

The STTAR Enhancement Plan



Department of Children and Families-contracted Short Term Assessment and Respite (STAR) homes are a critical part of the larger children's behavioral health system. Recently, the homes have experienced significant challenges in trying to meet the needs of youth in their care because the complex needs of some youth exceed what STAR programs were originally intended and equipped to address.

Collaboration between DCF and its providers, the Office of the Governor, the Office of Policy and Management, and the leadership of the General Assembly's Committee on Children has resulted in a comprehensive plan for addressing the vulnerabilities around how STAR responds to the complex needs of youth in that

level of care.

Now, the Specialized Trauma-Informed Treatment Assessment and Reunification (STTAR) Enhancement Plan significantly improves how youth are served in STTAR home level of care. It will also provide additional treatment options for youth who continue to require care outside their home that STAR homes cannot adequately provide.



The plan costs approximately \$6.2 million and implementation can be achieved within existing DCF resources. The components of the plan include:

- Enhanced Staffing/Supervision/Staff Training and Development
- Reducing Census of Homes
- Enhanced Therapeutic Recreational Programming
- Development of Two Intensive Transitional Treatment Centers
- Timely Access to PRTF for Youth in Crisis



"This plan enables more resources to be dedicated toward providing services that help youths in need and support their behavioral health and development. I am very appreciative of the staff at the Department of Children and Families and those who work with all of our community providers, whose valuable work supports critical care for the youngest members of our communities," **said Governor Ned Lamont.**

"As Connecticut's lead children's behavioral health agency, we are constantly evolving our work to best serve the complex needs of the youth in our care. To that point, we are grateful for the collaboration of the Governor, OPM and the leadership of the Committee on Children and, of course, our providers. It was that true team effort that led us to the new, comprehensive plan- we're announcing today - STTAR Enhanced," **said Commissioner Jodi Hill-Lilly.**

"The plan to address and rectify the identified issues in the STAR (Short Term, Assessment, Respite) home network will benefit our most vulnerable youth by refocusing on STTAR (Specialized Trauma-informed Treatment, Assessment, and Reunification). I'm grateful to the Department of Children and Families for addressing this significant issue by increasing staffing levels, reducing home census, and providing for an increased therapeutic environment. In a cost-effective and thoughtful manner, these

steps will provide more resources and aid to children in crisis. That support is critical for the success of their growth and development. I'm encouraged by these significant changes," **said Senator Ceci Maher, Co-Chair of the Committee on Children.**

"We are extremely proud to have worked collaboratively with the Department of Children and Families, the Office of the Child Advocate, and others to reimagine a service model that meets the highly specialized needs of this small subset of children. These reforms can go into effect immediately - without the need for legislative action - providing our children the critical care they urgently need. Thank you to DCF, OCA, and the Office of Policy and Management for working with us for the benefit of our children," **said Representative Liz Linehan, Co-Chair of the Committee on Children.**

Enhanced Staffing/Supervision/Staff Training and Development

Each program will be enhancing their staffing models and ensuring that there is a supervisory position to provide greater supervision of both staff and youth in the home, particularly during 'second shift' hours enabling clinical staff to more efficiently deliver therapeutic services.

In collaboration with the DCF Academy for Workforce Development, specifically the Provider Training Academy, external provider staff will have access to an increased array of training resources and course offerings.

Reducing Census of Homes

Census in each home will be reduced from 6 to 5, creating a more favorable staff-to-youth ratio that allows for additional intensive focus on the youth in care.

Enhanced Therapeutic Recreational Programming

Each program will be provided resources to enhance program recreational activities available to youth. Youth will have less idle time and more opportunities to channel their energy into positive activities creating a sense of normalcy that helps heal and prepare them for transition into a more permanent setting and overall development into thriving, productive adults.

Development of Two Intensive Transitional Treatment Centers

Priority access to the Intensive Transitional Treatment Centers (ITTC), one facility for boys (8 beds) and one facility for girls (8 beds), will be given to those youth in need of intensive treatment supports and disrupting from (or too acute for) STTAR programs.

Youth who stabilize in these ITTC programs who cannot be provided a home setting in a timely manner will be referred to Therapeutic Group Home (TGH) level of care. Youth who continue to be acute and/or whose needs exceed the ability of what the ITTC can provide will be referred to psychiatric residential treatment facility (PRTF) level of care.

Timely Access to PRTF for Youth in Crisis

When necessary, youth whose acuity and needs exceed STAR program parameters will transition in an expedited manner to higher levels of care and support. Priority access to 3 beds will be maintained at both Solnit South and Solnit North for these youth. This will allow referrals to the program to be processed in an expedited manner.