



WE ASKED:

## **When a youth leaves a foster care facility or institutional care (like a treatment center), what supports will be most helpful for them to integrate back into a family setting?**

The Family Voices United campaign brings together the voices of young people, birth parents, and relative caregivers with lived experience in the child welfare system to drive change in foster care. Learn more at [familyvoicesunited.org](https://familyvoicesunited.org). We encourage readers to review the “how you can use this paper” outline on the final page.

### **What are the current opportunities?**

Did you know that the Family First Prevention Services Act encourages placement in a family home? For youth who may need short-term treatment or interventions, there are new requirements to ensure quality care under Quality Residential Treatment Programs. One of the biggest changes is requirements to include family in treatment planning and support for the young person and family as they transition back to a family setting. Other changes include independent assessment, trauma-informed models, requirements for medical staff, and increased court oversight. The recommendations captured below should inform how a young person and their family are supported



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A collaborative project of Children’s Trust Fund Alliance, FosterClub, and Generations United with support from Casey Family Programs.

in transitioning from any facility or institution, not just the new QRTPs.

Some key themes that came out of the responses we received to this question:

- Permanent connections to supportive adults
- Opportunities to engage in Peer Support
- Support for Family and Youth to make transition plan together

### **Here is what young people, parents and kinship caregivers said...**

“When a youth leaves the foster care system, too often they are left without full wraparound supports. **I think it’s imperative that youth have the opportunity to be paired with mentors (those who’ve experienced care), and resources for their age group, as starting points, in order to lead stable lives.** I’ve worked as a professional in the social work field as an alumni for the past five years and it has been disheartening to see the lack of professionalism by case managers, agencies, etc and their treatment of young people who are currently in care, or who’ve aged out.”

- *Latasha Fuller, Former Foster Youth from North Carolina*

“Support counseling or mentorship to help the youth and youth's family/friends to understand how to integrate and help the youth integrate back into a new normal. **Often times the youth has a hard time explaining to their friends and family what they have been through and what they need to feel safe/secure.** This can help the family to know what the youth needs and helps the youth feel more comfortable integrating into their new role.”

- *Robyn, Community Partner from South Carolina*

“The biggest support would be to have the family learn how to adjust to that youth. Learn what the youth did in the facility to help with whatever treatment they received. **Show the youth that they're not different and they are a part of the family. If the youth has a "slip up" one day, let them know it's ok and they are loved no less.** I came from many facilities into different foster homes and I just did not feel like I fit in. I was more comfortable in facilities. The only thing I liked about some foster homes was the freedom. Foster parents should get to know the child before they leave that facility. Go visit that child and ask the youth what you as the parent can do to help them. If they say they don't know, get to know them and talk with them, you will eventually find out.”

- *Synthenia, Former Foster Youth from Georgia*

Develop a transition plan (these plans aren't just for youth "aging out") I think motivation, education & consistency is key. **Maintenance and retention of healthy relationships and permanent connections to caring adults is vital.** Utilize community outreach and resources.

- *Raven, Birth Parent, Relative Caregiver from Louisiana*

“When youth leave a foster care facility or institutional care and integrate back into a family setting, it is imperative that the youth and family receive various supportive services. This will allow an ability to foster healthy homeostasis. **To ensure families are properly supported, it is critical that Case Managers, Counselors, and Human Service Agencies have intensive training in cultural diversity, and understand that no two families are alike.** Each youth/family must be assessed with cultural competency, to identify problems. It is most helpful to identify the youth/family strengths and connect them with tailored resources to improve the problematic circumstances. Also, a strength based approach should be applied to promote family preservation. Families may have issues and instead of addressing them from a punitive approach, **we must be attentive to the family’s strength in order to do what’s in the best interest of the children.**

- *Shana, Youth Services Case Manager from Michigan*

Some children deal with the transition more easily than others, but it is helpful to be mindful of the structure they've been dealing with every day at that facility. It's helpful to stick with a set schedule and some basic rules that they know they need to follow. These are some of the things that will help them feel secure and safe. There will be traits within the family that will help them relax, like being able to **share laughter over shared silly jokes that will help them feel that they truly belong.** Gradually they grow accustomed to a normal, more spontaneous family life. **When they are shown true acceptance and caring, they are ready to begin a healthy, happy new life.**

- *Colleen, Kinship Caregiver from Illinois*

"Within a couple of months of me ageing out of care. I left my foster home. It was a choice I made myself, because of the negative situation in the house. I found myself homeless, couch surfing during college vacations, and actually being dropped from my classes because I didn't have a home address. I thought I could do things on my own, and I'm sad to say I learned quickly that I couldn't. It wasn't until my worker got back in contact with me that I started to get back on my feet. She cared enough to get in contact with me, to see I was struggling. With her help, I was able to bump up my grades, get a summer job, and as time went on get my own apartment and car. If it wasn't for her, I wouldn't be where I am today. Therefore, I think the most important thing for a youth to have when leaving care, is **someone who cares about them unconditionally**. Someone who is always going to be there for them, no matter the reason. That unconditional love is what got me through a very hard time in my life, and I know that it is something that has also helped out a bunch of other youth. "

- *Becky, Former Foster Youth from New Hampshire*

"A counselor of some kind. Someone to ask them the questions they haven't thought of. Like what do they want to do next and help them identify networks they have. Sometimes they won't know what they need to integrate back into a family setting and having a professional adult helping guide their next steps for their future will help them get back into a family mindset. When bonds of the family are broken, communication also suffers. If the youth also has to overcome that challenge, time is not on their side when they need to heal and still advance in education. **So having a supportive adult to help them navigate through life and relationships would be most helpful.** Make sure they don't repeat the unhealthy cycle."

- *Beatriz, Former Foster Youth from Oklahoma*

"Support. Youth need people in their lives that care and that are going to be some kind of support for them and go the distance and stick with them. So many times, in a crisis situation, youth have many people around them, supporting them, caring for them and then one day, the crisis is over, and poof, everyone disappears. **It's important for youth to know that they are cared for and that there will be someone there to not only support them in times of need but that is proud of them for their achievements.**"

- *Carol, Foster/Adoptive Parent and Community Partner from New York*

“I think getting involved within their community right away by getting a part time job or volunteering is the best medicine. Staying busy and focused will reduce re-entry into the system. Therapy is helpful to talk about how they are feeling and figure things out for themselves. Animals are great therapy for changing behavior and attitude as well. **Most importantly, having a caring adult that has their best interest, no matter what they have done or what happens next, is priceless!**”

- *Paula, Birth Parent from New Hampshire*

“Therapy and an outside mentor.”

- *Sierra, Former Foster Youth from South Carolina*

"When I graduated high school and left the group home I was in, I left all the people I had lived with and know for almost two years. They just vanished out of my life. I didn't have any good relationship building skills. I was young and excited to finally be 'on my own.' But I really didn't want to be on my own. Had I had a support person or was invited back to the group home to be involved, I might not have made as many mistakes as I did. I think we, as foster kids, don't have the relationship building skills needed to have healthy, lasting relationships. To help integration happen, **support the growth and development of relationship skills** by providing **access to mentors, peer support** and give youth opportunities to vent safely. Help us feel safe in the big new world we have to learn how to navigate. Give us peers who have been there-done that so we can see that we can do it too! **Celebrate us and help us learn to celebrate ourselves.**"

- *Tecoria, Birth Parent, Former Foster Youth and Advocate from South Carolina*

“The most successful way is to **participate in therapy with the family you’re integrating back into**. This will help the youth tremendously, because when in care the environment is different. When the youth partakes in therapy with the family with a different environment as well, the youth gets familiarized with their environment and will transition more smoothly. Also weekend outings/ visits with the transitioning family would help the youth adapt more to the out of care environment.”

- *Hanna, Former Foster Youth from South Carolina*

“Wrap around services for the youth and caregivers (therapy, medical, in home).”

- *Robyn, Kinship Caregiver from Oklahoma*

“The thing that would be the most helpful is a support group led by people who have been through the same thing as them outside of the home they’re returning to. They help push each other through and understand what it’s like CURRENTLY and can bounce ideas off to keep pushing toward that goal of stability. That **peer to peer support is helpful and an outlet when you feel like no one else understands.**”

- *Joczlyn, Former Foster Youth*

“One of the keys to a young person integrating from a facility or institutional care back into a family setting is preparation for the family itself. Foster families in particular should receive training on trauma and adverse childhood experiences so they are able to understand behavior that may differ from their idea of normal. It’s challenging for young people who have already been removed from their home into an environment where they are expected to be grateful and adjust quickly. Constant movement from one place to another may lead to a lack of trust or hesitancy to build relationships for fear new people will also be taken away from them. **Preparing foster parents for that reality and encouraging transparency in the process as much as possible may be the best way to support young people who are, without fault of their own, now part of a system that can cause further trauma.**”

- *Dana, Community Partner from South Carolina*



“The most helpful support for a youth who is returning to a family setting, would be one that consists of a series of **connected relationships**. Including the youth in the selection process, to determine those relationships which are most significant, would be a primary step in the process. Helping a child/youth begin to feel that they are important and that there are people they can trust, who will value them, protect them and love them, would require a team of individuals who focus on their needs and well-being. This may include: faith-based, medical, mental health, educational and social services professionals, along with significant family members, including the youth, where feasible, will work together to design a successful transitional plan. This plan will be a continuum of services that were met with success, before the decision to return the child home, and extended to services in the child's family's community - including creation or reconnection to healthy family traditions. **Intense progress monitoring (daily, weekly, bi-weekly, monthly) should be a component of the transitional plan.** All stakeholders, including the child or child advocate, will be in constant communication about the impact of the process. The supportive services may include (but not limited to): addressing identified educational, physical and psychological needs; provision of appropriate social skills opportunities; maintenance of a Guardian Ad Litem relationship; creation of a mentor-mentee relationship at school or religious organization; engagement in creative exploration and/or extra-curricular activities; career exploration opportunities.”

- *Linda, Former Foster Parent, Member of Charleston County Foster Care Review Board from South Carolina*

## Looking for more?



Listen to our Podcast Episodes featuring a young person, birth parent and kinship caregiver!  
<https://familyvoicesunited.org/voices/family-voices-podcasts>



## FAMILY VOICES UNITED

### How to use this paper

Our hope is that young people, parents and relative caregivers with lived experience in the child welfare system, community organizations, state Family First implementation teams, child welfare agencies, policymakers and other stakeholders will use this document to inform discussions about how to maximize support to families. If you are interested in using the quotes or perspective contained in this document or if you would like to bring young people, parents and relative caregivers to your event or project, email the Family Voices United team at [info@familyvoicesunited.org](mailto:info@familyvoicesunited.org) or call 503.717.1552.

### About the Family Voices United campaign

The Campaign elevates the voices and perspectives of young people, parents, and kinship caregivers, collectively known as family voices or “constituent voices”. Individuals with lived experience in the child welfare system are currently sharing their stories and expertise to educate, inform and transform the systems that serve children, youth and families - both in policy and practice. With new federal legislation - the Family First Prevention Services Act - states, tribes, and territories have new opportunities to implement changes that many constituents have identified are needed to fully support keeping children safe in strong, supported families.

**Join the movement! Sign up at [FamilyVoicesUnited.org](https://FamilyVoicesUnited.org)**