

Foster children need more help after they reach the age of eighteen

James S. Vacca *

Long Island University C.W. Post College, NY, United States

Received 30 October 2007; accepted 16 November 2007

Available online 23 November 2007

Abstract

The research shows that there are presently about a half million children in foster care, and approximately 20,000 of these youths will turn eighteen years of age, be classified as adults and emancipate or “age out” of the foster care system each year. The capacity to graduate from high school is often difficult and challenging for foster children. Typically, foster children have no continuity in their high school educational experience. These children will attend several high schools before they graduate, and if they move during the school year, classes will be frequently interrupted by changes—often requiring them to move when classes are in session. They will also have no consistency in the development of their educational plan of study because they will see several guidance counselors who mostly will be unfamiliar with the foster child’s social history, background and ability. Foster children will also frequently experience breaks in their direct instruction requiring them to adjust to different teachers, courses, school rules, and expectations. This article addresses and answers the following two questions: (1) “Why do foster children have difficulty after they leave high school?” and (2) “What can be done to help Foster Children Make a More Successful Transition to an Independent life?”

© 2007 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Foster children; Neglected; Schools; Education; Drop out; School placement

Contents

1. Why do foster children have difficulty after they leave high school?	487
2. What can be done to help foster children make a more successful transition to an independent life?	489
3. Reflections	491
References	491

According to Ferrell (2004), there are presently about a half million children in foster care, and approximately 20,000 of these youths will turn eighteen years of age, be classified as adults and emancipate or “age out” of the system each year. The author further points out that four years after these children leave the foster care system, 46% will have not finished high school, 25% will be homeless, 42% will become parents and fewer than 20% will be completely self-supporting.

* Tel.: (631) 423 9176; fax: (631) 423 9176.

E-mail address: jsvacca@aol.com.

The capacity to graduate from high school is often difficult and challenging for foster children. Typically, foster children have no continuity in their high school educational experience. These children will attend several high schools before they graduate, and if they move during the school year, classes will be frequently interrupted by changes—often requiring them to move when classes are in session. They will also have no consistency in the development of their educational plan of study because they will see several guidance counselors who mostly will be unfamiliar with the foster child's social history, background and ability. Foster children will also frequently experience breaks in their direct instruction requiring them to adjust to different teachers, courses, school rules, and expectations (Vacca, 2007).

The following case illustrates how difficult it is for a foster child to complete a high school education and find services that will provide a positive assistance to the child once he/she has completed high school. Lena is a seventeen year old student who has been in foster care since she was five years old. She is now in the twelfth grade and for the past three years she has been attending a combination Special Education and Vocational training program provided by the local Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) on Long Island, New York. Since Lena began in this program she has been experiencing great success in her classes, she is learning office skills and she has experienced positive social relationships with her classmates. She will graduate in June and will turn eighteen years of age during the school year.

Lena has been classified for special education services for her emotional and learning disabilities. She was placed in foster care when she was five years old because her mother and father had a long history of drug related problems and as a consequence, they abandoned Lena. Since entering the foster care system Lena has lived in seven different foster homes and seven different schools.

Lena was identified as a special education student at the end of third grade. When she began fourth grade Lena was placed in a self-contained classroom because the district Committee on Special Education believed that she was in need of individual academic assistance and they also believed that her behavior needs could be better met in a class with a smaller class size.

In the middle of fifth grade Lena moved to her third school and a new foster home. She encountered difficulty adjusting to the new school and foster home. The difficulties began when she was registered in school by her foster parents. They were told by the school district that Lena's records were incomplete and that she could not start school until the school district received all her official records. With the assistance of a conscientious caseworker's help, Lena was finally enrolled in school after waiting about three and a half weeks at home. When Lena was permitted to attend school, the foster parents were told that she needed to be placed in a self-contained classroom, pending a CSE meeting, again because of her social, academic and behavioral needs.

By the end of fifth grade, Lena had exhibited severe behavior problems and was sent home frequently because of her many fights with other students. School district officials assigned her a one-on-one aide because they believed that her emotional needs were an issue outside the self-contained classroom. She was placed in a regular physical education program, and she received all of her academic classes in language arts, science, and math from her special education teacher.

Within the first three months of sixth grade Lena began to experience frustration in school and at home. She had no friends, and she felt that having the one-on-one aide by her side in school all day made her feel different from the other kids. At home she began to exhibit daily acting out behavior, and the foster care parents told Lena's caseworker that they could not care for her needs. In this home placement, Lena was living with four other children that were also under foster care.

By the end of the first two months of school in grade six, Lena had an emotional breakdown, and she was hospitalized in a psychiatric hospital. She was under psychiatric care for two months, and when she was discharged from the hospital, Lena was placed in a Residential Treatment Center for children with severe emotional problems. She received round the clock residential and educational supervision seven days per week. Students in this program are permitted to go home for weekend visits when they demonstrate positive behavior both in the residential and educational settings.

Following a one year stay at the Residential Treatment Center, Lena was placed in a new school district and foster home. She was then placed in Suffolk Long Island BOCES Middle School placement for grades seven and eight, a special program for students with both psychiatric and educational needs. This placement included daily psychological counseling and small classes in an 8:1:1 class size ratio. She was greeted warmly by the school's administrators, teachers and other students. There is no longer a one-to-one teacher aide, and Lena's school welcomed the participation of Lena's caseworker in planning her academic program.

Although success was finally achieved in Middle School, there were problems in the foster home, and Lena was forced to move to yet another home. Because of Lena's high mobility rate, she experienced a fragmented educational program. Her reading skills are equivalent to those of a fourth grade student, and her math ability is equal to the average fifth grader. She has learned to compensate for her reading deficiencies in the content subjects by using her listening

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/347581>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/347581>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)