Youth with Disabilities in Foster Care

- Close to 400,540 children are in foster care in the United States with 20% being between the ages of 16 and 20.\(^1\)
- Between 60% and 80% of children in foster care have been found to have developmental, emotional or behavioral disorders.\(^2,3\)
- At least 50% of children placed in foster care arrive with chronic medical conditions such as growth and neurological problems, asthma, and obesity.\(^4\)
- The FCSIA of 2008 extended the provision of the John Chafee Foster Care Act of 1999 allowing youth to remain in foster care up to age 21 and receive enhanced transitional and independent living services. The FCSIA of 2008 recognizes that youth including those with disabilities need time and a personalized plan put into place in order for positive outcomes to occur.

In order to be eligible for these enhanced support services, youth must:

- Be completing high school or an equivalent program or
- Be enrolled in a post-secondary program or
- Be participating in a program or activity that leads to employment or
- Be employed for at least 80 hours or
- Be incapable of doing activities described above due to a medical condition\(^5\)
Positive outcomes for youth are easy to support!

- The longer youth stay in foster care during the transition years the better their outcomes.  
- Quality of life for youth rises as self determination and accomplishments increase.  
- Youth with disabilities transitioning out of foster care need personalized, youth directed services to ensure positive outcomes.  
- Successful educational achievement is contingent on promptly treating mental health problems, finding long term mentors, and using strengths based assessments.

So what is the problem?

- States do not consistently define what medical conditions exempt youth from the work and school requirements.
- States do not consistently assess children for disabilities as they enter foster care.

Rates of Disability of Youth in Foster Care

- About 50% of children in foster care are eligible for special education.
- Studies show that at least 23% of children in foster care have developmental disabilities.
- Around 10% to 15% of children in foster care have fetal alcohol spectrum disorders.
- About 50% of children in foster care have chronic medical conditions

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Cost Benefit Analysis

- Costs may include:
  - Youth who will stay in care for longer periods of time using more independent living supports.
  - Youth who are identified with disabilities may use more services through mental health, vocational rehabilitation, and other benefit programs.

- Benefits may include:
  - Youth may experience less arrests and incarceration, become employed adding revenue to the tax base.
  - Studies have found that youth who remain in care after age 18 achieve a benefit-cost ratio of between 1.2 and 2 to 1 of earnings from employment to dependence on public assistance.15,16

Policy Recommendations

- Implement a common definition of medical conditions and disabilities for use by all state welfare agencies. Children who qualify for SSI or special education would automatically be excluded from the typical work and school requirements.

- Ensure that all children receive complete assessments for physical and mental health conditions, developmental delays, and fetal alcohol spectrum disorders within 30 days of entering into care.

- Support youth to direct their transition planning and support their self-determination through a person centered process.
References:


