

Aging Out:
Navigating the Transition from Foster Care to Adulthood
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Abstract

When children turn 18 in the foster care system, they are emancipated from the system. This process of aging out pushes these young adults to encounter challenges like every other young adult, but without a support system. Because of this, many find themselves homeless, jobless, uneducated, incarcerated, and/or teenage parents (Statistics). These hardships are being tackled individually with help from the government and nonprofits. Through a thorough evaluation of programs for aged out foster children, it is evident that not enough is being done to solve these injustices. The creation of *Our House*, a nonprofit based in Maricopa County, is focused on creating a living and learning community that provides transitional housing for young adults who have aged out of the foster care system, as well as, educational programs that work to improve the transition into adulthood, and facilitates a successful transition to be productive members of the community. This paper provides empirical evidence to the lack of support given to post-foster care young adults, and how these young adults could benefit from a new comprehensive program.

Aging Out:

Navigating the Transition from Foster Care to Adulthood

The United States Foster Care System is responsible for hundreds of thousands of children each year and that number is growing exponentially (Adoption & Foster Care Statistics). Often products of bad homes, due to abuse or neglect, or orphans, these children are left with no other option of where to go. The average length of stay in 2014 was between one and eleven months with the median age when entering being 6.4 years old, and the median age for leaving care is 8 years old, see Figure 1 (Foster Care Statistics 2014). However, as time goes by, the opportunity of being placed in a nurturing, permanent home diminishes. Due to the system being under budgeted and under staffed, programs are rare for children who will age out of the system to help incorporate them into adulthood. Each year around 25,000 children are aged out of the foster care system nationally (Aging Out). In Arizona alone, roughly 600-800 young adults are expected to age out (Makrides). These children are usually emancipated at 18 years old and are no longer a ward of the state; however, there are no federal guidelines to mark the end of foster care and some cases have shown the earliest to be emancipated was at 13 years old (Aging Out of Foster Care).

With no resources and no support system, often, these newly legal adults are faced with many difficulties including homelessness. Homelessness affects 40 percent of young adults leaving the foster care system every year and predictors of this can be seen in Figure 2 (Covenant House). Studies have also shown that not only will these young adults face homelessness but they are also be less likely to finish high school, be unemployed, and many find themselves in prison or parents at an early age, as seen in Figure 3 (Statistics). In addition, several other factors place former foster youth at a disadvantage compared to their peers, they are less likely to attend

college and graduate, they lack basic skills for success in the workplace, such as tasks like filling out an application or showing up to work on time, and they are more likely to describe their health as poor (Dion, Dworsky, Kauff & Kleinman). This issue is a concern that needs to be addressed. These aged out foster care children cost taxpayers and communities about \$300,000 in social costs for public assistance, incarceration, and lost wages to a community over that person's lifetime (Stangler). In general, youth in foster care do not have help with the completion of high school, employment, accessing health care, housing and much more (Statistics on Foster Care). This issue is important and often ignored, and an under-resourced dimension of the whole foster care process.

It is important to look at what kind of financial and human resources are available to foster children before and after they leave the system, as well as what are currently being offered from national and local nonprofits. In addition, there should be a more comprehensive program for these children so that they can have stable housing while learning life skills, completing their education, or finding employment. The creation of a transitional living program with opportunities for continued education will offer necessary resources to foster children that have been aged out of the system vital tools and necessary assistance to help them successfully assimilate into adulthood.

Program Evaluation

It is important to evaluate current programs, and see what areas they offer support to foster children who have aged out of the system. All support services can be seen in Figure 4.

Chafee Foster Care Independence Program

The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Act was created in 1999 to address the hardship of transitioning from foster care into adulthood (John H. Chafee Foster Care

Independence Program). The CFCIP gives assistance to current and former foster care youth to help achieve self-sufficiency. Grants are offered to states and tribes who submit a plan to help youth by providing support to ensure a successful transition to adulthood. Some activities and programs include help with education, employment, financial management, housing, and emotional support. CFCIP funded services are limited and evidence of their effectiveness is mixed (John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program). The funding level in 2009 was \$140 million and there were 496,000 children in foster care which is about \$300 per person (John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program). In 2002, CFCIP included the Education and Training Voucher Program to provide resources to meet the education needs to youth aging out of foster care (John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program).

Education and Training Voucher Program

The Education and Training Voucher Program (ETV) provides \$5,000 each year to youth eligible for the Chafee-funded services who are attending a qualified post-secondary institution (Dion, Dworsky, Kauff & Kleinman). Those eligible must have been in foster care at the age of 16 or 17, and can receive help until they are 21 (Independent Living Program and Young Adult Program). As long as these young adults are already receiving aid at 21 years old, they can receive it until they reach 23 years old (Independent Living Program and Young Adult Program). Not only does the ETV program offer financial aid but it also offers social support to help these children complete their post-secondary education (Foster).

Arizona Department of Child Safety- Independent Living Program

Services to help teens in foster care are provided through the state of Arizona. Services offered include skills and competencies necessary for a successful transition into adulthood (Independent Living Program and Young Adult Program). These services are available to

children in foster care whom are most likely to reach the age of 18 while in foster care, those who are under 21 and were in foster care at 16 or older, or were adopted from foster care at 16 or older (Independent Living Program and Young Adult Program). Those services that are provided include independent living and life-skills training, education support and assistance, access to the ETV program, and employment support and assistance among many other services (Independent Living Program and Young Adult Program). The independent living and life skills training teach things like how to budget money, how to clean and do laundry, and many other daily living skills essential for adulthood (Independent Living Program and Young Adult Program).

The Department of Child Safety's (DCS) mission to help older foster youth is to prepare them for adulthood. They do this by developing individual case plans to address all needs. These plans include plans for housing, education, employment, healthcare, and many others regarding their personal needs. DCS has identified the most successful cases have a dedicated adult that support and care about them. With over 2600 eligible youth, these children are eligible for support and services starting at 16 and can be provided these until they are 21. This statewide program receives federal Chafee funding with over 1000 case carrying staff.

Arizonans for Children

Arizonans for Children was created to provide solutions to improve the lives of those that were "abused, abandoned, and neglected" children in foster care. As of the end of 2016, in Arizona alone, there are over 17,500 children in foster care (Our Organization). There is often a difficult balance between maintaining a normal childhood and providing safety by removing them from a potentially harmful family situation. Arizonans for Children works hard to create programs and provide services to ensure the children they serve are getting their needs met. They have three children's visitation centers located in Phoenix, Mesa, and Peoria, which provide a

safe and fun place for supervised family visits. They also provide a tutor mentor program, educational classes, and a boy scout program (Our Organization).

Arizonans for Children partners with Take Charge America, a nonprofit credit counseling agency, that offers free classes to young adults in Financial Literacy and Aging Out (Take Charge America). The classes offered teaches young adults in the foster care system how to budget money, apply for a job, write a resume, interview, and apply for college funding. The ‘Aging Out Series’ of classes are taught throughout Maricopa, targeting those in foster care between the ages of 15 to 18 (Financial Literacy & Aging Out Programs). In addition, each foster child that wants to participate is matched up with a volunteer mentor to spend eight hours a month learning life skills, this mentor often becomes a committed adult in the lives of these foster children. Mentors help maintain an adult/child relationship while teaching valuable skills such as doing laundry, pumping gas, grocery shopping, and navigating public transportation. Through the mentor program Laura Pahules, Executive Director, says that “foster children have a 100 percent growth rate in class attendance, self-esteem, and behavior. The organization has found this is the best way to increase success through the transition into adulthood according to Ms. Pahules.

Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation

Although Arizona provides foster children with necessities such as food, clothing, and basic medical care, the rest falls on those who look after and provide for these foster children. Many times, the caregivers of foster children cannot afford to do more than anything beyond the necessities. Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation gives awards to children in foster care, so that they can have the childhood they deserve and helping them be closer to a normal childhood (Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation).

The Keys to Success program focuses on individualized career planning, education, and employment services for youth aging out of foster care. They offer resources and support to increase chances of flourishing outside of foster care, thus, aiding in the transition to adulthood. The Keys to Success program works with businesses and employers to provide work experience for these youth, they welcome them as career coaches, or even to allow youth to interview with the business to narrow their career interests. Some employers already associated with Keys to Success are Fry's, Lowe's, Wells Fargo, Harkins Theatres, to name a few. Keys to Success also has community partners that allows the organization to participate in Keys to Success through numerous ways such as referring youth, providing services, or partaking in the professional support network. Some community partners include, Arizona State University, United Way, and Mesa Community College, among others. Foster children can apply or be referred to the program through a series of questions via the online application (Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation).

Eagle Pathway

Eagle Pathway was created by Angelese Calderon, a woman who, because of various circumstances, lived on her own when she was just 15 years old. Ms. Calderon has worked for the last 22 years to improve the quality of life for those who struggle to transition into adulthood. She has also fostered and adopted many children, and is extremely familiar with the process. Eagle Pathway is a nonprofit that intends to develop a safe and educational home environment for young women and their children, who will be exiting foster care. Through the purchases of property, Eagle Pathway builds tiny-home communities to provide transitional housing and resources to bridge the gap between foster home and adulthood (Eagle Pathway).

Eagle Pathway has multiple properties that are being considered for purchase in Pinal and Maricopa counties. They are currently in the stage of fundraising the program, and several events have been planned to raise the money; they are looking to purchase this year. They have chosen tiny homes because it is a low-cost living arrangement that encourages individuals to be in the community. Those accepted into the program will allow one child per participant since there is limited space within the home. Each tiny home will have a small kitchen, bathroom, living area, storage, along with a small back yard and covered parking. There will also be common areas for a barbecue, laundry facility, playground, and garden. The community will even have computer labs for special training and other activities. Those chosen as participants are required to be employed or be working to further their education. There is an interview process to determine income qualifications, background clearances, and compatibility within the community. Those accepted can be between 18 and 21 and can live in the community for up to three years. Other services Eagle Pathway offered are life skill coaching, cooking classes, financial budgeting, and resources for job and educational training (Eagle Pathway).

Foster Care Alumni of America

Foster Care Alumni of America works to bring together both people currently in foster care and those who used to be in foster care. They believe opportunities to increase outcomes goes well beyond the typical age to transition out of care. Connecting with each other decreases isolation, and increases the possibility of permanent family and community (Foster Care Alumni of America). Because of their expertise with the foster care system, they aim to be a voice for foster care, and to further public policy and continue improving foster care practice. The Arizona chapter focuses on social networking and engagement, and currently has a presence in the

Phoenix-metro area and looking to expand in the Tucson community as well (Foster Care Alumni of America).

Foster Care to Success

Foster Care to Success helps aged out foster children transition into adulthood through post-secondary school. They provide tuition grants, book money, living stipends and emergency funding for these students on a tight budget. They also provide academic coaches, mentors, care packages and internship opportunities to the 5,000 young adults annually. This is all done through the ETV. Eligible students can receive up to \$5,000 grants per year for up to five years or their 23rd birthday. These college bound foster youth have been poorly prepared for college. Foster Care to Success wants to help bridge this gap with services that provide encouragement and guidance both academically and personally (Foster Care to Success).

Youth on Their Own

Youth on Their Own is a dropout prevention program for homeless youth in Pima County. They strive to eliminate barriers to education and empower Arizona's homeless youth to stay in school. They do this by providing financial assistance, basic human needs, and one-on-one guidance. Students can receive up to 140 dollars a month to help with managing daily needs (Youth on Their Own). Students may also be provided with free basic needs items such as food, clothing, and hygiene items. Transportation is an important issue and can be combatted by using monthly bus passes and bicycles when available. Youth on Their Own has collaborated with other organizations to get these students the guidance they need to help through high school, and prepare for life after high school (Youth on Their Own).

A Place to Call Home

A Place to Call Home works to serve children who have developmental disabilities, and provide them with quality foster and adoptive families. Since 1998 they have been recruiting, training, and supporting possible foster and adoptive families providing respite services to children and adults with developmental disabilities. They provide specific training to care for those with disabilities or medical needs, resources and support for the family, and dedicated specialists on staff (A Place to Call Home).

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative is active nationally and believes every young person leaving foster care should be connected to their family and, have opportunities, and the support they need for a successful transition to adulthood. The organization sponsors Success Beyond 18, which advocates for policies and practices that help young adults age out of foster care. They also build young adult's personal and financial assets by helping them with self-advocacy and leadership opportunities, and utilizing a matched savings program (Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative).

National Independent Living Association

The National Independent Living Association helps youth and young adults transition into adulthood and be self-sufficient. Members can join for free and it is a grassroots organization working to promote quality services for youth. They provide technical assistance, youth advocacy, and support mechanisms to assist professionals working with foster care. Members have access to advocacy alerts, best practices in independent living, funding sources for grants and scholarships, networking, and much more (NILA).

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was signed into law in 2014 and helps job seekers access employment, education, training, and support. The WIOA provides services for adults, dislocated workers, and youth. They are partnered with the Department of Labor, Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Education to match employers with skilled workers (WIOA).

YouthBuild

According to YouthBuild there are at least 2.3 million low-income 16-24-year-olds in the United States that are not in education, employment, or training. YouthBuild's global programs help low-income youth learn construction skills through building affordable housing for homeless and low-income people in their neighborhoods and communities. They give the opportunity for those without a high school diploma to reclaim their educations, and gain skills needed for employment. Their primary funding source is through the Department of Labor and provides technical assistance, leadership development, funding, and advocacy for the programs (YouthBuild).

Covenant House

Covenant House was founded to help homeless children from living on the streets. They work to break the cycle of adult homelessness and offer services such as Street Outreach, Crisis Care, and Rights of Passage. These in-house training programs are made up of services in, healthcare, educational support, GED preparation, job and life skills training, drug abuse treatment and prevention, legal services, mental health services, and a mother/child program. These programs are offered to help those youths leaving the streets to become independent adults (Helping Homeless Children & Youth).

Developing a New Program

With the evaluation of 15 programs, there are gaps in service within these organizations. Housing for youth that are aging out is a priority because of the 40 percent that become homeless after their 18th birthday. According to figure 1, both education and job training need to be a priority as well because of the lack of success in those areas. Because of this, it is important to have a program that supports of these gaps, and that is all inclusive.

Our Home

Our Home is a living and learning community in which youth that have been aged out of the foster care system can learn to live independently while gaining real world skills based in Maricopa County. The mission to is provide stable housing while providing services to increase the success of transitioning into adulthood. The living community will be a dorm like building in which individuals have their own room, a shared bathroom, a common kitchen, living room, and computer room. Participants selected for program will have to meet the criteria of (1) Have been in the foster care system, (2) Being between the ages of 18-23 at the start date, (3) Actively seeking employment or enrolling in an educational institution, (4) Must be clean of any drugs and/ or alcohol, (5) Willingness to participate in support services. Each participant can stay for up to a maximum of three years. Of those employed and living at Our House, they are required to pay 200 dollars a month as rent, and will be returned to them when they leave the program. The interest that is accumulated will be reinvested into the organization. This helps to promote the idea of responsibility by having to pay bills, but in the end of the 3 years they are returned their money as ‘start up’ capital. In addition, upon completion of the program, alumni are welcomed back to become mentors or teach classes for the next participants in the program. The programs offered are:

Educational Support- Help enrolling into high school, GED, or secondary education.

Job Training- Training on how to dress appropriately for the job, how to build a resume and cover letter, how to interview, and help enrolling in any vocational programs.

Financial Classes- Classes on how to open a bank account, how to manage and budget money, finding grants and scholarships for school, doing taxes, and many other financial questions.

Life Skills Training- Training includes grocery shopping and cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, finding modes of transportation, parenting classes for mothers and fathers, and paying bills.

Health/ Wellbeing Classes- provides knowledge about the healthcare system, in addition to classes regarding the psychological wellbeing, such as resilience and coping mechanisms.

These in-house classes are taught once a week, and double up as the required check in for each person living on site. These check ins provide a space for evaluation and continued communication for residents and staff. Evaluations are done through an onsite case manager. Upon taking residence in the house, young adults are required to make a case plan with the case manager to create goals while being a part of the program.

Many case managers have a caseload of an average of one to 99 *See Figure 5* (Case Management Caseload). Therefore, the housing unit will have less than 100 participants to fit into this standard. However, as this rate seems high, participants of the program should be capped at 25. This is so that our onsite case manager can handle the caseload, and can provide a better individualized plan for each participant.

Funding for Our Home

To fund *Our Home* the organization needs to apply for grants and federal funding. Areas in which to receive grants from are:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children & Families through their Runaway and Homeless Youth Basic Center Program. Grants are awarded in three year increments and provide between \$100,000 and \$200,000 a year (Zeiger).

The Andrus Family Fund sponsors Foster Care to Independence grants and awarded grants range from \$15,000 to \$200,000 (Zeiger).

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development- Mission is to create sustainable, quality, and affordable housing. They have grants available for housing needs (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development).

Conrad N. Hilton Foundation- Mission towards foster youth is to help youth achieve healthy and productive lives after transition. Grants range from \$20,000 to \$2,500,000 (Foundation).

Annie E Casey Foundation-Mission to build a brighter future for children families and communities. Gives grants through Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. Applications for funding are by request only (The Annie E. Casey Foundation).

W.K. Kellogg Foundation- Works to make real change for children. Grants range from \$10,00 to \$3,500,000 (W.K. Kellogg Foundation).

Edna McConnell Clark Foundation-Champions disadvantaged youth. Their Youth Development Fund serves youth in 48 states (Edna McConnell Clark Foundation).

Expenses for Our Home

The first year of Our House has a high level of expenses, mainly due to the cost to purchase/construct a suitable building; the breakdown of the expenses can be seen in the financial statement below. One of the main expenses for Our Home is the salaries for the staff. In order to have the best case plans for the participants of the program, Our House will need a Case Manager. Based on O*Net Online, the average salary for a case manager is between \$50,000-

\$60,000 based on experience and education. In addition, in order to have the house running as efficiently as possible, Our House needs a Community Director who will coordinate the programs and take care of all the housing needs. O*Net Online shows that the average salary is \$40,000- \$50,000 a year. The land that Our House will be built on will be donated if building from the ground up is required. The property will cost around 1 Million dollars based on an internet search on Loopnet.com and comparable buildings are based on Senior Assisted Living facilities (LoopNet: Commercial Real Estate For Sale and Lease). Most of these properties are 10 bedrooms and are around \$500,000, so in order to get 20 to 25 bedrooms that Our House would require, the cost will approximately be doubled. With this many rooms, the property cost is high and there will be a lot of furniture needed, therefore, the first-year expenses are extremely high.

Staffing Model

Position Title	Degrees/ Certifications	General Responsibilities	Annual Base Salary*
Case Manager	Master's/Bachelor's Degree in Social Work or other related fields	Maintain case records and preform evaluations, advocate for individual needs, receives and admits participants to program	\$50,000-\$60,000
Community Director	Bachelor's Degree in Public Health, Business Administration, or other related fields	Coordinate classes and trainings, recruit volunteers to teach classes, create/ management class content. Manages household needs.	\$40,000-\$50,000
Volunteers	N/A	Provide classes, serve as mentors	N/A

*Based on onetonline.org

Financial Statement for Year 1

Financial Statement Year 1		
Revenues		
Grants (awarded 2 grants)		700,000
Donations		20,000
Loan		450,000
Net Revenue		1,170,000
Expenses		
Property		1,000,000
Property Taxes		8,000
Insurance Expense		12,000
Wages Expense		100,000
Supplies Expense		3,000
Maintenance Expense		3,000
Furniture Expense		15,000
Utilities		10,000
Total Expenses		1,151,000
Net Income		19,000

Logic Chain Model

Input and Stakeholders	Processes and Output	Short-term Outcomes	Long-term Outcomes	Impacts
<p>Time</p> <p>Financial Support</p> <p>Government Stakeholders</p> <p>Federal funding</p> <p>Dedicated employees and volunteers</p> <p>Purchased/ Donated Land for housing</p>	<p>Stable Housing</p> <p>Support Services- Job Training (Resume building), Educational Support, Life Skills such as Cooking and Cleaning</p>	<p>Give youth a place to stay while working or further their education</p> <p>Enhances knowledge</p> <p>Promotes healthy lifestyles</p>	<p>Independent growth</p> <p>Youth are high school graduates</p> <p>Youth have stable jobs and are making money</p> <p>After the 3 years, can live independently</p>	<p>Betterment of Community: independent youth lead to a better productive society. Costing tax payers less money in the future</p> <p>Productive Members of Society: Decrease rate of homelessness, incarceration, unemployment, and child pregnancies</p>

The Business Model Canvas

Key Partners	Key Activities	Value Proposition	Customer Relationships	Customer Segments
Arizona Department of Child Safety Other Nonprofits	Housing, Educational Support, Job Training, Life Skills Activities, Support Groups	Provide stable housing while providing services to increase the success of transitioning into adulthood	Housing and programing provided to youth Engagement through Donors mentoring	Youth that have been in the foster care system, Between 18-23 years old, Actively seeking employment or enrolling in an educational program, Clean of drugs and alcohol, Willingness to participate, Donors
Key Resources		Channels		
Employees, House, Furniture, Location		Housing Classes		
Cost Structure		Revenue Streams		
Housing, furniture, household goods, equipment, employee salaries, website, and other marketing activities		Grants, Federal Chafee Funding, Donations		

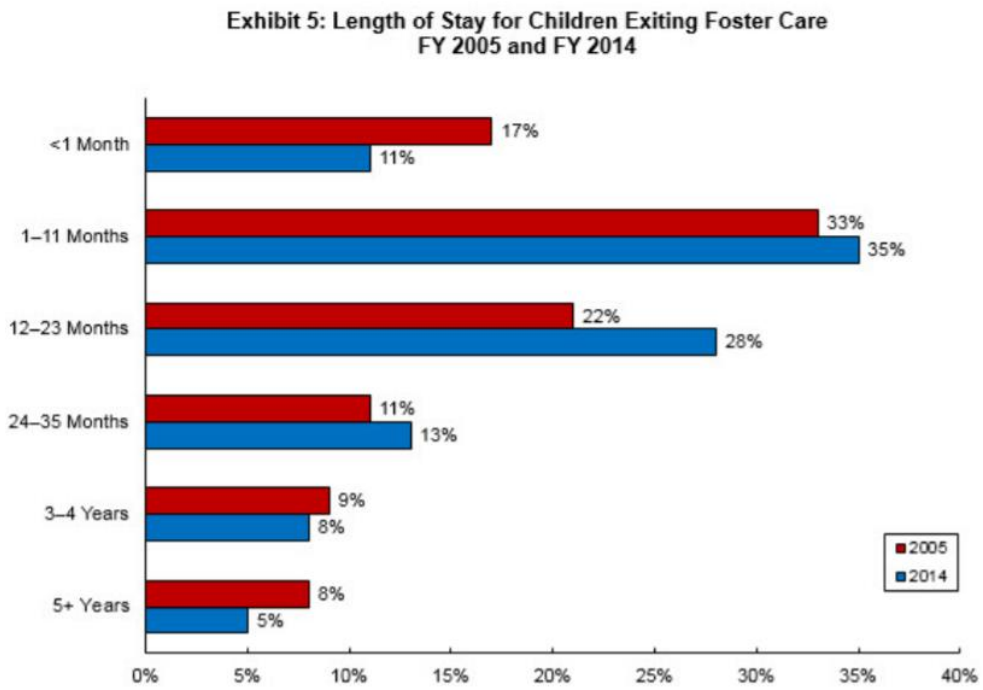
Conclusion

After a thorough examination of current nonprofit and government programs within Arizona and throughout the nation, the conclusion is drawn that there are gaps in the services offered to young adults in Arizona who have aged out of the foster care system. The grim

statistics about homelessness, incarceration, and unemployment can be prevented. This ends up costing the communities they live, and new services could save communities hundreds of thousands of dollars over the lifetime of these aged out foster children. The creation of Our House provides a more integrated approach to enhance the transition from foster care to independent living. Providing housing during the most formative part of a young adult's life, creates a stable environment that promotes learning and growth as well as a successful transition to adulthood. An impact model and business canvas show the benefits of having this program in Arizona. Our House will need two full time employees to run the program and the care for the building, and will rely on volunteers to help with run and teach classes. The financials for year one show that the startup costs are high since the building most likely needs to be built from the ground up; however, grant values are high in this area and Our House is optimistic about being awarded two grants. Our House could be implemented easily using the research provided, and Arizona desperately needs a program like this one for the 600 to 800 young adults aging out every year.

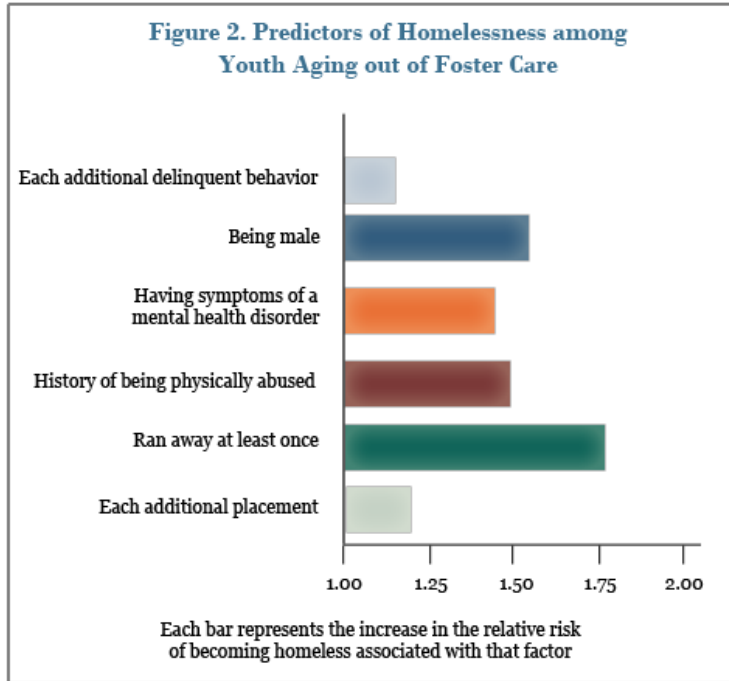
Appendix A

Figure 1: Length of Stay



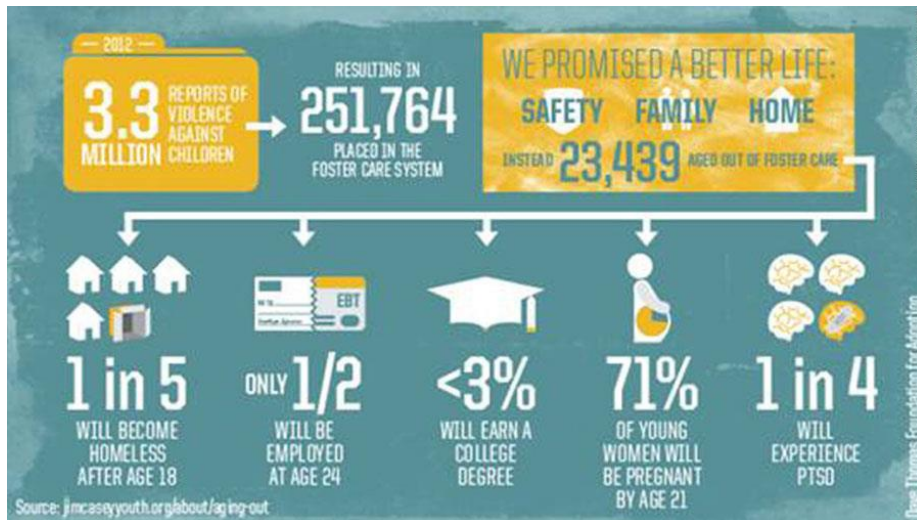
(Foster Care Statistics 2014)

Figure 2: Predictors of Homelessness in Aged Out Foster Care Children



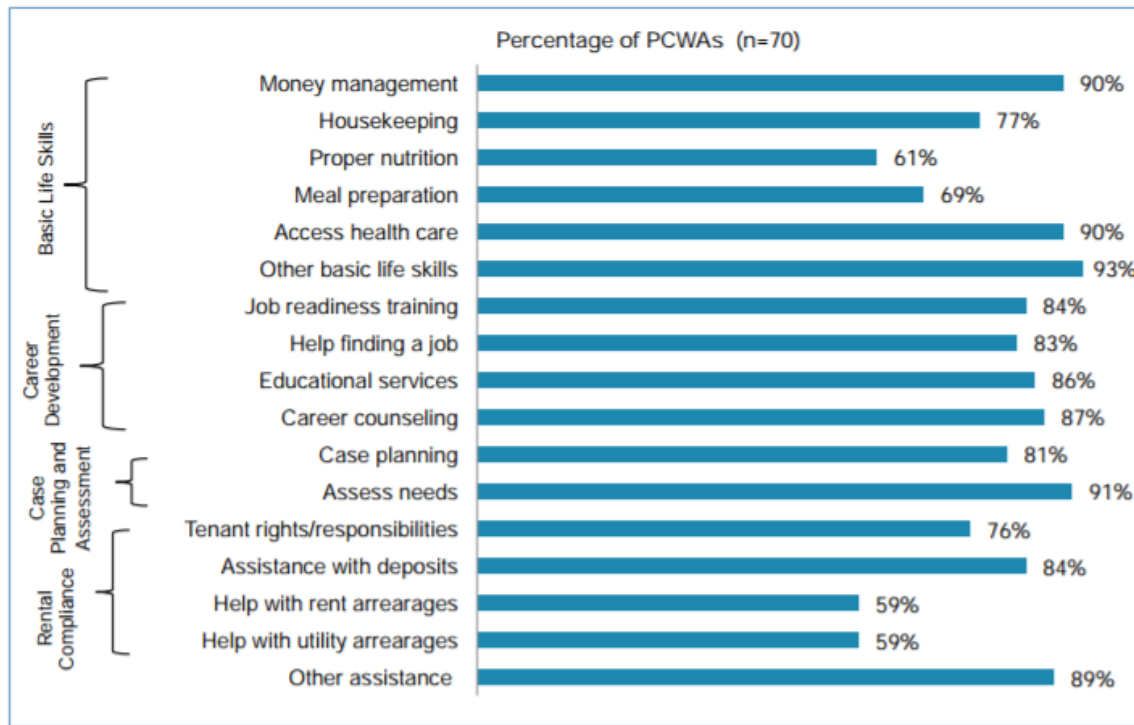
(Predictors of Homelessness during the Transition from Foster Care to Adulthood)

Figure 3: Transitioning out of Care



(Statistics on Foster Care)

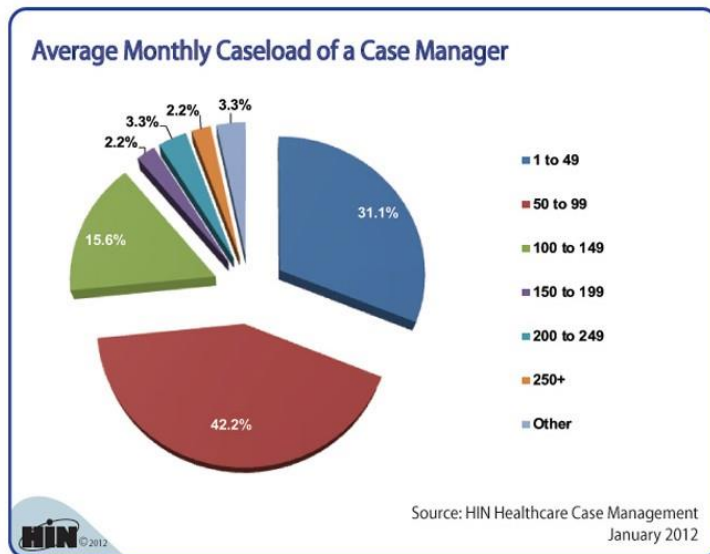
Figure 4: Support Services While Leased Up



PCWA = public child welfare agency.

(Dion, R., Dworsky, A., Kauff, J., & Kleinman, R.)

Figure 5: Caseload Management



Source: 2012 Healthcare Benchmarks—Healthcare Case Management, May 2012

(Case Management Caseload)

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