

TASK FORCE ON HELPING  
YOUTH THRIVE IN PLACEMENT

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# Task Force on Helping Youth Thrive in Placement

## BACKGROUND, CONTEXT SETTING, EVOLUTION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2010 the New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF) elevated the work of adolescent and young adult (ages 14-21) case practice in order to improve the coordination and delivery of services for these DCF involved youth. At that time the Office of Adolescent Services (OAS) was created. In early 2011, a strategic plan was developed that incorporated feedback from youth, DCF staff, service providers, and other critical stakeholders. The "Striving for Success in Transitions to Adulthood - New Jersey - DCF Adolescent Services Strategic Plan" was published in late 2011 as the roadmap of prioritized goals that needed to be accomplished in order to facilitate the much needed change in working with adolescents and young adults.

Early in 2012 as DCF continued working on the goals outlined in the Adolescent Services Strategic Plan, it became clear that focused efforts were needed to more comprehensively address the needs and experiences of DCF youth in out of home placement settings. In addition, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) released an informational memorandum on "Promoting Social and Emotional Well-Being for Youth Receiving Child Welfare Services" to provide guidance and encouragement to child welfare agencies to improve the well-being of children and youth in care. Similarly, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) introduced the Youth Thrive Framework which outlined promotive and protective factors that were identified through a synthesis of literature on adolescent development, resilience, brain development, trauma impact information, and positive youth development.

DCF Commissioner Allison Blake responded to this identified need for systemic and cultural change, recently released Federal guidance, and newly introduced Youth Thrive Framework by creating the Task Force on Helping Youth Thrive in Placement (HYTIP). The Task Force on HYTIP was designed as a collaboration between DCF, CSSP, and the Task Force members which include DCF staff, youth, service providers, and youth advocates. Through the lens of the Youth Thrive Framework, the Task Force was asked to identify and implement strategies to promote statewide, systematic, and cultural change that will impact the safety, well-being, and development of our adolescents and young adults residing in out of home care placements. Ultimately, the work of the Task Force on HYTIP would advise the Department and its partners on ways to enhance and ensure that the well-being of youth in an out of home care placement are supported so they have the most normal childhood and adolescence possible, thrive as individuals, and successfully transition into adulthood.

The Task Force on HYTIP launched in July 2012, outlined its charge, and introduced CSSP's Youth Thrive Framework as the foundational underpinning to help define, change, and improve the areas of work where systemic and cultural change was needed. The belief was that the Youth Thrive Framework would offer the necessary research, knowledge, and tools for creating such change.

During the remainder of 2012 and early 2013, the Task Force completed a comprehensive and critical analysis of current practice and policies surrounding adolescents and youth in out of home care settings. Using the protective and promotive factors outlined in the Youth Thrive Framework, DCF's strengths and areas needing improvement were identified as it relates to a youth's experience in out of home care placements. This system and practice analysis was conducted through creating three work groups based on out of home placement types (out-of-home clinical placements, out-of-home non-clinical placements, and resource/relative home placements). Each workgroup used the Strength, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results (SOAR) model to evaluate how well and if DCF was addressing the protective and promotive factors through current policies and practices for youth in out of home placements. The workgroups then provided recommendations regarding opportunities and aspirations surrounding how these policies and practices can be changed and/or improved.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The information, feedback, and ideas provided by the task force members through the analysis completed in their workgroups was synthesized and compiled into The Task Force on Helping Youth Thrive in Placement Recommendations (Table 1) outlining four major areas of work that need improvement and change:

1. Department of Children and Families Policy
2. Program Models and Licensing for Out of Home Clinical and Non-Clinical Placements
3. Resource and Relative Home Placements for Older Youth
4. Training

For each of the four major areas of work, the recommendations are defined through scope, broad examples, implementation teams, and timeframes to achieve the recommended changes. In addition through the HYTIP Implementation Guidance Document (Table 2), more detailed and specific recommendations related to each of the four areas of work is provided. This guidance provides more specific information and feedback to help inform the implementation teams identified to promote change and improvements.

The recommendations and respective guidance document emphasized that this change and improvement process needs to be youth driven, ensures that youth receive early and appropriate case planning especially as it relates to education and healthcare, that those adults working with youth are provided with the necessary resources, support, and training to provide a comprehensive understanding of a youth needs, and that youth are given every opportunity possible to have a normal adolescence and remain connected to their family, friends, and community.

The implementation teams identified for the four major areas of work will be created by 3/22/13 and begin and/or continue moving forward with recommendations identified by the Task Force. The Task Force will continue to meet quarterly and provide feedback, guidance, and encouragement throughout the implementation process. In addition, Task Force members will also and voluntarily have the opportunity to participate in any efforts outlined in the recommendations.

Through the support, collaboration, and partnership between DCF, CSSP, youth, providers, and other critical stakeholders, the recommendations proposed by the Task Force on HYTIP will be achieved and promote improved outcomes and quality of life for DCF involved youth in out of home placements and transitioning into adulthood.

**TABLE 1 - HYTIP RECOMMENDATIONS**

In partnership with youth, providers, other state departments, and critical stakeholders, DCF will work towards enhancing the well-being of adolescents in out of home placements by incorporating strengths-based initiatives that are normalizing, trauma informed, focus on adolescent development, and help youth to thrive in all aspects of their life.

AREA OF WORK	SCOPE	EXAMPLES	IMPLEMENTATION TEAMS	TIMEFRAMES FOR COMPLETION
<p><i>DCF Policy</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review and update Child Protection and Permanency youth specific regulations, statutes, and policies using the Youth Thrive Framework lens.</li> <li>Identify, update, and create Children's System of Care (CSOC) policy that specifically addresses practice related to CSOC involved youth using the Youth Thrive Framework lens.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy should reflect the current needs of adolescents and young adults and incorporate youth, staff, and stakeholder feedback.</li> <li>Policy should be easily accessible and navigated by DCF staff, youth, and stakeholders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaboration of DCF Staff- Policy Unit, Adolescent Services, Child Protection and Permanency, and Children's System of Care.</li> <li>Incorporate youth and CP&amp;P feedback from 2011-2012 surveys as it relates to CP&amp;P policy.</li> <li>Incorporate youth, service provider, and CSOC feedback regarding CSOC policy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CP&amp;P Policy: July 1, 2013 (<i>already in-process</i>).</li> <li>Identify existing CSOC policy by 4/1/13.</li> <li>Identify what CSOC policy needs to be created and provide draft policy by 8/1/13.</li> <li>Identify what existing CSOC policy needs to be updated and create draft updates by 9/1/13.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Program Models and Licensing for Out of Home Clinical/Out of Home Non-Clinical Placements</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review and update program regulations and policies using the Youth Thrive Framework lens.</li> <li>Review, propose, and implement new program models and contract expectations that use the Youth Thrive protective and promotive factors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review needs to address liability and risk issues, provide youth with more opportunities to be in the community, address issues regarding Medicaid and physical/emotional health, and ensure that youth's concerns and feedback are incorporated into the programs' policies and practices.</li> <li>Program models need to:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide opportunities for youth to maintain connections with families, peers, mentors, and their community when appropriate.</li> <li>Provide clear, understandable regulations that allow for flexibility and autonomy that is developmentally appropriate.</li> <li>Ensure appropriate and youth driven case and discharge planning practices that assist the youth to transition back to and be sustained in the community.</li> <li>Ensure that youth are provided with critical life skills that help them to promote and develop their strengths and expose them to various opportunities that will help them to succeed.</li> </ol> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaboration of DCF Staff- Licensing, Contracting, Adolescent Services, Child Protection and Permanency, Educational Support, and Children's System of Care.</li> <li>Youth</li> <li>Designated service providers and critical stakeholders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program models to be reviewed with draft updates by 9/1/13.</li> <li>Licensing Regulations to be reviewed and updated by 7/1/13.</li> <li>Program contracts to be updated for renewal cycles on 1/1/14, 7/1/14, and 1/1/15.</li> </ul>

AREA OF WORK	SCOPE	EXAMPLES	IMPLEMENTATION TEAMS	TIMEFRAMES FOR COMPLETION
<p><i>Resource and Relative Home Placements for Older Youth</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review and modification of recruitment, matching, and training of resource parents and relative caregivers of older youth.</li> <li>Review, propose, and implement a new resource home and relative caregiver program model specific for older youth that uses the Youth Thrive protective and promotive factors.</li> <li>Review, propose, and implement training and support options for resource and relative home placements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review to address:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Recruitment strategies and matching techniques for specific youth populations and non-relative resource homes.</i></li> <li><i>The need for an Older Youth Resource Home program model that provides and ensures:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Opportunities for youth to maintain connections with families, peers, mentors, and their community when appropriate.</i></li> <li><i>Clear, understandable regulations that allow for flexibility, autonomy, and healthy risk taking that is developmentally appropriate.</i></li> <li><i>Ensure that youth are provided with critical life skills that help them to promote and develop their strengths and expose them to various opportunities that will help them to succeed.</i></li> </ul> </li> <li><i>The need to strengthen resources, training, and support for relative caregivers and non-relative resource homes for youth ages 14-21 through:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Support groups</i></li> <li><i>Parent mentoring</i></li> <li><i>Updated and mandatory adolescent specific training</i></li> </ul> </li> </ol> </li> <li>The integration of the youth's concerns and feedback need to be incorporated into these efforts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiate the Older Youth Resource Home Workgroup (OYRHW).</li> <li>Collaboration of DCF Staff-Adolescent Services, Child Protection and Permanency, and Licensing.</li> <li>Foster and Adoption Family Services.</li> <li>Youth</li> <li>Resource Providers (including non-relative resource home parents and relative caregivers).</li> <li>Designated service providers and critical stakeholders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>OYRHW will identify improved strategies to recruit non-relative resource parents of older youth by 7/1/13.</li> <li>OYRHW will identify improved strategies to match non-relative resource parents to older youth by 7/1/13.</li> <li>OYRHW will identify and propose training, resource, and support needs for relative caregivers and non-relative resource homes by 7/1/13.</li> <li>OYRHW will recommend an Adolescent Resource Home Model by 9/1/13.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Training</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review and update current adolescent training; create and propose new trainings for DCF staff, service providers, youth, and resource parents/relative caregivers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trainings need to incorporate youth voice and the Youth Thrive Framework.</li> <li>Webinars/listening sessions/focus groups to be delivered to infuse the Youth Thrive framework into adolescent policy, practice, and programming.</li> <li>Training opportunities for resource parents/relative caregivers need to reflect the unique needs of youth ages 14-21 and provide a clear understanding of policies and regulations.</li> <li>Adolescent specific trainings need be available to DCF staff, service providers, resource parents/relative caregivers, and youth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaboration of DCF Staff-Adolescent Services, Training Academy, Child Protection and Permanency, Children's System of Care, and Educational Support.</li> <li>Montclair State University, Stockton College, and Rutgers University.</li> <li>Youth</li> <li>Foster and Adoptive Family Services.</li> <li>National Resource Center</li> <li>Designated service providers and critical stakeholders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Module Adolescent Training to be updated by 8/1/13 and pilot in 9/1/13.</li> <li>Develop Adolescent Specific Trainings by 7/1/13.</li> <li>Develop Youth Thrive specific webinar and listening sessions by 5/1/13.</li> <li>OYRHW will update training catalogue and requirements for resource parents and relative caregivers by 7/1/13.</li> </ul>

**TABLE 2 - IMPLEMENTATION GUIDANCE DOCUMENT FOR THE TASK FORCE ON HELPING YOUTH THRIVE IN PLACEMENT**

POLICY	OUT-OF-HOME CLINICAL/NON-CLINICAL PLACEMENTS	RESOURCE AND RELATIVE HOME PLACEMENTS FOR OLDER YOUTH	TRAINING
<p>Updated through the Youth Thrive Framework lens.</p> <p>Reorganized to be reflective of adolescent case practice.</p> <p>Policy should be easily accessible and navigated by DCF staff, youth, and stakeholders.</p> <p>Policy needs to be appropriately disseminated to key stakeholders and youth.</p> <p>Independent living stipend policy needs to be updated, clarified, and increased.</p> <p>Revise policies around healthcare according to the Affordable Care Act for youth who have been adopted or received KLG.</p> <p>Revise policies regarding holiday/college break homes for youth in college.</p> <p>Revise policies regarding overnight visitations for youth in programs and/resource homes.</p>	<p>Youth need to take risks and explore their own decision-making skills; to "fail" without automatically being discharged from a program.</p> <p>Youth need the opportunity to be in the community (i.e. working, dating, going out with friends, sleepovers) without background checks, etc.</p> <p>Youth need to have a voice in their treatment and/or goals, understand their rights in treatment/participation in programming, understand the reason they are in treatment and/or in programs.</p> <p>Ensure that youth are aware and know how to access community resources while they are in treatment/programs so they can access them when they are discharged.</p> <p>Out of home programs need to have close relationships with local community programs/resources that will benefit youth during the program and post-discharge.</p> <p>All programs need to have youth satisfaction surveys and pre and post program surveys.</p> <p>All programs need to have more engaging environments that are youth informed (décor, areas where the youth can have privacy/make calls, create more home like environments etc.).</p> <p>All youth need to have the opportunity to participate in community service and civic engagement opportunities where available.</p> <p>All youth need to have the right to be able to voice concerns and receive advocacy for their problems, they need to be given the knowledge on how to do this by staff in their program.</p> <p>Standardize and improve life skills programming.</p> <p>All programs need to deliberately encourage youth to participate in extracurricular activities (i.e. sports, clubs) at their schools and/or in their communities (i.e. church, other recreational programming).</p>	<p>Address subpopulations of youth.</p> <p>Include youth in recruitment efforts.</p> <p>Review current and identify needed training for resource parents and relative caregivers specifically related to the unique needs of youth ages 14-21.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adolescent Development</li> <li>• Delivering Life Skills</li> <li>• Trauma</li> <li>• Permanency</li> <li>• Identify strategies to require resource parents to complete training annually</li> <li>• Specific training and support for relative placement caregivers</li> <li>• Service provision and policy-(i.e. life skills)</li> <li>• Educational planning</li> <li>• Living with a relative caregiver vs. non-relative caregiver</li> <li>• Healthcare</li> </ul> <p>Promoting and creating strategies to ensure "normal" adolescent activities in the resource home (reviewing licensing regulations and updating policy).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allowance</li> <li>• Dating</li> <li>• Sleepovers</li> <li>• Unsupervised community outings with friends</li> <li>• Having friends over, visiting friends' houses</li> <li>• Using the computer</li> </ul> <p>Strategies to better support resource parents and relative caregivers who take older youth into their homes (i.e. mentor programs/support groups).</p> <p>Develop an Older Youth Resource Home Program Model (see Missouri's TLAP Model).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include Maternal and Infant Resource Homes</li> </ul> <p>Non-relative resource home matching strategies for youth ages 14-21.</p>	<p>Training should create an understanding of basic neuroscience including attachment, adolescent development, and trauma so staff can identify and coordinate appropriate clinical interventions at the earliest possible opportunity and make the most suitable placement for each youth.</p> <p>Understanding youth's story and experience behind behavior including resilience, permanency values, life skills, youth driven treatment planning and goal setting with adolescents.</p> <p>Staff and professional training should include self-awareness, boundary setting, and appropriate engagement with adolescents.</p> <p>Opportunities for youth to learn and practice emotional expression and self-regulation.</p> <p>Teaching leadership and self-advocacy skills to youth.</p> <p>Teaching agencies concrete strategies to use positive youth development in agency practices.</p> <p>Create a personal responsibility training.</p>

POLICY	OUT-OF-HOME CLINICAL/NON-CLINICAL PLACEMENTS	RESOURCE AND RELATIVE HOME PLACEMENTS FOR OLDER YOUTH	TRAINING
	<p>All programs need to address fitness, health, and nutrition.</p> <p>All programs need to include strategies for self-regulation.</p> <p>Youth need to participate in adolescent activities and milestones (i.e. prom, graduation).</p> <p>All programs need to create goals with the youth that are developmentally appropriate and realistic, identify strategies to celebrate "small successes."</p> <p>DCF and programs need to have an integrated CFT/FTM/Treatment Team process.</p> <p>Need to identify creative ways to engage families and ensure their participation in treatment, create more engaging environments for family visits, and prepare families for life post-discharge.</p> <p>Need to ensure the youth is able to maintain connections with friends and family (with an emphasis to also engage young fathers to be connected with their children while in treatment), either through visits (including with siblings), phone contact, using skype, etc.</p> <p>Need more opportunities for mentoring, tutoring, and counseling.</p> <p>Need generally for youth to be connected with the community to assist the youth to transition back into and be sustained in the community.</p>	<p>Promote family and sibling contact/connections.</p> <p>Improve background checks and recruitment efforts to ensure high quality resource families that are committed to the needs of adolescents.</p> <p>Promote legal permanency for older youth, "treat youth like they're going to be with you forever."</p> <p>Assist resource parents and relative caregivers to connect and collaborate with local organizations.</p> <p>Create a resource parent and relative caregiver mentor program.</p> <p>Help youth develop a life plan.</p> <p>Encourage and allow youth to explore their own religion/culture/ beliefs.</p> <p>Better incorporate youth into resource family life to help take away the stigma.</p> <p>Provide respite options for non-relative and relative caregivers.</p>	<p>Staff self-care strategies.</p> <p>Training for courts and associated stakeholders related to adolescent specific programs, services, and practice.</p> <p>Ensure that DCF staff are trained and informed regarding the role as an education advocate and are aware of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Educational resources</li> <li>2. The importance of early and realistic educational planning and academic goal setting.</li> </ol> <p>Provide training regarding the Youth Thrive Framework.</p>

