Homelessness among Young People Transitioning Out of Foster Care: Findings from the Midwest Study

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Children, Poverty and Homelessness, Institute for Children and Poverty

Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago
Policy research that benefits children, families, and their communities
• Permanency through reunification, adoption or legal guardianship is the goal for all children placed in foster care

• ~ 29,500 young people “aged out” of foster care in 2008

• **Chafee Foster Care Independence Program** provides states with funds to help young people make a successful transition to adulthood

• Yet many young people age out of care without the resources needed to do so
AFCARS Data

Number of children in care
Number of youth emancipating

Year


0 5,000 10,000 15,000 20,000 25,000 30,000 35,000

0 100,000 200,000 300,000 400,000 500,000 600,000

Chapin Hall
• No national data on homelessness among transitioning foster youth

• Homelessness is one of the outcomes states will be required to report as part of the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD)

• Most of what we know about homelessness among this population is based on survey data from a small number of studies
• **Foster Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study** (Courtney et al., 2001)
  - Surveyed 113 young people 12 to 18 months after they had aged out of foster care in Wisconsin
  - 12% reported being homeless for at least one night within 12 months of aging out

• **Youth Aging Out of Foster Care in Metropolitan Detroit** (Fowler et al., 2006)
  - Surveyed 264 young people an average of 3.6 years after they had aged out of foster care in the metropolitan Detroit area
  - 17% reported being homelessness for an average of 61 days
  - One-third had spent time doubled up or “couch surfing”
Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth (The Midwest Study)

- Longitudinal study of foster youth in Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois who entered care before their 16th birthday and were still in care at age 17.

- Collaboration involving Chapin Hall (U of Chicago), Partners for Our Children (U of Washington), Survey Center (U of Wisconsin) and state public child welfare agencies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wave</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Response Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2002–2003</td>
<td>17 – 18</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>603</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>591</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>23 - 24</td>
<td>602</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2010–2011</td>
<td>25 - 26</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Number of Places Housed Since Exiting Foster Care

- One: 12.1
- Two: 19.3
- Three: 19.4
- Four: 17.9
- Five or more: 30.1
- Missing: 1.2
Definitions

Homeless: Slept in a place where people weren't meant to sleep, or slept in a homeless shelter, or didn't have a regular residence in which to sleep

Couch surfed: Moved from one temporary housing arrangements provided by friends, family or strangers to another
Homelessness and Couch Surfing Since Exit from Foster Care

- Ever Homeless: 24.2%
- Ever Couch Surfed: 27.6%
- Ever Homeless or Couch Surfed: 36.5%
Number of Episodes of Homelessness/Couch Surfing Since Exiting Foster Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episodes</th>
<th>Homelessness</th>
<th>Couch Surfing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four or more</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Longest Episode of Homelessness/Couch Surfing Since Exiting Foster Care

Number of Nights

- Homelessness
- Couch Surfing

Number of Nights: 1, 2 to 7, 8 to 30, 31 to 90, > 90, DK

- 9.6, 6.0, 22.9, 25.9, 13.0, 16.9, 20.5, 18.7, 4.1, 9.6
Potential Impact of Fostering Connections

- **Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008** will soon allow states to claim Title IV-E reimbursement for eligible foster youth until their 21st (rather than 18th) birthday.

- How might extending foster care for up to 3 additional years affect the number of young people who become homelessness during the transition to adulthood?
  - Fewer 18 to 20 year olds may become homelessness (because they will still be in foster care).
  - Young people may be better prepared to meet their housing needs if they remain in foster care until age 21.
Natural Experiment

- State laws differ with respect to whether young people are allowed to remain in foster care beyond age 18.
- Illinois is one of the few states where courts can (and routinely do) extend foster state care and supervision until age 21.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discharge Age</th>
<th>Wisconsin</th>
<th>Iowa</th>
<th>Illinois</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>21.0</td>
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Questions Currently Being Addressed

- What are the best predictors of becoming homeless during the transition to adulthood?
  - Youth characteristics
  - Placement history

- Which of these predictors are amenable to intervention?
Barriers to Reducing Homelessness among Transitioning Foster Youth

• Limited data on the magnitude of the problem

• Little empirical evidence regarding programs that work

• High cost of providing housing, especially with supportive services

• Housing needs of young people generally not a high priority for HUD

• Lack of public awareness
For more information about the Midwest Study:

www.chapinhall.org