

Vermont Agency of Human Services
Department for Children and Families – Family Services
Foster Care - Preventing Homelessness at Discharge

PURPOSE

To support and implement, to the maximum extent practicable and where appropriate, policies and procedures for the discharge of youth from **Foster Care** in order to prevent such discharge from immediately resulting in homelessness; to clarify practices to promote greater housing stability for all persons served by the system of care.

MISSION

“No AHS program or service can achieve its goals for clients if those clients are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The highest priority for AHS housing efforts is to end homelessness in Vermont. All departments shall be attuned to the housing needs of clients and ensure that their programs support housing stability.” – AHS Policy on Housing Stability

To help reduce the incidence of homelessness in Vermont, the department has developed the following policies, procedures and services to support former foster youth transitioning to adulthood.

DEFINITIONS

The terms *Homeless* and *At Risk of Homelessness* are defined in the Vermont Agency of Human Services Housing Stability Policy. In general, an individual exiting a publicly-funded institution or system of care is deemed At-Risk of Homelessness if their annual income is below 30% of county median and they lack sufficient resources or support networks to prevent them moving to an emergency shelter, the street, or another place not meant for human habitation.

For the purposes of this document, homelessness prevention of former foster youth applies to youth who entered foster care by order of the court and remained in custody and out of home care until reaching their 18th birthday.

POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND SERVICES

DCF Family Services assists foster youth in preparing for adulthood and securing safe and stable housing through its formal casework planning process and the provision of financial and contracted youth development services extending until the youth's 22nd birthday.

The case planning process is guided by the Case Planning Practice Guidance and the Over 14 Case Plan document (*contained in draft form on the DCF Family Services website*). Both documents are in the process of being finalized and implemented statewide. The case planning document is completed twice yearly and reviewed at the six and twelve month interval by a formal case review process and again annually by the family court as defined in DCF Family Services Policy 122 Case Plan Reviews and Permanency Hearings for Children and Youth in Custody.

Status: *Being Implemented*

In addition to these documents, DCF Family Services is developing a Transition to Young Adulthood document which spells out the final plans, services and supports of youth exiting foster care to be prepared not more than ninety days prior to their 18th birthday in compliance with the federal Fostering Connections Act of 2008. This document spells out plans and services to support contact with family, and access to education, employment, healthcare, and housing. Application of this process will be codified in policy and procedure as part of its finalization.

Status: *In Development*

Financial and Casework Support as a Bridge into Adulthood

As youth approach their age of majority, they partner with their social worker and contracting agency Youth Development Coordinator to explore and pursue their plans to prepare for, transition to, and enter into adulthood. The casework support component of effort is provided through state and federal funds from the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. Financial support to secure and maintain safe and secure housing is provided through Act 74 the state Youth in Transition Law and accompanying regulations found on the DCF Family Services website.

These two support elements are integrated and structured to allow for all former foster youth to access them until their 22nd birthday.

EVALUATION OF EFFECTIVENESS

DCF Family Services evaluates the application and effect of its case planning process for children, youth, and families through its federal Five Year Plan, internal quality assurance plan (articulated in the Five Year Plan), Annual Progress and Services Reports (APSR) on progress of the plan, and external federal audits (Child and Family Services Reviews-CFSR) as well as federal services and outcomes through its National Youth Transition Database submissions. While the scope of these efforts extends beyond a specific focus on homelessness among former foster youth, it does address the department's compliance with federal and state policy and regulations. DCF also compiles and submits an annual report to the legislature on services provided to foster youth and outcomes. (*Available on DCF Family Services website*)

Status: *Implemented*

Compliance and monitoring of services and outcomes of the DCF Family Services funded Youth Development Program is conducted under the department's performance based grant with the Washington County Youth Services Bureau which tracks service delivery and outcomes across a range of activities and indicators, many related to housing. Regular summaries are provided to the state.

Status: *Implemented*

Additionally, as Vermont's homeless Continuum of Care implement a system for coordinated intake and assessment, the Agency of Human Services and local Continuum will seek to incorporate an evaluation of the effectiveness of homeless discharge planning for various systems of care into the standard client intake.

Status: *In Development*

COMPLIANCE AND MONITORING

Overall responsibility for ensuring compliance with the above policies or procedures rests with the department. To ensure a consistent and comprehensive approach, the Agency of Human Services Secretary's Office may provide individual departments with direction, support and consultation as needed. Additionally, the Governor's Council on Homelessness may provide feedback on these policies or procedures and their effectiveness in preventing routine discharge to homelessness.