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A Study of Outcomes

A study led by researchers from Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, referred to as the “Midwest Study,” provides some of the most comprehensive information to date on the outcomes of youth who have exited foster care. The study, comprising four waves of research findings, followed the same group of young people at ages 19, 21, 23 and 26 from Illinois (where youth can remain in care until 21) and from Iowa and Wisconsin (who exit care at 18). The data suggest that extending foster care

Key Facts: Older Youth in Foster Care
- Nationally, there are approximately 400,000 children in foster care on any given day, with nearly half (200,000) age 14 or older.
- Nearly 26,000 youth age out of foster care at age 18 each year.

Significant Challenges: Aging Out at 18
- More than one in five will become homeless.
- 58 percent will graduate high school by 19 (compared to 87 percent of peers not in foster care).
- 71 percent of young women will be pregnant by 21.
- At age 26, only half are employed.
- One in four will become involved in the juvenile justice system within two years after leaving foster care.
until age 21 may be associated with better outcomes.

Another important source of data for state policymakers to know about is the National Youth in Transition Database. Beginning in 2010, state child welfare agencies began collecting data that tracks the independent living services states provide to youth and develop outcome measures that may be used to assess states’ performance in operating their independent living programs.

### Youth aging out of care at 18, by the numbers...

- **1 in 5** were homeless
- **18%** had been homeless at least once since exiting care; more than half had been homeless more than once
- **1/3** lived in a least 3 different places; 20% had lived in 4 or more
- Only **58%** graduated high school by 19 (compared with 87% of all 19-year olds)
- Under **2%** earned a college degree by age 25 (compared to 28% of all 25-year olds)
- Nearly **¼** did not have a high school diploma or GED by 21
- Only **50%** were employed at age 24
- **$12,064** average income earned at age 23 and 24 (compared to $20,349 for youth in general population)

### Youth remaining in care beyond 18...

- **Doubled** the odds that they would be working or in high school at 19
- **Were twice** as likely to have completed at least one year of college by age 21
- **Doubled** the percentage of youth remaining in care until 21 who earned a college degree
- **Reduced by 38%** the incidence of pregnancy among young women in care before age 20

### Cost Savings

- **$72,000** estimated increase in per-person lifetime earnings by extending foster care
- **$481,000** more in projected earnings over their work life for former foster youth with a college degree compared to those with only a high school diploma
- **$2.40** return on each dollar spent on extended foster care with the attainment of a bachelor’s degree, according to a cost benefit analysis conducted in California

### Resources: