


## "It's scary out there":

Families and youth with mental health needs speak about transitioning to adulthood



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## Who We Are

- State Chapter of the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
- Funded by the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and Baltimore Mental Health Systems

[www.mdcoalition.org](http://www.mdcoalition.org)

## Our Mission

- To Build a family-driven network of information and support
- To improve services in all systems of care for children, youth and families

## *Listening and Learning From Transition-Age Youth and Their Families*


## Developmental Priorities for TAY



- Independence
- Friends
- Romantic relationships
- Fitting in with peers
- Risk-taking behaviors

## TAY with mental health needs

- Age 16-24 is especially difficult for youth with mental health needs
  - Emotional/behavioral difficulties impair abilities for successful transition to adulthood



## Parents' Transitioning Roles

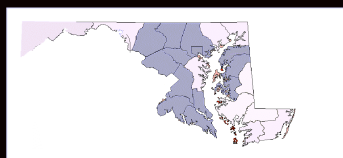
- Parents' roles change as youth transition into adulthood
  - Protection vs. letting go
- Transition is especially difficult for parents of children with mental health needs
  - Greater vulnerability - need for more extensive support
- Parents are no longer automatically included in treatment planning

## Recruiting and Sample

- Recruitment
  - Coalition email distribution list: 900 individuals, organizations, providers, state and county agencies
- Compensation
  - Snacks and beverages were provided
  - A \$20 stipend was paid to each family and youth participating
- Sample
  - 33 youth, 40 family members
  - Racial and socioeconomic diversity

## Geographic Distribution

- Focus groups held in 6 central locations across the state
- Participants represented 11 of 23 counties and Baltimore city



## Focus groups asked about seven life domains

- Housing
- Employment
- Education
- Life skills
- Health care
- Finances/benefits
- Social Life

## Themes: 6 Identified Needs

- ☞ Transition preparation
- ☞ Life skills and social life
- ☞ Employment
- ☞ Housing
- ☞ Education
- ☞ Mental health treatment



## 1. Transition Preparation

- No identified place for families and youth to receive coordinated information
  - Applying for benefits
  - Housing
  - Education
  - Employment



## 2. Life Skills and Social Life

- Often a gap between cognitive development and social and emotional development

- Establish friends
- Interact socially
- Perform daily living tasks



## 3. Employment

- Barriers to obtaining employment
  - Employment services are not tailored to mental health population
  - Transportation difficulties
- Low-paying jobs
  - No benefits or sufficient income
- Barriers to maintaining employment
  - Transportation difficulties
  - Frequent absences
  - Poor performance

**DREAMS**

*"I want to finish high school and go to college for child development to open my own day care center."*

*"I want to be a cartoonist or video game designer."*

*"I want to be an Emergency Medical Technician."*

*"I want to start a career in nursing."*

*"I want to be a barber."*

*"I want to go to college."*

## Where are the Young Adults Working?

- |                  |                  |
|------------------|------------------|
| ■ Fast Food      | ■ Pharmacy Tech  |
| ■ Summer camp    | ■ Bussing Tables |
| ■ Shoveling snow | ■ Construction   |
| ■ Bank teller    | ■ Landscaping    |
| ■ Auto detailing |                  |

## 4. Housing



- 65% of youth were still living with their families
  - Many parents feel hopeless about the possibility of independent living
- Independent living options are limited by:
  - Finances
  - Psychosocial concerns
  - Availability of programs
  - Lack of other options

## 5. Education

- High school and post high school education services are not tailored to mental health population
  - High school transition plans not geared to further education
  - Need for flexibility in transition plans
  - Greater support from Community Colleges



## 6. Mental Health Treatment



- TAY with mental health needs fail to continue treatment and stop taking medications
  - Termination of health care coverage
  - Differing ages of transition from agencies
  - Desire to stop treatment
  - At age 18 parents are not legally permitted to be involved in treatment

## Policy Recommendations

- ☞ Ensure health care coverage
- ☞ Align the definition of TAY across state agencies
- ☞ Build a system of care for TAY
  - Youth-driven and family-guided
  - Individualized approach
  - Funding for vocational, educational and residential services
  - Interagency coordination
- ☞ Reevaluate organizational structure within the Mental Hygiene Administration

"I told my mom, I'm never going to leave. I'm going to live under my bed until I die because, I'm not kidding, it's scary out there."