

**The Many Faces of Poverty**  
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*Tenement House*

Mayor Michael Bloomberg's poverty commission (officially called the Commission for Economic Opportunity) released its long awaited [report](#) on September 18, with a slew of statistics and recommendations about confronting poverty. Below, a dozen responses, which offer a glimpse at some of the many kinds of New Yorkers who are poor:

## Getting Foster Teens Beyond the System

*Betsy Krebs and Paul Pitcoff*

Most young people who "age out" of the foster care system at 18 can expect to live in poverty. Too many are not prepared for college and too many end up homeless, jobless, and incarcerated. They lack the financial and educational resources they need to become successful adults.

Young people from foster care have the aspirations and potential to become fully participating citizens -- to work in accounting, design, health care, web design, the entertainment industry. The main challenge is convincing adults around them that these youth can – and must-- take on more responsibility while they are still in foster care to

prepare for a future of economic opportunity. The culture of low expectations for teens in foster care and the lack of accountability for their success or failure must change.

The foster care system has been given the responsibility of raising thousands of teens to adulthood, but its primary purpose is to protect children from imminent harm, not bring teens to adulthood. As a result, the services provided by the foster care system for teens are typically inadequate, and do not focus enough on future planning as a way for the young people to rise above poverty.

The city has to set high expectations for foster care teens and give them the tools, skills, and education to make the contributions that they can for our society.

The teens themselves can speak most passionately and articulately about what they want for their lives--not just today but for the future. If given responsibility, education and opportunities, they are the best advocates for themselves. And thousands of dedicated and experienced professionals in the foster care system can help lift teens out of poverty if they are given the support and tools to treat each teen as an individual with potential.

But, if we are to be successful in helping foster teens avoid poverty, the broader community must be involved. Leaders from the private sector, experts on higher education, national service, the arts, etc. must get involved -- whether it means giving advice to individual teens, providing scholarships and internships, or participating in policy discussions about preparing teens for adulthood. We all should share in the challenge and responsibility for helping young people in our custody escape poverty and achieve economic opportunity.

*Betsy Krebs and Paul Pitcoff, co-founders and directors of [Youth Advocacy Center](#), are authors of *Beyond the Foster Care System: The Future for Teens*, a book about the development of a program that brings teens, the system, and the outside community into active collaboration to increase opportunities for teens in foster care.*