

"The transition to adulthood is never an automatic or uncomplicated process."

Moving Youth from Risk to Opportunity

KIDS COUNT 2004 DATA BOOK Essay, Annie E. Casey Foundation

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Contributing to Youth Development & Success

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The Data

Unless otherwise noted, information in this Fact Sheet comes from the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2004 KIDS COUNT Essay. (www.aecf.org/kidscount/databook/essay.htm)

- **Youth is a time of significant developmental milestones and the need for meaningful external supports.** Young people need positive values and a positive identity, skills to succeed in life, a commitment to lifelong learning, and a chance to contribute to the world. They also need boundaries and expectations, constructive use of their time, caring and supportive adults, and a sense of safety and security. (www.search-institute.org/assets/assetcategories.html)
- **Too many youth experience difficulties in achieving these milestones.** About 15% of all young adults aged 18-24 – 3.8 million – are neither in school nor employed. This number has jumped 19% since 2000. These youth are disproportionately from families with low-incomes and families that are African American, Hispanic, and Native American.
- **The most at-risk youth have certain common experiences.** They are most likely to be in the foster care system, in juvenile detention, among teens with early pregnancies, and among those who have never finished high school.

The Issues

- **Limited supports for transition from foster care.** Each year, about 20,000 young people leave the foster care system without being adopted or returning to families. Some studies indicate that within four years, only half of these youth were regularly employed, nearly half had been arrested, more than half of the young women had given birth, one-fourth had been homeless, and a significant number were receiving welfare support. Despite some federal support for transition services, available resources have not met the challenges facing these youth.
- **Severe consequences of juvenile detention.** Each year over 600,000 youth get locked up, more than one-third for non-criminal offenses and technical rule violations. Two-thirds are African American and Latino young people. Detained youth disproportionately suffer from mental health and drug use problems and inadequate academic skills. Once confined, these young people are less likely to complete high school, more likely to get re-arrested, and experience lifelong employment consequences as a result of juvenile detention.
- **Lifelong ramifications of early childbearing.** While teen birth rates are declining, 850,000 young women, disproportionately African American and Latino, became mothers in 2002. Both teen moms and dads are less likely to complete high school, which has an impact on their lifelong income. In addition, babies of adolescents have higher risk of developmental challenges.
- **High school failure for students in urban cores.** The most dramatic dropout problems are concentrated in 200-300 large, segregated, under-performing schools in the 35 largest cities, where at most half of all 9th graders will get their diplomas.

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Options for Philanthropy

- **Generate local area data for planning, intervention, and evaluation.** If a community needs data about youth issues and programming, Community Youth Mapping (www.communityyouthmapping.org/Youth) is a unique approach to data collection using youth development strategies. In places that have used this approach, young people have uncovered community resources not previously identified through traditional approaches.
- **Provide opportunities for inclusion of youth voices in issues affecting them.** Too often adults plan programs and activities for young people and communities without a complete understanding of how youth view the world and what motivates them. Helping youth voices to be heard and youth talents to be tapped is critical to positive youth development.
- **Support the replication of successful practices for positive youth development.** Any number of youth-focused interventions have demonstrated with solid data that they can produce successful results and at the same time be cost effective. Two examples are the Plain Talk Initiative, which reduced teen pregnancy risk by 70%, and AECF's School-to-Career Partnership, which placed young people transitioning from foster care into jobs averaging almost \$8 per hour (half of which offered health benefits) and demonstrated an 81% retention rate.
- **Underwrite advocacy for system reform.** Because so many young people are locked up for non-violent offenses, it makes sense to advocate for effective detention alternatives that don't undermine public safety. The State of Missouri is a model in that regard, with a focus on counseling, personal development, and small unit housing within driving distance of young people's families. The state's low recidivism rates are impressive, and its spending per youth is lower than in states with significantly higher recidivism.

Key Resources

- **Academy for Educational Development.** Focuses on young people as assets and provides information, tools, and publications related to after school programs, youth development, and youth worker training. (www.aed.org/Youth)
- **National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.** Provides a wealth of national and state level information on teen pregnancy, teen pregnancy prevention programs, media campaigns, and legislative activity. (www.teenpregnancy.org)
- **Pathways to Juvenile Detention Reform.** Offers a series of publications detailing various aspects of detention reform for advocates, legislators, planners and practitioners. (www.aecf.org/initiatives/jdai/download.htm)
- **Forum for Youth Investment.** Provides youth and adult leaders with information, technical assistance, training, and partnership opportunities in support of increased youth investments and involvement. (www.forumforyouthinvestment.org)



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