



**Implementation Grants to Develop A Model Intervention for Youth/Young Adults With  
Child Welfare Involvement At-Risk of Homelessness  
Children's Bureau**

**Grantee Name:** New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF): Connecting YOUth

**Project Director:** Jessica Trombetta, [Jessica.Trombetta@dcf.state.nj.us](mailto:Jessica.Trombetta@dcf.state.nj.us), 609-888-7100

**Project Summary:**

Connecting YOUth is an effort to provide youth with holistic, authentic, relentless, and individualized services and supports that develop and strengthen a youth's promotive and protective factors. These factors prevent and address homelessness and achieve dynamic outcomes including permanent supportive connections, socio-emotional well-being, housing stability, and education and employment success.

The Connecting YOUth intervention strategy includes: resources to expand and improve housing options and youth housing program model capacities, enhanced training, bolstering practice with new screening and assessment tools, reallocating funds and restructuring Chafee services, an intensive focus on permanency, and strengthening community partnerships to better coordinate and offer a robust array of services and supports. The project will pilot in three New Jersey counties and impact approximately 300 youth with experience in foster care. DCF continues to plan and partner with the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), Child Trends, and the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) to implement this comprehensive intervention package.

**Populations of Interest:**

- Youth in Foster Care, ages 14-17 (Population 1) – The project will bring a laser-like focus to the youngest youth in our cohort (Population 1). This will reduce the number of older adolescents in Populations 2 and 3 still in or re-entering care, or experiencing homelessness. An early warning system based on Phase I data analysis will enable us to prioritize our intervention package to youth currently in care who are at greatest risk of homelessness, but will allow us over time to target all 14 year olds in care. The intervention package will include radical permanency efforts, flexible group based life skills programming, educational champions, and mentoring.
- Young Adults in Foster Care 18 to 21 (Population 2) – For youth 18-21, intensive efforts will include a focus on supportive housing, group based life skills, and mentors. Access to newly developed supportive housing will provide a stable environment in which young adults can



access permanency services, job training, health care and social services, and receive the consistent emotional support they need to become self-sufficient and transition to true interdependence. We will assess these youth with both the Transition Age Youth (TAY) triage tool and the key risk factors, which are defined by our Phase I analysis. This will ensure youth with the highest needs receive more intensive services.

- Homeless youth with foster care histories, up to age 21 (Population 3) – All youth in Population 3 will be eligible for intervention services because they are, or have been at some point, homeless. These youth will be eligible for supportive housing, group-based life skills, and mentors. We will assess these youth with both the Transition Age Youth (TAY) triage tool and the key risk factors, which are defined by our Phase I analysis. This will ensure youth with the highest needs receive more intensive services.

### **Critical Elements of the Proposed Model to Be Implemented:**

Based on the diligent work done during Phase I, the New Jersey Connecting YOUTH project has designed implementation activities organized into three major intervention components:

#### Component 1-Connect to Family (1A) and Connect to Well-Being (1B)-1 program in each pilot county (3 total)

Connect to Family (1A): Targeted for youth 14-17, exceptions will be made for youth 18-21. Activities: provide intensive support to youth and their families leading up to and including post-permanence, convene radical permanence teams, conduct aggressive family finding, make realistic decisions, and expedite legal permanence.

Connect to Well-Being (1B): Targeted for youth 14-21. Activities: redesign life skills training (flexible, accessible, and ongoing), and promote positive group identity by holding, hosting or joining youth focused, fun gatherings and events.

#### Component 2-Connect to Achievement (2A) and Connect to Mentors (2B)

Connect to Achievement (2A): Targeted for youth 14-17, exceptions will be made for youth 18-21. Activities: Educational Champion Staff that liaison among the youth, case work staff, school, and community; ensure educational records are complete and thorough in the SACWIS system; obtain current and accurate educational information through data sharing; and create education passports that detail specific activities for youth to reach their goals.



Connect to Mentors (2B): Targeted for youth 14-21. Activities: “Near Peer” and Professional Mentoring to develop character, bolster social and leadership development, academic success, and explore career interest through assessment/inventory.

### Component 3-Connect to Home-Supportive Housing and Housing Screens

Screening: The intervention will use a newly designed targeting tool that addresses factors associated with risk of becoming homeless as defined by administrative data analysis. The intervention will also incorporate the six questions from the Transition Age Youth Triage Tool to identify the most vulnerable youth.

Targeted for youth 18 up to 21. Activities: Improving the quality of youth supportive housing, establishing a tiered housing model, conducting housing screens utilizing the Transition Age Youth Triage Tool, expanding housing options for the highest risk youth (through a partnership with the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA) 60 Project Based Section 8 housing vouchers, which will be committed to this pilot project), and improving access to housing.

Other Areas of Interest:

Although DCF is a state run child welfare agency, there is an awareness and acknowledgement that local Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P) offices and their respective communities are most knowledgeable about the young people they serve. Therefore, in order to ensure that the youth level service intervention components are delivered successfully, Implementation Committees will be created in each of the three pilot counties. Among other tasks, these committees will be responsible for:

- Creating a local network of community stakeholders to help support, track, and monitor the implementation of the pilot intervention components.
- Developing a community of practice who share similar ideals and philosophies regarding quality work with adolescents and youth.

The service intervention components, Implementation Committees, and all partners involved in the project will also be required to implement this project through the following tenets of practice:

- Youth driven
- Youth Thrive framework lens
- Permanency at the forefront, *always*.



- Trauma informed
- Cultural humility/racial equity
- Local communities know their youth best
- Housing First
- Focus on needs not behaviors

Given the complex and pressing needs of adolescents and young adults in this project and the goal of addressing vast goals as outlined by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), our system and youth level intervention components are necessarily comprehensive, multifaceted and ambitious in scope. Connecting YOUth's implementation plan introduces a number of new resources and strategies and takes positive advantage of several related innovations already underway in New Jersey.