



Department of Children and Families (DCF) Services to Prepare Youth Aging Out of State Care

Background

In June 2013, the PRI committee authorized a study to assess DCF services to prepare youth aging out of state care. The study also examined coordination between DCF and other state systems and services involved in transitioning the DCF population aged 18 and over.

Using a results-based accountability (RBA) approach, the study focuses on answering the questions: *How much did we do? How well did we do it? Is anyone better off?*

The study focus is on youth who turn 18 in DCF care, and how DCF prepares them to be self-sufficient adults. The population reviewed includes older youth aged 18 and over who voluntarily continue to receive DCF services and adolescents aged 13 up to 18 still committed to DCF's care.

DCF provides adolescent and transitional services intended to assist youth under its care make the transition from out-of-home care to self-sufficient, productive lives as adults in the community. DCF provides case management services, monitoring, and support services through a variety of programs.

Since June, committee staff had ongoing meetings with staff from the DCF Adolescent Services Division as well as with other agency staff on a number of cross-cutting topics. Interviews were conducted with program personnel for the Departments of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), Developmental Services (DDS), and Social Services (DSS).

In addition, committee staff spoke with representatives of several youth advocacy groups, former and current DCF youth and social workers, and other interested stakeholders, as well as with research experts on transitional issues for foster care youth and specialized treatment services.

Main Staff Findings

An overall assessment about how well DCF is preparing youth who age out of DCF care is not possible, and is hindered significantly by a lack of quality aggregate information on program activities and measures, and individual youth outcomes. Implementation of recent initiatives will strengthen data-sharing and performance monitoring efforts.

The number of DCF youth discharging at age 18 is relatively small but has increased as a percentage of all discharges.

There is a slight increase in enrollment to post-secondary programs and significantly fewer youth are discharged for education non-compliance.

Many entities, in addition to DCF, are responsible for assisting these youth and study-identified issues related to those entities require further review.

Many strategies to improve outcomes for DCF youth have been identified by national researchers, advocacy groups, and youth advisory boards, or are in some way already being considered or developed by DCF.

PRI Staff Recommendations

Permanency. Assist youth to establish stable and enduring connections; continue to gather professionals to review policies and practices; and develop tools to ensure the discharge process begins early to address developmental or academic needs, and facilitates youth involvement.

Housing. Improve access to housing options through an internal needs assessment; ensure regions are aware of housing opportunities; and continue to leverage resources with local housing authorities and community-based organizations.

Education. Promote goal setting, minimize disruptions in education, and continue post-secondary education preparatory activities and supports.

Employment. Continue to build partnerships with workforce investment boards and private employers; encourage further work readiness activities.

Health Care. Develop mechanisms to improve access to health care and maintain Medicaid coverage; continue collaboration with DMHAS and DDS to improve data-sharing and life skill instruction.

Life Skills, Re-Entry, Targeted Services. Re-vamp life skill instruction; connect youth to more formal aftercare services; continue collaboration with community providers for target populations (e.g., pregnant youth).

Youth Empowerment. Explore ways to increase mentorship; encourage diverse participation in youth advisory boards; continue support for Wilderness School activities; develop a website designed for older youth.

Data Collection. Improve data development through compliance with recent federal initiatives.

