

Start: Homeless Youth Program
Annual Report
SFY 2025

The Department of Children and Families (DCF), in collaboration with the Department of Housing (DOH), is submitting this report to fulfill the requirements of 17a-62a. “These Commissioners shall submit a report regarding the program established under subsection (b) of this section, in accordance with section 11-4a, to the joint standing committees of the General Assembly that oversee matters relating to housing and children. The report shall include recommendations for any changes to the program to ensure that the best available services are delivered to homeless youth and youth at risk of homelessness. The report shall incorporate key outcome indicators and measures and shall establish benchmarks for evaluating progress in achieving the purposes of subsection (b) of this section.”

In 2011, DCF established and launched the Start Program, designed to assist homeless youth, young adults, and those at risk of homelessness. Originally aimed at aiding youth transitioning from DCF, the program sought to foster critical relationships that would benefit them beyond their time with the Department. Over time, START has adapted and offers ongoing support for young adults, regardless of their DCF involvement. The program empowers these individuals to secure employment, pursue vocational or higher education, reconnect with family and friends, and develop a new support network. All these initiatives aim to support their success and ensure they continue to grow into adulthood while remaining in their communities.

Young adults involved with DCF can still access various services that support the safety, protection, health, and overall well-being of children and families. They can also receive guidance from knowledgeable staff specializing in child and youth development. Meanwhile, the Start program allows young adults without prior involvement to access similar services. This framework remains part of the ongoing collaboration among DCF, DOH, and The Connection Inc.

The services offered include temporary rental assistance; intensive case management focused on enhancing independent living skills like education/employment, financial independence, nutrition, building social support networks, and emotional stability; assessment, training, and placement services for job skills; referrals to GED classes; educational counseling and planning; help with acquiring social security cards, state IDs, and birth certificates; transportation support; referrals for psychiatric counseling, and drug/alcohol treatment; family counseling and reunification assistance; guidance in accessing Social Services for food, medical, or cash aid; and housing accompanied by supportive services.

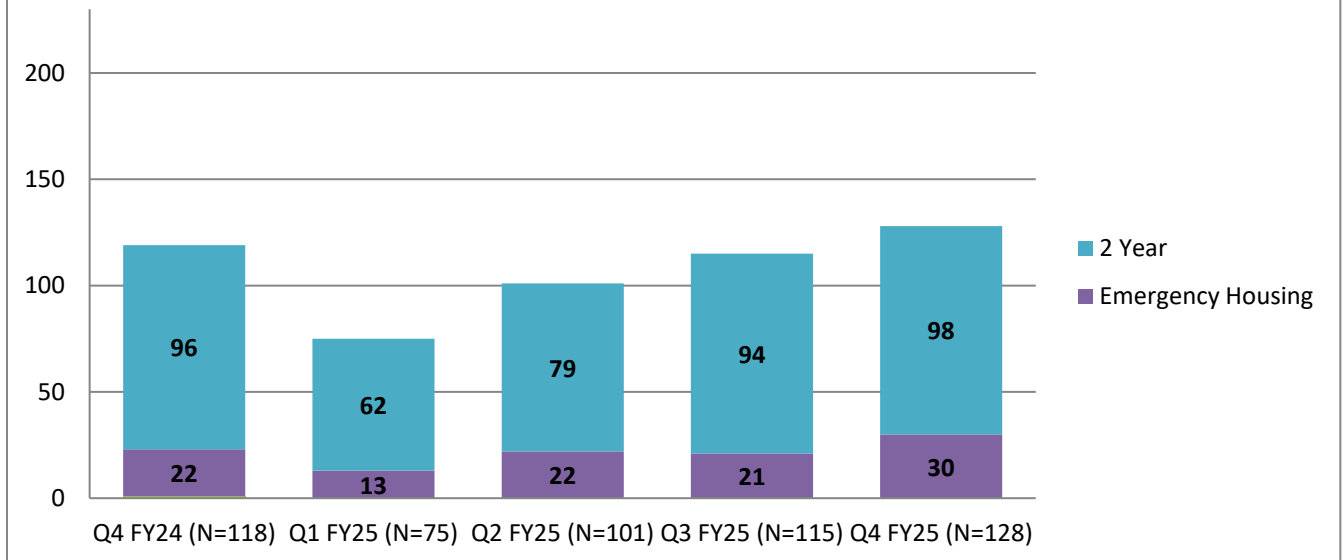
In 2015, program expansion occurred with additional funding. This expansion introduced new program components, such as Crisis Response and Outreach services, for both DCF-involved

youth and non-DCF-involved youth, as well as young people aged 16 to 18. Additional services include street outreach for youth and young adults in the Hartford area, emergency housing for youth and young adults statewide, family mediation, survival aid such as emergency food, blankets, and coats, LGBTQ-specific services, and housing.

As part of DCF's mission, the primary focus is to help youth achieve the highest level of legal permanence and maintain or re-establish critical connections that will support them in adulthood. While DCF provides a continuum of care alongside services, expertise, and knowledge in child and youth development, safety, protection, and health, central to child and family well-being, DOH brings knowledge, resources, and funding streams for housing assistance and development. Both agencies are members of the Governor's Interagency Committee for Supportive Housing. DCF and DOH collaborate to advocate for and facilitate housing development projects that serve homeless youth, in addition to the Start program. Through the Homeless Youth Count, DCF and DOH continue to develop data-based strategies to create a program model that effectively prevents youth homelessness. DCF and DOH complement one another in learning, understanding, and providing stability, safety, and opportunities for youth to eliminate homelessness.

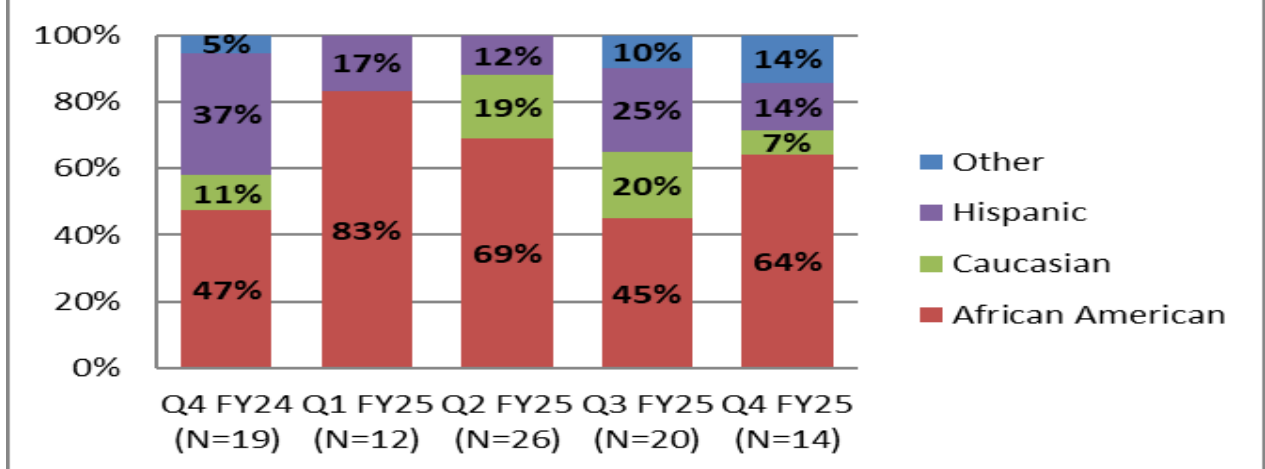
The program continues to show growth and positive outcomes, as seen in the most recent annual report.

Number of Youth Served by Program Track



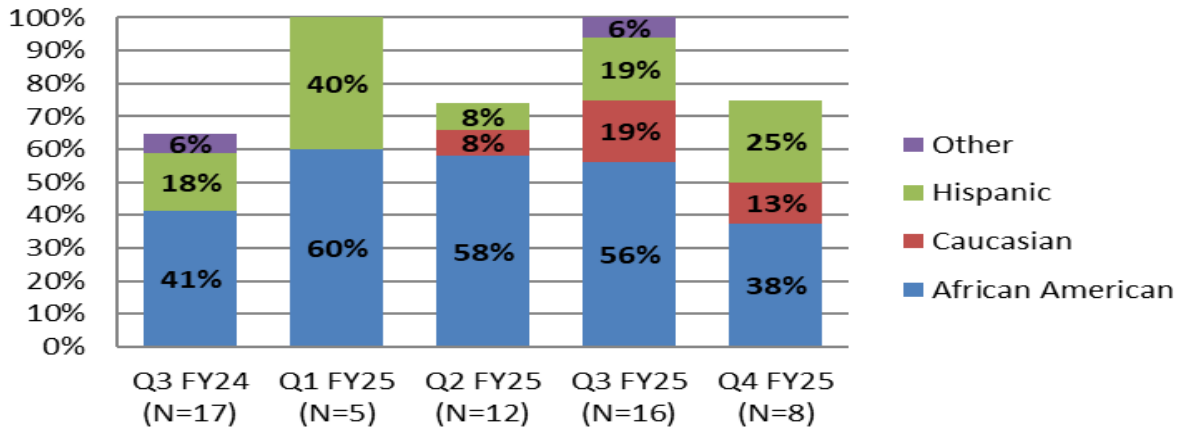
In SFY25, the Start Program maintained stable enrollment across both the 2-Year Track and the Emergency Housing track. While overall service numbers remained steady compared to recent quarters, we have seen a significant year-over-year increase from previous fiscal years. This stability was achieved despite a historically difficult housing climate. Referrals through the Coordinated Access Network (CAN) increased this year, resulting in a higher shelter bed utilization rate than in any previous year. The 2-Year Track remains consistent for youth exiting DCF care. We observed increased engagement from regional DCF offices, specifically for young people needing short-term housing and intensive case management.

Clients who had Achievement Plans within 1 month of Admission



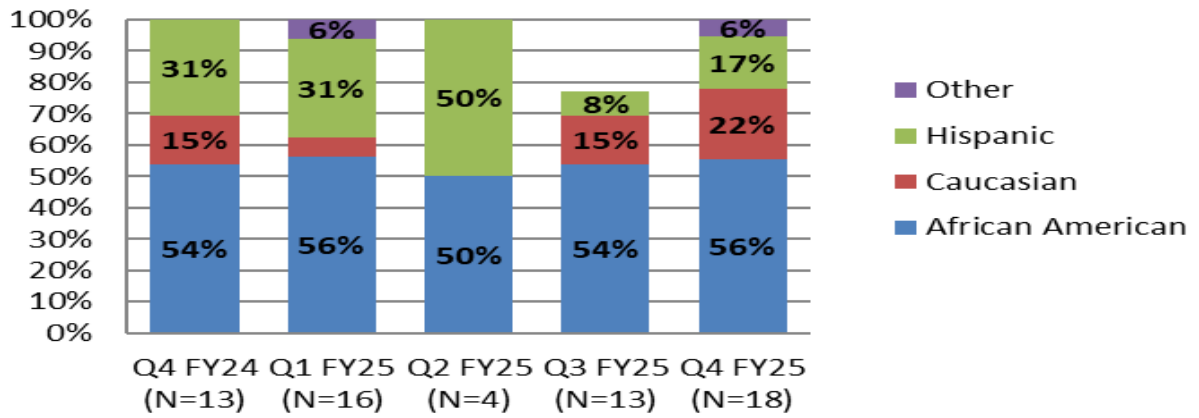
The data above reflects the youth admitted into the 2-Year Track or Emergency Housing during each quarter of SFY25 who remained in the program for at least 30 days. While early disengagement remains an occasional challenge for some newly enrolled youth, the program's approach of using the initial meeting to establish clear, individualized goals within the Service Plan has significantly contributed to strong retention and early engagement. By involving youth in goal setting from the outset, the program can quickly address housing stability and build protective factors that reduce the risk of future homelessness. This proactive model continues to demonstrate consistent success and remains a core strength of the program.

Clients Who Obtained Stable Housing Within 90 Days of Admission



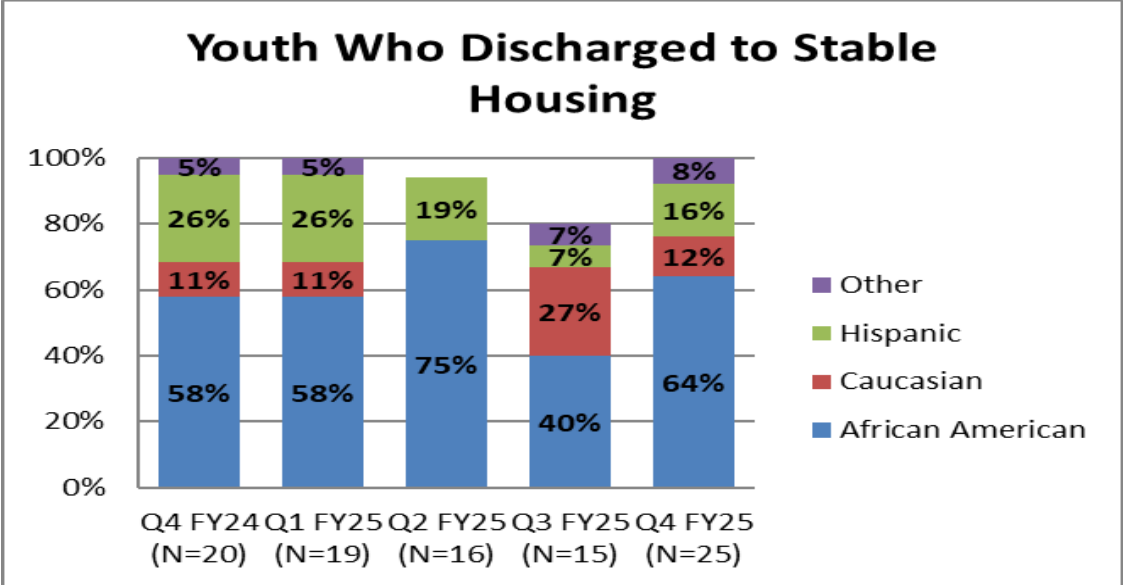
The data above represents youth in the 2-Year Track who reached their 90-day mark since admission during SFY25 and secured stable housing within that timeframe. In the most recent quarter, 6 youth were housed within 90 days. In QTR 3, all 16 clients were housed within 90 days, demonstrating the case managers' dedication. Those who did not meet the 90-day housing milestone faced several barriers, including a lack of employment, which is now more frequently required by landlords, and poor credit history. The rental market is becoming increasingly competitive, driven by a shortage of available units relative to demand. Youth with significant barriers, such as criminal records, unemployment, or eviction history, face even greater challenges. These market conditions will likely continue to affect the program's ability to place youth in stable housing within 90 days.

Clients Who Were Employed or In School Within 180 days of Admission



The data above reflects the youth in the 2-Year Program who reached their 180-day milestone during SFY25 and either enrolled in school or secured employment within that timeframe. This sustained achievement is primarily attributed to key program strategies, including the early implementation of rental contributions to foster financial responsibility, a strong emphasis on self-sufficiency, targeted case management focused on employment readiness and retention, and incentives that support continued education. These elements work together to help youth achieve meaningful progress toward long-term stability.

Historically, youth who did not meet this benchmark were typically impacted by significant barriers such as severe mental health challenges, pregnancy, or reluctance to pursue employment. Given the program's ongoing emphasis on jobs and education as core components of financial independence, no decline in this trend is anticipated in the upcoming quarters.



The data above reflects youth discharged from the 2-Year Track and Emergency Housing Track during SFY25 and exited to stable, permanent housing. Discharge destinations included long-term subsidies, family reunification, and independent living without subsidy (i.e., self-sufficiency). During SFY25, 75 youths were discharged from the 2-Year Track and Emergency Housing Track. The anticipated expansion of FYI vouchers for former foster youth may help offset these challenges by extending financial assistance while youth meet their service plan requirements. Twenty-seven youths exited the Emergency Housing Track with an average length of stay (LOS) of 3.82 months- a decrease from previous quarters. Forty-eight youths were discharged from the 2-Year Track with an average LOS of 18.72 months. However, the average length of stay is expected to gradually increase due to rising rental costs and stagnant wages in the types of jobs typically available to program participants.