

**Program Review & Investigations Committee Public Hearing  
DCF Services to Prepare Youth Aging Out of State Care  
Public Hearing  
Thursday, October 3, 2013**

**Testimony provided by  
John Lawlor, Program Manager, The Connection Inc.**

---

Every year, many youth exit from DCF care against recommendations or due to ineligibility for ongoing services. As a result, they are at heightened risk for homelessness and which in turn provides for a disproportionate interface with the mental health, substance abuse, public assistance, and criminal justice systems.

Their experiences while homeless put them at incredible risk for exploitation, victimization, and exposure to further traumatic events that compound upon what they experienced in their childhood; hindering their attempt to transition into successful contributing adults. With this combination of lack of supports, frequent homelessness, substance abuse, escalating mental health symptoms, and criminal justice involvement; those that we know today as “emancipating youth” research indicates we are likely to be recognizing tomorrow as our public-assistance and “Medicaid super-utilizers”.

In recognition of this growing problem, the Department of Children & Families initiated a collaboration with The Connection in November 2011 to pilot a supportive service program for these young adults. This program targets former foster youth, ages 18-24, who are ineligible for re-entry to DCF services and who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness. Specifically the program assists those youth in transitioning to self-sufficiency by providing case management services targeted towards employment readiness skills, continuing education, financial literacy and asset building, while providing temporary rental assistance. With access to our program services which extend beyond their DCF eligibility, our most recent point in time count indicates that our young adults have an employment rate of 79%; thus exceeding the 61 % employment rate for a general sample of young adults ages 20-24 in Connecticut (*Youth & Work*, Anne E Casey Foundation, 2012). To highlight the effectiveness of extending services beyond current eligibility for DCF involvement, amongst our early discharges from the program, we have had a young adult purchase her own condominium; an accomplishment that appeared far out of reach for her prior to her receiving supportive services from our program. We have also worked to successfully transition a young man with limited independent living skills into a “family” living environment with supportive adults. At present, we are serving thirty-six young adults all of which are referred to us via DCF with whom we have strong, interactive, working relationship.

From our observations, preparation for the transition to adulthood should begin in early adolescence, with a focus on education, exposure to developmentally appropriate employment opportunities and financial literacy skill building. As the Department of Children & Families has demonstrated via this pilot, successful transition to adulthood for former foster youth requires significant planning prior to discharge from DCF care along with services targeted specifically to the population. By providing these young adults with a safety net during those key years of their gradual transition into adulthood we believe that they will have the necessary opportunities to succeed in maintaining stable housing, obtaining gainful employment and becoming contributing citizens. By providing extended services beyond their DCF eligibility, we can tip the scales for these at-risk youth to become tax paying productive members of society instead of tomorrow's heavy utilizers of public assistance programs.

Thank you for your time.

John Lawlor  
Program Manager  
The Connection