On the Threshold of Change: Forces that Could Transform Future Conditions for Youth in Extended Foster Care

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On the Threshold of Change

Forces that could transform future conditions for youth in Extended Foster Care (EFC)

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Project History and Background

- Youth exiting foster care: who they are and the challenges they face
- 2008 Congress response
- 2010 to today – States response
- Extended foster care: positive impacts
- Extended foster care: need for additional change
Project History and Background

- Began over two years ago by identifying the need to radically improve extended foster care in California
- Partnered with CYC, whose members also identified extended foster care as a priority issue
- Joined forces with Institute for the Future to ensure that our project was informed by the opportunities and challenges of the future
- Worked over a year to develop this report
On the Threshold of Change
Forces that could transform future conditions for youth in Extended Foster Care (EFC)

A foresight report by Institute for the Future

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Harsh Realities of Today

- Family Inequity
- Racial Injustice
- Economic Inequality
- Climate Crisis
- Digital Divide
- Social Volatility
Family Inequity

- Extended foster care often *weakens* rather than *strengthens* family relationships

- Extended foster care undermines youth development research, emphasizing the importance of *independence* rather than *interdependence* for transition-aged youth

"The lack of stability causes relationships to become very rocky, and...can be extremely detrimental to one’s mental and even physical health."

—Amaris, CYC Member
Racial Injustice

- Racism is embedded in the structure of the child welfare system, including extended foster care
- Youth of color in extended foster care experience differential treatment
- Youth of color experience precarious housing

"I experienced racism within extended foster care when I first came to a mostly white town for transitional housing. Youth and the program mentors would constantly make little comments to me, like, ‘Why can’t you Black people clean up your hair after you shower?’ My program mentor was the same way. I always felt confined to my bedroom to the point that it made my mental health get really bad.”

—Olivia, CYC Member
Economic Inequality

- Current policy does not promote economic stability for youth in extended foster care
- Eligibility for programs and services tends to keep young people in poverty rather than help them build economic security
- COVID-19 exacerbated the impact of economic instability, particularly for the most vulnerable youth in extended foster care

“In a 2021 national study, approximately 75% of respondents reported experiencing high financial insecurity.”

—Think of Us

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Climate Crisis

- The consequences of the climate crisis are unequally distributed toward the most vulnerable in extended foster care

- In CA in particular, the climate crisis impacts the housing and employment options and stability of young people

- Impact of health on mental health differs by income and gender

"... The impact of heat on mental health was twice as severe for low-income women as it was for high-income men."

—Dr. Obradovich and Dr. Paulus²
Digital Divide

- Youth in extended foster care often enter adulthood with limited experience with technology

- Lack of digital literacy limits support, education, and employment opportunities for youth

“...I literally Googled ‘services for foster youth 21 and older.’”

—IFTF Interview Participant
Social Volatility

- Political divisions and social volatility impact youth safety and well-being
- National social division and volatility impact California youth

“Over 450 anti-LGBTQ+ bill have been introduced in U.S. state legislatures in 2023.”

—ACLU³
The Transformational Forces of Tomorrow
Futures Thinking: An act of “social imagination”

“Remember to imagine and craft the worlds you cannot live without, just as you dismantle the ones you cannot live within.”

–RUHA BENJAMIN

Image Source: https://www.ruhabenjamin.com/
The Transformational Forces of Tomorrow

Equitable Transitions

Computational Advantage

Restorative Care

Relational Design
The Transformational Forces of Tomorrow

Equitable Transitions
Imagine a 2035 with EQUITABLE TRANSITIONS

From allocating entitlements and supports toward guaranteeing basic resources, including:

- Stable short- and long-term housing
- Financial security
- Education
- Health care and wellness
- Broad access to tools, skills, social connections, and know-how needed to flourish in adulthood
Freedom West

What: The nonprofit equity housing cooperative Freedom West Homes has been an affordable housing ownership option for approximately 1,000 racially diverse, low- and moderate-income residents in San Francisco since 1973. Recently, the homeowners (aka the shareholders) agreed to Freedom West 2.0, a $2 billion plan to expand beyond permanent housing to include affordable rental units, a health and fitness center, a childcare center, a “Community Innovation Center,” and retail and entertainment spaces.5

By 2035: Intentional cooperative housing provides affordable stable housing and a pathway to homeownership.

Black Worker Hubs

**What:** The Southern California Black Worker Hub for Regional Organizing aims to address the “Black job crisis” through community partnerships and technical training, and is emerging as a core resource for cultivating quality work.6

**By 2035:** Trust-based, culturally unique organizations are critical support networks for youth in EFC facing barriers due to systemic oppression and stigmas in hiring, promotion, and pay.

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Restorative Care
Imagine a 2035 with RESTORATIVE CARE

From crisis and diagnosis -based mental health toward holistic healing

- Mental health as a spectrum: thriving, managing, struggling, experiencing distress
- Focuses on the conditions that produce and fortify mental health
- Responds to the psychological impacts of climate change
- Unlocks play and imagination as part of healing and care
Youth Mental Health Forum

What: The Youth Mental Health Forum held at the White House in May 2022 was the first convening to address mental health as a spectrum, from thriving, to managing, to struggling, to experiencing distress. It is helping to reframe mental or behavioral health as a continuum that encompasses prevention, regulation, and treatment.

By 2035: Commonly understanding mental health as a spectrum—thriving, managing, struggling, distress—helps explain the need for prevention, regulation, and treatment resources and services.

Image source: https://unsplash.com/photos/three-men-in-jacket-laughing-at-each-other-pumko2FFxY0
Canada’s PaRx Program

**What:** Science has shown that regular access to nature and opportunities for play can rewire the brain. British Columbia’s PaRx program allows doctors and other health providers in nine provinces to prescribe play in nature as part of a treatment approach for mental and/or physical health conditions, issuing subsidized passes to over 80 national parks. The project, which launched in 2020, aims to make it easier for Canadians to access nature and make time outdoors “the fourth pillar of health,” along with diet, exercise, and sleep.8

**By 2035:** Access to nature is prescribed as a treatment for mental and/or physical health conditions and is seen as the “fourth pillar of health.”
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Relational Design
Imagine a 2035 with RELATIONAL DESIGN

From preparing youth for independence toward interdependence and mutualism

- Relational permanency requires skills and time — and prioritizes familial ties
- Youth-led building of social infrastructure to be sustaining, authentic, and individual
- Emphasizes interdependencies within families and communities
- Embraces the arts as a medium for community-building and belonging
Miracle Messages

**What:** The nonprofit Miracle Messages identifies “relational poverty” as “a deadly, often overlooked form of poverty.” It provides family reunification services and other social connections and financial services for people experiencing homelessness.

**By 2035:** “Relational poverty” is fought by deeply investing in family reunification services modeled on initiatives and projects *beyond* child welfare services.

Image source: https://www.miraclemessages.org/stories
Thread

**What:** Baltimore-based nonprofit Thread makes a 10-year commitment to the ninth-graders who join the Thread Family. Its mission is to create a “social fabric” that stays with the youth through high school and at least six years afterward.  

**By 2035:** Cultivated and nurtured by intentional relationship-building, young people’s communities of support are sustaining (10-year commitments), authentic, and youth-led (individualized).
The Transformational Forces of Tomorrow
Imagine a 2035 with COMPUTATIONAL ADVANTAGE

From teaching specific tech skills toward building digital dexterity

- AI powers digital assistants for youth in EFC
- E-mobility revolution impacts EFC’s transportation supports
- Strong governance undergirds EFC’s digital practices
- Digital media sensemaking is a critical life skill
Woebot

What: Woebot is an AI-powered mental health therapy chatbot that draws from Cognitive Behavior Therapy. The app learns from and stores all the interactions, increasing its ability to tailor the content to the user's needs over time.¹¹

By 2035: Young adults will rely on AI tools to help develop résumés, write college and scholarship essays, and navigate the world more broadly. Many will have therapy bots that last for years.

Waymo

**What:** Alphabet’s self-driving car division Waymo has begun a small pilot in San Francisco to test its autonomous ride-hailing service.¹²

**By 2035:** EFC advocates help shape California’s 2030 transportation policy; an e-mobility revolution integrates autonomous ride services into the transportation options available for transition-aged youth.
We are free... former/current foster youth guaranteed a bright future

Exit Care 800 credit score

Yearly Wellness trip

Find Success After HS With THE Passion Test

- Available to Everyone
- Ensures flexible Employment
- If degree is NOT obtained Other Education IS Accepted
- Accommodations to the passion test can be made
- Passion Test would be taken Junior/Senior year of High School

Now Reporting to You Live INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL FOR FY

- Holistic Healing
  - Trip Advisor will plan the whole trip for you!
  - Can request for service 3 times throughout the year for up to 2 wks
  - Child care provided or you can bring your family w/you
  - Widen your healing horizons

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Three Takeaways

1. **Build relational wealth:** familial and social

2. **Build stability:** cultivate a sense of life’s purpose

3. **Instill optimism:** goodness and opportunity in the future
To learn more, please visit:

https://www.ylc.org/on-the-threshold-of-change/
1. Think of Us, “COVID-19 MicroCash Grant Application Data”, March 2021, https://www.thinkof-us.org/case-studies/microcash-grant-covid-19-data. (Note: Think of Us considered the responses “in (sic) having a money crisis” and “My money situation is on a week-to-week basis” to be indicators of high financial insecurity.)


Thank you!

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