

## Supporting Young Adults in Correctional Settings

Young adults impacted by the child welfare and criminal justice system are at elevated risk of adverse outcomes. This is a cohort that is most vulnerable for homelessness according to a recent research (retrieved at <https://housingmatters.urban.org/research-summary/do-people-incarcerated-age-25-experience-longer-duration-homelessness>).

The study reports that, "adolescents and young adults ages 18 to 25, or transitional age youth, who experience incarceration are particularly vulnerable to housing insecurity, including homelessness, defined by authors as "living in a shelter, on the street, in an abandoned building, in a garage or shed, in an indoor public space, in a vehicle, or on public transportation."

*"Those incarcerated as adolescents spent an average of 3,095 days experiencing literal homelessness, those incarcerated as transitional-age youth spent an average of 1,853 days literally homeless and those incarcerated greater than 24 spent on average 1,598 days in literal homelessness."*

Incarcerated young adults are often alone or have few supports during the period of incarceration. In many cases, young adults leave corrections without a comprehensive plan that addresses their specific needs. They may have a living arrangement and a parole officer to report to but then face many obstacles that prevent them from becoming successful. So often these young adults don't have the support and skills to manage a challenging world, often on their own, and resort back to past behaviors in order to survive

There are some young adults incarcerated that have a history with DCF. A small percentage of these youth incarcerated have been committed to DCF on abuse or neglect petitions. DCF became their statutory parent and despite years of working with the youth, the young adult ended up in the Department of Corrections (DOC).

It is often during these times of incarceration, that these young adults realize they need help and supports. If so, one possible option is to request services from DCF. DCF policy allows for a previously committed youth to request re-entry to the Department.

DCF has staff outposted within DOC facilities to assist incarcerated parents and DCF committed youth who are placed within DOC. These DCF DOC Liaisons are onsite at several facilities including Manson Youth; York Correctional Center; Hartford Correctional Center; New Haven Correctional Center; Corrigan Correctional and MacDougal Walker. These staff identify any incarcerated parents that have a connection to a DCF family and works with the assigned worker on the case. They meet with incarcerated people in their offices and assist with family and DCF calls about their child. For young adults either committed to DCF and/or seeking re-entry, the liaisons works with the youth, their attorney (if they have one) the area office social worker and others to create a re-entry plan for them.

To support DCF committed youth within corrections, the liaison will meet the youth onsite at the facility. During these meetings, permanency discussion is incorporated into the meetings with the youth. The DCF DOC liaison utilize the "permanency pact" toolkit to guide the youth in identifying specific supports they need. The permanency pact provides 45 suggested supports that a youth transitioning out of care may need. The youth then identifies supportive adults whom they believe can committed to providing these supports. The liaison serves as the facilitator between the youth and identified supportive adult.

Ultimately, the youth and supportive adult(s) sign a permanency pact, copies are given, and a token keepsake gift is provided to the youth. The youth now has supportive adult(s) they can rely on for ongoing support and life-long, kin-like connections.

In addition to supportive adults, credible messengers are also an important connection for young adults exiting incarceration and returning to their communities. A person from similar backgrounds, especially if they themselves were system involved, can be a transformative relationship for the youth by helping them to change their attitudes and beliefs. Identifying credible messengers as part of the youth transition plan increases the youth positive supports when in the community.

Supportive adults, credible messengers, extended family members, employers and co-workers, educational staff, students and faith-based clergy are all important pieces for improving social supports and connections for our young adults. Helping incarcerated youth identify and then utilizing these supports when out in the community can help greatly in improving outcomes for them.

The liaison will also refer the youth for a LIST assessment while they are incarcerated. Having the appropriate life skills to navigate reentry back into the community is also a vital component for success.

The V.I.T.A.L. Resources website provides a variety of resources that are geared to incarcerated youth leaving corrections. The website can be accessed with the assistance of the liaison while within the facility and by the young adult once they have transition out. Please feel free to contact the Division to brainstorm opportunities for young adults exiting corrections.

Although not ideal, the time in corrections must be focused on preparing the young adult for successful reentry, developing a permanency pact, identifying supports and credible messengers and learning life skills through the LIST process they need to manage themselves back in the community.

**Please note that the Legal Division is available for consultation for young adults who are detained pre-trial.**

## Tip Sheet

### *V.I.T.A.L. Steps Applied in Case Practice*

#### **Focus: Supporting young adults in correctional settings**

**Best Practice Summary:** Young adults leaving correctional facilities have difficulty securing and maintaining employment. These young people also face difficulties in finding and securing housing which often leads to homelessness. They often don't have the finances to secure an apartment and some strict housing policies against ex-offenders from being a candidate for housing is also an obstacle. Quite often relationships have become strained during the period of incarceration and family separation. 83% of adults released in 2005 across 30 states were arrested at least once during the 9 years following their release: ([Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2018](#)). Therefore, a comprehensive approach to preparing youth for discharge while they are within a correctional facility is essential. It also requires specific supports for their return to the communities through an integrated discharge plan.

#### **Goals for activity:** Discharge planning and resources

Young men and women released from correctional facilities receive minimal preparation and inadequate assistance and resources, which makes their re-entry into communities challenging. Research indicates that those who participate in correctional education programs are 43 percent less likely to re-enter prison. However, these programs often have a long waiting list and are not widely available.

While youth are within a DOC facility, the DCF DOC Liaisons will focus their work with young adults on ensuring the LIST assessment and module training is occurring; they will work with the young adult on identifying supportive adults through the permanency pact toolkit; they will develop a re-entry plan in collaboration with the area office; they will coordinate with DOC and bring into the facilities providers and others whom will be working with the young adult, so that relationships are developed prior to discharge. The Transitional Support and Success Division also has web page that provides a variety of resources with a section geared for incarcerated youth leaving corrections. Please feel free to contact the Division for support and brainstorming.

#### **V.I.T.A.L. Values and/or Essential Practice principles in action**

- **Voice and choice** for the incarcerated youth to have **a say** and be **a part** in their discharge plan.

- **Authentic youth engagement** in identifying supportive adults and credible messengers **they need** to be there for them.
- **Shared power** in creating a treatment plan with them that is **done collaboratively** and not dictated to them.
- Strengthening the young adult's **self-confidence** and **resiliency** to be successful and seek help when facing obstacles or if they just need to talk.

**For coaching and support of skill development in supervision-**

Has the team looked at this case from the perspective of a young adult with little supports and what he/she/they would need to navigate the community on their own?

Can the team persist despite years of lack of engagement by the youth and embrace this opportunity to finally be successful?

Are there some opportunities here to build parts or all a plan that is outside the normal service array that might prove to be effective for this person?

Is there some value in meeting with this young adult along with a credible messenger to see what else is needed to support them?

Do we need to increase contact with this person as they may need to see and hear from a positive support?

Has the team consulted with anyone from the Transitional Support and Success Division for resources?

**Suggested CQI Checklist**

**Serving youth discharged from a correctional facility**

[ ] was the discharge/transition plan completed by the youth, AO Social Worker and the DCF DOC Liaison prior to the youth exiting corrections? This supports the youth voice and choice.

[ ] were supportive adults, AO social worker and/or providers invited to DOC to meet with the young adult in preparation for this discharge? This supports the authentic youth engagement and relationships.

[ ] was the LIST Assessment and/or teaching modules done while within DOC? This supports the teaching of tangible skills and soft skills that young adults need.

**Foundational:** The team member is at an early stage of core practice and skill acquisition. The team member is supported in learning the skills. The team member has an opportunity to develop skills. Coaching agendas may target specific skills for development. The skills are demonstrated and actively coached by team leaders.

**Rising:** The team member occasionally applies the practices and skills independently. Coaching agendas focus on generalizing skills. The team member demonstrates increasing understanding of the practices. Skills are demonstrated and coached by team leaders.

**Secure:** The team member consistently applies skills independently to a wide range of settings and aspires to apply knowledge and understanding. There is a range of evidence that shows a deeper understanding of concepts and that skills are sustained over time.