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Former foster youth share Voice 2 with legislators

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Foster youths today presented member of the Michigan Legislature a report outlining ten priorities to guide state policies and services for foster youths soon to leave care.

"Voice 2: Discussing Issues and Concerns of Michigan Foster Youth" is the work of 18 youth boards representing 28 counties. It evaluates the progress on the youth boards' original 15 recommendations issued in 2005 and asks the Michigan Department of Human Services and Michigan courts to continue working on issues critical to young adults who will soon leave or have recently left foster care.

DHS Director Ismael Ahmed spoke with the youths in December about their report and urged them to share the report with their local legislators.

"Lawmakers can enact certain reforms that help foster youths mature into self-sufficient adults," Ahmed said. "I was very moved by their stories and I know lawmakers will be too."

Some of the recommendations include devoting resources to keep families together, maintaining sibling connections, involving youths in decisions, and ensuring youths have education and housing before leaving foster care. A very important focus is the need for all young people to have a permanent connection to a caring adult before they leave foster care. The full document can be viewed on the Foster Youth in Transition Web site at www.michigan.gov/fyit

A study of former foster youths in three Midwestern states found foster youths departing at age 18 were:

- Three times more likely than their peers who had not been in foster care to be unemployed or not in school.
- Twice as likely to be unable to pay their rent.
- Fewer than half had bank accounts.
- 30 percent of the males and 11 percent of the females had been incarcerated at least once after leaving foster care.

A survey of 237 Michigan foster youths ages 18-23 found similar outcomes. Only 12 percent were employed full time and only 36 percent were working part time. More than half were on public assistance and 40 percent said they were either homeless or had no stable housing.

"The youth boards are critical to helping change these outcomes," said Kate Hanley, who manages DHS permanency programs. "We're making excellent progress in addressing their most basic needs, but there is more to be done and this document helps articulate where we can devote our resources to do the most good."

The youths want to see more resources devoted to preserving families through supports that allow them to remain safely with their birth parents. If they must be removed from the home, they want a "Sibling Bill of Rights" that allows them to be placed with their siblings or have structured contact with them. The youths also want a say in decisions made about their placement. "Nothing about us without us," is the motto caseworkers are urged to adopt in team decision-making meetings that determine where a youth will be placed.

Supports to help youths learn to drive and obtain a driver's license, apply for higher education financial aid, and obtain important life skills such as financial planning are critical to help the transition from foster youth to adult, the report states.

For more information and copies of Voice 2 and the progress report on Voice 1, go to www.michigan.gov/dhs or www.michigan.gov/fyit

Related Documents

> [FYIT Voice 2 publication Summer 2007 - 606979 bytes](#) 