

Securing Safe and Stable Housing

This material is largely based upon the Document- "Strategies to Promote Housing Stability for Youth Exiting from DCF Care" from the Connecticut Reaching Home Campaign's Youth and Adult Homelessness Work Group. For more information on this group, please feel free to contact work group members Chris Lau, Assistant Chief or Linda Dixon, Administrator of Transitional Supports and Success.

Safe and stable housing is a foundational platform for children, adolescents, and young adults to thrive and achieve self-sufficiency. The risk factors and vulnerabilities to homeless young adults cannot be understated. According to the Coalition to end Homelessness, more than 4,500 people are homeless on any given night in Connecticut— nearly 1 in 5 are children. Connecticut's emergency shelters are full beyond capacity, and yet many people experiencing homelessness must live on the streets or in places not fit for habitation. According to the Reaching Home Campaign, roughly 30% of Connecticut's young adult homeless population were previously under DCF care. Adolescents and Young Adults in the care of the Department inevitably will discharge. DCF Workers should assist and fortify these individuals with the skills and resources to secure safe and stable housing. This focus on housing and housing stability during the transition process have been shown to reduce homelessness and enhance success.

The following practices are recommended in these efforts:

1. Begin integrating discharge planning efforts with the permanency teaming process and approach- Participants of this meeting should ensure a safe and viable plan for the youth or young adult prior to leaving care.

As summarized by the Reaching Home Campaign, "Most youth aging out of care do not have the resources to immediately rent their own apartment upon leaving DCF. Instead, youth typically stay with extended family, former foster family, or with their partner or friends while others may return to their biological parents. Youth may need support in identifying potential living arrangements and navigating the details of this arrangement to ensure it is a solid housing plan."

Living with others is a common thing for young people to do but it is important to work with youth to gauge the stability of the living arrangement and problem-solve any potential issues. If the youth is not on the lease, and instead is depending on a partner, family, or friends then the youth is at risk of losing housing without notice, especially if the youth does not know the expectations regarding their stay. *When possible invite these individuals to one or more of their transition planning meetings to help facilitate a discussion about the parameters of their stay. Where appropriate, support youth in exploring and fostering a healthy relationship with their biological family members or extended relatives.*"

2. For youth actively planning a discharge from care, ensure a 90-day (at minimum) transition period with active and frequent transition planning. A complete discharge plan should have a specific person identified as a contact should the youth or young adult encounter a barrier implementing their plan.
3. Assess, Educate, Fortify, and plan- All adolescents and young adults have unique needs, strengths and challenges. Make thorough assessments of needs and plan accordingly- The Learning Inventory and Life Skills Training (L.I.S.T.) is a helpful assessment tool.

4. Ensure informed decision making- Young adults discharging from care should be fully informed as to the range of choices and options they have *within the department*, the resources available from other agencies and in the community, and the guidelines and pathways to reentry. Extended care in the Department enables young adults to practice the life skills they have learned, such as budgeting as well as obtaining and maintaining their first apartment, in "real world" environments with continued support. This "informed decision making" should include perspective from those with "lived experience" such as other young adults who have made the transition. See "no place to put my stuff" video.

(Link to "No place to put my stuff" is available in the resources section of this document)

(Possible Link to Start Program of Family Unification Program (FUP)? Are these still up and running?)

5. Specific plans should include "safe and stable housing" among an essential grouping of inherently influential and interrelated factors such as:
 - a) Money Management (including estimate budget, savings, income, etc.)
 - b) Workforce supports/employment
 - c) Personal & Community Supports (including mentor opportunities, support network, etc.)
 - d) Education
 - e) Healthcare
 - f) Necessary documents checklist
 - g) Other- immigration/parenting

Practical Planning considerations:

Relationship Based Living Arrangements (As adapted from the Reaching Home Campaign):

Stability:

- a) Timeline of arrangement?
- b) Is the landlord aware of arrangement?
- c) Will youth be added to the lease?
- d) Any conflicts or communication issues?
- e) Is this subsidized housing? Does the young person's addition to the household jeopardize the arrangement?

Safety:

- a) Are there requirements of the young person that are unreasonable- strings attached?
- b) Are there drugs and Alcohol or Substance use or sales in the home that could negatively affect or harm the youth?
- c) Are their people in the home that may physically or emotionally harm the young person?
- d) Any other safety concerns?

Expectations/Responsibilities:

- a) Does the young person have the monetary resources to meet the requirements of the arrangement?
- b) Will the youth contribute to utilities and household maintenance costs?

- c) Are their requirements for the young person to participate in additional chores or responsibilities?
- d) Will the young person receive their own Key? Are there restrictions to accessing the housing?
- e) Does the young person have concerns about compatibility?
- f) How can the young person fit into the household routines and activities?
- g) access to household items- washer and dryer, placement of personal belongings, visitors, music or Television, smoking, bedtimes, quiet times, etc...
- h) Is the young person staying in their current situation but leaving DCF care? If so, will the arrangement change?

Physical Space

- a) Are their location concerns- Is it near employment or transportation to employment?
- b) Are the heat, lights, plumbing, and running water work reliably? Any pest issues?
- c) For parenting young people- where will the children sleep? (Also consider safe sleeping arrangements for kids)
- d) Does the young person need to obtain furniture, bedding, or other supplies?
- e) Does the young person have allergy concerns in relations to household pets- as applicable?

Rental Based Living Arrangements (As adapted from the Reaching Home Campaign):

"Help the youth understand all the costs of living on their own and set realistic expectations about what they could potentially afford based on their financial circumstances...Emphasize the importance of renting an "affordable" apartment and fully understand their responsibility as a tenant. An eviction can make it very challenging to obtain future housing and can damage their credit as well. Encourage youth to meet their neighbors once they move-in and to greet them with a smile when they pass by. If any issues arise, neighbors are less likely to go directly to the landlord to complain when they know the tenant.

Landlords may be reluctant to rent to a young person who does not have prior experience renting an apartment, a strong credit history, and/or a history of stable employment. A landlord may require that the youth have a co-signer, someone who is willing to take financial responsibility of the lease if the youth fails to pay rent. A landlord may also request references from potential tenants. This list of contacts could include their employer, previous landlord, DCF Adolescent Specialist, etc. A youth with barriers to housing could also provide reference letters to help persuade a potential landlord that they are responsible and financially stable."

Cost:

- a) How much can the young person afford? What steps do they have to do to save/afford their own rental?
- b) Does the young person have enough resources for upfront costs- fees, deposits, first and last month's rent, moving costs?
- c) What are the utility costs? Are they included? Is there any room for negotiation with the landlord?
- d) Does the young person know how to apply to utility assistance?
- e) Furniture and household items- Does the young person know how and where to obtain these items?

Location:

- a) Is the apartment located where the youth feels safe?
- b) Is the apartment close to public transportation?

c) Are their laundry facilities nearby or onsite?

Preparedness to Rent:

- a) Does the young person have the identification and all information/documents required for the rental application? (State ID, social security number, proof of income- pay stubs/tax returns, addresses of current and previous employers)?
- b) A landlord may require a co-signer- who assumes financial responsibility if tenant fails to pay rent.
- c) Character references for youth with no rental history- These references vouch for the young person's responsibility and character. Landlords want assurance that rent will be paid on time and that the tenant will be a good neighbor.
- d) Has the young person identified potential units?
- e) Has the young person submitted a rental application?
- f) Does the young person have a good credit history- landlords will run a credit check? Young people should check their credit and resolve any issues.

Choosing a Roommate: (As adapted from the Reaching Home Campaign):

"Living with a roommate or multiple roommates can help make renting an apartment and paying for utilities much more affordable and might be the only way a young person can afford to rent an apartment. Roommates can split the cost or rent, utilities, and common area furniture as well as share in household chores. They can also provide companionship and support. While it is tempting to share a lease with a significant other, it can be risky to do so if the relationship is new or volatile and can add pressure to that relationship. Encourage youth to have an honest discussion with their partner before jumping in. Young people might identify roommates through school, work, and community activities. Encouraging the development of positive peer support networks through participation in school or community groups, such as sports or drama club, or perhaps through join the DCF Youth Advisory Board, might lead to possible roommate opportunities when youth begin their apartment search. It is important to have an honest discussion with a potential roommate before committing to live together to determine compatibility and how to handle conflict and shared responsibilities."

Government-Financed Affordable Housing (As adapted from the Reaching Home Campaign):

Voucher and Rental Assistance Programs (Formerly Section 8):

"Educate Youth on housing assistance programs but ***empower them to be as independent as possible***. There are a variety of types of governmentally funded affordable housing options in Connecticut. While it seems like there are numerous options capacities is limited with lengthy waiting lists. ***Staying with various other people for short periods of time until a governmentally financed unit or voucher becomes available is not a solid housing plan.***

The demand for housing always exceeds the limited funds available. Long waiting periods are common...even when placed on the wait list, it can be a long wait before receiving housing assistance.

United States Public Housing and Urban Development (HUD)- funds rental programs through local Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) and the State of Connecticut Department of Housing. Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs) and Rental Assistance Programs (RAPS) include tenant-based vouchers provided to low income individuals or families.

Information regarding these programs can be found at The United Way's Connecticut 211 Website.

Additionally, Local PHAs may maintain their own websites and may have different management of waitlists. Local PHAs may be more informative

Affordable Housing:

HUD and The State of Connecticut fund the development of affordable housing. These programs assist landlords and apartment owners along with PHAs to offer reduced rents to low income tenants. ***There are hundreds of programs, but they tend to have long wait lists as well.***

(Recommended links will be provided in the resources section of this document).

Alternative Planning- Job Corps, Military, Transition to Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), Transition to Department of Developmental Services (DDS) (As adapted from the Reaching Home Campaign):

Job Corps- Job Corps is a Federal residential education and career training program that helps eligible people aged 16 to 24 train for meaningful careers, complete their high school education, and obtain employment. At Job Corps, students have access to room and board while they learn skills in specific training areas for up to three years. Job Corps also provides transitional support services, such as help finding employment, housing, childcare, and transportation." If a young person anticipates enrolling in Job Corps, invite the Job Corps staff person to a transition planning meeting. (Recommended links will be provided in the resources section of this document).

Military- "Housing is typically provided for all service members who join the military on a full-time basis. If a young person anticipates joining the military, encourage the youth to invite their recruiter to a transition planning session to help support a smooth transition"

DMHAS and DDS- "DCF collaborates with both DMHAS and DSS to identify youth who need referral to these agencies and support smooth transitions. Most young people who meet program criteria go directly to the DMHAS Young Adult Services (YAS) Program for 18-25 year olds aging out of the DCF system or community based youth who have significant psychiatric disabilities and who will need services and supports when they leave DCF care.

DDS has an array of services and has been able to target resources not available to general public specifically for youth aging out of DCF.

When young people are transitioning to DDS or DMHAS, these placements typically include housing, such as group home, supervised apartments, rental subsidies, etc. DDS or DMHAS staff should participate in the transition planning meetings to ensure the youth understands the program and expectations."

(Recommended links will be provided in the resources section of this document)

Homeless Assistance (As adapted from the Reaching Home Campaign):

"Despite thorough transition planning, some youth may need emergency support after leaving care because they lack a sufficient safety net when in a crisis. Youth may seek assistance by calling 2-1-1 if they are (a.) experiencing literal homelessness, such as living on the street, abandoned building, in their vehicle, etc.; or (b.) are fleeing from an unsafe housing situation; or (c.) are at imminent risk of losing their housing within 14 days

and have no other resources or natural supports to assist with their housing. The vast majority of homeless assistance services in Connecticut are only accessed the 2-1-1 coordinated system. The 2-1-1 housing specialists will screen youth for immediate safety concerns and will refer a youth experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of homelessness to their local Coordinated Access Network (CAN) for an initial appointments to assess their needs and assist them with identifying natural supports an alternatives to shelter."

Resources:

DCF Produced Video:

"No Place to Leave my stuff" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGez0QgS404>

DMHAS: Skills Building Curriculum:

General:

<https://portal.ct.gov/DMHAS/Publications/Publications/Skill-Building>

Specific- How to find Housing:

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DMHAS/SkillBuilding/HowtoFindHousingCurriculumpdf.pdf>

Landlord and Tenant Responsibilities:

<https://www.jud.ct.gov/Publications/hm031.pdf>

Fair Housing/Anti- Housing Discrimination:

National:

https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/fair_housing_act_overview

Connecticut:

<https://www.ctfairhousing.org/>

Roommate Selections and Agreements

Selecting a roommate:

<http://independence.wa.gov/housing/prepare/selecting-a-roommate/>

Sample Roommate Agreement:

<https://opendocs.com/lease-agreements/ct/connecticut-roommate-agreement/>

Utility Assistance:

The Connecticut Energy Assistance Program (CEAP):

<https://portal.ct.gov/dss/Economic-Security/Winter-Heating-Assistance/Energy-Assistance---Winter-Heating>

Public Housing Assistance Programs:

Connecticut Department of Housing (DOH) and Local Public Housing Agency's: Housing Voucher Program (HVP) and Rental Assistance Program (RAP)

<http://www.cthcvp.org/>

Federal Public Housing Agencies List (For local networking and support)

<https://www.hud.gov/states/connecticut/renting/hawebsites>

Affordable Housing:

State of Connecticut State financed rental apartment owners listing:

<http://cthousingsearch.org/>

US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD):

Young People or Social Workers should contact or visit the management of each apartment building to check availability- HUD publishes a guidebook, "Looking for HUD-Associated Rental Housing in Connecticut" (Downloadable or can be ordered) Call Hartford, CT HUD office- 1-860-240-4800

<https://www.hud.gov/states/connecticut/renting>

Job Corps:

Connecticut Department of Labor (DOL)- Job Corps

<https://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/JobCorps/index.html>

Military:

One Source Military Support Website- On Housing:

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/moving-housing/housing/specialized-housing/housing-options-for-service-members-and-families/>

The State of Connecticut Department of Mental health and Addition Services (DHMAS) and State of Connecticut Department of Developmental Services (DSS):

DHMAS Young Adult Program:

<https://portal.ct.gov/DMHAS/Divisions/Divisions/Young-Adult-Services>

For additional information, contact Young Adult Services at [\(860\) 262-6988](tel:8602626988)

DDS: Eligibility and Programs and Services:

Eligibility-

<https://portal.ct.gov/DDS/Legal/Eligibility/Eligibility-for-DDS-Services>

Services-

<https://portal.ct.gov/DDS/Family/Supports-and-Services/Programs-and-Services-Home-Page>

Homelessness Assistance:

Access to regional based housing support- Coordinated Access Networks (CANS)

United Way 211- <https://www.211ct.org/>

Telephone Call- 211

Additional Emergency Housing Support:

Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV)- CT Safe Connect-
For housing instability due to Intimate Partner Violence/Domestic Violence

<https://ctsafecconnect.com/>

About Safe Connect:

Safe Connect is a project of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) that was developed to make it easier for victims of domestic violence to access information, resources and assistance. It is our goal to remove barriers. Services are CONFIDENTIAL, SAFE, FREE & VOLUNTARY (which means you can change your mind at any time).

You can reach us 24 hours a day, 365 days per year, via:

- Voice Call: (888) 774-2900
- Email: safecconnect@ctcadv.org
- Web Chat

Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness:

<https://www.cceh.org/>

Youth Rights and Resources – for Connecticut youth in unstable housing situations:

<https://www.ctyouthhelp.org/>