

Housing, transportation, jobs continue to be biggest issues for Orlando-area foster youth

Foster youth in metropolitan Orlando face continuing challenges to find stable housing, reliable transportation and meaningful jobs, according to a groundbreaking City of Life Foundation review of Florida's Independent Living Checklist data for 2007-2010.

The City of Life's review finds, for example, that 25 percent of former foster youth in metro Orlando – aged 18-22 – reported in 2010 that they had moved three or more times in the previous 12 months. That figure was unchanged from 2009, reflecting persistent issues confronting former foster youth in establishing stable lives after turning 18 while “in care.”

The Independent Living data, compiled from questionnaires filled out by current and former foster youth, has been published annually on a statewide basis since 2007. The City of Life's review of this published data marks the first time ever that the data has been broken out for Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties to give local leaders a snapshot of how this population of at-risk youth are faring.

The City of Life Foundation advocates for children's issues in Central Florida and focuses specifically on the issue of foster care. City of Life estimates that approximately 150 children each year in metro Orlando turn 18 while in foster care. The Foundation serves in an ombudsman capacity to coordinate and facilitate among the various agencies in that serve foster youth while also seeking to establish measures of accountability that will improve outcomes for children “in care.”

Among the other findings revealed in the City of Life's data review:

- In Orange and Osceola counties, only 32 percent of former foster youth (aged 18-22) reported in 2010 that they have reliable transportation to work, a figure that declined from 34 percent the previous year. The balance report having no reliable transportation to work. In Seminole County, 33 percent of former foster youth reported having reliable transportation in 2010, a small improvement over the 32 percent reported in 2009.
- In 2010, only 4 percent of youth in foster care (age 16 and 17) in Orange and Osceola counties reported having a part-time job. Child experts believe that the experience of having a part-time job before turning 18 increases a young person's likelihood of finding stable employment after turning 18.
- Among former foster youth (aged 18-22), only 17 percent reported having a job in 2010, a decline from 22 percent in 2009.

City of Life is distributing its review to elected officials, opinion leaders and other child advocates in Central Florida. A full presentation of the data can be found by clicking on the link below.

Gerry Glynn, a City of Life board member and a professor of law at Barry University, said the data revealed in the City of Life's review, will be an important tool for policy makers and child-welfare practitioners in Central Florida.

“Somebody once said: ‘You can't manage what you can't measure,’ and so we really have not been able to ‘peel the onion’ of foster care in metro Orlando until now,” Glynn said. “This data will help us tell the

story of what's happening to foster youth in Central Florida and hopefully guide us all to better outcomes.”

McDonalds hosts Youth Advisory Board

Congratulations to McDonald's franchisee Oerther Foods of Orlando for agreeing to host meetings of Orange County's Youth Advisory Board, a panel of foster youth charged with advising local agencies on issues facing youth “in care.”

An agreement to host the meetings at Oerther's South Michigan Avenue store, located next to the SODO development in south Orlando, was brokered by the City of Life Foundation. Oerther Foods agreed to work with Intervention Services, Inc. and CBC of Central Florida to make meeting space and refreshments available.

Oerther Foods is one of Orlando's largest McDonald's franchisees with 25 restaurants. Among its locations is the world's largest McDonald's at the intersection of Sand Lake Road and International Drive. For more information about Oerther Foods, visit www.mcfun.com.

City of Life helps create volunteer opportunities for foster youth

City of Life is working with the Heart of Florida United Way, Intervention Services Inc. and CBC of Central Florida to create volunteer opportunities for foster youth in metropolitan Orlando.

Child experts believe that when youth in foster care get the opportunity to serve in meaningful volunteer opportunities at non-profit agencies, it broadens their horizons and increases their chances for success after they turn 18. As volunteers, foster youth learn job and communication skills and gain job-related experience.

Join with City of Life to help youth age out of foster care

City of Life is looking for volunteers interested in making a difference in the lives of foster youth in metropolitan Orlando. We seek interested volunteers, advisors and committee members who are interested helping this at-risk population.

For more information about serving on the City of Life board, please contact Executive Director Allan Chernoff at alchernoff39@gmail.com.