

Community Housing Employment Enrichment Resources (CHEER) Program Definition

DCF offers the Community Housing Employment Enrichment Resource (CHEER) program. This service provides financial assistance to youth who were committed uncared for, abuse, or neglected as of their 18th birthdays and demonstrate strong motivation to pursue a post-secondary employment training and career development program. These programs include non-certified vocational or technical training and apprenticeship programs or job readiness development and job placement.

DCF recognizes the need to provide youth in care with opportunities that will lead to gainful employment as an alternative or a springboard to a college education or formal vocational program. For youth who were committed as of their eighteenth birthday and deemed eligible may be offered the opportunity to participate in an employment training or career development program while practicing living in the community. Youth will gradually assume the cost of their care during this time-limited period.

CHEER services are available on a voluntary basis to a youth 18 or older, immediately following secondary school graduation or completion of GED, and for a time period not to exceed 24 months. Youth participating in CHEER may elect to change programs and enroll in a post-secondary educational or vocational program. All requests for PSE plan programs will need to include a complete PSE packet that has been approved by the Area Office Adolescent Program Supervisor and submitted to the DCF post-secondary education staff for final review and approval. A youth who has participated in one or more PSE programs may elect to participate in CHEER.

Volunteer Experience

A youth may also be approved to participate in a formally recognized volunteer community service program for up to one year immediately following secondary school graduation. Only youth who have been accepted into a degree-awarding college program and deferred such acceptance, may participate in this volunteer experience. All volunteer programs must be approved by Post-Secondary Education staff.

If a youth successfully complete such volunteer experience, he may continue with DCF and pursue a PSE program. Individual consultations are available through the PSE team.

Productive Hours

The goal is for youth to maintain 40 productive hours per week. The actual number of hours can vary based on youth needs (e.g., participation in extended day treatment programs, etc.). A "productive hour" is defined as time devoted to classes, study time, part-time work,

internship, volunteering (if approved), training, apprenticeship, treatment activities, transportation time used for these activities, and any combination of these activities.

Monthly Subsidy

The Transitional Specialist and CHAP Community Case Manager, if applicable, shall develop a monthly budget with the youth based on expenditures for rent, food, utilities, telephone, transportation and clothing. Once the subsidy is determined, a monthly payment shall be sent to the youth to spend on budget items. The youth shall save all documentation for said expenditures and the Transitional Specialist and Community Case Manager shall monitor these items to assess the youth's compliance with his or her budget.

Youth will begin to assume a portion of the cost of his or her care utilizing earnings from employment. Monthly subsidies gradually reduce over the course of CHEER enrollment. The CHEER subsidy must be processed in the computer system by the fifth day of the month in order to cover expenses for the following month. The payment request should show the fifth of the month as the Request Date and the last Friday of the month as the Scheduled Date. In order for a youth to enter CHEER, the Transitional Specialist must establish a provider number for the youth at least 21 days prior to placement.

CHEER Funding

Apartment Deposit

DCF may provide a one-time apartment deposit for eligible CHEER youth. If a youth successfully completes his or her post-secondary employment program, the youth may keep the deposit.

Start-Up Furniture, Housewares, and Food

DCF may provide an eligible youth with start up support, which must be used for the purchase of furniture. If a youth has obtained any or all of the above items through donations, he or she may negotiate with the Transitional Specialist for the purchase of additional housing items. DCF may also provide eligible youth with an established maximum for the purchase of housewares and household supplies. If youth is in a program where housing is provided, youth may access these funds for room start-up costs as needed. DCF may also provide eligible youth with a maximum amount for the purchase of food staple items only.

The Fiscal Division will outline the basic cost of living standard with a maximum subsidy. This will include rent, a stipend, food, personal care, utilities, phone, transportation, and clothing.

Rental Rates are also set by the Fiscal Division based on HUD rates.

Calculating the Monthly Subsidy

The subsidy may be below the HUD rate limit. If heat is not included in the rent, the amount for heat and rent combined cannot exceed the limit for rent for that Area Office. CHEER categories and line item limits may not be exceeded.

If a youth is participating in a paid internship, fellowship or any learning opportunity that pays a subsidy this funding is to be subtracted from the funding limits provided in this policy and is considered as part of the overall budget for youth.

If a CHEER youth returns to stay with his or her biological parent(s) during program breaks, youth is eligible for CHEER stipend only.

CHEER Stipend Only

Full-time CHEER youth who are participating in a program where housing and living expenses are being provided may receive the subsidy only. Any funding for living expenses provided by the program must be subtracted from allowable policy limits.

CHEER Boarding

Full-time CHEER youth residing in the community with an approved caregiver or at an approved location, e.g., former foster home, relative, friend or boarding home.*

If the youth will be residing in a relative's, friend's or former foster home, the responsible adult(s) in the home must sign off on youth's CHEER contract agreeing to such an arrangement. The roles, rules and responsibilities of all involved must be identified and agreed upon in the youth's CHEER contract and updated quarterly.

Any funding going directly to the identified adult in the household for rent is considered taxable and reportable income.

Out-of-State CHEER Youth

If a youth is attending an approved CHEER program out-of-state and living arrangements are not provided, the HUD Fair Market Rental Rates for that state and area where youth is living must be used when calculating monthly rental subsidies. DCF CHEER boarding rates shall be used if youth is boarding out-of-state. CHEER stipends are used for youth in out-of-state and boarding arrangements.

CHEER Categories

CHEER with Case Management

Full-time CHEER youth residing in their own apartments and receiving case management services from a private CHAP provider. This service includes five hours of case management per week: three hours face-to-face and two hours for collateral contact. **The focus of the work is application and practice of life skills.**

CHEER Case Management Rate - Hourly

To be used for hourly case management, additional case management hours, pre-service activities and travel. The DCF-2163, "Request for Additional Case Management Services"

(CHAP/CHEER)," must be submitted by the Area Office and sent to the Central Office CHEER Program Coordinator for approval. Private CHAP providers are eligible to provide CHEER case management hours.

CHEER without Case Management

Full-time CHEER youth residing in their own apartments and NOT receiving case management services from a private CHAP provider.

Non-CHAP Adolescent Service Type

For youth who are in secondary school, adult education or in a general equivalency diploma (GED) program, and in an approved boarding living arrangement, the placement shall be entered in the computer system under the service type "Non-CHAP Adolescent" #791. This service type is ONLY authorized for Child Welfare Accounting (CWA) use. The Transitional Specialist will make requests for this service type to the CO CHEER Program Coordinator. Upon approval from CO, CWA will enter the placement in the computer system and will notify the Transitional Specialist.

Funding for a "Non-CHAP Adolescent Service Type." #791 placement that is considered "boarding" is limited to the CHEER boarding funding limits stated above.

Payments for Minor Children

Payments received by the youth for minor children in their custody shall not be included in the calculation of the youth's net income or the youth's PSE funding limit.

Youth who are the custodial parents of a minor child and who are participating in CHEER are eligible for the benefits outlined in DCF Policy 42-3, "Adolescent and Young Adult Programs."

Community Case Management

While involved in CHEER, a youth may receive CHAP case management services which include the following:

- development of a DCF CHEER contract with the Transitional Specialist;
- identification, development and support of permanent family and fictive kin relationships and a network of community providers;
- assistance in developing a monthly budget;
- a monthly subsidy;
- monitoring of employment income and savings plan requirements;
- monitoring of expenditures;
- a DCF-approved Life Skills Assessment;
- a strength/needs assessment with the youth;
- monitoring and assessing of employment status;
- assistance with educational and career exploration;

- crisis intervention;
- trauma-informed training;
- supportive intervention and on-going contact;
- community referral services;
- monthly case management written progress reports that contain specific dates, times and number of case management hours; and
- a quarterly life skills acquisition report including transition planning progress.