

Youth Focus Group - Boys Haven & Bellewood

April 7, 2006

Question 1: What are the top 5 survival needs of transitioning youth?

- Listening
- Having connections/bonds to older adults/someone to fall back on in a crisis/building a support group/building own support network/mentors
- Be better represented by caseworker and lawyer
- Knowing resources that can be helpful
- Case workers who are more involved
- Housing
- Employment/job skills (interview skills)
- Knowing what benefits are available and am eligible for
- Assistance with disability paperwork
- Access to transitional money
- Start IL skills building earlier
- Knowing the benefits of staying in care past 18th birthday

Question 2: Are you as involved as you'd like to be with your transition plan? What would you like more or less of?

- "What transition plan?"
- More explanation (until I understand completely) about re-committing vs. aging out
- More explanation of paperwork
- Maintain same social worker throughout care
- Don't think youth can take care of themselves
- More respect of my right to know what is going on (youth should have knowledge on decisions re: their life choices)
- More packets of skills management

Question 3: What do you feel most prepared for?

- Feel prepared to get a "real" job / be successful
- Find a home
- How to complete housing applications
- Helping other youth - mentor
- Budgeting (sometimes)/making things work on little money
- Creating career goals - i.e. employment, military, etc
- Being alone vs. being lonely
- Less worry about violence and theft
- Cleaning a house/home

- Having company when you want
- Being streetwise

Question 3A: What do you feel least prepared for?

- Using the bus system
- Too used to state care/less about being independent
- Having people to talk to
- Having connections with adults who can help
- What benefits are out there to age 21
- Knowing resources for when you turn 18 and what can help

Question 4: How do you define success?

- Not going back into the system or to jail
- Staying sober
- Keeping a job
- Owning a home/condo (one youth just bought a condo)
- Gaining an education
- Setting and achieving a goal - knowing/having a plan
- Staying out of debt

Define Family Success (bio/foster/friends/etc)

- Having a healthy standard of living
- Breaking the cycle - away from drugs, abuse, neglect, etc.
- Being on good terms with everyone in family/don't worry about what others will think
- Seeing how family members are succeeding
- Forgiving for the past, but not forgetting
- Learning to trust again
- Reconnecting with family - creating adult relationships

Question 5: What do you need most from your worker?

- Time
- A relationship
- For my worker to know about the county I live in
 - Worker needs to know resources in my community even if they live elsewhere
- Timely submission of paperwork, ex. for college
- Be mindful of different ways people learn - be more experiential
- Help in creating a support system going into adulthood
- Help in understanding the real world while in the foster care world
- Find ways to work with you if not ready for total independence

- Help in getting drivers license - need worker's signature, but liability is an issue

Question 6: What would you do to improve the system as it stands in order to better prepare youth for IL?

- Create a "middle ground" so that youth do not have to go from total dependence to total independence
- Implement drivers training (can only get permit if in state's care, residential, no permit)
- Limit the number of cases per worker
- Social workers need to be more involved and not just in the background

Question 7: What would make you feel more supported?

- Having more connections when transitioning out

Youth also offer "Good Things about the System"

- Getting support
- Relationships, bonding with staff
- Boys Haven staff helps to socialize, build relationships and create social skills
- Boys Haven's new program that offers a safety net if IL grad is struggling in apartment
- Get feedback and pointed in right direction
- Worker helps to connect with food stamps and other benefits
- Legislation extended emancipation age from 18-21 (15 years ago)
- Youth can sympathize with worker's high caseloads
- Getting to know social worker when they can
- Decrease contact with social worker when moving to IL
- Get help with unfamiliar situations
- Helps to pay for education/college - tuition waiver
 - ETV - education training voucher

Wishful Thinking:

* Having a "How To" manual for resources - knowing exactly where to go to get all that you need.