



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

Commission on Youth



Workforce Development for Foster Care Youth

October 19, 2021

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Foster Care Background



- A child is placed in Foster Care through no fault of the child.
- All children deserve to have a family, and to be loved, educated, supported, nurtured, and have equitable opportunities to succeed in life.
- Sustainable social capital, permanency supports, and connections to education and the workforce are essential foundations for independence.
- Federal, State, and Local resources exist to support foster care youth, young adults, and alumni.
- Foster care stakeholders want youth who have experienced foster care to be successful by being civically-engaged, earning a family sustaining income, and continuing to be lifelong learners.

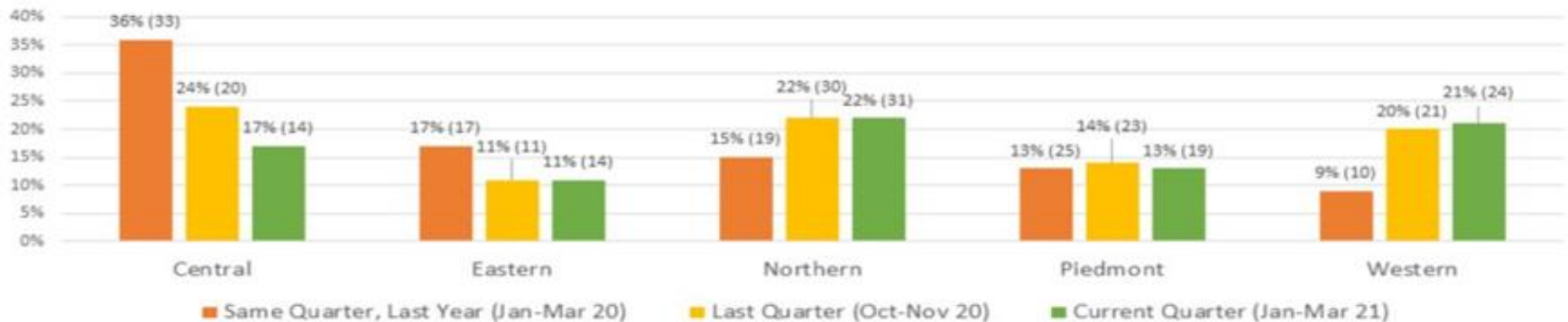
Youth Aging Out of Foster Care



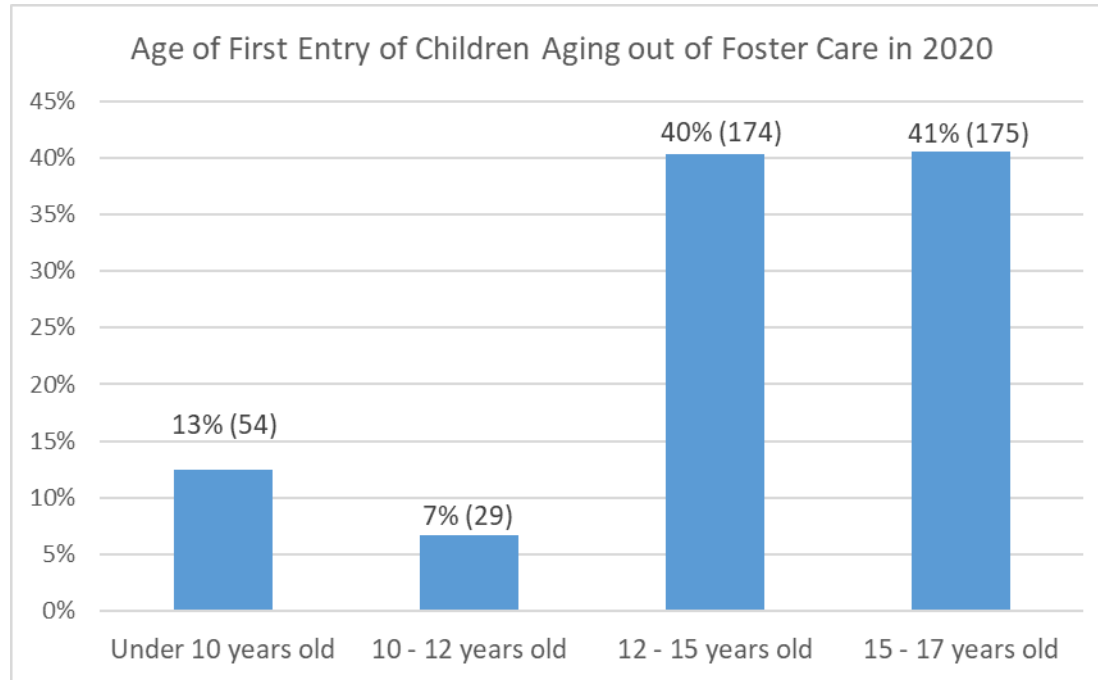
Percentage of Children Aging Out (State)



Percentage (#) of Children Aging Out (Region)



Youth Aging Out of Foster Care



- This chart from the Department of Social Services is based on children who emancipated during calendar year 2020.
- Overall, 432 children aged out during this time period.

Aging Out Facts



	CY16	CY17	CY18	CY19	CY20
Fostering Futures % of Entry	32%	53%	50%	38%	58%
Total Eligible FF Population	534	567	641	656	510
Total Participating FF Population	170	303	317	247	294



Why is Transitioning to Opportunities so Important for Foster Care Youth?



- Youth leaving foster care through emancipation, runaway, or switching to another agency, as opposed to reunification with family or adoption, suffer emotional, physical, financial, housing, and health challenges.
- Youth who leave foster care are more likely to:
 - become homeless (40% more likely),
 - drop out of high school (20% drop out),
 - be unemployed (62% unemployed),
 - not complete a college degree (less than 10%),
 - have physical and mental health problems, lack health insurance, use illegal drugs, become teen parents, live in poverty, and commit crimes.

Why is Transitioning to Opportunities So Important for Foster Care Youth?



- Foster youth most likely experienced trauma from emotional and physical abuse, neglect, poverty, frequent moves, lack of consistent and loving caregivers, homelessness, food insecurity (29%), isolation, or other.
- Trauma can be overcome with professional help, consistent and positive emotional and financial support, policies and programs that provide resources and opportunities, as well as guidance during challenging times.
- Once consistent emotional and financial support are available, trust in others is regained and the youth is more open to finding and using relevant resources.

Foster Care Facts



- 40-50% of former foster care youth are homeless within 18 months after leaving foster care.
- 60% earn incomes below the poverty line.
- Only 1-3% graduate from college.
- 25% will be in jail within 2 years of leaving foster care.
- 65% have seven or more school transfers from elementary to high school.
- 80% of women who have experienced foster care will get pregnant before they are ready.
- Foster care youth are 6 times more likely to be diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) than the general population and twice as likely as veterans returning from war.
- 81% of males are arrested compared to 17% of their peers who were not in the foster care system.



At its May 3, 2021 meeting, the Commission of Youth adopted the following study mandate:

- Youth aging out of foster care face significant challenges in navigating the labor market to obtaining meaningful employment.
 - The Virginia Commission on Youth shall convene an Advisory Group to include representatives from the Department of Social Services, Department of Education, Department of Labor, Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, the Virginia Employment Commission, One Stop Centers, local Workforce Investment Boards, the Virginia Community College System, local Departments of Social Services, advocacy groups, foster care youth and other relevant stakeholders. The Advisory Group shall review current policies, practices, and programs in Virginia that support youth aging out of foster care and make recommendations to improve workforce opportunities for youth in foster care.

Advisory Group Members



- Senator Barbara Favola and Delegate Emily Brewer (Co-chairs)
- Jim André, VCCS
- Cassie Baudeán, Children's Home Society
- Suzanne Bednar, Adoptive Parent
- Jason Brown, VEC
- Jason Brown, Fostering Acadia
- Delegate Karrie Delaney
- Allison Gilbreath, Voices for Virginia's Children
- Delegate Elizabeth Guzman
- Tiffany Haynes, FC Youth Advocate
- Samantha Hollins, VDOE
- Avi Hopkins, Citizen Representative
- Vanessa Johnson, Richmond DSS
- Janet Kelly, Virginia's Kids Belong
- Valerie L'Herrou, Virginia Poverty Law Center
- Senator Monty Mason
- Leah Mills, VDARS
- Patricia Morrison, VDOLI
- Sarah Morton, Virginia Career Works
- Amber Pajouhandeh, Foster Youth Rep.
- Em Parente, VDSS
- Gary Powers, The Success Foundation of Virginia
- Eric Reynolds, Office of the Children's Ombudsman
- Donna Shires, Medworks
- Rachel Strawn, VCCS
- Alex Wagaman, VCU
- Celest Williams, Harrisonburg-Rockingham DSS
- Deana Williams, DJJ



- Chaired by Senator Barbara Favola and Delegate Emily Brewer.
- Commission Members, Delegates Karrie Delaney and Elizabeth Guzman and Citizen Member Avi Hopkins, as well as co-chair of Foster Care Caucus, Senator Monty Mason.
- Advisory Group met:
 - June 21, 2021
 - October 5, 2021
- Heard presentations from a foster care panel; the Great Expectations Program; iFoster; and the Youth Law Center.
- Reviewed and developed draft recommendations.



- State Agencies providing support to foster care youth:
 - Department of Social Services
 - Department of Education
 - Department of Medical Assistance Services
 - Department of Aging and Rehabilitation Services
 - Department of Labor and Industry
 - Department of Juvenile Justice
 - Department of Behavioral Health And Developmental Services
 - Virginia Community College System
 - Virginia Employment Commission
 - Virginia Commonwealth University



- Local agencies and organizations providing support to foster care youth:
 - 120 Local Department of Social Services
 - 132 Local School Divisions
 - Child Placing Agencies
 - Independent Living Programs
 - Non Profit Organizations
 - Foundations
 - Businesses
 - Advocacy Groups
 - Foster Family Providers
 - The Faith Community



- **McKinney-Vento Act** – Ensures educational stability for both homeless and foster youth.
- **John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program** – Grants offered to states to implement services/activities that will lead to self-sufficiency for current or former foster youth.
- **Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act** – Allows states to extend foster care and benefits up to age 21 with federal funding for states and counties.
- **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act** – The WIOA Title I Youth Program provides workforce development skills to qualified youth between the ages of 16-24 who are out of school, authorized to work in the U.S., and have barriers to employment or education.



■ **WIOA Title I Youth Program**

■ **Work Experience and Training**

- Occupational Skills Training
- On-The-Job Training
- Summer Employment Opportunities
- Work Experience Placement
- Pre-Apprenticeship Opportunities

■ **Supportive Services**

- Transportation assistance
- Payment of credentialing/licensing fees
- Childcare assistance
- Books and training materials
- Required uniforms and other work-related expenses

WIOA Funding



LWDA	REGION	Youth – 2021
1	Southwest Virginia	\$638,384
2	New River/Mt. Rogers	\$734,283
3	Western Virginia	\$420,731
4	Shenandoah	\$551,160
5	Crater Area	\$470,971
6	Piedmont	\$309,474
7	Central Virginia	\$497,943
8	South Central	\$365,136
9	Capital Region	\$1,777,460
10	West Piedmont	\$586,185
11	Northern Virginia	\$1,205,393
12	Alexandria/Arlington	\$184,578
13	Bay Consortium	\$449,551
14	Hampton Roads	\$2,827,371



- Great Expectations Program
- iFoster Portal
- Virginia Department of Education-School Counseling



- Virginia Community College System (VCCS) program for young adults who have experienced foster care.
- Began in 2008.
- Privately-funded ONLY.
- Currently at 21 of 23 community colleges; soon to be 23.
- Helps foster care youth complete high school and navigate college by providing the following assistance:
 - Career exploration and coaching
 - Access to college degree and certification options
 - Individualized tutoring
 - Applying for college admission and financial aid
 - Applying for and keeping a job
 - Life skills training, including financial management
 - Personal counseling; finding affordable housing and mental health services
 - Coordinating student mentors



- FREE national internet portal of resources for foster care youth, alumni, and professionals.
- Portal is linked directly to the iFoster app that can be used on cell phones.
- Hundreds of resources with companies, government agencies, and non-profits already included.
- Virginia-specific resources from the state and localities must be identified and added.
- If Virginia adds the local resources, there is no cost to use.
- Internet connection is needed—Hot spot or WiFi work for use in the field.
- Closes the gap in resource information that Transition Age Youth (TAY) need for self-sufficiency and independence.
- Digital Locker Technology for cell phones and laptops that stores documents in one place for future use.



- What's included?
 - List of resources with contact information
 - Search feature with categories of support (housing, transportation, child care, education and training, employment, etc.)
 - Place to apply for resources
 - Tracking of resources used
 - Notifications and surveys
 - Program ratings and feedback options
 - Discounted products and services, and more
- Already have 376 Virginia members in the national portal:
 - 17 Transition Age Youth Members
 - 19 Professional Staff Members
 - 340 Caregiver Members



- Mississippi
 - Identifying and adding their own resources to the iFoster portal (FREE).
 - Training employers on trauma through the portal.
 - Scaffolding foster care youth into jobs through mentorship, job training and career “cruising” and assessments to determine training needed for a particular job through the app.
 - Sharing documents in a centralized place.
- Next Steps
 - Need to identify state and local resources and then input the information.
 - Need to update resources regularly



- Goal: “Students will investigate the world of work in order to make informed career decisions.”
- Grade 6-12 Public School Counselors are required to do the following:
 - Provide career awareness and exploration opportunities to students.
 - Assist students in identifying strengths, skills, preferences and interests related to career choices and success.
 - Teach the effect of career choices on quality of life.
 - Teach that punctuality, courtesy, proper dress and language, and hard work are essential for job success.
 - Assess the ability of students to demonstrate individual initiative, teamwork, problem-solving, organization, and communication.
 - Teach students to use research skills to locate, evaluate, and interpret career and educational information.
 - Assess students’ awareness of educational, vocational, technical and training opportunities available in high school.
 - Introduce self-employment as a career option.



- **Oregon – Passed the Former Foster Youth Tuition and Fee Waiver (HB 3471-A)**
 - Allows youth who spent 12+ months in foster care to waive tuition at a state university or community college.
 - Waiver is applied after all other financial aid is exhausted.
- **Oregon – Youth Villages: Transitional Living Program**
 - Youth work with specialists to find stable housing + employment, continuing education or training.
 - 84% of youth are living independently or with family 2 yrs. after completion.
 - 83% in school, graduated or employed after 2 yrs.
 - 77% remained jail-free.



■ Arizona

■ **Bridging Success Early Start** at Arizona State University

- For entering freshmen and transfer students with foster care backgrounds.
- Move in early to learn about campus resources, personal success strategies, academic expectations.
- Designated staff to assist foster care students.

■ **Arizona Foster Youth Award** tuition waiver program covers cost of undergraduate tuition and fees with combination of federal grants, scholarships and university aid.

■ Tennessee – Hope Foster Child Tuition Grant

- Youth in foster care are eligible to attend a 2-year or 4-year public institution without tuition with a high school diploma or equivalent
- Students may attend a private institution but must pay costs above the average cost of public institutions.



■ Rhode Island – “Works Wonders” Research Program 2011-16

- Partnered with local businesses
- Awarded a grant to use Workforce Investment Act Funding to give foster youth training skills and coaching needed for workplace success
- 52% maintained employment after program completion; up from 38.3%



- Held 5 in-person and 1 virtual roundtable discussions throughout the state
 - Harrisonburg – July 20, 2021
 - Richmond – July 21, 2021
 - Charlottesville – July 22, 2021
 - Williamsburg – September 23, 2021
 - Abingdon – September 27, 2021
 - Virtual Roundtable – October 4, 2021



- Total Participants with VCOY Staff:
 - 18 Foster Care Youth, Young Adults, or Alumni
 - 1 Legislator
 - 2 LDSS Directors
 - 7 Local Department of Social Services Foster Care Supervisors and Staff
 - 9 Non-profit Organization Representatives (Fostering Acadia, Goodwill, Impact Living Services, Virginia Career Works, VCU, Voices for Virginia's Children)
 - 5 Community College/Great Expectations Representatives
 - 1 Higher Education Advocate



- Foster care youth and young adults need a way to learn about and connect with financial, emotional, educational, and other support programs, coaches and mentors in their community.
- Funding is needed to increase flexible support for Great Expectations, decrease foster care case loads, and improve access to community resources.
- Better communication and data sharing across state agencies, schools, and organizations for foster care youth is warranted.
- Accountability standards for foster families and Independent Living organizations must be developed and enforced.
- Consistent mentors and coaches create stability and a safety net for each youth and young adult who has experienced foster care.



- Virginia school guidance counselors, public and private, need to provide standard career exploration, exposure to a variety of career fields, and interest assessments for every student.
- Each Institution of Higher Education (IHE) needs to have a dedicated and reliable support coordinator for young adults who have experienced foster care.
- Life skills classes need to be timely, relevant, engaging and emulate real-life situations.
- Meaningful Independent Living (IL) experience is needed that prepares youth for independence.
- Local workforce development boards should prioritize the foster care population.
- Child Care and transportation challenges are a barrier to employment.



Workforce Development for Foster Care Youth Findings and Recommendations



Finding: There is a lack of communication and coordination of resources with state, local, and private agencies that offer services to those who are currently being served or have been served in the foster care system.

Recommendation 1:

Direct the Virginia Department of Social Services, in cooperation with the Virginia Commission on Youth, Department of Aging and Rehabilitation Services, Department of Education, Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of Medical Assistance Services, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, the Department of Labor, the Virginia Community College System, including the Great Expectations Program, local workforce development boards, the League of Social Services' Executives, private providers and advocacy groups to develop the iFoster Portal or an App with similar functionality to include Virginia- and locality-specific resources that are available for individuals who are currently being served or have been served in the foster care system, as well as for professionals serving the foster care population. (cont. on next slide)



Recommendation 1 (cont.):

Resources include workforce development assistance, educational opportunities, housing and living stipends or discounts, financial supports, internship and employment opportunities, and other resources that are available in Virginia for those involved in the foster care system. Update the App regularly with additional resources that are available to assist in the development of becoming a successful and independent adult. Ensure that all state and local agency employees working with foster care children, join and use the iFoster App with their foster care clients, assist foster care youth in subscribing to the App themselves, and remain current with newly added or updated resources.

Recommendation 2:

Request the Virginia Social Services System (state and local departments of social services), through its regional and local offices, to identify workforce development organizations (such as Goodwill, Virginia Department of Labor and Industry's Apprenticeship Program, Great Expectations, etc.) and other foster care transition support resources in each locality, add them to the iFoster App, and communicate those opportunities to the local agencies on at least an annual basis.

Finding and Recommendations



Finding: Private companies and non-profit agencies are willing to hire those who have been in foster care. These organizations need to better understand the challenges of youth who have experienced foster care by becoming trauma informed. This awareness training will facilitate a smooth transition into the work world for both parties and encourage the development of a graduated training structure and mentoring plan to ensure success. Many times employers do not understand trauma consequences that could impact the work habits and attitude of an employee.

Employment or entrepreneurship support are critical to help foster care youth and young adults and alumni to be successful in their workplace. The Virginia Workforce Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center, (VWIEC), an entity of Hampton University, in partnership with Old Dominion University, provides free services such as mentorship, education, networking, pitch competitions and assistance with financing strategies for adults who wish to become entrepreneurs. In addition, VWIEC provides supports for participants by removing barriers that restrict them, including child care, transportation, certification costs and business licensure fees.



Recommendation 3a:

Request that local workforce development boards recruit and engage potential employers who hire foster care young adults and alumni in training that includes the effects of trauma, related child care issues for parenting youth, and gradual accountability strategies for employment success. Encourage employers to work through challenges on work attendance and productivity with external job coaches to support workers in finding success.

Recommendation 3b:

Request the Workforce Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center to provide support for foster care young adults and alumni who need business assistance. Those working in the foster care system with young adults who are interested in starting their own business should connect the young adults to VWIEC.



Finding: Great Expectations is a nationally recognized program that helps Virginia's foster youth earn the postsecondary credentials they need to achieve an independent and successful life. Currently, Great Expectations is available in 21 of the 23 Virginia Community Colleges and will be in all of the Community Colleges by the end of the year. Through the program, foster youth gain financial and additional supports needed to ensure their successful completion of the degree/credential sought. Currently, Virginia's program is funded solely through private funding.

Recommendation 4:

Introduce a budget amendment to develop a state-funded grant program for the Great Expectations Program. The Virginia Community College System (VCCS) shall develop the grant program to provide a range of funding for Community Colleges in the following areas: the hiring of college coaches or mentors; housing stipends; child care; and transportation needs. VCCS shall report to the Commission on Youth the outcomes of the grant program by November 30 each year.



Finding: A point of contact is needed in Virginia colleges and universities to assist those who have been in the foster care system. Students with a history of a traumatic childhood living in a variety of foster care situations often suffer from post-traumatic stress and need extra support while becoming independent and learning how to face life's challenges while attending college, working, and sometimes taking care of a family.

Recommendation 5:

Introduce a budget amendment to direct the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) to examine the feasibility of having a point of contact at each state and/or private college and university for those who have been involved in the foster care system. SCHEV shall investigate the possibility of using federal dollars (such as the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) for this purpose and report their findings to the Commission on Youth by November 30, 2022.



Finding: The Fostering Connections to Success Act, Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, and Title I, Part A provisions in the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) are intended to ensure school stability for students in foster care, requiring child welfare agencies to coordinate with school divisions. School counselors provide a critical link in assisting foster youth’s educational and sustainable employment success.

Recommendation 6:

Request that the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) provides virtual training for school counselors that includes trauma informed strategies for those working with students experiencing foster care, resources available with the iFoster App, and the importance of knowing these students and providing consistent checks and support. The Commission also requests that the VDOE partner with the Virginia Alliance for School Counseling (VASC) and the Virginia Department of Social Services to develop this training.



Recommendation 7:

Request that the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) issue a memorandum that provides guidance to local school divisions regarding resources for school counselors on providing supports for students experiencing foster care, including the requirements of completing an interest inventory, the Career Connections course, and the Academic and Career Plan, as well as the updated guidance for the Profile of a Virginia Graduate (which establishes multiple paths toward college and career readiness for students to follow in the later years of high school, which could include opportunities for internships, externships, and credentialing). This guidance will also include resources on leveraging existing data and information on various career fields, job trends and salaries, and resources available to local school divisions from the Weldon Cooper Center and how to specifically support foster care youth and link to specific resources (such as the iFoster App, Fostering Futures, Great Expectations, successful independent living programs, etc.).



Finding: Quality Independent Living programs are beneficial to the youth and young adults who have experienced foster care by providing a gradual independence plan. These programs include standards of completion with requirements for a high school/GED diploma, driver's license and stable transportation, savings account, possession of a secured credit card, stable housing and employment, ownership of and access to vital records, and permanency.

Recommendation 8:

Request that the Virginia Social Services System (VDSS and LDSS) review their requirements for foster care Independent Living programs in Virginia and include a gradual independence plan that includes these Standards of Completion. Quality Independent Living programs ensure that the youth are knowledgeable and have practical application experience with budgeting, housing solutions, job expectations, emotional regulation and management skills, transportation and health care options, communication skills, as well as problem-solving in the real world. Ensure each LDSS has a workforce development plan.



Finding: The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Youth Program is designed to serve low-income youth who face barriers to continued education and employment which includes those youth either in, or aged out of, the foster care system. Services provided through WIOA may include, but are not limited to, the following elements: work experience opportunities; occupational skills training; on-the-job training; GED and high school completion options assistance; tutoring and basic skills education; leadership development opportunities; financial literacy; career counseling and exploration services; assistance with navigating child care options for parenting youth; post-secondary education preparation; entrepreneurial skills training; apprenticeship opportunities; and supportive services.

Recommendation 9:

Request that Virginia Career Works, through the local workforce boards, prioritize and promote serving the foster care population with WIOA funding and other workforce development opportunities.

Finding and Recommendations



Finding: Foster care families receive a maintenance payment to provide for the basic needs for the foster child in their care. The Virginia Enhanced Maintenance Assessment Tool (VEMAT) is used to determine the need for, and amount of, enhanced maintenance when a child has a clearly-defined need that requires the parent to provide increased support and supervision due to the child's behavioral, emotional, or physical/personal care requirements. When children first enter foster care, it is expected that their needs may be higher due to the circumstances that led to the child's removal and the impact of the removal itself. However, as the child stabilizes in the foster home and the child's needs are met consistently over time, it is expected that the child's on-going need for support and supervision would decrease, and therefore the VEMAT score would decrease with subsequent reassessments. As a result, it may be viewed that foster families are financially penalized for a child's success.



Recommendation 10:

Direct the Virginia Department of Social Services to convene a stakeholder group to determine the feasibility of adopting a new uniform assessment tool in determining the enhanced payments for children in foster care with additional needs. The stakeholder group shall consist of representatives from the Department of Social Services, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, Office of the Children's Services Act, Office of the Children's Ombudsman, private providers, licensed child placing agencies, local departments of social services, foster parents, and advocacy groups. The stakeholder group shall investigate ways to provide more flexibility regarding the foster care payment to address a wide variety of needs for hard to place children and develop ways to ensure accurate documentation. Consideration should be given to current assessment tools used in determining a child's needs such as the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) tool.



Finding: Lack of transportation options provide a barrier for foster youth in trying to obtain an educational degree or employment. Evidence reveals that youth who leave foster care without their driver's license are less likely to make a successful transition to adulthood. These young adults are more likely to have limited housing, employment, and education choices. Without transportation it is difficult for those involved in the foster care system to get a job and establish a work history.

Recommendation 11:

Introduce a budget amendment to support the development and implementation of a statewide driver's licensing program to support foster care youth in obtaining a driver's license. Funding shall be made available to local departments of social services to reimburse foster care providers for increases to their existing motor vehicle insurance premiums that occur because a foster care youth in their care has been added to their insurance policy. The program may also reimburse foster care providers for additional coverage (i.e., an umbrella policy or the equivalent) that provides liability protection should a foster care youth get into or cause a catastrophic accident. Additionally, funding shall be made available to foster care youth in Virginia's Fostering Futures Program to assist in covering the cost of obtaining motor vehicle insurance. (cont. on next slide)



Recommendation 11 (cont.):

The Department of Social Services shall develop reimbursement policies for foster care providers and foster care youth. The Department shall coordinate and administer the driver's licensing program based on best practices from similar programs in other states, to include developing educational or training materials that educate foster parents, private providers, and foster youth about (1) liability issues, insurance laws, and common insurance practices (to include laws about renewal and cancellation, how long an accident can affect premiums, how to establish that a foster youth is no longer living in the residence, and other applicable topics); (2) DMV requirements to obtain a learner's permit and driver's license; (3) what funding and resources are available to assist in this process, to include paying school lab fees for "Behind the Wheel" or paying a private driver education company; and (4) why getting a driver's license on time is important for normalcy and a successful transition to adulthood. The Department shall provide information on how many foster care youth were supported by this program and any recommendations to improve the program to the Governor, Chairmen of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees by November 30 each fiscal year.



Finding: Lack of access to child care is a barrier to successful employment for parenting youth/young adults. Finding and paying for quality child care is a barrier to holding a steady job or completing an education program. Currently, local departments of social services will assist parenting youth in foster care with child care costs either through IV-E funding or the Children's Services Act. However, when the youth is no longer in foster care these funding sources are no longer available.

Recommendation 12:

Request foster care workers and others working with youth experiencing foster care to identify child care resources for their parenting youth. Ensure that youth aging out of foster care are placed on the local child care assistance program waiting list prior to aging out of care.



Public Comment

Written public comment must be
received by 5:00 p.m.
on November 30, 2021.

Submission instructions are available
online (<http://vcoy.virginia.gov>)