
**Report to
The Vermont Legislature**

**Annual Report on
Transitional
Services Outcomes**

**In Accordance with
Act 74. 33 V.S.A. § 4904 (d): Foster care; transitional youth services**

**Submitted to: General Assembly
House Committee on Human Services
Senate Committee on Health and Welfare**

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Commissioner**

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**AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES
Department for Children and Families**

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Overview of Transitional Services

Act 74: Youth in Transition Act was passed in 2007 to create a focus on the needs of youth exiting foster care and provide them with the resources to address those needs.

Act 74 was a visionary effort on the part of Vermont’s administration and legislature. The federal government mirrored a number of its components in the Fostering Connections Act of 2008. The funds provided through Act 74 have created opportunities for youth to remain in supportive living situations while they complete high school, receive training and higher education to enter the workforce, and establish safe, independent living situations.

DCF’s Youth Development Program (YDP) is the primary vehicle through which Youth in Transition services are delivered. The YDP program stresses the importance of permanence for adolescents, partnering with youth using the strength-based approach of positive youth development, and creating pathways to safety, well-being and law abidance. These strategies are being accomplished through education, affordable housing, job training and access to healthcare.

DCF delivers YDP through a grant to the Washington County Youth Service Bureau (WCYSB). The Washington County Youth Service Bureau sub-contracts with ten provider agencies in all twelve DCF districts. Through the capacity and expertise of WCYSB, outcomes are being targeted with best practice approaches supported by training and technical assistance, and measured for effectiveness.

An objective of the grant is for WCYSB to develop a system for measuring outcomes related to increased access to health care, permanency measures, educational attainment, and employment. WCYSB will analyze outcome data, report on progress, and provide recommendations on establishing measurable targets for future performance of YDPs. This year, we are collecting initial

baseline data from YDPs statewide. WCYSB will offer recommendations for measurable outcome targets to the State for SFY2015 contract development, around March 2014.

The following performance measures are also included in the grant:

- 100% of YDP agencies will collect and provide data leading to the identification of defined outcome measures;
- 100% of YDP agencies will engage in training and technical assistance activities to ensure that youth are served by competent professionals; and,
- 100% of Youth Advisory Board activities will focus on youth empowerment and the development of leadership skills.

As of July 1, 2013 the YDP began tracking information about services, outcomes, and demographics for youth served to meet federal reporting requirements for the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program and the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD). Youth Development Programs statewide are reporting monthly on 8 demographic elements, 11 categories of service provision, 21 outcome measures, and differing types of financial supports provided.

This year, YDP implemented use of the Youth Connections Scale, an evidence-informed tool developed by Anu Family Services and the University of Minnesota. The tool guides users to identify a score on a scale of 0-100 of the level of social connectedness for youth. This tool is accessed and completed through the YDP Database. Scores are maintained for future reference. This allows Youth Development Coordinators to easily determine which youth are most at risk for not securing permanency and to prioritize identifying natural supports for these young people. This scale can also be used to determine whether the YDP is making a difference for youth in this area by re-testing them over time.

The Youth Development Committee, a statewide youth advocacy group of current and former foster youth supported by YDP, also saw significant changes this year and has developed a better mission, values, a plan for sustainability and recruitment, as well as identifying many additional opportunities for youth leadership and engagement. Youth Development Committee members are the primary planners of DCF's annual Youth Development Conference held every spring.

The Extended Care program, created by Act 74, funds a variety of supports for transitioning youth up to their 22nd birthday:

- Funding for foster care for youth over the age of 18 who are completing high school;
- Assistance with funding Adult Living Partners for youth who have completed high school;
- Assistance for youth living independently
- Incidental living grants;
- Limited Case Management services delivered by Youth Development Coordinators;

Categories of Financial Support	# of youth benefiting FY2013
Completion of Secondary Education (Category A)	46
Adult Living Program (Category B Extended Foster Care)	25
Housing Support Program (Category C Independent Living)	31
Incidental Living Grant funds	129
Post-secondary Education Supports	49
Drivers' Licensing Supports (permits, driver's ed, licenses)	35
Basic Needs	39
Employment Supports	14

Incidental Living grants provided to individual youth are modest and generally require a copayment by the youth. Some examples of what funds were utilized for in the past year include:

- Textbooks for college classes
- Rental assistance
- Clothing for job interviews
- Transportation assistance to maintain connections to family
- Driver's Education classes
- Laptops for school work
- Bus passes to get to employment

This assistance allows youth to move towards self-sufficiency and establishing a sense of well-being by making progress towards their future goals

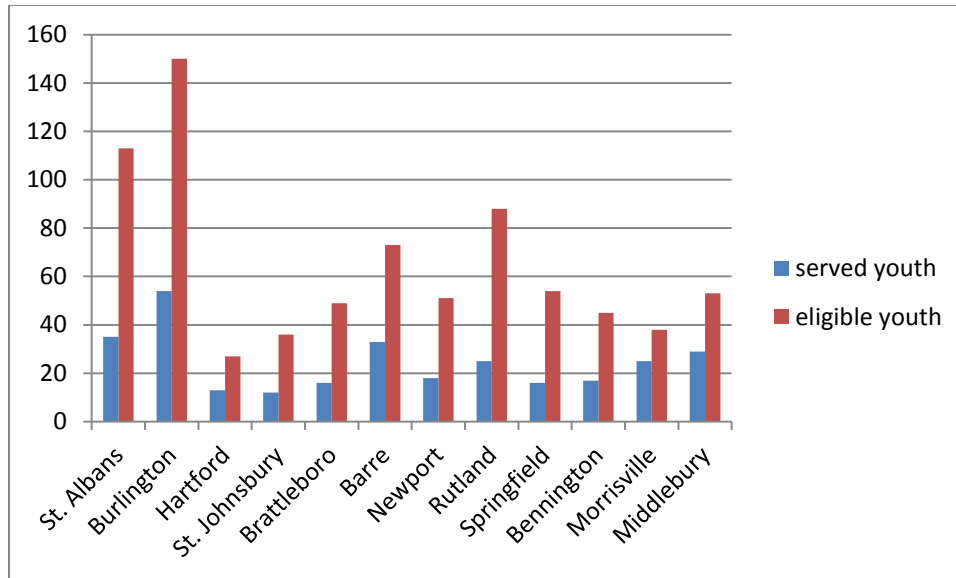
Act 74 Rules

Rules promulgated in 2008 continue to be in place and provide the regulatory underpinnings of our work. They are available on the public web site of the Family Services Division:

http://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/pdf/fsd/rules/Transition_Age_Youth.pdf

Youth Development Program - Eligible vs. Served Youth

The state continues to lack the capacity to serve all eligible youth (aged 15-22 years old) through the YDP. The following chart shows a district breakdown of the discrepancy between the youth served and the youth eligible for services, based on the numbers of youth that exited foster care at 18 each year:



Since July 1 2013, **352** youth have benefited from YDP services.

Evaluating Outcomes of Transitional Services

The Youth in Transition Law required DCF to develop a “method for measuring, evaluating, and reporting outcomes of transitional services provided under this section to the house committee on human services and the senate committee on health and welfare annually.”

The Washington County Youth Service Bureau is moving forward with collecting and evaluating data in target outcome areas related to youth served by the YDP. They have also incorporated the federally required National Youth in Transition (NYTD) reporting expectations into monthly reporting requirements. Data collected in this effort includes services provided under Act 74 (see chart on page 4) post-secondary employment and training participation (page 6) employment (page 7) and freedom from incarceration (page 8). As part of its collaboration with the Vermont Coalition of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs (also supported by DCF) the Youth Development Program has as part of its health promotion efforts begun collecting data on the number of youth enrolled in the Medicaid program, seeing an identified primary care physician and participating in primary healthcare prevention. Results from this year’s efforts will be reported in next year’s report.

As required by the federal Chafee Foster Care Independence Act, Family Services Division has continued its NYTD reporting process required by that funds a portion of the YDP. We are now in our third year of collecting baseline data for 17 year-old youth in foster care. Two data sets have been completed—one in April 2011, the other in November 2011. We are now in the process of collecting data for a second cohort of 17 year-old youth in foster care. Outcome data was collected in April 2013 and November 2013 for the first cohort, now 19 year old youth formerly in foster care. At this time, results from this outcome survey process and another on services received by youth available from the federal government will be captured by Washington County Youth Services Bureau’s database efforts and available for next year’s report.

Post-Secondary Education and Training

DCF Family Services is continuing its efforts to improve post-secondary outcomes for foster youth through early career exploration, better educational preparation, college recruitment, retention and completion.

The Youth Development Program formalized a partnership with the Community College of Vermont (CCV) this year and produced a youth-friendly pamphlet and information for current and former foster youth. The Community College of Vermont represents an excellent educational opportunity for Vermont youth, and foster youth in particular. Because the college has a presence in twelve areas of the state and also online, youth have the option to remain in their communities and connected to their natural supports and service providers for an additional period of time in the course of their adolescent development. Youth also enter the institution at the appropriate educational level, often taking basic skills classes needed to prepare for college-level learning. CCV advisors and professors provide individualized support to youth and collaborate well with YDP supports. Lastly, due to the affordable cost of a Community College of Vermont education, former foster youth are able to attend at virtually no cost and limited financial risk. Interested youth are also supported to transfer to other colleges as they are interested and become prepared.

An advisory group to support access to higher education for foster youth continues to meet twice annually. The group includes youth formerly in foster care, college administrators, college student assistance professionals, and VSAC program staff. This group tracks enrollment, college retention, and data to make adjustments to our approach.

Youth currently involved in YDP Program, age 18-21	Percent	Number
High school credential	89.33%	134
High school credential <i>and</i> some post-secondary education or training.	50.74%	68

College of St. Josephs STEPS Program

In addition to the efforts of the higher education committee, the College of St. Joseph in Rutland sponsors an innovative program for former foster youth called STEPS. STEPS provides year round housing, educational programming and support to help these youth meet the challenges of enrolling and succeeding in college. This last fall semester **20** former foster youth were enrolled in the STEPS program.

Youth Leadership

The Youth Development Committee, DCF's statewide youth advisory board, continues to build focus and direction. This year, youth members have developed a mission and set a purpose for the committee, designed logos and branding, become involved in several policy and practice initiatives across the state, and participated in valuable leadership trainings. Since July 2013 the Youth Development Committee has directly supported over 30 youth across the state engage in leadership and advocacy activities. The Youth Development Committee expects continued growth through recruitment initiatives being implemented over the next few months.

Youth leaders are involved in policy and best practice initiatives on the local, state, and regional levels through partnerships with DCF Family Services and groups such as the Justice for Children Task Force, the Children and Family Council for Prevention Programs, the New England Youth Coalition, and others. Many youth are even applying for nationally competitive internships with the FosterClub All-Star Program in Oregon and the Foster Youth Internship Program in Washington, D.C.

These young people are able to become leaders and play an essential role in their communities because of the supports offered by the Youth Development Committee and the opportunities it creates for collaboration, advocacy, and professional skills development. Youth learn how they can make a difference in the lives of others, which empowers them to make positive decisions for their own lives.

Employment

Through its collaborations with the Vermont Coalition of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs (VCRHYP), the Department of Labor, the Support Systems for Runaway and Homeless Youth (SSRHY) grant, Vocational Rehabilitation and its JOBS Program, the Youth Development Program will be increasing its emphasis on assisting youth in accessing long term employment through research-based progressive employment practices.

Youth currently involved in YDP Program	Percent	Number
Youth age 15-21 employed (full or part-time).	58.52%	206 of 352
Youth 18-21 experiencing employment.	70.67%	106 of 150

A youth is employed part-time or full-time if employed between more than 1-35+ hours per week, in one or multiple jobs, as of the date of the outcome data collection.

Freedom from Incarceration

Consistent with DCF Family Services' approach to working with youth and families the YDP, through prevention and early intervention strategies, is designed to increase the assets and strengths of youth minimizing their risk of involvement with the criminal justice system. This programming is structured to partner with and empower youth to enter adulthood as valued, contributing members of their community with networks of positive social connections, secure employment, safe and affordable housing, access to health care, and education and training.

Youth currently involved in YDP Program, age 15-21	Percent	Number
Free from incarceration	96.88%	341 of 352

A youth is considered to have been incarcerated if the youth was confined in a jail, prison, correctional facility, or juvenile or community detention facility in connection with allegedly committing a crime (misdemeanor or felony).

Additional Information about DCF Family Services programs for youth in transition can be obtained by contacting Dana Lawrence, DCF Family Services, dana.lawrence@state.vt.us or 802-279-6104.