

Focus Group - Foster Parents

July 10, 2006

Question 1: What are the most important things for foster parents with youth transitioning to independent living to know?

- School system invests no personal time, just passing from grade to grade, youth not learning skills at school
- Different teaching in different schools - learn how your school works
- Schools lack in offering basic education
- Schools treat foster youth differently - not help kids, they do the work for them so it just gets done.
- No teaching, just get it done - not fair to kids
- Foster parents need to know options for youth

Question 2: What are the most effective ways to teach foster parents this information?

- Support groups
- Trainings

Question 3: What would be most supportive for you when working with youth transitioning to independent living?

- Need schools to hear our requests when we ask for a youth to be held back in a grade
- Support from case workers re: school - they say "it will all work out"

Question 4: What are some of the biggest challenges in working with youth who are transitioning to independent living?

- Youth lack basic math skills
- Introduction to life skills should be at a younger age - currently at around 16 - needs to be earlier
- Should be mandated for youth to begin skills learning
- Need to know more resources, referral sources for our youth
- Be vocal about kid's expectations of biological parents

Question 5: What are some of the best moments in working with youth who are transitioning?

- Great to have contact with former foster youth who you thought were gone
- Give back what was given to me (some foster parents were foster youth)
- Successes make it worth the harder experiences

Question 6: What are some of strengths to working with the current Child Welfare system for working with youth who are transitioning to independent living?

- Maryhurst has been good about getting skills started with youth
- Affirmation to clients helps some workers teach reality/truth - deal with reality of a situation - kids have higher accountability and parents aren't always accountable for their goals
- Chaffee program - great idea, poor execution
- Youth still need life skills - IL not "real world"
- It's a good system, but not always practical

Question 7: What are some of the barriers to the current system?

- Mental health needs - will services continue once age out?
- Lower functioning youth not ready to be adults at 18 - should automatically stay until 21
- To recommit, a youth must be in school
- State workers paint unrealistic picture of life after care
- Why not have a "3 strike" rule with bio-families? - Why does TPR have to take so long?
- Guidelines and expectations to Chaffee need to be better explained to both youth and foster families

Question 7A: What would you like changed?

- More worker involvement
- Schools to be more understanding and helpful to foster youth
- Youth job training camp needs to be implemented
- Federal government should offer employers money or incentive to hire foster youth

Question 8: How would you involve youth in training foster parents in this area?

- Have them there to share opinions and experiences