

What Happens When You Get Too Old For Foster Care?

Reported by: *Cristina Flores*
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19 Year-old Skylar Goodspeed is the exception among teens who suddenly “Aged-Out” of foster care. Skylar has a job doing maintenance for the county and he has a girlfriend whose family has allowed him to move in. “If I didn’t have my girlfriend with her family, I’d be homeless right now,” said Skylar who first went into foster care at age 13.

On Tuesday at 1p.m. Salt Lake County Youth Government and other government leaders will gather at Cottonwood High School to discuss how to build temporary housing for teens like Skylar who are too old for foster care and suddenly forced into independence. The public is invited. “If we could have an apartment complex for youth, it would be easier ‘cause they wouldn’t have to go through troubles,” added Skylar speaking from experience. Skylar said his mother, who still struggles with drug addiction, still can’t take care of him. His biological father only recently made contact with him for the first time through “Facebook”.

But Skylar is fortunate. As he approached 18 he was enrolled by his mentors in a transitional housing program which helped him learn some important life skills before moving out. Most kids don’t end up on that path. “They couch surf, work odd jobs, they donate a lot of plasma. A third of them are on the street,” said Marianne Hough who is director for Utah Youth Mentor Project. The group pairs “aged-out” foster kids with a group of mentors who can advise them as they live independently. Hough believes kids need transitional housing where mentors, advisors and social workers can all be available to teach the teens necessary skills to help them live on their own. “How do you grocery shop, chose a melon? How do you have a bank account?” said Hough of the challenges faced by teens like Skylar.

Hough said kids who grow up in foster care, often leave the system deficient in life skills and support. “They don’t have someone to call in time of crisis.” This year, she said about 250 local teens will age out of foster care and will have no place to go, no one to turn to. In Skylar’s case, he had nobody to teach him to drive. The law didn’t allow foster parents to accompany kids to get a driver’s license. That law recently changed. Skylar just got his license this summer. He bought his first car for 100 dollars.

Hough would like to see an apartment complex devoted to teens just like Skylar - A place where they can live and have someone hold their hand, while they find jobs and homes of their own. She said San Francisco recently opened such an apartment complex big enough to house 600 teens. Right now in Salt Lake County, Hough said teens like Skylar can sign up for rent vouchers to help pay rent. But the teens fall in the back of a long line where others have priority. That means often, the teens wait two years for rent vouchers. “In two years you could be in jail, homeless or even killed,” said Skylar. Skylar has hopes for a better future. “In the future I’d like to have my own house, family, steady job.”
