



## **Providing Continued Mental Health Services to Foster Youth Transitioning Out of Care *National Foster Youth Advisory Council***

The National Foster Youth Advisory Council believes that youth in care who have mental needs should receive continued services once they exit the foster care system.

We believe that young people transitioning out of the foster care system with mental health needs are entitled to

- Continued mental health coverage after aging out
- To have access to affordable mental health services in their community
- To have access to financial supports, resources, and services that promote physical and mental health well-being
- To have a caring and supportive adult that will work in partnership with the mental health system to ensure the young person receives appropriate medications

### ***NFYAC's Recommendations for Ensuring that Youth Transitioning Out of Care Receive Continued Mental Health Coverage***

- It should be a priority that if a foster youth is taking any psychotropic drugs while in care they will be transitioned into adult health care as well as adult mental services. *This transition should be incorporated into a foster youth's case plan during their aging out process.*
- It should be mandatory that a caseworker, ILP worker, or even a foster parent coach their foster youth on how to navigate the mental health care system. This would include showing them where and how to apply for Medicaid or other insurance, helping them find what insurance plan best suits them, and introducing them to other health care resources they can access. *All youth have the right to understand how the mental health system works.*
- NFYAC would like to see a Federal Initiative Insurance pilot program that functions like Medicaid but with affordable co pay health coverage. This would cover mental health services as well. *We suggest that young adults who have higher income have higher co pay.*

- It should be mandatory that foster youth receive coaching and support from a trained and knowledgeable adult to help them navigate the mental health system. This would include support in applying for insurance, identifying resources and determining what insurance coverage is best for them. *Youth with mental health needs must have support on all levels.*
- Foster youth have the right for their ideas and feelings to be heard and considered with regard to all medication issues. Adults must assure access to a fair hearing to youth and be responsive to and supportive of the youth's opinion. *Foster youth and adults must make it a priority to resolve health issues for the sake and safety of their youth.*
- NFYAC expects that adequate pharmaceutical training will be provided for all caseworkers, foster parents, judges, and physicians who work with foster youth. *It is crucial that individuals dispensing and monitoring medication are prepared and qualified to educate the youth regarding their condition and treatment.*
- It is the judge's responsibility as the last authority in a youth's transitional plan to ensure that a full review and plan is in place for meeting their mental needs. *Judges must take responsibility.*
- It is expected that there be a foster care team of supportive adults involved in the youth's mental health case plan. This team should not be limited to the therapist, physician, counselor, or casework. The mental health plan as well as the medication should be regularly reviewed. *There has to be a regular plan reviews.*
- Youth should receive education and support regarding the exploration and use of effective alternatives to psychotropic medications. *Youth have the right to look at all methods to supporting their mental health needs.*
- Mental health issues can carry a harmful stigma; therefore it is crucial that the youth's confidentiality is protected at all times. *Youth don't deserve to be stigmatized due to their mental health needs.*

### ***Why NFYAC Feels Advocacy and Education Is Important When Navigating the Mental Health System***

NFYAC members feel that foster youth in care are under the control of the state, and this makes youth who are mentally unstable or mentally ill often feel that they are not in charge of their lives. In addition, it is overwhelming for these youth to ask how to navigate the system. Council members believe it is important for these youth to advocate and educate themselves, because the more a youth knows, the more that youth can become empowered. When youth are empowered they can then become active in their case planning, ensuring that their mental health needs are better met.

NFYAC also expresses concern around youth in care being misdiagnosed and having medications incorrectly prescribed which can lead to serious health problems and even death in some cases. The Council is even more concerned about mentally ill youth exiting out of foster care being abruptly cut off from their medications because they no longer have the supports to pay for them. One member had a hard time functioning once psychotropic medications were no longer available after leaving care. This member battled with depression, which ultimately led to academic and employment difficulties. Life without medication can make it very difficult for youth to become self-sufficient during a transition period.

***NFYAC's Recommendations for Disseminating Mental Health Information to Foster Youth, Child Welfare Professionals, and Foster Parents***

***Work with the media to communicate message.***

Get our message to the target population through various types of media, such as a youth-friendly brochure, a serious professional legal brochure for representatives, and an informational website for foster parents. Everyone should have equal access to mental health information.

***Create a brochure.***

This brochure should give step-by-step instructions to youth concerning medications, risk, insurance, and other resource information.