



Child Welfare  
Capacity Building  
Collaborative

# **White House Convening on Developmentally Appropriate Services for Children, Youth, and Young Adults in Foster Care**

*Washington, District of Columbia  
May 29, 2015*

Summary Report

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# Introduction

## Purpose and Goal

On May 29, 2015, the White House, The Children’s Bureau, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, hosted a national meeting at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building in Washington, District of Columbia to address normalcy for youth in foster care. Titled “*White House Convening on Developmentally Appropriate Services for Children, Youth, and Young Adults in Foster Care*,” the meeting assembled young people who have been in foster care, foster parents, child welfare directors and commissioners from across the country, and leading researchers in adolescent development<sup>1</sup>. Meeting participants developed recommendations to help Federal Government leaders instruct States in the implementation of the [Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act \(H.R. 4980\)](#) provisions, aimed at improving children’s experiences in foster care.

There are milestone experiences young people need to become successful adults – such as getting a driver’s license or taking on a summer job – but these and a number of other “normal” activities are often out of reach for youth in foster care due to liability concerns. For example, normalcy in the daily life of a young person in foster care might simply be the ability to spend the night at a friend’s house, without needing a judge’s permission. The latest neuroscience research on adolescent development confirms that teen experiences ultimately shape their adult development. The goal is to ensure that youth in foster care are safe and that foster parents are enabled to help children learn, grow, and thrive as they transition through adolescence and into adulthood.

## Welcome and Opening Remarks<sup>2</sup>

**Roy L. Austin, Jr.**, *Deputy Assistant to the President for Urban Affairs, Justice and Opportunity, White House Domestic Policy Council*, reminded everyone that youth must have multiple seats at every table. They are the ones experiencing the impact across systems, they know the work that remains, and they have the energy to drive the reforms forward. He thanked the leadership and amazing work being done by the Administration for Children, Youth and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to ensure that the Administration and the Federal Government are facilitating the work needed by the States. In the past year, the coverage provisions of the Affordable Care Act have been extended, now allowing youth eligibility until the age of 26. However, additional accomplishments across the Federal Government are needed and Mr. Austin urged everyone to make things happen in their State, wherever possible.

**Patrick McCarthy**, *President and Chief Executive Officer, The Annie E. Casey Foundation*, shared that the nature of families is to get to know children as individuals—understanding their needs and preferences—and to nurture, guide, and support them across the tough developmental milestones they will face. The normalcy provision in the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act is a huge step forward in understanding the fundamental fact and nature of human development, and it allows foster parents to actually parent. Young people deserve so much, including our careful attention to all they have to say. Mr. McCarthy exhorted

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<sup>1</sup> A complete list of meeting participants is available upon request

<sup>2</sup> A recording of the Opening Remarks can be found [here](#)

everyone to work together so that youthful voices are empowered to change the futures of literally thousands of children in foster care.

**Mark Greenberg**, *Acting Assistant Secretary, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services*, conveyed his gratitude that state and local officials, young people, researchers, representatives from the foundation community, and others gathered for such a vital conversation – to ensure that young people in foster care have access to the full range of opportunities and experiences necessary to succeed. While it is essential that the foster care system provides a safe environment for youth and young adults, youth should be allowed to participate in the same activities as their peers: this is fundamental for development and a sense of community. Twenty-two States have extended foster care and the remaining states and jurisdictions should be encouraged to replicate those developmentally appropriate implementation methods. States should design systems that provide key supports while helping young people achieve their goals.

**Tymothy Belseth**, *Young Adult Consultant, Capacity Building Center for States*, stated that after nearly 10 years since entering foster care, he better understands how his experiences have shaped and driven him forward. The need to protect and promote normalcy is necessary to ensure the overall well-being of youth, positively alter their trajectory, and improve their outcomes. Mr. Belseth proclaimed normalcy as the key to success because children in foster care are normal children and foster care is merely a legal status, not a personality trait.

## Panel Presentations

### Panel 1: Neuroscience, Resilience, Foster Care<sup>3</sup>

**Moderators Monica Ramirez Bosco, Ph.D.**, *Assistant Director for Neuroscience, Mental Health, and Broadening Participation, White House Office of Science and Technology*, and **Sixto Cancel**, *Young Adult Consultant, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative Fellow*, invited experts to discuss the neuroscience of development in the brains of children and young adults.

**Nathan Fox, Ph.D.**, *Director, Child Development Lab, University of Maryland*, suggested that people think of principles within the context of early experience. The Bucharest Early Intervention Project demonstrated that orphaned and abandoned children, placed into foster care over time, succeeded compared to those who remained in the institution. Successful brain development requires warm, responsive caregiving along with a structured environment for the child.

**John Landsverk, Ph.D.**, *Senior Research Scientist, Oregon Social Learning Center*, pointed to another science parallel to neuroscience – that of family life. Good parenting and good family life are structured, consistent, and enhance brain development. Across many years of interventions, evidence from randomized trials of 22 parent-focused prevention programs showed long-term, broad impacts on developmental outcomes. Dr. Landsverk recommended an increase in positive, sensitive parenting and the attachment between parents and children, and he encouraged parents and/or guardians to acknowledge stress and to set clear limits.

### Panel 2: Best Practices for Normalcy<sup>4</sup>

**Moderator JooYeun Chang**, *Associate Commissioner, Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services*, asked State representatives if they have clear policies around youth access to cell phones. She cited the need to trust foster parents and equip them with the knowledge and skills to be good parents, while building youth and family feedback into our systems.

**Glen Casel**, *President and Chief Executive Officer, Community Based Care of Central Florida*, articulated that the positive impact on outcomes when cell phone access is provided to youth dramatically outweighs the risks. He has not yet witnessed the liability concerns people have raised; his experience is that the system supports their efforts to make the best decisions. His agency supports technology for adolescents, such as cell phones, but cautions about the need to tailor the approach for each child.

**Caia Cruce**, *Young Adult Consultant*, recalled how alone she felt in her first foster home. Now, she strives to mentor other foster youth and explained the importance of that type of support. Significant improvements in communication with young people, caseworkers, and families are needed at every step in the system. Her personal safety plan was restrictive and isolating, and she had insufficient clarification as to when she entered care, apparently a common experience.

**Stephen Pennypacker**, *President, Chief Executive Officer, Partnership for Strong Families*, mentioned the Florida Statute Limitation of Liability: where a caregiver is not liable for harm

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<sup>3</sup> A recording of the Neuroscience, Resilience, Foster Care presentation can be found [here](#)

<sup>4</sup> A recording of the Best Practices for Normalcy presentation can be found [here](#)

caused to a child who participates in an activity approved by that caregiver, provided the caregiver has acted in accordance with the reasonable and prudent parenting standard. The culture shift, and training of workers and families, continues.

**Amanda Williams**, *Foster and Adoptive Parent*, noticed concrete changes as a result of new laws. Foster parents at the table throughout the process make better-informed decisions about the best interests of the children in their care. She detailed the expectations her family communicates to foster children entering their home, describing what is normal for their family and how to build trust. It is critical for teenagers to have a say—albeit not absolute—and cell phones are a good example of the variable nature of the issue.

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During the Q&A, the panel addressed what young people can do in their State or community to ensure foster parents have the adequate policies, training, and skills rather than focusing on problems. Additionally, there were discussions about quality assurance and possible discrepancies between the various state policies on transparency and normalcy standards, and information accessible to young people.

### Panel 3: The New Face of Foster Care: 18+

**Moderator Catherine Heath**, *Child Welfare Program Specialist, Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF), U.S. Department of Health & Human Services*, mentioned that ACYF has a legislative proposal that will allow States, offering foster care to age 21, to extend the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program<sup>5</sup> until the age of 23. She asked panelists how to empower young people with the relational competencies needed to manage the complex relationships that are part of normal adolescent development.

**Mark Courtney, Ph.D.**, *Professor, University of Chicago, School of Social Service Administration*, explained that the application of developmentally appropriate care for young adults requires a fundamental rethinking of what leaders do, and partnership and engagement with other adult-serving agencies. Young people must be supported throughout the transition, vis-à-vis access to education, employment, mental health, and/or substance abuse services, etc. Sometimes youth want to stay in care, primarily to continue their education. Dr. Courtney shared key findings from the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth study.

**Greg Rose**, *Deputy Director, California Department of Social Services*, indicated one reason California became involved was because the State realized—when reviewing outcome data for aging-out populations—that it could improve in creating the same opportunities for its children not in care. Everyone shared a set of values, principles, and goals and uses these as a constant check on work. California approached developmentally appropriate services for this population with intentionality, acknowledging the group requires a distinct set of services. Youth need to make and learn from mistakes and the system attempts to be flexible as they make decisions. He referred to a fact sheet that describes developmentally appropriate housing options available under extended foster care. California's Department of Social Services seeks the same markers of success, regardless of whether the young person has been in foster care or not.

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<sup>5</sup> The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program offers assistance to help youth who have experienced foster care achieve self-sufficiency. Grants are offered to States and Tribes who submit a plan to assist youth in a wide variety of areas designed to support a successful transition to adulthood. Retrieved from: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/chafee-foster-care-program>

**Chelsea Faver**, *Young Adult Consultant, Capacity Building Center for States*, held statewide focus groups with young people, and the Department of Child Services partnered with youth, to ensure they were included in every step of the process. Indiana extended foster care to age 20 so that young people who opt in are supported through their transition. Ms. Faver referred to the youth-led development of youth-friendly brochures, informing young people why they might choose to opt in and providing a variety of available housing options.

**Judge Mary Beth Bonaventura**, *Director, Indiana Department of Child Services*, has been a judge for 31 years in the juvenile court system. One of her biggest frustrations was having case managers coming to court inquiring what she would “do” with a particular youth, or asking what Chafee was, so she identified the need for specialized case management. Now they have a unit of specialized case managers who provide ongoing targeted training and who function in separate reporting structures, allowing for individualized and targeted services for the unique client population. Judge Bonaventura stated that success can be measured by improvements in educational outcomes, employment opportunities, and social capital.

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During the Q&A, the panel discussed what is critical for young men and women to understand about creating life so that they fully comprehend what they are doing. Surprisingly, many who study teen pregnancy indicate that some young mothers believe that this will be good for them. There was planning and conversation centered on prevention and informing youth of available opportunities. Until recently, there has not been significant consideration given to expanding specialized programming for the next generation of young mothers and fathers, to support them in becoming good parents themselves.

## Breakout Sessions

Attendees self-selected into three groups and were presented with guiding questions on the formulation and implementation of the Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standards, and for the cross-system collaborations essential to enhance developmentally appropriate services for youth and young adults. The discussions generated observations and suggestions that may be incorporated into subsequent action steps.

### Breakout I – Topic 1: Formulate the Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standards (RPPS) to Best Serve Children, Youth, and Young Adults in the Foster Care System

Cultural paradigm shifts: Changes in perspectives will be required within child welfare agencies, the media, and society at-large. Child welfare agencies must constantly prioritize mandates and other requirements related to normalcy. They must weigh which mandate will create trouble for failure to implement and wonder how they will be penalized, e.g., potentially losing State reimbursement. Liability concerns and paper trails needed for many activities create barriers for both the child and the parent. Normalcy involves risk...the danger is that these barriers (and a rigid mindset) may undermine efforts.

Normalcy: This should be viewed not only as an important part of mental health, but from a human rights perspective as well – for the child and the parents/caregivers. The task is to realign the balance between safety versus risk (especially in light of sex/child trafficking) and the liability implications, given our litigious-oriented society. Youth need to engage in various activities, enjoy select privileges, and take part in certain rites of passage. States have different laws complicating this issue—and the price tag may exceed their budgets—but there was general agreement that foster parents/caregivers need more leniency, responsibility, trust, and training in order to provide youth with more normative experiences. Approval processes may require flexibility on a case-by-case basis. Older youth want to obtain a driver's license, play sports, date, ride ATVs, etc., to name a few. Younger children need vaccinations, hygienic grooming, playtime, and story-telling. Resource caregivers must be sensitive to ethnic/cultural identity issues.

Cell phones: For many years, some participants have been advocating phones for youth in foster care but typically encountered objections, from concern over who would pay for them to worry that adolescents would call drug dealers and be subsequently trafficked. In practice, this is probably less likely than the daily humiliation of being the only person in the class without a cell phone.

Behavioral issues: Youth should not be summarily kicked out of programs because they fail to follow the rules, otherwise opportunities to better the relationships and build on the positive are missed. There are many gray areas, not always black/white, and we should use the neuroscience behind adolescent brain development to inform funded programs for children and interventions. There is a burden for using evidence-based practices and providing training, especially for surrogate/foster parents. The science shows that failing to normalize experiences for young people can cause more harm than the potential liability concerns.

Labels/Stigma: Marginalized youth may not be valued if they are less than articulate, so their voices aren't heard. Further stigma results from the assumptions people make when they are labeled as "foster kids." This results in increased difficulty to engage youth in discussions as the system itself heaps more shame upon them. Establishing traditions and roots is extremely important: staying in the same school; not having to move around; keeping consistent friends; sibling visitations; selecting/practicing religion; and having access to their personal items when leaving their biological family (versus the trauma of being transported in police cars with their belongings stuffed into a trash bag).

## **Breakout I – Topic 2: Best Practices for Cross-System Collaboration**

Appropriate systems: The attendees listed services required to enhance the life of these youth and follow-up will be done to identify the associated Federal and private resource partners. Life for pre-school children should be characterized by keeping them with their families, whenever that can be done safely. Home visiting programs will help to maintain stability and biological family bonds. Sensitivity is required for visiting incarcerated parents because this is one reason children enter foster care. It is helpful to retain the same childcare provider, when possible, and provide special community-based services for the developmentally disabled child. Interestingly enough, discussions on children migrate towards the programmatic needs for parents, who are often young adults themselves. Parents need economic assistance programs to help with employment and housing.

High school youth will interact with transportation and motor vehicle offices; sports programs in schools and other organizations; universities/colleges, preparatory programs, and vocational technical schools; family planning; health providers including public health services (Medicaid); social service programs; faith-based communities; arts/sciences and anything that facilitates positive peer interactions (e.g., 4H); law enforcement and juvenile justice systems; financial and military institutions; mentoring programs like the Boys and Girls Clubs; social media; and the private sector, to name a few.

Young adults, ages 18-21, need support with GED and post-secondary educational programs; housing; tax/financial advisors; legal aid; health services – physical/mental, Social Security, substance abuse, disability, etc.; employment services—Job Corps, professional development, résumé and interview preparation, workplace etiquette, dress codes, etc.; parenting support programs; immigration and citizenship; juvenile justice reentry programs; and understanding adult guardianships/conservatorships.

Successful cross-system collaborations: Participants described effective partnerships in their home States, leveraging programs and shared resources of Federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, secondary educational institutions, medical facilities, housing authorities, etc.

Administration: State representatives discussed the implications of State-administered versus state-supervised/county-administered collaborations. State administration typically yields consistency across the State, but it is challenging when programs become modified by the counties who often lack the economies of scale. Different funding streams are also an issue. On the other hand, county-administered States can sometimes move faster because they don't have to get the State on board, but their follow-up challenge is to convince the State of the broader benefits.

Other subjects: Participants discussed where support has been lacking and, conversely, where children, youth, and young adults in foster care/formerly in foster care are treated as a priority population. Youth/adult partnerships work when there is sufficient preparation and active, authentic engagement of youth. One must consider the skillset being taught to young people and not to simply use them as a tool.

## **Breakout II: Action Steps to Implement RPPS**

Implementation: The conversations included suggestions on how normalcy can be framed to assist caseworkers with implementation of RPPS; training and support needed for foster parents and child care institutions; addressing the current state policy barriers; and youth/young adult involvement and support. Another issue was how to improve current State practices to provide developmentally appropriate services to youth, and to assist in the developmental trajectory of adults. Models, tools, resources, training, and legal guidance to foster parents were all cited as important factors. Discussions from this session ultimately led to the generation of the following suggested action steps for RPPS implementation:

- Utilize foster parents and youth to train caseworkers.
- Provide structure for more communication between foster parents and caseworkers; implementation will not be solved by training alone as these decisions require thinking and conversation.
- Review policies: make them less regulatory and more value-oriented.
- Establish agreement about normalcy for multidisciplinary groups.
- “BE BOLD” and more directive. For example, a Director could issue a policy memo stating what will be done. Otherwise, there will be a reversion back to the way it was/is currently.
- Identify the basic principles that underlie the new principles.
- Issue a “Bill of Rights” for youth in foster care through a variety of mediums and identify what happens when a youth enters care. Also collaborate and share “Bill of Rights” examples for creation/modeling by other States.
- PRIDE will need to talk about normalcy. This must be a collaboration between youth, agencies, and educators to discuss the importance (in addition to PRIDE).
- Provide more information on FL co-training.
- Limit Affordable Health Care barriers when people move between States.

## Wrap-Up

**Taffy Compain**, *National Foster Care Specialist, Children’s Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF), U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS)*, solicited themes/highlights from each breakout discussion and asked what ACYF can do to provide momentum. Some of the responses included:

- Systemic culture change must happen for success.
- Fear (for safety, for protecting yourself) is a pervasive, overshadowing theme that must be overcome.
- Tools and resources are needed to translate the science and the law into practice specific to certain audiences (courts, caseworkers)—incorporating each sector’s specific role and responsibilities—and for authentic engagement, tailored messaging around normalcy, and value in cross-training.
- Many more stakeholders need to be around the table, involving more than just government agencies. The business community is an untapped resource.
- Youth and foster parent voice and engagement must build the capacity to do this.
- How do we tap foster parents to do the work? Tools such as credible data, research, and evidence are needed to do the work.
- Who is liable and why?
- Developmentally appropriate services are needed.
- Create a network across and within States to tap into best practices around neuroscience and normalcy, train educators, and use applications and technology to communicate with youth.

**JooYeun Chang** added that when Congress passed the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, it stressed implementation—not just signing papers—and HHS has taken that to heart. Deep down, this is good social work: doing what is right for children and holding sacred their childhood. She challenged everyone present to become a champion for this issue in their home jurisdictions. Over the next month or two, HHS will provide additional guidance to set expectations and begin working with its partner agencies to issue joint letters.

## Next Steps

The Capacity Building Center for States, working with the Capacity Building Center for Tribes and the Capacity Building Center for Courts, is providing follow-up information and assistance to the States, Tribes, and Courts to support the planning and implementation of the prudent parenting and normalcy provisions of PL 113-183. Following the Convening, CB Regional Offices, all Convening participants, and foster care managers across the country received thumb drives containing all of the materials from the meeting. Execution of the next steps is well under way and upcoming activities include the following:

- Products and learning experiences:
  - Resources to Support Implementation of PL 113-183 (Annotated Resource List available now)
  - Reasonable and prudent parent standard outreach and resource compendium, including the following components:
    - Guide for State Replication of a State or Local Cross-System Normalcy Summit
    - Guide for State Replication of Best Practices for Engaging and Using Child Welfare Alumni/Young Adults in Development of Bills of Rights and Dispute Process include Website Listing of State BORs
- Supports/services provided by the Capacity Building Collaborative:
  - Constituency group support – resources for existing Constituency Groups, e.g., Foster Care Managers and Independent Living Coordinators
  - Peer-to-peer learning – connecting States around common challenges/initiatives, such as standard development and implementation, and information sharing
  - Cross-system capacity building – such as assistance in updating training offerings to provide for cross-system learning
  - Support in developing and implementing normalcy standards:
    - Sharing cross-agency models and best practices
    - Webinar #1 – provide an overview of the RPPS provision including background and the five (5) core requirements
    - Webinar #2 – provide an overview and background of the White House Summit, including major themes, recommendations, and takeaways for States

