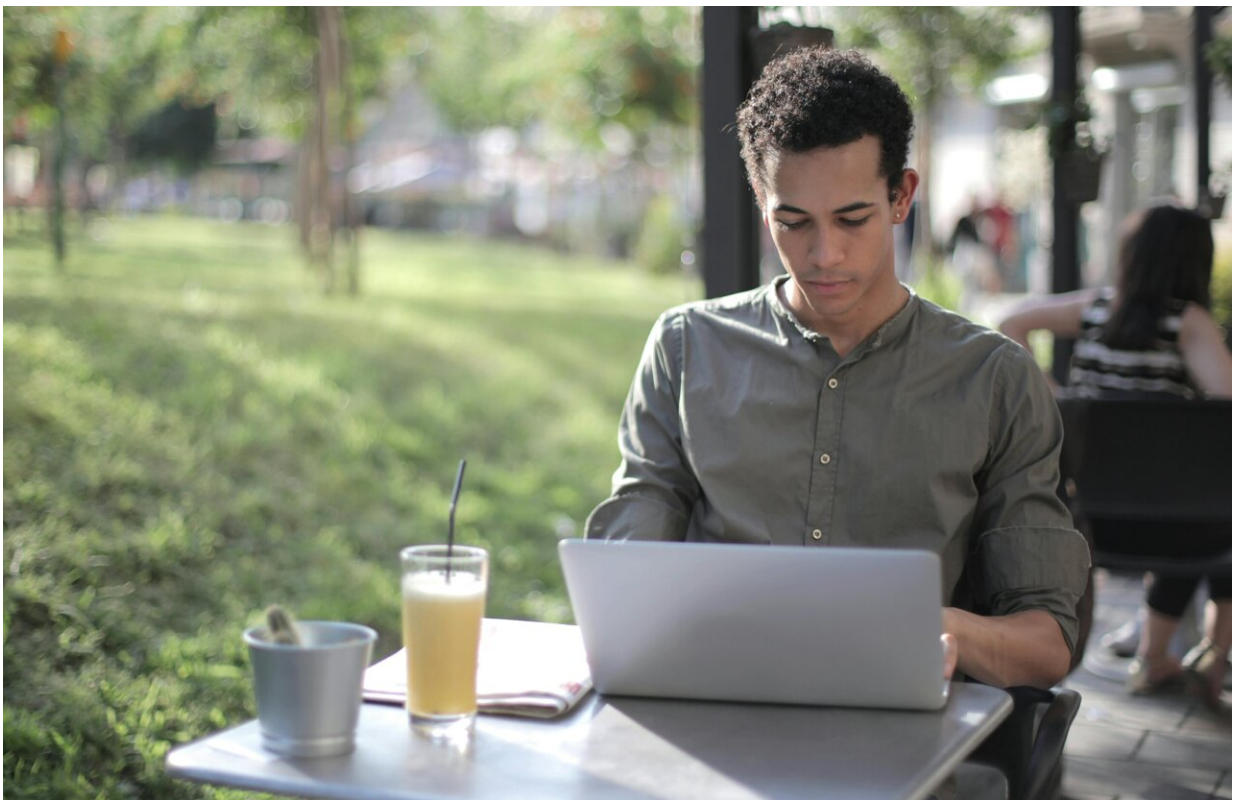


Young adults say steady support from caring adults made difference in transitioning from child welfare system

June 6 2024, by Julie Cederbaum



Credit: Andrea Piacquadio from Pexels

Young people who have exited foster care generally fare better—in work, school and relationships—if they [get consistent support from adults who care about them](#) during their teen years.

My research team reached these findings by interviewing 21 people, now in their late 20s, who had aged out of foster care when they turned 18, had spent time in foster care as children or grew up in families that had active child welfare cases.

These young adults relayed the degree to which they received support from their relatives, friends, [foster parents](#), [social workers](#), mentors, teachers and coaches. They described help coming in many forms—safe places to stay, someone to listen to them vent or open doors, or just making them feel cared for in any way.

All of the people we interviewed were doing relatively well in life by the age of 18, in that they didn't have significant mental health or substance use problems. We wanted to understand what factors contributed to their success.

"My [grandmother](#) was the key thing that helped me be successful in life to this day," said one of the people we interviewed. "She's given me, I guess, routine. ... That's what's helped me to this day."

"I feel like teachers were really good at being understanding and open-minded toward, like, kids with different backgrounds," another explained, "like kids who were raised in, like, rough environments or weren't raised by their parents, or didn't have certain resources other kids did."

Every year, roughly 600,000 children spend some time in foster care,

and about [23,000 of them age out of the system](#) once they reach their 18th birthday.

Young adults leaving foster care are making two transitions. Like everyone else their age, they're turning into adults. But unlike most of their peers, they also have to start living on their own.

They are more likely to experience [poverty, unemployment, homelessness](#) and [incarceration](#) than other Americans their age.

Unlike young adults who have stable relationships with their parents or other guardians, young adults aging out of foster care often have to try to figure out basic skills on their own, like how to open a [bank account](#), create a resume, apply for jobs or navigate financial aid forms for college. People leaving foster care are also [less likely to graduate from high school](#).

My team wants to know more about what kinds of services make the biggest difference in helping young people transition out of [foster care](#). For an upcoming study, we surveyed a larger group of [young adults](#), as well as the staff members of programs serving this community.

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