



Institute for Community Health

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Aging out of foster care: Strategies for supporting adolescents as they transition into adulthood.

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Adolescents "aging out" of foster care comprise a population of great concern for local child welfare providers, advocates and policy makers. Previous studies have demonstrated that adolescents who age out of foster care face enormous challenges in the transition to adulthood and are at high risk for a number of negative health outcomes. Efforts to better prepare adolescents for adulthood through policy and programmatic enhancements are underway in many states. Although they are primary recipients of local child welfare services, few efforts have been made to obtain and incorporate input from adolescents into programmatic and policy changes. The proposed presentation is based on a qualitative study conducted with 30 adolescents, ages 16-18, living in out-of-home placements in Massachusetts. The purpose of the study is to learn more about the experiences of adolescents in out-of-home placements, including factors that have been helpful while in placement, areas in need of improvement, and recommendations for supporting adolescents aging out of care. Methods include three qualitative interviews conducted with each participant over a six-month period. The presentation will highlight salient themes in participants' understandings of why they entered out-of-home placements and the benefits and challenges of being in substitute care. Policy recommendations for improving services for adolescents will be presented. Recommendations include greater participation of adolescents in case planning and placement decisions, placement stability, clear and consistent communication regarding individual expectations and goals, and increases in the provision of family-based services and supports. Findings will be useful for informing aging out services for adolescents.