A Number Everyone Should Know

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As we have discussed in class, education is a vital part of social mobility. Having a good education influences what type of job a person gets, who that person marries, and ultimately which rung of the social ladder of family incomes he or she is a part of. We have talked about poor families versus rich families, broken families versus stable families. But what about foster kids?

Children are put in foster care when they are in danger from their physically and mentally abusive parents. Until the age of eighteen, kids are in foster homes without a choice. But once they do turn eighteen, they have the option of taking themselves out of the foster care program and try to make it on their own. These kids are much more likely to end up homeless or in prison.

Because of their lack of financial support from their parents or guardians, these kids who have “aged-out” of foster care usually can’t afford to pay for further education, assuming they have graduated from high school. According to USA Today (http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-05-23-foster_n.htm), only three percent of foster kids that took themselves out of foster care once they turned eighteen go on to graduate from college.

To give a more tangible feeling for this statistic, we can look at the actual numbers. In 2005, there were 24,407 foster children who had removed themselves from the foster care system. If the estimation holds true, about 732 of those children will finish college. Centre College has 1,175 students. We would need almost eight Centres to have
the number of “aged-out” foster kids, and not even one of them would graduate all their students.

I believe this number is important because with sociologists, as well as most of American society, putting so much stress on how important education is to a person’s future and social stature, it seems there should be a lot of support to help the children who are more in need of extra support. Foster kids don’t have their parents to tell them to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps.” They live with a different family that, a lot of times, is only taking in foster kids for the money. These are the kids who need to make a better life for themselves and move up in the quintiles. As these kids “age out” of foster care when they turn eighteen, they can live completely on their own, and many don’t have education on their list of attainable goals. Something should be done to help motivate these young adults to beat the odds; to help them go to college and graduate; to help them not become just another statistic.