

Reaching out to foster kids

Education is the key to helping Brevard youths

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The 13th Annual Children's Week is currently underway in Tallahassee and advocates, corporations, and non-profits from across the state are highlighting the issues that impact our youngest residents.

Each year with special events, through quiet conversations, or sometimes through unfortunate circumstances, we are reminded of the many children who are living in foster care.

We in Brevard County are fortunate to have some wonderful programs in place to address the needs of foster families and young adults in the foster care system. But, as always, there is room for improvement.

There are approximately 130 children between the ages of 13 to 17 currently in foster care in Brevard. A quarter of those are young adults who recently turned 18 and "aged out" of foster care to start a life on their own.

Unfortunately, what is often considered a great freedom by many can be a very traumatic time for those leaving the system. While all young adults must learn how to navigate the real world, most do so with the help and support of family and friends.

When that support network is not in place, times can be tough.

Right now, Brevard has a new opportunity to help those young adults and build a better mousetrap in the process. It's through an organization called Connected by 25 Brevard.

The group, working in collaboration with Brevard Public Schools, the Department of Juvenile Justice and the Department of Health, is trying to put the pieces of the puzzle together for these individuals.

Young adults aging out of foster care have told us what they want.

That includes something as modest as clothes for an interview to learning how to properly balance a checkbook and keeping a savings account. They also want help maneuvering the Medicaid system and ability to easily transfer credits from school to school -- or, better still, the opportunity to finish out high school in one location.

Corporations large and small, community leaders, and caring individuals and organizations have the opportunity to join this campaign by dedicating their

services and time to open doors through internships, scholarships, training programs, and youth-friendly directives.

Simple plans, such as offering a workshop in auto mechanics or serving as an insurance advocate, are priceless to someone treading a new path.

The beauty of such change is that once applied to a small population of people the process may become embedded in the system and sustainable for generations to come.

Affordable housing, reliable transportation and employability are all areas that require attention in our nation, but also are under a microscope in our own backyard. Why not provide a solution that is local, manageable and directly benefits those who are most affected by even the smallest knot in the bureaucratic red tape?

The answers are right in front of us. Change happens here.