

PFP IMPACT

Best Practice Recommendations of project Foster Power



FOCUSING ON EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT:

- Encouraging Education
- Providing Support
- Modeling Skills
- Planning for the Big Picture
- Thinking Ahead

IMPROVING SUPPORTS AS YOUTH TRANSITION OUT OF FOSTER CARE

project Foster Power is a group of current and former foster youth, ages 15 to 25+, who are using our voices and experiences to improve the Colorado child welfare system through youth-led organizing and advocacy. Hosted by the Rocky Mountain Children's Law Center, pFP is the Colorado partner of **Foster Youth in Action**, a network of groups across the United States and Canada who believe in the power of foster youth voice.

pFP follows a **Youth Action Cycle** to listen directly to youth members across the state, identify a shared issue, develop a plan, and work to create change through collective action. Hearing time and time again that youth did not feel adequately prepared or supported in their transition to adulthood, we identified our 2020-2021 issue for action: **Improving Supports for Young People Exiting Foster Care**. As part of this campaign, youth came together to develop best practice recommendations for professionals across three key areas: 1) Placements that Better Meet Our Needs, 2) Self-Care and Community, and 3) Education and Employment. This is the third of three volumes of best practice recommendations. Our intention is that these recommendations spark change in practice and create greater dialogue around these issues. We encourage you to contact us to continue the conversation.

BEST PRACTICE #1 PURSUING EDUCATION

Believe in youth. Show them what is possible.

Our Recommendations:

- Don't just tell youth that college is possible. Make it possible by helping them find, apply for, and understand scholarships, grants, and financial aid.
- Experiences matter. Bring youth to visit different types of education programs like trade schools, community colleges, state colleges and universities, certification programs, and others. Young people need to see it to know that it is actually a possibility for them.
- Connect youth with people, programs, and resources that will help them throughout their post-secondary education, both within the school itself and outside of school. Getting to the first day isn't enough. To pursue their goals, they need continued support.
- Help young people to build and manage their schedules as they transition to post-secondary opportunities. They may be juggling work, family, and other commitments on top of the school obligations. There are a lot of moving pieces and they need support to navigate everything.
- Believe in youth. And help them to believe in themselves. Help young people to navigate the barriers that they may face along the way.

The Problem . . .

"It is an institutional problem that not everyone is seen as 'good enough' or 'having what it takes.' I had people who told me I had what it takes, but not everyone had those things."

-S.L.

"The supports professionals can provide us even before we get into school can make all the difference.

It can make it feel actually possible. Without these support systems we can easily fall through the cracks or not believe that we can do it."

-B.T.

Our Voice:

"When I was getting ready for college, I had to do my own personal research and make connections myself to find supports in order to pay and go to college."

-E.M.

" Programs like Fostering Success supported me during my time in higher education. It made me feel like I was not alone, and was one of the reasons I stayed. Help youth get connected to programs like these."

K.U.

BEST PRACTICE #2

FINDING EMPLOYMENT

Walk alongside youth. Show them where to start.

Our Recommendations:

- Allow youth to get jobs while they are still in foster care. Support them during their introduction to the workforce!
- Encourage youth to think about volunteering. It's a great way to build job skills and connections and may lead to employment opportunities in the future.
- Show youth how to do a job search online or where to look in their own neighborhoods. Talk with them about what they may want to look for when they are searching, and help them develop a plan.
- Getting a job is an entire process requiring skills from start to finish. Knowing how to apply is an important step. Help youth practice filling out job applications, crafting resumes, and writing cover letters.
- Youth may be nervous before an interview or before their first day of work. Help them to develop the confidence and skills to overcome those nerves.
- Support youth in finding jobs that will offer them community. Friends made at work can be some of the best support systems.
- Make the connection for youth that having a job can be beneficial for their own mental health, their social and emotional lives, and their futures.

The Problem . . .

"After transitioning out of care you have to rely on yourself. Your GAL and caseworker aren't there anymore. There are so many skills we need to know in order to find and keep a job before we leave foster care. Please take the time to communicate with us, help us develop these skills to step into a professional world."

-S.B.

Our Voice:

"I didn't get any support looking for a job. I had classes for interview prep. But every job I ever got, I got of my own devices."

-S.C.

"I got jobs while in residential care but every time I went to go for a first day, my therapist or someone else said I wasn't ready and needed more healing work."

-V.C.

BEST PRACTICE #3

KEEPING EMPLOYMENT

"Don't just tell us. Teach us."

Our Recommendations:

- Help us to learn skills common to all types of employment. For example: "professionalism", talking to strangers, showing up on time, advocating for ourselves in the workplace, and professional conflict resolution.
- Give youth the opportunity to learn how to manage their own time and schedules while they are still in foster care.
- Support youth in navigating transportation. They will need to get to and from work. Some jobs will even require a license. Support youth in getting their license before they turn 18. If that's not possible, brainstorm other transportation options.
- Being able to work with different personality types is a necessary skill. Support youth in this area. Help young people navigate difficult conversations with co-workers or their employer. This might range from discussing a conflict with a co-worker, asking for a raise, navigating a schedule conflict, or discussing opportunities for job growth.
- Employment paperwork can be confusing! Help youth learn the essential skills of filling out a W-2 or I-9 form at work and filing their taxes correctly.

The Problem . . .

"We need stability in placement in order to learn the skills to build our professionalism. Young people in foster care need the opportunity to experience the work place. Give us this opportunity."

-S.L.

"If you don't teach us these skills, who will?"

-Anonymous

Our Voice:

"My team didn't teach me how to keep a job. When I turned 18 years old, I had no where to go, and I was broke. I took a job that wasn't good for me, just to pay my bills."

-Anonymous

"When I was in foster care I was not taught any of these skills, because of this I still don't have a full time job. These skills are essential to succeed in life."

-A.M.

BEST PRACTICE #4

BIG-PICTURE LIFE SKILLS

Set youth up for success after care.

Our Recommendations:

- Help youth develop overall financial literacy. Many young people learn these skills naturally in their homes while growing up. Those in care do not often get that education.
- Open a bank account with youth and help them understand the purpose of having one. Teach young people how to save money in that account. Explain what it means to have a credit score and talk about how one can build and maintain "good credit." Help youth practice both writing a check and paying a bill electronically.
- Be sure to connect youth with the Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood before they leave care. Explain what kind of support that program can provide, even if they aren't currently open to those services.
- Coach youth about balancing their schedules, upholding commitments, and setting up necessary appointments. Logistics can be difficult. Work with young people to practice scheduling things like doctor's appointments.
- Talk with young people about being parents themselves. Teach them skills and tell them about supports. This is a big worry for some young people in care. These conversations can help them break the cycle of having their children experience the system.
- Encourage young people to advocate for themselves while they are still in the system. Self-advocacy is a skill that will support them for life.

The Problem . . .

"Society expects parents to teach youth these subjects. In foster care, this isn't an option for us. Leaving these topics out of discussions between a professional and a young person will create gaps for foster youth when it comes to their life skills and overall success."

-B.T.

"Youth in the system grow up so fast. Priorities shift when a young person is involved. We miss out on opportunities to learn some of these life skills. It is important for our teams to reach out, and find ways to support us."

-H.T.

Our Voice:

"During my time in foster care I was never taught by my professionals what a 401k was, what a proper salary looks like, how to file taxes, or how to understand what job benefits are. This didn't set me up for success."

-S.B.

"The system sets you up to be lost, afraid, and frustrated with yourself. We never could work and weren't taught responsibility. They were too focused on our traumatic pasts and treated us like breakable kids who needed to be in a bubble, but that never helped us, it only hurt us."

-S.L.

BEST PRACTICE #5

OTHER LIFE NEEDS

Teach youth to think to the future.

Our Recommendations:

- When youth leave foster care, they need a place to live. This isn't just a temporary need, but a need for the rest of their lives. Help them understand what housing options exist, even if they aren't ready for those opportunities yet.
- Rent is expensive, especially on one's own. Help youth learn to safely find roommates that will feel like a "good fit."
- Teach us how to find and get connected to temporary and permanent financial supports. Example of these are: housing voucher programs, public housing, Education Training Vouchers, scholarships, loans, grants, social security, etc.
- Prepare youth to be problem-solvers. They don't want to be reliant on partners or friends. Teach them how and when to ask for help.
- It can feel overwhelming to have so many fragmented resources and agencies providing support. If you are working with a young person and they need help from another organization, provide a warm introduction when possible, rather than just giving youth a referral number.
- Encourage youth to learn from their mistakes along the way. It is natural for young adults to "mess up." Help them to keep going.
- In foster care, youth don't always get the same opportunities as their peers in learning how to care for themselves. Don't forget about youth. They may seek out your help in the future.

The Issue . . .

"When a young person is in foster care everyone makes decisions for them. We need to learn responsibility, and how to take of ourselves while we are still in care."

-D.M.

"Professionals are networkers for youth in care. We need help navigating these systems. We haven't been taught these things yet, and we need your help to learn it."

-K.A.

Our Voice:

"My team connected me with Chafee services before leaving care. My Chafee resource has connected me with my community to better myself currently. It has been lifesaving. Every young person in care should be connected to a resource that will support them like Chafee has supported me."

-A.M.

As foster youth, we often feel like outsiders in our own lives, not being given the opportunity to speak up and make choices.

These best practice recommendations were created FOR professionals BY youth with lived experience in foster care. We are here to be a part of the solution. We offer these recommendations to guide your work so that you can support youth in the best way possible.

Thank you for taking the time to read these. We hope you stop to think about how you can put them into practice.

Our goal is to improve supports for youth exiting foster care.
That starts with YOU and it starts NOW.

Stay connected with us via Facebook or Instagram:

@projectfosterpower

To get more information, email, call or text:

projectfosterpower@childlawcenter.org

720-591-6901

