

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/aging-out-of-foster-care-doesnt-have-to-leave-kids-out-on-a-limb>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

[A new report](#) by Mark Courtney and colleagues at Partners for Our Children and the University of Chicago's Chapin Hall presents the latest findings from a longitudinal study of older foster-care youth and their transition to independent living. The release of the report once again shines a light on the personal challenges faced by older youth who age out of foster care—youth who are discharged from foster care without being adopted or reunited with their families. As young adults, they have high rates of homelessness, unemployment, and incarceration. Many are parents, but few have completed any college. Such outcomes generate steep social costs.

As the [NPR story](#) covering the report points out, part of the problem is that the transition from the safety net of the foster-care system is often abrupt. While foster-care agencies provide referrals and services to youth before their discharge, it is only after they are living on their own that many youth fully realize the challenges they face and the services they need.

These are all serious problems, but the situation is not entirely without hope. At Vera, we recently conducted an implementation study of an innovative program called [the Academy](#), which seeks to improve post-care outcomes of older youth transitioning out of the New York City foster-care system by providing educational, employment, and recreational services all under one roof.

Unlike traditional programs available to disconnected youth, the Academy does not require youth to meet eligibility criteria. Its easy to get in, impossible to be kicked out philosophy allows the Academy to serve lower-performing youth who might be excluded from other remedial education programs. It also seeks to bridge the gap between foster care and independent living by connecting youth to community-based providers while they are still in foster care and allowing them to return to the Academy after discharge if they find that they need the program's services at a later date.

Although rigorous outcome evaluation is still needed, these important features of the Academy model may smooth the transition out of foster care and mitigate the underinvestment of youth in their skills while still in care.

For more details about the program design and the lessons learned from its implementation for serving older foster-care youth, look for our report here on the Vera web site in the next few weeks.

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