



NEBRASKA  
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## **LB 216: Growing Healthy, Productive Adults**

*What research tells us about young adults' need for continued support*

**Young adults are no longer adolescents, but they are not yet adults.**

Over the past two decades, neuroscientists, psychologists, sociologists, and other scholars have increasingly called for the recognition of a new phase of life between adolescence and full-fledged adulthood. This life stage, defined as “emerging adulthood,” begins at age 18 and continues through the 20s.<sup>i</sup>

Research on brain development supports this finding, with neuroscience now clearly showing that **the parts of the brain responsible for more complex tasks like decision-making, reasoning, judgment, and impulse control continue developing into the 20s.**<sup>ii, iii, iv</sup>

Simply reaching Nebraska’s age of majority does not mean that a young person suddenly wakes up as a fully functioning adult. Rather, the research shows that these young people are neither developmentally nor socially ready for the full responsibilities of adulthood.

**Young people need continued support in order to make a successful transition into independence and self-sufficiency.**

When family is unavailable or unable to offer this support, programs like LB 216 have proven to be effective in helping young adults start off on the right foot.

**Young adults who have experienced trauma are likely to be even less ready for independence than their peers.**

Young peoples’ experiences during their first few years of life have a major impact on their brain’s development. **The trauma that occurs as a result of abuse, neglect, or separation (e.g. removal into the foster care system) can alter and, in extreme cases, even stunt the development of the brain.**<sup>v</sup>

If a youth experienced severe trauma in his/her childhood, he/she may be biologically 18, 19, or 20 years old but function emotionally at a much younger age, such as 13 or 14.

Most youth who enter the foster care system do so because of some form of abuse and/or neglect, and all of them at least experience the trauma of being separated from their families and uprooted from their lives. This can and does have an impact – not only on brain development, but also on youths’ abilities to prepare for independence.

If a young person spends their adolescence in an institutional setting (e.g. a group home or emergency shelter) or bouncing from foster home to foster home, they are very unlikely to have opportunities to learn and practice the skills, behaviors, and competencies they will need to successfully live on their own.

## **As a whole, youth in foster care have less support and face more barriers than their peers in the transition to adulthood.**

Unlike their peers, older youth who age out of foster care are often unable to turn to family for the support they need. Current services are sparse, difficult to access, and ultimately do not go far enough. Many of these young people don't have even one permanent, responsible, and supportive adult to lean on in times of crisis.

**Outcomes for those who have been in foster care provide a sobering reality check about what happens when we push young people out into the world without adequate support.** Research shows that young people who age out of foster care are at a higher risk of experiencing:<sup>vi</sup>

- Mental health problems
- Victimization
- Social isolation
- Homelessness
- Unemployment
- Low wages
- Incarceration
- Young parenthood
- Reliance on public assistance
- Relationship/marital problems
- Health issues
- Criminal activity

Young adults aging out of foster care have the same needs and deserve the same opportunities as all other 19- and 20-year-olds. **Passing LB 216 and implementing the Young Adult Voluntary Services and Support Act will remove barriers to success by ensuring that they have access to the support all young adults need.**

**To learn more about the unique needs and challenges of youth aging out of foster care, watch a short video of Gary Stangler, Executive Director of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, at: <http://ow.ly/j0S1y>**

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<sup>i</sup> Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55, 469-480. Available at: [www.jeffreyarnett.com/articles/ARNETT\\_Emerging\\_Adulthood\\_theory.pdf](http://www.jeffreyarnett.com/articles/ARNETT_Emerging_Adulthood_theory.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. (2011). *The adolescent brain: New research and its implications for young people transitioning from foster care*. Available at: [jimcaseyyouth.org/adolescent-brain%E2%80%94new-research-and-its-implications-young-people-transitioning-foster-care](http://jimcaseyyouth.org/adolescent-brain%E2%80%94new-research-and-its-implications-young-people-transitioning-foster-care)

<sup>iii</sup> Lenroot, R. K., & Giedd, J. N. (2006). Brain development in children and adolescents: Insights from anatomical magnetic resonance imaging. *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews*, 30, 718-729. Available at: [www.wisspd.org/htm/atpracguides/training/progmaterials/ch980-09/bdca.pdf](http://www.wisspd.org/htm/atpracguides/training/progmaterials/ch980-09/bdca.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> Lebel, C. & Beaulieu, C. (2011). Longitudinal development of human brain wiring continues from childhood into adulthood. *The Journal of Neuroscience*, 31, 10937-10947. Available at: [www.jneurosci.org/content/31/30/10937.full.pdf](http://www.jneurosci.org/content/31/30/10937.full.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway (2009). *Issue Brief: Understanding the effects of maltreatment on brain development*. Available at: [www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/issue\\_briefs/brain\\_development/brain\\_development.pdf](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/issue_briefs/brain_development/brain_development.pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> Courtney, M. (2005). Youth aging out of foster care. Network on Transitions to Adulthood Policy Brief. Available at: [transitions.s410.sureserver.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/courtney-foster-care.pdf](http://transitions.s410.sureserver.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/courtney-foster-care.pdf)