

International Fathers Rights Foundation, (785) 230-5620

## Special Interest

At the center of preparation of foster adolescents for interdependent living are the roles of biological and foster families.

"Relations are simply a tedious pack of people who haven't got the remotest knowledge of how to live, nor the smallest instinct about when to die."



## Roles of Biological and Foster Family

The Role of the biological family in foster care of adolescents in general in preparation for independent living in particular needs to be reexamined and strengthened.

The biological family continues to have critical significance for the adolescents in care. For example, it has been found that many adolescents returned to their biological families learning connections and resume their relationships with their parents and other family members.

Moreover families can end by feeling better about themselves for having become involved at least in the end phase of their child's growing up.

For these reasons, biological families should be more extensively considered as potential resources for adolescents during the placements as well as following discharge. The practice of separating young people from their families must be questioned.

Current knowledge suggests rather that young people need differentiating from troubling aspects of their families. While remaining connected in whatever ways possible to those biological figures central to their identity and

experience. Social workers, foster parents and others working with adolescents should consider more explicitly whether biological parents can become at least partial resources for their children.

This process however is one that should begin long before the young person leaves care. In addition parents as well as adolescents require help to develop the skills that may be useful in learning or relearning to relate to one another.

Although the parents pay have not been competent in bringing up their children in the earlier phases of development, perhaps they can be helped to learn the skills required to relate to them as young adults.

### Foster Families:

Foster parents play a central role in helping adolescents to prepare for life after foster care. It is they who have the most contact with and knowledge the young persons in their care.

For these reasons as well as those related to federal cutbacks in services to children, society has changed foster parents with a full range of professional caregiving responsibilities. Foster parents are expected to

guide youths and learn skills for interdependent living: observe and assess progress toward service goals: advocate for services for their foster children and often manage the provision of these services for their foster children and perhaps most important, deal daily with difficult behaviors that commonly occur in adolescent as well as those that result from adolescent experiences in foster care.

Clearly foster parents are an integral part of the services team and should be encouraged to work as partners with social workers, agencies and adolescents for interdependent living. Their roles should be strengthened supported and made more visible. It is true that young people in care struggle to become emancipated from parent figures, including their foster parents, but this fact does not mean that they do not have a need for linkages with a family just as adolescents in general do. In some situations the foster family can be a source of ongoing supports and connectedness. In short, interdependent approach would encourage continued involvement between adolescents and foster parents? But this approach also means that the foster parents continued involvement should be recognized and supported.



*"Hold fast to dreams  
For if dreams die  
Life is a broken-winged bird  
That cannot fly.  
Hold fast to dreams  
For when dreams go  
Life is a barren field  
Frozen with snow."*

*Langston Hughes*

## Foster Families continued.....

So inclusion, successful achievement of interdependence leads to what we really mean when we say becoming independent, namely becoming a self-sufficient person who is comfortable with self and happily connected to significant others, family as they see

them, community and society interactions.

This situation is what we want for all youths who will constitute the next generation. Why would we want less for the very children for whom society has assumed the greatest responsibility, to enable

adolescents in foster care to achieve the goal of interdependent living? We must provide them with services that help them develop the key components of competent adulthood

## Life after Foster Care

### OVERVIEW:

In response to their growing, adolescents in foster family care in recent years have been attracting increasing attention from policymakers, researchers, administrators, and practitioners in child welfare as other agencies.

### ADOLESCENTS IN FOSTER FAMILY CARE:

The proportion of adolescents in foster family care in the United States has been increasing as the permanency planning movement has been successful in keeping younger children out of care and reuniting them with their families following placement or placing them in adoption or their permanent planed placement. Although policies and programs have tended to lump all of these young people into one category, it is important to understand more clearly and plan

more deliberately for their different needs and challenges.

Clearly adolescents in care need to develop or enhance a range of life skills if they are to move toward competent adulthood. Life skills have been defined as those competencies needed to act effectively in social roles and environments.

For adolescents, these include skills in two major categories: Tangible or hard skills and intangible or soft skills. The tangible skills refer to those skills that are known or done, such as finding and maintaining employment and housing, obtaining food, clothing, healthcare and other service and managing money.

Now in contrast the intangible skills are those that are felt and are related to communication, decision making, and

problem solving as well as the personal attributes of self-esteem and the ability to confront anger, manage past losses and develop relationships.

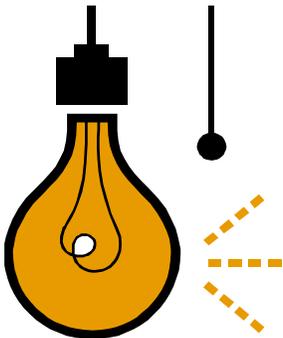
Recent focus on the complex needs of young people leaving foster family care hassled to an understanding both categories of skills are necessary for a satisfying life and that each relies on the other for full life and that each relies on the other for full development.

These include coping with the effects of separation from their biological families, especially their feelings of loss and grief; making peace with a personal history different from the norms that society defines and relating to diverse families (biological parents, foster parents and in some cases adoptive parents); and establishing, connections with other significant figures in their

social environment without the visual family supports which the foster care experience, which often involves multiple placements and lack of stability, is likely complicate rather than promote their growth and development, its resources are insufficient their growth and development. The resources are insufficient as is attention to their individual needs and the abrupt and often premature discharge at age eighteen leaves no provision for the continuing supports that all young adults needs.

The foster care population includes a disproportionate number of young persons of color who have limited economic opportunities and who suffer the consequences of racism and other oppressive social conditions hostile to their achievement of competence. The increased recognition of the needs and risks faced by adolescents in foster family care has led to important developments in policy, programs and practices.

Two pertinent federal laws should be mentioned public law 96-272 adoption assistance and child welfare act



of 1980 and public law 99-272, the independent living initiative of 1986. Now what you need to understand in this has been implemented, have they been refreshed, renewed and rewritten to deal with the problems of the 21's century issues.

The adoption assistance and child welfare act established the legal and policy framework for children and youths coming to the attention of the public child welfare system. In particular it sets forth several procedural reforms aimed at providing permanent families for young people, preferably with their biological parents but also, if appropriate with adoptive or foster families. In relation to adolescents, one of the most prominent provisions of this law is its emphasis on the responsibility of public agencies to provide a permanent family for every young person.

The independent living initiative of 1986 focuses on preparation of young people in care for "emancipation" or independent living that is the status of adulthood and self-sufficiency. The law provided a sum of forty million dollars per annum, available to the state that supports independent living programs. But required that the effectiveness of these programs be documented for finding to be continued or expanded beyond 1988,

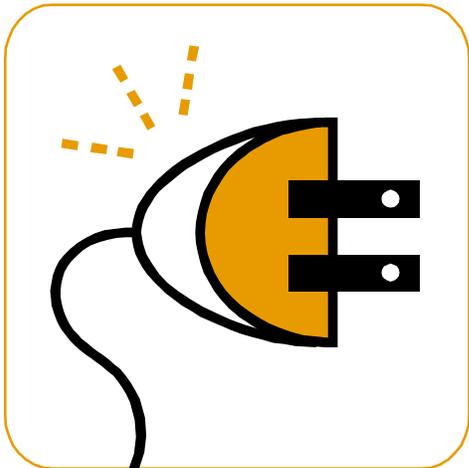
Agency administrators, policy makers and practitioners have therefore had to go beyond showing that there are foster children who appear to need preparatory and remedial emancipation programs; they must assess program activities and outcomes. Now it should also be noted that is a growing trend toward provided specialized therapeutic foster family care for certain adolescents entering the foster care system in recognition of their special needs.

## PREPARATION FOR INTERDEPENDENT LIVING

As a central feature of the philosophy of permanency planning a major goal of the child welfare system is preparing young people in foster care to develop, sustain and enrich nurturing relationships with others; select relationships that are mutually rewarding and growth producing and become adults who are able to care for others through giving to and interacting with individuals and groups in the community.

This goal requires shifting from our current emphasis on independent living to a mindset of interdependence or interdependent living in our work with young people in foster care.

# Life after foster care continued.....



The concept of independent living, while having societal currency and embodying ideas such as self-direction and self-sufficiency, also involves negative connotations or consequences. In particular emphasis on independence for adolescents in foster care increases the following probabilities:

There will be unrealistic/unfair/inappropriate expectations of adolescents, foster parents, social workers and the services delivery system in general.

Adolescents whose dependency needs have gone unmet may be denied the services and continuing dependency, they may require by pushing for premature independence.

The preparation for adulthood is placed largely on the adolescent rather than being perceived as the shared responsibility of policymakers, practitioners, biological and foster parents and others to help youth who have been in

community care become participating adults in the community.

Programs and services may be misdirected for example, some adolescents may be forced to use programs focusing on learning skills in intangible areas such as budgeting or housekeeping (skills commonly identified with independence) when first and foremost, and they need help in intangible areas such as self-image or interpersonal communication.

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## Interdependent Living

The concept of interdependence living is however based on the assumption those human beings are interdependent: that is able to relate to and function with others using community influence and resources and being able to carry out management tasks of daily life and having a productive quality of life through positive or appropriate interactions with individuals, groups, organizations and social systems. It means recognizing the value of mutuality as well as self-determination and being able to assume responsibility for individual choice and its consequences.

In addition this concept helps to emphasize that a major goal of child welfare practice is helping adolescents in foster care to

develop and maintain the essential connection required to meet their common human needs. Interdependent living involves a range of essential connections between specific human needs and the ways people seek to fulfill these needs: that is reciprocal connection between the youth in foster care and diverse components such as family community history and values. When people have positive connections, they tend to live more stable satisfying lives. When people are disconnected ever from one essential connection their wellbeing may be negatively affected regarding preparation for interdependent living as a shared responsibility involving the young person, foster parents, biological parents the agency and the community for the focus of intervention for the youth.