Presenters: Female Narrator; Tom Oates, Child Welfare Information Gateway; Sixto Cancel, Think Of Us; Sarah Sullivan, Think Of Us

[00:00:00]: [Music Introduction]

FEMALE NARRATOR [00:00:03]: This is the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast, a place for those who care about strengthening families and protecting children. You’ll hear about the innovations, emerging trends and success stories across child welfare direct from those striving to make a difference. This is your place for new ideas and information to support your work to improve the lives of children, youth, and families.

TOM OATES [00:00:31]: The data is pretty clear. Former foster youth face high rates of homelessness, incarceration, unemployment, and lack of access to healthcare. And the outcomes are disproportionately worse for black, native, and brown youth, as well as queer and trans youth. We’re diving into the transition process for youth aging out of foster care on this episode of the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast. I’m Tom Oates. And thanks for joining us to talk further about the issues and reforms of the transition process we’re talking with Think of Us - specifically Sixto Cancel, Think of Us’s CEO and Sarah Sullivan, Senior Director. And the reason is that Think of Us recently partnered with Bloom Works to develop Aged Out, a report that provides insights and recommendations gathered from on-site discovery with five separate locations. The team spoke with more than 200 people across 92 research sessions. And this includes foster youth, former foster youth, child welfare staff, supportive adults, and foster parents. Now, the interesting thing is that the Aged Out report was not the original intention. And you’ll hear about that.

[00:01:44]: But across the research, you’ll hear about three themes that represent where the child welfare system is failing transition age, youth, and where the report recommends attention be focused. And those themes are healing and dealing with trauma, centering youth in their preparedness, and helping youth build a supportive network. Now, this is part one of our conversation where we discuss the insights regarding the three themes. In part two, we’ll hear the recommendation Sixto and Sarah have to address the three themes. Alright, let’s get to it. Discussing improving how foster youth transition out of care with Sixto Cancel and Sarah Sullivan from Think of Us. Sixto and Sarah, welcome into the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast.

SARAH SULLIVAN [00:02:33]: Thank you so much for having us, it’s great to be here.

SIXTO CANCEL [00:02:36]: The pleasure is ours.

TOM OATES [00:02:38]: Thank you and I'll say this to folks already, Sixto was the very first guest that we had on the Information Gateway Podcast back in 2016. So, it’s a pleasure to welcome you back. And clearly, you’ve been busy in between the two episodes. And so right now, we’ll focus in on the Aged Out report. And I’m curious of how did Aged Out come to be.

SIXTO CANCEL [00:03:02]: This is such an interesting story because this Aged Out report actually was a result of us having to take a pivot. So, when we started Think of Us, our main focus was an app where young people could build a personal advisory board that would help them navigate the system. It would help them interact with their social workers and so forth. And as we continue to build on this application, what we realize is that there were some things that were just magical about putting the
power in a young person's hand to say, here are my needs, where my wants, here are my goals, and then the activation of their support network. But then there were very concrete things that just weren't working. And so when, as the more we dug into it, the more we realized is that technology wasn't actually the issue that we needed to solve for, right, it wasn't a tool that was missing, but that we had inherited a system that had certain mindsets and mental models about young people. That the power dynamics of a system was one where you are not just a little bit unbalanced, but in our opinion, extremely unbalanced between voice and choice of your life. And that, that this system is inherited. And that the policy and the practice and the resource flows just weren't aligned to the, to a system that we believe would have the output of helping youth people heal, develop, and really be positioned to thrive.

[00:04:29]: And so that started the journey for me to go find, like, how do we start to fix this, because it's not just a tech issue, it's literally a policy, practice resource flow, power dynamic, mental model relationship and connection they feel. Like, we've inherited this big dysfunctional system. And so I started to look for folks who had solved big problems like that. And as I looked for people, two people came across the radar - Marina Martin and Sarah Sullivan. And they had did things with President Obama to figure out how to solve big, giant crazy problems that involve bureaucracy hacking, right? How do you fix the bureaucracy and how do you center the actual person who you're serving? And on top of that, how do you, might you leverage some type of technology and that? And so, when I met Sarah, I thought it was like, oh, we have a big tech issue and then Sarah was like, wait, no, we have to actually go back and center ourselves and the user. And that began the journey to five different jurisdictions, hundreds of young people to really get the understanding of the nuances of how do we begin to actually unpack why this - what started off as the product not working the way that we envisioned to woah, here is the systemic shift that needs to happen. And I’ll actually talk with Sarah so that you can be even go off of that.

SARAH SULLIVAN [00:05:50]: Yeah, absolutely. So, I joined Sixto and the team at Think of Us in the Fall of 2019. And again, we were looking to start this next iteration of a Think of Us app that was kind of the problem space. But you know, at that point this app had gone really wide and done a bunch of cool things, but as Sixto just said, we really needed to uncover, like what, did it and really, what were the underlying problems that we really needed to fix? And certainly, child welfare spends a lot of money and a lot of calories on young people who age out of care and yet still outcomes remain really poor. So, you know, what is the system really missing for youth who age out of care? And we went on a journey to try to find that answer for ourselves so that we could know how to best serve as an organization. And so, that's the journey that became Aged Out. And we went to a total of five jurisdictions across the country over the course of the Fall 2019 and Spring, early Spring 2020, really looking to answer this question of what are we missing for youths who age out of care so that Think of Us could focus on those things. And we ended up answering that question with three answers saying that there are three big missing links that child welfare is missing for youths who age out of care - and it's healing and dealing with trauma, centering youth and their preparedness, and helping youth build a network of supportive adults. And this is basically the framework that now Think of Us as building a lot of its work off of. But basically, in the process we realized, hey, some other people might be interested in what we found. And so, we packaged together and published in a report that we published called Aged Out and it's really our gift, our contribution back to the field to say, hey, you might want to go on this journey with us and learn from what we learned, too. And so, that's what became Aged Out.

TOM OATES [00:07:40]: Yeah, I’m curious because you talked about this journey and it, you know, it started as an app to navigate the system. And then now you pull back and say, well, no, let's really take a look at the system in itself. But, Sixto, so, normally you are the consultant and you're the expert, you
know, sharing your lived experience and teaching others. But it sounds like you may have been the first one on, at least this Aged Out journey. So, I'm curious, as you had to now become somebody who was learning instead of somebody who was teaching - what were some of the most important things that you've learned so far in, in what's been, you know, a year plus journey.

SIXTO CANCEL [00:08:18]: Wow, I would have to say my biggest insight has really been around the importance of healing and dealing with trauma. I think the way that all of us have been associated in the system, those of us working in the system, for those of us living in the system - when we hear the word trauma, we immediately think to what is the mental health diagnosis that we might need to be able, that we might need to be able to like, assign in order to get services, in order to get resources so that then we can be in our healing journey. And so, my understanding of what healing was, was just very limited to the systematic function that we're used to doing. Right, we don't have a healing section in our independent living plans. We don't have a healing section in our transition plans. In our case plans, if we are talking about, quote, quote, healing, what we’re really talking about is the section that says, I'm on psychotropic meds or I'm in talk therapy. And that healing is so much more and there's so much modalities and what we're starting to see in this new emerging research is that there are many different pathways that folks have gone through very traumatic experiences and begin to like, actually regulate the physical piece of their body that is going into that flight, fight or flight mode that, that are able to start to work on those feelings that end up coming to the outside world as quote, quote, behavioral things that then we as a system try to then try to mitigate, right. Because of the liability it brings. So, for me it was like trying to understand the problem from a different way. Trying to understand the problem from a structural place of like, what is the power dynamic that is making folks feel oppressed here? Or that is flipping the script so much that you don't have enough voice and choice to actually give an adequate enough information to then have adequate enough interventions back. So, those are some of the things that I learned there.

TOM OATES [00:10:17]: You know, you, you focused on trauma and it is one of the three - I'll call them the pillars - that Sarah had mentioned, trauma, preparedness and that supportive network that, that Aged Out focuses on. I'd like to kind of dive into these a little bit. And Sarah, you know, trauma, of course, like Sixto mentioned, a huge part of this. But if you take a step back, we, we supposedly do recognize trauma within, within the field, we understand the adverse impacts of aces and, you know, the phrase of trauma-informed care is, is pressed about and people are working toward focus of trauma-informed care. Yet, the report talks about trauma as the elephant in the room or unspoken. Explain, explain the dichotomy here. Why is that?

SARAH SULLIVAN [00:11:05]: Absolutely. And, you know, first I'll just share a little bit of, to exactly your point, how we came to recognize this is one of the three pillars and, you know, it was kind of right in our face the first morning, the first day we showed up to our very first site, and the morning - it was late, it was early November - and we arrive a little bit early, and we see someone taking down in this, in this, it's a hub, it's a place where young people come to hangout and also get resources. And we see someone taking down something from the wall and we ask them about that and say, what are you, what are you doing? And they said, oh, this was a Dia De Los Muertos altar that we've had up for the last month and you just caught us as we’re taking it down. And we said, oh, well, tell us about that. And they said, well, it started a few years ago when we lost a former foster youth in the community and we were really looking for a way to acknowledge the loss of this, this former foster youth. And someone said, well, you know, Dia De Los Muertos is kind of for this occasion and it's fall and it's the right time and so, why don't we use that as a way to recognize this. And 70% of foster youth in that community are Hispanic. And so, they decided to lean on that ritual. And then when they did, interestingly, youth quickly used that event
to address other grief and losses in their life. So not only this former foster youth, but people were showing up to recognize the loss of siblings or foster family members or aunts and uncles. And were bringing their other losses to the table. And the staff could really see that there was this overwhelming need to address the loss and grief that many young people had.

[00:12:48]: And now it’s become an annual ritual that they do each year. And they have an opening ceremony where young people can come and place the flower on an altar, but it also stays up. And so, for young people who don't want to just say it that way, they can do it throughout the month. And then they have a closing ceremony and they have a grief counselor come at both the tail ends. And so, it was really kind of meant to be for us that it was right in our faces the first day that really what we were seeing is how in this case, a staff created a beautiful annual ritual to fill a gap. But what we saw is that that really was a gap that opportunities for young people to safely grief, to safely experience their loss were really missing throughout the time. This one being a great exception for how the staff filled, so beautifully filled in that gap.

TOM OATES [00:13:38]: You talked about the gap, right? And the venue was put in front of you, of this venue for trauma was created locally. So, there's clearly a difference from what's being done in so many other places. So, I'll just ask this, you know, how is trauma being kind of treated or addressed, I don't know, not to say everywhere else, but maybe commonly?

SIXTO CANCEL [00:13:58]: I think one of the things that I remember leaving the hub and talking to Sarah, and one of the things that was communicated was the gap between having a way to process trauma is so wide that young people had co-opted this traditional ritual to use it to honor some of the grief that they were going to. And I think that part of the experience in foster care is that you don't have the definite answers to, like, is the relationship over or is it here, right? When people die, who do I talk to? And so, when you're going from a new home to a new home, you're getting new rules. You're getting new frameworks of how people deal with trauma, how people deal with stress. It doesn't stick, and sometimes we are not able to stick around long enough, right, to actually adopt those rules and we're piece-mailing it together. So, those were just some of the things that came immediately to mind on that end.

SARAH SUILLIVAN [00:14:46]: And, I’ll also share, to your, to your question, Tom about, you know, we're saying the right words we’re doing trauma-informed, people know about trauma. Like what do you mean we're missing trauma? And I think part of the answer is exactly that. That we've gotten ourselves so cautious around some of this stuff that we've actually been a little more, had a clinical approach to a lot of these things when sometimes foster youth are experiencing, like all young people and like all grownups, big emotions or strong feelings in the aftermath of big things that have happened. And I'll give you some examples that we heard at a site that, you know, really, really stuck with us where many young people were sharing. Basically, the strong reactions that can come when they share strong emotions. Like somebody said that, you know, not every time that I’m being sad, do I need to go to a hospital. And, you know, it's really triggering for if I'm feeling sad to get handed the suicide hotline. And I think exactly what you're talking about can lead to a situation where, where sometimes jumping to extreme, jumping to the extreme around how to handle the side effects of trauma - which can sometimes be sadness that young people feel - and really not always providing the space for young people to safely experience the sadness they may be feeling.

TOM OATES [00:16:14]: Just let me be sad when I'm sad, right?
SARAH SULLIVAN [00:16:17]: Yeah.

TOM OATES [00:16:18]: So, you know, you guys have mentioned, you know, the word healing and I’m curious to where the report shifts towards making that a focus of foster care, of healing from trauma needs to be the goal of foster care. That’s a big, big shift from the idea of what the view of safety is versus the view of healing, right? So how far away would you say we may be either in processes or bureaucracy as you mentioned, or just in terms of the mind shift?

SIXTO CANCEL [00:16:56]: When I think about what's the gap, it's a huge gap in my opinion. And I think not because foster care is doing something wrong. I think there's things that we can look at that I think just as a society, we're actually just beginning to learn and in a way as a collective experience as a nation - what does it mean to be on the pathway to healing? More than ever, we see young people, we see adults, we see the whole spectrum of humans that live in the U.S. actually starting to talk about what does self-care look like? What does that healing journey for myself look like? We're actually saying the words trauma, right, in our community. We are starting to have this new awakening around it and I think that with that, there is the new awakening of what works and what's worked has been for people who are part of the majority of the country for a very long time. And I think now space is being created for those of us who are people of color, for those of us who have been marginalized to the extreme ends, right? Whether that be an experience around being involved in a system, the healthcare system failing you, whether that be another experience such as homelessness or you name it - now, we're starting to actually lift up how do you heal from some of these certain experiences and what does it actually, what's actually needed for that, for that actual healing to happen. And when I think about healing, I think about it in many different modes. But one way I think to myself, it's literally when you have come to the point where your body is literally not releasing those chemicals that are shooting you into that flight, freeze or flight mode.

TOM OATES [00:18:30]: If we can get to that, there are some other structures, right, that fall into play with what's, what's safe, what helps in healing. And so, preparedness is a big part of this. But our view of preparedness now is about, you know, transferring to independent living. So, it's education, it's employment, and it's housing. And they're critical, right? I think we all understand that when trying to prepare for somebody to move into adulthood. But those are still exterior, right? Those are still not to say cosmetic, but it all deals with the outside. Right. So, what are we missing?

SARAH SULLIVAN [00:19:12]: Yeah. I'll share some of how we came to have this preparedness as what we think is really the second pillar. And again, you know, the system spends a lot of money, a lot of calories on so-called preparing young people for aging out when they're going to age out or preparing for adulthood. So again, it's kind of funny to say how could this be one of the things that we’re missing? But what we really found is that what we're missing is centering youth in the preparedness. That the system has definitions and a way of thinking about preparedness, but we're missing how young people might be thinking about it. And one, kind of, anecdote that just captures it so clearly was we were out at one of the sites and in that, in that state there is extended foster care and - so it goes to 21 - and we would ask staff, when does extended foster care end? And they would say 21. And we would ask young people, when does foster care end, and they would say 21. But then when we dug deeper, we found out that many foster youth thought that it meant through 21, which is to say 22. Whereas staff we’re talking about until 21, which is 21. And so, even though they were saying the same words, they were off by a whole calendar year. And it really just summarizes what I think can go on sometimes, which is, we can sometimes be saying the same words but meaning different things. So, what does it mean to really center youth in their preparedness and have terms defined by them, goals defined by them?
[00:20:39]: And I think, you know, we talk about the big three which is education, employment, and housing. So, within those big three, what are young people’s specific goals within those big three? So, you know, we went to another site where it’s customary that as preparation for aging out, you get added to the public housing waitlist, which is two years long. And, you know, that’s probably a good backup plan. But you talk to foster youth and they’re like, I don’t want to live there. So how can we be surfacing what foster youths’ real primary goals are around housing and help meet those goals. And then to the what are we missing? By focusing on those three we’re sometimes missing what the other goals are that maybe don’t fit into those. And, you know, we had this great chance to speak with a team that does the youth transition conference in Hennepin County in Minnesota. And they do this really cool program that’s optional for youths who age out, where foster youth get to design a conference and they get to decide who gets to be there when the meeting is and what the meetings about. It’s really trying to empower young people to get to be the leader of this transition process. And so, they get to decide what the meetings about. And staff say that they’ll guide young people, they say, what is the most important thing in your life? And design a meeting around that. You know, what’s the most important thing that you need help with? Let’s work on that. And I said, Well, what do, what have young people had meetings about? And they said, you know, it’s really surprising, it’s not what you’d expect. Like, we’ve had a number of transitioning foster youth who are transitioning genders or non-binary, we’ve had a lot of meetings about that. And when you think about it, you’d say, well, yeah, if I was going through that life experience, that might be the most important thing in my life too. But if we didn’t ask you an open-ended question, it’s not going to be on your till. So, we have to give opportunities to really ask what are your goals and then help young people address those specific goals.

**TOM OATES [00:22:41]:** The fact that you heard somebody say it wouldn’t be what you expect tells you that there’s just a, just a difference in perception in thought of, of what maybe a case worker has and what the youth would have. So, it sounds like there’s a huge communication barrier or not enough happening of just, you know - when you talk about youth centered preparedness, youth driven preparedness, you’ve gotta find out where the youth wants to drive, right, where the young person who wants to go. So, talk to me about the communication that either happens or doesn’t happen, the actual, you know, not checking the box of yes or no questions like you mentioned, but actually the intrigue, right, that happens in a dialogue between caseworkers and foster youth. Did, did you see any of that in these particular areas or are you, are you seeing it happening or where would you like to see it happen more?

**SIXTO CANCEL [00:23:36]:** You know, this is where I go to, the system is just not designed in a way to foster something that’s not happening right now. And so, when we, when I hear you say something like, you know, what’s the communication barriers? I don’t know if there’s an actual communication barrier. I think the system designed a communication interaction, which is one that most of the activities that social workers are doing with their young people is - outside of a meeting - is responding to a request. So, the dynamic of the relationship is one where it’s like I asked you for something, you give me something and I determine how good you are based on if I get it, right. And then in these meetings, it happens, it happens that you’re having - whether it be monthly meetings or whether it be administrative case review every three to six months - meeting where you’re able to lift up what you want. And those meetings, all of a sudden, the expectation is that there’s like this huge clarity of like, here’s all the things that I really want in life and, like, here are the things that I’m supposed to be doing. But there’s not yet a system, in my opinion, that is designed to actually foster the relationship between a worker and a young person that would actually have, like, formed enough proximity that you can actually start to be vulnerable by like what are those things that you envision outside of the first level kind of checklist, right? So, like you can ask any young person, what do you want to be in life and we’ll, you know, for the
most part we’ll have to stay on that level. But when we started saying when you want to go deep, it takes work to get to, I want to be in connection with my sibling, I haven’t seen in a while. You know, I want to be, every time someone says I’m sick and tired, it makes me act out and I just can't help but, you know, have a reaction to it. I don’t want, I don’t want my emotions to leave my behavior anymore. To get to those type of things that are so deep, I think we have to actually change the way that the system has been structured to reinforce this very transactional nature.

**TOM OATES [00:25:32]**: Is it a structure that is really a structure? Or is it something that where we've kind of created these invisible barriers? And I don't mean to go back to communication barriers, but I just, you know, here is the way the process works and we follow the path, right? So, I’m curious within you talking about changing the structure, maybe it's more changing the approach and, and kind of widening your, your, your lens on how you approach preparedness. So, are you seeing - and this is something that when looking through the report, I was, I was looking to pull on - were there any made-up limitations that maybe caseworkers put on themselves that may keep folks from being maybe more creative or more open in preparing foster youth for transitioning out of care.

**SIXTO CANCEL [00:26:20]**: Before I hit that, I want to go back to the structure piece. I believe it is the structure. We have structured our adolescence program in child welfare to have, consist of monthly meetings, right? We consist of, like, every three to six months there's a bigger meeting to hold people accountable, kind of certain thing or lift up really big needs. And that in of itself - and sometimes that's a court case, right? But that in of itself doesn't follow the flexibility and the plasticity of the adolescent brain, which is that we’re ever-evolving. We make a plan and then say like this is your independent living plan and we, here are the life skills you’re going to learn - the structure by default that we inherited, all of us who are living today, it's, in my opinion, completely wrong. And the reason why is because what we now have learned about what does it mean to have an adolescent brain is that you have to have some of these developmental experiences where you're being coached, where you’re able to iterate, right, where you’re able to go ahead and have people like literally guide you. And the structure of the system has, is set up in a way that you don’t have that in the way that I believe is, it's truly, it truly amplifies your neurodevelopment. And I think when we see reports like the adolescent brain, the promise, the promise of the adolescent brain that the National Academy for Science, Engineering, Medicine - I hope I got the acronym correct, they're NAM - when we look at their research, you see that they've made statements about child welfare and the neurodevelopment of young people, and that the report is not in favor of child welfare’s impact on the brain.

**TOM OATES [00:28:06]**: We’ll make sure we actually have a link to that report on this episode’s page, along with, of course, the links to the Aged Out report and Think of Us. But I just, I want folks to understand that that idea of, of making sure that you have the ability for, for that young person to grow, to develop to as, Sixto, you mentioned, to be coached, which, which wonderfully transitions into that third pillar of the supportive network. And so, I'm just curious to how we define that, right. And so, the differences that we talk about with caseworkers, agencies, foster, foster youth and even those supportive adults themselves - define supportive adult. What are the definitions that we're using here?

**SARAH SULLIVAN [00:28:51]**: Yeah, totally. Well, Think of Us and Sixto had done work for a long time around supportive adults. So, we went into this research process knowing we wanted to dig in and learn more about that. And we already had kind of the bias - which much of the research supports - that having more people in your life who are supportive is a good idea for foster youth. But we knew there was more to figure out there. So, we really dug into how those relationships work. And to your point exactly how, like, more on how they're perceived. And we started by doing one-on-one interviews with
young people and we would ask them, tell us about the supportive people in your life. And you would get crickets. Nobody, I don't have anybody. What are you talking about? Nothing. And so, we learned to ask the question differently. And so, we would say things like, oh, if you got sick at school one day, who would pick you up or if you needed a drive, drive to a job interview, who would take you? And they would name names and then we'd say, okay, well, tell us about that and who's that person?

[00:29:51]: And then we would do an exercise where we had in a workshop setting, had young people take out a piece of paper and actually draw the, draw out the people in their lives and then ask them to put stickers next to the ones they were closest with and underline the people who they can ask for help and underline, you know, and have different exercises. And it turns out that young people have complex social networks and complex ways that they organize and make sense of them. Now, this is a big insight that a lot of child welfare doesn't recognize. A lot of staff, if you ask them to, do young people have supportive people in their lives, they will say no. And young people, if you ask them, they will say no. But if you ask them more creatively, we found out there's more going on there. So, we realized is that what was actually going on is that there was a disconnect between what the system knew about young people, supportive networks, and what was really going on. So, we dig into why that would be. And it turns out that for many complicated and interesting reasons, foster youth are really, in many cases, protecting these relationships from the system. And that's for reasons including, you know, every time they introduce someone into the system, something bad happens to that relationship. So, this is one relationship that's going right. I don't want to mess up this one relationship. Sometimes it's because young people feel so embarrassed to be a part of the system. A big thing we saw is for young people in group homes, they really will go out of their way to try to not let people in their external life know that they live in a group home because they feel so embarrassed. And so, they'll want to protect that piece of their identity from people that they know.

[00:31:36]: Other times it's supportive people themselves who don't want to be interacting with the system. I mean, we've heard cases of, you know, where an aunt would be glad to be a placement for somebody - this came up in our research - they were happy to be a placement for somebody, the foster youth wanted to be placed with the aunt, but the aunt had children of her own and she was afraid of further scrutiny by the child welfare system might mean something bad for her and her family. So, she ultimately opted to not engage with the system for that reason. So, there's complex web of reasons that foster youth are protecting this relationship, these relationships. And to answer your question, how are these defined? There's so much separation that there is no working definition of what that is. And if you ask a young person, if you ask a foster youth, tell us about your supportive person - I'm telling you you're not, you're not going to get a rich answer. Like, there's no real relationship with this concept because it's so primitive and our understanding in Child Welfare.

TOM OATES [00:32:35]: We've attached, I guess, a mythical definition to it. And nothing meets anybody's idea of that. Yet, those folks, when you ask somebody to map it out, who would come and pick you up, they fit. But it's one of those things of I'm not going to put this label on somebody or I'm not going to, I don't see anybody who sits that quote, unquote label. And so, it's interesting to see about the way you're interpreting how somebody develops, but also kind of recognize and identifies their own network.

SIXTO CANCEL [00:33:07]: I will, I will name also two things. It's not just like who would come pick you up because the system will allow anyone to pick you up. But it's like who you want to come pick you up, right. But I will also want to say that one of the things that I believe is happening and what we saw when young people are also making these maps of their network is that the ILP worker - across jurisdictions
there was this trend - becomes one of the central points in this young person’s life. And so now this young person’s having these very developmental moments with their Independent Living worker who’s doing certain tasks with them that you would have traditionally learned from a mentor or in a family setting, right? Doing a resume, finding your first job, learning what that interview dress up looks, dressing up for an interview looks like, right? So, you have these really rich moments that you’re supposed to, or traditionally you would see happening with your mentors and with your family, and now they’re happening with this paid staff.

[00:34:03]: So, when you hit 18 or you hit 21, and you’re no longer there, the big question for young people becomes oh, who is the paid person I’m supposed to go to? There’s not that innate thought that I should go to my supportive adults in my life. Because you haven’t actually practiced what it looks like to troubleshoot problems with them because you’re so used to going to the paid professional. And then this dynamic came from, and this insight came from because we kept hearing workers say, oh, our young people are so entitled, they’re so enabled, right? And so, as we dug in, it actually is that we’ve actually spent all this time training you to go to your ILP worker to figure out life scale problems. And then all of a sudden, you were supposed to go ahead and have this quote, quote certificate, imaginary certificate, and be really good at life skills. And that’s just not how it works, right?

TOM OATES [00:34:57]: I don’t think it works that way for anybody. Only, only, you know, letting somebody just kick them out of the nest and say you’re good now, you’re an adult, so you’re fine for the next 60 years. For anybody out there, I think, I think we’re all still works in progress. Okay. In part two, we dive into the recommendations Think of Us developed for child welfare agencies and others to address those three urgent themes - healing and dealing with trauma, centering youth and their preparedness, and helping youth build a supportive network. If you head on over to child.welfare.gov and head to this episode’s page, we’ll have links to Think of Us’s Aged Out report, along with the report that Sixto mentioned, the Promise of Adolescence, which was developed by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. We’ll also have additional resources on supporting youth as they transition into independent living and adulthood. Now, if you like what you’re hearing on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast, well, hey, that’s great, please subscribe. We’re available on Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Spotify, Google Podcasts, and SoundCloud. We’re delivering new conversations to you each month. My thanks to Sixto Cancel and Sarah Sullivan with Think of Us. And a reminder to look out for part two of this conversation. And of course, my thanks to you for joining us here each and every month on The Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. I’m Tom Oates. Have a great day.