

TRANSIENCY

THE STORY

Elizabeth was brought into care by age 3. She was placed in a foster home and was relatively happy there. When she was four she went to sleep one evening in her room and woke up the next day in an entirely different home. She was very upset and cried for about an hour before anyone came to talk to her about the move and why she was moved. They believed that she was so young that she wouldn't remember the move and that it wouldn't affect her. As a young woman today of 22, she still vividly remembers the confusion and the hurt. She was told that the reason she was moved in the middle of the night was to spare the foster mom and dad from seeing her cry when she left.

Youth in care have coined the term "placement bouncing" for the phenomenon of constant moving from group home to group home or foster home to foster home. In our organizational history, we have heard a number of horror stories such as moving 11 times in one year, changing social workers 8 times in a year.

The detrimental effects of transiency can be seen in the lack of stable personal relationships and the inability to trust. Without a stable home environment it is difficult to build stability in outside aspects of the youth's life. This lack of stability affects their ability to feel safe and secure and develop personal attachments that may ward off emotional and behavioral problems over time. The cyclical nature of perceived rejection, acceptance and rejection affects a youth's ability to form secure attachments that would act as a protective factor. This detrimental effect is also obvious in the research related to school permanency and after care successes.

Each time a youth moves, he or she must readjust to a new foster family or group home setting. The move may also mean a readjustment to a new school or even a new school board. This can take away from the time and attention that they are able to focus on school, both academically and interpersonally. (Who Will Teach Me To Learn, p.5)

There are many reasons that can lead to placement breakdown and moves. There are systemic issues such as mismatched placements, lack of emergency beds, and abuse within the care setting. There are personal reasons that placements break down such as emotional or behavioral problems and lack of support for foster parents and young people.

Frequently children are bounced from service to service, because they have multiple needs and the agency has a limited mandate...Some children move through all these three systems (corrections, child welfare, mental health) according to different professional diagnoses of their problems. Children are frequently adrift in the service system, particularly in foster or institutional care. (To Be On Our Own, p.37)

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Consult with youth regarding their placement options and allow time to prepare to be moved from one placement to the next.
2. Preplan visits with youth and placement option.
3. Show consideration and sensitivity for youth who have to be moved.