



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Contact:** Barbara Ray  
312-624-7642

## Foster Care System is Failing Many Young People as They Make the Transition into Adulthood

*New Book Details Risks Confronting Foster Youth and The Child Welfare System's Inadequate Response*

November xx, 2005 – The child welfare system is failing to meet the needs of teenagers in foster care as they “age out” of the system and begin what is often a particularly difficult transition into adult lives, according to a new analysis being released this month.

The study of foster youth entering adulthood is one chapter of a major new research collection, “On Your Own Without a Net: The Transition to Adulthood for Vulnerable Populations,” a product of [The MacArthur Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood](#).

Research cited in the book makes clear the challenges confronting youths as they leave foster care.

- Youth leaving foster care are more likely to have mental health problems, be involved in crime and are less likely to be employed than their peers.
- Thirty-seven percent of foster youth aged 17 to 20 had not received a high school diploma or GED.
- Twelve percent of that population reported being homeless at least once since leaving foster care.

“One would be hard pressed to find an adolescent population in more need of help during the transition to independence than those approaching adulthood in the child welfare system,” the authors write in “Without a Net.” “Too often, when the state has stepped in to be their parent it has failed to do justice to this solemn responsibility.”

The analysis, by Mark Courtney and Darcy Hughes Heuring, outlines the inadequacy and offers some needed corrections of some governmental programs designed to assist young people leaving foster care. For example, a young person who becomes too old to stay in foster care and must find his own place to live can receive, on average, only about \$700 *per year* in governmental assistance for housing.

The analysis suggests that public institutions must do more to provide health insurance, mental health care and housing for young people leaving foster care. Research shows, for example, that young adults are far less likely to receive mental health treatment after they age out of foster care.

“When the state removes young people from the care of their parents, it becomes the parent,” Courtney said. “No responsible parent would abandon their parental responsibilities precisely at the point where a young person is beginning the transition to adulthood, but most states do just that.”

“These young people have many needs but few resources to support them,” Courtney added. “Many need mental health treatment but the child welfare system typically stops providing that help when the young people reach the age of 18. Cutting off access to treatment during a very trying period is the wrong thing to be doing with this population.”

Mark Courtney is director of the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. Darcy Hughes Heuring is a former researcher at the Chapin Hall Center and is now a doctoral student at Northwestern University.

“[On Your Own Without a Net](#),” which is being published by the University of Chicago Press, will be a valuable resource for policy makers, elected officials, advocates, researchers, journalists and members of the public interested in society’s response to the overwhelming needs of youth leaving foster care and other special situations.

The book is part of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Mental Health and Development, a series of more than 20 policy- and research-oriented books published since 1987.

The book is available at many book stores and can be ordered through the [University of Chicago Press](#), at 1-800-621-8476.

“On Your Own Without a Net: The Transition to Adulthood for Vulnerable Populations,”  
edited by D. Wayne Osgood, E. Michael Foster, Constance Flanagan and Gretchen R. Ruth.  
ISBN: 0-226-63783-2.

*The Research Network on the Transitions to Adulthood examines the changing nature of early adulthood, and the policies, programs, and institutions that support young people as they move into adulthood. Significant cultural, economic, and demographic changes have occurred in the span of a few generations, and these changes are challenging youths’ psychological and social development. Some are adapting well, but many others are floundering as they prepare to leave home, finish school, find jobs, and start families.*

*The network is both documenting these cultural and social shifts, and exploring how families, government, and social institutions are shaping the course of young adult’s development. The Network is funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and chaired by University of Pennsylvania sociologist Frank Furstenberg.*

###