Chapter II
A Common Framework to Help Achieve Positive Transition Outcomes

This chapter provides a framework to assist the multiple organizations that need to be involved to substantially improve the transition outcomes of youth involved with the foster care system and to create the necessary community webs of support.

When thinking about youth in foster care, certain "ordinary" adolescent and teen competencies become particularly relevant: increased independence, separation from the family, exploration of career opportunities, enhanced competencies to organize social and financial assets, educational achievements, and self-confidence. Ideally, the foundation for these competencies begins early in a child's life. Unfortunately, it is exactly at that early stage when many foster care youth begin to experience serious disruptions to these critical developments.

Children enter foster care primarily because of serious abuse, neglect, unstable living conditions, parental abandonment, and voluntary placements by the family as the result of parental inability to manage the behavior of a child. Many of these children come with significant developmental delays, as well as emotional trauma. The necessary stable base of support, especially in early childhood, is inconsistent for some, and totally lacking for many. Thus, the developmental tasks associated with the adolescent and teen years become even more challenging. Frequent moves from one home to another, particularly in the case of older youth, assignment to a group or residential care facility, separation from siblings, and extended separation from the child's family of origin leave only a limited opportunity for positive compensating influences and building resiliency.

The framework that follows, developed by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) in conjunction with ODEP, highlights specific experiences, supports, and services that are relevant to providing comprehensive transition services to all foster care youth, including those with disabilities, within the framework of the *Guideposts for Success*. An increased understanding of the challenges facing this population of young people, combined with an enhanced level of coordination among the education, workforce, post-secondary and child welfare systems, will increase the likelihood of personal and systemic success in the transition from adolescence to productive adulthood and citizenship. This coordination is also a necessary precursor for the leveraging ("blending" or "braiding") of resources among these partners. Finally, the *Guideposts* can support an infrastructure for the measurement of outcomes for foster care youth in transition, especially as it relates to their economic self-sufficiency.

Full implementation of the *Guideposts for Success for Youth in Foster Care* does not yet exist in any known community in its entirety. However, key components are emerging in an array of communities across the country. As more is learned through collaborations among key institutions, and as professionals develop more familiarity and expertise about what different stakeholders can bring to the table, it can be anticipated the full framework will be realized.

Table I:
Guideposts for Success for Youth in Foster Care

GENERAL NEEDS	SPECIFIC NEEDS
1 **School-Based Preparatory Experiences**	In order to perform at optimal levels in all education settings, all youth need to participate in educational programs grounded in standards, clear performance expectations and graduation exit options based upon meaningful, accurate, and relevant indicators of student learning and skills. These should include the following: • academic programs that are based on clear state standards; • career and technical education programs that are based on professional and industry standards; • curricular and program options based on universal design of school, work and community-based learning experiences; • learning environments that are small and safe, including extra supports such as tutoring, as necessary; • supports from and by highly qualified staff; • access to an assessment system that includes multiple measures; and • graduation standards that include options.
	In addition, youth with disabilities need to do the following: • use their individual transition plans to drive their personal instruction, and strategies to continue the transition process post-schooling; • have access to specific and individual learning accommodations while they are in school; • develop knowledge of reasonable accommodations that they can request and control in educational settings, including assessment accommodations; and • be supported by highly qualified transitional support staff that may or may not be school staff.
	Because of the transient nature of the foster care system, the lack of traditional family supports, and the variance in residential settings, youth in foster care need stable education and learning environments and access to additional educational supports and services. More specifically, youth in foster care may also need • to remain in one educational setting or single school system, to the greatest extent possible; • access to safe, quiet and positive learning environments inside and outside of residential facilities, group homes and foster family homes; • access to diverse re-enrollment opportunities to complete high school studies; • additional assistance to assure they master basic skills such as tutoring, after-school programs, and other education preparation services; • exposure to the full range of lifelong learning opportunities; • designated staff at the educational setting with primary responsibility for supporting and monitoring their progress toward educational outcomes; • access to foster care caseworkers trained to support the educational process; and, • educational records stored in a central location and easily retrievable by those who need to access them.
	Youth in foster care who have disabilities need • to be engaged in creating, modifying and integrating their Individualized Education Program (IEP), Transition Plan (TP), Independent Living Plan (ILP), Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), and/or other individualized planning tools. • to be aware that they can bring a non-parental adult, friend, or *guardian at litem* (court appointed representative) to their IEP and/or other individualized planning meetings (e.g., TP, ILP, IPE).

GENERAL NEEDS	SPECIFIC NEEDS
2 **Career Preparation & Work-Based Learning Experiences**	Career preparation and work-based learning experiences are essential in order for youth to form and develop aspirations and to make informed choices about careers. These experiences can be provided during the school day, or through after-school programs, and will require collaborations with other organizations. All youth need information on career options, including the following: • career assessments to help identify students' school and post-school preferences and interests; • structured exposure to postsecondary education and other life-long learning opportunities; • exposure to career opportunities that ultimately lead to a living wage, including information about, educational requirements, entry requirements, income and benefits potential, and asset accumulation; and • training designed to improve job-seeking skills and work-place basic skills (sometimes called "soft skills"). In order to identify and attain career goals, youth need to be exposed to a range of experiences, including the following: • opportunities to engage in a range of work-based exploration activities such as site visits and job shadowing; • multiple on-the-job training experiences, including community service (paid or unpaid), that are specifically linked to the content of a program of study and school credit; • opportunities to learn and practice their work skills (so-called "soft skills"); and • opportunities to learn first-hand about specific occupational skills related to a career pathway.
	In addition, youth with disabilities need to do the following: • understand the relationships between benefits planning and career choices; • learn to communicate their disability-related work support and accommodation needs; and • learn to find, formally request and secure appropriate supports and reasonable accommodations in education, training, and employment settings.
	Because of the significant instability in their lives (e.g. abuse, neglect, abandonment), youth in foster care may not have developed employment expectations, may not have been exposed to employment opportunities, and may have been exposed to a lot of misinformation about employment opportunities. Youth in and preparing to leave foster care need connections to a full range of youth employment programs and services. Youth in and preparing to leave foster care may also need • ongoing assessments of career interests, abilities, strengths, weaknesses and aptitudes; • focused career exploration, employability skills building and work-based learning experiences, including entrepreneurship opportunities; • permanent and meaningful connections to significant adults as mentors and role models in an employment and training context; • the development of an understanding of the value of work, a work ethic and how to obtain, retain, and advance in a job, and transition from one job to another; • Independent Living Plans that incorporate employment and training programs and services in a way that integrates federal Foster Care Independence Act funds (a.k.a. the Chafee program) to leverage other youth employment opportunities; • employment-based programs that have comprehensive and customized services, including structured work-based learning experiences for transitioning youth, which in turn are likely to require a formal relationship between a private or public child welfare agency and the workforce development system.

GENERAL NEEDS	SPECIFIC NEEDS

3

Youth Development & Leadership

Youth development is a process that prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them gain skills and competencies. Youth leadership is part of that process. In order to control and direct their own lives based on informed decisions, all youth need the following:

- mentoring activities designed to establish strong relationships with adults through formal and informal settings;
- peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities;
- exposure to role models in a variety of contexts;
- training in skills such as self-advocacy and conflict resolution;
- exposure to personal leadership and youth development activities, including community service; and
- opportunities that allow youth to exercise leadership and build self-esteem.

In addition, youth with disabilities also need
- mentors and role models including persons with and without disabilities; and
- an understanding of disability history, culture, and disability public policy issues as well as their rights and responsibilities.

Because the child welfare system generally no longer has responsibility for foster youth by the time they turn 18, a time when realistically they will not likely be prepared to be independent self-sufficient adults, youth in foster care need special attention to the development of personal, social and emotional skills for dealing with the consequences of abuse, neglect, abandonment, and victimization. Youth in foster care are highly likely to need

- formal and informal connections to significant adult role models, peer mentors and older youth who have transitioned from foster care to independence, including after they have left the child welfare system;
- additional emphasis on self-empowerment through training in self-advocacy, self-esteem, self-reliance, self-determination, and self-sufficiency;
- ongoing assessments of personal development such as through the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment;
- programs with built-in activities that highlight "rites of passage" or that specially recognize accomplishments;
- Independent Living Plans that incorporate cross organizational support systems in promotion of youth development and leadership;
- an understanding of risk-taking behaviors, and their consequences, such as substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases;
- opportunities to participate in advocacy and civic engagements, such as through volunteer and leadership roles with foster care boards, associations and local youth councils;
- connections to services through youth-driven independent living planning meetings that include family members and/or foster parents;
- connections to lifetime networks of support activities, such as foster care alumni associations; and
- exposure to cultural, ethnic, religious, and gender-specific experiences, as well as culturally competent mentors, peers and program staff.

GENERAL NEEDS	SPECIFIC NEEDS
4 **Connecting Activities**	Young people need to be connected to programs, services, activities, and supports that help them gain access to chosen post-school options. All youth may need one or more of the following: • mental and physical health services; • transportation; • tutoring; • financial planning and management; • post-program supports thorough structured arrangements in postsecondary institutions and adult service agencies; and • connections to other services and opportunities (e.g., recreation).
	Youth with disabilities may need one or more of the following: • acquisition of appropriate assistive technologies; • community orientation and mobility training (e.g., accessible transportation, bus routes, housing, health clinics); • exposure to post-program supports such as independent living centers and other consumer-driven community-based support service agencies; • personal assistance services, including attendants, readers, interpreters, or other such services; and • benefits-planning counseling, including information regarding the myriad of benefits available and their interrelationships so that youth may maximize those benefits in transitioning from public assistance to self-sufficiency.
	Although typically leaving the child welfare system at age 18 with the expectation that they will be independent self-sufficient adults, youth in and leaving foster care need connections to a host of programs and services, particularly in the critical areas of physical and mental health, additional education, employment, housing and income support programs. Youth in and leaving foster care are likely to also need • opportunities to obtain and maintain a valid driver's license, library card, voter registration card, birth certificates, medical and other treatment records, green cards, and other critical personal documents; • access to a knowledgeable adult(s) who can serve as an adult systems "navigator"; • both transitional and long term housing; • safety education that prepares them to maintain safety in personal relationships and in independent living situations; • special accommodations for financial aid for postsecondary education; • parenting education and child care; • special efforts so they are prepared to be informed health care consumers; • connections to municipalities to become responsible, contributing citizens; and • state and local foster care caseworkers and managers partnering with community providers and businesses to foster connections within these domains.

GENERAL NEEDS	SPECIFIC NEEDS
5 **Family Involvement & Supports**	Participation and involvement of parents, family members, and/or other caring adults promotes the social, emotional, physical, academic and occupational growth of youth, leading to better post-school outcomes. All youth need parents, families, and other caring adults who do the following: • have high expectations which build upon the young person's strengths, interests, and needs and that foster each youth's ability to achieve independence and self-sufficiency; • remain involved in their lives and assist them toward adulthood; • have access to information about employment, further education and community resources; • take an active role in transition planning with schools and community partners; and • have access to medical, professional, and peer support networks.
	In addition, youth with disabilities need parents, families, and other caring adults who have the following: • an understanding of the youth's disability and how it affects his or her education, employment and daily living options; • knowledge of rights and responsibilities under various disability-related legislation; • knowledge of and access to programs, services, supports and accommodations available for young people with disabilities; and • an understanding of how individualized planning tools can assist youth in achieving transition goals and objectives.
	Family reunification is a difficult challenge that cannot be separated from the young person's desires to go to work, pursue additional education and live independent lives. Because of the diversity of family experiences and living situations, youth in foster care need systems that recognize an expanded definition of "family," which includes grandparents, relative caregivers, other relatives (siblings, aunts, uncles, etc.) and non-relative, caring adults and that take into consideration unique cultural issues and practices. These systems need to promote permanency, and to identify and help build a support network of family member(s), peers, mentors, and/or significant adult(s) to be included in all aspects of life planning for the young person. Youth in foster care may also need birth parents, siblings, grandparents, other relatives, foster families, group home staff, caseworkers, case managers, and/or significant adults who • participate in "family" team planning that provides opportunities for collaborations among the service providers and the youth; • understand the changing relationships and the life-long need for belonging to a "family"; • have connections to an adult(s) systems "navigator"; • can work with the court system (e.g. attorneys, court appointed special advocates (CASAs), and *guardians ad litem* (GAL)) to be aware of, assess and support each young person's needs, desires and planning process for education, employment and independent living options; and • have knowledge of their own and the young person's rights and responsibilities under child welfare, transition and youth-related legislation.
	Additionally, youth in foster care who have disabilities need birth parents, siblings, grandparents, other relatives, foster families, group home staff, caseworkers, case managers, and/or significant adults who • understand and are trained in recognizing, assisting and supporting youth in dealing with the social and emotional consequences of having been abused, neglected and/or abandoned as a direct result of their disability(ies); and • know how to access and make connections to and between the child welfare system and various disability programs and services.