

## **2016 Michigan Young Leader Advocacy Summit (8-5-2016)**

### **Extension of Foster Care/ YAVFC, Life Skills Coach Support Breakout Session Notes**

#### **Morning Session**

11:34: Joi introduced session, outlined 2011 MI policy that followed 2008 federal policy initiative, reiterated importance of safe sharing

Candaz & Vee introduced facilitators and asked participants to identify themselves based on their exposure to YAVFC

#### **Flexibility in eligibility criteria & process**

Vee shared her experience and questioned whether being in care after 16<sup>th</sup> birthday was the most helpful cut-off point; suggested maybe that should change so that more youth could become eligible

Alicia shared that she felt she missed out on resources because she was reunited with birth parents and did not age out of care; questioned whether there could be an option for extending services for youth whose cases were closed out

Jan K. clarified that the extension of FC is specific to FC but guardianships and adoption subsidy extensions are other options, youth reunited with birth parents can still access YIT funds; this information was much appreciated

Participant shared that his brother was adopted at age 16 was able to access more supports than he was due to being adopted at 14

Clarifying question asked about 80 hr/ month requirement to remain eligible for YAVFC: these hours can be a combination of school and work-related activities

Participants shared that being young and worrying about meeting the requirement adds stress; they worry about being kicked out of the program, suggested other options for meeting hours such as counting work required to start their own business, volunteering and networking to build business – focus on “doing something productive.”

Joshua: “If you want to be stable it’s hard to meet all of those standards at one time when it’s your first time on your own.”

Participants discussed the importance of maintaining a connection to a case worker when youth move through different programs and between counties, talked about it being really rough over the first year of college

“You don’t always get somebody who wants to stick with this kid.”

Expressed the need to focus on making a plan to meet challenges and the importance of workers being transparent and “100% honest”

“...this is what we can do to help you...” vs “coming at me about ‘follow through’”

### **Additional training and specialized caseworkers + better coordination between programs**

Nicole: Could there be a specialized YAVFC caseworker? Similar to MYOI. “I know every resource in my county...a specialized worker can maintain connections between workers in different counties...”

Alexis: We need better training for workers about services offered and preparation for next steps, also need to train youth to advocate when they get different information from different workers; workers who share accurate info consistently are very much appreciated

Wide variation in how case workers get youth to school - need to follow student; possibly “sign off” at each stage between programs and/or workers? Need consistent help with navigating documentation and credit transfer processes

“Transitioning needs to happen from the top down...”

“Everybody should sign off when you move...”

“There needs to be face to face action”

Vee: Stability is a common theme, youth don’t have stable addresses, miss out on resources, different agencies are not on the same page...good exit plan has to include housing stability

Need problem-solving approach around application process: youth can’t fulfill requirements for services...need solution planning around 30-day period...need a specialized worker to help youth navigate...need a plan for re-engaging disconnect youth

Joi: it’s essential youth reach out to MYOI “...once you reach out, you’re putting the ball in that worker’s court...”

### **Focus on budgeting and life skills**

Candaz: important to meet with worker on budget every month but you have to be strong-willed to make budgeting work

The final say on the budget is with the youth, but youth experience great variety from workers, workers don’t have training in this area,

Vee: Youth need asset training/ financial literacy

Need to reach youth not in MYOI

Vee: "...as MYOI youth, we are the leaders of foster care in MI." "It's your duty as you receive resources to make sure you are giving back."

A lot of youth miss out – must keep track of youth and keep them engaged, possible through a website or app

Website or app would be better for some youth who don't understand all the language in their information packet (opportunity passport); youth appreciate workers who sit down with them and explain but not everyone does that

### **Worker accountability**

Participants discussed the need for worker accountability and also talked about accountability being a two-way street

"...we've got to get managers and directors on board to expand accountability..."

DHHS workers regularly help when youth move through different programs even when their cases are assigned to private agencies

Additional training and continuing education credits could be helpful

Need "...some type of obligation from the workers..." to avoid ending up homeless, some youth don't even know MYOI exists

Need communication, advocacy

Possibly increase number of visits with worker

Need to focus on building relationship – youth and workers need to get to know each other before youth can rely on workers to avoid disconnection

"...get over the awkwardness..."

### **Need to keep information flowing even when youth leave FC**

Every youth needs a stable email address

Need to develop a website or app to keep youth engaged

## Afternoon Session

Facilitators organized the information from the morning session into the following key areas, divided into smaller groups to discuss options for improvement, small group reports were rushed due to time but the main points shared are below:

- Consistency of training/ Accountability
  - focus on youth needs rather than program reqs
  - quarterly training on MYOI/YIT/YAVFC with youth speaker panel
  - emergency/ triage process when youth/ worker hits a barrier
  - streamline transition processes
  - include foster parents in training
  - financial literacy training 2x/year
- Resources and outreach
  - Create app and/or website to reach youth
  - Provide online access to resources
  - Highlight key transition times
  - Include access to documents
- Housing/ exit planning & food
  - Include “have you been in foster care” to application questions for other programs such as housing, food, medical, etc.
  - Create transition centers
  - Extend application period beyond 30 days
- Youth advocacy workers
  - Create peer advocate positions
  - Link to internships, other positions
  - Allow youth advocacy to count for 80-hour requirement
- Budgeting and life skills
  - Foster parents need to have financial literacy training
  - Every youth should have a bank account
  - Help youth access existing apps and budgeting services from their credit union or bank
  - Case managers need training
  - Need to understand credit scores
  - See progress through life domains using Casey assessment tool – keep it available as part of the app or website for youth to track their progress