# Foster Care & Disability

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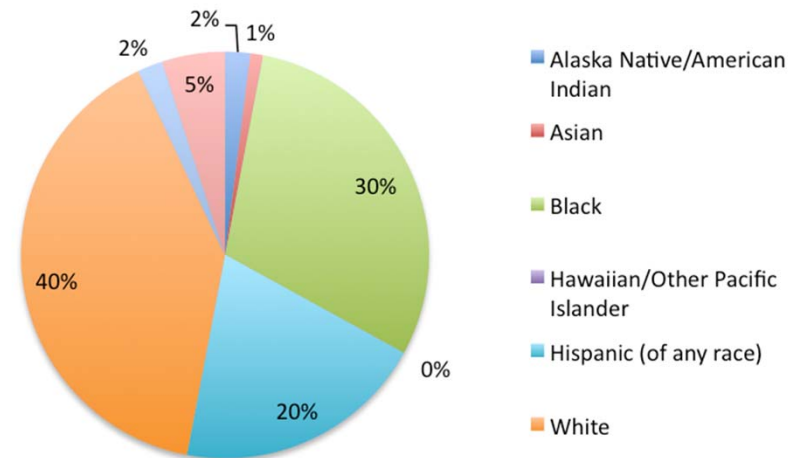
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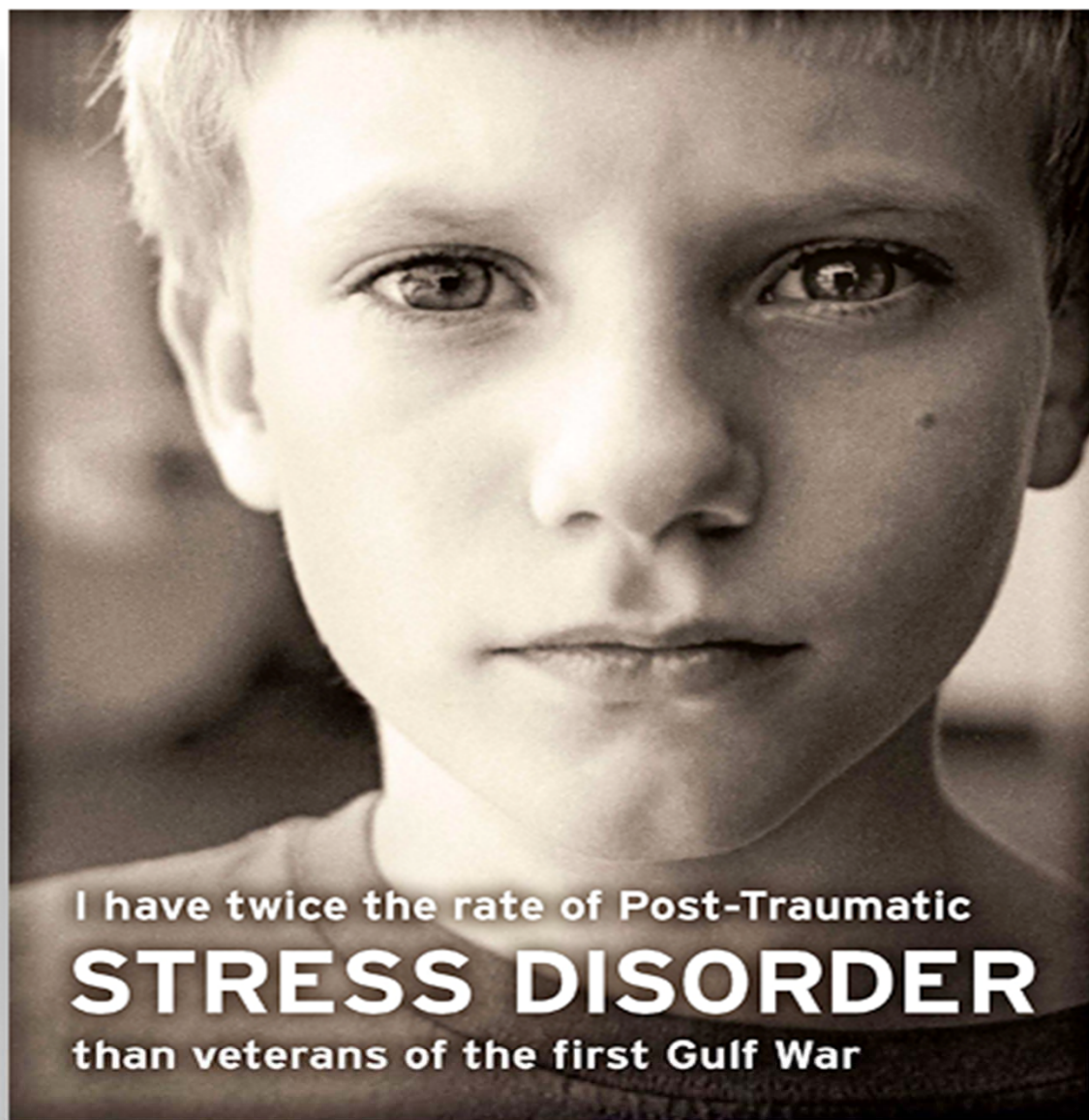# How many children are in foster care?

## 500,000

# Maria

Maria is a 17 year-old Latina, who resides in a residential group home with seven other adolescents in foster care. She has been in foster care since she was eight years old and has lived in six different foster homes, attending four different schools. She has had no contact with her biological mother or father in the past three years, but does see her younger brother and sister occasionally (both are also in foster care). She ran away from her last foster home, with little explanation

Maria has a history of physical and sexual abuse and has received some counseling to assist with her post-traumatic stress disorder. She also has an information processing learning disability and receives special education services (mostly extended time accommodations and tutoring services) at her high school. She has some difficulty getting along with others, either responding aggressively or withdrawing, when she is stressed.

She attends high school, but she is behind academically and isn't prepared to graduate with other students her age. Maria doesn't know "what she would like to be when she grows up", however she has been receiving independent living training from child welfare as she will be expected to live on her own next year. She will receive some ongoing services from the Independent Living Provider and thinks that she might need to get her GED and possibly attend community college. However, she also knows that she'll need a job to pay the bills.

# Youth with Disabilities In foster care

Over half of foster youth alumni had mental health problems compared to 22% of general population.

25% had PTSD versus 4% of general population

20% had major depressions versus 10% of general pop.

Social phobia, panic syndrome, and generalized anxiety disorders at higher rates

# Youth in Foster Care…

- Are 3 to 6 times more likely to have emotional, behavioral, and developmental issues

- Score 15 to 20% lower on achievement tests

- Twice as likely to have repeated a grade, changed schools and receive special education services

- Only 60% graduate from high school

# Educational Instability

- Every time a child changes schools they lose 4 to 6 months of academic achievement

- The average # school changes per year is three.

- It isn't uncommon for a student in foster care to experience more than seven school changes.

# Overly Restrictive Environments

- **IEPs are often delayed or not followed due to an inability to identify or locate the person who holds educational rights**

- **Youth in foster care often are placed in overly restrictive group homes, due a lack of therapeutic foster home placements**

- **Non-public schools operated by group homes or other institutional residential providers.**
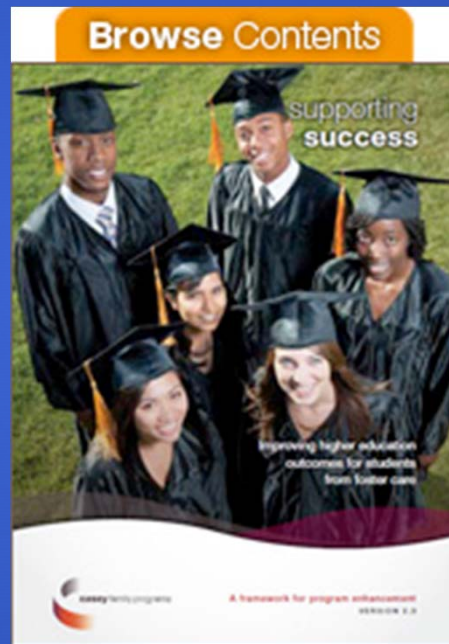
# Unique Issues

- **Distractions and thoughts of home**

- **Sadness about family separation**

- **Concerns about siblings and parents**

- **Difficulty adjusting to new foster family and school**

- **Coping with multiple losses**

- **Recovering from abuse and neglect**

# The importance of connection is amplified for alumni of foster care

- Reasons for disconnection
  - dropping out of school
  - running away from their homes, foster care placements, rehabilitations, and detention centers;
  - failing to take part in societal experiences, such as getting a job, spending time with friends, and joining clubs.

- Lack of consistency or permanency in their family situations means a lack of mentoring and adult guidance.

- Many youth with disabilities can end up feeling isolated, lonely, and even rejected by societal experiences.

# 79% of high school students in foster care have college aspirations

- 12 to 18 months post emancipation

  - only 55% had graduated from high school

  - only 9% had entered college and

  - 37% had not obtained a diploma or a GED

# Poor Transition Outcomes

22% homelessness rate

33% have no health insurance

Only 43% are employed

## Less Likely to go to college

- 20% go to college
- Only 5% complete college

## High pregnancy Rates

- 50% of females have been pregnant by the age of 19
  - Compared to 20% of non-foster peers

## Criminal Activity

- 38% have been arrested by the age of 19
  - Compared to 7% of non-foster peers

# Systems perspective

- **School and special education system**

- **Child welfare system & foster care system**
  - **Dependency court system**

- **Health systems**
  - **Mental health system most likely**

- **Juvenile Justice System?**

# Many, Many Examples of System Barriers

- There is almost no alignment of IDEA's IEP transition plan with the transition plan required by the public child welfare system for foster youth

- Coordination between public education and public child welfare is crucial for ensuring that youth with disabilities who are also in foster care receive the assistance and services they need for successful transition.

- Example: Independent Living Goals must be emphasized about all else.

# Content Analysis: PscyInfo

| Search Terms |
|:---:|
| • Rehabilitation Counseling |
| • Transition/School to Work |
| • Foster Care |
| • Disability |

| 25 Peer-Reviewed Results |
|:---:|
| • Social Work/Interdisciplinary Journals (16) |
| • Developmental Disability (3) |
| • Education (3) |
| • Medical (3) |

# Transition Activities May . . .

- Decreasing hopelessness

- Reducing health-risk behaviors

- Enhancing relationships with parental figures

- Increasing school commitment

# Common barriers post-secondary educational attainments for students with disabilities

- Deficits in study skills such as test preparation, note-taking, and listening comprehension

- Problems with organizational skills

- Difficulties with social interaction

- Deficits in specific academic areas, with reading and written composition being the most frequent

- Low self-esteem

- Higher school dropout rates

# National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth
## *Negotiating the Curves Toward Employment: A Guide About Youth Involved in the Foster Care System.   2007*

### All Youth Need

- mental and/or physical health services
- transportation
- tutoring
- financial planning and management
- post-program supports through structured arrangements in postsecondary institutions and adult service agencies
- connections to other services and opportunities

### Youth with Disabilities May Also Need

- appropriate assistive technologies
- community orientation and mobility training
- exposure to post-program supports (e.g., independent living centers)
- personal assistance services (e.g., interpreters)
- benefits-planning counseling

### Youth in Foster Care May Also Need

- opportunities to obtain a driver's license
- library card, voter registration, birth certificate, or medical records
- adults who can serve as adult systems "navigators"
- transitional and long-term housing
- safety information for personal relationships and independent living
- access to financial aid opportunities for college
- parenting information and childcare
- information on health care
- connections to municipalities
- foster care caseworkers making connections in work and community on behalf of these youth

# Role of the rehabilitation counselor?

We know that youth who experience a caring relationship with an adult are better equipped with the skills necessary to:  combat the risk factors in their environment, and achieve at levels higher than expected levels.

# Factors that Promote Resilience

- Extended family or support systems in the community that encourage trust

- Autonomy and initiative

- Positive role models (caring neighbors, teachers, elder mentors, youth workers, peers) that reinforce and reward the child's competencies

(Werner, 1995; Masten, 1994; Werner & Smith, 1992; Carlson & Sroufe, 1995).

- Good communication and problem solving skills

- The ability to recruit substitute caregivers

- Having a talent or hobby that is valued by their elders or peers

- Faith that their own actions can make a positive difference in their lives

# Best Practices Discussion

# Post-Secondary Education Resources

- **Foster Care Independence Act of 1999**
  - This law established the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP), which enables states to provide independent living programs and services to foster youth "aging out" of the foster care system.

- **Educational and Training Vouchers (ETV) Program for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care (2002)**
  - provides education and training funds to those foster youth most likely to be in the system on their 18th birthdays (as well as youth adopted at age 16 or later);
  - youth up to age 23 are eligible so long as they are enrolled in a postsecondary education or training program on their 21st birthday.
  - provides vouchers worth up to $5,000 per student per year for the cost of attending these institutions.

# Resources

- **Youth with Disabilities in the Foster Care System:  Barriers to Success and Proposed Policy Solutions**
  **http://www.ncd.gov/newsroom/publications/2008/FosterCareSystem_Report.html**

- **Casey Family Programs www.casey.org/ToolsandResources**
  - *A Road Map For Learning*
  - *Endless Dreams*
  - *Mythbusting: Breaking Down the Confidentiality and Decision Making Barriers*
  - *It's My Life* Guides

# Resources for Alumni of foster Care

- Foster Club  www.fosterclub.org

- Foster Care Alumni of America www.fostercarealumni.org

- The National Council on Independent Living www.ncil.org

- The National Youth Leadership  www.nyln.org