

Resources for Organizations Serving Youth Exiting Foster Care

Youth Exiting Foster Care Often Rely on Support from Nongovernmental Organizations

Every year, approximately 19,000 youth age out of the U.S. foster care system. The transition to adulthood can pose risks, including homelessness, financial insecurity, and poor health. While most services for transition-age youth (TAY) in foster care are provided by publicly funded government agencies, many foster TAY also rely on the services and support provided by nongovernmental organizations to meet their needs. However, organizations often face challenges securing the funding they need to provide these supports and services. In particular, public funding streams are complex and fragmented across different geographies and levels of government and agencies and can be challenging for organizations to navigate. This complexity also hampers private funders' ability to identify funding gaps and to target resources most effectively.

A RAND Team Catalogued Resources to Help Organizations Better Serve Transition-Age Foster Youth

To help address these problems, a RAND team assembled an overview of the public funding opportunities to support organizations serving foster TAY

in metro Atlanta, Los Angeles County, and New York City. The team conducted a landscape review to catalogue the available public funding streams in a directory and identified barriers and facilitators to accessing them, as well as gaps in funding. The team also held a series of interviews with foster TAY, their caregivers, and the staff of organizations that serve them to hear firsthand about their experiences accessing funding and services.

Key Findings: Most Funding Comes from Federal Sources, Though There Are Critical Gaps

- Identifying funding opportunities was challenging. Funder websites varied widely in the amount and quality of information and frequently hosted dead links.
- Most funding sources were federal: 59 out of 70.
 - However, there were often barriers to accessing these sources of funding, including complex eligibility requirements, matching or reimbursement plans (as opposed to up-front funding), and burdensome application and grant management processes.
- As a result of these barriers, organizations require significant capacity to identify, apply for, and manage funding opportunities. Many lack this capacity.

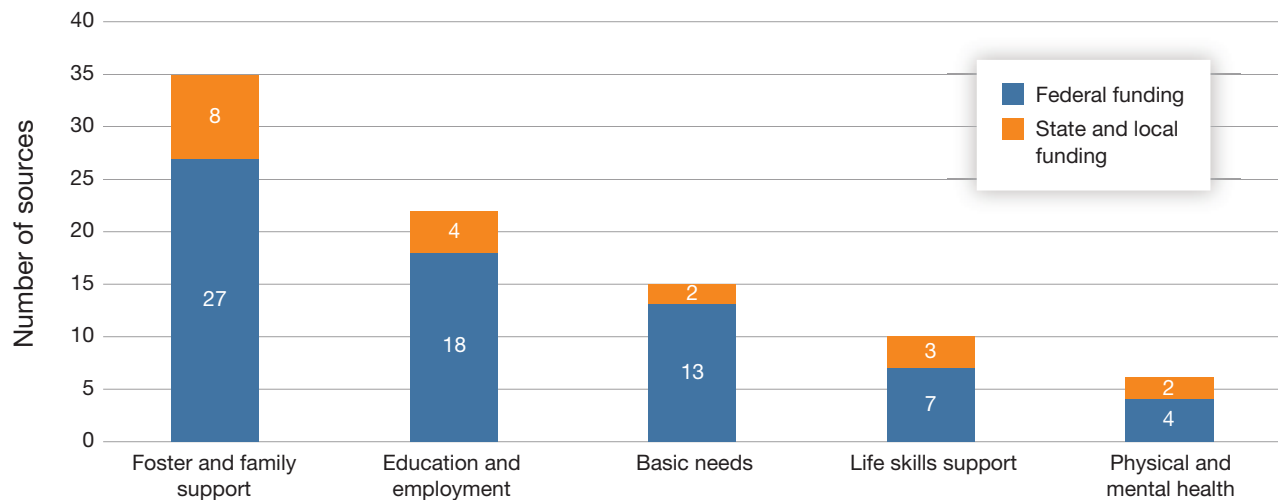
- Funding varied widely for different types of support (see Figure 1) and had notable gaps.
 - The analysis identified 35 different sources of funding for family reunification and support. There were fewer opportunities identified for education and employment, basic needs (e.g., housing or food access), life skills support, and physical and mental health care.
 - Notably, there were no foster youth–specific public sources of funding for crisis intervention, furniture purchases, utilities, sexual health or family planning, or access to technology, such as phones and internet.
- There was a lack of alignment between the available public funding and the needs identified by foster TAY, their caregivers, and the organizations that serve them.
- There are limited available data on the needs and preferences of foster youth.
- There is a need for funding for operational support (e.g., human resources, staffing, program evaluation, and grant management).
- Many organizations expressed enthusiasm at the idea of receiving technical assistance in obtaining funding.

Recommendations

Based on these results, the team offered five recommendations for funders:

- Assess the full funding landscape for organizations that serve foster TAY.
- Centralize information on funding opportunities to make them easier to find.
- Make more funding available for organizations’ operational needs.
- Collect and disseminate better data on foster youth needs and preferences.
- Explore the possibility of providing technical assistance to help organizations apply for and manage public funding.

FIGURE 1
Availability of Funding by Service or Support Area



This brief describes work done in RAND Social and Economic Well-Being and documented in *Understanding the Landscape of Public Funding for Organizations Serving Transition-Age Foster Youth*, by Petra W. Rasmussen, Sara G. McCleskey, Jamie Ryan, Emma Bianculli, Andrew Sloan, and Amy L. Shearer, RR-A3095-1, 2023 (available at www.rand.org/t/RR-A3095-1). To view this brief online, visit www.rand.org/t/RBA3095-1. The RAND Corporation is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest. RAND’s publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. RAND® is a registered trademark.

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