

Making a Difference...

Helping Teens Help Themselves

A national blueprint for expanding access to supportive housing among pregnant and parenting teens exiting foster care.



Generously Supported by the Freddie Mac Foundation



Healthy Teen Network

MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES
OF TEENS AND YOUNG FAMILIES

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Pregnant and Parenting Teens in Foster Care

Despite laudable progress in reducing pregnancy rates and births to teens, the United States still has the highest teen birth rate among Western industrialized countries. The rates of teen pregnancy within the child welfare system are of particular concern. Young people living in foster care settings are prone to high rates of risky sexual behaviors, including earlier age of first intercourse, larger numbers of sexual partners, and earlier age of first pregnancy than their peers not in foster care^{1,2}. This does not mean that living in foster care is itself the impetus to these risky behaviors. Rather, the risky behaviors may be sequelae of the youths' experiences prior to being placed in foster care, as the majority of children in foster care are victims of sexual or physical abuse, neglect or abandonment, or have a parent who is incarcerated or otherwise unable to care for them³. However, due to the increased risky behavior, young women in foster care are 2.5 times more likely than those not in foster care to have been pregnant by age 19².

Every year 20,000 foster youth ages 16 and older exit the child welfare system and suddenly find themselves on their own³.

Teen Pregnancy and Parenting Outcomes

Approximately 400,000 infants are born to teen parents in the U.S. each year⁴. Teen pregnancy and parenting carry multiple risks for all involved. For example, pregnant teens are less likely to receive adequate prenatal care and more likely to smoke during pregnancy, be unmarried, have inadequate nutrition, and give birth to low birth weight and pre-term infants⁵. Low birth weight and pre-term infants are at greater risk for developmental delays and death during the first year of life⁶. Teen pregnancy is the number one reason girls drop out of high school⁷. Teens are generally at higher risk for abuse, and this is especially true for teen mothers, who as a group are at risk for both family and intimate partner abuse. The consequences of teen pregnancy are not isolated to the parents; their children are also affected. In fact, an extensive study by The Urban Institute found that the costs of teen childbearing are felt primarily by the children of teen parents⁸.

Because of these and other social issues involved with teen parenting, such as a lack of family and social support, teen mothers and their children are many times more likely to live in poverty. Children born to unmarried, high school drop-out teen girls are ten times more likely to live in poverty than those born to married women over the age of 20 years⁵. These children must generally overcome tremendous odds to thrive.

Pregnant and Parenting Teens Exiting Foster Care

Today, it is increasingly common for American youth to stay home until their mid 20s or return home from time to time. Unfortunately, most youth exiting foster care do not have this option, as they lack the unconditional support system a stable family can provide. Unlike familial supports, many of the government services available to foster youth terminate at age 18. While there are some programs to help this transitioning population, such as job training, there are no systems or government programs that provide supports (such as a case manager) to young adults who experience difficulty in making the transition to adulthood⁹.

Pregnant and parenting teens exiting foster care face the additional challenge of trying to raise a child, often without a support network of family or friends. Safe and stable housing is imperative for a young mother trying to support herself and her child. Expanding access to supportive housing programs is one way to provide both shelter and the social supports necessary for successful transition to independent living.

The Role of Supportive Housing in Making a Difference for Young Families

Based on key informant interviews and an expert roundtable, we know that pregnant and parenting teens exiting foster care are particularly vulnerable and have unique needs¹⁰.

Pregnant and parenting teens need more stability in the form of:

- A connection to a caring adult;
- Healthy relationships with family, the father of the baby, peers, and case managers;
- More time receiving services; and
- Access to affordable housing.

Pregnant and parenting teens need skills training and support in the form of:

- Parenting and relationship skills, including early child development, effective communication, and conflict resolution.
- Life management skills, such as educational support, job training, and time and money management.

Pregnant and parenting teens need opportunities to “fail” safely and learn from their mistakes

- Pregnant and parenting teens, like all youth, need opportunities to make mistakes, and then learn from their mistakes without fear of being expelled from the program.

Supportive housing meets these needs and offers an opportunity for young parents to build self-reliance and succeed in their transition to independent living.

Be Part of the Solution

A logic model serves as a blueprint, or plan, to reach an intended goal. The enclosed model moves the agenda of expanding supportive housing for pregnant and parenting teens from action steps to short-term outcomes, long-term outcomes, and impacts to ensure that the ultimate goal of building self-reliance and successful transition to independent living is achieved.

This national blueprint represents a multi-year, multidisciplinary approach to increase supportive housing options for pregnant and parenting teens exiting foster. Healthy Teen Network asks every relevant organization and/or individual to identify action steps that they can promote and implement to join us in making a difference in the lives of teens and young families.

References

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Expanding Access to Supportive Housing Among Pregnant and Parenting Teens Exiting Foster Care

To build self-reliance and increase successful transition of pregnant and parenting teens from foster care to independent living through increased access to supportive housing.

ACTION STEPS	SHORT TERM OUTCOMES
<p>Build Relationships to Promote Policy and Expand Services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish relationships with local officials and public housing authorities. Go to their meetings and let them know what you can do for them.• Convene colleagues across disciplines to discuss collaboration (e.g., child welfare, foster care, juvenile justice, independent living coordinators).• Visit potential housing sites for pregnant and parenting teens and note the distance to bus lines, services, etc.• Talk to landlords.• Establish relationships with community partners (e.g., taxis, bus companies, day care centers, neighbors).• Develop relationships with other youth service providers (e.g., physicians, mental health services, substance abuse counselors). <p>Increase Knowledge of Supportive Housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase knowledge on the benefits of supportive housing among professionals in various disciplines who interact with the foster care system and pregnant and parenting teens.• Train front line staff on the effectiveness and availability of supportive housing.• Identify a housing liaison, or point person, to coordinate housing options and work with other organizations offering supportive services. <p>Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assess availability and need in your area, and then develop a plan to increase access to supportive housing.• Create a multidisciplinary advocacy group to promote supportive policy and funding.• Share cost analysis data demonstrating how a supportive housing model will benefit the community at large (e.g., higher completion of school, increased skilled workforce, reduced reliance on social services, and decrease in criminal activity).• Take responsibility at all program levels to identify housing options for youth in foster care.	<p>Effective Collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Multidisciplinary support for creative community-based approaches to providing supportive housing for pregnant and parenting teens exiting foster care.• Collective advocacy.• Collaborative funding. <p>Increased Knowledge of Supportive Housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Key players are knowledgeable on the effectiveness of supportive housing for pregnant and parenting teens to gain independence.• Program staff and case managers are able to counsel clients effectively on how to access supportive housing. <p>Advocacy/Policy</p> <p><i>Policies exist that promote supportive housing, such as:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Setting aside Section 8 vouchers for pregnant and parenting teens.• All youth in foster care have a “housing file” that includes a concrete housing plan complete with timetable, actions steps, and relevant paper work. This file follows the youth throughout her time in foster care.

LONG TERM OUTCOMES	IMPACTS	GOAL
<p>Increased Multidisciplinary Collaborations and Cross-Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public housing authorities, case managers, landlords, and program directors work together to increase access to more supportive housing. Housing and Urban Development, Department of Justice and Department of Labor co-fund services for supportive housing. <p>Key Players (funders, program managers, front-line workers, etc.) Are Aligned in Promoting Access to Supportive Housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in grant and foundation money for supportive housing. More pregnant and parenting teens are able to access supportive housing. <p>Increased Supportive Policies and Procedures for Pregnant and Parenting Teens Seeking Housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal, state, and local policies mandate that housing vouchers are set aside specifically for pregnant and parenting teens. Pregnant and parenting teens can be placed on a housing voucher waitlist prior to turning 18. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased supportive housing is available to pregnant and parenting teens exiting foster care. Increased number of pregnant and parenting teens living in safe and stable environments, including supportive housing. Increased number of pregnant and parenting teens able to maintain housing. Decreased reliance on social services among pregnant and parenting teens. Decreased number of young families living in shelters. Reduced number of children of teen parents living in the foster care system. 	<p>To build self-reliance and increase successful transition of pregnant and parenting teens from foster care to independent living through increased access to supportive housing.</p>

Supportive Housing is a highly integrated system of living arrangements and professional case-management services that provides pregnant or parenting teens a safe place to live, 24-hour access to caring adults and connections to all community resources. This system helps young mothers develop necessary skills and secure resources needed to maintain housing throughout adulthood. Core aspects of supportive housing services and supports include parenting and life skills training, educational supports, vocational training, referrals to physical health services for both mother and child, child care, and mental health services.

There are different models for supportive housing. Here are just two examples.

E X A M P L E A

Lighthouse Youth Services (LYS)

Lighthouse Youth Services (LYS) places youth in their own scattered-site apartments and covers the security deposit, rent, utilities, phone bills, and furnishings. Most clients take over some of their bills toward the end of their stay. Clients receive \$55 weekly, \$10 of which is placed in savings. The remaining \$45 covers food, transportation, and personal items. A client must work in order to have spending money. Many clients eventually take over the rent for their privately-owned apartment. Teen mothers who cannot afford market rate apartments are assisted with finding subsidized housing. LYS offers financial support; parenting and life skills training; emotional support/guidance through weekly meetings with a social worker and support groups, crisis management, and a 24-hour on-call service; employment assistance and discharge planning; and outreach, such as year-round self-sufficiency workshops. “Life coaches,” (i.e., additional staff) are sometimes hired to provide extra support for youth with special needs. For more information go to www.lys.org or email mkroner@lys.org.

E X A M P L E B

Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (G-CAPP)

Second Chance Homes are adult-supervised residential facilities for teenage mothers under the age of 18 and their children. The homes have on average five mothers and their children. Each mother and baby has their own bedroom. These homes are designed to provide safe, stable, and supportive living environments for teen mothers who have nowhere else to live with their children. G-CAPP’s network of Second Chance Homes helps teenage mothers become self-sufficient by providing them with a safe living environment; 24-hour supervision; support for long-term economic independence (such as, high school diploma or GED); child development and education; parenting and life skills; and help finding jobs and affordable housing upon leaving the program. For more information go to www.gcapp.org or email vincent@gcapp.org.

Resources

Healthy Teen Network, www.healthyteennetwork.org

Housing Options for Independent Living Programs by Mark Kroner, www.cwla.org

Moving In: Ten Successful Independent/Transitional Living Programs by Mark Kroner, www.northwestmedia.com

Lighthouse Youth Services, www.lys.org

It’s My Life: Housing, www.casey.org

Keeping Families Together and Safe: A Primer on the Child Protection—Housing Connection www.cwla.org

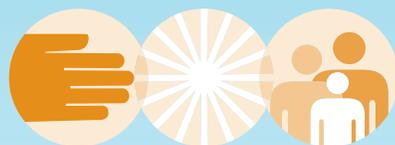
National Child Welfare Resource Center, www.nrcys.ou.edu/nrcyd

Funding sources for Second Chance Homes, www.hud.gov/offices/pih/other/schresources.cfm

Corporation of Supportive Housing - Youth Supportive Housing
www.csh.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageID=3220

Food, clothing, and shelter are essential for survival. Yet, not everyone has equal access to these basic services. Safe and stable housing for pregnant and parenting teens exiting foster care is critical to their effective transition to adulthood. However, our policies, programs, and political will do not always support this vulnerable population. This National Blueprint attempts to change that; use it to . . .

Be part of the solution.



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