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## Plenary Session: Self-Determination and the Transition to Adulthood

**Nancy Koroloff:** Good morning. I'm very pleased to be up here today to introduce these exciting speakers. We have two presentations today, and we're going to start with Dr. Mike Bullis, who's here from the University of Oregon, School of Education. I had never met Mike until this morning, but I've certainly read his articles and heard about his work. We're very pleased that he agreed to come up and talk about some of the research that he's done around this phase in life called transition, when you're moving from childhood into adulthood. I asked him how to introduce him, and he said to tell you that his goal in life is to become a golf pro, or if he can't do that, he's going to be a guide for fly fishermen. Either way, he sounds like he's a great guy.

**Mike Bullis:** Thank you. Let me tell you a little bit about what I intend to do today. Adolescence is a time of incredible changes, and I think that as middle-aged people, or as parents or grandparents or family members, we oftentimes forget that we ourselves were adolescents. Moreover, I think it's important to keep in mind the historical context of adolescence.

Throughout history, adolescence has been a time of wildness, changes, and not-yet-adult-like behaviors. Marc Anthony and Caesar were in their teens when they engaged on their historic exploits. Napoleon started to become a military leader when he was 17. Alexander the Great began his conquest of the then-

known world when he was 14 years old. A very good friend of mine is a Native American and is a storyteller in his tribe. He says that a story that's handed down in his tribe for generations tells about the difficulties the older members of the tribe had in managing the younger members of the tribe who wanted to become adults before they maybe were ready to, or they wanted to go against what the elders of the tribe thought was correct. Adolescence is really not much different than that today. It's a time of change; it's a portal of passage. It also is a time, or can be a time, of extreme difficulty. One of my favorite singers is a woman by the name of Bonnie Raitt, who came from a very musical, wealthy family. In an interview I saw her give, she said that the most searingly difficult thing she ever did as a person was go through adolescence. And she didn't have any risk factors, right? She came from a wealthy background. She was well educated; she was bright. And even with that, adolescence for her was a very difficult time.

I have four goals for this talk today. I want to talk about what we know about adolescents and the challenges they face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I want to talk about an overused phrase that I think is critically important, and that is the concept of self-determination. Most of the work that I've done focuses either on alternative programs or programs within the schools that can be used to foster adjustment among adolescents, both in terms of work, independent learning skills, and social experiences. I want to talk about the characteristics of those alternative programs, and then I want to use that as a context to lead into Lorea and Brandon and Emily's presentation about Powerhouse, because there is a consistent theme here of self-determination: providing the context in which young people can learn the skills they need so they can make the correct choices in life.

The other thing I have a very deep desire not to do is sound like a university professor. Often university professors tell you things like this—and I love this quote:

We've not succeeded in answering all your problems. The answers we found only serve to raise a whole new set of questions. In some ways we feel we're as confused as ever, but we believe we're confused on a higher plane and about more important things.

I actually was given that quote by a parent at a conference in Minnesota. I think it was a gentle reminder to be concrete, so I'll try to do that.

Transition actually is an overused term, as well. The concept of school-to-work transition has been integrated into the federal law of 94-142 [which became the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act]. Moreover, it's in the school-to-work transition legislation, which is part of the Department of Labor regulations and law, which drives the school reform, apprenticeship programs, and those kinds of trainings. There's a growing emphasis at the federal level to merge those various laws and regulations so that there's hopefully a coherent, seamless program for peer adolescents to go out and enter the work world. Now 94-142 says that transition is a coordinated set of activities that must be based on individual students' needs, taking into account their preferences and interests, and must include instruction, community-based experiences, the development of employment options, the development of other post-school adult living objectives, and if appropriate, daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

Moreover, transition is a coordinated set of activities, and it's designed within an outcome-oriented process that promotes movement from school to post-school activities. I think that's overly inclusive, to be honest. Many of the kids we work with who have a special education label, or who have come into contact with the mental health system or the correctional system, don't finish school. The stock answer we hear when we talk to people at the state level or at the federal level is "We'll base our services within the school system." Well, guess what? They're not in the school system, so it doesn't make a whole hell of a lot of sense, right? At any rate, we do need to focus on these various outcomes, and we need to look at multiple outcomes. I would like to see a show of hands: How many of you all just work? I know Constance Lehman just works; that's all she does. We don't. We are social animals. We have to manage our homes; we have to manage our finances. We have to, hopefully, engage in what are positive social activities that give us, give our lives, meaning and that reward us in multiple ways aside from working.

Now, what do we know about kids as they exit the school and enter society? Remember I told you I'm a professor; I'm real good at making easy things complicated. Well, I'll show you this slide before I go on. This actually is a model. It's a true—let's call it a LISERAL model—a statistical model of transition outcomes that myself and my former major professor, Andy Helprin, developed. We looked at the different factors that can affect a kid going out into the community and looked at certain outcomes, and that's what I want to focus on here in this brief talk.

What we know is that transitions have four different sets of outcomes that we should look at for young people. By the way, it's interesting to me that adolescence is not a defined time. Traditionally, we've talked about adolescence as being between the ages of 12 and 17, and at 18 something magical happens that means you can sign contracts and smoke, right? You can smoke legally. You can't drink, but you can be drafted and go to war and fight for your country. In reality, our definition of adolescence is changing dramatically, and I want to talk a little bit about that in a second.

We look at employment, educational outcomes, living outcomes, and then social outcomes. The area I've spent most of my time in is employment, and what we know about kids who are at risk is that their employment options and outcomes are far worse than typical kids. These are data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study, which was conducted at SRI International in Palo Alto, California, and these are just employment rates. "Are you employed?" "Yes." "No." Which is a horrible indicator of how well somebody is doing in employment, but it's one indicator. The employment rates of kids who are labeled as emotionally disturbed hover around 50 percent, meaning 50 percent are unemployed. Moreover, these data, which included a nationally representative sample of about 8,000 kids, indicates that kids who are emotionally disturbed not only are employed at a lower rate, but they have earned less, work fewer hours, and change jobs more frequently after leaving school.

Now that is critically important to keep in mind, because something we have found in work that Constance Lehman and I did, and my friend Mike Denz at the university, is that the more positive job experiences a young person has while in high school,

the more likely it is he or she is going to be successfully employed two, three, four, five years after leaving high school. So moving around in jobs while in high school is a good thing. It gives you multiple experiences. Afterwards it becomes a bad thing.

Now, as far as education goes, what we know is that about 60 percent of all kids who carry the special education label of emotional disorder, emotional disability, will drop out of school before completion. About 35 percent of all kids who are considered learning disabled will drop out of high school before completion. Only about 50 percent of all kids—all kids, everybody in this country—go on to 4 year, post-secondary educational programs. Of that, only about 18 percent will graduate from college. We are the only industrialized country in the world that does not have a formal system of channeling kids through the high school grades out into post-secondary education. The only one. We're trying to make steps toward that goal.

How many of you all are Oregonians? Where you all from? All around? Okay, then I need to talk a little about this. Oregon is one of the leaders in school reform. I believe it's in 2005 that we will have a certificate of initial mastery completely in place for adolescents. That means that in tenth grade, young people will take a test that will determine if they have the necessary base skills to go on in education either to achieve what's called a CAM, Certificate of Advanced Mastery, in one of six career areas, and if they will be funneled towards college or towards professional/technical education.

About 60 percent of kids labeled with emotional disorders drop out of school. Now what we don't know—or what I don't know, maybe Nancy knows—is what percentage actually go back and then will finish later on. At any rate, as far as independent living goes, and this gets into the social definition of adolescence, 65 percent of all young people at the age of 25 list their parents' address as their permanent address. They stay. I have a 14-year-old who on any given day I'd gladly say, "Please go out the door and don't let it hit you in the butt on the way out."

And finally, then, there are various social experiences that we monitor and look at as being important for kids. Let me talk a little bit about the job level changes.

It was always possible in the fifties or sixties to drop out of high school in Oregon and get a really good paying job. You could work in the mills for \$20 to \$25 an hour. You could work in the woods. You could do a lot of things that were technically unskilled labor that would still afford you a decent living wage. In 1950, 60 percent of all jobs in this country were unskilled. By the year 2000, only 15 percent of all jobs in this country were unskilled. We have lost 45 percent of those jobs into which people who had difficulty with education or had trouble keeping a job could go. While there are the same number of jobs, the requirements for those jobs have changed dramatically, and they mandate a certain type of worker. I'm going to talk about that in just a second or two.

As far as social outcomes, there is a term I don't like, but it is the term that's used in the literature. It's called *Anti-Social Syndrome*, and it's also called the *At-Risk Syndrome*. When I was a young man, when I had a full head of hair that wasn't gray, I ran the first drop-out study for our then-governor Neal Goldschmidt. I would go and talk to these school superintendents, and they kept talking about at-risk kids, at-risk kids. I didn't know what that was. There's a fellow at the University of Colorado, a fellow named Richard Jessor, who has identified the fact that kids who get in big-time trouble and who have multiple concerns, the kinds of kids that we're most interested in, really tend to display social behaviors or anti-social behaviors in terms of four different clusters: criminal behavior, substance abuse, promiscuity, and school failure. What we know is that currently in this country, generally, between 25 and 30 percent of all adolescents who are in high school are at risk to engage in at least one of these behaviors. About 10 percent of all kids will engage in two of these behaviors, and 5 to 7 percent of all kids will engage in all four of these behaviors.

I should editorialize a little bit here. One of the problems within the social service system is that we tend to focus only on part of the problem. We have a kid who has come through the correctional system, so we just work with them on their anti-social behavior. Well, guess what? They typically have multiple problems that require multiple interventions. Somebody's having trouble with school; we just work with them on teaching them how to read. Well, guess what? They have other problems which are very difficult to deal

with for anybody, much less a young person. So one of the things we need to focus on is ways to address this issue and ways to ameliorate those problems.

I want to stress the fact that the experiences of at-risk kids aren't necessarily their fault. Within the social service system, within the professional sphere, we're real good at assigning blame, because God forbid it would be my fault. I think that it's very important to realize that there're actually two parts of the equation that affect young people. One is their own behavior and the way in which they choose to behave. The other is the social forces that affect them, and it's really where the rubber meets the road. We have a fragmented social service system. In fact, I was on a committee for Ted Kulongoski, who was the attorney general, I believe, at that time, regarding the social service system for young people in this state. And Mike Gleason, who was the city manager for the City of Eugene, Oregon, said that within their city there were 37 different agencies that provided what he considered to be roughly the same types of services to young people. Then after age 18, as near as he could tell, there were one or two, the most prominent being the correctional system. So our social service system is somewhat fragmented.

We have something that has never occurred before within the history of the world. Not only do we have TV and radio and various audio outlets, but we also have the Internet. You can play games. My son plays Counterstrike with somebody in Portugal on a regular basis. You can access incredibly wonderful things through the Internet, and you can also access incredibly horrible things through the Internet. What the effects of that interaction is we simply do not know. We do know that media can be both a wonderful teacher, and it also can be a really awful model when kids begin to act like Beavis and Butthead and burn down things, or when people look at Counterstrike and think they can take a gun and blow somebody away and there's no real blood.

At any rate, we also are in the process of dealing with school reform, which is something that, for some reason that defies logic, I have gotten right in the middle of. When I go on sabbatical in two years, if I never have to sit and talk to another school administrator again, it won't make me sad. The school reform is one

of those processes that is seeking to change an immoveable object, and one of the things about the social service system is that it moves at glacial speed: “We should change this.” “Well, that makes sense, so we’ll wait about three years to change it.” School reform is something that can be both incredibly good and incredibly bad.

We are in a process of fiscal austerity, certainly in this state. Again, how many Oregonians? About a third of you? At any rate, within our state, we’re going through huge budget cuts. Primarily there’s a deteriorating economy; moreover, there’s a changing workplace. But the most important social force that affects kids is poverty. This is an article by a fellow by the name of Joel Handler, who’s a professor of law at the University of California, Los Angeles, and he chaired the National Research Council panel on high-risk youth:

Most research has concentrated largely on why individuals engage in high-risk behaviors that involve drugs, unprotected sex, pregnancy, dropping out of school, and crime. Too little attention has been paid to the enormous power of settings in shaping adolescent lives. These settings have deteriorated sharply over the last two decades.

Although many young people manage to rise above the circumstances of their lives, for many others the odds are simply too great. Adolescents need and depend on families, neighborhoods, schools, and social health systems. All of these institutions are now under severe stress. Some of the institutions and systems initially designed to help high-risk youth, such as juvenile justice and child welfare systems, have instead become sources of risk. The most powerful determinant of a young person’s environment is family income. In this respect, American families have slipped badly since the 1970s. Over the last two decades, social and economic changes have reduced the real income of American families headed by young adults by almost one-third.

By the way, what’s the best predictor of how much money you will make at age 40? How much your parents made at age 40. One of the most important indicators of how much money you can make, that you can change, is the level of education that you achieve. The higher the level of education you achieve, the

more likely it is that you will earn more money, unless you’re a university professor or unless you are a plumber. I knew I was in trouble last year when we bought a new house and the plumber showed up in his Porsche to give us an estimate on what his work would be.

Why is all this important? I mentioned to Nancy, and I’ve said this a couple of times—some of you in the audience have heard this—I grew up in Indiana, parented by two people who had been farmers during the Depression. As a result, I grew up with the concept of the American-Puritan work ethic. If something’s wrong, you work at it, and it’ll get better. “Mom, I feel really bad that Connie just dumped me. She’s not going to the prom with me.” “Oh, that’s too bad, son, go paint the house.” That will make it all better, right? And in some sense that’s true.

This is a study that we just finished. It was funded by the Office of Special Education Programs. It’s the hardest study I have ever managed, and I’ve managed 28 different federally funded projects. This particular project was the TRACS study, Transition Research on Adjudicated Youth in Community Settings. These are kids who get in big time trouble in our state and are remanded to state custody and go through the Oregon Youth Authority [OYA]. They’re locked up, oftentimes for up to seven to eight years. Now we’ve passed laws where many of them will never see the light of day again.

This is a semi-random sample of 531 kids who we were able to track. Some of them track for up to five years. And we profiled what happened to them after they left the correctional setting. These results are somewhat emblematic and are actually reflective of other studies we have done of kids that are considered at risk who don’t have a formal label and of kids who have a formal label in special education as either learning disabled or emotionally disturbed. We looked for participants who were engaged. We call engagement either working, going to school, or some combination of working and going to school. Kids who were engaged at Time 1, compared to participants who were not engaged at Time 1, were 3.22 times more likely to be engaged at Time 2.

What that means is that we tracked these kids as they left the community, and we gathered data on them at 6-month intervals. Kids who left the correctional setting and who were either working or going to school or some combination at 6 months out were 3.22 times more likely to be engaged at 12 months out. So it's getting off on the right foot. These guys who are—and by and large they were guys—who are incredibly at risk, getting them a job and getting them the right sort of services to get them back to school was incredibly powerful in keeping them engaged. Moreover, if they were engaged, they were 2.38 times less likely to return to OYA at Time 2. So again, if you are doing something positive at Time 1, you're less likely to have a negative outcome, that is, go back to the slammer at Time 2. Makes sense. Common sense. We don't do it. We have found that these same kinds of results and these same types of effects show for kids in all ranges of life. If young people who are at risk can be afforded the right types of services, they can be successful. There is no reason that they cannot be.

One of the things, though, that has concerned me came from one of my colleagues whom I heard speak one time. He made a major point of saying that one of the reasons why he became fascinated in reading—he's one of the world's experts on literacy—was because he became fascinated in why kids couldn't read. That really struck me as wrong. This was about seven or eight years ago. And I became fascinated with the concept of resilience and why kids can do something. What is it that makes people successful?

At any rate, we identified 16 kids, split evenly between males and females, Whites and cultural/ethnic minorities, special education and non-special education, and we conducted 5-year case studies of their lives. These are all kids who had come out of the correctional system, who at one year had not returned to the correctional system. That in and of itself is a major outcome, because about 52 percent of all kids who go through the correctional system go back into the correctional system. So this is a unique group onto themselves. And at one year out, they had to be not back in the slammer and either working or going to school. So we conducted profiles—paintings—of their lives and what happened to them. We heard things like this, which concerned me. This is a young man we interviewed in that group:

I don't feel like I'm going to make it. I don't have the kind of help that I need, and I don't have the kind of willpower to give myself the help I need. I need people there for me at this point in life, and they need to take the initiative for me because I can't do it myself.

Now, he was aware that ultimately he needed to be responsible, but at this point in his life, he needed assistance that would afford him to be self-determined. Something that we found consistently in both our quantitative studies and our qualitative studies of at-risk kids going into the community is that there are two key factors to being successful, to being resilient. This is what resilience is: the ability to achieve success in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. All of you know folks who are resilient. I work with people who are resilient, who have overcome amazing odds to somehow become doctors and lawyers and Indian Chiefs. How do they do that? That is a process that has become fascinating to me, and it's one I intend to study for the rest of my career, until I become a golf pro, which means I'm going to have to learn how to hit a chip shot a lot better.

There are two factors that determine if someone is going to be resilient or not. The biggest one is self-determination, which we also call self-advocacy: social skills, being your own person, acting like an adult. We found in our qualitative study that successful respondents are characterized by a determination, a positive outlook and approach to life and a strong future orientation. Each of these individuals who are successful made a conscious choice to save their lives. The second is a supportive environment. The fortunate ones, guided by mentors, got second and third chances, and oftentimes they got fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh chances. There was a supportive environment that interacted to help them make right choices, to learn how to make right choices as an adult, and to enter adulthood successfully.

There's a woman at the University of California, Davis who has conducted a study for 35 years. Her name is Emmy Werner. Not only is it a 35-year-old study at this point, which seemingly gets renewed every year, she has tracked a birth cohort on the island of Kauai, in Hawaii, for that period of time. Now, people who live on Kauai don't leave Kauai. It's a neat place. What

she's been able to do is involve these 600 plus people over 35 years to profile their lives, to administer different instruments to them, to see what happens to them over a period of time. What she's found is what we're finding, and that is for young women in particular, being self-determined, to have that native intelligence to make correct choices, is critically important. For young men, it is an important process; however, it's not as important as having a mentor, which I find uniquely interesting. And it has interesting implications for the way in which we provide social services or the way we're not providing social services now.

What we know is that the way in which we make choices goes through a structured process, and often-times those of us who are poor decision-makers will either marry or become involved with our cognitive prosthesis. I have no sense of direction—none—so I learned a long time ago that when I'm driving, I have to have my wife in the passenger seat. I learned that I have to ask, and I have to ask a certain way: "Do I turn here?" You have to give me two blocks because otherwise I'll screw it up. There is a process we go through in making choices that relates to the Who, What, and Where of what we're doing, and it also relates to our history, our characteristics, what the event is, and where it happens.

Many of you went out on the town in Portland last night, right? I know you did; I can see it. You behave very differently at a bar or a certain restaurant than you do here. It is expected. The environment sets the context for the way in which you behave. What we know about young people who enter work, living, different social environments, is that those environments are foreign to them. They have not had the experience to either interpret those cues or practice how to behave within those settings. We also know that there is a cognitive mediator that relates to being able to interpret the interaction, what's going on with the other individual or the setting. It's a process called role-taking. It's also called situational analysis. Once you identify what the problem is—which for many young people becomes an adventure because it's a new environment, because they've not had a chance to practice within that environment—they need to then generate a range of alternatives to that problem based on what that problem is. Young people who are taught to generate a range of possible alternatives, whether

they be good or bad, are more likely to solve that problem than young people who can come up with one or two possible alternatives. Once you generate a range of alternatives, you must decide which one to enact. Then before you enact it, you go through a process of mental rehearsal.

Here's the problem: You've thought about all the different things you can do. You've chosen what you can do. Now you have to think about what you're going to do. You perform that skill, something called social skill mechanics, which is how you say what it is you're going to say. Then there's the content of what you say. And finally, there's some actor, some other judge who says whether you're competent or incompetent.

Now this basic process is what self-determination is. What we know is that we can set up programs that foster this kind of self-reliance through alternative programs if we do it correctly. I presented to the Presbyterian Ministers Association in Klamath Falls. After I presented on at-risk kids and outcomes, one of the ministers from eastern Oregon, a big gray-haired man, huge hands, came over and gave me this from the Bible. I think it's very appropriate. Now it's sexist, because at that time, men worked: "But if you train up a child in the way he should go, when he was old, he will not depart from it."

Briefly, alternative programs in schools need to have multiple components. Alternative programs for young people need to be located in public school settings, and that's fascinating to me because when we served young people directly, one of the last places they wanted to go when they were enrolled was in school. They drop out of school, and then they spend more time in school than when they were enrolled in school. I find that fascinating. The research that's been done in this regard suggests that the best alternative types of school-based programs are located around schools but not necessarily in schools. Moreover, they include community-based, multi-agency collaboration. If you're working with kids with multiple problems, it is absolutely ridiculous to believe that any one agency can meet all of their different needs. However, what's the best way to screw something up? You have a group of people, particularly a group of adults, come together and try to reach a decision. It is very, very difficult.

This means that we need to have some concept of service coordination, which is an activity that is not typical within the schools. We need to include staff training to bring educational folks up to speed about what contemporary issues are for at-risk kids. We need to involve the family. I think too often professionals talk about the family as being the problem. Well, the simple fact is that I work with a kid for maybe three to five years on a grant cycle. You have them for all of their lives. Involving family members, particularly at the adolescent level when roles become redefined, is crucial, as is involving peers. I used to think that I could tell a kid to do something and they'd do it because I was hip and cool. Well, I got old, and they don't believe me anymore. So peer monitoring, peer instruction, is critically important, as is intensive individualized instruction. Kids don't go on to post-secondary education. High school years are the last time, the last coordinated set of activities, they're likely to receive in terms of academic instruction. If you can get them to finish school, they're much more likely to go on to school. Finally, we need to look at social skill training and link to work. I believe this concept of self-determination is inherent in what Lorea and Emily and Brandon are going to talk about, so I'm done.

**Nancy Koroloff:** We're going to go on with the second part of our presentation this morning, and then we should have some time for questions. Now I'd like to introduce Lorea Alba, who is the director of Powerhouse, and two youth consultants, Emily Strong and Brandon Shaver, who are young adults who are participants at Powerhouse. They are going to tell you about that program.

**Lorea Alba:** I'm not a professor, so I didn't come with my overheads, and I didn't come with a lot of statistics, because I don't know any. I kind of wondered why they wanted me to do this, and I've been struggling over my purpose for being here today, especially in a conference where it's so well attended by such a diverse group of people. The best conclusion that I could come to was that I'm bringing the best part of our program here for you today, so you can hear their voice and listen to what they have to say. And maybe I'm bringing a face to an underserved population, a population that in my career I have not recognized as needing services. The population that I work with in the program, Powerhouse,—I'm the di-

rector there—is young adults who are in transition from foster care to independent living.

Now young adults that are transitioning from foster care into independent living need the same kinds of social supports, emotional supports, and monetary supports as any other young adult that moves out of a secure, safe place into a place that's a little bit unsettled or unsure. Well, frankly, I have to say that when I come to things like this and I hear startling statistics, it takes me aback a little bit. I have to thank Mike for giving me a heart attack about the 25-year-olds still living at home thing. I have a 21-year-old daughter, just turned 21 yesterday, and a 19-year-old son, both in college, and then a 17-year-old and a 12-year-old. I'm thinking, "Oh great, just when you think they're out there, they'll be back." That's not comforting.

However, looking at my own situation with my children, when my oldest daughter was 18, I was thinking, "Okay, it's time for you to go away," and she was thinking, "I'm not ready. I need to stay and get my feet on the ground, figure out what I need to do." I was there to allow it to occur. My 19-year-old son, however, was ready to go. He went; however, I was there for monetary support. He comes home every once in a while on the weekends. Now my daughter is gone. She's down in Vegas going to school, and she is going to Scotland this summer having a great time. She doesn't need me. She sees me maybe twice, three times a year, for very short visits. My son and I happen to see each other more regularly; he's not quite ready to let loose yet. I go with what they need, but the bottom-line for them is that they know I'm there. If they need a hundred dollars to cover the phone bill, they call me up and say, "Do you have an extra hundred bucks?" I may say, "yes," and I may say, "I've got fifty."

But the young adults that move from foster care into independent living, it's a different set of circumstances. Oftentimes the system says, "Okay, you're 18, and/or you've graduated from high school, or have your GED. Goodbye." And there's really no foundation for them upon which to land. We've been fortunate to create a program, technically from scratch—it's never really been done before—that provides housing, mentoring services, and service coordination for young adults that are in this situation, who are between the years of 18 and 21, 22, 23. We are

hoping that we provide an opportunity for them to get up on their feet, to have a place to land, to have a solid surface to get started, and to know that they can build some social supports and emotional supports. We provide housing.

These two [Emily and Brandon] used to be residents in the same home. That's how their bond formed. They're like a brother and sister team now. It's very interesting to watch the dynamics from providing services to these young adults. Actually, that's been the best part of providing these services, watching these young adults form relationships with each other. My growth in this area is seeing how important those relationships are to them. Like Mike said, as adults, we tend to think we have the answers and say, "This is what you need, so this is what we'll do for you." It's quite a different way to provide services to take a step back and listen, and even though it's difficult, we have tried to listen to what they need. It's important at this time of their life that they're trying out their wings, growing, and becoming autonomous human beings. That's the desire; that's the end result. And hopefully that's exactly what they're going to be working toward.

But they need some support. When you're 18, you think, "I'm going to be out on my own." Now as a foster kid, you might be really looking forward to being 18 because it means, "I'm going to cut loose from the system. I'm tired of this. Nobody is going to tell me what to do anymore. I'm gone." And then it comes time to actually leave, and where do you go? You may want to try out your biological family, see if there's a possible way to reconnect with them. Chances are it's not going to be the kind of relationship that will be on-going, or it may be tentative. It may take years to actually redevelop a relationship with the biological family. It may not even be a safe place to go at all. You may have a previous foster family that will care about you, will continue to provide some on-going support, but it's not their role, and they may not be able to do that.

They still need to be able to have a place to live. What do you do when you need a first and last months' rent and deposits? You need a co-signer if you're 18 years old and have no credit history. Who do you ask to do that, if there's nobody to do that? If you want to go to school, who's going to help you financially get through

school? You need to be able to provide transportation for yourself whether you're working or going to school. You need health insurance. There's all of these factors that they need to take care of on their own now.

The program that we provide allows them the opportunity to not pay rent. They pay utility and community living costs, a very small amount compared to what they'd be paying out in the real world, but they are required to work or go to school. They need to be doing 40 hours of either work or school or both, and that is for them to learn, to practice their independence. We also provide some ways for them to learn independent living skills. An easy assumption, I think, on many adults' parts is to look back and say, "Oh, well that's just an easy thing to do." But many people don't know how to do laundry. Many people don't know how to go shopping and what it takes to comparison shop, or what it takes to pay your bills on a daily or monthly basis. Those things we take for granted. How to balance a checkbook. So the opportunity for them is that they can learn these things and practice these things and sometimes make mistakes. Nobody's going to say, "You're bad. You're wrong." But they'll say, "This was a mistake, and you need to learn from it."

I think one of the best quotes I ever heard was—and I'm going to read it so I say it right—from Winston Churchill. He said, "Success is the ability to go from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm." And I feel that's what young adulthood is about. I was a very young parent, and I made a lot of mistakes, and I still make a lot mistakes. My best friend drove me in today, and she said, "Are you nervous?" I've been up since two o'clock this morning. And she said, "You know what, just say what's in your heart." I'm trying to say that transition into young adulthood is a very trying time. It doesn't stop once you become an adult; you spend your life in transition. Life is about transition. You go from one thing to another thing to another thing. If you aren't in transition, if you aren't learning, if you aren't making mistakes, you're not growing. So I'm delighted to have the opportunity to work with this population, because they remind me of that. They also give me patience with my own children.

On that note, I'm going to turn the time over to two very capable, but semi-nervous folks who would like

to address you and let you know their feelings about what it takes for them to transition into young adulthood. I'd like to introduce to Emily Strong. She's 19 years old. She lives at one of our homes with four other residents, and she'd like to talk to you.

**Emily Strong:** Hi, my name is Emily Strong, and when I was 18 years old, I was really looking forward to moving out on my own. It was really important to me to have my freedom. I had been in foster care since I was 14. I was tired of being in the system, and I was ready to live my own life. As I was making plans to move out, I realized it wasn't going to be as easy as I thought it would be. Transitioning out of the system was very hard, because everything I had known was being taken away from me. The only people I had lived with were no longer able to help me, so even though I was excited to turn 18 and to think that I didn't need anyone to tell me what to do, I also realized how scary it would be to try and make it on my own. I also realized I needed to be making enough money for rent and bills and an apartment, and I needed furniture and things I didn't have.

[Microphone connection lost.]

**Emily Strong:** Powerhouse pays my rent, and I pay a certain amount every month for utilities and community costs, but I work full-time, and I'm able to save money for when I'm ready to be on my own.

After I moved into Powerhouse, I found out I was pregnant. Now I have more things to worry about. I'll have a new life to take care of. I know I need to be prepared for that. I need a lot of emotional support during this time, and I will need that when the baby is born, as well. The staff and volunteers from Powerhouse have to provide that for me, but the most support has come from roommates and friends that live in the house with me. Like most young adults, I need to know that I'm cared for, and I'll still need nurturing. Also, I need to be able to provide that for my baby. I also need to provide a stable living environment for her, and this program has allowed me to make that opportunity. I know that they will be there for me after the baby is born to provide the help I need.

A lot of 18-year-olds, especially in foster care, don't have a place to go when they leave the system, and

Powerhouse provides a place to live and the support they need. I feel lucky to have been in this program, and there are many young adults that will also benefit from this program as they transition into adulthood.

**Brandon Shaver:** My name is Brandon Shaver, and I'm 21. I'm going to talk about all the stuff she was worried about in Powerhouse, because I've been in Powerhouse since day one. I was in the process of helping build the program every step of the way.

When most teens turn 18, the really important part to them is independence, and some of the most important things they need to learn about is goal-setting, and long-term goals, and self-determination, like Mike said earlier. You have to learn how to make long-term and short-term goals and how to make plans to reach those goals. Some of the choices that I've had to make, and that other people have to make, is where I go to college, or what job I'm going to get. When I first got in the program, I didn't have a job. I was going to school full-time, but I still needed to make sure I got rent in. I'm still accountable for my rent and all that stuff. I actually chose to go to a college that's a lot farther away than the closer college. I chose it because I knew that it would be away from everybody I went to high school with, and I don't want to be around any of those people because I think they might be distracting. I wanted to do the best I could.

Part of making it and reaching your short-term and long-term goals is making good choices. When you're at home—well, I live in one of the apartments Powerhouse has—a decision I have to determine every day is whether I should stay in or go out with my friends. A lot of them don't work, and they still live at home, and they go to school. So they're all about going out and having fun, and I still have to do my homework. That's really hard, lots of times, trying to keep on task.

Other stuff we have to be accountable about are the rules in the house. The rules in our houses aren't made by anybody else; they're made by the residents in the house. We get a say in the rules, so everybody's accountable to those rules. Everybody makes a census vote towards the rules. Pretty much you're accountable for all your actions. We sign contracts when we first get into the program that we won't do certain things, and so you're held accountable if you do them.

Well, I think that's about it. I just wanted to say that this program is really valuable, and it helps teach all these young people, me included, young adults, how to transition and how to make good decisions. We have caseworkers that help us make long-term goals and short-term goals and reach those goals and make a plan to reach them. It's really important to have a program like Powerhouse out there so kids have a place to go when they transition. Thank you.

**Nancy Koroloff:** Thank you to all our presenters. We have some time for questions. You're going to have to yell them out because we don't have any microphones out there.

**Conference Participant:** How did you find out about Powerhouse?

**Brandon Shaver:** When I turned 17, I got kicked out of my house, and I thought of the idea, and other people thought of the idea about the same time. Through the program I was in, they were able to reach me, and they knew that I really wanted to be involved, and I really like helping people. In the same way helping myself, too. But they called me and asked me to be on the panel and look at houses and figure out rules and figure out the whole plan. I volunteered to do it.

**Emily Strong:** I found out from my ILP worker, which is my Independent Living person that helps me get into housing and stuff like this.

**Conference Participant:** How did you organize funding for the program?

**Lorea Alba:** Grassroots effort, actually, around the development of the program, and there ended up being several agencies that were interested in collaborating in addressing the issue. Along this line, there was Casey Family Programs. I don't know how many are aware of that. They provide long-term foster care. The Independent Living Program, which is the SCF [Services to Children and Families] provider for the young adults that would be in foster and transitioning out of foster care, and also SCF. Right along with discussions about providing these programs, was the Chaffey Bill that was signed by President Clinton which allowed for federal money to be provided. It doubled the Independent Living. Up to 30 percent of

that—the first time ever this has happened—up to 30 percent the states can use toward housing for 18–21 year olds, if they meet certain criteria. So all of this happened at the same time during the creation of this program. That's the nutshell.

**Conference Participant:** Are you associated with the Portland Housing Authority?

**Lorea Alba:** Yeah, we are working directly with the housing authority in Portland, but that's nothing that involves our program right now. It's in developmental stages.

**Conference Participant:** Emily, do you know if your baby is a boy or a girl? And do you have plans for taking care of the baby when it arrives?

**Emily Strong:** It's a her. Her name's Taylor. It's not going to be easy, but I'll have lots of support.

**Conference Participant:** Will you be able to continue to live in the Powerhouse?

**Emily Strong:** No, but they will help me transition into an apartment and give me further service. The volunteers will come and help me if I need something, and they'll pay half of my rent.

**Conference Participant:** Why don't they teach the kinds of things that Mike was talking about in school before kids get to the Oregon Youth Authority?

**Mike Bullis:** If I knew the answer to that I would be a fly-fishing guide now. Too much risk. I often puzzle that around in my own head. The simple fact is that schools get a lot of things dumped on them. And right now, those of you who are in Oregon, anyway, know that our schools are under tremendous fiscal pressures, incredible cuts. Our economy has recently had a downturn, and the state legislature is reflecting that downturn in the budget that's being given. And at the same time, we're asking the school system to change towards this model of school reform that in some ways is laudatory, and in other ways doesn't make sense to me, to be perfectly honest. I think the kinds of things that I talked about, that these young people talked about so eloquently, is probably done on a piecemeal basis by those teachers you can't pay

enough money. But as a rule, the system is set up towards an end that probably doesn't include the kind of self-determination aspects we talked about today. And that's unfortunate. Hopefully, we'll be part of the on-going work that I do, but that you all do, as family members. A friend of mine once said that the only thing bureaucracies respond to is pain. Frankly, they don't care about the statistics I cite; what they care about is advocacy groups and family members who exert pain to have the system change in a proper way.

**Conference Participant:** (Response not recorded)

**Lorea Alba:** We have demographic slides, so we have everything all broken out by ethnicity and age and what they're doing in school, how many are going to school. We are having a three year evaluation study of our program to see how effective it is, who we are serving, how we can serve other people better. We have two of the evaluators here today, so we're very interested in providing the best possible services we can. This program started specifically in Multnomah County. That doesn't mean that other counties can't utilize the same funding, but Powerhouse is currently only able to serve in this county. It's not because we couldn't do it, but we're growing so fast. We're already providing direct housing assistance to more than 25 young adults, and we've only been up and running for over 6 months. That doesn't include the mentoring program we're developing that we just got a Meyer Grant to do. So that's going to be a whole other component to the program. We're up and moving as fast as we can, but we are always looking at how to improve in information sharing with other service providers, so that they will be aware of our services. The house that we hope to build with the Housing Authority of Portland is going to be in northeast Portland, which we hope will be in a very diverse area. We do have a fair amount of diversity, but we are always looking at where our referrals are coming from, who's referring, what caseworkers, and if they are misrepresentative of the young adults that might be in the system.

**Conference Participant:** Do either of you, Emily or Brandon, feel like you've benefited at all from being in foster care?

**Lorea Alba:** Can I just prompt for a second? Actually, Emily and I had this conversation yesterday, and

Emily said, "You know it wasn't all bad, because there are some things I got out of being in foster care."

**Emily Strong:** The fact that I wouldn't be here if I wasn't in foster care. I wouldn't have been able to meet so many wonderful people and experience the things that I have. I think what irritated me the most was that I was scared because I didn't know what I was getting into or the people I was living with. But over a period of time it's easy to adapt to, and then you grow friendships and build really strong relationships with people, and that's what got me through a lot of it, is to have that.

**Brandon Shaver:** The basic thing I've learned is that I can do a lot by myself. I was in the families, but when I was 17, I got kicked out of my foster home. That was a foster home I had been in for 12 years, and so I didn't have anywhere to go. I didn't know what to do, so I was able to stay with friends' families. I've met lots and lots of wonderful people, and I've lived with lots of different families, and I've met lots of people that are really wonderful, and that's helped me. I think the biggest thing is that it's taught me to be independent and that I can make it. One day at a time. Try to make goals, to set goals, and plan some way to reach them. Recently, I've started setting better goals for myself, and challenging myself. I went to outdoor school recently, and I had some kids in my cabin that were really depressed, some of the most depressed persons I've ever seen in my life. One of my goals in life was to be maybe a psychiatrist, a child psychiatrist, and I was able to get through to the kid and make him smile and make him laugh and make sure he had a good time. That was like a calling to me. You need to put some direction and go that way.

**Conference Participant:** Do either of you have a mental health diagnosis?

**Brandon Shaver:** I know that I don't read as fast as I should and stuff like that. I just learn slower. I don't have Attention Deficit Disorder that they've documented or anything. I think I do, just because I have the hardest time concentrating sometimes. For the most part, I don't really have anything in that area, but I learn a lot slower, and I read slower than everybody else in my class. It's little things like that, nothing that's been documented.

**Emily Strong:** My mouth moves too fast for my brain, so that's pretty much what mine is.

**Conference Participant:** Did either of you get moved around a lot between foster homes or see a lot of different case workers?

**Emily Strong:** To tell you the truth, when I got in foster care I was 14, like I had mentioned in my speech. I had gotten a wonderful group home provider. There were seven girls that lived in the home that I did. That was really scary to walk into, but the person that ran it was the most—let's just say I'll remember her for the rest of my life. I could talk to her whenever I chose to. I had only gotten two case-workers in the four years that I was in. I only had the first one for about a year, and the other one I had for the last three remaining years. The second foster home I was in was my first foster mom's best friend and her husband, and so it was a family type thing, and I got treated like their family. That was what made me the person I am today, because if I wouldn't have been able to have that kind of environment for myself. I wouldn't be as strong as I am, let's just say that.

**Brandon Shaver:** I was in Services for Children and Families, that's a state program [Oregon State Child Welfare], for a year or two, actually like four years. From the time I was five until I was nine. Then I got into a program called Casey Family Program, and I got another caseworker, and then when I turned 17 and got kicked out of my house they gave me another caseworker. And then after that, I got another case-worker when I went to college, and now that I'm going to college and I'm in Powerhouse I get another one. It's really hard to transition between the case-workers, but I just figure they all want to help me, so it's really important that you build a relationship with them. It's hard to open up for a lot of kids. It's really hard, because they just, "Okay, this person's going to

dump me anyway, what's the point?" I think it's really important that you encourage them to open up to this person, because they're not going to know any of your needs. You're not going to be able to talk to them about what's important unless you open up to them.

**Conference Participant:** (Response not recorded)

**Brandon Shaver:** Powerhouse actually accepts all ages from 18–23, and actually Emily is a person in Powerhouse. I'm a person in Powerhouse. It's really diverse; it accepts both men and women. In our first house, we actually lived together in the same house. We all have our own rooms, and we're able to function like a community. I haven't seen any problem with it. We haven't had any problems with people. No fights or anything.

**Conference Participant:** (Response not recorded)

**Lorea Alba:** Well, I heard a statistic once, and I wish I knew where this came from, that 100 percent of the young adults that come out of foster care are depressed. On a scale, of course, so I would say that everybody comes with their issues. We look at what they need individually, what their situations are, how they're able to maintain. We have the criteria that they need to be able to self-medicate because we are not a residential treatment facility. We do not take upon ourselves that liability or that responsibility. They need to be able to care for themselves. They need to be able to shower, to shop, to budget, to hold down a job. There are those criteria. We're not programmed for somebody who needs a lot of one on one assistance or mental health help. But that's not to say we won't work with them in other areas. Because we don't have them necessarily living in a residence doesn't mean that we can't help them out with rental assistance or with a mentor, if they need a mentor. So we will look at individually what they need case by case.