

TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD FOR ETHNIC MINORITY YOUTH IN CHILD AND YOUTH WELFARE

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This document is a summary of an exploratory literature review on youth from ethnocultural communities in youth protection. Leaving the youth protection system places youths at risk. In fact, these individuals have little education or professional and life skills to help them transition «smoothly» into adulthood. Those from ethnocultural communities also face other barriers related to discrimination, particularly in the labour market. These barriers result in increased vulnerability (Iglehart and Becerra, 2002).

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS

The implementation of transition support programs, as well as the development of long-term relationships and trusting relationships with social workers, are components that aid in the successful transition of youth to adulthood. For example, Iglehart and Becerra (2002) found that adolescent who were placed and participated in an independent living program valued the relationships they had with the staff more than the program itself. These connections became the program's cornerstone, «eclipsing» the parts of skill development that were at its core. According to the authors, the lack of enthusiasm for the program may be due in part to a lack of family systems to support them until they are ready to embark on the independence journey.

PREPARATION FOR AUTONOMY AND PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH IN CARE

Adequate preparation for transition is a vehicle for success for youth exiting the youth protection system and can act as a foundation against the adversities they encounter in adulthood. Moreover, because the realities of exit involve housing insecurity, uncertainty in work and school, and family dysfunction (Iglehart & Becerra, 2002), it is essential to prepare youth with a plan for housing, work, and education in order to minimize the risks of transitioning to adult life.

In addition, high participation in activities designed to transition youth to independence and emancipation from the youth protection system is likely to result in better outcomes (Villegas, Rosenthal, O'Brien, & Pecora, 2014). As an illustration, adequate preparation for independent transition to adulthood increases the likelihood of high school completion among youth in ethnocultural communities, and particularly among African Americans (Garcia et al., 2012).

Support networks dedicated to individual assistance, coordination of services, and involvement of youth in decisions that affect them are thus considerable success factors toward a successful life after the placement experience. Equally important is maintaining the relationship with the child's biological family. Providing foster youth with appropriate skills (self-advocacy, mentoring, social support, etc.) to succeed in adulthood and to engage in discussions about their future is also critical (Barrett, 2017; Iglehart & Becerra, 2002; Villegas et al., 2014).

YOUTH WHO ARE LESS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE

The transition to adulthood is difficult for young people involved in the youth protection system, and more particularly for those from ethnocultural communities, for whom the issue of discrimination represents an additional obstacle on several levels: education, the labour market, the social safety net, health and social services, community resources, etc. (Sow, Zorn and LaRoche, 2001). (Sow, Zorn and Lamarre, 2020). In this regard, the authors believe that «belonging to a minority group influences the perceptions and expectations one may have of a young person and, more generally, influences his or her pathway in a multitude of ways...» (Sow, Zorn and Lamarre, 2020, p. 31).

The importance of preparation for adulthood and social support networks should not be disregarded. Without these, youth in care may see their future in a less positive light, as evidenced by the study by Unrau and colleagues (2020). Indeed, this study found that youth from ethnocultural communities were less optimistic than their white peers about life after college. In addition, they had fewer people to rely on for support after school, also feeling less prepared than their White peers in many life skill areas.

WILLINGNESS TO LEAVE AFTER PLACEMENT

Despite the pitfalls, youth who have been involved in the youth protection system can use their negative experiences as a source of motivation for successful transition to adulthood, Chaney and Spell's (2015) study reveals. To this end, African American women have demonstrated an ability to be introspective and make their transition to adulthood a positive experience. Their singular hardships forged their determination to succeed in life and made them resilient. These difficulties led them to learn from their experiences and think positively about the future. The independence and self-confidence of these women motivated them to make a stable life for themselves once they were no longer in the care of the state.

In conclusion, the transition to adulthood is likely to increase the vulnerability of youth from ethno-cultural communities who have not previously had effective support networks, adequate preparation for emancipation from the youth protection system, and general life competencies that help them become self-sufficient. High levels of youth participation in activities designed to prepare them for discharge from placement lead to positive outcomes. Nonetheless, research has shown that negative placement experiences can contribute to resilience and forge youths' determination to succeed in life once they leave the child and youth protection system.

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