

# Three Strategies to Enhance Extended Foster Care in Minnesota

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Most young people are neither prepared—nor expected—to be fully self-sufficient by age 18. Young people in foster care are no different and benefit from having support as they transition into adulthood. [Extended foster care](#) provides services and supports to young people ages 18 to 21 while they achieve the important milestones of their young adult years (e.g., educational attainment or career milestones). [Young people who spend time in extended foster care fare better](#) than their peers who did not enter extended foster care.

For our study of extended foster care in Minnesota, **we interviewed 28 Fosters** (see textbox for definition) who are or were eligible for extended foster care about information they received, barriers to care, and benefits from the program. **These Fosters shared three sets of recommendations on enhancing extended foster care in Minnesota.**

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## Start talking about extended foster care early, often, and through multiple channels.

Fosters wanted extended foster care information to be shared more strategically. Although case workers are required to inform Fosters of extended foster care 6 months before their 18th birthday, Fosters felt better informed when they learned about the program earlier and received smaller amounts of information as it became relevant to their lives. Fosters who leave care at age 18 may remain eligible but are unaware of the program.

- **Start sharing information on extended foster care benefits, eligibility, and requirements before Fosters turn 17** and repeatedly present extended foster care information every few months through age 18. This will allow Fosters to understand how their out-of-home placement plan or independent living plan can evolve to reflect the goals of extended foster care.
- **Ensure that all eligible Fosters, even those who leave foster care at age 18, know about extended foster care** as an option up to age 21. Share information through youth-serving providers (e.g., youth centers, advocacy agencies, homeless youth shelters) who may be better connected to Fosters who have left care.

## What Does “Foster” Mean?

People with lived experience in foster care in Minnesota wanted a term that conveyed their time in foster care as part of their identity, no matter their age or whether they were reunited with family, were adopted, or aged out of foster care. Used throughout this fact sheet, the term “Foster” is about inclusion, empowerment, and reclaiming.

- **Provided by the Minnesota Office of the Foster Youth Ombudsperson**

## Minnesota’s Extended Foster Care Program

### Eligibility

- Ages 18 to 21
- In foster care placement immediately before 18th birthday
- Ran away from foster care after age 15

### Enrollment

- Opt-in through a voluntary placement agreement any time before age 21
- Re-entry after exit allowed

### Benefits

- Monthly payments to cover food, housing, personal needs, and basic expenses
- Flexibility to stay in foster care placement or live independently in an approved setting
- Supportive case management and service navigation

### Requirements

Any one of the following:

- Enrolled in secondary, post-secondary, or vocational education
- Enrolled in a workforce training program
- Employed at least 80 hours per month
- Unable to meet other requirements due to medical condition

## 2

## Streamline enrollment and service delivery so Fosters can focus on their education, career, and self-sufficiency goals.

Fosters identified program awareness, case worker capacity, and difficulty with payments as barriers to access and use. Automatic enrollment and better accessibility and transparency around monthly payments can increase Fosters' access to extended foster care and reduce instances in which case workers may not provide Fosters with needed information.

- **Shift to an automatic enrollment/opt-out model instead of requiring Fosters to actively enroll**, while also ensuring that Fosters have adequate time and autonomy to consider whether they can or want to meet the eligibility requirements.
- **Ensure that every case worker has a comprehensive list of available services in their county or Tribe** so access to services is not limited by an individual caseworker's ability to find all service options nor by a Foster's knowledge of what to ask for.
- **Standardize the use of direct deposit across the state** to remove inconsistent county-level policies and reduce payment delays due to slow traditional mail, onerous requirements to submit paperwork or pick up checks in person, and inconsistent bank policies on paper check deposits.
- **Ensure that every Foster has a bank account in their name** so they may choose to receive their foster care maintenance payment directly.
- **Inform Fosters directly about their monthly payment amount**, even for Fosters who live in traditional foster care placements in which the payment is issued to their current guardian or caregiver.



*I wish it was [automatic enrollment with the option to] opt-out because when opt-in [is required], it feels more almost like extended foster care is a grant or scholarship rather than help. Where if opt-out, it would feel more like okay, this is something they recommend, obviously they want me to be in it."*

**- 22-year-old woman who entered extended foster care at age 18**

## 3

## Support Fosters' journey to self-sufficiency through supportive, nonjudgmental conversations that prepare Fosters for life as young adults.

Without effective case management, extended foster care may only delay an abrupt transition to independence by three years. Fosters noted the importance of case workers meeting them where they are in their planning goals.

- **Encourage case workers to more frequently ask Fosters about the quality of the case worker-Foster relationship** to maintain warm, trusting connections with the Fosters they serve.
- **Ensure that case workers support Fosters' financial literacy goals** with opportunities to practice making and maintaining a budget, understanding credit cards, and building wealth through savings and investments.
- **Encourage case workers to discuss life plans after extended foster care with Fosters**—especially about how Fosters will continue to meet their financial obligations, and to better prepare them to transition out of extended foster care and into self-sufficiency at age 21.



*I just wish [my case worker] had been a little more involved in my life [and] in trying to help me. Like, I wish I could have learned about, like, financial planning, how to create a budget, what credit is ... different ways of making money ... driving [practice] options, a [driver's] license ... I didn't know it wasn't supposed to be that way until hearing other people's experiences years later."*

**-25-year-old woman who entered extended foster care at age 18**

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