



The Possibilities Project:

Creating a New Path to Independent Adulthood
for Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care



“We can galvanize this population’s too often untapped potential by providing safe and stable housing and access to other critical supports.”

Nadine Marsh-Carter
President & CEO of Children’s Home Society of Virginia

Every year in America, 23,000 young people age out of foster care and are sent into the world without permanent housing. Their educational outcomes are uncertain, their job prospects inadequate. Like most 18-year-olds, they’re not prepared to be fully on their own. Their challenges are compounded by histories of abuse, abandonment, and instability.

Although some states are providing this population with innovative, evidence-informed services, this is not happening consistently across or within states. These young adults – among the most vulnerable in our society – are not well-served by our current foster care system.

A paradigm-shift is needed: a model that is youth-centered, responsive to the impact of trauma, with services that meet the unique needs of young adults who are making the transition to self-sufficiency.

Children’s Home Society of Virginia, in partnership with the Richmond-based Better Housing Coalition, is changing the paradigm. In 2015, our organizations launched **The Possibilities Project (TPP)** – a best-practices-based service model that gives youth the stability and support they need to become successful and productive members of their communities. The cornerstones of TPP are stable housing and trauma-informed wraparound services, guided by research and developed to be replicable in communities across Virginia and the country.

TPP, with support from the Robins and Brookfield Foundations, 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 organization, the reports will be utilized by the TPP task force as well as practitioners, program providers, and policy makers throughout the state and nation.

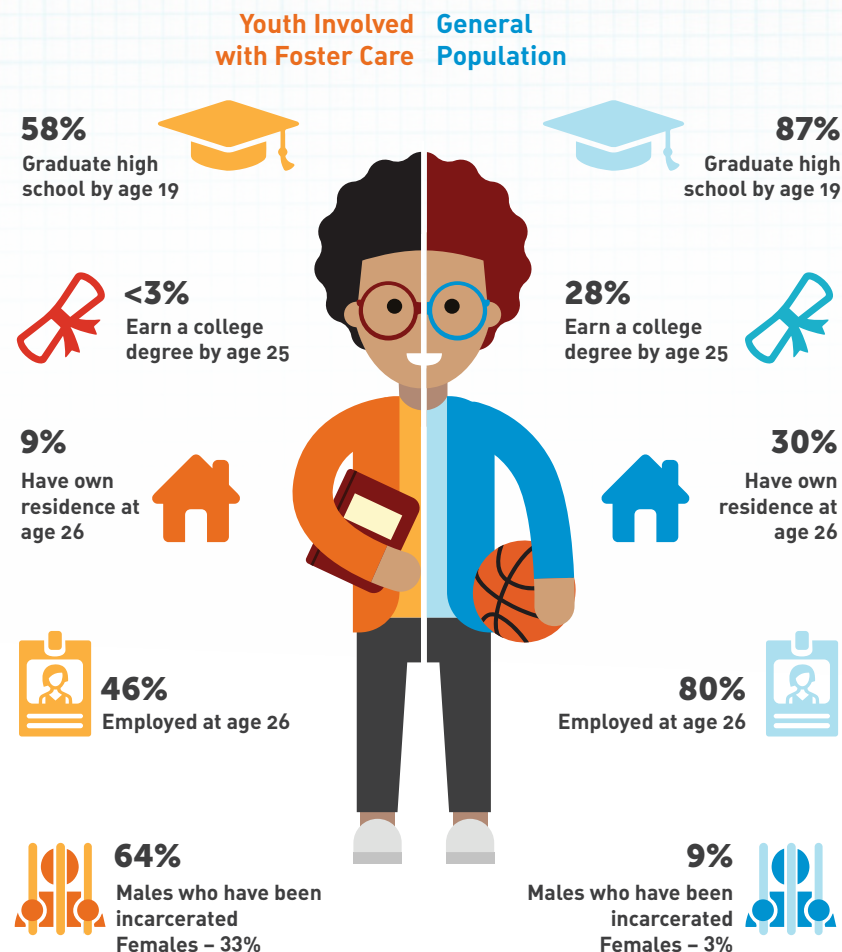
The **TPP Task Force on Transitioning Youth** will examine the reports’ findings and TPP program results to help strengthen the network of support for youth transitioning out of foster care. The task force will include experts, advocates, and aged-out youth themselves, who will issue a call to action focused on the policies and practices that will enable foster care systems to better serve this population.

“[The first night at TPP was] the best night of my life. Now I know there’s a light at the end of the tunnel.”

Kevin (TPP Participant)

An Opportunity to Overcome the Odds

In 2015, more than 427,000 children in the United States received foster care services. About 5% age out of the system annually, never having found their forever families and facing significant challenges.



Overcoming these challenges would reap tremendous benefits for these young adults and their communities. The Child Trends nationwide report references one cost analysis of youth transitioning from foster care that found that if they graduated from high school at the same rate as the general population of young people, those 7,000 additional graduates each year would earn \$1.8 billion more over their working lifetimes, and contribute \$430 million in additional taxes.

An Opportunity to Learn From Other States

The Child Trends nationwide report, entitled [Supporting Young People Transitioning from Foster Care](#), assesses services and supports provided to youth transitioning out of foster care. Forty-five states, plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, shared best practices and innovations in six crucial service areas:

1. Safe and Stable Housing
2. Postsecondary Education
3. Financial Capability
4. Employment and Career Development
5. Permanent Relationships
6. Physical and Mental Health



Physical and Mental Health

Young adults who have aged out of **Arizona's** foster care (ages 18-26) may qualify for Young Adult Transitional Insurance (YATI) provided through Arizona's Medicaid program. YATI provides low or no-cost medical check-ups, prescription medicines, medical specialists, and doctors' visits.



Postsecondary Education

Bridging Success is a recruitment/retention program for youth formerly in foster care in **Arizona**, in a partnership with Arizona State University and the Maricopa Community Colleges.



Permanent Relationships

Youth-Centered Permanency Roundtables are hosted throughout **Colorado**, and include youth remaining in foster care after age 18.

An Opportunity to See Both Innovations and Inconsistencies

Throughout the country there are pockets of creative, research-based services, like these cited in the Child Trends nationwide report, that states provide to young people aging out of foster care. However, much more is needed to ensure that this population is set up for success.



Financial Capability

Get Real: Financial Decisions in the Real World is a financial literacy curriculum from the Economic Awareness Council provided to **Illinois** youth prior to receiving their emancipation funds.



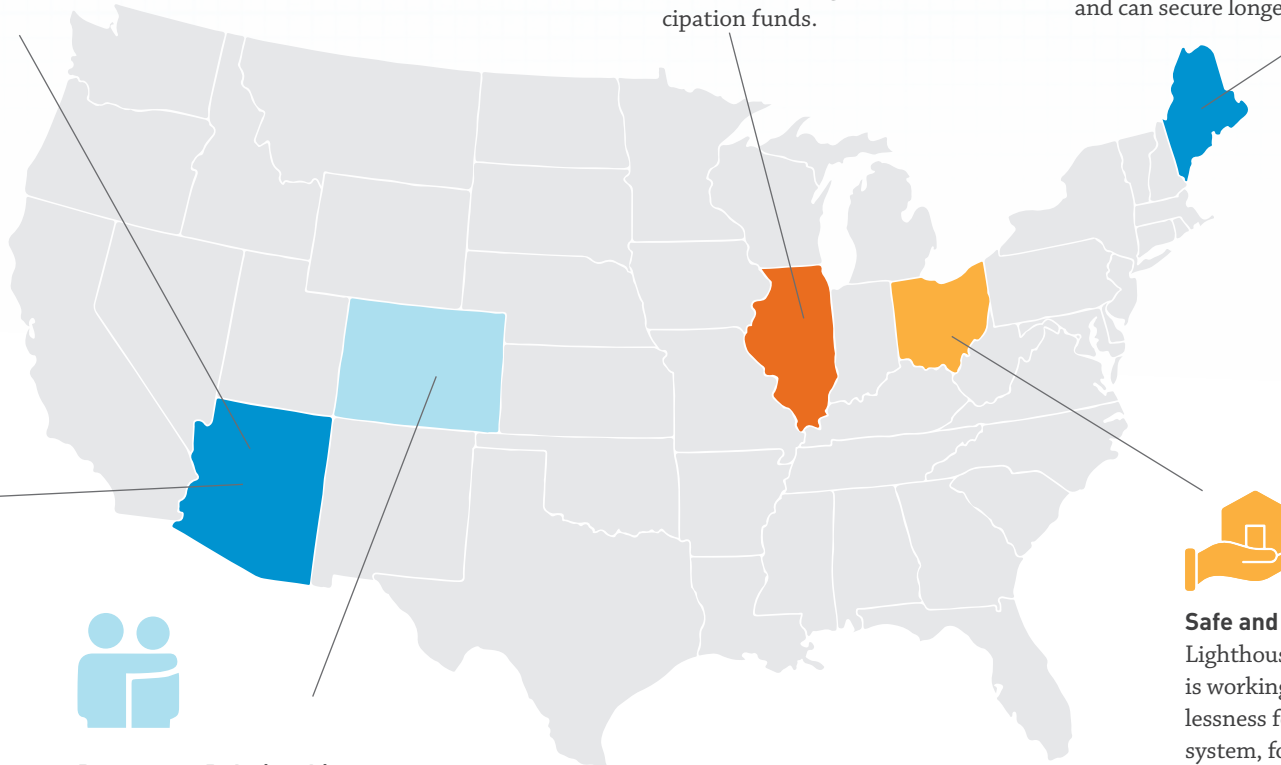
Employment and Career Development

Youth Transition Collaborative in **Maine** helps youth formerly in foster care find summer employment. Participants receive mentoring, job shadowing opportunities, and can secure longer-term employment.



Safe and Stable Housing

Lighthouse Youth Services is working to prevent homelessness for youth in **Ohio's** system, focused on social-emotional well-being, permanent connections, stable housing, and education/employment.



“Housing is fundamental.
The other pieces of success more easily fall into place once a person has a safe and stable place to live.”

Greta J. Harris
Better Housing Coalition President & CEO

An Opportunity for State Systems to **Improve**

The Child Trends reports identify three key areas to improve and strengthen the supports for youth transitioning out of foster care.

Increase Participation in Extended Foster Care Services

Research shows that young people who remain in care until age 21 are more likely to be employed and attend college, and are less likely to be homeless, compared with those who leave care at age 18. Although 40 of the 47 states (including DC and Puerto Rico) that responded reported that foster care is available to young people up to age 21, **more than three-quarters of respondents stated that most young people leave foster care before the maximum age permitted.** Dissatisfaction with the foster care system and lack of knowledge about services may result in young people opting out of care early. Further research is needed to explain why and to ensure that eligible youth can take advantage of the services available.

Use Evidence-Informed Research

Many states are adopting evidence-based or evidence-informed practices, but there is significant room for growth. Although a majority of states report having research-based practices for at least one type of service or support, 11 states report that they have no research-based practices for this population. Lack of evidence makes it difficult to determine the effectiveness of the services provided.

Ensure Safe and Stable Housing

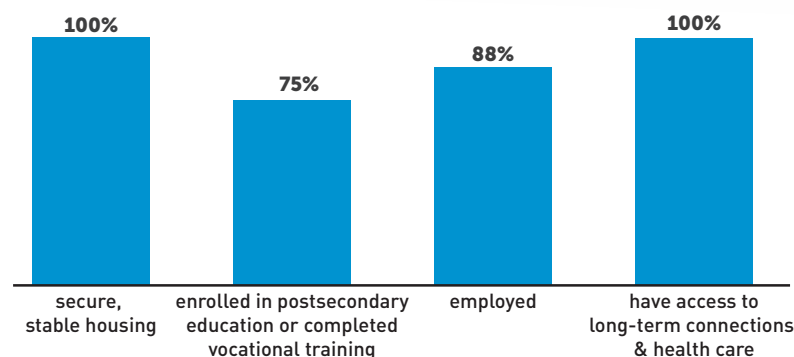
The stability of a home can function as a platform that promotes positive life outcomes across areas such as education, employment, and physical and mental health. Alternatively, living in unsafe or unstable housing can be a significant obstacle to positive life outcomes and impede important efforts to become self-sufficient. 21 states reported that housing was a primary area in need of improvement or an area in which their state is actively working to improve, specifically through providing transitional and/or affordable housing.

An Opportunity to **Learn More**

The Possibilities Project is responsive to the opportunities and challenges outlined in the Child Trends reports:

- The need for extended foster care services is particularly crucial in Virginia, where nearly 500 youth age out of the commonwealth’s foster care system every year without being adopted. Virginia has one of the highest percentages of exits due to aging out in the country (20% compared to 9% nationally, as reported by the Child Trends survey).
- In 2016, Virginia’s Fostering Futures program began extending foster care services to age 21. The TPP task force will work with the state to monitor who is participating, identify barriers to youth remaining in extended foster care, and track outcomes.
- TPP is committed to proven effectiveness, and commissioned our reports to learn from our peers in other states, to closely examine what is happening in Virginia, and to use research and best practices to inform our model.
- Just as the importance of stable housing is emphasized in the Child Trends reports, providing transition-age youth with safe and reliable housing is a core foundation of TPP’s support.

Early results from The Possibilities Project are promising:



Please visit www.thepossibilitiesproject.org to learn more, stay informed, and support The Possibilities Project and The Task Force on Transitioning Youth.



The Possibilities Project

About the Partners



Children's Home Society of Virginia is a 117-year-old full-service, private, nonprofit, non-sectarian licensed child-placing agency. CHS offers a continuum of care – finding permanent adoptive homes for children of all ages throughout the commonwealth; providing critical support services to birth families, adoptive families, and past and present adoptees; and supporting youth who have aged out of the foster care system. Please visit www.chsva.org for additional information.



Better Housing
COALITION

The Better Housing Coalition is the Richmond region's largest nonprofit community development corporation. BHC works to ensure that every citizen in the Richmond region, regardless of their economic status, has good choices in where they live, and opportunities to reach their fullest potential. Please visit www.betterhousingcoalition.org for additional information.



Child Trends is the nation's leading nonprofit research organization focused exclusively on improving the lives and prospects of children, youth, and their families. For 37 years, decision-makers have relied on Child Trends' rigorous research, unbiased analyses, and clear communications to improve public policies and interventions that serve children and families. Please visit www.childtrends.org for additional information.