YOUTH VILLAGES
TRANSITIONAL LIVING PROGRAM 10-YEAR REPORT

10 YEARS
TRANSITIONAL LIVING PROGRAM

HELPING FORMER FOSTER CHILDREN
BECOME SUCCESSFUL ADULTS
THOUSANDS AGE OUT OF FOSTER CARE AND STATE CUSTODY WITH NO SKILLS FOR THE ADULT WORLD. SOCIETY CANNOT OVERLOOK THESE YOUNG PEOPLE.

In 1999, Youth Villages decided to do something about it. Patrick W. Lawler, chief executive officer, met with Memphis philanthropist Clarence Day about funding a new program to help children.

“We’ve identified a population of older children who are failing miserably,” Lawler said. “Children are leaving our programs at age 18 with no support system. When a 14-year-old has a bad outcome, it may mean they’re suspended from school. But when an 18-year-old has a bad outcome, it can mean they’re living on the streets. They’re pregnant or they’re incarcerated. They don’t have a job, or maybe they’re using drugs.”

With start-up and continuing financial support from The Day Foundation and others, Youth Villages’ transitional living program targeted these teenagers, offering guidance, assistance and support as they learn to navigate society independently.
REPORT SUMMARY

THE MOST STATISTICALLY VULNERABLE YOUTH IN THE U.S. TODAY ARE FOSTER KIDS WHO HAVE AGED OUT OF THE SYSTEM. HOW CAN WE AS A SOCIETY EFFECTIVELY HELP THESE OFTEN INVISIBLE, FORGOTTEN YOUNG PEOPLE?

For more than a decade, Youth Villages has been working to answer that question. In 1999, our organization began offering a voluntary transitional living program specifically designed to help young people at their most statistically vulnerable point: beginning life as an independent adult after aging out of foster care or other children’s services.

In the transitional living program, Youth Villages specialists work with young people to help them find safe housing, achieve stable employment, continue their education or get job training, reunite with birth families if possible, build healthy adult support systems and learn to manage their physical and mental health issues. Youth Villages now has 10 years of data collected from checking in with young people who received at least 60 days of service in the program six, 12 and 24 months later, since 2002.

The results of our research are clear. After aging out of the system, these youth are statistically at their most vulnerable, with many facing a high risk of falling into a life of substance abuse, prison and poverty. However, we’ve also learned that with the right intensive guidance and attention, their odds of becoming successful, independent adults increase dramatically.
Youth Villages is one of the only agencies working with transition-age youth that records and reports long-term outcomes of its program participants.

84% Living independently or with family two years after completing the program

In comparison, by age 26, more than half of former foster children surveyed for the Midwest Study¹ had been arrested as adults.

77% No involvement with the law even two years after completing the program

In 2010, Youth Villages began participating in a rigorous evaluation of its transitional living program, conducted by MDRC, a national social service research group. The study is overseen by Mark Courtney, senior researcher at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. He also is the principal investigator for The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth. That longitudinal study has been following a group of young people from Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois as they transition from foster care to adulthood.

In school, graduated or employed two years after completing the program

83%
Right now, more than 500,000 children in the United States are being raised by the state in foster care, juvenile justice or children’s mental health systems. More than 26,000 young people age out of state care every year alone without being reunited with their families or finding new ones through adoption. While some federal assistance is available for former foster children who meet strict guidelines, most do not receive adequate help or support in their transition to adulthood. And their path is a rocky one.

In 2002, researchers at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago began following former foster children to see how well they did in adult life. The findings were alarming. Studies showed that 18 months after leaving foster care, young people were more likely to be homeless, unemployed, drop out of high school and live in poverty. Former foster children were more likely to be parenting as teenagers and more likely to have their own children placed in the foster care system, perpetuating a cycle of neglect, abuse and poverty, according to the study.

**Midwest Study of Former Foster Youth outcomes**

at 18 months after discharge from state custody

- **55%** Poverty
- **45%** High School Dropout
- **25%** Homeless
- **50%** Unemployed
**Estimated cost savings from 100 youth aging out**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NO TL</th>
<th>WITH TL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent Incarcerated</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Annual Cost of Incarceration</td>
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<td>$20K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Length of Incarceration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Incarceration Cost Per Person</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Total Incarceration/Probation Costs for 100 Young Adults</td>
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<td><strong>$1.3M</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Crime Costs (assuming Incarceration/Probation accounts for 60% of costs)</td>
<td>$4.8M</td>
<td>$2.2M</td>
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</table>

Based on the costs associated with incarceration and probation as well as victim costs associated with criminal behavior, 100 hypothetical youth who do not have TL services will incur $4.8 million in crime-related costs, compared to $2.2 million for youth who have had TL services. Per-person costs for each group are the same, but fewer than half as many youth in the TL group report trouble with the law as those in the Midwest Study. This difference represents a cost savings of $2.6 million.


“We make an investment in these young adults, because the consequence of doing nothing is such a dramatic cost to society,” said Richard Shaw, Youth Villages’ chief development officer. “To do nothing and let a young person end up homeless, incarcerated or on welfare, the cost is so much greater. And that’s not even factoring in the lost potential – society benefits tremendously when young people realize their potential and contribute.”
To find the best way to help former foster youth, Youth Villages’ leaders benchmarked the few programs providing assistance to this group in the late 1990s. Many programs focused on housing, providing apartments or group homes where teens could live after age 18 when foster services ended. Some offered classes young people could attend to gain job skills or educational support.

Youth Villages took a different approach.

Its voluntary program is designed not to perpetuate dependency or to offer some training that may or may not be beneficial but to help young people quickly develop the independent living skills needed to support themselves in the community.

Finding a place to live, getting insurance and budgeting money are all skills that have to be learned. In addition to that, transitional living counselors meet with young people in the program at least once each week and are on call 24 hours a day. Through this intense support, young people in the TL program learn to deal with the minor and major problems that come with adulthood. They set education and career goals. They develop resumes, prepare for job interviews and select a career. They learn the basics to becoming an adult.

“The Youth Villages program is unique because of the intensity and thoughtfulness of the intervention. There’s been organizational thinking about all the different domains of support and competency that these young people need,” said Dr. Mark Courtney, Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. “The program model recognizes all the challenges these young people face such as limited education, mental health problems, complicated families. Addressing all those factors is reflected in the Youth Villages program.”
Youth Villages transitional living specialists help young people develop and achieve their own goals for the future. They help participants secure housing; pursue educational and employment goals; access health and mental health services; learn such independent living skills as budgeting, cooking, cleaning and shopping; and create and maintain healthy relationships with family and others.

The program is open to young people ages 17 to 22. Most young people participate in the program for six to 12 months. Young people can rejoin the program if necessary before their 23rd birthday, and data show that 7 percent of young people do re-enter the program during the two-year follow-up period.

The key element of the transitional living program is intensity. Transitional living specialists have small caseloads, working with only six to 10 young adults at a time. They meet face-to-face with the young people at least once a week and are on call 24/7 in case of emergencies. But they also communicate with young people continually throughout the week through texts, emails and phone calls. TL specialists provide the kind of continual encouragement, feedback, advice and support traditionally offered by parents in family settings.

Specialists follow a detailed program model developed by Youth Villages with manualized interventions. They work in teams with close supervision, and all cases are reviewed once each week by a clinical program consultant.

Youth Villages employs more than 190 transitional living specialists who work in assessment, placement or direct frontline support of former foster youth.
Steven models academic success for siblings

No member of Steven’s family had ever gone to college; some didn’t complete high school. Steven had another strike against him. One of 15 children that his parents couldn’t care for, Steven grew up in foster and residential care.

The largest study of former foster children, The Midwest Evaluation of Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, found that 25 percent of former foster youth do not have even a high school diploma or a GED and only 6 percent of the group had a degree from a two- or four-year college by age 23.

Stephen received support from the Youth Villages transitional living and mentoring programs. He’s now a sophomore in college. He’s confident he’ll finish and go on to be a Spanish teacher or an interpreter.

“Without Youth Villages, I wouldn’t have gone to college in the first place. I would have been off track,” he said. “I have younger siblings. They’ll be able to see their older brother graduate from college. I can be a role model for them and for other children receiving help at Youth Villages.”

Amber got a job and her grades turned around

Struggling college student Amber stressed over little things so much, she was losing sight of larger issues.

“I didn’t know what to do,” the 20-year-old said. “I was away from home and everyone.”

Detached from everything that was familiar, Amber’s grades began to suffer. Her college financial aid was threatened. Going into the summer months, she thought she’d lose her housing. Luckily, her case manager from the Tennessee Department of Children’s Services contacted Youth Villages about Amber.

Teresaann Fisher, Youth Villages TL clinical supervisor, said Amber was motivated to succeed.

“She didn’t know where to start,” Teresaann said. “We worked on building her resume and re-applying for health care.”

Amber got a job. Her grades turned around. Now a junior, Amber recently was selected to enter the social work program at her school.

“We found a structure so I wouldn’t feel lost,” Amber said. “She helped me walk through things. I began to accomplish smaller goals, and it gave me confidence to move on to the larger ones.”
The Youth Villages Research department began tracking every young person who completed at least 60 days of transitional living services in 2002. Program success is defined as maintaining stable and suitable housing, remaining free from legal involvement, participating in an educational or vocational program and developing the life skills necessary to become a successful, productive citizen. Some 86 percent of young people who participate in the program for at least 60 days are discharged successfully — they were living independently or with family. Some 84 percent were still living successfully at the two-year follow up.

Education is a major predictor of success for young people. Transitional living specialists work hard to help young people in the program complete their high school requirements or earn a GED. They help young people find financial aid for college and job training programs. Thirty percent of young people in the program are parenting young children of their own. TL specialists help them juggle jobs and child care arrangements while they continue their education.

Some 83 percent of transitional living participants are in school, have graduated or are employed at the two-year follow up.

In the two years following their involvement with the Youth Villages program:
• 89 percent of the young women had not been pregnant
• 70 percent of the young people were not parenting children
• 79 percent were not receiving mental health services
• 77 percent had no involvement with the law
In 2006, The Day Foundation proposed a public/private partnership with the state of Tennessee to allow more young people across the state to receive help from the Youth Villages program. Philanthropist Clarence Day offered to donate millions of dollars to fund the program each year if the Tennessee Department of Children's Services would match his contribution dollar for dollar. DCS leadership saw this as the way to stretch scarce state resources to help a very vulnerable population. Since 2006, the Tennessee Department of Children's Services has contributed almost $9 million to assist young people who have aged out of state custody or foster placements in the state get help to become successful, independent adults.

State support was a turning point for the program, allowing Youth Villages to double the number of young people helped in Tennessee. This support for former foster children put Tennessee on the forefront of developing effective services for this population and set it apart from other states.

Youth Villages is committed to offering transitional living services in each geographic location where it provides intensive in-home services. The program is most successful where Youth Villages can build public/private partnerships between foundations and states. The program has grown most rapidly in Massachusetts, where young people are supported by the Department of Children and Families and private donations from foundations, such as the GreenLight Fund.

The program also is available to young people in Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina and Alabama through the donations of Youth Villages’ own employees.

“Tennessee provides more resources for this population than any other state in the country,” said Patrick W. Lawler, Youth Villages chief executive officer. “With our match, Tennessee is so far ahead it’s unbelievable. The foresight of state leaders has saved taxpayers millions of dollars they otherwise would be spending on these youth, who so often fail in big and small ways. Their commitment to the TL program means happier, more successful young adults who can contribute to a robust community.”
States with Youth Villages’ TL Program

Major support from the **GreenLight Fund** brought the transitional living program to Massachusetts in 2009.

A targeted grant from **The Day Foundation** allowed the program to begin in North Carolina.

Keith’s dream of a college education seemed shattered

Keith’s mother’s persistent mental health issues and his father’s unstable situation made it impossible for the separated parents to raise their son and daughter.

Keith found stability with a caring foster mom. A smart and resourceful young man, Keith is the first in his family to earn a high school diploma and go to college. But after working so hard to graduate high school, Keith was burned out by the time his college courses started. Normally a good and dedicated student, his grades suffered and he was suspended.

Keith’s dream of a college education seemed shattered, and because he was no longer enrolled in school, he also was no longer eligible to stay in extended foster care past age 18. His anxiety was mounting. He had nobody to help him, and he would soon be homeless. But Keith found help.

Youth Villages’ transitional living program helped Keith straighten out his situation, get off school probation and re-enroll in college courses. His Youth Villages TL specialist also helped him obtain a driver’s license and stay in foster care. Today, Keith is back on track toward making his life goals a reality.

“Things were really hard the year after I graduated high school. I just wasn’t ready for college,” Keith says. “It’s a lot different now. I now know how to handle my responsibilities and I’m ready to achieve my dream of graduating college and getting a really good job.”

Jasiah finally has a home

Growing up with a crack-addicted mother, Jasiah and his siblings never knew what would happen next. Their mom’s addiction culminated in the family’s eviction. The family scattered – their mother went to live at a church shelter, but for Jasiah and his siblings, their new home was with the Division of Family and Children Services.

Jasiah ended up living in several group homes until he couldn’t take it any longer and ran away. He eventually got connected with the Youth Villages transitional living program. His TL specialist helped Jasiah and his brother find an apartment they could afford on a major bus line so Jasiah could continue to go to work and make it to his college classes.

Jasiah is taking college seriously now. He wants to work in the music business. He and his TL specialist work on making ends meet on a tight budget, juggling work and college responsibilities, making smart choices and taking care of his health.
Zoey found out she was pregnant

Zoey left her foster home and lived at the YWCA while she took classes at a local college. She lived nearby and could walk where she needed to go. She had a job. In foster care almost all of her life; she faced serious adult decisions at 18 years old. She had trouble securing the things adults need — finding a doctor, pursuing a career and finding housing. Her case manager with the Tennessee Department of Children’s Services told her about Youth Villages’ transitional living program.

“One of the first things we did was get her to a doctor for a checkup,” said Lindsey Jones, Youth Villages TL specialist. “That’s when we found out she was pregnant.”

And a little less than a year ago, Zoey’s son was born. Zoey’s discharged from the TL program and works part time. She plans to return to school.

“If it wasn’t for Youth Villages, I’d be a lot further behind,” she said. “I’d still be the timid little girl I was before.”

Kamilah learned to budget her time and money

Kamilah, her mother and seven siblings recently moved to Tennessee from Georgia.

She found herself behind academically after some class credits didn’t transfer. After graduating from The Academy, a school for students to catch up and graduate high school on time, she earned scholarships and started attending college. But she needed help managing her time and money.

With the help of Youth Villages TL Specialist Katelyn Brooks, Kamilah learned about budgeting money. She learned better time management and how to take care of herself first.

“You can see she’s a very independent person,” Katelyn said. “She just needs the support to handle money and manage her time.”

Kamilah already has plans for graduate school. Although she’s very shy, she’s found a core of friends at school.

“I don’t know where I’d be or what I’d be doing without the TL program,” she said. “It’s like the TL program is an extra leg to help me stand.”
Of the young people helped since the TL program began in Memphis in 1999, 51 percent were female; 50 percent were Caucasian; 43 percent were African-American; and the remainder were Hispanic or other races.

Four-nine percent of participants began receiving Youth Villages’ transitional living services when they were 17 years old or younger. This is a reflection of the state of Tennessee’s efforts to provide services to young people prior to their aging out of care. Thirty-three percent began the program at age 18; the rest committed to the program at age 19 or older.

In 2000, 65 young people were admitted to the program; in 2012, yearly admissions were 938. The number of young people being helped increased by almost 50 percent in 2008 when the Tennessee Department of Children’s Services began helping fund the program for young people in the state. Prior to that, services had been funded entirely through private donations.

While Youth Villages has expanded the program to other states, 90 percent of the young people helped by the program so far have been in Tennessee.

Youth Villages has helped 1,657 young people in West Tennessee, 1,727 in Middle Tennessee and 1,336 in East Tennessee. Two hundred ninety-four young people have been helped in North Carolina. The program is growing fastest in Massachusetts, where transitional living services are funded through specific gifts from private foundations and from the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families. More than 180 young people have been helped in Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi.
FINDING WHAT WORKS FOR FORMER FOSTER CHILDREN

A randomized, rigorous study of the Youth Villages transitional living program

More than 1,200 Tennessee young people who have spent some of their lives in foster care or state custody now are participating in a rigorous study of the Youth Villages transitional living program. Researchers hope the study will yield solutions for helping this very vulnerable group find more success as adults.

More than 1,300 young people who turn 18 through October 2012 will participate in the rigorous evaluation of the Youth Villages program being conducted by MDRC, a national social service research group, through a partnership with Youth Villages and the Tennessee Department of Children's Services. The study, funded by grants from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, will measure the Youth Villages program's effectiveness as compared to usual services available for these young people in Tennessee communities.

Mark Courtney, senior researcher at the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, recently joined the MDRC team on the study. Dr. Courtney has extensive experience in studying this population. He is the principal investigator for the Midwest Evaluation of Former Foster Youth, the largest evaluation of youth who have aged out of foster care.

Participants in the study are randomly assigned to receive services from Youth Villages or available community resources. MDRC tracks each participant and evaluates the outcomes for both groups. MDRC research often helps shape legislation, program design and operational practices across the country. This type of scientific study of social programs is a part of the movement toward the use of evidence-based programs – programs that have been proven to work.

“This is one of the largest experimental evaluations ever conducted in the child welfare services field and the largest by far of a program focused on improving the transition to adulthood for foster youth. It will provide invaluable evidence to the field regarding ‘what works’ for foster youth,” Dr. Mark Courtney, Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.
THE WAY FORWARD ...

One day we hope no children will grow up in foster care, and every child will grow up with a stable, loving family who helps them reach their potential.

We believe more than half of the 500,000 children growing up in state children’s systems could live at home safely with their families, saving states tens of millions of dollars and saving children and parents untold misery and trauma. Our track record proves we can keep the hardest-to-serve kids at home, where they have the best chance of success—with their families.

At Youth Villages, we fiercely believe that building strong families is the answer for vulnerable children. Our counselors are a force for families, providing Evidentiary Family Restoration™ for kids and parents alike. We do this with one goal in mind: to ensure that each child has a functioning family and a safe, permanent home. Because stronger families result in safer neighborhoods and better communities for everyone.

Billions of dollars are being wasted on unproven, unsustainable efforts with little evidence of any lasting impact. Youth Villages offers a better approach, Evidentiary Family Restoration, and the results are remarkable. Our long-term success rate of 80% is nearly twice the national average, compared to traditional services. And we operate at one-third the cost. Additionally, by continuously collecting data and measuring outcomes, we’re able to quantify effectiveness precisely—something most programs don’t do.

In those cases where it is impossible to repair or restore a family, Youth Villages’ counselors have been very successful in carefully matching children with adoptive parents. In Tennessee, the Youth Villages adoption program partners with the state Department of Children’s Services to find permanent homes for the children in our care who have adoption as a goal. In the other states we serve, our staff works with state officials to facilitate adoption for children who cannot return to their birth families.

Youth Villages has been very successful in helping these children with emotional and behavioral problems find permanency; some have been adopted just before their 18th birthday. The need for family never goes away.
Youth Villages is a leading national nonprofit providing the most effective local solutions for troubled youth and their families. Founded in 1986, with the merger of two residential campuses in Memphis, the organization added foster care services in 1992 and made intensive in-home services the foundation of its continuum of programs in 1994.

Over the years, Youth Villages expanded programs and services to meet the changing needs of children and families and developed its own approach: Evidentiary Family Restoration™. EFR involves intensive work with the child and family, as well as a focus on measuring outcomes, keeping children in the community whenever safely possible and providing accountability to families and funders. Youth Villages uses its EFR approach in all its programs and services, and the approach has been proven to produce lasting positive results for children. Youth Villages’ success rates are twice that of traditional services at one-third the cost of traditional care.