

**New England Convening on Youth Permanence
November 30 and December 1, 2010
Policy Roundtable - Extending Care beyond Age 18**

The policy roundtable on extending care beyond 18 was a forum for the 6 New England states to discuss practice & policy regarding continuing services and placements for youth who are approaching adulthood. These conversations revealed three broad topic areas, there are highlights from each area below:

1 – The Needs of youth in care as they approach their 18th birthdays and prepare for transition – what topics need to be addressed in services and case planning, what common challenges are faced;

2 – The Logistics of extending care for youth over-18 – how these services are funded, promising and emerging practices, how they are structured and delivered;

3 – The Value of the extending foster care – persuasive arguments for the practice, data points that indicate its success, feedback from youth and other stakeholders about its efficacy

1 – The Needs

- Permanency
 - Finding and strengthening connections for older youth has become the number one priority across the region. This includes pursuing adoption for older adolescents, even after their 18th birthdays. It also includes creating a broad relationship-based network.
- Education
 - Education has historically been the main reason to extend care past 18. There is an ongoing regional focus on higher education – informing youth about resources and opportunities, promoting access, increasing successful completion, finding funding, etc.
 - Youth report that they would like to have more help with education planning and decision-making at and around their 18th birthdays, including exploring resources
- Employment
 - Building job skills is a priority for youth approaching transition out of foster care, and becomes more critical after 18. Apprenticeships and internships have been successful employment preparation tools and have also built social/community connections.
- Other Aspects to consider
 - Mental Health, Housing (including maintaining foster home placements)

2 – The Logistics

- Promising Practices
 - Teaming – This practice assembles groups of professionals and stakeholders (including kin, caregivers, teachers, and staff) to address issues facing youth in transition, particularly permanency planning. There is a general consensus that youth should be encouraged to participate on their own teams – higher levels of youth engagement and participation result in better outcomes overall. Team meetings should happen more frequently as youth approach transitions, and can be used to address all relevant issues.
 - Milestone Meetings – Some states are having meetings with youth (and their networks) at crucial junctures to discuss options and make plans, e.g. goals and milestones meeting at 18th birthday, case reviews every 6 months after 18,
- Funding Strategies
 - Several states have been spending state (non-federally reimbursed) dollars to support 18+ placements, they are recently pursuing ways to get federal reimbursement
 - Some employment efforts have leveraged Workforce Investment Act dollars to provide internships, training, etc
 - Community providers must support these placements with complementary services.

3 – The Value

- Data about its worth
 - The most convincing arguments are those with a cost-benefit analysis about the relative value of current preventative services vs. the eventual cost to other state systems (e.g. welfare, adult corrections) if youth aren't served now.
 - Information about educational attainment for 18+ youth in care is available & persuasive.
 - Stories about youth leadership are available & persuasive.
- Effective Advocacy Strategies
 - Youth-led advocacy
 - Youth are very effective at direct advocacy with law- and policymakers
 - Youth can provide success stories that can personally illustrate the data
 - Youth can provide a very personal reminder that the 18+ population shouldn't represent an "easy cut" in budget
 - Leadership buy-in
 - Legislative, executive and agency leadership have been key in several states – their understanding of the issue has helped this become (and remain) a priority.
 - This extends to leaders in the broader community outside the public child welfare agency (juvenile defenders, non-profits), their support can be very effective.
 - Messaging
 - The ability to achieve permanency outcomes is enhanced by providing services to 18+ youth because we have more time to work toward permanent plans.
 - Educational outcomes improve with services to 18+ youth, and several other outcomes have positive correlations with improvements in education
 - The need for these services will decrease over time if we improve permanency outcomes earlier in cases