

**Policy Critique: Fostering Futures**

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## **Policy Critique: Fostering Futures**

Policy critique is essential for enhancing policy effectiveness, promoting accountability, identifying unintended consequences, addressing inequities, and facilitating continual policy improvement. By engaging in policy critique, policy advocates and other stake holders ensure that policies align with societal values, aspirations, and the well-being of the people they aim to serve. Policymaking affects government, state, private, nonprofit, for profit, and other institutions. It is important to develop a comprehensive understanding of the difference between different types of policy subsets, the relationship between social problems and social policy, the ways in which policies impacts clients and practice professionals, as well as how to assess for the effectiveness or need for modification of specific policies.

Public policy and social policy are two distinct but closely related concepts in the field of policymaking. Public policy is a broad term that encompasses all policies formulated and implemented by governments or other public authorities to address the various issues impacting society. While social policy is included in public policy, other subsets of public policy may include economic policy, environmental policy, healthcare policy, foreign policy, and more. Social policy refers to guidelines, laws, regulations, and actions implemented by governments and other relevant institutions to address various social issues and improve the wellbeing of individuals and communities. Social policies focus on the allocation of resources and the provision of services to address societal challenges and promote social justice, which is a core value of the social work field. Social policy tends to target specific groups such as the elderly, children, people with disabilities, those living in poverty, or other marginalized groups, to ensure their rights and meet their needs.

There is a reciprocal relationship between social problems and social policy as social problems often serve as a catalyst for the development of social policies. Social policies are formulated to address specific social problems and achieve desired social outcomes. They are designed to provide guidance, rules, and regulations that govern the allocation of resources and the delivery of services to individuals, families, and communities. Social policies aim to provide support, protection, and opportunities to vulnerable populations and promote social well-being. As social problems evolve or new issues emerge, policy makers must adapt and respond to these changes by evaluating, updating, and improving social policies. Social policies can be developed to address immediate social problems or they can be implemented to work towards long-term solutions that help prevent and mitigate future social problems.

Petersburg Department of Social Services (PDSS) is a government agency which is responsible for providing services to local residents with the focus of supporting individuals and families in need by administering programs and benefits that promote their wellbeing and self-sufficiency. To effectively administer and deliver services, PDSS must follow standard operating procedures and policies that govern employee decision making which allows staff to best serve clientele and other dependents. Like all agencies and public authorities, policies and programs within PDSS must be regularly reviewed for adherence and effectiveness as well as to ensure that the goals of the policy are meeting the needs of those impacted by the targeted social problem.

A relevant policy program that has been developed and implemented in all local Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) agencies, including PDSS, is the Fostering Futures foster care program. The Fostering Futures program is designed to address social problems facing young adults who are aging out of the foster care system by mitigating the challenges these individuals encounter as they transition into adulthood (Virginia Department of Social Services

[VDSS], 2019). The program is available to individuals between 18 to 21 years old who were in custody of a local VDSS prior to reaching 18 years of age or who were in foster care at the time of commitment to Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) and are released from DJJ after age 18 and prior to turning 21 (VDSS, 2019). Some of the social problems that impact young adults aging out of the foster care system are the lack of stable housing, health care access, employment and educational opportunities, and life skills necessary for independent living (VDSS, 2019). Consequently, these young adults are at a higher risk of experiencing homelessness, poverty, unemployment, and involvement in the criminal justice system. The Fostering Futures program recognizes that by providing resources and support to this population, there is an increased chance of improving outcomes and promoting self-sufficiency.

The Fostering Futures program's implementation typically involves identifying eligible participants, conducting assessments, creating individualized plans, and connecting participants to appropriate services. Therefore, effectively implementing the program requires coordination between various agencies and supplemental programs that may include child welfare services, educational institutions, housing authorities, healthcare providers, and employment agencies (VDSS, 2019). This collaborative effort among various agencies allows young adults to receive comprehensive support for their unique needs across different domains using a multidisciplinary approach. Within PDSS as well as other local departments of VDSS, staff administer ongoing case management to monitor progress, adjust support, and advocate for the needs of program participants (VDSS, 2019)

The Fostering Futures program presents many advantages and disadvantages, pros and cons, and opportunities and limitations that have direct impacts on clients and staff. The holistic approach of the program in improving outcomes for young adults with unique needs is a notable

strength. Additionally, the extension of support beyond the age of 18 until age 21 helps to bridge the gap between foster care and independent living, which has shown successful outcomes for many participants (VDSS, 2019). This distinct recognition of the advantages associated with continuity of care has had a meaningful impact for clients connected with PDSS. For clients, the program provides stability, guidance, and increased access to essential resources during a critical development phase of participant lives as they enter adulthood. These benefits improve overall client wellbeing and various prospects related to self-sufficiency. For PDSS staff, the program creates a meaningful opportunity to aid in the ongoing development of young adults and their futures. However, the tasks necessary to effectively operate the program may also place additional demands and stressors on staff resources and workloads such as training requirements, staffing levels, and other forms of ongoing support that are essential to meet client needs.

As with all policies and programs created to mitigate a social problem, there are disadvantages and limitations to consider when critiquing the Fostering Futures program. One limitation might include resource limitations such as funding constraints that affect the ability to provide services and support. There are existing financial limitations faced by PDSS due to its location in a low-income locality area, which in return, has significant impacts on budgets and fiscal resources due to lower generated tax revenues. These limitations can affect the department's ability to fully fund and implement programs like Fostering Futures, resulting in consequences such as some participants being unable to receive adequate assistance through the program. Additionally, the department may face challenges in prioritizing and allocating funds to different initiatives within PDSS leading to trade-offs between supporting Fostering Futures and other crucial social service programs. Another potential limitation of the program are challenges associated with implementation. Because of the need to coordinate different services through

multiple agencies for the program participants, there is greater potential for inefficient implementation of the program leading to gaps in service provision and confusion among clients and staff.

Overall, the Fostering Futures program has shown to be a beneficial resource for young adults aging out of the foster care system in PDSS and other departments of VDSS (VDSS, 2019). In consideration of the need to modify the policy, the program may benefit from addressing resource limitations to ensure that all eligible young adults are able to receive support. Ongoing evaluation and feedback methods should be used to monitor the program's efficiency, to identify potential areas in need of improvement, and to ensure that the services provided through the program are adequately responding to evolving needs of the target population. Fostering Futures is an important resource for young adults aged 18 to 21 that enables the extension of foster care maintenance and services intended to provide support and guidance in young adulthood.

## References

Virginia Department of Social Services [VDSS] (2019). *Fostering Futures program for young adults 18 to 21*. Child and Family Services Manual.

[https://www.dss.virginia.gov/files/division/dfs/fc/intro\\_page/guidance\\_manuals/fc/07\\_2019/Section\\_14\\_Fostering\\_Futures.pdf](https://www.dss.virginia.gov/files/division/dfs/fc/intro_page/guidance_manuals/fc/07_2019/Section_14_Fostering_Futures.pdf)