

Helping Youth Transitioning from Foster Care Achieve Great Outcomes

North Carolina Institute of Medicine

Task Force on Transitions for People with
Developmental Disabilities

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What does LINKS do to help youth transition from foster care?

- The North Carolina LINKS program and services are designed to help youth to achieve seven critical outcomes as they transition from foster care to adulthood. These seven outcomes, if achieved, help young adults to build a foundation for success.

The Seven Critical Outcomes

- Sufficient income to live on;
- Safe and stable housing;
- Sufficient education and vocational training;
- Avoidance of High Risk Behaviors;
- A personal support network of at least 5 caring, responsible adults;
- Postpone parenthood; and
- Have access to health care and health insurance.

NC LINKS

- Any youth or young adult aged 13-20 who is or was in DSS foster care as a teenager is eligible for LINKS services and funding if they are legal residents of the U.S. and have less than \$10,000 in reserves.
- To some extent, counties determine what services will be provided.
- Counties must serve the young adults who aged out of their county DSS custody and youth 16+ who are now in DSS foster care custody.

LINKS Services

- LINKS services and resources are all directed at helping youth develop their capacity to achieve good outcomes.
- LINKS Services include
 - An assessment of their life skills
 - Planning based on their goals for themselves
 - Helping youth to access resources
 - Tough love
 - LINKS Special funds
 - Positive youth development approach
 - Experiential learning

Funding for LINKS Services

- Program allocation to counties
 - Based on number and ages of eligible youth and young adults
 - Not sufficient to pay salary but can help
 - Used for programmatic needs
 - May be used for individual youth
- LINKS Special Funds
 - Used to reimburse counties for allowable expenditures made on behalf of individual youth

Voluntary Youth Involvement

- Youth cannot be court ordered to participate in LINKS. It is, in accordance with Federal Rule, a voluntary service.
- Youth have to contribute some of their own resources to resolving barriers to achieving goals- may be monetary and/or effort.
- LINKS and LINKS Special Funds are not a right.
- Our intent is to help youth achieve their highest level of self sufficiency.

Data for Report

- Each county is required to respond to an annual survey of outcomes of young adults who aged out of foster care. The statistics reported in this presentation are based on the young adults with whom we have sufficient contact to know how they are doing, approximately 54.2% of the 1772 young adults who aged out of foster care in NC between 2004 and 2007. These statistics are based on the 991 youth with whom we have sufficient contact.

Sufficient Income

- About a third of young adults 18-21 who aged out of foster care do not have enough money to live on. Statistically, this represents 336 young adults.

Safe and Stable Housing

- 13.9% of young adults 18-21 who aged out of foster care are not in safe and stable housing. This represents 140 young adults. 162 have been homeless for at least one night in the previous year.

Sufficient Education/Vocational Training

- 25.7% of young adults aging out of foster care who are not yet 21 have **neither** their high school diploma nor their GED, and are not currently attending high school or GED classes. This represents 266 young adults.

Avoid High Risk Behaviors

- 46.2% of young adults 18-21 who aged out of foster care are engaging in high risk behaviors. This represents 458 young adults.

Personal Support Network

- Four of every 10 young adults aging out of foster care, or 133 young adults per year, cannot identify five caring adults who would be supportive toward them in a crisis or just as an ongoing friend and counsel.

Postpone Parenthood

- Over 20% of young adults 18-21 who aged out of foster care are parents who are neither married nor partnered with another person who is helping them to parent their child. This represents 201 single, unsupported parents.

Access to Health Care and Insurance

- The majority of youth aging out of care have more mental, dental and physical health problems than their peers who did not age out of care. Many are underinsured or uninsured.
 - 4.9% have untreated medical problems
 - 10.7% have untreated mental health problems
 - 6.0% have untreated dental health problems
 - 4.6% have developmental disabilities

Education Training Vouchers Eligibility

- Students who were in DSS foster care on or after their 17th birthday or were adopted from DSS foster care on or after their 16th birthday; **and***
 - have completed high school diploma or GED; **and**
 - are enrolled or accepted for enrollment in a qualifying postsecondary educational or vocational program; **and**
 - are eligible for LINKS services
 - Students who are younger than 17 may qualify on an individual basis if they have finished their secondary school requirements and are accepted for enrollment at a qualifying postsecondary school.
- **Recent legislation includes as eligible youth who entered relative guardianship on or after age 16.*

Eligible Institutions (ETV)

- Up to \$5000 per year toward the cost of attendance at any qualifying institution.
- If the institution takes Pell Grants, they are eligible
- Includes vocational school, community college certificates as well as degrees, and 4 year colleges
- Public or private, in-state or out of state.

NC Reach Scholarships



- Established as part of the 2007 Budget Bill
- Eligible: Youth who aged out of NC foster care OR were adopted from NC foster care on or after 12th birthday
- Good at all branches of UNC and all public NC community colleges
- Pays balance of costs of attendance after other publicly funded grants are applied (e.g. Pell Grant, ETV)

Costs of Attendance are determined by the schools and include:

- Tuition
- Fees
- Books and equipment
- Room and Board
- Transportation
- Day care for parenting youth
- Student health insurance
- Loan repayment for costs of attendance

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