



## Program Demonstrates Positive Impact for Youth Who Age Out of Foster Care

**Des Moines, Iowa** – September 23, 2013 – The [Youth Policy Institute of Iowa](http://www.ypii.org) has released its annual report on the outcomes of services provided by the [Iowa Aftercare Services Network](http://www.iowaaftercare.org). The Network has offered individualized services and financial support statewide to young people who age out of Iowa's foster care system since 2002.

Young people who are discharged from foster care at or near the age of 18 face uncertain futures. Often lacking the stability and support of an intact family, these young people frequently struggle to meet the challenges of living on their own. Aftercare services are available on a voluntary basis for these young people to help them transition successfully to adulthood.

"It's generally accepted that young people are not ready to be entirely on their own at the age of 18, so it's not surprising that the outcomes for youth who age out of foster care absent ongoing support and services are extremely vulnerable to poor outcomes," states Carol Behrer, Executive Director of the Youth Policy Institute and author of the annual report. "Without consistent support of a stable family and social network, small setbacks can completely derail even the most capable of these young adults."

Moreover, many of the young adults who seek support from the Aftercare Network face significant challenges to stability and self-sufficiency. "It's not just that they aged out of the system," continued Behrer, "they leave care with the odds stacked against them." Among the youth who accessed Aftercare last year:

- A significant number had attempted suicide or inflicted self-harm, including 27.6% of young women and 18.3% of young men who reported a previous a suicide attempt at intake into Aftercare;
- A majority have been prescribed medication for ongoing maintenance of physical or mental health;
- Among young women, 29% had already had an unintended pregnancy when they first accessed services;
- 24.4% entered Aftercare without a high school credential; and
- 35.3% were unemployed and 56.3% reported zero income.

The Aftercare Network helps these young adults overcome these kinds of obstacles. The services are voluntary and youth who age out are eligible to participate up to the age of 21.

"Youth make many choices as they transition from foster care to adulthood," says Doug Wolfe, Program Planner at the Iowa Department of Human Services. "In terms of educational achievement and housing stability, voluntary participation in the Iowa Aftercare Services Program is one of the best choices these young adults can make."

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This year's outcomes show similar improvement as previous years, including:

**Employment:** Among the 198 participants that exited Aftercare services in SFY 2013, less than half (44%) were employed either full or part-time when they first accessed services. At exit, 56.1% of participants were employed (39.4% of participants at least 25 hours per week and another 16.7% less than 25 hours per week). The percentage of participants "unemployed" declined from 32.8% at intake to 19.7% at exit.

**Housing:** Compared to when they first access services, more youth are assuming some responsibility for the cost of housing on exit (from 60.6% at intake to 76.3% at exit).

**Education:** Nearly 95% of youth on exit have earned at least a high school diploma or GED, compared to 76% of the same youth at intake. And 35% have been able to complete some college before exiting services, including a small number who have completed AA degrees (2.5%), Bachelor's degrees (0.5%), or a vocational certificate or license (3.0%).

**Health Insurance Coverage:** Just under 90% of young people have Medicaid at both intake and exit, in large part due to the automatic extension of this coverage in Iowa under the Medicaid for Independent Young Adults (MIYA) coverage group. Currently MIYA coverage ends at age 21, but beginning in 2014 under provisions of the Affordable Care Act, Medicaid eligibility will continue to age 26 for young adults who age out of foster care.

**Children and Parenting:** Early childbearing and parenting are relatively common among youth who age-out of foster care. While only 6.6% of youth entered Aftercare as parents, by the time they exited, 28.3% are parenting. Of exiting participants who are parents, 86% have their children living with them.

Since SFY 2009, an average of 728 youth age 17.5 or older have exited Iowa's foster care system each year and an average of 276 youth per year have accessed Aftercare services. Funded by the Iowa Department of Human Services using a combination of state and federal funding sources, the Aftercare Network provided services to 725 young adults in SFY 2013. Outcomes of 198 of those young people who exited Aftercare services during the year are summarized in the YPII report which is available at [www.ypii.org](http://www.ypii.org).

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#### [About Youth Policy Institute of Iowa](#)

Founded in 2000, the Youth Policy Institute of Iowa (YPII) works to expand and improve the delivery of services and supports for Iowa youth by partnering with public and private entities throughout the state. YPII is involved in a wide range of initiatives, but specializes in policies and programs affecting youth transitioning from adolescence to adulthood, particularly those who have been involved in child welfare (foster care) or juvenile justice systems.