# Children's Foster Care

**Michigan House of Representatives**
**Families and Children's Services Committee**
**February 14, 2007**

**Department of Human Services**

## Foster Care In Michigan

- Current status of Foster Care Program
- Foster Care Training
- Foster Parents with Special Needs Children
- Youth in Transition
- Other

2

# Foster Care

Current Status

## Program Description

- Foster Care provides care and supervision to children removed from their home because of abuse and neglect while providing services to children and families to establish permanency.
- Foster Care provides quality "*Child Centered and Family Focused*" service to meet the outcomes of safety, permanency, well-being and independence for children and families.

## The Focus of Foster Care
## DHS Child Welfare Philosophy

- Safety
  - Our first priority is to keep children safe.
- Children's Needs
  - Children must have a voice in decisions that affect them.
- Families Need's
  - We must treat families with dignity & respect, recognize & value their ethnic and cultural traditions & actively include them in decisions that affect them and their children.
- Communities
  - We must actively partner with communities to protect & support families.

5

## The Focus of Foster Care
## DHS Child Welfare Philosophy

- Placement
  - The ideal place for children is in their own home with their own family. If they cannot be with their family, placement in the most family-like and least restrictive setting where their needs can be met is preferred.
- Reunification and Permanence
  - We must reunify children with their siblings and families as soon as possible.
- Services
  - When we intervene on behalf of children we must strive to leave children and families better off than if there had been no intervention.

6

## Foster Care Services

- DHS and many private agencies throughout the state provide foster care services. There are approximately 90 provider agencies with contracts to provide foster care.
- DHS provides supervision and care to 60% of foster care cases, while private agencies provide 40%.

7

## Purchased Service Contract Changes

- Private Child Placing Agency contracts were modified to include specific outcomes which include:
  - No children supervised by the CPA will be a victim of substantiated abuse or neglect
  - No more than 15% of children shall have more than 2-placements during program participation.
  - 86% of children placed will be placed with a sibling or sibling group.
  - 75% of children place will be reunified with their parent within 12-months of entering the foster care program.

8

## Residential Treatment Contract Changes

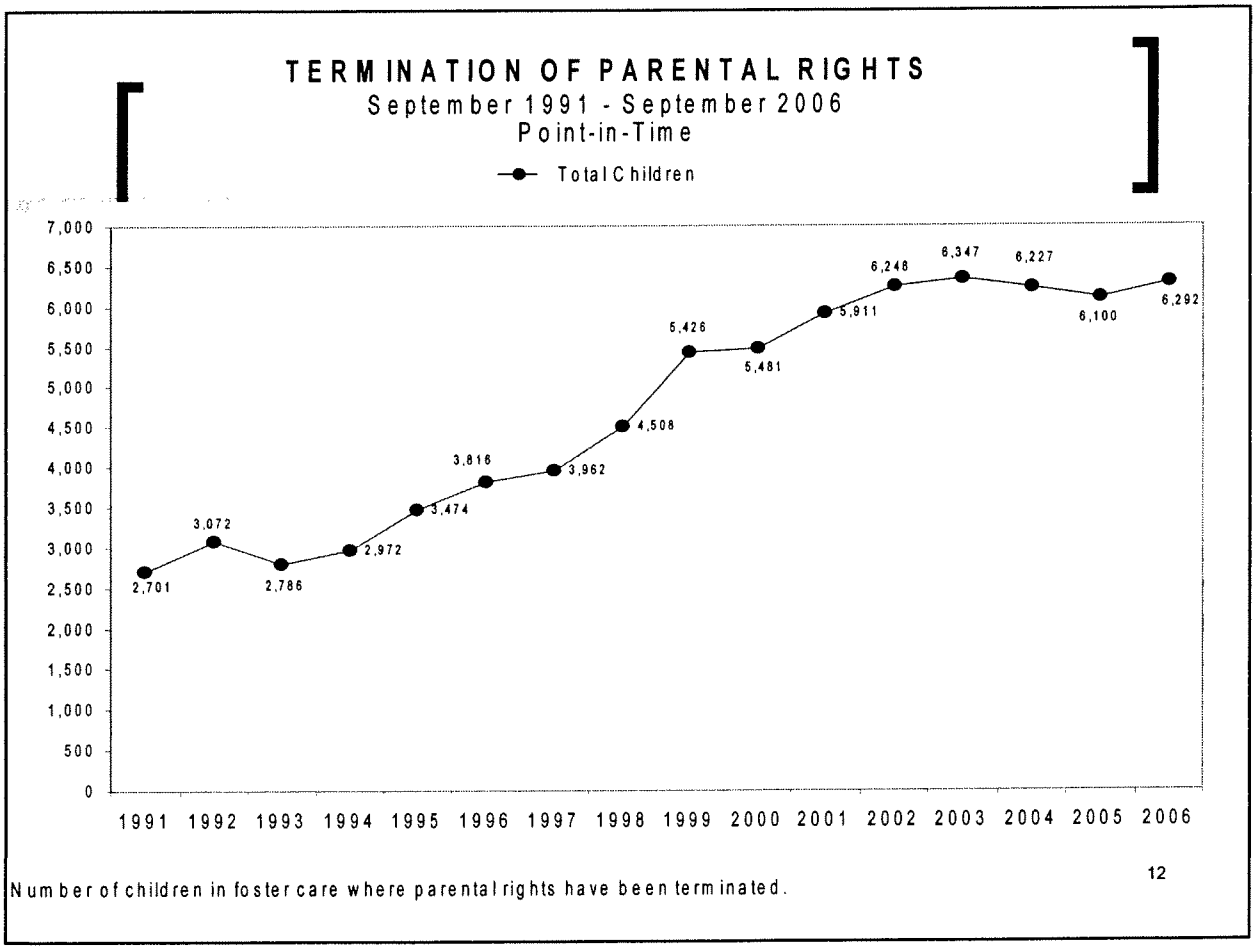
- DHS is currently finalizing changes to the Residential Treatment Program contracts.
- Review with providers will occur February 2007.

9

## Residential Program Outcomes

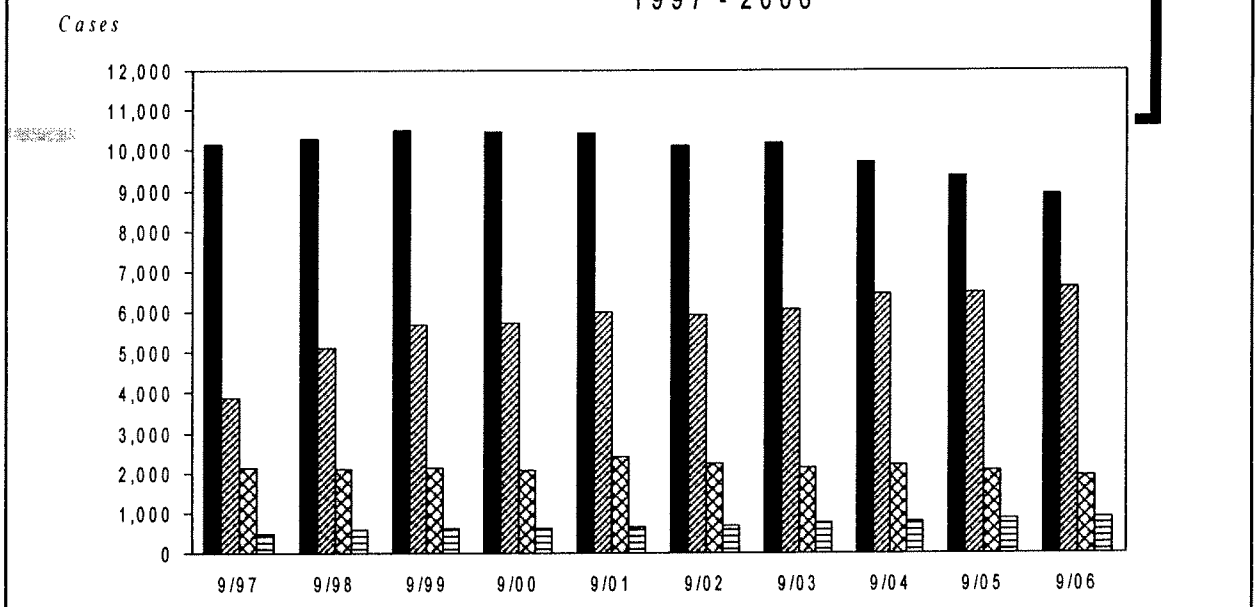
- Outcomes include:
  - One hundred (100%) of youth supervised by the Contractor shall not be a victim of a substantiated abuse and/or neglect complaint during residential placement.
  - Ninety percent (90%) of youth placed in residential care will have routine family visitation, if appropriate, in accordance with DHS foster care policy.
  - Eighty percent (80%) of youth placed in residential care shall be released to a less restrictive setting within 12 months of placement.
  - No more than 10% of youth discharged to a less restrictive setting will re-enter a more restrictive placement within six-months of discharge.

10




Number of children in foster care where parental rights have been terminated.

## STATEWIDE ABUSE/NEGLECT CASELOAD* (FOSTER CARE PROGRAM)
## 1997 - 2006




| | 9/97 | 9/98 | 9/99 | 9/00 | 9/01 | 9/02 | 9/03 | 9/04 | 9/05 | 9/06 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Out-of-Home Placements* | 10,148 | 10,291 | 10,493 | 10,453 | 10,423 | 10,108 | 10,186 | 9,699 | 9,367 | 8,916 |
| Relative Placements | 3,883 | 5,095 | 5,704 | 5,728 | 5,996 | 5,916 | 6,076 | 6,442 | 6,481 | 6,628 |
| Own Home/Legal Guardian | 2,131 | 2,104 | 2,128 | 2,067 | 2,390 | 2,227 | 2,119 | 2,208 | 2,042 | 1,924 |
| Other** | 477 | 580 | 606 | 614 | 636 | 672 | 749 | 797 | 843 | 879 |
| Total | 16,639 | 18,070 | 18,931 | 18,862 | 19,445 | 18,923 | 19,130 | 19,146 | 18,733 | 18,347 |

- In the last 10-years, the caseload peaked in 2001 and has decreased by 5.6% between 2001 and 2006.

13

* *Includes DHS foster homes, private agency foster homes, DHS group homes, public shelter homes, residential care centers, detention facility, jail, private institutions, DHS training schools, DHS camps, mental health facility, court treatment facility, out-of-state placements and Arbor Heights.*

## Treatment Foster Care

- DHS is currently finalizing a Treatment Foster Care (TFC) program that will be an alternative to residential treatment or as a step down from residential treatment centers
- We anticipate the TFC program will be operational in September 2007

11

## Foster Care

Foster Care Worker Training

## Foster Care Worker Training

- The Child Welfare Institute (CWI) provides 8-weeks of training in the foster care program to both DHS staff and the Private Child Placing Agency (CPA) foster care staff
- CWI teaches foster care staff a broad set of core competencies

15

## CWI Training Topics

- Foster Care Orientation
- Engaging Children and Families
- Childhood Trauma
- Medical Findings
- Sexual Abuse
- Domestic Violence

16

## CWI Training Topics

- FC Legal Process
- On-line Manual
- Forensic Interviewing
- Entry into Care
- Structured Decision Making
- Indian Child Welfare Act

17

## CWI Training Topics

- Working Safe Working Smart
- Legal Testify (Mock Trial)
- Time Management
- Independent Living
- Bring in the Customers

18

## Supervisory Training

- Supervisors in the foster care program are required to attend the same core training as the staff attend
- CWI is currently developing a separate supervisory training that will be provided to supervisors to enhance their skill development as they work with casework staff

19

## Foster Care

Foster Parent Training and Support

## Michigan's Foster Parent Training

- Michigan has adopted the Child Welfare League of America's Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education (PRIDE) model for foster parent training
- PRIDE incorporates the Family to Family model of services delivery and planning
- Family to Family is Michigan's preferred model and we are completing statewide implementation in FY 07.

21

## The PRIDE Model

- PRIDE is designed to strengthen the quality of family foster care and adoption services
- PRIDE is a 14-step process that is comprised of three major training components: Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE Pre-service, Foster PRIDE Core and Foster PRIDE Advanced and Specialized Training
- PRIDE Advanced Training is for parents with special needs children who may be placed with them

22

## Foster Parent Training

- To become licensed, prospective foster parents must attend a pre-service training of 12-hours before a placement can be made.
- An additional 12 hours of PRIDE training must be delivered to foster parents within the first year after the initial licensing period.

24

## Foster Parent Training

- Foster parents must also receive at least 6-hours of additional training annually.
- Training topics must include:
  - Characteristics and needs of the child
  - Effective parenting
  - Behavior Management
  - Importance of the foster child's family
  - Role of the agency
  - Emergency procedures, first aid, fire safety
  - Preparation of the foster child for independence

25

## Youth in Transition

Services for youth leaving foster care

## Youth In Transition

- Based on legislative direction, Michigan convened an inter-departmental task force on at risk youth transitioning to adulthood
- Michigan was selected for the National Governor's Association Policy Academy on Transitioning Youth to advance the recommendations of the task force.

27

## Challenges for Youth

- Permanency
  - 450 youth "age out" of foster care annually
  - 44% of the 6000 children available for adoption were 13 or older
  - Only 14% of the 2843 foster children adopted were 13 and older

28

## YIT

- Approximately 5500 youth are served annually through YIT
- Educational services such a tutoring, tuition, books and driver's education are the most often provided services/supports to youth.
- 2589 open cases receive services
- 2913 closed cases receive services

29

## Challenges for Youth

- Education
- Housing
- Employment
- Physical and Mental Health
- Transportation
- Permanent connections with caring adults

30

## Michigan's Response

- 23 areas have been identified as our immediate focus to respond to our Youth in Transition
- These recommendations came from the combined work of the legislative Task Force and the NGA Policy Academy

31

## Michigan's Response

- Partner with the Department of Labor & Economic Growth for youth 14 and older in the area of training and job readiness
- Partner with the Department of Community Health to assure continuous medical coverage through Medicaid

32

## Michigan's Response

- Joint purchasing of mental health services in selected communities
- Partnering with MSHDA on a project in Wayne county to provide transitional housing for youth
- Partnering with Education on the Student Advocacy Center model; creating a single student record database and working toward tuition waivers for foster youth at Michigan colleges and universities

33

## Michigan's Response

- Provide for automatic enrollment of youth in the Tuition Incentive Program (TIP)
- Create a service model for youth similar to the Circle of Support to assure youth have a permanent connection with an adult before they leave care

34

## Michigan's Response

- Modify adoption contracts to assure older youth have families identified
- Work on models to extend the opportunity for youth to remain in foster care past age 19
- Assure youth receive copies of critical documents such as birth certificates, social security cards etc.

35

## Michigan's Response

- Develop a mentoring program
- Conduct a statewide training focused on achieving and assuring permanency for youth

36

## Foster Care

Additional Information

## Child Placement Network

- DHS Child Welfare Philosophy states a child's placement out of home must meet the specific child's needs
- The Child Placement Network (CPN) replaced the Family Assignment System in Wayne County
- The key to the CPN is the Child Profile Database (CPD) and Foster Home Management System

39

## CPN

- The profile identifies the key needs of the child and matches those needs with foster homes where the foster parent can best meet the needs
- Data from the CPN assists DHS in recruiting foster parents who are able to meet children's needs
- Data from the CPN also instructs DHS on what type of training and support foster parents are in need of

40

## Key CPN Data

- In September 2005, prior to the CPN, only 3% of children placed were placed in their own Zip Code and only 8% were placed in close proximity to their birth families.
- In September 2006, 13% of children were placed in their own Zip Code and 28% were placed in close proximity to their birth families.

41

## Family to Family (F2F)

- Family to Family is a key component of Michigan's Child Welfare Reform
- F2F relies upon four key strategies:
  - Building Community Partnerships
  - Making Decisions as a Team
  - Evaluating Results
  - Recruiting, Training and Supporting Resource Families

42

## F2F

- F2F began in Wayne and Macomb Counties in 2000 as a pilot.
- Statewide implementation will be finalized in 2007.
- In 2006, Wayne and Macomb became Annie E. Casey F2F Anchor Sites, which means Michigan is now showing other states how to implement the model to improve child welfare outcomes.

43

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

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DIRECTOR

Members of the Legislature:

Youth who age out of foster care are at high risk for poverty, homelessness, unemployment, and other poor outcomes. This report focuses on the challenges these young people face and how the public and private sectors can help them.

As you will recall, the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) budget bill for FY 2006 required DHS to convene an inter-departmental task force on services to at-risk youth transitioning to adulthood (task force). The task force was directed to:

- Assess current services for at-risk youth.
- Determine the extent to which DHS programs and services are coordinated with those of other state departments and agencies.
- Identify ways to better coordinate services.
- Identify potential resources and services in the public and private sectors.
- Develop a plan to ensure that all current public and private resources and services are effectively organized and available.
- Recommend improvements to services.

In January, 2006, we convened the statewide task force. The 45 member task force included current and former foster care youth, as well as representatives from the departments of labor, education, community health, and housing. Private agencies, state foundations, United Way, tribal councils, k-12 education, community colleges, community mental health boards, youth advocacy groups, and associations of foster and adoptive parents were also represented. Members of the state youth advisory board co-chaired each of the task force sub-committees. National consultants supported the work of the task force and that of the sub-committees.

The current and former foster care youth members profoundly influenced the task force's work and they educated other members who did not fully realize what serious challenges these young people face. Thanks to the foster youths' input, the task force focused on meaningful change for these young adults.

From the beginning the task force sub-committees found it difficult to focus on one issue without looking at how all issues overlap. It is impossible to talk about employment without considering education. Similarly, it can be difficult to find good employment without having reliable transportation. Safe, affordable housing needs to be close to jobs and school. Access to health care is dependent on steady employment.

This report provides background on the issues in Michigan and defines the initiatives, timelines and outcomes for positive change and promising futures for our children and young adults.

Respectfully,

Marianne Udow

Marianne Udow, Director
Michigan Department of Human Services

Maura D. Corrigan

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

BACKGROUND ..... 1

GIVING YOUTH A VOICE ..... 3

TASK FORCE ON AT-RISK YOUTH TRANSITIONING TO ADULTHOOD ..... 3

CHALLENGES ..... 4

- Permanency ..... 4
- Education ..... 6
- Housing ..... 6
- Employment ..... 6
- Physical and Mental Health ..... 7

VOICE: DISCUSSING ISSUES AND CONCERNS OF MICHIGAN FOSTER YOUTH ..... 7

TASK FORCE INITIATIVES ..... 9

## BACKGROUND

The state of Michigan recognizes the critical importance of prioritizing supports and services for older youths in foster care who are transitioning to adulthood. When children are placed in foster care, the state becomes their legal guardian and assumes responsibility for their safety and well-being. While most parents nurture and care for their children well beyond the age of 18, many of Michigan's most vulnerable and disadvantaged youths make the transition to adulthood without parental support. Past experiences of trauma, neglect, abuse, and abandonment affect a foster youth's ability to face life's challenges without a loving family or an enduring connection.

Youths in Michigan's foster care system are eligible for a variety of programs and services from the state and private providers for permanency planning, education, transitional services, advocacy, housing, employment, health, and mental health. Over the past four years the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) has placed increasing importance on appropriately supporting and nurturing older foster youths. Poor outcomes for young adults who have "aged out" of the foster care system have also received heightened attention from Congress and state legislators, the media, and state and national advocacy groups.

**National statistics show a disturbing picture for youths who age out of foster care. Four years after leaving care:**

- Less than 50% graduated from high school (vs. 85% for all 18-24 year olds)
- Less than 13% graduated from a four-year college
- 25% endured a period of homelessness
- Almost 65% did not maintain employment for a year
- Over 25% of young men spent time in jail
- 40% had become parents

**According to a study of former foster youths in three Midwestern states, conducted by the Chapin Hall Center for Children and released in May, 2005:**

- Young adults in the study were far less likely to be employed than their same-age peers and far more likely to be earning less than $10,000 a year.
- Teens in the study were twice as likely as their 19-year-old peers to be unable to pay their rent or utilities. They were four times as likely to be evicted.
- A third of the youths suffered from a diagnosable mental illness, substance abuse or substance dependency.
- Thirty percent of the males and 11 percent of the females who aged out of the system had been incarcerated at least once in the two years after leaving care.

**Those who left care at age 18 faced deeper challenges than those who remained in care longer:**

- They were three times more likely than their peers to be disconnected from work or school.
- About 14 percent had been homeless in the first two years after leaving care, and about a third changed their living arrangements twice or more.

**The results of a 2006 Wayne State University study of "aged out" foster youths in Wayne County who had been out of care an average of three years confirm these findings.**

- 47% experienced homelessness
- Only 36% graduated from high school
- 18% were unemployed
- When employed they earned an average $452 per month
- 54% received public assistance

**In 2004, after a year of intensive analysis and conversations with professionals, parents and children, the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care, a national non-partisan panel of leading experts in child welfare, released a report recommending:**

- Fiscal reform: greater flexibility in federal dollars; incentives to focus on permanency; and investments in prevention
- Court reform: emphasis on collaboration with child welfare agencies; resources, training and performance standards; and leadership focused on accountability

The push for policy and program change in Michigan has gained powerful momentum, in many cases guided by available national data and best practices from leaders across the country. There are encouraging developments in Michigan.

**In fiscal year 2005, with support from state and federal Chafee funds:**

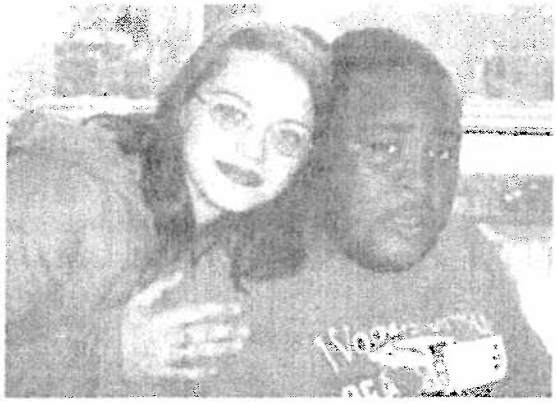
- Foster youths received $4 million for educational services, housing, employment and transportation.
- DHS awarded $1 million in Education and Training Vouchers, giving former foster youths up to $5,000 per year for post-secondary education. In fiscal year 2005, 226 students received vouchers, up from 127 in 2004. The numbers are expected to continue increasing.

However, federal regulations limit Chafee eligibility to youths who are in foster care because of abuse or neglect. Youths who are in the system because of mental health or juvenile justice issues are not eligible, even though the underlying cause of their problems is often abuse or neglect.

In 2003, with funding from the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (JCYOI), DHS began an innovative approach to better support foster youths as they transition into adulthood. JCYOI is a major national effort to improve outcomes for youths transitioning from foster care to independent living. Of twelve JCYOI sites across the country, DHS is the only grantee that is a public child welfare agency and the Michigan plan is being used as a national model for integrating this approach within other state governments. The initiative encourages development of youth leadership boards, strengthens relationships with public and private partners to embrace foster youths within their own communities, and supports success in adulthood by helping foster youths identify long-term goals and acquire the savings habits needed to achieve them. By the end of 2005, Michigan had 13 youth boards in 17 counties, nurtured by DHS staff but comprised of and led by more than 200 young adults currently or formerly in foster care. DHS has made the commitment to dedicate the resources needed to support the initiative in all 83 counties by 2010.

The first matched savings Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) were opened in December, 2003. Within two years, with support from JCYOI grant funds, state and federal Chafee funds, and youth savings, almost 460 youths opened IDAs, saved $320,000, and made withdrawals totaling $76,000 to purchase assets related to education, employment and small business start-up, transportation, housing, and health care. The withdrawals were matched at a rate of 1:1. Current and former foster youths are eligible for these IDAs until they reach their 24th birthday.

In 2004, DHS convened a JCYOI advisory group consisting of representatives from various state agencies, and youth leaders and community partners from across the state. The advisory group was co-chaired by DHS Director Marianne Udow and Supreme Court Justice Maura Corrigan. The group became the precursor of the inter-departmental task force as mandated by the legislature.



## GIVING YOUTH A VOICE

The state youth advisory board, an active and highly effective group of leaders from youth boards around the state, advises DHS on policies and practices that affect young people currently and formerly in foster care. In 2005, the state youth board developed their list of priorities for change and produced *VOICE: Discussing Issues and Concerns of Michigan Foster Youth*. They were invited to meet with the Governor and her cabinet, and they continue to consult with the DHS director and her executive management team. In January, 2006, the state youth advisory board hosted a legislative breakfast, and then opened the first meeting of the inter-departmental task force on at-risk youth transitioning to adulthood (task force) mandated by the legislature. *VOICE* continues to guide and inform the work of the task force and has received national attention through the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, National Governors Association, American Public Human Services Association, and others.

Despite the many challenges faced by foster youths, many of these fine young people have been able to overcome the barriers and lead successful and productive lives. These youths are committed to improving the system for foster youths who have no voice. It is incumbent upon all citizens of our state to listen.

## TASK FORCE ON AT-RISK YOUTH TRANSITIONING TO ADULTHOOD

In the DHS budget bill for fiscal year 2006 the Michigan legislature mandated creation of an inter-departmental task force on services to at-risk youth transitioning to adulthood. The task force was convened in January, 2006, and is co-chaired by DHS Director Marianne Udow and Michigan Supreme Court Justice Maura Corrigan. The 45 member task force includes current and former foster care youths, and representatives from the departments of Human Services, Labor & Economic Growth, Education, Community Health, and the Michigan State Housing Authority. Members also represent private agencies, state foundations, United Way, tribal councils, k-12 education, community colleges, community mental health boards, youth advocacy groups, and associations of foster and adoptive parents.

The task force created six committees: education, employment, mental health, physical health, housing and permanency. Members of the state youth advisory board co-chair each of the task force committees. The full task force met four times and the committees met monthly.

First and foremost, the focus of the task force was on improving outcomes for current and former foster youths. Youths framed the issues and participated fully in designing solutions. The task force shared information across, and sometimes within, agencies of state government. Members learned that many innovative service approaches can be achieved by just having better communication. Access can be made automatic for foster youths to many existing programs that can otherwise require complicated enrollment. Each committee placed a priority on recommendations that would have the greatest impact, but also would be possible in a time of serious state

budget challenges. Taken together, these initiatives and the activities related to them comprise a comprehensive approach to helping foster youths and young people as they leave foster care acquire the knowledge, skills, experiences, and supports they will need for adulthood.

The legislative mandate gave Michigan the opportunity to create a partnership among state agencies, the non-profit sector, advocacy groups and other community and state based organizations to focus on foster youths that is unique in the nation.

As a result of the task force and other work of DHS, the National Governors Association (NGA) selected Michigan in July, 2006, as one of six states to participate in its Policy Academy on Youth Transitioning out of Foster Care. The 10-member Michigan team is led by DHS Director Marianne Udow and includes a former foster youth and representatives from the departments of Community Health, Labor & Economic Growth, Education, the State Court Administrative Office, and the Michigan State Housing Development Authority. Participation in the year-long policy academy allows the state to continue to refine, build on and be supported by the work of the task force and its committees. The state NGA team, support staff and additional foster youths meet monthly to monitor progress.

## CHALLENGES

### Permanency

DHS and its contracted private providers finalized 2,843 adoptions of children in foster care in 2005. Many other foster children were reunified with their birth and relative families with the support of intensive, home-based services intended to improve and preserve family relationships.

Youths tell us that permanency needs to be defined by the youth and caring adult. Though it often means adoption, it doesn't always. Foster youths over 14 who refuse adoption may also benefit by peer mentoring from other foster youths on the importance of permanency. Mentoring programs are needed specifically for foster youths, with mentors trained to understand the difficulties foster youths may have with finding and keeping connections and the importance of having relationships that they can count on. Most importantly, decisions about permanency should be supported by staff but driven by the youths themselves.

**2005 data on Michigan foster youths:**

- Approximately 450 youths "aged out" of foster care
- 5,800 youths in foster care were 14 or older
- 44% of the 6,000 foster children available for adoption in Michigan were 13 or older.
- Only 14% of the 2,843 foster children who were adopted were 13 or older.

**Youth Stories:**

*"Adoption wouldn't have been best for me. It's not always the best way to have permanency. It's really important to have really strong, supportive adults in my life. I can't imagine where I would be without some of the people I've met through the Jim Casey initiative but I didn't want to be adopted."*

*"I lived with my great grandma when I was 10 years old till 13. She always taught me right from wrong and the importance of being a hard worker. Without my great grandma and my first foster mom being such good role models and mentors I don't know where I would be."*

*"I'm 20 years old and now I have a mentor through Jim Casey. She's someone there for me whenever I need to talk. I can call her any time to talk about things and she gives me good advice. Sometimes we go out to dinner, go to the Y or the mall, ride bikes and we can just hang out."*

*"I'm 19 and I want to go to college and make good decisions about my future. When I was 17 I was helping do a training on financial aid for foster kids and parents, and one foster family took an interest in me. They asked for my email address and started emailing me, just to check up. Then they took me out to dinner and we started to build a relationship. Then they asked me to their own house for dinner. They've done so many good things for me - they've really helped me not feel so alone. One time my car broke down and I needed it for school and my job. So they let me borrow theirs and he tried to fix mine. When I had to take it to a mechanic they loaned me money and now I'm paying them back. I know they'll always be there for me and they're like the parents I've never had in my whole life. Now I'm in college full-time and also work full-time so I know I'm going to make something of myself. It's important for youth to have a chance for a mentor. I know relationships can't be forced, but everyone needs the opportunity."*

## Education

Foster youths who are in the child welfare system because of abuse or neglect are currently eligible for up to $5,000 annually in post-secondary Chafee Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs). Vouchers have become more accessible over the past year and almost doubled over 2004. Other federal and state programs including the Tuition Incentive Program (TIP) are available but can be complicated to negotiate. Filling out paperwork and providing the information needed to access financial aid can be significant barriers to higher education. Financial aid programs require the student to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which can be challenging even to parents and students from intact homes. DHS county offices that pilot programs to connect youths with an educational planner have shown a dramatic increase in post-secondary enrollment.

If they live on-campus, students in post-secondary education often don't have a place to live when college dorms close for holidays and summers. Most financial aid and scholarships won't cover the cost of off-campus housing, but the flexibility of federal ETVs, supported by a proposed state housing stipend, help address that problem. Former foster youths also benefit from a mentor or other support system, including connection with other foster youths, at their college, university or training program.

**Youth Story:**

> *"I had an idea of maybe going to college but I didn't know how to go about getting in and getting it paid for. But I had a DHS education planner who helped me find scholarships, places to go, and included me in the process of what needed to be done to get it paid for so I knew how. If it weren't for her I probably would have gone to community college but my goal is to become a social worker and I needed a school that had a social work degree so she helped me get there. And now I'm a freshman at Central Michigan University."*

## Housing

Collaborations among the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), Michigan Department of Human Services, Michigan Network for Youth, local public housing authorities and continuum of care planning bodies have resulted in the development of thirteen transitional living programs for former foster youths, as well as other voucher and housing assistance programs. It can be particularly difficult for teenagers to access housing, and for young adults to have the credit record required for rent and utilities. In early 2007 MSHDA will have awarded contracts worth $3 million to expand housing assistance programs for foster youths as part of local communities' 10-year plans to end homelessness.

**Youth Story:**

> *I'm a single mom and former foster youth and I'm a volunteer peer outreach worker at Third Level Crisis Counseling. I've been offered a full-time job at the new Goodwill transitional housing adolescent wing that Third Level is running. I really feel like I can help other foster kids because I've been one."*

## Employment

Foster youths in Michigan qualify for Workforce Investment Act Youth Programs, JobCorps, and the Michigan Youth Challenge Academy as well as other local and community-based employment and vocational services. Experience with

innovative summer youth employment programs shows that youths who have a permanent connection with a caring adult are much more likely to succeed in getting and keeping a good job. The expansion of employment and career-development programs for foster youths, and ease of access, are of vital importance to future self-sufficiency. In particular, part-time work during school is a strong predictor of long-term educational and economic success. If youths have jobs they are four times more likely to graduate from high school.

**Youth Stories:**

> *"I always had a part-time job when I was in high school but I couldn't if I didn't have a car. Where I lived was really far out of town and nobody else could drive me. One of the good things about the youth IDAs that we have is that we can use our match to buy a car."*

> *"I'm in high school and got a summer job through the STEP program. I never worked before so I didn't know how important it is to show up on time. My grandma really helped me keep the job. It took me an hour on the bus to get to my job but she made me leave 2 hours early just to make sure I was there on time. My job was outside and one day it was so hot I decided to skip work. But my grandma found out and I never did that again."*

### Physical and Mental Health

Eligibility of former foster youths for medical and mental health services in Michigan is also an essential service component. National studies indicate up to 44 percent of youths who have transitioned from foster care encounter problems obtaining health care. Most foster youths are eligible for Medicaid managed care until their 21st birthday. DHS and the Michigan Department of Community Health have addressed the shortage of dentists and mental health professionals who accept Medicaid by piloting programs around the state and are planning other innovative ways to expand coverage.

## VOICE: Discussing Issues and Concerns of Michigan Foster Youth

In 2005 the Michigan state foster youth advisory board produced *VOICE*. In it they identified 15 priorities for change that would better the lives of foster youths transitioning into independence. The task force used these priorities as a starting point in its work.

1. Foster youth should be part of the decision making process every time there is a change in placement.

*"Please expand Family to Family across the state. This builds a relationship and reduces acting out and AWOL."*

2. The state should develop strategies that help foster youth maintain positive connections with their birth families and hometown friends. *"Make it policy that you will help us find all our family members once we leave care."*

3. The state should provide support that will connect every foster youth age 14 or older with a mentor or other caring adult in their lives. *"Place greater emphasis on nurturing the relations we already have with caring adults."*

4. Foster youth should always receive an allowance for their own personal use. *"It's important that we learn how to handle money, how to budget, and how to open a bank account."*

5. The state should develop a savings account for each youth in care over age 14, and contribute to the account for each year the youth is in care. *"The state should open a matched savings account (IDA) for each foster youth in care."*

6. The state should make it possible for every foster youth to get a driver's license. *"The state should hire someone to take us for our practice driving and we should be allowed to use state cars for practice."*

7. Youth in care should have a certified copy of a birth certificate, Social Security card and state photo ID. *"All youth 14 and older should have their own copy, as well as the one maintained in our files."*

8. The state should recruit more foster homes for teens, with foster parents who like and understand teens. *"Teens can suspect foster parents and push them. We know there are many good foster parents out there and we want to show them how much we appreciate them."*

9. Youth panels should be included in all foster parent training. *"Create a Voices of Youth video for training foster parents and workers."*

10. Foster youth should be entitled to transportation to after-school events and social gatherings. *"We are already so isolated. Please help us feel a part of things."*

11. Foster youth should be allowed, and supported, to attend the religious services of their own choice. *"As elementary as this seems it doesn't always happen."*

12. All foster youth should be entitled to free tuition at any state college or community college. *"We know this is a funding issue, but we will never reach our full potential without post-secondary education or training."*

13. Foster youth should have priority for free or low cost items (cars, computers, etc. at state auctions. *"At least we'll know we won't be getting a lemon when we buy a car."*

14. Every effort should be made to ensure that foster youth enter the system through child welfare, if appropriate, instead of juvenile justice. *"So many of us are in care because of 'acting out.' Many, many of us are 'acting out' because we have been abused. But if we are in the juvenile justice system we aren't eligible for many of the supports available to youth in child welfare."*

15. Foster youth should be eligible for Medicaid until our 21st birthday. We should be given the option of remaining in state care until 21. *"Health care is a basic need, especially for those of us who have been in the foster care system. Many of us need mental health services after we leave care. We are survivors, and we want a hand up, not a hand out."*

## TASK FORCE INITIATIVES

The task force and its committees examined many issues and concerns. The voices of the young adults were, of course, at the forefront. But the knowledge the older adults hold about existing services, ways to integrate, and available funding streams brought resources to the table. Each committee met several times to inform itself about available resources and gaps. The committees then developed their list of priorities, timelines and desired outcomes. All committees regularly reported to the full task force and in the process the task force agreed upon the following initiatives.

1. Web site: Youths have identified a need for information on a broad variety of issues and topics. Each committee of the permanency task force recommended a youth-friendly web site that will link to existing services and resources and that could be accessed by youths, caseworkers, birth and foster parents, teachers and others. The web site will have information from all service areas, provide links to other sources of information, and be designed primarily by youths.

   Lead: Department of Human Services

   Timeline: January 2007

2. Referral of foster youths to Michigan Works! Agencies: Michigan Works! Agencies (MWAs) operate the Workforce Investment Act youth programs. The Department of Labor & Economic Growth (DLEG) presented a federal waiver which would allow them to automatically refer foster youths to MWAs at the age of 14. Internal discussions are being held with MWAs about how they can give assistance to foster youths to develop job skills and educational planning that lead to career opportunities that maximize the youth's potential. DLEG will give priority to foster youths in their summer youth employment programs and within the MWAs target population.

   Lead: Department of Labor & Economic Growth

   Critical partner: Michigan Works! Agencies

   Timeline: December 2006

3. Coordination and expansion of STEP (Wayne County DHS) and STEP (DLEG) Programs: In June 2006, Wayne County Department of Human Services began a pilot Summer Training and Enrichment Program (STEP). DHS recruited employers who would commit to hire at least one half-time youth intern and provide a supervisor/mentor to work with the youth. Over 100 youths enrolled, participated in a one week job readiness orientation conducted by a community partner, and were matched with a meaningful job in a career path of their choice. The youth interns were paid by DHS. Although most youth participants were still in high school or college, 14 out-of-school youths received full-time job offers and many students received summer job offers for next year. The Department of Labor & Economic Growth also runs a STEP summer employment program with additional youth supports. The two programs will be coordinated and

expanded, using lessons learned from both.

Lead: Department of Human Services with Department of Labor & Economic Growth

Timeline: Double the number of youths by summer 2007

4. Continuous Medicaid Coverage: Currently youths in foster care are eligible for Medicaid fee-for-service coverage. When they leave care, almost all are eligible for Medicaid managed care coverage, but they are required to re-enroll and an income eligibility determination must be made. In some cases they don't know they are eligible, how to re-enroll, or what managed care coverage means. The federal Chafee Independent Living Act allows former foster youth to be presumed eligible for Medicaid, but that is not included in the Department of Community Health's state Medicaid plan. The departments of Human Services and Community Health will work together to research amending the plan to ensure all foster youths' continued Medicaid eligibility is seamless to age 21.

   Lead: Department of Community Health and Department of Human Services

   Timeline: Implementation by January 2007

5. Expand Dental Coverage for Current and "Aged Out" Foster Youths Aged 0-21: Access to dental care has been a challenge because of the shortage of dentists accepting Medicaid reimbursement. The Healthy Kid Dental model has worked successfully in some counties. In addition, Blue Cross/Blue Shield and Delta Dental have an interest in providing dental care coverage for this population, from birth to age 21. This model will also be used to approach private health insurance providers to offer health insurance to 18-25 year old former foster youths.

   Lead: Department of Community Health and Department of Human Services

   Critical Partners: Blue Cross/Blue Shield and Delta Dental

   Timeline: Increase the number of youths with access to dental care by 50% in 2007

6. Healthy Behaviors Education and Information: Like many vulnerable populations, foster youths can improve their health by learning to change behaviors and life styles. This can help prevent disease, unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, drug and alcohol addiction, and smoking. Internal meetings have been held and work has begun to collect key indicators of adolescent health to ensure the right areas are targeted. The Department of Community Health and public health staff at the county level will make education of this population a priority.

   Lead: Department of Community Health

   Timeline: Implementation will begin by January 2007

7. Departments of Human Services and Community Health to Develop Joint Purchase of Mental Health Services in Three Selected Communities: The Departments of Human Services and Community Health have responsibilities for providing mental health services to

youths while they are in foster care. Numerous federal programs and state general funds are used to fund services. Improvement in coordination of efforts and use of best practices across both departments is needed to maximize resources. DCH and DHS have identified a leadership group to develop a model for joint purchasing of services that meets the needs of foster youths and youths transitioning from care. Staff members, including pilot counties, are identifying current funding sources available at federal, state and local levels and developing funding models for implementation. The group will also determine necessary statutory and policy changes.

Lead: Departments of Human Services and Community Health

Timeline: Research will be conducted by March 2007 to determine required statutory and policy changes.

8. Housing Education and Information: Youths have identified a need for information on how to access safe and affordable housing, such as: information on available subsidized or affordable housing, how to negotiate a lease with a landlord, understanding conditions normally found in a standard lease, as well as tenant and landlord rights and responsibilities. The team proposes holding regular workshops on housing around the state with youths trained to be peer educators.

   Lead: Michigan State Housing Development Authority and Department of Human Services

   Timeline: A minimum of four trainings will be presented regionally in 2007.

9. Provide Housing Assistance for Homeless Foster Youths: MSHDA has allocated $3 million for the Homeless Youth Initiative to fund 8-10 homeless youth projects across the state. Funds can be used to provide rental assistance for youths ages 18 to 24, for a maximum of two years. This initiative is intended to support the implementation of local community "10-Year Plans to End Homelessness". Homeless foster youths will be a target population. Approximately 250 – 300 youths will be served.

   Lead: Michigan State Housing Development Authority

   Timeline: Contracts will be awarded by December 31, 2006

10. One-Stop Housing Resource Center: The Housing Resource Center, located in the city of Detroit, will administer a pilot project that will provide information and referral on available quality affordable rental units to former foster youths in Detroit, Hamtramck and Highland Park. In addition, participating youths will receive a two-year rental subsidy, supportive services, and eviction prevention services to assure that they sustain their housing over the long-term. Forty to fifty youths will be served.

    Lead: Michigan State Housing Development Authority

    Critical Partners: Departments of Human Services and Community Mental Health

    Timeline: The contract will be awarded by November 2006.

11. Expand Student Advocacy Center Model: Foster youths often fall behind and have difficulty graduating from high school on time, or sometimes

graduating at all. Advocacy models like the Student Advocacy Center in Washtenaw County, "From Designs to Actions" in Chippewa County and the educational planner in the 10-county northern JCYOI site provide individual education planning, link students with tutors, and ensure youths have what is needed to successfully complete high school. The McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Grant Program is another model that can be used to establish advocates in local school districts to ensure that services are available to foster youths.

Lead: Department of Education

Critical Partners: County Child Care Funds

Timeline: Double the number of students served in 2007

12. Single Record Student Database: The Department of Education has designed a system that would allow student record databases to be accessed through a web interface. Databases are not linked for longitudinal tracking at this time. When a longitudinal tracking system is implemented it will eliminate the delays in record transfer that students face when a foster placement change results in a school placement change. MDE will continue to work with the Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI) to upgrade the Single Record Student Database (SRSD) to enable effective, statewide tracking of student data from district to district and on into post-secondary education. The student transcript module will be built but requires an additional $3 million to activate for all Michigan students.

Lead: Department of Education in partnership with Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI)

Timeline: The first state of the upgrade will be complete in fall 2008

13. Higher Education Support System (Guardian Scholars model): Youths have identified a need for more supports, both financial and personal, to students entering post-secondary education. The Guardian Scholars model in California ensures each youth has a financial aid package to cover the basics, support systems that serve special needs such as year-round housing, an on-campus community of youths and adults, and a dedicated on-campus point person. In order to ensure continuation of a Guardian Scholars program over time, high level support is necessary both on-campus and off-campus. Corporate sponsors are very important to the on-going success of the program.

Lead: Department of Education

Critical Partners: Colleges and Universities

Timeline: A pilot with 2 or 3 foster youths will begin in the 2007-2008 school year

14. Tuition Waiver, Housing Stipend and Education Planners: There are several sources of financial aid available, including the Tuition Incentive Program, Michigan Tuition Grants, Pell Grants, and Education and Training Vouchers. However, these sources lack the flexibility necessary to address the particular needs of youths coming out of care. There is a need for tuition waivers at all public colleges and universities. Many other states provide a model for waiver of tuition and fees. Housing stipends are also

needed to ensure students have stable year-round housing and can maintain their educational goals. These two supports would allow the youths to use other sources of funding to meet additional costs associated with staying in school, including books, computers, child care and transportation.

Expanding the pilots to fourteen new DHS regional education planners would assist youths in developing an education plan and identifying all available financial aid resources to fulfill the plan. Preliminary data demonstrate a 300 percent increase in students who move on to post-secondary education as a result of a dedicated education planner.

Lead: Department of Human Services
Timeline: 2007/2008 school year

15. Automatic Enrollment in Tuition Incentive Program: The Michigan Tuition Incentive Program (TIP) is a high school completion initiative that was designed to keep low income Medicaid-eligible youths, many of whom are in foster care, from dropping out of high school by encouraging college attendance. It is available to youths who have been Medicaid-eligible for 24 months during a 36 month period. The program is administered by the Department of Treasury and will pay tuition and fees for an associate degree or certificate course, and up to $2,000 in tuition to students continuing beyond associate degree.

    Letters are sent to the homes of all eligible students and the student must enroll before completion of high school or GED. Automatic enrollment of foster youths can be accomplished by linking data bases in the same way as automatic referral to MWAs and automatic enrollment in Medicaid managed care.

    In addition, there are a very small number of foster youths who were not removed from their homes until their teen years, and therefore may not have been Medicaid-eligible for 24 months before high school graduation. Youths who have suffered abuse or neglect should not be penalized because the issues were not discovered until their late teen years. A special category should be designated for these youths and DHS should be granted "professional judgment" to provide TIP benefits to students who meet this standard. (The federal government allows financial aid directors to use "professional judgment.")

    Lead: Department of Human Services
    Critical Partner: Department of Treasury
    Timeline: 2007/2008 school year. Legislative changes will be required.

16. Circle of Support/My Adult Living Team: All foster youths should have a permanent connection with at least one caring adult before they leave care. There are several models used nationally, but the most critical consideration is that the decision about permanent connections be youth-driven. DHS will work with each youth to help them identify supports and connections. Caseworkers will be trained and supported, and mandatory data fields will be built into SWSS (Service Worker Support System) to collect information on what was done, what needs to be done, who participated in the team meetings, and whether the participants were identified by the youth. Efforts will be made to use technology to re-connect youths with significant people in their lives,

including siblings, birth families, fictive kin and others.

Lead: Department of Human Services

Timeline: Training of caseworkers will begin April 2007.

17. Permanency for Older Youths: There is no "age limit" for adoption. Too often adolescents fear that adoption equals severing their emotional ties with members of their birth family. However, in many cases adoption does not have to mean a complete replacement of the birth family by the adoptive family. Positive connections can be supported and the sense of belonging expanded rather than severed. Youths can be their own best advocates in the selection of an appropriate adoptive family.

    Changes in current contracts with private agencies providing adoption services will include performance outcomes that demonstrate increased adoptions of older youths and minority youths in care. This will require challenging long-held attitudes and helping youths understand the importance of permanency.

    Statutory changes will be required to allow for permanent guardianship of youths whose parental rights have been terminated. In some cases family members may want to provide a permanent home without the confusing relationships that adoption can cause. A grandmother may prefer to be a permanent guardian without becoming an adoptive mother – which would mean that uncles become the child's brothers, aunts become sisters and cousins become the child's nieces and nephews. DHS is conducting research into the cost and outcomes of subsidized guardianships in other states.

    Lead: Department of Human Services

    Critical Partners: Private Agencies, Courts and Legislature

    Timeline: Contracts with private agencies that include performance outcomes will be in effect October 2006. Legislation will be required to allow permanent guardianships.

18. Extension of Foster Care Beyond Age 18: Data from other states show dramatic improvement in outcomes for foster youths who have the option to remain in care until 21. In several states the courts routinely keep cases open after 18 unless the youth asks to be emancipated. Current policy and law in Michigan allow youths to remain in care until the age of 20 with court approval. Case workers for MCI wards (youths for whom parental rights have been terminated) will automatically recommend an extension of foster care, if the youth consents. The same should be true for youths who are not MCI wards.

    Youth advisory board members report that foster youths often want to leave the system behind as soon as possible. It is essential that youths be able to leave care at 18 if they choose, but have the option to return to care later when they have experienced independence and discover how much support and guidance they need.

    Lead: Department of Human Services

    Timeline: DHS will complete its research on issues and costs for extension of all foster youths to age 21 by November 2006

19. Access to Critical Documents: Certified copies of birth certificates, Social Security cards and government-issued photo IDs, are necessary to open bank accounts, get jobs, travel and the like. Inter-agency access will

be simplified, and caseworkers trained, so that all foster youths have critical documents in their possession, with back-up copies in the DHS case file.

Lead: Department of Human Services

Timeline: November 2007

20. Increase Transportation Stability: The task force recommends that foster youths be given access to free or reduced-cost older cars from the state fleet. The task force also recommends policy that foster youths be enrolled in driver training classes, and given the opportunity for the required number of practice driving hours, so that if they aren't able to get a driver's license while in care, they will be immediately able to get the license when they leave care.

    Lead: Department of Human Services

    Timeline: Giving foster youths access to free or reduced cost access to cars in the state fleet requires legislation. Legislation is also required to allow foster parent or caseworker to sign for drivers learning permit.

21. Expand Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative statewide: In 2006 the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative (currently funded by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative) is in 17 counties, with another 7 counties beginning to form youth boards. The initiative encourages youth leadership and advocacy, engages public and private community partners and encourages long-term asset building through matched savings Individual Development Accounts (IDAs). Current and former foster youths who were in care after age 14 are eligible until their 24th birthday. DHS formally adopted a sustainability plan in March, 2006. By the end of 2007 the initiative will be in counties where 85 percent of the state's foster youths would be eligible. DHS envisions statewide rollout by 2010. Each new county is expected to spend at least 6 months planning, during which time they will raise local cash and in-kind support to leverage state and grant funds. In addition to raising community awareness, youth leaders in the initiative sites regularly participate in training for foster parents and caseworkers.

    Lead: Department of Human Services

    Timeline: An increase of 1,200 youths enrolled in 2007