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Foster Youth Mentoring Program: Assisting with and Connecting the “Aging Out” Challenges in Delaware

Leann Moore
University of Delaware

Delaware has made great strides providing and improving services for the state’s foster youth “aging out” of the system. However, even in light of new legislation and enhanced community-based programs, Delaware youth in foster care face many challenges when aging out of the foster care system. Potential outcomes for youth aging out of the foster care system, such as higher rates of incarceration, homelessness, unemployment, and teen pregnancy, as well as lower rates of high school graduation, can cost taxpayers up to \$300,000 per youth in incarceration costs, public assistance support, and lost wages. However, Delaware’s supportive services infrastructure has potential to address these problems. The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative put forth six specific policy and practice recommendations for successful transitions (deemed the Ready-By-21 campaign), and, to date, the only one of these not directly addressed is permanency. The Delaware Youth Opportunities Initiative (DYOI) is the Delaware agency working to address each recommendation. One of the best ways of achieving all of these goals is to establish a statewide and inclusive mentoring program for foster youth beginning at age 14 through age 21. There are many ways to implement this: through a resource guide, a school-based program, or by reframing the Court Appointed Special Advocate’s (CASA) role and training. When considering cost, timeline, feasibility, and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative’s recommendations, the CASA role reframing option best fits Delaware’s current atmosphere. This option achieves permanency within a one-to-one adult relationship.

Background: Aging Out of Foster Care

“On average, for every young person who ages out, taxpayers and communities pay \$300,000 in social costs over that person’s lifetime.”

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, Success Beyond 18 Campaign (“Aging Out of Foster Care,” 2001)

What is “Aging Out” and Why Does it Matter in Public Policy?

According to Delaware’s Division of Family Services, “aging out” is a term used to describe “what occurs when a youth reaches a state’s age of majority,” in other words, when a youth legally becomes an adult. In a report by the University of Delaware’s Institute for Public Administration,

this means the youth is “no longer eligible to remain in foster care and the supports that come along with it” (Aging out” of Foster Care: Background and Resources Brief, 2012). National statistics from the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (JCYOI) show that youth who age out of foster care have higher rates of dropping out of high school, teen pregnancy, incarceration,

Leann Moore is a Masters of Public Administration student in the School of Public Policy and Administration at the University of Delaware. She earned a B.A. in Psychology and a B.A. in English from the University of Delaware. She is currently a Legislative Fellow with the Delaware General Assembly's Division of Research.

Email: lmoore@udel.edu

unemployment, substance abuse, mental health concerns, and homelessness.

Research done by the JCYOI shows that over a lifetime, each youth costs taxpayers and communities \$300,000 in public assistance and incarceration, as well as wages lost due to lack of high school graduation (Culter, 2009). If foster youth had the same rates of high school graduation, teenage pregnancy, and incarceration as their peers who had not been in foster care, then the United States would gain close to \$5.7 billion in outcomes differences. Therefore, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative asserts that if local government and communities support youth during their transitional period (until age 21), then the youths' educational, employment, housing, and incarceration outcomes will save their constituents billions of dollars.

According to the Delaware Youth Opportunities Initiative's (DYOI) website (2013), approximately 100 youth will "age out" of foster care in Delaware each year. While no primary research on direct and specific costs related to these 100 youth, considering the previously mentioned research and statistics, potential societal and financial burdens to Delaware's youth and taxpayers can be estimated. According to Felicia Kellum, the Independent Living Program Manager for the Delaware Department of Service for Children, Youth and Their Families (DSCYF), 109 Delaware youth are projected to age out in FY13 and another 86 in FY14 (personal communication, 28 October 2013). However, it is important to note that this number cannot be perfectly accurate. Some who are included in this number currently will be reunited with their biological families. There may also be a number of youth who will enter into the system in their 17th year, and thus, be a part of the actual number at the end of the year. Therefore, it is impossible to tell what the exact number of youth aging out will be each year, and even once the number is settled, some youth who need services will be missed because they have returned to a home that cannot provide for them. The JCYOI has partnered with Delaware Center for Justice, the parent agency responsible for DYOI, to implement specific policy and practice recommendations to target the state's specific foster youth population. Over the last five years, Delaware has taken direct steps to further support youth aging out of foster care through legislation and services.

Delaware's Historical Context for Foster Youth Aging Out and the Challenges They Face

Over the last decade, Delawareans have made children and youth in foster care a priority. During the Delaware Children's Campaign's 2008 report, serious concerns were noted with family and adult permanency, Family Court jurisdiction, and Independent Living Programs (ILP). A March 2007 statewide phone survey established Delawareans' explicit concern with the outcomes of children and youth who spent their lives in and out of foster homes. According to the 600 Delawareans surveyed, 91% agreed that, "young people who reach age 18 and therefore leave the foster care system should have access to a transition program focused on housing, education, and jobs" (Our Children: Aging Out of Foster Care in Delaware, 2008). In 2008, projections related to the state's aging out population were as follows:

- 30% of youth will graduate high school by the age of 19;
- 10% will be incarcerated within a year of aging out;
- 6.7% will experience long-term homelessness (Delaware Children's Campaign, 2008).

These concerns and related projections birthed the Delaware Youth Opportunities Initiative (DYOI), a partnership between the Delaware Center for Justice and the JCYOI, and with the cooperation of DSCYF. Since its inception in January of 2011, DYOI has served as an advocacy think-tank "important [in] leveraging state and local resources, strengthening partnerships, and expanding legislation related to improving the quality of services for youth aging out of foster care in Delaware" (O'Hanlon, 2011). JCYOI provides technical assistance and support for Delaware's Ready-by-21 initiative. JCYOI helps DYOI address specific recommendations for target areas, which were shaped by foster youth voices and concerns from around the country. DYOI uses the JCYOI model to shape all programs because their model and recommendations

represent the leading and most up-to-date research. The JCYOI model addresses all outcome areas of concern expressed by the Delaware Children's Campaign. At the top of the list of concerns is permanency. According to JCYOI, permanency is achieved through foster families, adoptive families, or some other trusted and constant adult figure, and by which youth age out of the system with the stability only a permanent family, guardianship, or caring adult can provide. Without permanency the transition for youth to a completely autonomous lifestyle is difficult, and youth may struggle building and sustaining long-term, meaningful relationships for the rest of their lives. Thus, youth may begin to completely rely on the supportive services provided in the other focus areas. Permanency allows for former foster youth to positively mature emotionally and psychologically, while also creating a social network and social capital that prepares them to be independent at age 21. Due to this autonomy, youth will also be prepared to advocate for themselves in post-secondary education opportunities, which may subsequently lead to economic success and stable housing.

In 2011, the University of Delaware's Institute for Public Administration (IPA) published an environmental scan of the aging out population in Delaware. In these interviews, participating youth indicated that the most challenging and concerning issues they face as a part of the foster care system are:

- permanency
- employment opportunities
- educational success in high school, and subsequently, access to post-secondary opportunities

Foster youth asserted that "communication... [i]s an important factor related to personal and community engagement," and one that is not being holistically met (O'Hanlon, 2011). It is important to note that between 14 and 16 years old, youth were not very concerned about housing or physical and/or mental health. While youth recognize that having someone they trust is important, they were not as concerned as many professionals and the public were with these components. Whether this is because these are more long-term issues, and therefore not at the front of a 14-year-old's mind, or if these are not a concern in Delaware is debatable. Regardless, the youths have expressed concerns regarding the need for a more long-term and proactive intervention to address the needs of youth as they transition to adulthood. Establishing stable, trusting relationships between youth and adult mentors would serve as this proactive intervention.

Through its seven working groups, DYOI attempts to address the Environmental Scan's findings through the lens of five JCYOI policy recommendation areas. These include groups on education, employment, court involvement, housing, permanency, and physical and mental health, as well as financial literacy. On a legislative, policy-making scale, DYOI drafted the recently presented legislation to the Delaware General Assembly, in order to continue Delaware's work of assisting youth after age 18.

Delaware's Current Service Provision and Aging Out Environment

The administrations of both Governor Ruth Ann Minner and Governor Jack Markell have prioritized addressing the challenges associated with foster youth's transition to adulthood. Over the past decade, there have been many steps taken to address the challenges facing Delaware's aging out foster youth. To begin, on August 4, 2010, a multi-agency Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) (2010), involving Delaware State Housing Authority, Department of Correction, Department of Education, Department of Labor, and DSCYF, established an initial agreement between agencies "to better coordinate efforts and resources to address the comprehensive needs of foster care youth." The primary purpose of its establishment was to help DFS caseworkers and youth better understand and utilize the resources and services that already exist.

On July 15, 2010, Governor Markell signed into law Senate Bill 113, *An Act to Amend Titles 10, 29, and 31 of the Delaware Code Relating to Extending the Jurisdiction of the Family Court for Abused, Dependent and Neglected*

Children. This bill allowed for an extension of Family Court jurisdiction over youth in foster care through age 21. This extension gives youth who are having difficulty with support services, like obtaining housing vouchers or continuing their education, legal support by which the court can review their case to ensure the expectations for the Federal John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Act (“Chafee”) are being met. Chafee expects that Delaware will provide some supports in areas such as finances, health, education, housing, and training through the age of 21. Through a filing by DSCYF, youth, guardian ad litem (GAL), and/or the Court can apply for this extension. This type of legislation and the philosophies behind it, which is promoted nationwide by JCYOI, is a piece in youth’s “successful transition to adulthood by age 25” (“Policy and Practice Recommendations,” 2010).

Senate Bill 113 also allows for the continued and ongoing representation by the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) for youth until age 21. CASAs are volunteers who are trained, selected, and supervised by an arm of Family Court. They are charged with “establishing a strong, stable connection with assigned child(ren), gathering information and making recommendations to the court about the child’s best interest, and advocating to make sure the child receives needed services” (Court Appointed Special Advocates,). The CASA represents foster youth and children in court, as some children and youth may choose not to appear in court due to the difficulty of seeing their biological family. The CASA will ensure the Family Court judge is getting a full picture of the successes and challenges the youth or child is having, so that the state can better support them while in the foster care system and/or make a well-informed decision of whether or not reunification with the biological family is appropriate. The CASA gets all sides of the story, including the point of view of the child/youth, biological family, foster placement, school staff, and social worker. CASA volunteers must be committed to one year of service and are often the only consistent adult relationship in the life of foster youth and children. According to Delaware’s Statewide CASA Program Coordinator, Gwen Stubbolo, as of October 2013, Delaware has 235 CASA volunteers; there are 100 volunteers in New Castle County, 65 in Kent County, and 70 in Sussex County. Approximately half of the foster population is assigned a CASA, the other half are assigned a Guardian At Litem (GAL). Each CASA is typically assigned one child or sibling group at a time, allowing them to dedicate their CASA responsibilities to this specific case (G. Stubbolo, personal communication, 31 October 2013).

In order to incorporate the voice of foster youth into the evolving system, the Youth Advisory Council (YAC) was founded in 2001 through the Division of Family Services (DFS) in partnership with youth who were in foster care at that time. YAC is an opportunity for Delaware’s current and past foster youth to come together and share with each other, DCJ representatives, and Family Court judges their concerns and ideas for improvement. YAC is a community and support group for current and former youth who have been in care. They generate problems they and their peers face, and also propose solutions to those in roles able to make the change. This youth voice is an important asset to anyone attempting to make policy changes to positively affect current youth transitioning from care, while still being involved in court.

On September 18, 2013, House Bill 163, or *An Act to Amend Titles 10 and 29 of the Delaware Code for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care*, was signed into law by Governor Markell. This bill aligns DYOI and JCYOI policy and practice recommendations by providing additional policy support for youth in transition. These services and supports are a part of a larger JCYOI campaign referred to as “Ready By 21.” Specifically, this law helps provide support for continuing education, financial stipends, and housing options. Now, reviews of young adult cases in Family Court, through “Extended Jurisdiction” (ages 18-21) must occur at least annually, and the representation of the youth, by attorney, GAL, or CASA, must be client-directed instead of a best interest standard, starting at age 18. “Extended Jurisdiction” refers specifically to the in-court, legal proceedings, but youth participating in “Ready By 21” services are not necessarily also participating in Extended Jurisdiction. If a youth is participating in Extended Jurisdiction, that individual youth opinion and desire must be given priority in court over the opinions of the attorney, GAL, or CASA. Extended Jurisdiction law explicitly states the areas that must be reviewed are: “financial stability; housing; medical benefits, including access to health care and other public benefits; employment and training; education; and community and individual connections to help support the youth” (Delaware House Bill 163, lines 70-75).

The Bill has a laser focus on independent-living services as they relate to the necessary skills required for full independence of state care. Though the law explicitly states the need to review specific topics annually and the need to “develop, administer, implement and provide a developmentally appropriate, comprehensive program,” the responsibility of educating the youth about these things has not been formally assigned to any particular agency or organization (Delaware House Bill 163, lines 160-161). Creating a new role or program to guide youth through the new services will also create a better pathway for communication, which will help bridge gaps in services and among the various parties who are involved in assisting with transitional phases into adulthood.

Same Problem, New Approach

While Senate Bill 113 and House Bill 163 make substantial progress towards holistic support for Delaware’s aging out population, questions about implementation, responsibility and accountability, and permanency still exist. Over the last six years, Delaware has collected substantial research analyzing the existing gaps in the services and supports available to youth as they age out, but there is still a question of how the new initiatives, resources, and services are linked together, and more importantly, communicated to the youth. The state agency primarily responsible for child welfare relies heavily on other community-based agencies to provide support services, namely Independent Living Programs (ILP). West End Neighborhood House (WENH), NorthEast Treatment Centers (NET), People’s Place, and the Elizabeth W. Murphey School, Inc. contract with the State to provide supports like housing vouchers. However, WENH and the Murphy School are the only agencies in Delaware that actually have beds available for stable housing support geared specifically towards post 18-year-old youth in transition. ILP workers for these agencies have large caseloads and sometimes frustrating relationships with other caseworkers and advocates, commonly naming the problem of lacking explicit guidelines or expectations for each caseworker involved with each individual youth’s case. These four agencies are also not included in the 2010 MOU, and thus communication between these agencies and the state agencies may be disjointed, tense, and even competing.

For example, Independent Living Caseworkers are charged with fostering accountability among youth. Youth who are housed through ILPs or the housing support voucher have responsibilities like finding and maintaining a job, continuing their education, and meetings bimonthly with their ILP worker and therapists. Depending on the program, youth must continue to do a combination of these things to maintain their eligibility to participate. ILP workers help the youth to find jobs or register for GED programs or college classes. ILP workers also often assist youth in developing the long-term skills needed to be successful in these areas. However, trying to promote transformational changes among youth can be undermined if youth are exposed to inconsistent frameworks. There is simply a need for clearer expectations and training guidelines, as well as conversations among all caseworkers and providers working on the same case. As a part of refining *Ready By 21*, DYOI is developing self-sufficiency benchmarks to be shared and utilized by all providers and youth aging out. The benchmarks are currently in draft form, and DYOI is working with DFS and the ILP providers to get them approved and finalized (J. Miller, personal communication, 21 November 2013). Implementation of the benchmarks is expected in 2014, but it is currently unclear which agency will be responsible for implementation.

With the new state requirements resulting from House Bill 163, additional youth education and awareness of services is necessary. Better communication between the public and nonprofit sectors in Delaware is also critical. All the services and disconnects between providers or responsible parties can be addressed through an appropriately framed youth mentoring program. However, this mentoring program must be very specific in its definition, approach, and training. First, there are many different definitions of mentoring. Delaware’s mentorship should be a blending of a few different philosophies. Delaware’s mentorship should be a “structured and trusting relationship that brings young people together with individuals who offer guidance support, and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the mentee” (DuBois, 2012). David DuBois and Michael Karcher provide a model framework illustrating how this relationship is built (DuBois, 2012). Mutuality, trust, and empathy are key, but the three different development stages would be looked at through the lens of the JCYOI’s five recommendation areas

and the moderators would be a specific training component based on the individual foster case. Lastly, the parental/peer relationships will become an outcome instead of a mediator. In other words, at first, establishing healthy, long-term relationships between youth and their biological family and/or their peers will be a goal of the mentorship, rather than a compliment to it. Eventually, these relationships may become mediators and join the support team for youth in their transition and beyond. In addition to the relationship-building model, the mentor should be matched to the youth through explicit guidelines and screening processes (Scannapieco, 2013). The mentor will also be trained to expect and address the unique circumstances and challenges associated with aging out within a checkpoint-timeline framework. “Checkpoints” are recommendations and talking points set up to serve as a “check-in” schedule. These serve to guide the mentor in their conversations with youth, as well as to ensure each mentor-youth pair is equitably discussing the myriad of issues and services available to assist in Delaware.

Criterion for Mentoring Program Evaluation

Exploring The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative’s Recommendations

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative gives six explicit recommendations for the policy and practice of helping youth make a successful transition to adulthood.

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Description of</i>
PERMANENCY	Every effort should be made to connect youth with permanent families. If permanent placement and/or adoption is not possible, it should be mandated that upon leaving foster care, aging out, youth should be “discharged to a family, legal guardian, adoptive parent, or a permanently committed, caring adult.
EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS	Stable educational pathways should be provided and accessible, including higher education and trade schools. Continually, academic successes /struggles should monitored and addressed as necessary.
ECOMINIC/FINANCIAL SUCCESS	Stakeholders should create opportunities for economic success through financial literacy and employment.
STABLE HOUSING	Safe, affordable and stable housing should be provided.
EQAULITY AMOUNGST RESOURCES/SUPPORT	All of these should be addressed in an equitable fashion, regardless of race and geography, and work towards the long-term goal of youth autonomy.
YOUTH AUTONOMY	Youth should also be directly involved in the shaping of their own futures, especially from age 14 years and forward

Other Important Evaluation Criteria for Delaware Implementation

Any mentoring program option should be assessed primarily by how well it follows an appropriate and well-evaluated mentoring model, specifically the matching process and training curriculum. Training should include directly addressing the unique challenges of foster youth and the various services and providers that are available. Standards should be set that require mentors' commitment of at least a year of partnership with the youth, as well as explicit standards for checkpoints and time spent. Each area of concern for foster youth (e.g., graduation rates, educational attainment, criminality, career planning, and housing) should be addressed with the youth, and, therefore, with the mentors in ongoing training.

Next, the time and cost associated with implementation should also be considered. Ideally, the implementation timeline should not be more than one year, and the cost should not require the State to take away funding from other, already existing programs. The willingness and enthusiasm with which the responsible party would undertake the mentoring program, and how much support the program would get from all stakeholders (the youth, DFS caseworkers, court system, CASA/attorneys/GAL, ILP providers, etc.) may factor into the implementation time and start-up costs. The political and/or systematic feasibility may trump the extensiveness and effectiveness of the actual mentoring model and training program. In other words, beginning something from scratch may not be as feasible as expanding or using already existing resources and programs. However, there may be resistance to change within those programs. Therefore, the current service providers and their leadership must be included in initial conversations and their buy-in estimated. Lastly, options should be evaluated on how well they incorporate the opinions of current and former foster youth before, during, and after the development of the program. Specifically, their feedback on how well the proposed option addresses current concerns and outcomes (specifically, graduation rates, continuing education, housing, employment, and incarceration rates) should be strongly consulted and considered in development, implementation, and evaluation.

Delaware's Opportunities to Implement a Statewide Mentoring Program

Implement Mentoring in High Schools

Educational intervention is the primary method for programs to address negative outcomes associated with aging out. Currently, DYOI's Education Working Group has begun to develop a pilot program of mentoring within the school. Felicia Kellum of Division of Family Services is coordinating the pilot program in Kent County. In a partnership with Connection Generations, mentors have already been trained and will be placed in schools to help willing and eligible youth with educational and vocational planning. A focus will be made to reach out to eligible foster youth in Kent County to participate and be matched with a mentor. Connecting Generations has a proven training and mentorship philosophy called "Creative Mentoring" (Creating Hopeful Adults Mentoring Program). This philosophy helps train in-school volunteers to be tutors, as well as creative, ongoing advocates to empower children and youth within an educational and vocational framework. Creative Mentoring also helps schools design their own programs within the philosophy and to incorporate the unique strengths of the individual school and its faculty.

The Connecting Generations program is a widely used program in Delaware, and the training is free. Kellum used Connecting Generations to kick start another statewide mentoring program called Creating Hopeful Adults Mentoring Program (CHAMP). CHAMP aligns with the mentoring framework outlined in the evaluation criteria, but has had difficulty getting enough adult mentors to support the number of youth needing one. The educational pilot program will use the same training, provided through the independent nonprofit agency, Connecting Generations. However, the education-based program has built-in mentors through the school system faculty and staff. Connecting Generations' training program can be altered in order to cater to the educational aspects of the program. The education-based mentoring program is ready to launch immediately, and would impact 19 youth between the ages of 11 and 14. By instituting a mentoring program in schools, DYOI hopes that graduation rates among foster youth will increase from the current 30% rate. Attention to youths' grades and struggles, is an important element, helping them in subject areas in which they struggle would lay a stronger foundation for high school. However, the mentoring is more than

that; therefore, by initiating and taking time for conversations about career ambitions and futures dreams, mentors can then encourage and connect mentees to specific school subjects or extracurricular activities that are related to their career goals. The mentor can provide valuable social capital for later in life by kick starting a network to help with employment – whether this is promoting part-time employment during high school or contribute to long-term career goals.

Within the JCYOI recommendations, the autonomy component is as equally unaddressed as permanency in the aging-out, foster youth population. By addressing each of these issues in a school setting youth can simultaneously increase emotional intelligence for relationship building, while also positively planning for a sustainable career path. Continually, the Delaware school mentoring program option would allow the mentor to discuss any individualized classroom concessions that may need to be made for foster youth. The 504 plan, which refers to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, is a plan any student in Delaware can apply for, and which would provide for some concessions, allowing the child to be successful in the classroom. These concessions could provide additional time to submit assignments, having a “chill pass” that allows children to leave the classroom to calm down in stressful moments, or helping to teach proper communication modes and coping methods. The school mentors would address these elements with youth, and the mentor would be able to secure the 504 plan in less time than the placement-focused caseworker (J. Miller, personal communication, 21 November 2013).

The school-based mentoring program does have some drawbacks. First, there is currently no plan for how this relationship will continue into high school, or if it would be possible to implement in all schools across the state. It is fair to estimate statewide implementation of such a program would occur over several years, and there is no current plan for how placement changes would impact the ability of mentors to travel between schools. Still, this option has major strengths. First, it has the potential to directly address the concerns with incarceration, graduation rates, continuing education, and employment. If these areas are addressed more comprehensively, and youth have options from continuing their education after high school, they would gain a better educational foundation, and thus support for employment opportunities as well. This option also allows the youth to have a lot of power. They become better decision makers when choosing their education pathway, and can safely learn to advocate for themselves. This could translate into the courtroom and increase their involvement in their foster cases, and into their lives at large. However, youth who must transfer schools often, or who have already dropped out, could be lost in the system. Statewide implementation could take years due to the time it would take to get each school on board and to enlist the required number of volunteer mentors. It might not even be feasible to get every school system to agree to have the mentor program in its schools. Housing after aging out will still be a challenge. It is also likely that financial literacy and aid would be necessary for a period during and after high school. Social challenges like established support and relationships within the community and among peers would remain an issue. Still, educational attainment is tied to employment, and therefore, more economic stability among youth. There may be a lessened likelihood of incarceration, while establishing a trusting and positive relationship with an adult. This option could be a good place to pilot a mentoring program, especially since DYOI is already moving to pilot an educational mentoring program in Kent County, DE. Evaluation of this DYOI pilot experience can greatly inform any statewide option in the future (J. Miller, personal communication, November 21, 2013).

Modify CASA Volunteer Training and Expectations

Similar to the education related option, introducing a new mentoring framework to the CASA training program would build on an established system without perpetuating new cost. CASAs are all volunteers and the required curriculum for new training has already been obtained, though not yet implemented. When a person is interested in becoming a CASA they have an initial interview with the statewide and respective county coordinators. After the interview, they will complete an application, which will be followed by a second, more formal, interview. If the coordinators determine that the applicant is qualified to serve as a CASA, candidates are then required to go through a 30-hour training program before being assigned a case. Typically, CASA’s will spend about 12 hours a month on their case depending on the circumstances

surrounding the case. The CASA is matched to children or youth based on personality and demographic information and this already addresses one of the biggest problems cited when mentoring programs are attempted with foster youth- appropriately matching mentors and mentees (Scannapieco, 2013).

Gwen Stubbolo has been with the CASA program for 16 years, and she has noticed a changing culture and nature of the CASA role within the past three years because of the recent legislation. She says that it is “moving towards being more of a natural mentoring role, especially with the older ones” (G. Stubbolo, personal communication, 31 October 2013). New training programs are being formulated in response to extended jurisdiction and being able to represent adults from 18-21. Recently, the CASA program has adopted the National CASA “Fostering Futures” training curriculum. This curriculum focuses on combining the traditional court advocate role with the emerging mentoring role (The National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association, 2012). Training begins with an activity that requires CASAs to complete a Venn diagram with characteristics that describe “advocate” on one side and “mentor” on the other. The training focuses on the intersection of the two components. Stubbolo contends that this intersection represents the evolution of the CASA role. CASAs are a blend of nonprofit sector volunteerism and public sector, court-system privileges. As a mentor, the CASA would have a role in all areas of the foster youth’s life. The CASA position permits the volunteer to have the privileged case information, as well as the freedom to work with youth outside of agency allegiances, allowing the youth’s well-being and success to be the primary focus. The framework to support a mentoring program already exists; additionally the CASA coordinators support the change in the CASA role. When the idea of enhancing the CASA role to encompass a mentoring relationship was proposed to Gwen Stubbolo, she was supportive. As the statewide coordinator she has the power and position to enable the program’s implementation. Therefore, all the criteria for evaluation have been sufficiently met through this option.

However, to expand the role of the CASA role from a court advocate an out-of-court mentor would require an overhaul of the CASA statute within the state of Delaware. The cost and time associated with this statute and role changes would take time, but it would be possible for Delaware to change its CASA statute. The CASA role change would also further complicate the worker relationships discussed earlier, especially between ILP workers and the CASAs. Furthermore, the youth who have Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) instead of CASAs would not benefit from this program. As mentioned, half of the foster population has a GAL instead of a CASA, but it is not clear how many youth, ages 14-21 have a CASA versus a GAL; this would need to be explored in order to ensure that as many youth as possible are benefiting from this program. Still, this option directly addresses all of JCYOI and DYOI’s recommendations and goals, as well as direct resources towards clarifying the roles of each caseworker in the youth’s lives.

Optional Supplemental Resource Program: Resource Guide

Throughout the country, resource guides designed to help youth with the transition process have been developed. These guides address a variety of issues including housing options, court proceedings and processes, and appropriate points of contact for specific issues or concerns. Many of these guides are developed by, or at least with the help of, youth in care or who have aged out. DYOI has expressed interest in putting together a similar guide, and has begun work on a Bill of Rights document. The Bill of Rights would address all the rights youth have in court proceedings, the information that should be provided to them, how to maintain relationships or visits with siblings, and how and when their desires can and should be used in court and placement. Two related guides would need to be developed in conjunction: both for foster youth. One would focus on needs and support of children and youth while they are in the system and another as a guide to navigate the aging out process. These would flow from the Bill of Rights; therefore, full development and distribution of all “Guides” would be more than a year down the road. The guide would provide a list of agencies that exist to assist with a variety of support services (e.g., access to and funding for continuing education endeavors, housing, stipends, transportation, and job training).

Development of such a guide would take time, dedication, and communication among numerous agencies throughout the state. Empowering youth and/or YAC members to take part in the formation and

maintenance of the guide would provide a project opportunity for youth, aligning with the JCYOI recommendation of giving the youth autonomy to help shape their own futures and understand the specified programs and policies in place, which are designed to assist in various phases of transition. The guide would promote communication among agencies and give youth more responsibility and autonomy in shaping the policies they help them make developmentally appropriate decisions. Instead of having to always ask a caseworker or judge for help, they can initiate conversations with agencies that would be able to help the youth, help themselves. This guide would make a useful supplemental resource to the work done through a mentoring program, and would allow the youth to continue developing the autonomy JCYOI stresses.

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
Continue Current Program(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No added cost • Address the majority of JCYOI focus areas (education, housing, incarceration, healthcare, etc.) • Already have buy-in from necessary stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not address permanency problem for foster youth
Supplemental Resource Guide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ties together current services • Low cost • Already being put together by DYOI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relies on youth to navigate the system • Does not address permanency problem for foster youth
School-Based Mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives foster youth a permanent adult role model • Helps youth navigate educational supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High cost for new hiring • No guarantee of equitability across school district, or buy-in across school district • Long-term timeline before it can begin to be implemented statewide.
CASA role changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low Cost • Gives foster youth a permanent adult role model • Helps youth navigate existing services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not reach all youth equally • Requires new role to be written into statute

Proposal: Modify CASA Volunteer Training and Expectations

The CASA mentorship model would be the easiest and most cost effective to implement. It would take approximately 6-12 months to implement the Fostering Futures training, and ensure that all current and in-training CASAs are trained (for more information on Fostering Futures see Step 2 of Action Plan). Gwen Stubbolo has already received the training and the CASA Coordinators are involved in a “train the trainer” program. The mentor-mentee framework addresses the five JCYOI recommendations. The CASA statewide coordinator is convinced that the mentoring relationship between CASA’s and older youth is happening

naturally. Implementing a new training component to establish clear definitions and an understanding of “mentorship” for older foster youth would solidify this transition, and ensure equitability of expectations for the relationship. This addresses the JCYOI concern with equitability and the Delaware ILP caseworker concern of unclear boundaries. It is recommended that a panel of YAC members or other former foster youth be involved in the training to inform CASAs about Delaware’s unique environment and the specific experiences of the foster youth who have lived it. Therefore, the “CASA option” is the best option for a statewide mentoring program, especially considering that the program is already established with staffing and involvement in court. However, there is room to include all of the options in a long-term plan. The resource guide could be developed as DYOI continues its work; the education-based mentoring could be included over time, as this aspect takes unique and expert knowledge to correctly navigate all the pathways. First though, the CASA’s who are matched with youth 14 years and over should be trained in a mentor framework.

Why?: Support for Proposed Option

The funding for this training is already built into the CASA program. The training requires no supplies outside of the curriculum, and because the Fostering Futures curriculum has already been obtained, there would be no additional cost of implementing this program. CASAs are required to complete at least 16 hours of training annually, in addition to the 30 hours required when they first become a CASA. Adding mentoring training to existing hours would not be difficult. A potential challenge would be getting all current CASAs who have youth over the age of 14 to choose this option as a part of their training. Since DYOI is currently piloting the educational mentoring program in one county, it will be important to share best practices, and make sure that any youth involved in both do not become confused, and that the adults are working together towards the same short and long-term goals for the youth.

The CASA option has a solid logic model that fits within the existing DYOI and JCYOI framework. The CASA mentor model could be slowly implemented over the next year, with the goal of all current and prospective CASA being training in the mentoring framework by 2015. This would mean that Delaware’s CASA coordinators would need to offer the curriculum monthly, in order to make the training as accessible as possible. This option would only positively affect existing programs. There would be some growing pains, particularly in clarifying caseworker roles in relation to the mentor, but ultimately the CASA mentor would serve as the connector between all supportive services, the court system, and the youth.

How: Action Steps for Implementation

1. Establish a Resource Guide, Complete with a Bill of Rights

Using the Texas Resource Guide model, DYOI has begun developing a plan for the Bill of Rights. The concerns and questions raised by YAC about the foster care system as it applies to court involvement, the ability to see siblings or continue a relationship with biological parents, and being involved in extracurricular activities will be addressed in the Bill of Rights and lay the framework for the rest of the Guide’s index. Thus, the entire Resource Guide would be a joint effort by the youth and the Delaware Center for Justice since the guide would be distributed to youth through their CASA. Therefore, it will be important for a CASA representative to serve on the guide development. The guide provides CASA volunteers with educational tools, which help initiate conversations with their youth mentees. CASA’s are expected to work with youth on how to use it and have ongoing conversations about the topics included. This will provide youth with direction for housing, continuing education, and career planning, encouraging them to think longer-term and begin preparation earlier than 18. Alternatively, the distribution and upkeep of the guide could also be done by DFS or YAC within DYOI.

2. Institute New Training for all CASAs- New and Old

As previously mentioned, Gwen Stubbolo recommended using the National CASA training in a program called *Fostering Futures for Delaware’s CASAs*. DYOI and the Delaware CASA program can or may review

this curriculum to help establish whether or not it addresses the mentor role as described earlier. The curriculum blends the role of advocate with that of a mentor in order to support youth transitioning into adulthood. Each of the seven chapters in the training manual addresses a different aspect important in the aging out process. Youth involvement in court is a priority area of DYOI, and CASAs with this training could partner with DYOI in achieving relatedly similar goals (The National Court Appointed Special Advocates Association, 2012).

In order for the implementation of such a program to run smoothly, explicit expectations regarding communication between agencies should be established up front. First, minimum communication hours/times between youth and CASA mentors should be set. At least a year commitment should be made, but this is already a requirement of the CASA program. Effective communication with youth requires at least two hours per week (Scannapieco, 2013). However, Stubbolo asserted that the average amount of time spent volunteering as a CASA is 12 hours per month. Therefore, an outline of how to spend this time between youth development and investigation for court proceedings would be required. This could be part of the training; how to begin conversations when looking for court information, and then, how to use these conversations as an opportunity for development (G. Stubbolo, personal communication, 31 October 2013).

Second, checkpoints should be set. Again, “checkpoints” are recommendations and talking points set to a “check-in” schedule, in order to guide the mentor in their conversations with youth, as well as to ensure each mentor-youth pair is equitably discussing the myriad of issues and services. These checkpoints would serve as guidelines for the appropriate age to begin having conversations about various topics discussed in the guide. The guidelines will most likely not be followed to the letter, as the developmental and emotional state of youth will vary, regardless of age. However, the age points serve as a countdown to aging out. The mentee and mentor should together set goals about where the youth would ideally like to be at different ages. Short-term goals, such as academic (or grade) achievement or choosing high school classes, medium-term goals, such as wanting to apply to college or be involved in an ILP, and then long-term goals about careers and family-relationships should all be discussed.

Another significant aspect that should be addressed through checkpoints and training is the importance of establishing, or reestablishing, healthy and safe relationships between the youth and their biological families. This relationship may not be desired by the youth. However, if they do express interest in going back to live with or reconnect with their biological families, then this is a subject matter that the CASA should address in combination with other stakeholders. DFS, ILP, and any other caseworkers involved with the youth should work together to ensure that reconnecting with biological family members is done in a healthy, safe, and productive way.

The CASA-as-mentor program could be piloted in one county. An ideal county may be one with the smallest foster youth (age 14-21) population, and one who’s CASA Coordinator has already gone through the Fostering Futures training. A pilot program would allow any unforeseen challenges to be addressed before launching the program statewide. The evaluation of the pilot would follow the same evaluation steps as a statewide program, but would allow extra or less attention to be paid to certain areas of the curriculum, while also allowing additions to be made in areas the mentors did not feel adequately prepared to address.

3. Evaluation Program

There should be a plan to evaluate the mentoring program. This would best be conducted by members of DYOI, who have a good understanding of the full-range of services and programs provided for foster youth aging out in Delaware. The desired outcome is to create permanent relationships for foster youth in transition, while also helping youth navigate supportive services Delaware has implemented. Other outcomes that must be assessed include increased high school graduation rates, decreased rate of

homelessness, incarceration, and teenage pregnancy, as well as the less statistics-driven goal of giving youth more autonomy and futuristic-thinking ability. Surveys should be given before entrance to the program and after exit in order to obtain data on these outcomes. Longitudinally, the program hopes to see less former foster youth reliant on public aid after 21, and more former foster youth in successful careers, being self-sufficient. The evaluation should address all of the desired outcomes, as well as the youth and mentors feelings about the relationship and its effects on the youth's transition. The Scannapieco-Painter study models one evaluation plan, which uses the Likert Scale to measure youth and mentor's feelings about the relationship, but Scannapieco is skeptical of the self-report's ability to capture true data (Scannapieco, 2013). However, if the survey is anonymous and conducted annually, or if there is a CASA change, while also accompanied by an exit interview process, more valid data may be found. The data from the more immediate, one-year-out statistics, the yearly surveys, exit interviews, and longitudinal public aid statistics will serve as a way to modify the program as necessary over time. The program's effectiveness should be revisited at least every two years in order to ensure the training curriculum encompasses any new legislation, service providers, or cultural changes.

In addition to the overall evaluation of the program, there should be ongoing, monthly self-evaluations conducted by the various agencies that are involved in youth cases. This may not be directly related to mentoring, but it allows for all parties to troubleshoot various issues that would affect mentors' conversations and planning with youth. This also helps to ensure that those who may not have CASAs are still getting the benefit of across-provider communication. Representatives from CASA, DSCYF, YAC, DYOI, and the court system should meet monthly to evaluate and hold one another accountable for their role in the legislation's service provision mandates. This would also be a place for youth to raise concerns about the mentoring program's discrepancies across cases or just a concern about how a service is being delivered. Continually, within the courtroom, judges can evaluate or check-in on the mentoring program. This holds mentors accountable, and also gives youth an incentive to come to court. Both parties (CASA and judges) will usually be in the courtroom anyway, and no extra mandates would be needed the discussion would surround the well-being of the youth. According to Julie Miller, "DYOI and the Child Protection Accountability Commission are currently working on the extended court jurisdiction process (what tools can be used by judges during these hearings) and that can be added into the process we come up with" (personal communication, 21 November 2013).

Conclusion

Permanent or long-term, trusting adult relationships can make all the difference in a successful transition out of state care and into self-sufficient adulthood. Delaware has a unique opportunity to institute a statewide mentoring program to help establish these relationships because of its small size and the current efforts and attention being paid to this transition. Delaware already has progressive legislation in place, as well as many community-based support services. Therefore, a mentoring program can link all the services and supports together, while giving personal, one-on-one guidance to youth. Mentoring aligns with the current efforts, initiatives, the recently passed legislation, and other already existing programs and services that are proving to have a positive impact, all the while ensuring that the youth are being held accountable for their actions and have autonomy in shaping their futures.

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Appendix A

<u>Youth Aging Out of Foster Care Statistics</u>		
<u>CONCERN</u>	<u>DELAWARE</u>	<u>NATIONAL***</u>
Incarceration	Of 394 youth 16 to 21 years of age that participated in IL services during 7-1-12 through 6-30-2013, 27% reported having ever been incarcerated.*	25% incarcerated within two years of leaving foster care
Homelessness	Of 290 youth 18 to 21 years of age that participated in IL services during 7-1-12 through 6-30-2013, 37% reported having ever been homeless. (this includes youth that reporting having experienced homelessness prior to entering foster care).*	20% by the age of 20
High School Graduation	Of 290 youth 18 to 21 years of age that participated in IL services during 7-1-12 through 6-30-2013, 34% have obtained a diploma or GED.*	51% vs. national comparison group graduation rate of 90%
Unemployment	66%**	25-55%; only 38% of those working after one year

*Felicia Kellum, DSCYF, November 18, 2013

** As of 2011, and only those youth participating in an Independent Living Program

Source: IPA Environmental Scan, 2011, page 14

*** Source: <http://www.childrensrights.org/issues-resources/foster-care/facts-about-aging-out/>

Appendix B

<u>Social Cost of Aging Out Challenges</u>	
The increased earnings of one cohort year graduating at the rate of the general population over a working life	\$748,800,000
One cohort year unplanned parenthood based on the cost of first 15 years of life for the first child	\$115,627,350
One cohort year criminal justice costs for a criminal career	\$4,833,736,200
Total for education, unplanned pregnancy and criminal involvement for each cohort year	\$5,698,163,550

SOURCE: Cutler, I. (2009). Cost Avoidance: Bolstering the Economic Case for Investing in Youth Aging Out of Foster Care. *Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative*, 1, 1-20.

Appendix C – Acronym Glossary

CASA- Court Appointed Special Attorney
CHAMP- Creating Hopeful Adults Mentoring Program
DCJ- Delaware Center for Justice
DSCYF- Delaware Department of Services for Children, Youth and their Families
DYOI- Delaware Youth Opportunities Initiatives
GAL- Guardian At. Litem
JCYOI- Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative
ILP- Independent Living Program(s)
WENH- West End Neighborhood House
YAC- Youth Advisory Council