

What the disability community needs to know

About youth in foster care with disabilities

This brief aims to provide information for those working in the disability community who may be unfamiliar with the needs and concerns of children with disabilities in foster care waiting for permanency, including adoption.

For many children and youth with disabilities, one of the greatest assets they have is a strong parent or relative advocate...but for children in foster care or congregate care, there is often no one who takes on that advocate role in their life.

Foster youth with disabilities who “age out” of the foster care system without a permanent family arrangement such as adoption or guardianship have higher risk of poor adult outcomes (i.e. unemployment, involvement with the correctional system, homelessness, substance use and abuse, use of public assistance) than their peers without disabilities.



You may not know

Children with disabilities are 1.7-3.4 more likely to be maltreated than children without disabilities.

Nearly 50% of children/youth in foster care receive special education services.

80% of children/youth in foster care have chronic medical conditions.

School-aged children with disabilities are 2.1 times more likely to be in foster care.

Approximately 14% of school-aged children in Minnesota receive special education services.

Although many children and youth in foster care have one or more disabilities, they may never have had a parent or caregiver talk to them about their disability. As a result, many may DENY or MINIMIZE the disability

What do children and youth in foster care need from the disability community?

- **A higher need for communication across systems**, which may include a county child welfare agency case worker, foster parents or staff at a group home or residential treatment center, teachers and school administrators, therapists, doctors, guardian ad litem, and/or attorney or other court personnel.
- **Targeted training for foster and adoptive parents on disability services and advocacy** to broaden the pool of knowledgeable resource families for youth in care.
- An understanding that a history of abuse, neglect, trauma and loss may impact a child's ability to accept their disability
- Targeted services for youth in preparation for transitioning to independent living should they emancipate from foster care with no family members or committed adults to fall back on or help advocate for them.



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Adoption is the priority for waiting youth

The alternative is to help create meaningful connections and relationships to committed adults while youth are still under guardianship. This is not about funding – this is about helping youth develop a social network who will be there for them as they transition to young adulthood.

