

State of Connecticut Adolescent Needs Prior to Transitioning from Care

We the adolescents in care in the state of Connecticut require the following to ensure that every youth who exits out of the foster care system has the opportunities, resources and supports necessary to achieve a stable transition into adulthood:

Vocational Preparation and Training

- *Awareness of available programs.* The Department of Children and Families (DCF) should ensure that all youth have access to and awareness of the vocational programs¹ available to them, regardless of the location of their residence.²
- *Internship connections.* DCF workers should support youth pursuing internship opportunities, paid or unpaid, in their desired fields. Support should include, but not be limited to, providing letters of recommendation and referrals to appropriate agencies and organizations.
- *Access to career preparation classes and services.* To help youth prepare for the job market, DCF should ensure that youth have access to career preparation classes and services, which should include résumé building and drafting, assistance with job applications, interview preparation, and mock interviews.
- *Special consideration in applying for DCF employment.* For youth seeking employment or internships³ with DCF, time spent in state care should be viewed with special consideration on applications.⁴

Secondary and Postsecondary Education

- *Assistance building a competitive résumé.* During a youth's secondary education experience, DCF should assist youth in developing a competitive résumé. To aid this effort, DCF should ensure that youth achievements are continually documented in case plans, certificates and awards should be filed in case records under important documents and youth should have access to career services.
- *Career fairs.* DCF workers should regularly arrange for youth visits to age-appropriate career fairs.
- *Educational financial assistance.*⁵ DCF should provide a clear written policy outlining the availability of a limited waiver to extend postsecondary education funding beyond age 23 in cases with extenuating or unique circumstances. Waiver requests would be drafted by youth and submitted to the petitioning youth's DCF Area Office chain-of-command before seeking approval from the Commissioner's Office. A student must complete the Federal Application for Free Student Aid (FAFSA) prior to seeking a waiver, and may need to apply for additional academic scholarships as a prerequisite for a waiver approval.

Sufficient Transition Time

- *Sufficient transition time.* DCF should allow youth successfully completing college or vocational programs to request an extension of up to three additional months to transition from care into independence.⁶ The extension request should include a detailed description as to why an extension is needed as well as a comprehensive chronological list of efforts that have and will be taken to successfully achieve employment, stable housing and reliable transportation.

Life Skills

- *More preparation for adult situations.* DCF should enhance Life Skills classes to include preparation on how to handle situations and opportunities unique to adulthood that may not otherwise be addressed for youth in care.⁷
- *Follow up life skills classes.* DCF should offer youth the opportunity to repeat attendance, if needed, in the entire Learning Inventory of Skills Training (LIST) life skills curriculum or receive further instruction in specific LIST life skills domains based on their age and needs.⁸
- *Centralized access to LIST assessment.* DCF should ensure that youth, providers, foster parents and social workers have access to a centralized data system where life skills progress can be updated in real time. Such a system will maximize the effectiveness of life skills programming for youth and prevent youth from unnecessarily being referred to life skills domains they have already successfully completed.

Finances

- *Credit education.* DCF workers should educate youth, from age 14 until transition from care, on credit scores and how to monitor, maintain and improve credit.⁹
- *Matched savings accounts.* DCF should offer youth the opportunity to utilize and benefit from an Individual Development Account (IDA) matching program.¹⁰
- *Financial literacy courses.* DCF should ensure that youth have access to age-appropriate financial literacy courses to learn about banks, types of accounts, financial aid/services, common financial scams, etc.¹¹

Social Support Networking and Transition Support

- *Non-DCF supportive adult relationships.* DCF workers should assist youth in building relationships with people outside the Department by encouraging youth to connect with other supportive adults in their lives and to volunteer in their community in order to build their networks.¹²
- *Resource lists.* DCF should develop an accessible contact list of statewide resources as well as a quick reference guide highlighting DCF Adolescent Policy in youth-friendly language. The resource list and quick reference guide should be made available to every youth in care fourteen years old and above and include email addresses, phone numbers and photos of key persons who can be contacted by youth to receive assistance in accessing resources.
- *Easy digital access to resources.* The Department should develop a smartphone application able to easily provide access to information about statewide community resources such as housing programs, employment opportunities, health care clinics, and legal services.¹³
- *Access to alumni.* The Department should organize and utilize a DCF alumni program through which foster care alumni can receive aftercare benefits and provide volunteer mentoring services for youth currently in care.¹⁴

Accessing Social Services and Transitioning to DCF Sister Agencies or the Military

- *Involvement when transitioning to other departments.* To the extent they are able, youth who have been identified for transition to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services' (DMHAS) Young Adult Services or the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) should be active participants within their planning process.

- *Involvement when transitioning to the military.* For youth transitioning into the United States Armed Forces or participating in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), Reserve or National Guard, DCF workers should be involved in this process and maintain regular contact with the youth's Armed Forces recruiter while the youth continues to receive DCF services.¹⁵
- *Access to assistance programs.* DCF workers should assist youth transitioning from care with accessing government and nonprofit assistance programs they may be eligible for, including Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, energy assistance, Department of Labor or CT Works vocational training and opportunities, tax assistance, food pantries, and diaper banks.
- *Assistance accessing affordable housing.* DCF workers should assist youth with locating and securing affordable housing if their current placement or residence will no longer be available or affordable without DCF subsidies after exiting care.¹⁶

Notes

¹ DCF vocational programming available statewide is outlined in DCF Policy 42-3 and corresponding Contract Scope of Service documents. These programs include Work to Learn (Adolescent Practice Guide page 23), Life Skills programs that facilitate the LIST Assessment (Adolescent Practice Guide pages 19-20), the Community Housing Assistance Program (CHAP) and the Community Housing Employment Enrichment Resources (CHEER) Program.

² At the time of adoption of this proclamation, the DCF Meriden Area Office is currently the only office without a contracted Work to Learn provider for its catchment area (Work to Learn Scopes of Service as of 7/20/16 update).

³ DCF Internships for current youth in care are not limited to social work opportunities, but should extend to additional professional disciplines such as fiscal services. Connecticut's Public Act No. 13-124 (Effective July 1, 2013) does provide preference for youth in care, up to age 24, for state agency internships over similarly qualified applicants.

⁴ Statewide YAB members request that DCF look into establishing an internal hiring practice that offers points on an employment application for former youth in care, similar to the "Veteran's Preference" points currently available on the CT-HR-12 Application for Examination or Employment.

⁵ Under the Postsecondary Education subcategory of Financial Assistance, there was an initial proposal for a tuition waiver (either full or partial) for youth in care who were also attending a state university, as well as the creation of an on-campus continuum of educational support for these students. The goal of these proposals was to assist DCF youth in successfully completing their postsecondary education while also easing their transition from care. As DCF cannot unilaterally act in this regard, Commissioner Katz agreed to have her administration approach the Connecticut State University administration about this possible partnership.

⁶ Timeframes for youth transitioning out of care after completion of a Postsecondary Education Program are outlined in DCF Policy 42-4 (revised 6/1/16). The policy allows youth who have completed a college degree or vocational training program a transitional period for up to 90 days to begin immediately following graduation. The policy notes this allowance exists in part to provide time for youth to secure full time employment. Any extension of this time would be subject to available resources and the approval of the DCF Commissioner.

⁷ Statewide YAB members specifically cited how to handle a vehicle breaking down roadside, how to conduct oneself during a traffic stop and internet safety training as examples of practical life instruction not normally offered to youth in care. Statewide YAB members also expressed support for educating all adolescents prior to their transition from care on voter rights and registration.

⁸ Statewide YAB members originally identified several Life Skills domain areas in which they would like to receive additional instruction. The domains noted by the youth are now covered in the LIST Life Skills curriculum recently adopted by DCF as follows: Filing Taxes (Domain A), Financial Budgeting (A), Food Planning and Nutrition (B), Professional Dress (C & K), Housing (D), Advanced Transportation (F), Emergency and Safety Skills (G), Post-Educational Planning (I), Job Seeking Skills (J), Job Maintenance Skills (K), Conducting Professional Conversations (K), Locating Resources (L), and Legal Skills (N). The request for repeat or further instruction is not, however, limited to those domains specified or identified.

⁹ The DCF Adolescent Policy Practice Guide pages 9-12 outlines the specific guidelines for instructing youth in care age 14 and older on credit scores, including providing all youth under 18 a copy of their free credit report on an annual basis and assistance with interpreting the report and rectifying any falsities on the report due to child identity theft. It should be noted that youth age 18 and up should be advised and instructed to access their own free annual credit report, as credit checks requested by DCF for these youth result in a “hard inquiry,” which can negatively affect a youth’s credit score.

¹⁰ Youth committed to DCF at the time of their referral to a contracted Work to Learn program can access an Individual Development Account (IDA) in which deposited funds into the account are matched on a dollar for dollar basis, up to \$1,000 per year for a total match of \$3,000 over time as funding allows.

¹¹ The LIST Life Skills Assessment’s Domain A covers Money Management but the skills listed for this domain are not as specific as the statewide YAB members have requested regarding financial services and education regarding types of bank and savings accounts.

¹² DCF Policy 36-8 Child and Family Permanency Teaming (CF-PT) and its accompanying Practice Guide are in place to ensure that case decisions made on behalf of youth are crafted with the youth’s active participation as well as the active participation of important persons identified by the youth (including but not limited to parents and family members and the youth’s natural support network) in order to support safe relationships and permanent connections with caring adults.

¹³ The Alliance for Children’s Rights, a California-based charity organization, partnered with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services to develop a resource-connecting smartphone application called B4UGO especially designed for youth transitioning out of the foster care system. The B4UGO app’s resources are currently specific to the Greater Los Angeles area, but conceivably the infrastructure could be expanded to include Connecticut resources or perhaps a local advocacy organization could partner with DCF and other agencies to develop a similar app for Connecticut youth.

¹⁴ DCF is currently collaborating to support a statewide Foster Care Alumni program with a mentoring component to benefit youth currently in care. In line with youth feedback, it is expected that the alumni organization will offer an aftercare component for youth who have transitioned out of care to include membership invitation, notice of advocacy initiatives, information about the DCF Re-Entry Services program and targeted opportunities for networking.

¹⁵ DCF involvement in a youth’s transition to the U.S. Armed Forces includes, but is not limited to, staying informed regarding the youth’s training and drill schedule, assisting with any necessary leave of absence forms required by a postsecondary education institution, and working with the Veteran Affairs Office at the youth’s university or college campus to facilitate transfer of any college credits earned through military service.

¹⁶ In addition to Housing and Urban Development (HUD) sponsored housing programs such as the Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) program, there are programs available in Connecticut like The Connection’s Start Program, which provides homeless youth ages 16–24 in the Hartford area with emergency housing, temporary rental assistance, and intensive support services aimed at assisting the youth in transitioning towards safe, stable housing and self-sufficiency.