

## Nebraska Older Youth Stakeholders



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## Nebraska Older Youth Stakeholders, Child Welfare Advocates, Elected Officials Launch Milestone Initiative for Older Youth in Foster Care

*Success Beyond 18 Campaign Says “Time is Now” to Improve the Odds for Young People  
Transitioning from Foster Care to Adulthood*

WASHINGTON, D.C. (May 6, 2013) – Today on Capitol Hill, a collaborative group of youth-serving agencies, the **Nebraska Older Youth Stakeholders**, played an integral role in launching *Success Beyond 18*, a national campaign to create a better path for young people transitioning from foster care to adulthood. The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative–Nebraska Older Youth Stakeholders’ national partner and the leader of *Success Beyond 18*–joined The Honorable Jack Markell, Governor of Delaware and current chair of the National Governors Association, legislators, child welfare experts, and young people in foster care from around the country to kick off the campaign.

Approximately 26,000 individuals “age out” of the foster care system each year. In Nebraska, the roughly 300 youth who age out often fail to graduate from high school and experience high rates of homelessness, early and unplanned pregnancy, poverty, unemployment and incarceration.

“The goal of our collaborative work is to ensure that no young person leaves foster care without a supportive family and the opportunities they need to help them succeed in work, school, and life,” said Jennifer Skala, Vice President of Community Impact at Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, a collaboration partner. “We’re excited to be part of this important campaign to help Nebraska and others make this goal a reality.”

“We have an obligation as a community to ensure that youth have a system of formal and informal supports as they transition to adult life,” said Sarah Helvey, Nebraska Appleseed Child Welfare Program Director. “Unfortunately, too many of our youth in foster care are forced to go it alone when they age out. I’m excited about Success Beyond 18, because it will help us make progress in realizing the enormous potential of our youth.”

“We have witnessed the resilience of young people in our community. New brain research shows that the brain does not stop developing at age six but continues to develop during adolescence. This means we have a second chance to help young people overcome adversity, and we cannot waste that opportunity,” said Rosey Higgs, Associate Vice President of Project Everlast, a program that helps foster youth transition to independent living.

At the launch, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative also released a white paper documenting the urgency and opportunity for reforms needed to improve outcomes for older youth in foster care; a video PSA calling on states to take action; and a new report detailing the potential cost savings to taxpayers for acting now to increase support for young people transitioning from foster care to adulthood. Materials are available at [www.jimcaseyyouth.org](http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org).

Gary Stangler, Executive Director of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative said, “Any parent of a teenager knows, their brain hasn’t fully developed yet. They’re not ready to be on their own without the support and help that families can provide for kids.” He continued, “This is a solvable problem. We’re trying to get the states to extend foster care to 21. They think right away it is going to cost them money, but the fact is, it will save them a lot of money.”

The data indicate that for every young person who ages out of foster care, the social costs incurred as a result (through lost wages, public assistance, and jail time) equal \$300,000 over that young person’s lifetime – or \$7.8 billion in total costs to the U.S. every year. In 2012, 307 people aged out of the Nebraska foster care system, and could end up costing the state more than \$90 million, according to a Jim Casey Foundation Cost Avoidance study.

“By making changes today to improve the lives of young people in foster care, we will all see the benefits, and sooner than you think – through a more productive workforce, fewer unplanned pregnancies, lower health care costs, and reduced crime,” said Gary Stangler, Executive Director for the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. “States are increasing their focus on the needs of young people beyond age 18. Now is the time to help them do it right and ensure that these kids are getting the same opportunities for success as their peers.”

While on Capitol Hill, Skala met with staff of U.S. Rep. Lee Terry, Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, Rep. Adrian Smith, and Sen. Deb Fischer to update them on Nebraska’s work to advance opportunities for older youth in foster care.

To see photos from the launch event and track progress of *Success Beyond 18*, visit [www.jimcaseyyouth.org](http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org) and follow Success Beyond 18 by “liking” the Jim Casey Initiative’s Facebook page and following the Jim Casey Initiative on Twitter.

#### **MEDIA RESOURCES:**

FOR BROADCASTERS, VOICER (GARY STANGLER) AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD AT:

<http://www.broadcastnewsresource.com/news/improving-odds-older-youth-foster-care>

YOUTUBE VIDEO on Adolescent Brain Development:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVOX1dZ1J6s>

PHOTOS AVAILABLE AT:

[https://www.dropbox.com/sh/gogbbq4zoord0a0/Fikgv\\_Ddhm?m](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/gogbbq4zoord0a0/Fikgv_Ddhm?m)

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#### **About Nebraska Older Youth Stakeholders**

Nebraska Older Youth Stakeholders is a collaboration of youth leaders, state government, advocacy groups, charitable organizations, and community service agencies united to support and improve outcomes for older youth in the Nebraska foster care system. For more information, contact Kelly Medwick at [kmedwick@nebraskachildren.org](mailto:kmedwick@nebraskachildren.org) or Jeff Sheldon at [jsheldon@neappleseed.org](mailto:jsheldon@neappleseed.org).

#### **About Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative**

Founded in 2001, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative is committed to improving the lives of young people transitioning from foster care to adulthood. For more information, visit [www.jimcaseyyouth.org](http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org).