

Executive Summary from Partnering CEOs

The Possibilities Project Announces New Research On Services And Supports For Youth Aging Out Of Foster Care

Youth aging out of foster care have daunting challenges set before them. Instead of having the freedom and privilege to develop into thriving adults at their own pace, they are forced to “age out” of a system that fails to provide them with the permanency, supports, and stability they need. All too often, they disappear from these systems and fall into devastating outcomes. While we know there is so much more that could be done to effectively serve this population, there has been a lack of research indicating what practices, policies, and innovations around the country are in place to effectively support them. Moreover, there has been a lack of research revealing how consistent or effective some of these supports are. Until now, too little has been understood about this sector.

In 2015, Children’s Home Society of Virginia and the Better Housing Coalition joined together to form The Possibilities Project, a best practices-based service model that provides youth who have aged out of foster care with the crucial supports, housing, and stability they need to become successful and productive members of their communities. TPP also encompasses an exciting research and advocacy initiative. This effort seeks to combine insights from our innovative program work with new research into nationwide trends and supports to better inform our efforts and the field. TPP is on the forefront of research and best practices in this field.

It’s been more than three years since Greta and I first met at a local gathering of nonprofit leaders. We immediately began discussing our shared passions: providing quality, affordable housing and supports for one of our most vulnerable populations – youth aging out of foster care. We quickly saw the intersection of our work and began dreaming of a better way to support these young people.

Three years later, we’ve come a long way. We’ve gathered together an incredible group of leaders in our steering committee to help guide this initiative. We found smart, dedicated staff with a wealth of experience with this population. Together we launched an innovative, research-based program providing housing and crucial wrap-around supports for our young people.

And now, we’re proud to announce the next step in our efforts: two exciting new research reports.

With support from the Robins and Brookfield Foundations, TPP commissioned nationwide and Virginia-centered reports on extended foster care services to strengthen and inform its practices. Conducted by Child Trends, a leading nonprofit research firm, the reports illuminate state trends and innovation in 6 major areas:

- 1) Post-secondary education
- 2) Employment and career services
- 3) Financial capability
- 4) Safe, stable and affordable housing
- 5) Health and mental health care
- 6) Permanent relationships with supportive adults

Our research highlights crucial insights into what services are being offered and how consistently they are being implemented around the country. Further, it spotlights compelling policy and program innovations across the US. We are proud to say that the survey’s response rate is a phenomenal 90%, with 47 out of 52 states (including DC and Puerto Rico) responding.

(continued)

The Possibilities Project

Empowering Former Foster Youth



Key Takeaways from the Reports:

1. Like too many states, Virginia's service array is rich but not consistent throughout the state, leaving too many underserved
2. The disparity of programs and services leads to a neglected population
3. The services that are offered may not be grounded in a strong research base
4. Effective, evidence-based programs and services adapt to the needs of the youth
5. Youth mental and physical health challenges must be a primary focus
6. Trauma-based mental health issues require a trauma-informed approach and program design
7. Programs that provide housing, a crucial foundational need, are all too rare and not available throughout the state.
8. Housing is a necessity but is not sufficient alone. A holistic approach is crucial.
9. Virginia's county-administered system presents unique challenges that need to be addressed
10. There is a need for more research into this field and this population and more evidence-based programs and services.

This research will inform the work of practitioners, program providers, and policy makers throughout the state and nation. We believe this report will be used to bring much-needed attention and supports to this vulnerable population all across the country.

Sincerely,

Nadine Marsh-Carter
President and CEO
Children's Home Society of Virginia

Greta Harris
President and CEO
Better Housing Coalition