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New Playbook Creates Roadmap to Improved Services for Young People Who Experience Foster Care

Arlington, VA: Developed by young people, child welfare leaders, policymakers, and advocates, ["Improving Outcomes for Young Adults and the Systems that Serve Them: A Playbook of Best Practices,"](#) is a newly released resource designed to drive improvements to services for young people who experience foster care. This playbook is the first project from the National Collaborative for Transition-Age Youth, formed by three organizations involved in helping young adults who turn 18 in foster care: the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA), FosterClub, and Youth Villages.

"The playbook reflects our belief that every young person deserves not only a path forward, but a voice in shaping it. By elevating lived experience and centering trust, belonging, and opportunity, this resource serves as a catalyst for systems that listen, respond, and truly empower young people to thrive," said Reggie Bicha, President and CEO of APHSA. "This isn't just guidance—it's a movement toward a more just and connected future."

Each year, approximately 16,000 young people age out of foster care in the United States without being reunited with their families or adopted. Without adequate support, they face significantly higher risks of homelessness, interrupted education, low wages, and early parenthood.

The playbook equips policymakers with actionable strategies to improve outcomes in their states and jurisdictions by providing resources that include the following:

- 35 targeted policy and practice recommendations
- Nearly 100 examples of innovative practices
- Tools for implementation and accountability
- Specific calls to action for public sector leaders

It offers a framework for advancing outcomes across key domains including housing, health, education, employment, and permanency.

The playbook concludes with eight overarching priorities for state and federal elected officials and policymakers, including a focus on the need to expand high-quality, federally reimbursable extended foster care (EFC).

Priorities in the playbook include:

- Co-designing systems and programs with shared power alongside young people
- Prioritizing prevention services for older youth
- Increasing funding for the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program
- Expanding Medicaid eligibility and support through age 26
- Investing in affordable housing and flexible housing assistance
- Promoting interagency collaboration
- Creating flexible funding mechanisms
- Maximizing Title IV-E EFC

“Our goal is simple but powerful: that every young person in foster care can look forward to adulthood with confidence, stability, and opportunity,” said Celeste Bodner, Executive Director of FosterClub. “This playbook helps us get closer to that reality.”

To develop the playbook, the National Collaborative convened six virtual meetings and two in-person sessions, gathering insights from young people and other stakeholders. The group reviewed best practices and model standards of care, analyzed data, and engaged in collective learning to address the unique needs of youth leaving foster care. Young people worked alongside local and state human services leaders to determine the playbook’s structure, themes, and recommendations.

“This was a collaboration between lived experts and child welfare professionals,” said Dina Santos, who spent three years in Florida foster care. “We came together to share ideas and perspectives—not just locally, but nationally.”

In its second year, the National Collaborative will continue its work by engaging policymakers and leaders at the state and federal levels to advance the playbook’s recommendations.

“Helping young people who have experienced foster care become successful adults is an important goal for child welfare leaders across the country,” said Patrick Lawler, CEO of Youth Villages. “As we go forward, we’ll be working to share the playbook with leaders who can use the recommendations to bring immediate positive change to their systems.”

Young adults will play a key role in sharing the playbook and ensuring its impact.

“When young people who’ve experienced foster care are true partners in shaping solutions, the systems that serve them get stronger,” Bodner said. “This playbook reflects that power—it’s designed *with* young people, not just for them.”



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The American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) supports leaders from state, county, and city human services agencies to advance the well-being of individuals, families, and communities nationwide. As a bipartisan membership association, they work with their members to generate pragmatic solutions grounded in lived experience. Visit aphsa.org to learn more.



FosterClub is the national network for young people in foster care, leading efforts to connect, educate, inspire, and represent youth in and from care. The organization aims to realize the potential of these young individuals and empower them to improve the lives of their peers through system change and direct service. At fosterclub.com, young people discover other successful former foster youth, share opinions about their foster care experiences, get recognition for overcoming obstacles, and connect with supportive adults.



Youth Villages is a national leader in children's mental and behavioral health, committed to building strong families, delivering effective services and significantly improving outcomes for children, families and young people involved in child welfare, mental health, and juvenile justice systems across the country. Learn more at youthvillages.org.

