

Focus Group - Supervisors and Caseworkers

March 31, 2006 - 2:00 pm

Question 1: What do you want to know about youth transitioning into IL?

- Setting up resources in community for aged out youth
 - Need for resources - how to prepare for age 18
 - What are these youth eligible for? i.e. waivers, school, etc,
- Clear communication - currently there is an information influx
 - What exists isn't well known among all workers
- Need to update information as it changes - creating a clearinghouse for info
- Need to know what adult services are available (Mental Health, Special Needs, etc)
- All groups need to be aware of guidelines for IL programs and IL apartments - different teams have different guidelines
 - i.e. Adoptions doesn't always know what is current with IL
- Know all housing options/resources
- "General information" isn't always so general - not everyone knows it - some workers are better at finding out info than others
- Information on pregnant or parenting teens

Question 2: How competent do you feel with adolescent development issues?

- Workers are knowledgeable, foster parents need more
- Clarify difference between "normal adolescent" and "normal foster care adolescent".
- Foster parents have "launching" issues when youth are ready to transition.

Question 3: What do the youth you're working with need most from you during transition?

- Dose of reality - they don't know about getting work, apartments, etc.
 - Need realistic expectations for themselves
- Everyone involved in their lives needs to be on the same page
- Greater consistency - same message in communications
 - Currently - a gap in consistency of expectations of youth by providers
- Need for more than one IL team

- i.e. youth in adoptions can't transfer till age 18 because IL program so full - don't have the appropriate skills and little IL training - youth are left in "limbo".
- Need for information
 - Knowing all options available for these youth in re: school, career, extending stay, etc
- Case worker to work with the youth to help them understand what they need to do to gain independence.
- Workers take some responsibility to begin preparations at 17 or 17.5, so at age 18 they have some necessary skills
- Adult Protective Services (APS) is supposed to offer 1 year protective services, but not a reality in this area
 - Little follow up once they emancipate from system, so it would be nice to use APS if needed

Question 4: What are the top 5 survival needs of transitioning youth?

- Housing
- Employment
- Connection to positive someone
- Knowledge of resources or where to get needed resources
 - Like having one resource hotline number to call
- Education
- Goal - have a purpose

Question 5: What supports do you need to be able to work most effectively?

- More workers / lower case loads
- Foster parents willing and understanding of the needs of IL youth
- More IL programs for girls especially but in general too
 - More IL programs rather than apartments (greater support)
 - Apt. program are over emphasized - need programs for increased training opportunities
- More trainings
 - i.e. folks in adoptions don't know all about IL
- Less enabling of youth re: making sure all is set up - let them take some of that responsibility

Question 5A: What does support to transitioning youth look like?

- Case managers differ - personality, dedication, knowledge of resources
- Making referrals to whatever services are needed (i.e. mental health, SA, educational, etc)
- Relationships vary and how far a worker is willing to go for a youth

Question 6: What would your adolescent's say about you?

- It seems that the youth you're after the most, come back - the others you mostly never hear from

Question 7: How do you use youth as a resource?

- They know most about the streets, language, gangs, drugs
- They know each other and fill you in on what other youth in care are doing
- Fill you in on the myths of foster care (i.e. when you get your own apartment, what you can get away with etc.)
- Talk about different foster parents and what goes on in houses, schools, PCCs, and various workers

Question 8: What would you do to improve readiness for transition age youth?

- Start earlier with IL training
- Help youth feel like a partner in their plan
- Current training age begins at 16, should be age 14

Question 9: What are some of the barriers in the work that you do?

- Educational resources for kids who are behind
 - So little knowledge of what school systems have to offer the kids and getting the appropriate follow through
- inconsistencies
- lumped all together - stigma - "they're a foster youth"
- Can't speed kids through - some programs offer fast track to graduate to get them out of the school, but education severely lacks
- Youth are not treated as individuals
- Case loads too high for adequate care - average 23 youth per worker
- Stigma placed on foster care youth
- More medical providers need to take Passport
- Transportation - some foster families live off TARC line or on fringes

EXTRAS

- Training foster parents to be “parents” not just room and board
 - IL classes only present info to youth; foster parents need to help kids use skills like budgeting, laundry, etc.
- No IL coordinator in Jeff. Co.
- Need for more beds, more help in court, school, better qualified foster homes, someone to check-in with youth after age 18, i.e. APS
- Contingency Planning - do it leading up to age 18, but no planning after
- Bio-Families - sometimes sabotage youth success
 - Nosing in on youth foster families and getting \$ from youth who are working and bio-families are not
- Help prepare youth for their expectations of bio-family - many want to go back home at age 18 and don't anticipate reality of home situation
- Many workers are discouraged from spending time and relationship building
 - At times, not given time to build/form close relationships with youth