

# JOURNEY TO SUCCESS

A diverse group of six young adults, three men and three women, are smiling and looking towards the camera. They are standing in front of a light-colored brick wall. The group includes a Black man, a White woman, a Hispanic man, a Black woman, an Asian woman, and a Hispanic woman.

Policy Solutions to Improve Outcomes for All  
Youth and Young Adults Who Experience Foster Care

MAY  
2023



# JOURNEY TO SUCCESS

**A campaign to improve outcomes for all youth and young adults who experience foster care by promoting their health and healing, family connections, and economic security**

Journey to Success brings together a diverse network of youth advocates, local, state and national organizations, researchers and others to elevate a national conversation about the experience of youth in foster care and share policy solutions that are needed to drive program and practice improvements. The campaign embraces a wide range of perspectives, with a priority focus on the perspectives and involvement of individuals who have lived experience in foster care.



**EQUITY → HEALING → FAMILY → ECONOMIC SECURITY**

# The Campaign's Vision

**Every young person who experiences foster care has the opportunity to succeed and thrive on their journey through adolescence to young adulthood, and throughout life.**

This entails healing, achieving family connections and permanence, and having economic stability.



**EQUITY → HEALING → FAMILY → ECONOMIC SECURITY**

# Continuing Legacy of Youth-driven Advocacy

1985

**Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985** authorizes new entitlement funds to help young people transition from foster care

1999

**Foster Care Independence Act** creates the Chafee Program as we know it today

2008

**Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act** extends Title IV-E foster care eligibility to age 21

2010

**Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act** Extends Medicaid coverage to age 26 for youth formerly in foster care

2014

**Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act** updates Chafee; empowers youth decision making; promotes normalcy

2018

**Family First Prevention Services Act** extends reach of program to youth up to 23; ETV up to 26

2020

**Consolidated Appropriations Act, Division X, 2021** provides an additional \$400 million to Chafee for COVID relief for young people  
**Consolidated Appropriations Act, Division Q, 2021** the **Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act** provides full implementation of housing assistance through FUP & FSS for all youth leaving foster care

2022

**Journey to Success** advances equity and better outcomes for all youth and young adults who experience foster care

**1986:** Willie Palmer vs. Mario Cuomo in the New York State Supreme Court

**1988:** California Youth Connection launches

**2001:** PSSF Amendments of 2001 authorizes ETV program

**2004:** First Midwest Study report by Chapin Hall

**2009:** Creation of Senate Caucus on Foster Youth

**2010:** Creation of Congressional Caucus on Foster Youth

**2011:** First dataset submitted to National Youth in Transition Database

**2020-21:** #UpChafee campaign

**2003-23:** ~20 state legislatures enact foster youth bill of rights: AZ, AR, CA, CO, DE, FL, HI, IN, MA, MN, MS, NV, NH, NJ, NC, OR, PA, RI, SC, TX  
**2008-23:** Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute Foster Youth Interns publish policy recs for Congress & Administration

At least 40 states have youth leadership entities (i.e. youth boards)



# Policy Advocacy Goals



HEALTH AND  
HEALING



FAMILY TIES AND  
PERMANENCE



ECONOMIC  
SECURITY

# What Youth and Young Adults Say They Need

## Healing

- Prioritize our mental health and healing from trauma
- Let us lead
- Value and affirm who we are
- Support our connections to family, friends, community, and culture
- Work to rebuild trust in our communities

# What Youth and Young Adults Say They Need

## Family

- Do more to prevent foster care
- Keep us with our siblings and with people we know
- Work harder to help us achieve permanency
- Never give up on our families (as we define them)
- Support us when we have our own children



# What Youth and Young Adults Say They Need

## **Economic Security**

- Support our education and early work experience
- Help us build assets
- Provide for our basic needs past age 21
- Make transition supports effective
- Make all supports more accessible
- Give us more time to launch, like our peers!



# Actionable Recommendations That Will Create a Better Future for All Children and Youth in Foster Care



## FOSTERING YOUTH TRANSITIONS 2023:

# Policy Action Recommendations

1. Prioritize family ties and permanent family connections to provide those lifelong relationships that youth need most to succeed
2. Invest in and redesign Chafee to ensure youth in foster care are plugged in to supportive relationships and services
3. Improve extended foster care to provide the supportive services that youth and young adults need to heal and succeed in young adulthood

## JOURNEY TO SUCCESS

### FOSTERING YOUTH TRANSITIONS 2023: POLICY ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

The Fostering Youth Transitions 2023 report shines a light on the urgent need for policy action to nurture family connections and create stronger supports for youth in and transitioning out of foster care.

Advocates can use this new data to urge federal policymakers to advance practical, grounded, youth-informed policies that improve outcomes for older youth in care through three policy approaches: **1) Prioritize Family Ties and Permanence**; **2) Invest in and Redesign Chafee**; and **3) Improve Extended Foster Care**. Below are specific talking points advocates can use for policymaker outreach.

#### POLICY ACTION TALKING POINTS

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's new report, "Fostering Youth Transitions 2023" lays bare the challenges and the opportunities for youth experiencing foster care across the country.

The latest data shines a light on the fact that the supportive services that are meant to help youth in foster care succeed on their journey to adulthood are underfunded, inaccessible, or fundamentally broken.

**These findings are nothing short of an alarm bell that federal policymakers should heed as an urgent call to action.** We encourage policymakers to take immediate action in three key areas.

#1

**Prioritize family ties and permanent family connections to provide those lifelong relationships that youth need most to succeed.**

Findings from the Fostering Youth Transitions 2023 report show that we are severely failing to connect youth to family. Youth in well-supported family-based foster care are more likely to leave foster care to join a permanent family.

#### RECOMMENDED POLICY ACTION:

Federal policymakers should increase support for kinship placements and address the barriers that prevent youth in foster care from living with relatives or in family-based settings while in foster care. Federal policy also should build incentives to take best practice to scale and make youth engagement in permanency planning a practice norm.

# Prioritize Family Ties and Permanent Family Connections to Provide Those Lifelong Relationships That Youth Need Most to Succeed

- Address barriers that prevent youth in foster care from living with relatives or in family-based settings while in foster care
- Increase kinship placements
- Improve supports to youth and caregivers
- Improve recruitment and retention of kin and non-kin caregivers

Strengthen and incentive permanency through reunification, and continue incentives for permanency through guardianship and adoption

Make youth engagement in permanency planning a practice norm; incentive agencies and courts to achieve wide-scale implementation of best practices in youth engagement; clarify that peer delivered services and youth engagement are federally reimbursable

Support state and local foster care agencies in developing their workforce so they can provide tailored and intensive permanence services for youth and young adults

Improve the effectiveness by increasing involvement of youth in continuous program improvement, including methods of obtaining youth feedback

Incentivize agencies to develop outreach policies to ensure more youth are aware of services available to them

## The Case for Reform

- Permanency rates for teens and young adults are declining.
- One in four teens who are in foster care age out on their own, usually at age 18, without ever being connected to family in a permanent way. As young adults, they often experience homelessness, joblessness, mental health challenges and poverty.
- Too many youth have a group placement while in foster care, even though youth in these settings are less likely to have relationships with supportive adults, access to effective mental health support or success in school and work.



# Invest In and Redesign Chafee to Ensure Youth in Foster Care are Plugged In to Supportive Relationships and Services

Make healing and family connections a priority for Chafee eligible youth

Increase investment in Chafee by at least \$100/m year to address resource needs of state and local agencies

Give state the flexibility to serve youth and young adults up to age 26, similar to Medicaid and ETV eligibility

Update the array of services and incentivize agencies to offer those that youth most need:

- peer-delivered services
- transportation, and
- help brokering housing, mental health, parenting and workforce support

Improve the effectiveness by increasing involvement of youth in continuous program improvement, including methods of obtaining youth feedback

Incentivize agencies to develop outreach policies to ensure more youth are aware of services available to them

## The Case for Reform

- Permanency rates for teens and young adults are declining.
- One in four teens who are in foster care age out on their own, usually at age 18, without ever being connected to family in a permanent way. As young adults, they often experience homelessness, joblessness, mental health challenges and poverty.
- Chafee services are not reaching large numbers of eligible youth; more than half of youth ages 14-21 never received a Chafee-funded service during their time in care.

# Improve Extended Foster Care So That it Provides the Supportive Services That Youth and Young Adults Need to Heal and Succeed in Young Adulthood

Encourage and incentivize agencies to collaborate with youth and young adults to raise awareness about the availability of extended foster care and other programs and services.

Guide and incentivize states in designing more effective extended services and programs that young people will want to utilize.

- Elevate the focus on permanency planning
- Ensure young people have safe and appropriate living settings
- Ensure youth and young adult involvement in case planning
- Have caseworkers with specialized skills in supporting young adults

Eliminate barriers to improve access to extended foster care by removing eligibility criteria. Youth who age out of foster care without being connected to permanent family should be categorically eligible for extended foster care. Also eliminate the outdated income eligibility for extended foster care to rebalance the federal-state partnership.

Protect and preserve the rights of youth in foster care, including young parents' rights to their own children, through high-quality legal representation and other avenues.

## The Case for Reform

- To date, 33 states — including D.C., Puerto Rico and nine tribes — provide extended foster care programs that are federally reimbursable.
- Despite the availability of federal reimbursement for extended foster care, participation is low. Nationally about 1 in five youth who leave foster care at age 18 are utilizing extended foster care programs a year later.
- Youth who participate in extended foster care, especially youth of color, have improved outcomes including: increased high school completion and enrollment in higher education; improved employment; and improved earnings and savings.

## THE CASE FOR REFORM:

# Inequities and Poor Outcomes Persist

- Permanency rates for teens and young adults are declining
- Chafee is woefully under-delivering. More than half of eligible youth never received a Chafee service during their time in foster care
- Nearly half of teens who are in foster care age out on their own, usually at age 18, without ever being connected to family in a permanent way
- After foster care, many young people experience homelessness, poverty, unemployment and incarceration
- Poor experience during foster care: lack of access to health and mental health, poor educational achievement, separation from siblings
- Children and youth of color are overrepresented in foster care and are more likely to experience poor outcomes after foster care



# Why the Time is Right for Reform

- We have the benefit of **twenty years of policy research and insights from young people with lived experience.**
- Newly released data on youth experiences and outcomes is nothing short of **an alarm bell that policymakers should take action.**
- We know more than ever before more about **what works.**
- **Opportunities exist on the federal policy landscape**
- **Youth-driven advocacy is mobilized**; we have a policy roadmap and strategic messaging

# Strategic Casemaking

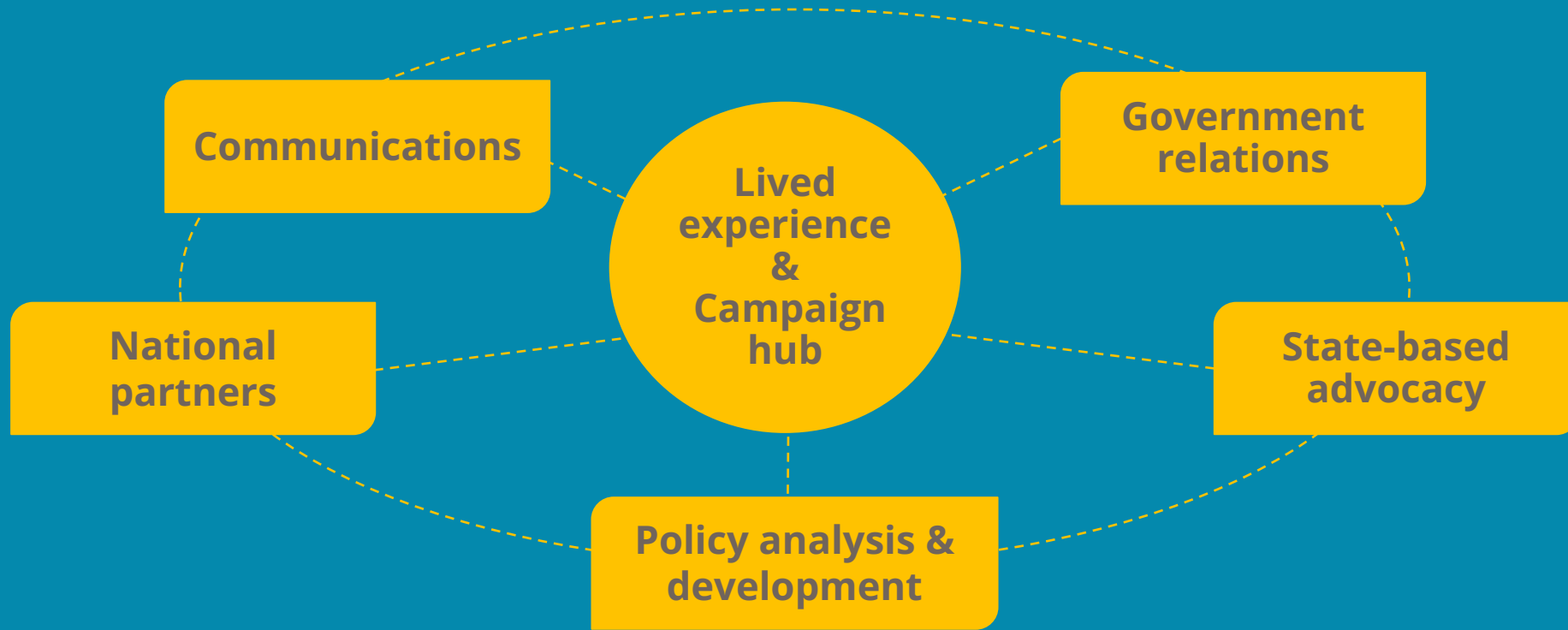
- The potential of today's youth to shape the future is unmatched.
- The energy, creativity and vision young people bring can galvanize prosperity in communities across the country.
- The **journey** from adolescence to adulthood is a pivotal time for all young people and sets the course for success in life.
- All youth need help to navigate the road to adulthood, but youth who have spent time in foster care often face a particularly **steep climb**.

# Supporting These Youth Benefits Us All

- Stronger families
- Stronger workforce
- Fewer homeless
- Fewer isolated from society
- Less poverty and more opportunity for economic mobility



# Journey to Success → Building Momentum for Action



← LEADERSHIP OF INDIVIDUALS WITH LIVED EXPERTISE →

# Publications

# Social Media

## Imagining a New Future for Foster Youth — This Time, With Youth

By Jennifer Rodriguez  
In 1999, when Congress passed the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act, policy makers were extending a life buoy for me and my peers exiting foster care. At the time, there was little, if any, attention paid to what youth like us said we needed to be successful. We know now that...



Jennifer Rodriguez, executive director of the Law Center. Photo courtesy of the Youth Center.

## JOURNEY TO SUCCESS COMMUNITY CONVERSATION GUIDE

## JOURNEY TO SUCCESS

### YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS WHO EXPERIENCE FOSTER CARE FEDERAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO PROMOTE HEALTH, HEALING & WELL-BEING FOR LIFELONG SUCCESS

#### KEY FACTS

- Youth with experience in foster care have a significantly higher incidence of serious physical and mental health issues due to childhood trauma and factors associated with their foster care experience.
- For years, youth and young adults with experience in foster care have consistently called for improved attention to supporting their mental health and well-being. Among the solutions proposed are peer-to-peer support and therapies that help young people develop healthy relationships, resilience, social and vocational skills and other developmental milestones.
- Connecting youth to supportive, caring adults who provide them with a sense of belonging is a vital part of nurturing their positive mental health as is helping youth maintain the relationships that are important to them, including with siblings, parents, extended family, friends, neighbors, teachers, coaches, and others.

#### HIGHER RISK OF HEALTH ISSUES, INCLUDING MENTAL HEALTH

The majority of children and adolescents who enter foster care have one or more serious physical or mental health issues stemming from childhood traumas.<sup>1</sup> Up to 80 percent of children and adolescents who spend time in foster care have a significant mental health need.<sup>2</sup> Entering and living in the foster care system can be traumatizing, often exacerbating existing mental health issues.

1. American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Foster Care, Adoption, and Transfer Care, Committee on Early Childhood and Committee on Adolescence (2015). Health Care Issues for Children and Adolescents in Foster Care and Transfer Care. Pediatrics. 136(4). <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/lookup/doi/10.1596/00004575-201513604A001>

2. Ibid.

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The Fostering Youth Transitions 2023 report show that we are severely failing to connect youth in well-supported family-based foster care are more likely to leave foster care to their permanent family.

#### POLICY ACTION:

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## JOURNEY TO SUCCESS

We seek to promote federal policies that lead to what young people who have experienced foster care say they most need – **equity, healing, family and economic security.**

Young people deserve a say in the policies that affect their lives and their futures.



## UPLIFT YOUTH VOICES FOLLOW US!

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Instagram.com/JourneyCampaign  
Twitter.com/JourneyCampaign

JOURNEY TO SUCCESS



THE  
STORYBOARD  
PROJECT



Addison



Emilio



Eltuan



Emmerald



Shayla






Taja



EQUITY → HEALING → FAMILY → ECONOMIC SECURITY



# Take Action

- **Learn** about the campaign at [journeytosuccess.org](https://journeytosuccess.org)
- **Connect** on social media
  -  [facebook.com/journeyToSuccessOrg](https://facebook.com/journeyToSuccessOrg)
  -  [instagram.com/JourneyCampaign](https://instagram.com/JourneyCampaign)
  -  [twitter.com/JourneyCampaign](https://twitter.com/JourneyCampaign)
- **Get involved** on issues that matter to you:
  - Host or join a community conversation
  - Be a messenger
  - Explore being a state partner
- **Stay connected** by signing up online to receive updates from the campaign

# Campaign Partners

Illinois Collaboration on Youth  
& Foster Care Alumni of  
America, Illinois Chapter  
Children's Defense Fund –  
New York  
Kentucky Youth Advocates  
Texas Network of  
Youth Services  
Foster Success (Indiana)  
Idaho Voices for Children  
John Burton Advocates  
for Youth

Florida's Children First  
& Florida Youth Shine  
Journey to Success  
Leadership Team  
Achieving Maximum Potential  
Campaign Ambassadors  
Think of Us  
FosterClub  
Youth Law Center  
The Partnership for  
America's Children

Individuals & Families  
with Lived Experience  
Child Trends & Other  
Research Organizations  
Message Experts  
FrameWorks  
TheCaseMade  
State-Based Advocacy  
Organizations  
National Advocacy  
Organizations

# Philanthropy Partners & Champions of Change





# JOURNEY TO SUCCESS

**POLICY SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR ALL  
YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS WHO EXPERIENCE FOSTER CARE**