

## Foster Care Work Group

Ensuring all youth transitioning from foster care are connected by 25

# INVESTMENT MATTERS

## Investing in Supports for Pregnant and Parenting Adolescents and Young Adults In Or Transitioning From Foster Care

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*Adolescent pregnancy is a significant issue for public and private funders seeking to improve outcomes for transitioning youth.*

Adolescent parents face multiple obstacles in raising a child while still working to fully become adults themselves. For young parents who are currently in or who have aged out of foster care, the challenges are even more acute. Adolescent pregnancy is a significant issue for public and private funders seeking to improve outcomes for transitioning youth. While data are limited, the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth (Midwest Study) found that young women in foster care have much higher rates of pregnancy and parenthood compared to their peers in the general population. Over 70 percent of young women in the study reported being pregnant by age 21 and over half reported having at least one child by that age. Almost half of young men reported they had gotten a partner pregnant by age 21 and almost one-third reported having at least one child.<sup>1</sup>

**The challenge is clear:** public and private investors need to support efforts to better equip adolescent mothers and fathers who have experienced foster care to become successful adults and parents; and to work to prevent or delay pregnancy until young people are ready to take on the responsibilities of parenthood and adult living. Investors can also creatively consider opportunities for intergenerational permanency planning with young people, their children and their children's grandparents. This brief highlights considerations, challenges, and opportunities for foundations in investing in supports for pregnant and parenting adolescents and young adults—both mothers and fathers—currently in or transitioning from foster care.

## STATE OF KNOWLEDGE ON PREGNANCY AND PARENTHOOD AMONG ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS WITH FOSTER CARE EXPERIENCE

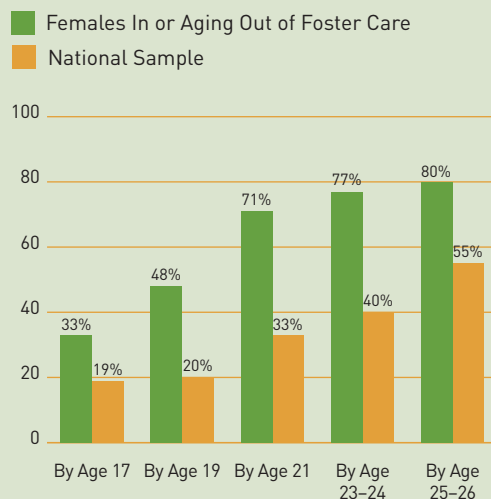
- Early Sexual Behavior.** Studies have found that young people in foster care are more likely to have sex at an early age than adolescents in the general population. One study found that approximately 65 percent of girls and 40 percent of boys who had ever been in foster care had sexual intercourse before the age of 16 compared with 35 percent of girls and 33 percent of boys who had never been in care.<sup>2</sup>
- Incidence of Pregnancy:** No national data exist on the incidence of adolescent pregnancy among young people in foster care. However, the Midwest Study (a regional study of young people in Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin) found that rates of pregnancy are much higher for adolescents and young adults who are or who have been in foster care than for the general population.

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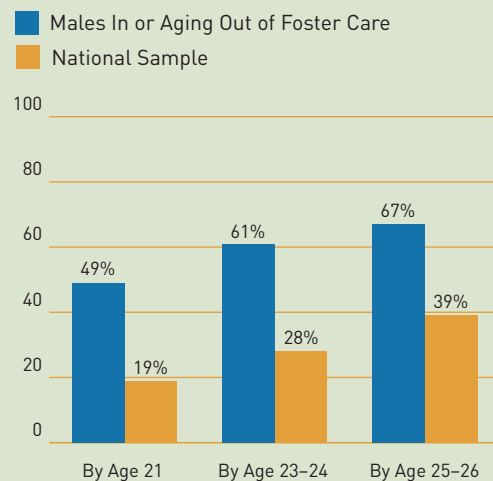
The Midwest Study found a significant increase in the percentage of young women who had been in foster care who became pregnant during their late teens and early twenties. The study found that one-third of young women had been pregnant by age 17<sup>3</sup> and over 70 percent had been pregnant by age 21.<sup>4</sup> At the most recent follow-up survey in the study, nearly 80 percent of the 25- and 26-year-old young women had ever been pregnant compared with only 55 percent of their peers who had not experienced the foster care system.<sup>5</sup>

### Incidence of Pregnancy

Percent of Adolescent Females and Young Women Who Reported Having Been Pregnant, by Foster Care Status



Percent of Males Who Reported Having Got a Partner Pregnant, by Foster Care Status

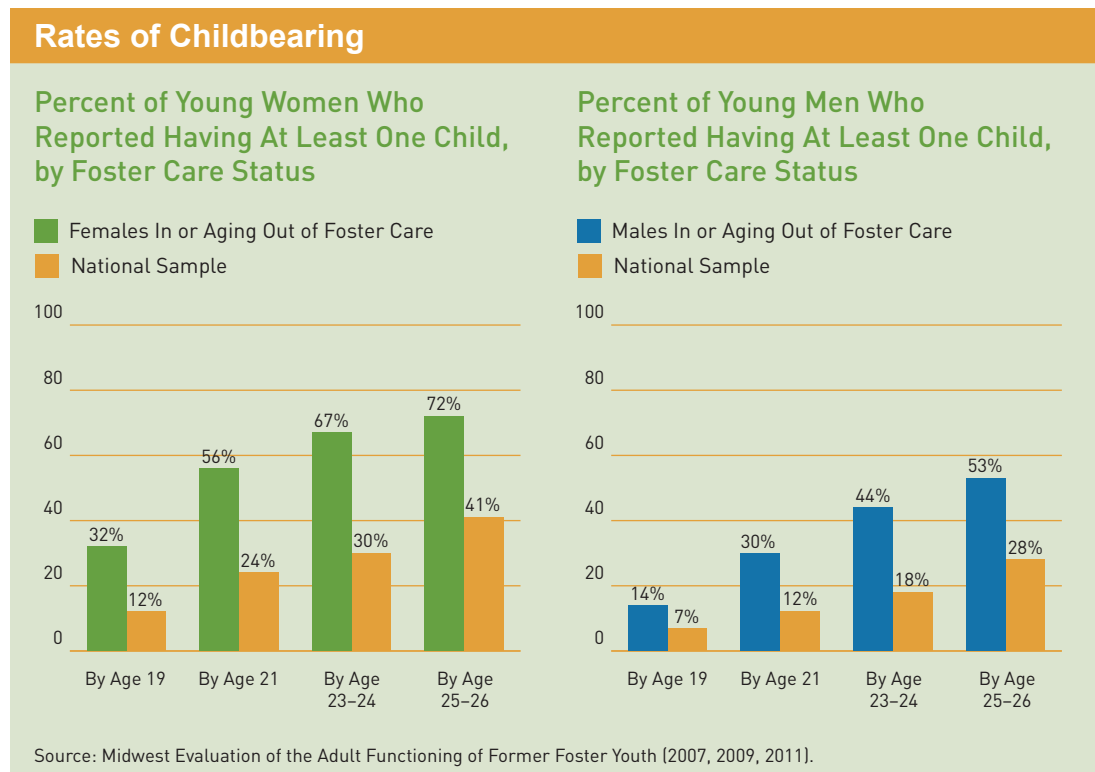


Source: Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth (2004, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011).

Young men who have experienced foster care also have much higher rates of impregnating a partner than their peers outside of the child welfare system. Nearly one-half of 21 year-old men who aged out of foster care reported having gotten a partner pregnant, compared with only one-fifth of young men nationwide at that age. In the most recent follow-up survey of the Midwest Study, two-thirds of the 25- and 26-year-old young men reported that they had ever gotten a partner pregnant compared with only 39 percent of their peers in the general population.

- Rates of Childbearing and Parenthood Among Adolescents and Young Adults Who Have Experienced Foster Care.** With significantly higher rates of pregnancy among adolescents and young adults who have been in foster care, it is not surprising that rates of childbearing and parenthood are also much higher than the general population. Among respondents to the Midwest Study, almost one-third of 19-year-old and 56 percent of 21 year-old females reported having at least one child. By age 25 to 26, over 70 percent of young women reported having at least one child. Among young men, 30 percent of 21 year-olds and more than half of 25–26 year olds reporting having at least one living child.

Many of these young women have had multiple children as they become young adults. At age 21, most of the young women who were mothers reported having only one child. However, by age 23–24, half of the young women reporting having children had more than one child. Moreover, most young mothers report that they are living with at least one of their children, underscoring the importance of providing support in the context of a young



family. At age 23–24, nearly all of these young women reported that one or more of their children was living with them. Rates of resident children were much less among young men. Less than half of young men at this age reported that one or more of their children was living with them.

- **Risk Factors for Adolescent Pregnancy:** A well-established body of research has identified several family and individual factors that make teens more susceptible to getting pregnant or having a child. Many young people in foster care often experience more of those risk factors than the average adolescent. These risk factors include exposure to abuse or neglect, family turbulence while in care (including placement changes), low levels of school engagement (in part due to frequent changes in schools), behavioral problems, and high rates of sexual risk taking.<sup>7</sup>
- **Challenging outcomes.** In general, adolescent pregnancy is associated with a number of poor outcomes for young mothers and their children, including poverty, poor health, and low rates of high school graduation.<sup>8</sup> Children of teen parents may have poorer cognition and educational outcomes, higher levels of behavioral problems, and poorer health outcomes than do children of older parents.<sup>9</sup> Few studies have focused on how young parents with foster care experience fare relative to the general population. However, one study in Illinois found that less than half of pregnant and parenting youth in foster care had a high school diploma or GED when they exited care. Having more than one child significantly reduced the rate of high school attainment. Additionally, that study highlighted the fragile nature of those young families, finding that about one in five adolescent mothers in foster care were investigated for child abuse and neglect of their own children.<sup>10</sup>
- **Important, but complex role and needs of adolescent fathers:** Issues of adolescent fatherhood among young men in foster care is a complex one. In some cases, the relationship between the young mother and father has ended, and may or may not have been a positive or healthy one. In many states, child welfare agencies do not even ask about or know whether young men in foster care are fathers. Increasingly research has shown the importance of male involvement in sexual decision making as well as in the lives of children. As early efforts demonstrate, much more research is needed to further understand the incidence of adolescent fatherhood and explore ways in which to appropriately engage young fathers in their own planning and the planning for their children.

*Adolescent pregnancy is associated with a number of poor outcomes for young mothers and their children.*

## CHALLENGES

Funders seeking to support positive opportunities and improve outcomes for pregnant and parenting youth and young adults who have experienced foster care face a number of important systems and practice challenges.

- **Lack of national data on the incidence of pregnancy and parenthood among young people who have experienced foster care and their specific needs and challenges.** Current research on the incidence of pregnancy and parenthood is based on small and regional samples. Although the federal child welfare data system tracks living arrangements for all children and youth in foster care, the system does not track whether a young woman is pregnant or not or if a young man has fathered a child—or whether adolescent parents in foster care are living with their children in relative or non-relative family placements.
- **Lack of practice models to support the healthy development of young parents,** support the healthy development of the child, and to nurture the parent-child relationship and bonds. Additionally, few practice models exist that support permanency planning with the three generations impacted by adolescent pregnancy and parenting.
- **Need for staff development and training to enable child welfare staff to increase knowledge and build skills related to transitions planning,** innovative intergenerational pregnancy prevention and building healthy intimate relationships.
- **Little attention paid to understanding how to best identify and support adolescent fathers.** Most focus of prevention, interventions and support is on the adolescent mother. Although there is a growing research base on “responsible fatherhood,” most programs designed to support engagement of fathers has focused on the general population. Scant research exists on adolescent fathers in foster care. States do not routinely ask at intake whether adolescents are parents.
- **Limited application of developmentally appropriate service delivery and planning with adolescents and young adults that remain in foster care through age 21,** particularly when they are young parents. With the passage of the Fostering Connections Act in 2008, states have the opportunity to extend Title IV-E foster care services up to the age of 18 and receive federal reimbursement. While a growing number of states have taken advantage of that option, few approaches exist for engaging young adults in developmentally appropriate ways in building their plans for family connections, school and work opportunities, healthy peer relationships and connections to community services and opportunities. Fewer approaches exist specifically for young parents in care.

## INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Foundations seeking to invest in supports for adolescent and young adult parents in and transitioning out of foster care have a range of options and opportunities.

- **Invest in research and data collection.** The research agenda on the circumstances and needs of adolescent parents and their children is significant. Critical knowledge gaps exist in quantifying the incidence of adolescent pregnancy and parenthood among those who have experienced foster care, in exploring the experiences of young parents—both mothers and fathers, and in understanding the outcomes and needs of their children.
- **Invest in strategies to delay and or prevent pregnancies and early parenthood for both young women and men.** Preventing pregnancy for young women and men is another critical investment strategy. Private investors can also support efforts to expand the outline of medical services to include pregnancy prevention counseling and services. Foundations can also support efforts to advocate for inclusion of sexual health education and services in the health section of the transition plan—and support service implementation and evaluation efforts at the local level.
- **Invest in support for states to improve practice models to support young parents and their children.** Developing new practice models that effectively support young mothers, fathers and their children remains another critical investment strategy. Consider investing in efforts to design, develop, and test innovative approaches, including those serving multiple generations, as well as to create supportive placement options for young families.
- **Invest to improve practice models to support father identification and engagement.** The needs of adolescent fathers are often overlooked. Consider investing in efforts to improve father identification and engagement. Efforts could include creating placement options that encourage involvement of fathers in children’s lives. Support efforts to ensure father identification takes place early in pregnancy and promote father engagement by child welfare staff with the goal of appropriately promoting the healthy involvement of the father in his child’s life.
- **Encourage states to explore policies for extending IV-E eligibility to 21 and allowing for re-entry.** Research shows that youth who remain in care delay parenting, are less likely to become homeless, are more likely to attend college and have a higher overall earning potential. Additionally, as states are considering extending IV-E eligibility, encourage leaders to consider how parenting teens and young adults might re-enter care when necessary for safety, support and permanency and transitions planning assistance.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- <sup>1</sup> Courtney, M.E., Dworsky, A., Cusick, G. Havlicek, J., Perez, A., & Keller, T. (2007). *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 21*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.
- <sup>2</sup> Manlove, J., Welti, K., McCoy-Roth, M., Berger, A., & Malm, K. (2011). *Teen parents in foster care: Risk factors and outcomes for teens and their children*. Washington, DC: Child Trends.
- <sup>3</sup> Courtney, M.E., Terao, S., & Bost, N. (2004). *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Conditions of Youth Preparing to Leave State Care*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.
- <sup>4</sup> Courtney (2007) op. cit.
- <sup>5</sup> Courtney, M.E., Dworsky, A., Brown, A., Cary, C., Love, K. & Vorhies, V. (2011). *Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 26*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.
- <sup>6</sup> Courtney (2007) op. cit.
- <sup>7</sup> For a detailed review of research on risk factors see Manlove, J., Welti, K., McCoy-Roth, M., Berger, A., & Malm, K. (2011). *Teen parents in foster care: Risk factors and outcomes for teens and their children*. Washington, DC: Child Trends.
- <sup>8</sup> Hoffman, S.D., & Maynard, R. A. (Eds.) (2006). *Kids having kids: Economic costs and social consequences of teen pregnancy* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Dworsky, A., & DeCoursey, J. (2009). *Pregnant and parenting foster youth: Their needs and experiences*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.
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### ABOUT THE YOUTH TRANSITIONS FUNDERS GROUP

The Youth Transition Funders Group (YTFG) is a network of grantmakers dedicated to improving the lives of young people between the ages of 14 and 24 who have few supports—such as teens aging out of the foster care system, youth who don't finish high school, or youth in the juvenile justice system. Through collaboration and strategic alliances, YTFG works to ensure that every young adult has the education, skills, and supports to be truly Connected by 25.



### ABOUT THE FOSTER CARE WORK GROUP

The Foster Care Work Group (FCWG) is one of three work groups of YTFG. The FCWG is a network of funders who work together to support the economic success and well being of youth transitioning from foster care. FCWG members coordinate and leverage investments to ensure that all youth have lifelong family, personal, and community connections and the opportunities and tools to succeed throughout adulthood.



### ABOUT MAINSPRING CONSULTING

Mainspring Consulting provides staff support to the FCWG. Mainspring works with foundation officers, policymakers, and state and community leaders to design effective programs and initiatives for children, families and communities, develop sound strategies to leverage resources, and to create effective plans to move from good thinking to action.