

# BECAUSE RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

*Improving opportunities and outcomes for youth in foster care*

Developing healthy and permanent relationships is essential for young people in foster care to become successful adults. ***Without secure relationships, youth who grow up in foster care have greater difficulty achieving positive life outcomes***, and face risks of homelessness, unemployment, and poverty. While our State engages in many best practices, **Connecticut can and should do more to help youth in foster care forge permanent relationships.**

## To form relationships that last a lifetime, every young person in foster care needs:

- Permanent connections to adult families, siblings, and mentors
- Strong bonds with attorneys and social workers to help achieve permanency
- An adequately funded child welfare agency, with savings from child welfare reforms “re-invested” back into the DCF budget
- A foster care system that allows youth to remain in care even after they turn 18
- An opportunity to engage meaningfully in case planning and in DCF policy



***“A key to being successful in life is having that support system, having someone to lean on when you need them, to cheer you up when you’re down, or just to say ‘no, this isn’t a good decision.’”***

- CT Youth in Foster Care

***“I am proud of myself for being who I am now. After all my struggles, trauma, and sad days, here I am still standing and being educated to be someone in life.”***

-CT Youth in Foster Care

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***“Challenge us. Ask us these questions: ‘What are your dreams? What is your purpose? What are your talents? How can you utilize your talents to help others?’ Let us know that you are there to help us reach our goals and we will feel empowered.”***

- Former CT Youth in Foster Care

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase opportunities for all DCF youth to develop lasting adult relationships by including permanent adult relationships in “Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement” (APPLA) planning, limiting APPLA designation to those over 16, and providing support to Connecticut’s foster and adoptive parents.
- Ensure that youth have the best chance to achieve permanency by lowering caseloads for social workers, developing measures to ensure high-quality legal representation, and providing attorneys for youth at risk of being discharged from DCF.
- Protect DCF’s budget and consider legislation creating a “re-investment fund” to ensure that state savings from child welfare reforms are put back into the DCF budget, and that congregate care reduction is accompanied by a robust array of services to help youth succeed in families and communities.
- Increase opportunities for youth engagement in case planning by beginning Adolescent Transition plans well in advance of a child’s 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, providing resources to help social workers and young people create a successful transition plan, and mandating that case reviews not be held during school hours.
- Increase opportunities for success by allowing all eligible youth to remain in DCF care until 21, capturing additional federal funds and saving the state money while helping the state’s most vulnerable youth.