

JOHN T. GORMAN
FOUNDATION



From
**Adolescence
to Adulthood**

A BLUEPRINT FOR HELPING
MAINE'S YOUTH SUCCEED



ABOUT THE JOHN T. GORMAN FOUNDATION

The John T. Gorman Foundation advances ideas and opportunities that can improve the lives of disadvantaged people in Maine. To achieve the greatest impact, the Foundation has a special interest in strengthening families and helping communities provide them with the supports and opportunities they need to thrive.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jennifer Miller is a founding partner of ChildFocus, a national consulting firm that supports non-profit organizations, foundations and public agencies in their mission to improve outcomes for America's most marginalized children, youth, and families.

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We are also grateful to Maine Inside Out for allowing us to use some of their photos in this report.

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THOUGHTS FROM THE JOHN T. GORMAN FOUNDATION



Any parent of teenagers knows how challenging it can be for young people to successfully navigate the passage from adolescence to adulthood. Success requires connections to supportive adults, to mentors, to financial assistance, to employment opportunities, and to the guidance and social capital often required to navigate everyday life. It requires time, since the needs of young people don't stop when they turn 18. This transition can seem daunting, even to a young person with every possible advantage. Imagine what it's like for someone without the inherent connections all young people need.

That is too often the reality for youth who are poor, homeless or involved with the child welfare or juvenile justice systems. These youth and young adults face the most challenging obstacles, the highest hurdles, the most daunting odds and, unfortunately for them and for all of us, they historically experience the poorest educational, economic and social results of any group of young people in our State. Because of this, they are one priority of the John T. Gorman Foundation's work and the focus of our newest Policy Brief, *From Adolescence to Adulthood: A Blueprint for Helping Maine's Youth Succeed*.

This policy brief aims to improve public understanding about the issues facing these particular older youths. In addition to examining their demographics and their challenges, we also highlight several innovative Maine efforts that are improving results for these high-potential young people. The commonality of these different interventions is that they are comprehensive, coordinated and flexible. As such, they can respond to the specific needs and characteristics of youth and, often, their communities. Virtually all reflect public/private involvement and the John T. Gorman Foundation is proud to have supported each of them. This Policy Brief concludes with a set of common sense recommendations. We believe these recommendations can help policymakers at the State and local levels improve the odds that these young people will achieve their dreams and become valuable contributors to Maine's future prosperity.

Finally, while the focus of this publication is on older youth who are homeless or system-involved, it is critical that we not lose sight of the importance of helping other Maine youth facing significant challenges avoid such involvement in the first place. The fact is, given the size, the demographics and the economy of our State, we can ill afford to have any young person not reach their full potential. We need them all. We need them for our workforce and for the future stability of our communities. We need these young people to contribute to our economy and lead our civic institutions. And we need them to be as equipped as they can be to successfully raise the next generation of our kids. Giving up on any young person in Maine is simply not an option.

We urge you to contact the John T. Gorman Foundation should you have questions and comments about this Brief, if you would like further information, or if you simply want to continue the conversation about this important issue.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tony Capollasso". The signature is fluid and cursive.

President and CEO

WHAT DO MAINE'S YOUNG PEOPLE NEED TO SUCCEED?

All young people deserve an equal chance to be healthy, happy, safe, and nurtured as they transition from adolescence to adulthood. Unfortunately, not all young people in Maine have the essential support needed to successfully make this transition and reach their full potential. This report highlights the needs of an all too often hidden and underserved group of Maine's young people. This group faces unique obstacles in the transition to adulthood because they are homeless or involved in the state's foster care or juvenile justice systems. The report also shares some promising approaches underway in Maine that can be scaled up to help all young people succeed in school, at work, and in their relationships. Finally, it recommends how state leaders can act now to create better opportunities for young people and improve the odds that they can contribute to Maine's future economic and civic success.

Since time immemorial, adolescence has been understood as a turbulent time, both physically and emotionally. Across generations, families and communities have struggled to create the societal conditions that can best support young people through this transformative period of growth and development, helping them navigate the sometimes rocky road to adulthood. Adolescent brain science has confirmed what many of us already knew from experience: there are essential opportunities and supports that all young people need to become caring, healthy and productive adults.

For example, to become successful adults, young people must have opportunities to:

Build positive connections with supportive people – Adolescents long for safe, stable, and nurturing relationships with supportive adults, including parents, grandparents, coaches, teachers, neighbors, or mentors. Trusted adults can help to create safe and affirming environments for Maine's young people as they prepare for an increasing level of independence in all aspects of their lives.

Create safe and secure places to live, to learn, and to play – Young people in Maine need safe and supportive schools, neighborhoods, and communities that foster healthy adolescent development in all domains of well-being, including physical and mental health, social interactions, and cognitive growth.

Access high-quality health and mental health care – Teens in Maine benefit from access to high-quality medical care and mental and behavioral health services from providers who understand adolescents and are committed to meeting their unique developmental needs.

Engage as learners, leaders, team members, and workers – Maine's adolescents thrive when involved in activities that help them build confidence and interact with other people and programs that promote healthy adolescent development. This includes activities at school, work, community and places of worship.¹



Sadly, too many of Maine's adolescents live in families and communities that fail to offer the conditions that young people need for positive growth and development. These young Mainers experience multiple childhood stressors that jeopardize their successful transition to adulthood. Poverty is one of the most pervasive stressors that young people experience. In 2015 17 percent of Maine's children lived in poverty.² Growing up in poverty impacts every aspect of a child's development. Young people in poverty are more likely to have experienced abuse and neglect, family and community violence, housing and food insecurity, and lack of educational and work opportunities than youth with better economic supports enjoy. While some of Maine's young people find the inner resiliency to counteract the impact of poverty and family instability, too many will transition to adulthood lacking the essential opportunities and connections they need to succeed as adults.

Growing up in poverty also increases the likelihood that young people will experience hardships that lead to involvement in Maine's foster care and juvenile justice system, or to a need for services for youth experiencing homelessness. These adversities include family conflict, school suspension or expulsion, living with a substance user, and more. Once entwined in these systems and service networks, young people more often than not become further isolated and disconnected from the trusted adults, the community opportunities and the supports that can make such a difference to their well-being. More can and must be done to create effective public system responses that ensure young people have opportunities to remain in their communities with the essential supports they need to thrive.

Investment in helping all young people succeed is an urgent task, as Maine faces one of its most challenging workforce crises in recent memory.

Achieving the best results requires treating each youth as a still-forming individual with purpose and potential and making sure all young people, regardless of the color of their skin or where they grow up, have an equitable chance to reach that potential.

— The Road to Adulthood: Aligning Child Welfare Practice with Adolescent Brain Development

Businesses simply cannot find enough skilled workers for our most vibrant industries, and the opportunity to better support young people as a way to address labor shortages has already been recognized by business leaders across the state. According to one estimate, helping vulnerable young people succeed has the potential to add more than 6,000 workers to the state’s labor force.³ Just as urgent is the reality that failure to invest in these young people will continue to cost the state more in budgets for prisons, homeless shelters, and government assistance, as well as loss of tax revenue from a productive workforce. In short, investing in programs that result in positive outcomes for young people now avoids a range of economic challenges for the state later.

WHO ARE MAINE’S MOST VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE?

The primary focus of this report is a population of young Mainers — many of whom are homeless or involved in the juvenile justice or foster care systems — who are struggling to reach their full potential because they lack the essential ingredients for healthy adolescent development. There are multiple reasons for these critical

gaps in support. Many of their families lack the financial and emotional resources to respond to normal adolescent developmental challenges in a healthy way, leading to parent-child conflict that escalates without the necessary intervention. Some families reject young people because they identify as LGBTQ, become pregnant or are failing in school. Other families in Maine face challenges with unaddressed alcohol and drug use that stand in the way of healthy parent-child relationships.

These young people face the same kinds of challenges in their journey to adulthood. Yet the systems that are designed to step in for them rely on very different funding streams, assessment tools, and interventions to meet their needs. As a result, young people often receive services and supports that are dictated by which systems door they enter, often creating a mismatch between what the systems have to offer and their true needs. This lack of coordination is compounded by the fact that many of Maine’s communities simply do not have enough services to meet these needs, particularly health and mental health services that are designed specifically for teens. Too many young people in Maine are falling through the cracks and dealing with adversity entirely on

their own, without the benefit of community supports and despite many warning signs that they are struggling.

What's more, involvement in one system often leads to unintentional involvement in another because the systems are not meeting the full range of young people's needs. One study in Maine, for instance, found that 72 percent of the homeless youth in urban areas and 32 percent of those in rural areas had spent some time in foster care.⁴ In fact, many youth flow within and between the systems and service networks throughout their teen years and multiple systems involvement is not unusual.

Tragically, many young people fare worse, not better, after their involvement in these systems. Study after study details the consequences when adolescents don't get the help they need, including unwanted pregnancies, involvement in the adult criminal justice system, poor educational outcomes, unemployment and increased dependence on government benefits. Although Maine-specific studies are lacking, national studies have found that young women who had been in foster care were twice as likely as their peers who were not in foster care to have ever been pregnant by age 19,⁵ and that youth who spent time in juvenile detention were 22 percent more likely than other youth in the same community to spend time in adult prison by age 25.⁶

Research also confirms that youth who have been detained or experienced foster care fare poorly in school and have uneven work experience compared to their peers.⁷ No parent would accept these poor outcomes if paying for services out of their pockets, and neither should the people of Maine.



The financial cost of these failures is also astonishing, and can be viewed through the lens of both taxpayer burden – the loss of tax revenue and the cost of government expenditures for criminal justice, health care and social welfare payments – as well as societal costs, including loss of earnings and the cost of crime, among other things. For one 16-year-old “opportunity youth” – defined as a young person not connected to school or work – the total lifetime burden to taxpayers is \$258,240. For the full lifetime of approximately 6.7 million opportunity youth nationally who are ages 16-24, the total cumulative taxpayer burden is \$1.56 trillion. The social burden of one 16-year-old opportunity youth amounts to \$755,900 over a lifetime. Total cumulative societal costs are \$4.75 trillion.⁸

Thankfully, it's also clear that investments in young people pay off. Analyses from the Opportunity Youth Network found that a \$30,000 one-time investment designed to connect a young person to education or training and work will save taxpayers \$65,230 over a lifetime, while generating \$105,500 in new tax revenue. Maine alone stands to gain \$29 million in savings by investing in just 1,840 of its most disconnected young people.⁹ In the foster care arena, it's estimated that closing the gaps in outcomes between young people who age out of foster

care and their peers in the general population for a single year would reduce costs to society, including the cost of academic failure, unplanned pregnancy, and criminal involvement, by \$7.8 billion dollars.¹⁰

Maine has an obligation to its young people — and to its taxpayers — to make the investments that will help young people turn their lives around. A critical step in fulfilling this obligation is to better understand who these young people are and how public systems can be better-designed to respond to their needs. Below are the characteristics of three specific populations of highly vulnerable young people, many of whom are involved in more than one system. These are the young people who, without a more comprehensive and coordinated approach today, will go on to face challenges in their journey to adulthood.

Homeless youth in Maine are a hidden population of young people, many of whom are sleeping in fields or under bridges in isolated areas of the state, without transportation or access to the broader array of services available in larger communities. Approximately 1,481 young people in Maine are homeless or unstably housed. This includes young people who are literally homeless, those who are school aged with no fixed stable nighttime residence, and young people with no safe alternative living arrangement.¹¹ Many of these young people utilize one of the three youth shelters based in urban communities of Bangor, Lewiston and Portland. While these shelters provide a lifeline for homeless youth who otherwise would have no roof over their heads, they

are not always able to provide the entire array of resources needed to help young people thrive. Homeless youth providers also report that youth who identify as LGBTQ are heavily represented in their programs. Although recent statewide data is unavailable, approximately 38 percent of the youth participating in Preble Street’s transitional living program identified as LGBTQ, and 50 percent of the young people at Lewiston’s New Beginnings drop in center for runaway and homeless youth identified as non-heterosexual.

Juvenile justice involved youth – Youth are referred to the juvenile justice system for behaviors that are considered to be delinquent or criminal, including truancy from school, property or personal offenses, drug violations or disorderly conduct. As of January 2018, there were approximately 1,300 youth involved in the juvenile justice system in Maine.¹² These young people may be involved in formal diversion efforts designed to prevent court involvement or be under formal community supervision, which requires oversight by the court and a probation officer. Approximately 5 percent of the youth involved in the juvenile justice system — ranging between 65 and 80 youth in recent years¹³ — experience Maine’s most costly youth justice intervention, secure confinement at Maine’s only remaining detention and commitment facility, Long Creek



INNOVATION AT WORK: Portland's First Place for Homeless Youth

First Place is a transitional living program operated by Preble Street, a homeless youth provider in Portland. First Place is designed to help Maine's homeless young adults, ages 18-23, find and maintain stable housing through two primary avenues: housing and an Enhanced Services Curriculum. First Place housing consists of six scattered site apartments that support homeless youth transitioning into long-term independence using an individualized approach to secure permanent housing.

Utilizing principles of harm reduction and trauma-informed care, as well as an understanding of young people's street culture, First Place staff work intensively with clients living in Preble Street apartments by combining the freedom and

flexibility of apartment living with the life skills development and intensive support of more traditional programs. Youth graduate 12-18 months after entering the program with the ultimate goal of taking over the lease for his or her apartment with a Housing Choice Voucher issued through the Portland Housing Authority.

In addition to providing supportive housing, First Place offers the Enhanced Services Curriculum, a life-skills curriculum designed to assist youth who seek independent housing other than the housing options offered through First Place. The Enhanced Services Curriculum consists of seven workshops, each of which supports increased skill building such as budgeting and employment to navigate adult responsibilities that reinforce long-term housing stability.

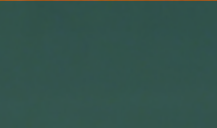
To date, 23 young people have been placed in First Place supported housing, 109 participated and 33 percent have completed the Enhanced Services Curriculum. Fifty-eight percent of those who participated and 84 percent of those who completed the Enhanced Services Curriculum went on to permanent housing.

Preble Street launched First Place with private funding in its early years, and a two-year federal demonstration program from the Department of Health and Human Services supported further testing of the intervention. Unfortunately, the federal demonstration grant was not renewed for 2018, and Preble Street will not be able to continue providing these comprehensive supports without sustained state and federal funding.

Youth Development Center. Many of these young people come to detention directly from residential treatment and have complex and unmet mental health needs.¹⁴ Young people of color are also overrepresented at Long Creek. In 2016, youth of color made up 22 percent of the population at Long Creek, compared to just 8 percent of Maine's general youth population.¹⁵

Youth in foster care – Youth in foster care have been removed from their homes and placed in

relative care, family foster care, group homes or residential treatment centers. Many of the older youth in foster care were removed when they were younger and have experienced multiple placements while in the foster care system. In 2015, there were 257 young people in foster care in Maine between the ages of 16-21. Eighty-four percent of these young people were removed from their families and placed into foster care due to parental neglect, not abuse, while 27 percent of placements were the result of parental substance



use. Twenty-eight percent were in foster care because of child behavior. Seventy-six young people left Maine's foster care system with no place to call home.¹⁶

Although the overall number of Maine's young people involved in its homeless, foster care and juvenile justice system is relatively small, the cost of systems involvement has a deep impact on Maine's budget. For example, it costs \$250,000 a year for a young person to be incarcerated at Long Creek Development Center¹⁷ and \$33,864 per year to fill a bed in a youth homeless shelter.¹⁸ Given these significant ongoing costs, it's critical for Maine's state leaders to commit the necessary investment in strategies that produce better outcomes for its older youth.

As is true in all states facing the challenges of innovating in complex service systems, Maine continues to look for new and more effective ways to provide a more comprehensive and coordinated service network for its struggling young people. But there is also promising news. Thanks to the commitment of a range of community leaders, advocates, and systems leaders, as well as critical partnerships with young people, there's a growing understanding about the needs of Maine's young people and what it will take to help them become thriving and productive adults.

MAINE'S PROGRESS FOR SYSTEMS-INVOLVED AND HOMELESS YOUTH

In recent years, many of Maine's community organizations, advocates and systems leaders have begun to break down systems' silos to help the state's most vulnerable young people

reach their full potential. These partners are applying the latest research on adolescent brain development, using new trauma informed and evidence-based interventions, and learning from the experiences of other states to improve outcomes for systems-involved and homeless youth. Young people who have experienced these systems are also becoming more engaged in influencing system and service improvements to better meet their needs and take into account their ideas for reform. As they continue to build on these strengths, Maine's youth and communities are well positioned to turn the promising practices described below into a new way of doing business to support Maine's most vulnerable youth.

Addressing the Comprehensive Needs of Homeless Youth

Homeless youth advocates and practitioners agree that the three youth homeless shelters in Maine are a critical safety net to provide young people with a safe place to sleep and the services and supports to help them in a time of crisis. At the same time, experts know that shelters alone are not enough to meet the comprehensive needs of homeless youth. Additional necessary interventions include an expansion of transitional housing options, access to more permanent housing resources to prevent homelessness, and continued certification of trusted adults who can serve as "host homes" for young people so they don't have to disrupt their school, work, and social connections.¹⁹

Advocates for homeless youth also agree that while there will always be a need for a small number of shelter beds, the primary goal of the system and community-based supports should

INNOVATION AT WORK: A New Community-Based Diversion Program in Lewiston

Driven by the Department of Corrections' desire to reduce incarceration and recidivism by using disaggregated data to direct resources to the highest need communities, in 2016 DOC partnered with several community-based organizations in Lewiston's Tree Street neighborhood to launch the Tree Street Reporting Center.

The Reporting Center – called the Sequoia Program – is embedded at Tree Street Youth, a community-based youth development organization, and serves moderate to high-risk young men currently involved or at risk of being involved in the juvenile corrections system. Youth may be on informal adjustment, pre- or post-adjudicatory, or on aftercare status. Of the 29 youth served in the first 18 months of Sequoia's operation, 54 percent were involved in the juvenile justice system and the remaining were at-risk of involvement. The program is

designed so that the courts or Juvenile Community Correction Officers (JCCOs) can offer it to youth and their families as an alternative to incarceration, an alternate supervision option or as an enhancement for other services.

Youth attend Sequoia for a prescribed period of time to reach specific personal, educational, and aspirational goals. The program operates five days a week from 2 p.m. to 8 p.m. – the hours during which a significant number of juvenile arrests were identified. Using individualized plans that are developed for and with each youth, JCCOs, counselors, and caseworkers meet with youth at the program in a space that is both confidential and appropriate, while specific restorative practices group programming – directed by youth needs – takes place daily.

The structured programming includes mentoring, community service opportunities, tutoring,

skills development, and a variety of life experiences aimed at building confidence, connections to community and team building skills. There is also targeted “as needed” support for parents and schools.

Based on an independent evaluation as well as an analysis of DOC data, the program is delivering results. Since beginning operation, the average number of juvenile arrests in the Lewiston area decreased by 35 percent compared to the five months prior. The Reporting Center is also credited with arrest prevention by working with youth who are at-risk of becoming involved with the juvenile justice system. In addition, youth in Sequoia experienced other positive outcomes, such as increased enrollment and attendance in school as a result of the array of educational services provided by Tree Street Youth.

be to prevent homelessness in the first place. And given that so many homeless young people have also been involved in the foster care and/or juvenile justice systems, a greater level of coordination between these multiple service systems is needed to strengthen targeted prevention efforts.

Building Positive Outcomes for Maine's Justice-Involved Youth

The past decade has seen a remarkable increase in the number of young people in Maine who are diverted away from the juvenile justice system and referred to alternatives designed to help them remain in their schools and communities. In many pockets of the state, these diversion efforts are helping young people avoid court in the first place, and when they do become involved with the courts, to seek alternative services and supports to keep them out of detention. Perhaps the best news in Maine is that these diversion programs seem to be working to prevent further

involvement in the system. Only seven percent of the young people who participate in diversion programs have any further involvement in the juvenile justice system.²⁰

The state's juvenile justice stakeholders agree that while the system's new priorities appear to be working for some youth, there are still too many young people who are driven further into the system even though they pose a low risk to public safety.²¹ Historical trends on recidivism find that 59 percent of youth placed in Long Creek have committed misdemeanor offenses while 56 percent present a low to moderate risk to public safety. The juvenile justice community is also concerned that while the overall number of admissions is down, many young people who enter the facility stay too long. The average length of stay in Long Creek in October 2017 was 351 days. While this is an improvement from past years, it is still almost a full year in which young people are separated from their family and community bonds and far exceeds the national average of six to nine



INNOVATION AT WORK: Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential (LEAP)

Maine Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential (LEAP) is a statewide initiative that is increasing employment and educational opportunities for young people who have been involved in the child welfare and justice systems, or who are homeless, by adapting and scaling two evidence-based models to address their specific needs and challenges. Launched by the Corporation for National and Community Service's Social Innovation Fund and the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 2015, this effort involves 10 local partnerships working across eight states, including Maine, four national organizations — Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG), Jobs for the Future (JFF), MDRC and School & Main Institute — and a growing network of nearly 50 local and national funders.

The Initiative recognizes that youth involved with systems face unique and significant barriers in reaching their career and education goals and require more targeted supports to enable them to

develop their careers once they complete high school.

In Maine, the Youth Community Engagement Team at University of Southern Maine's Muskie School of Public Service is building on its ongoing partnerships with Jobs for Maine's Graduates (JMG), the Office of Child and Family Services, Goodwill Industries, and other community-based organizations to implement the LEAP model. The goal is to develop career and education supports for over 350 young people in Maine.

LEAP targets systems involved youth, ages 15-25, who are transitioning to adulthood to help them complete high school prepared for the transition into post secondary education and employment. JMG is implementing its model in 55 high schools throughout the state to ensure high school completion and to help young people bridge the transition to post secondary education and career pathways.

Youth who enroll in LEAP after high school receive support from various service providers that are matched with them based on their location and individual career and education plans. JMG offers services at 11 colleges and universities through its College Success Program. At the same time, Goodwill industries is adapting Jobs for the Future's Back on Track model to help both college and non-college bound students develop the core competencies needed to succeed in the workforce.

This approach includes engaging employers in supporting young people through apprenticeships, providing them with high-touch supervision, and helping them navigate a meaningful career path. As of October 2017, Maine's LEAP Initiative had served a total of 124 youth, 48 of whom were being served in the Back on Track model and eight who successfully completed their first year of college while enrolled in Maine LEAP.

“The best way to ensure public safety is by creating a healthy and hopeful young person.”

**— Edwin Chester
Vice Chair, Maine Juvenile Justice Advisory Group**

months. These extended stays are particularly common for young people who are incarcerated for non-violent crimes and do not pose a risk to public safety.

Fostering Success for Older Youth in Foster Care

Maine has made many strides in meeting the needs of youth transitioning from foster care. Maine’s voluntary extended care agreement, available since 1972, provides support to help youth continue with education or career training, work, or care for extreme health issues through their 21st birthday. Youth on the extended agreement can receive supplemental services to help them complete high school and college, develop employment skills, and attain the life skills needed as they transition to adulthood without the support of a permanent family. In 2015, the Alumni Transitions Grant Program was established through state law and helps eligible alumni of Maine’s foster care system with higher education expenses up to the age of 27.

Despite having access to the voluntary extended care program, too many young Mainers are still leaving foster care without the appropriate skills and supports needed to succeed in higher education, and only 3 percent of youth in foster care successfully complete post-secondary school. Child welfare advocates also agree that more emphasis is needed to help young people

access housing and mental health services, and to find permanent families and adult connections before they leave foster care.

MAINE’S FUTURE FOR VULNERABLE YOUTH: Creating a Comprehensive, Coordinated, Flexible, and Youth- Centered Continuum of Care

The examples above provide hope that with enough focused attention and leadership, Maine’s communities can give its most vulnerable and at-risk young people the essential supports they need. These efforts are guided by the belief that all adolescents need the same opportunities: positive connections; safe and secure places to live, learn and play; high quality health and mental health care; and engagement in school, work, and community. Perhaps most importantly, research shows – and young people confirm – that healthy adult connections are the single biggest buffer against poor outcomes in adulthood.

Important to future state investments, vulnerable youth across populations share many of the same characteristics that can drive systems directions moving forward. The system features that define these efforts are:

- **Comprehensive** – Comprehensive approaches designed to ensure that young people get what they need, not just what systems can

CURRENT SYSTEM

FOSTER CARE



JUVENILE JUSTICE



YOUTH HOMELESS SHELTERS



WHAT WE NEED

A Comprehensive, Coordinated Youth-Centered Service Network

Career & Education Supports

Independent Living Skills

Trusted Adult Relationships

Safe, Stable & Affordable Housing

Access to Health Services

Flexible Emergency Funds

Connections to Community

Financial Literacy



offer. Providing young people with all of the essential supports they need regardless of which door they enter not only produces better outcomes, but also helps to ensure they do not needlessly become involved in multiple public systems at greater expense to the state.

- **Coordinated** – Coordinated systems ensure that young people have many individuals, organizations, and systems working together on their behalf, with a sense of urgency about wrapping the right services around young people so they don't have to navigate complex systems on their own. They are also funded in a way that allows resources to work effectively to meet young peoples' needs across systems silos.
- **Flexible** – Many of the examples above illustrate that local communities need greater flexibility in many arenas to produce better outcomes for systems involved youth. First and foremost, communities need to have

greater flexibility in how they use their funding so that rigid eligibility and service requirements don't get in the way of meeting young people where they are. Flexibility to engage a diversity of systems partners, apply evidence based and evidence informed interventions, and test new strategies to respond to evolving community needs are also key.

- **Youth-centered and culturally appropriate** – Systems and services are most effective when they put youth at the center of planning for their future, setting goals they want to achieve, and being engaged in defining the services, supports and opportunities they need to succeed. Being youth-centered also involves engaging young people in design and implementation of programs to ensure they are responsive to their needs. Culturally appropriate efforts plan for and design interventions taking into account young people's culture, race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation.

INNOVATION AT WORK: Putting the Pieces Together — The Mitchell Institute Promise Scholars

The Mitchell Institute began the Promise Scholars program in 2014 to offer scholarships and other comprehensive supports to outstanding young people in Maine who have experienced adversity and wish to pursue higher education. Currently, 32 percent of the Promise Scholars have experienced homelessness, 43 percent grew up in foster care, and 93 percent came from families earning less than \$35,000 annually. Promise Scholars are selected on the basis of academic achievement, community impact and financial need, and are provided additional personal and professional support to help them succeed in college and increase their social capital. As of 2017, there were 33 Promise Scholars attending 16 different institutions across Maine and the Northeast with the first class of scholars scheduled to graduate in 2018. The Promise Scholars program demonstrates that when provided with comprehensive supports, in addition to financial help, young people facing some of life's most difficult adversities can earn a college degree, make lifelong connections, learn leadership skills, and gain the confidence that people believe in them and want to see them succeed.

Recommendations *for* State-Level Action

More can and must be done to create effective public system responses that ensure young people have opportunities to remain in their communities with the essential supports they need to thrive. The John T. Gorman Foundation recommends the creation of a comprehensive, coordinated, flexible and youth-centered continuum of care for Maine's young people. This work will take the collective will of a diverse group of state and local stakeholders. It's also essential that the voices of young people are central to any effort to design a system that truly responds to their individual and collective needs. Recommendations for state level action to help all systems involved youth include:

- 1. Create a Statewide Coordinating Body for Youth** — Maine should follow the example of several other states by creating a statewide coordinating body with the authority to change how public dollars and public policies are aligned for its most vulnerable youth.²² This coordinating body should focus on the needs of older youth and have involvement from top leaders in the state, including the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, Education, Corrections, and Maine Housing as well as the Governor's office and state legislators. It is also critical to have representation from young people and parents who have first-hand experience with the systems, as well as non-profit and other community leaders who know what it takes to implement programs well and meet the full range of young people's needs. A state level entity that is committed to improving coordination across agencies will ensure that Maine communities have access to the full range of flexible resources needed to help young people succeed in their families and communities. This entity can also lead the way to systematically remove historical barriers that derail a young person from succeeding in school and work, such as detaining young people who do not pose a risk to public safety before they stand trial.
- 2. Increase access to community-based programs** — Young people involved in the juvenile justice and foster care systems, and those at risk of homelessness, need access to a range of essential services and supports to help them stay on track and avoid deeper systems involvement. This includes trauma informed and culturally appropriate mental health services, substance use treatment, mentoring programs, and adult assistance with navigating education, and employment goals. State systems should also ensure that communities can use a portion of their dollars for flexible funding to help young people meet basic

emergency expenses for food, clothing, transportation, and school-related costs that are essential for them to succeed in their path to adulthood. Funding for local programs should also be flexible enough to allow communities to implement evidence-based and evidence-informed practices that are proven to meet the challenges young people face. Young people should be partners with communities in helping them design programs that are responsive to their needs. Ideally, all youth serving systems will use a consistent assessment process to ensure that young people are matched with the services and supports they need and to ensure that those who are involved in multiple systems do not experiencing competing, overlapping, or duplicating services.

- 3. Develop community-based housing options** — Young people who cannot safely live with their family or friends need safe, stable and affordable housing to succeed in school and work. Young people who experience homelessness report that they want to stay in their schools and communities, but need help finding housing options that don't compromise their safety and allow them to continue to work toward their goals. This is particularly important for young people who are transitioning from foster care and detention, too many of whom often don't have the support to navigate their housing options.
- 4. Prevent systems involvement in the first place** — This brief makes the case for why Maine's state leaders must invest in its most vulnerable youth today to avoid the cost of negative outcomes for this generation. At the same time, we must not ignore the long-term goal of preventing systems involvement in the first place. As Maine attends to the urgent task of helping young people currently experiencing hardships, it's critical to pursue a parallel path for the next generation – one in which all communities have the necessary resources to identify and help families before they are in crisis. This two-generation approach – investing in young parents and their children – should also be a cornerstone of the state's commitment to its children and families.

These four recommendations hold great potential to ensure a wiser and more effective use of Maine's resources for its most vulnerable youth. Yet helping young people get back on track is not just an economic imperative. Maine policy makers have a moral responsibility to help these young people become respected and valued members of a fair and inclusive society. Systems-involved youth and those who experience homelessness are not only Maine's future employees. They are also Maine's future parents, community and faith leaders, volunteers and neighbors. Giving these young people a roadmap to a bright future also gives hope and strength to Maine's families and communities — something all Maine leaders can support as a cornerstone of a strong and vibrant state.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Adapted from the Office of Adolescent Health's, *Five Essentials for Healthy Adolescents*. Retrieved from <https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/tag/why-tag/five-essentials-for-healthy-adolescents/index.html>.
- 2 The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2017). *2017 KIDS COUNT data book: State trends in well-being*. Retrieved from http://www.aecf.org/resources/2017-kids-count-data-book/?gclid=EALalQobChMlxnb-sy_y72QIV1bfACh1_6Q_jEAYASABEgKpXPD_BwE#state-rankings.
- 3 See a 2013 report by the Maine Development Foundation and the Maine Chamber of Commerce, *Making Maine Work: Critical Investments for the Maine Economy*, which estimated that reducing the percentage of disconnected youth from just 15 percent to 10 percent of the overall youth population could add more than 6,000 workers to the state's labor force. Retrieved from <http://www.mdf.org/publications/Making-Maine-Work---Critical-Investments-for-the-Maine-Economy/285/>.
- 4 Bradley, J. and McGlaughlin, T. (2015). *Conducting an accurate count of rural homeless youth: Implications for policy and practice and lessons learned*. Retrieved from <http://www.mainehomelessplaning.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Rural-Homeless-Youth-Count-Report-2015-12-FINAL.pdf>.
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- 10 Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (2013). *Cost avoidance: The business case for investing in youth aging out of foster care*. Retrieved from <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/JCYOI-CostAvoidance-2013.pdf>.
- 11 This statistic is an aggregate count that combines the 913 young people reported as homeless in the Maine Point in Time survey (2017), the 101 young people reported as unstably housed in the Point in Time survey addendum, and the 467 young people reported as homeless by the Maine Department of Education's McKinney-Vento Statewide Coordinator (2015-2016).
- 12 Data provided by the Maine Department of Corrections, February 2018.
- 13 This number fluctuates from day-to-day and includes youth who are being detained and awaiting commitment, as well as those who have already been committed.
- 14 In 2016, 29 percent of the young people at Long Creek were referred directly from residential treatment. See Appendix B in Sanchez, M., King, E., and Ward, J. (2018). *Youth justice in Maine: Imagine a new future summit*. Retrieved from https://muskie.usm.maine.edu/justiceresearch/Publications/Juvenile/Youth_Justice_in_Maine_Summary_Recommendations.pdf.
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- 18 The monthly cost for a young person to be in a homeless shelter was attained by dividing annual estimates of \$34,000 by 12 to attain a monthly cost, which is more reflective of the amount of time a young person spends in a homeless shelter.
- 19 Legislation enacted in 2011 (22 MRS Section 4099-H) authorizes the creation of host homes. See <http://legislature.maine.gov/Law-MakerWeb/summary.asp?LD=509&SessionID=9>.
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- 22 Several states have statewide coordinating bodies that vary in their scope and focus. For a summary of key findings about existing coordinating bodies and key considerations for such an approach, see Gaines, E., Allen, O., Patel, N., and Logan, N. (2017). *2017 state policy survey: Child and youth policy coordinating bodies in the U.S.: Summary of findings*. Retrieved from http://forumfyi.org/files/ccn_survey_report_2017.pdf

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Page 1, Julia Sleeper, Tree Street Youth.

Page 3, Maine Inside Out in collaboration with Portland Outright, Love is Alternatives to Incarceration, November 2017, photo by Jen Sorkin.

Page 8, Maine Inside Out in collaboration with Portland Outright, Love is Alternatives to Incarceration, November 2017, photo by Polychrome Collective.

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