



July 2012 Newsletter

Aging out of the foster care system in America can be a terrible life sentence – but it doesn't have to be!

You can help.

There are nearly half a million children in the US foster care system today. **Each year, approximately 20,000 "age out"** of the system to live on their own. There simply aren't enough people there to help them, mentor them, adopt them or simply give them a hope for the future. If nothing changes, by the year 2020, more than 300,000 children will age out of the foster care system, and the statistics of what awaits them are grim. **60% end up in a federally funded homeless shelter because they have no place to go.**

Having reached the age of maturity, they are **presumed** to be productive, self-reliant and self-sufficient. We do not have these expectations of adolescents who grow up under the best of circumstances. But we insist that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people make the transition alone and unsupported. Already burdened by their childhood experiences of abuse, neglect or abandonment, these young people leave the foster care system without the knowledge, skills, experience, attitudes, habits, and relationships that will enable them to be productive and connected members of society. They are not equipped to find gainful employment. Many have untreated physical and mental health needs, and no health insurance. Most have no housing options. Some have no immigration status. And none have had the benefit of parental role modes to transmit the expertise needed to negotiate the trials of living on one's own. Without family or any other dependable adults to rely on for assistance, these young people are, not surprisingly, at high risk. *According to studies of young people discharged to themselves in different states:*

1 Peter 5:2 "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve."



12-30% struggled with homelessness
40-63 % did not complete high school
25-55% were unemployed (those employed had average earnings below the poverty level)
30-62% had trouble accessing health care
32-40% were forced to rely on some form of public assistance
50% experience extreme financial hardship
31-42% were arrested
18-26% were incarcerated
40-60% of the young women were pregnant within 12-18 months of leaving foster care



How You Can Help in Imperial County

AB 12 is a new law recently passed that extends foster care to age 20 for now, eventually age 21. At age 18 they can choose to remain in the system or not. If they opt in, they are referred to as non-minor dependents, which means they can't live in group homes or in the foster home they were in. So they are in the foster care system, but have no home. They receive an average of \$750/month as well as Medical benefits and they are required to get their own housing. The only rule is that they can't go back to the home they were removed from. **There is a great need for families to take these young people into their homes.** Generally, how it works is that a family will open up a room and receive an average of \$250/month rent, and the remaining \$500 goes back for spending money for the young person. They are required to be independent – do their own laundry, they can go to IVC, etc., so this can be attractive to families not necessarily feeling up to the full-time care of a younger child. According to Alex Cardenas of CASA, many of these "non-minor dependents" are really good kids who just need someone to give them a chance. If you aren't able to open up your home, there are other ways you can help like volunteering to be a mentor. In fact, **the Bible clearly calls us to mentor and disciple others.** So pray about how you can get involved in the life of a child aging out of the foster care system, and help prevent them from becoming a sad statistic.

Matt. 25:40 "The King will reply 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

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