



## POLICY BLUEPRINT 2020-2024\* SUMMARY

### POLICY PRIORITY AREAS

#### YOUNG PEOPLE IN SYSTEMS MUST HAVE NORMAL EXPERIENCES

Youth placed in systems are often denied the chance to participate in the everyday activities essential to the process of maturing into adults. This may include working an after-school job, dating, and learning to drive. Agencies and caregivers must commit to facilitating age-appropriate experiences for youth in systems so that they can achieve the key markers of child and adolescent development.

#### YOUNG PEOPLE AGING OUT OF SYSTEMS MUST BE BETTER PREPARED TO TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD AND HAVE ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUCCESS

When older youth living in foster care or detention facilities end their formal ties with systems, generally at age 18, they face high risks of becoming homeless; giving up on their education; being unemployed and relying on public services or benefits to survive; and more. Young people must be better prepared for this journey.

#### YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE MUST EXPERIENCE PERMANENCE

Legal permanence for youth in care should include a permanent legal connection to family, such as reunification with birth parents, adoption, kinship care, or legal guardianship. However, physical and relational permanence are equally important. Physical permanence is having a home or a place to be; relational permanence is having a relationship or connection with a caring adult (e.g., maternal and paternal kin, teachers, neighbors, former foster parents).

#### CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE MUST RECEIVE HIGH QUALITY ADVOCACY

All children and young people removed from their homes and placed in foster care deserve and are entitled to safety, permanency, and well-being. In order to achieve this, they must receive high-quality advocacy from all parties within the child welfare system. This includes having their voices heard, respected, and acted upon throughout the process.

#### CHILD AND YOUTH-SERVING SYSTEMS MUST MEET THE NEEDS OF THOSE THEY SERVE

State agencies need to work together to ensure that they are coordinating efforts and creating conditions for strong, thriving families.

*See reverse for more information.*

*\*Updated September 2019*

NMCCAN's Policy Blueprint was created, and is continually updated, in partnership with young people impacted by foster care, the juvenile justice system, and/or homelessness. Authentic engagement of young people was the foundation from which this document was created. We supported young people in an extensive planning process to identify the areas of greatest priority and then helped walk the recommendations into this blueprint.

Proposed policy interventions are intended to provide possible state solutions within each priority area. Of course, some solutions might impact multiple priority areas. While not stated within the individual priority areas, racial equity is an important lens through which each policy area must be examined, and data needs to be disaggregated and analyzed. Systems must be accountable for treating children and youth equitably.

## WHY IS THIS POLICY BLUEPRINT NEEDED?

Young people aging out of foster care endure poor outcomes with high social costs. National data provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation shows that by their 19th birthdays:

- 1 out of 3 experienced homelessness
- 3 out of 5 have not obtained their high school diploma/GED
- 2 out of 3 are unemployed

Similarly, young people who are impacted by the juvenile justice system or homelessness may face the same challenges. They often have a history of abuse, neglect, or trauma, and have few healthy social connections. Most mainstream initiatives are unable to address the complex barriers and challenges faced by those who have experienced systems.

To address these outcomes, NMCAN's policy work is more than just advocating for legislation. We are building a movement where young people and partners come together to build community, promote equity, and lead change. We are committed to working in partnership with young people to ensure that they have a respected voice and full participation in the development of the programs and policies designed to support them, and to confirm that existing laws and policies are meaningfully and consistently implemented statewide.

## PRIORITIES FOR 2020

- Ensure all young people age 18 to 21 have a safe and supportive home. We seek to expand supports available to young people who aged out of foster care to their peers who are impacted by juvenile justice or homelessness.
- Support the continuation and increased use of state funds specifically for transition-aged youth across the state.
- Increase the foster youth tax credit so more employers will access it.
- Continue to work with state agencies and administrators to ensure meaningful implementation of state and federal laws and improve practice in systems.

## HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

Contact Director of Policy and Advocacy Arika Sánchez at 505-217-0220 ext. 1003 or [arika.sanchez@nmcan.org](mailto:arika.sanchez@nmcan.org) to learn how you can help improve systems for New Mexico's young people.

## ABOUT NMCAN

NMCAN partners with young people to build community, promote equity, and lead change. Learn more at [NMCAN.org](http://NMCAN.org).

Image credit: Jonathan Cabada

“Research and federal requirements strongly support the importance of integrating family and youth voice into all aspects of child welfare system design and operation. The magnitude, gravity and urgency of this need is reinforced by the stories of parents and youth with lived child welfare experience and the continued poor outcomes we are achieving as a system across the country. Listening to families and youth and acting on the information they provide about what would be most helpful to keep them healthy and strong is a critical first step to correcting our course. Acting on the information and knowledge that families and youth provide is critical to reshaping child welfare in the United States into a system that truly strengthens families.”  
—Administration for Children and Families, 2019.  
“ACYF-CB-IM-19-03.”