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Fostering Connections: A Potential Game Changer for Connecticut to Ease Kids' Transition from DCF to Adulthood

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Fostering Connections

A Potential Game Changer for Connecticut to Ease Kids' Transition from DCF to Adulthood

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This paper examines how Connecticut can best serve older foster youth through the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008: H.R. 6893 / P.L 110-351.

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Executive Summary

This paper examines how Connecticut can best utilize the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008: H.R. 6893 / P.L 110-351 (Fostering Connections Act). As of October 1, 2010, the legislation was amended to expand foster care services using Title IV-E funds. Title II, sec.201 of the Act provides states the option to extend foster care to youth through the age of 21. Connecticut already extends care to youth committed to DCF through age 21, and in some cases through age 23, yet it has one of the highest rates of youth exiting care at age 18. In exchange for extended care, youth are required to be enrolled in full-time post-secondary education. Youth unable or unwilling to meet this requirement are those most vulnerable to the well documented perils of former foster care youth. The Fostering Connections Act enables Connecticut to significantly expand services to 18-21 year olds emerging from foster care by offering greater flexibility in service delivery. Under the new legislation, youth have a variety of choices other than full-time post-secondary educational enrollment to meet eligibility requirements to remain in care through age 21. This paper outlines five alternatives for Connecticut to implement the new legislation. Criteria used to consider alternatives are: identification of the problem, effect on equity, cost effectiveness, maximization of benefits, and political feasibility. I recommend a statutory change to the term “child” to include youth ages 18-21 in DCF care, and technical exits from care at age 18, with immediate re-entries into care. This will enable Connecticut to greatly reduce the amount of youth aging out of care who are not prepared for adult independence, and take full advantage of the new legislation.

Introduction

“I left and then I was like, now what?” This is a statement from a young woman talking about her experience after leaving the state foster care system at the age of 18 (Egan, 2012). This paper assesses Connecticut’s options with the new federal funding available to serve youth aging out of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) care. As of October 1, 2010, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008: H.R. 6893 / P.L 110-351 (Fostering Connections Act) was amended to include an expansion of services to youth ages 18-21. The legislation allows states to access federal funding to support expanded services through Title IV-E of the Social Security Act.¹ Title II, sec.201 of the Act provides states the option to include supporting youth through the age of 21 if they meet at least one of the following requirements:

- Is completing secondary education or a program leading to an equivalent credential.
- Is enrolled in an institution which provides post-secondary or vocational education.
- Is participating in a program or activity designed to promote, or remove barriers to employment.
- Is employed for at least 80 hours per month.
- Is incapable of doing any of the activities described due to a medical condition.

This differs from the current policy in that it offers greater flexibility for youth and removes the requirement of full-time post-secondary education enrollment in order to continue to receive support services. Unless medically incapable, those electing to continue receiving DCF support would have the option to choose from the first four tracks rather than take on full-time studies

¹ Option to Extend Eligibility for Title IV-E Payments to Age 21 (Effective October 1, 2010) - allows States and Tribes to elect to provide title IV-E foster care, adoption assistance and kinship guardianship payments to youth up to age 19, 20 or 21, when those youth meet certain education, training or work requirements.

which they are ill prepared for. The Fostering Connections Act allows Title IV-E funding for foster care maintenance, subsidized guardianship, and adoption assistance.

Connecticut is one of the most advanced states when it comes to policies aimed to support youth aging out of DCF care. The state already extends care to this population through age 23, if youth are working toward a college degree. However, Connecticut also has one of the highest percentages of youth exiting from care who lack preparation for independence.

According to *The National Center for Permanency and Family Connections*, a service of the Administration for Children and Families Children's Bureau, about 15 percent of Connecticut's DCF youth aged out of care in 2012.² New legislation offers Connecticut the opportunity to significantly reduce the number of youth aging out of care, and access funding for supporting their transition from care.

In a recent National Public Radio (NPR) segment hosted by John Dankosky, Joette Katz, Commissioner of DCF, made clear that she is looking into options offered by the new legislation. In her words:

*"We take care of kids until they are 21 and in many instances 23 but we are only required to do it until the age of 18. But there's federal legislation [...] that if in fact we do some tweaks to the statute, and I've been already working with the legislatures on this, we will recapture millions and millions of funds [...]. This is money that we are spending because it's the right thing to do [...]. You spend money on children now either through education, vocational schools, college, employment opportunities, and we do all of those things. You will save millions over the course of a lifetime. Millions if not billions frankly if you think about this as a national issue but there is the Fostering Connections Act that was passed by Congress that will allow us to recover some of those funds."*³

While the supports are available to youth to remain in DCF care, more youth than not are choosing to leave care when they reach age 18. By taking full advantage of the Fostering

² http://www.nrcpfc.org/fostering_connections/

³ <http://www.yourpublicmedia.org/node/23318>, 'Where We Live' – WNPR, aired December 13, 2012

Connections Act, Connecticut has the opportunity to change its approach to supporting youth in their transition from DCF care to adult independence, by capturing not only federal dollars but also decreasing the number of youth who leave care prematurely. The new federal funding stream will allow youth to self-direct their lives, a skill they may have missed out on developing while in care, explore career and educational options, provide them the stability of continued support while emerging into their adulthood, and provide DCF more time to work with youth in developing their plans for permanency.

Methods

I reviewed relevant literature, available data, legislation, public forums, and current policies regarding youth in DCF care. I also consulted with industry experts. Experts include: Gary Kleeblatt, Connecticut DCF Communications Director, Jacqueline Rabe Thomas, Education/Child Welfare Reporter for CT Mirror, an independent, non-partisan, non-profit news organization, DCF employee (name withheld to protect anonymity), Tina Raheem Director of Scholarships and Grants, Foster Care to Success Program, Timothy J. Sullivan Jr., Assistant Superintendent for Operations, Capitol Region Education Council, Education Specialist serving Connecticut DCF Youth (name withheld to protect identities of youth served), Tracy Serdjenian, Director of Information Services, National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections, Kenny Feder, Policy Fellow, Connecticut Voices for Children, an Independent Research and Advocacy organization, and Bob Cavanaugh, Region I Program Manager, US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau.

Experts were selected based on their ability to provide insight into services provided to youth in DCF care, their knowledge of policies impacting youth in care, and their affiliations

with DCF and educational institutions. In addition, I incorporate interviews conducted as part of a 2012 study with youth in the process of transitioning from DCF care and those who had already discharged from care. In the previous study, eight youth over the age of 18 were interviewed, along with one DCF social worker and one DCF administrator. Of the youth interviewed, two were still receiving DCF support services and the remaining four had already discharged from care at the time of the interviews. (See Appendix I: Egan, 2012)

The initial focus of this project was on educational outcomes for youth who have emerged from DCF care. Only when I began to seek out educational data did I realize the contractual agreement between youth and DCF based on academic achievement. The contractual agreement for youth to remain in care beyond age 18 is either completion of high school or enrollment into full-time post-secondary education. Youth who do not fulfill these requirements discharge from care. The number of youth exiting care vs. those who remain in care beyond age 18 is alarming. In 2011, the number of exits was 337 vs. 189 who remained in care. Based on DCF's linkage between academics and eligibility for care, focusing solely on educational outcomes would have resulted in missing 64 percent of the DCF youth population. The inadequate tracking of educational outcomes for those who age out of care also contributed to the steering of this project. For example, when I tried gathering educational outcomes, the response I received from a DCF employee after being referred to numerous employees in the process was: "I have cc'd the 2 data people I work with that may be able to help. This is definitely data that our agency should aim towards capturing and I hope that in some near future there is 21st century technology that can help us extract this kind of data."⁴ Tracking may soon be enhanced

⁴ Email correspondence with DCF employee.

by the Children's Bureau National Youth in Transitions Database (NYTD) which began collecting data in 2010 on youth ages 18-21 exiting the foster care system.⁵

New Legislation/Opportunity to Expand Services

The Fostering Connections Act allows states to expand services to the 18-21 age group in the following ways:

- Offers states the option of changing the term "child" to include youth already committed to DCF care, up to age 21. This essentially de-links AFDC income guidelines from Title IV-E funding for youth in care.
- Offers flexibility in programming for youth in care up to age 21. This changes the stipulation for full-time post-secondary education enrollment and provides alternatives for youth desiring to remain in care.

Title IV-E of the Social Security Act (Title IV-E) provides federal funding to reimburse states for youth in foster care who, based on their household's income prior to entering care, would have qualified for the now defunct Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) benefits.⁶

Connecticut is reimbursed at a matching rate of 50 percent of the cost for youth in care.

Eligibility for reimbursement of youths' care maintenance is based on the income guidelines for AFDC on July 16, 1996 and has not been adjusted for inflation.⁷ The state is only reimbursed for youth who were removed from households that meet the income requirements for AFDC eligibility. For children removed from households ineligible for AFDC, the state is unable to receive Title IV-E funding. Currently, about half of Connecticut's youth in care qualify for Title IV-E funding.

⁵ No data was released at the time of this project's completion.

⁶ Title IV of the Social Security Act is administered by the Department of Health and Human Services.

⁷ <http://www.cwla.org/advocacy/overviewtitleIV-E.htm>

With the Fostering Connections Act, states can have youth sign a voluntary contract to remain in care beyond their 18th birthday. Doing so relieves the criteria of youth in care from qualifying for AFDC under their household of origin income, and instead uses their individual income to determine eligibility. Upon their 18th birthdays, youth technically exit from care and immediately re-enter care through a voluntary contract with DCF. The 1996 “Need Standard” used to determine eligibility for AFDC for a family of three in Connecticut is \$680.⁸ This means that in order to qualify for AFDC, income for a family of three could not exceed 185 percent of \$680 a month. The maximum gross monthly income for a family of three to meet eligibility for AFDC is \$1,258 and net income cannot exceed \$680 per month or \$8,160 annually. Because youth generally have very low incomes, they are likely to meet the threshold for Title IV-E funding eligibility. This will enable Connecticut to receive funding for many more youth in DCF care.

Due to the age of “child” technicality, Connecticut is not receiving Title IV-E funds for the youth already in its care who meet DCF’s eligibility criteria of full-time post-secondary education enrollment. This greatly limits the state’s ability to provide for this population as the state is taking the full fiscal burden of this population. Under these constraints, it is in the best interest of the state to limit the amount of youth who remain in care beyond the statutory age of 18. This also places undue burden on foster care providers who may wish to maintain support for youth in their care but are unable to do so because of the financial changes that occur once the child reaches age 18. In addition to alleviating the state’s burden, access to these funds would enable the state to serve more youth than it is currently serving.

⁸ <http://www.census.gov/hhes/povmeas/methodology/nas/files/afdc.pdf>

Connecticut Now

Connecticut has yet to take advantage of this opportunity to serve more youth eligible for care under federal guidelines. The most recent (2012) report submitted to the Children's Service Bureau's National Resource Center for Youth Development by Lisa Driscoll, Independent Living Coordinator, Adolescent Services for DCF, in addressing the question of, "Does the state have an approved plan to extend Title IV-E (Federal foster care) beyond 18?" the response was, "No."⁹ As noted by Commissioner Katz, Connecticut is not currently required by federal legislation to provide care for adults over the age of 18. This would change if Connecticut were to be granted funding through the Fostering Connections Act to serve youth age 18-21. The stipulation for funding changes the voluntary aspect of extending care through age 21 to a contractual agreement between the State and Federal Government to do so. States have the option to amend their Title IV-E agreements with the Administration for Children, Youth and Families to include services for 18-21 year olds. In exchange for provided services, Connecticut would qualify for federal funds covering 50 percent of the cost of care.¹⁰

Current guidelines for youth to remain in care beyond their 18th birthday include full-time post-secondary educational enrollment. The Federal Government has loosened those restrictions to maintaining care for youth through age 21 and is encouraging states to offer more flexible programming options for youth. The problem is that the most vulnerable youth, those unwilling or unable to engage in full-time post-secondary education, are turned away from care without the safety net typically afforded to their non-DCF involved similar aged peers. The current stipulation of full-time post-secondary education enrollment in exchange for DCF support

⁹ <http://www.nrcyd.ou.edu/state-pages/state/ct>

¹⁰ This was clarified in part through consultation with Bob Cavanaugh, Region I Program Manager, DHHS/ACF/Children's Bureau

services through age 21 excludes youth, who by default, have histories of trauma, and based on numerous studies, lag behind their non-DCF peers academically.

Connecticut's DCF extended care for youth beyond age 18 is directly connected to youths' willingness and ability to successfully participate in full-time post-secondary education. DCF will also continue to support youth beyond their 18th birthday who are working toward their high school diplomas. Connecticut's policy specifically prohibits extended care beyond a youth's 18th birthday for GED test preparation which, upon passing, qualifies students to receive a State of Connecticut High School Diploma; although this contingency can be waived by Joette Katz, DCF Commissioner. In a July 26, 2011 memo issued to all DCF staff, Katz reiterates DCF's policy of excluding GED programs from eligibility criteria for care beyond age 18, and that a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) is "irrelevant." Youth still need to attend full-time postsecondary education, in order to remain in DCF care. (See Appendix II: Katz Memo)¹¹ The Fostering Connections Act requires that states seeking Title IV-E funding to care for youth through age 21, provide flexible programming options including part-time college/vocational training enrollment, career exploration/workplace readiness courses, GED studies, and/or employment of at least 80 hours per month. The exception is youth who are medically unable to perform these activities. The new options would open up support services to young people who, under Connecticut's current eligibility guidelines, do not qualify for services.

Inadequacies of Current Policy

At the end of Fiscal Year 2011, there were 4,926 children in CT's foster care system. That same year, 2,101 children exited care.¹² The age group of 16 and up represents 32 percent

¹¹ In addition to image provided in appendices, memo can be viewed in PDF format at: http://www.ctmirror.org/sites/default/files/documents/dcfmemoo_0.pdf

¹² <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/entryexit2011.pdf>

of all exits from care. 3.3 percent of those exiting care are in the age group of 16 and up were adopted from care.¹³ Those not fortunate enough to be adopted from care or return to their biological families will face the grim realities of aging out of care. Some of those left behind will go on to post-secondary education and have the ability to remain in care through the age of 21. In cases when youth are well on their way to attaining a degree, demonstrated by having completed one year of college by age 21, they will continue receiving support until their 23rd birthday. In fact in 2012, DCF financially supported a total of 577 youth ages 18-23, enrolled in full-time post-secondary education.¹⁴ Yet in 2011, 526 children in care turned 18. Also in 2011, “337 foster children “aged out” of DCF care [...] with no permanent placement either because they turned 18 or dropped out or graduated from an educational program at an older age” (Jacqueline Rabe Thomas, CT Mirror).¹⁵ Youth without permanent placement are those who do not have family to rely on and have no long-term connection with caring adults once they leave care. As one young woman put it, “I used to call my DCF worker but I can’t anymore, she was only 5 years older than me, she was like an older sister to me but we got really close and I was hurt when I didn’t have her in my life anymore” (Egan, 2012).

Connecticut’s practice of discharging youth who do not enroll in full-time post-secondary education, places undue stress on youth in their care. This also consequently serves as a punitive measure for youth who already struggle academically. In addition, the shame of not living up to the expectations set forth by DCF reinforces the message to youth that they, not the adults entrusted with their care as children, are responsible for their circumstances. For youth who do

¹³ http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/final_age_2011.pdf

¹⁴ Email correspondence with Gary Kleeblatt, CT DCF

¹⁵ Information verified by phone conversation with Jacqueline Rabe Thomas

not meet the current eligibility requirements to stay in care beyond the age of 18, their futures, based on outcome studies of youth who have aged out, look bleak.

Factors Contributing to Low Academic Achievement

According to the US Department of Health and Human Services, youth have an average of one to two home placement changes per year while in DCF care. Along with these placement changes are academic disruptions. Studies conclude that every time a student changes schools, it can take four to six months to recover academically.¹⁶ These disruptions in education are part of the lifecycle for youth in foster care, and contribute to the greater likelihood that they will not be prepared to meet the demands of full-time post-secondary education by their 18th birthday. Prior to entering DCF care, youth are unable to focus on educational needs because they are dealing with physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect, and abandonment issues. They are also likely to have missed significant amounts of school before entering foster care.¹⁷ According to the Assistant Superintendent for Operations of Capital Region Education Council, Hartford, CT, youth in DCF care, “Typically lose a year of education during the transitions and graduate a year later.” In addition, “Students who lack the basic supports for college transitions will likely not make it through college. DCF involved youth are the most extreme examples of students who grew up without those supports many of us take for granted.”¹⁸

The Child Welfare league of America¹⁹ reports youth average nine school changes during their time in care. Each new school entry requires youth to quickly acclimate to their new educational milieu and attempt to develop short-term relationships. In addition, curriculums are not universal so school changes often mean completely different material and levels from school

¹⁶ <http://www.nrcyd.ou.edu/publication-db/documents/educating-children-in-foster-care.pdf>

¹⁷ <http://www.findyouthinfo.gov/youth-briefs/foster-care-youth-brief-challenges>

¹⁸ Consultation with T. Sullivan

¹⁹ <http://www.cwla.org/advocacy/fostercareeducation.htm>

to school. Students in care have notoriously experienced loss of credits and incorrect grade placements as a result of school mobility issues. These outcomes will likely differ with the January 2013 passage of the Uninterrupted Scholars Act (S.3472)²⁰ which removes barriers to accessing educational records of youth in care, supporting smoother transitions for school changes. The stigma of foster care, along with being the oldest in their class, may explain why the majority of DCF youth exit care upon their 18th birthday. According to one Educational Specialist working with Connecticut's DCF youth:

“The main barrier is that our youth who have been in the foster care system for a long time have had several school placements. For example, a youth who currently resides at (name of placement withheld) was in 42 different foster homes and about 12 different elementary schools. There is very little academic consistency from school to school especially if you take into account that our youth historically attend inner-city schools with many problems.

Many of our youth did not grow up in a household where adults found success in school, therefore there seems to be a disconnect with our youth in understanding why school and jobs are important. Youth that came into foster care later in life (for example if a parent died) tend to have more supports and are more successful in school.

[...] youth in DCF care try at least one post-secondary opportunity which is often community college before exiting. Unfortunately, many of our youth are not prepared to meet the academic demands of college and decide it is not for them.”²¹

The indication that many youth are attempting college but not succeeding demonstrates the need for more flexible education/training options. The requirement of full-time postsecondary education for youth is likely the reason for so many of them trying to meet the demands of college in order to remain in care.

²⁰Amendment to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974

²¹ Consultation with Educational Specialist who works solely with DCF youth

Studies have also found the rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in adults who were previously in the foster care system to be twice as high as U.S. war veterans and six times higher than the general U.S. population.²² This alarming rate of PTSD among former foster care youth should signal the need for a trauma informed approach to supporting youth in their transition to adulthood. These studies are backed by more recent data linking childhood maltreatment to impaired brain development. Dr. Bruce D. Perry (2009), who has applied the neuroscience of brain development to the treatment of childhood trauma states, “Adverse experiences interfere with normal patterns of experience-guided neurodevelopment by creating extreme and abnormal patterns of neural and neurohormonal activity” (p. 242). Perry claims that “when the child has adverse experiences—loss, threat, neglect, and injury—there can be disruptions of neurodevelopment leading to compromised functioning” (p. 243). He describes the response of the child to maltreatment as functioning in a hyper-threatened state. “The accumulated impact of years of chaos, threat, loss, and humiliation as experienced by children who are victims of maltreatment, need specialized treatment and time to recuperate from the effects”(Perry p. 244).

How Discharged DCF Youth Fare

The Midwest Evaluation of Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth, or *Midwest Study*, is the most extensive longitudinal study of former foster care outcomes. Researchers began tracking outcomes of the cohort in 2002 when the youth were age 17. According to the latest follow up to the study released in 2011, at age 26, 75 percent of women relied on some form of government assistance to meet their needs. These included Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Food Stamps (SNAP), Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women Infants and Children (WIC), Supplemental Security Income, Medicaid/Medical Assistance, and

²² http://www.casey.org/resources/publications/pdf/WhitePaper_ImprovingOutcomesOlderYouth_FR.pdf

Public Housing/Rental Assistance. The most common form of assistance was food stamps with two thirds of women and 42 percent of men relying on them to get by. Close to 80 percent of the 25 and 26 year old females interviewed had experienced pregnancy, with 32.1 percent having been pregnant prior to the age of 18. 67.2 percent of males in the same study reported having gotten a partner pregnant. 18 percent of males and 4.9 percent of females reported belonging to a gang at some point in their lives. 59 percent of females reported having ever been arrested and 81.8 percent of males reported having ever been arrested. 42.8 percent of females reported having ever been incarcerated and 74.2 percent of males reported having ever been incarcerated. 52 percent of females and 39 percent of males reported being employed at age 26. The researchers note that, “Given that many of these young people were at least a year behind in school, it is also not surprising that the largest increase in the percentage of study participants who had completed at least one year of college occurred between ages 19 and 21” (Midwest Evaluation Report, p 104-105). This specific report is referenced because the researchers credit the ongoing studies of outcomes as influencing federal legislation prompting the latest amendment to the Fostering Connections Act. Commissioner Katz also directly refers to this study in her recent NPR radio interview.²³

Potential Impact of the Fostering Connections Act

DCF supports for youth include housing, health care, legal representation, funding for educational expenses, and regular contact with an assigned social worker. Taking advantage of Title IV-E funding will enable Connecticut to join a national movement to level the platform between DCF youth and their non-DCF peers, as they enter adulthood. The reimbursement to the state would offset additional costs incurred due to the greater number of youth in care. The federal reimbursement comes with the contingency for DCF to meet specific requirements in

²³ <http://www.yourpublicmedia.org/node/23318>, ‘Where We Live’ – WNPR, aired December 13, 2012

service delivery and reporting. The Fostering Connections Act stipulates that states need to provide transitional planning for youth preparing to transition from care to independence. These plans need to be personalized to each individual, be directed by the youth, and include details to meet the housing, medical, and education/employment needs, and a variety of pro-social support options. This indicates the Federal Government's recognition that not only does program design need to be focused on the 18-21 year old population, but also that one size fits all approaches are not producing positive results. As of January 2013, 18 states have been approved to extend Title IV-E funding to care for youth beyond age 18 through the Fostering Connections Act.

Fiscal Analysis

The per diem rate Connecticut pays for foster care maintenance of youth over the age of 12 is \$28.24, or up to \$10,335.85 per year. This amount is equal to guardianship subsidies for youth residing with a licensed relative foster care provider. The allotted living expenses for youth in DCF supported independent living settings is between \$1,272 and \$1,813 a month depending on which region of the state they live in. This covers housing, food, utilities, clothing, transportation, and miscellaneous expenses.²⁴ The maximum annual allotment for expenses for a full-time student is \$22,000. If DCF were to pay the full amount allotted (\$22,000 x 4 years) the total expenditure per student could not exceed \$88,000. Taking the average per month independent living allotment of \$1,542 and multiplying that by 36 months which covers the three years between ages 18 and 21, results in an average expenditure per youth of \$55,512. Because data on administrative costs per youth in care is not readily available as costs fluctuate based on the level of services required per youth, these figures do not take into account the administrative

²⁴ <http://www.ct.gov/dcf/cwp/view.asp?a=2639&Q=327752&PM=1>

costs to provide services. Aside from educational funding, Connecticut does not currently receive any federal reimbursement for the care of youth over age 18.²⁵

In 2010, Connecticut received \$55,726,416 in Title IV-E foster care reimbursement funds.²⁶ This represents a 50 percent reimbursement for approximately half of all children in DCF care that year. With the total population of children in care to be about 5,000, and half of those to be about 2,500, the per child allotment in 2010 was \$22,291. With an estimated 550 youth in care turning 18 each year, the state faces a loss of $(\$22,291 \times 550)$ \$12,260,050 for failing to take advantage of federal opportunities to extend care age beyond age 18. Currently, the state is losing approximately $(2011 \text{ count of } 189 \times 22,291)$ \$4,212,999 annually for youth ages 18-21 already being served by DCF. Over the course of three years covering the time between age 18 and 21, the state faces a loss of \$12,638,997 for youth already being served. Assuming a 50 percent take up rate for youth opting to remain in care beyond age 18, the state stands to gain $(550/2=275 \times \$22,291)$ \$6,130,025 per year in revenue through the expansion of eligibility criteria provided by the Fostering Connections Act. This scenario involves half of potential exits from care upon their 18th birthdays to technically exit care, thereby removing the AFDC parent eligibility criteria, and simultaneously re-entering care using their individual income to meet Title IV-E eligibility criteria.

Connecticut's Alternatives to the Fostering Connections Act

I identify the following five alternatives for Connecticut's approach the Fostering Connections Act:

Alternative I: Maintain Status Quo. In this scenario, DCF would continue to provide the same level of service to youth who meet DCF's eligibility requirements. DCF would not expand

²⁵ This was clarified in part by discussion with Kenny Feder of CT Voices for Children

²⁶ <http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/pdf/SafeandStableFamilies.pdf>

services nor would Connecticut receive any Title IV-E funding to support youth ages 18-21 in DCF care.

Alternative II: Passage of Connecticut H.B. 6367 as it is written.²⁷ In this scenario, Connecticut would be able to access Title IV-E funding to support half of the youth ages 18-21 already in DCF care, but it would not expand services to more youth than are currently being served.

Alternative III: Amendment of H.B. 6367.²⁸ In this scenario, DCF would expand care to 18-21 year olds who currently do not meet eligibility requirements to remain in care, and Connecticut would receive Title IV-E funding for 50 percent of this population.

Alternative IV: Extend care seamlessly without having youth technically exiting and re-entering care simultaneously. In this scenario, Connecticut would receive Title IV-E funding for 50 percent of youth ages 18-21 in DCF care.

Alternative V: Structure extended care as simultaneous exits and re-entries to care without actually interrupting services. In this scenario, youth who, prior to age 18, did not qualify for Title IV-E funding based on their household of origin income, would become eligible based on their individual income and Connecticut would receive Title IV-E funding for 100 percent of youth ages 18-21 in DCF care.

Criteria Used to Consider Alternatives

I identify the following criteria in considering the above identified alternatives:

²⁷ The bill was introduced on February 7, 2013, and if passed will change the term “child” to include youth committed to DCF care ages 18-21 for the purpose of providing post-majority care. Original bill text includes only those already being served and meeting the eligibility for care through full-time post-secondary education enrollment.

²⁸ Proposed amendment includes all 18-21 year olds committed to DCF care, not only youth enrolled in full-time post-secondary education.

Identifies problem

The alternative must identify the problem of serving a limited number of youth. The alternative must increase the amount of youth served and target those most vulnerable due to their inability or unwillingness to maintain full-time post-secondary educational enrollment.

Effect on equity

The alternative must reduce inequity in services between academic achievers and non-academic achievers. I define equity as providing the same level of services to youth capable of full-time post-secondary education as those with differing abilities. The alternative needs to increase equitable services to youth in DCF care. In doing so, the alternative should aim to reduce disparities among the foster youth population both on the state and national levels.

Cost effectiveness

The alternative must be cost effective. Cost effectiveness is measured both in terms of a loss in revenue to the state and gains in revenue to the state. I also consider both the short-term and long-term fiscal impact of each alternative. The alternative needs to address the problem yet avoid additional fiscal burden to the state.

Maximizes benefits

The alternative must maximize benefits afforded through the Fostering Connections Act in terms of the ability to increase the amount of youth served. I also consider the level of utilization of federal support for each alternative.

Political feasibility

The alternative must be politically feasible. Political feasibility is measured in terms of the likelihood of relevant stakeholders' support and opposition to each alternative. Alternatives are considered both at the state and federal government levels, as well as whether the two are aligned.

Projected Outcomes of Each Alternative:

Based on consideration of the five criteria discussed above, I present the following projected outcomes of each alternative:

Alternative I: Maintaining status quo does not identify the problem of serving a limited number of youth, maintains inequity among youth, is not cost effective, does not maximize benefits, and is unlikely to meet the criteria of political feasibility.

Alternative II: Passage of H.B. 6367 as written does not identify the problem of serving a limited number of youth, maintains inequity among youth, is more cost effective than the current state of affairs, yet benefits just half of youth already being served, and is currently supported at the state level.

Alternative III: Amendment of H.B. 6367 identifies the problem by increasing the amount of youth served, increases equitable services to youth, provides a significant source of revenue for the state, takes partial advantage of benefits afforded through federal legislation, yet is unlikely to pass at the state level but is supported at the federal level.

Alternative IV: Extending foster care without technical exits does not identify the problem of serving a limited number of youth, maintains inequity in youth services, continues a loss of revenue to the state, does not maximize the benefits afforded through federal legislation, and political feasibility is unlikely in the long-term.

Alternative V: Structuring extended foster care as technical exits/re-entries identifies the problem by increasing the amount of youth served, increases equity in services to youth, provides a significant source of revenue to the state, maximizes benefits afforded through federal legislation, and is politically feasible.

Criteria, alternatives, and projected outcomes are outlined in a matrix format provided. See Exhibit 1: Projected Outcomes Matrix for Proposed Alternatives

Recommendations

I present the following two ways for Connecticut to take full advantage of the new legislation while a) continuing to serve youth through age 21, and b) serving more youth ages 18-21:

I. Amend Connecticut House Bill 6367, Sec. 5. Subdivision (1) of section 46b-120²⁹ set to take effect July 1, 2013, which, if enacted, can change the statutory definition of “child” up from up to their 18th birthday, to the age of 21 for youth already committed to the care of DCF and meeting the current requirements of full-time post-secondary education enrollment.³⁰ DCF does not receive federal funding for the estimated 450 (2012 count) youth ages 18-21 in its care. Estimating the federal funding opportunity for this population alone, the 50 percent reimbursement rate would provide Connecticut with (450 x \$22, 291) \$10,030,950 in Title IV-E reimbursements to care for this population through age 21. Without the passage, the state will continue to lose out on federal funding targeted at this population. While H.B. 6367 in its current form is an improvement to services in that it will enable DCF to capture federal funding for youth already being served, this still falls short of meeting the needs of all youth in DCF’s custody who are in need of support. An amendment of H.B. 6367 to include the additional criteria provided by the Fostering Connections Act of youth enrolled in part-time school, training, employment, or medically unable to do so, would enable Connecticut to expand services to those currently ineligible and receive federal funding for youth already served by DCF. This entitlement to change the technical definition of child is stated in “section 475(8)(B) of the Act to adopt a definition of “child” for the title IV-E program that will allow it to provide

²⁹ <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2013/TOB/H/2013H.B.-06367-R00-H.B..htm>

³⁰ <http://openstates.org/ct/bills/2013/H.B.6367/documents/CTD00015314/>

foster care, adoption and, if applicable, guardianship assistance for eligible youth up to 21 years of age if the youth meets certain criteria established in section 475(8)(B) of the Act.”³¹ Not amending H.B. 6367 to reflect a change in the technical term “child” to include all youth in DCF care ages 18-21 and staying with the current bill text will result in the state continuing to lose out on this revenue stream, and leave those most in need without supports. H.B. 6367 is written to include only those youth ages 18-21 who are enrolled in full-time post-secondary education.

II. In order to maximize funding available, Connecticut should structure care beyond the age of 18 as providing voluntary services rather than simply extending care. Doing so de-links federal reimbursement to parents’ income by instead, using the income of the individual care. Because youth in care would no longer need to meet the AFDC eligibility for Title-IV-E funds, the re-entry option would instead determine eligibility based on the young person’s individual income. This would enable Connecticut to serve more youth who, based on their parents’ income, may not have qualified for Title IV-E funding. Because youth 18-21 typically have very low incomes, Connecticut can receive federal reimbursement for nearly all of this population who exit and re-enter at their 18th birthdays, rather than limiting funding to just 50 percent of this population. Therefore, if Connecticut is to get as much federal funding for serving youth age 18-21 as possible, it should structure extended foster care in such a way that every youth who wishes to remain in care signs an agreement whereby they technically exit and then immediately re-enter care. In this way, Connecticut could get far more federal money for providing the same services.

The combination of alternatives III and V will enable the state of Connecticut to expand services to youth who are most at risk of being ill prepared for self-sufficiency and to access federal funding to support 100 percent of this population. This entails both amending H.B. 6367

³¹ <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/pi1011.pdf>

to expand the definition of “child” to include all youth age 18-21 rather than only those that meet current DCF requirements for care, and structuring extended care as voluntary re-entries into care rather than simply extending care. Connecticut has the opportunity to join a national movement to change the outcomes of youth exiting the foster care system. With federal legislative backing, the state can increase the number of youth leaving care who are prepared for adulthood and no longer have to take on the full financial burden of caring for this population.

Rationale for Extended Foster Care

It should be of no surprise that foster care youth obtain high school diplomas/GED at a later age than their non-foster care peers and are more likely to have to take remedial classes upon entering post-secondary education, adding another layer of postponement to achieving a degree. While ideally all youth would graduate high school and go on to succeed in college, this is a far cry from the reality of youth emerging from the foster care system. The greater flexibility in options for this population provided by the Fostering Connections Act, offers youth a layer of protection against economic insecurity with the option to attend school part-time and/or be employed. The employment option will be especially appealing to those youth who lack the ability or confidence to succeed academically, but if given the chance, will thrive as employees. In addition to managing finances, employment can develop transferable skills such as time management, communication, multitasking, and seeing a project through from start to finish, all of which are necessary for academic success. Having the opportunity to develop these skills in a workplace may inspire future academic pursuits. Employment not only has a prosocial impact on youth but increases tax revenue, contributes to economic growth, and reduces the likelihood of reliance on means tested government assistance. In addition, youth engaged in some type of school/work activities are less likely to spend time in destructive behaviors.

Cost Effectiveness

First, I present the avoidance costs due to reduced criminal activity which translates into reduction in costs to law enforcement, judicial systems, crime victims, prisons, and finally the cost to DCF in caring for children of incarcerated parents. Next, I focus on cost savings based on the reduction of reliance on government assistance as a result of extended care.

Cost savings due to reduced criminal activity:

Table 1: Investment in DCF care vs. Incarceration Cost

Department of Corrections Annual Cost to House 101 Inmates	Annual Avoidance Cost to DCF in Extending Care	Annual Savings
\$3.6 million	\$1.9 million	\$1.6 million
Average per person cost of one year of Incarceration	Maximum cost per person of one year of DCF Care	Benefit-cost ratio of Extended Care
\$35 thousand	\$22 thousand	\$1.58

For every \$1.00 invested in extended DCF care, the state stands to gain \$1.58; or nearly 60% in return.
Source: Author's calculation of estimates.

The average daily expenditure during 2011/2012 for each inmate housed in CT's Department of Corrections was \$95.16.³² Therefore, the average annual cost to house one inmate ($\$95.16 \times 365$) is \$34,733.40. Using the incarceration rate for former foster care youth of 30 percent as reported in the *2010 Midwest Study* to estimate Connecticut's rate of incarceration for former foster care youth brings an annual figure of 101 inmates in Connecticut's prisons who were formerly in the foster care system. This figure accounts for exits at age 18 (30% of 337 exits in 2011) and does not include those remaining in care beyond age 18. The annual expense to the state of Connecticut for housing these inmates ($\$34,733.40 \times 101$) is \$3,508,073.40. If DCF were to extend care to this same group at the average rate of expenditure, ($\$1,542. \times 101 =$

³² <http://www.ct.gov/doc/cwp/view.asp?a=1505&q=265600>

\$155,742 per month x 12 months = \$1,868,904) the annual cost avoidance savings in providing DCF care vs. incarceration expenses is \$1,639,169.40.

Cost savings due to reduced reliance on means tested government assistance:

Table 2: Investment in DCF Care vs. Government Assistance Cost

Total Cost for TANF and SNAP Dependence for 175 Recipients	Total Avoidance Cost to DCF in Extending Care	Total Savings
\$11.6 million	\$9.7 million	\$1.9 million
Cost of TANF and SNAP combined (5 years)	Cost of Extended DCF care for 3 years	Benefit-cost ratio of Extended Care
\$11.6 million	\$9.7 million	\$1.19

For every dollar invested in extended DCF care, the states stands to gain \$1.19; or nearly 20 percent in return.
 Source: Author’s calculation of estimates.

The standard monthly TANF payment for a family of three in Connecticut is \$576.³³ This is the cash benefit only and does not include other means tested benefits such as housing and SNAP. The maximum SNAP benefit for a family of three is \$526 per month.³⁴ The *2010 Midwest Study* reports 75 percent of female exits and 29 percent of male exits from foster care rely on one or more forms of means tested government assistance (TANF, SNAP, SSI, WIC, Housing). Using this to estimate the number of Connecticut exits, which do not significantly differ by gender, yields (2011 cohort of 337/2=168.5) approximately 126 females and 49 males annually who will rely on means tested government benefits following their exit from care. Assuming the combined total of females and males (126+49=175) will collect TANF for the maximum of 60 months and receive SNAP simultaneously, the total cost of these two benefits for this cohort (TANF = \$6,048,000 + SNAP = \$5,523,000) is \$11,571,000. In contrast, the total cost to extend care through age 21 for this same group (\$1,542 x 175 = \$269,850 x 36 months) is

³³ http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/welfare_rules_databook_2011.pdf

³⁴ http://www.ct.gov/dss/lib/dss/pdfs/food_stamps_brief.pdf

\$9,714,600. The difference between the two is \$1,856,400; the cost saving in avoiding TANF and SNAP benefits.

As of January 1, 2013, the maximum monthly SSI benefit for an individual is \$710 or just \$8,520 per year.³⁵ Relying on TANF or SSI will undoubtedly cause the recipient to rely on other forms of government assistance for housing, food, child care, and heating/utilities to get by. This can be avoided or at least reduced by providing flexible options toward outcomes of self-sufficiency for youth exiting care. Because reliance on government assistance is higher for females due to parenting responsibilities, it is important to note the *Midwest Study* findings of a 38 percent reduction in teen pregnancy for females remaining in care through age 19.³⁶ Providing one additional year of care to females from age 18 to 19 has the potential to reduce the likelihood of early parenting for 64 Connecticut females each year. Health care cost is excluded from this analysis due to the current DCF policy of providing Medicaid coverage for youth up to age 21 regardless of exit status, and the changes to youth coverage resulting from the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (P.L. 111-148) which, beginning in 2014, will extend coverage up to age 26.³⁷

Conclusion

It is unsettling to imagine the struggles of young people in today's job market without the traumatic histories that are embedded in youth exiting foster care. For youth without these experiences, having their parents to fall back on gives them a competitive edge. Based on U.S. Census data, the trend of youth living with their parents has been steadily rising, likely due to economic constraints on young people trying unsuccessfully to enter the job market. "59 percent of men age 18 to 24 and 50 percent of women that age resided in their parents' home in 2011, up

³⁵ <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/ssi/text-benefits-ussi.htm>

³⁶ http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/publications/ChapinHallDocument_1.pdf

³⁷ <http://www.healthcare.gov/law/information-for-you/young-adults.html>

from 53 percent and 46 percent, respectively, in 2005” (2011 US Census data).³⁸ In addition to adult children living at home, according to a recent Forbes poll, 59% of parents were providing financial help to their adult children ages 18-39 to pay for: housing (50%), living expenses (48%), transportation costs (41%), insurance coverage (35%), spending money (29%), medical bills (28%), emergency money (19%), loan assistance (16%), credit card debt (10%), and down payment for a home (7%)³⁹ (Egan, 2012).

It should be of no surprise that youth in the foster care system need support beyond the age of 18 to develop the level of functioning required for successful adulthood, and that not all will have the capacity to maintain full-time post-secondary educational enrollment. The combination of childhood trauma, inadequate school performance, and life in DCF care, is the perfect recipe for making choices that can have long-term negative impacts on youths’ lives. The engagement in part-time studies and/or employment should not disqualify youth from maintaining the support of their surrogate parents. Furthermore, youth should not have to endure facing the trade-off between being homeless and building human capital. Supporting youth in their transition to adulthood needs to be a priority for DCF rather than caring for those who excel academically, and discarding the rest. Current economic conditions are keeping youth at home longer and causing them to re-enter the home after attempting to make it on their own. Providing DCF youth with flexible options to achieving self-sufficiency may help to close the achievement gap between DCF youth and their peers. The Fostering Connections Act provides the ideal opportunity for Connecticut to do just that.

³⁸ http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/families_households/cb11-183.html

³⁹ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jennagoudreau/2011/05/20/parents-provide-financial-support-money-adult-children/>

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Exhibit 1: Projected Outcomes Matrix for Proposed Alternatives

Criteria	Alternative I Status Quo: DCF Continues to provide care for 18-23 year olds in full-time post-secondary education	Alternative II Passage of H.B. 6367 as written: Changes term of “child” to include 18-21 year olds already being served by DCF	Alternative III Amendment of H.B.6367: State is able to access Title IV-E funding for all previously eligible 18-21 year olds in DCF care	Alternative IV Extend care without technical exit/re-entry: Maintains linkage between youth and household income for Title IV-E eligibility	Alternative V Structure extended care as simultaneous exits from care/re-entries to care: Removes household of origin income criteria from Title IV-E eligibility
Identifies Problem	Does not address the problem of serving limited number of youth	Limits care to those already DCF eligible	No longer limits care to those enrolled in full-time post-secondary education	Limits Title IV-E funding to those already eligible	De-links youth from household of origin income
Effect on Equity	Maintains inequity in services between academic and non-academic achievers	Maintains inequity in services between academic and non-academic achievers	Increases equity between academic and non-academic achievers.	Maintains inequity on the national level due to Title IV-E funding for 50 percent of population	Increases equity by creating incentive for DCF to expand the number of youth served due to 100 percent of youth served becoming eligible for Title IV-E funding
Cost Effectiveness	State continues to lose \$4,212,999 annually	States stands to gain \$2,106,500 annually for youth already being served	State stands to gain \$6,130,025 annually in expanding services to just 50 percent of the eligible population	State continues to lose \$4,212,999 annually	State stands to gain \$4,212,999 for youth already in care and an additional \$22,291 annually for each added youth in care
Maximizes Benefits	Does not maximize benefits of Fostering Connections Act	Benefits 50 percent of youth already being served	Maximizes benefits due to increase in the number of youth served	Does not maximize benefits of Fostering Connections Act	Maximizes benefits by taking full advantage of Fostering Connections Act intended to serve more youth
Political Feasibility	Unlikely due to Federal push to expand services	Supported by Federal Legislation and likely to pass at state level	Unlikely to pass at state level	Unlikely in the long-term due to fiscal burden on state	Aligns with Federal support to expand services to more youth

Exhibit 2: Table of Projected Outcomes for Proposed Alternatives

Status Quo
Connecticut serves 450 youth per year
ages 18-21
Receives **\$0** in Title IV-E funds

Pass H.B. 6367 as written
Connecticut serves 450 youth per year ages 18-21
Receives **\$2 million** in Title IV-E funds annually

Amend H.B. 6367
Connecticut serves 725 youth per year ages 18-21
Receives **\$4 million** on Title IV-E funds annually

Technical Exits/Re-entries
Connecticut serves 725 youth per year ages 18-21
Receives **\$6 million** in Title IV-E funds annually

Amendment of H.B. 6367
Combined with
Technical Exits/Re-entries Connecticut serves 725 youth per year ages 18-21
Receives **\$10 million** in Title IV-E funds annually

Appendix I: Egan 2012 Study

Unpublished Paper

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION
THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS, AMHERST

Life After DCF

Examining Outcomes of Former Foster Care Youth

Rose Egan

12/13/2012

Introduction

“I left and then I was like, now what?” This is a statement from a young woman talking about her experience after leaving the state foster care system at the age of 18. The question of what to do with one’s life is all too common for youth leaving the foster care. Once they reach the age of majority, which varies from state to state but is generally between the ages of 18 and 21, foster care youth are left to fend for themselves in a society that is no more prepared for them than they are for it. This study aims to identify outcomes of former foster care youth once they are no longer under the care of the Department of Children and Families (DCF). While there are variations in department titles, for this study the term DCF is used to identify the foster care system.

The foster care system is comprised of various types of placements. A youth is removed from their home due to physical, sexual and or/emotional abuse, neglect, and/or abandonment. Once removed from the home, they are placed into the care of DCF. At this point DCF becomes the child’s primary caregiver. DCF then places the youth into either a temporary shelter with youth of similar ages, a relative caregiver who is approved to provide foster care, a non-relative licensed foster care home, a group home which typically house 6-10 youth of similar ages, or a residential treatment facility that provides on-site schooling and therapeutic services. The number of youth housed in residential treatment centers varies by capacity rates.⁴⁰ Facilities are similar to dorm style housing with 1-4 same gender youth per room who share common dining, lounge, and restroom areas. Youth in need of intensive psychiatric care are placed in hospitals that serve both as a homes for the youth and provide in-patient psychiatric care. It is not

⁴⁰ <http://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/progTypesResidentialTreatment.aspx>

uncommon for youth in DCF care to experience all or most of these placement types throughout their time in care.

This study examines outcomes of former foster care youth in the areas of housing, income, education, support, normalcy, and motivating factors. These focal points were selected due to the relevant literature that supports the notion that former foster care youth struggle in these areas. Former foster youth are more susceptible than their peers to homelessness and unemployment and have lower rates of educational attainment. Although the initial focus of this study was on educational attainment of former foster care youth, the research revealed themes of housing instability, income insecurity, support and normalcy as factors contributing to educational barriers.

Methods

Interviews were conducted with 6 females between the ages of 20 and 25 who are currently or were formerly in the foster care system. Two of the participants were still receiving services and the remaining four were already discharged at the time of their interviews. Those currently receiving services are identified as transitioning from care; they are in the process of preparing for life beyond DCF care. Transitional care units are supervised residences operated by a social service providers where youth live in apartments alone or with other DCF youth and receive support in the form of daily staff contact, life skills training, recreational activities, and adult guidance. Transitional care also includes DCF's Community Housing Assistance Program (CHAP) where young adults live in apartments that are not affiliated with social service providers. Youth residing in these apartments receive financial support from DCF to pay for housing expenses and continue to have contact with their social workers. In addition, transitional

care includes DCF involvement for young people living in college dorms. Those no longer receiving services are identified as DCF alumni.

Interviews were also conducted with 1 DCF social worker and 1 DCF administrator. Although DCF is the legal guardian of youth in care, the social worker is authorized to serve in the capacity of guardian on behalf of DCF. The social worker maintains contact with the youth in care, is the authorizing signatory on legal documents such as court and school papers, and is the youth's primary contact person for DCF. The social worker who participated in this study maintains a caseload of 23 adolescents. The DCF administrator supervises social workers and oversees their combined caseloads. The administrator interviewed has worked for DCF for over 30 years and began as a social worker before being promoted to an administrator several years ago.

Study participants were selected using the network sampling method. The researcher was formerly employed by a transitional care providing organization. Through these prior professional relationships, the researcher was able to contact a regional DCF office in Connecticut and social service providers who facilitated access to study participants. Social workers and service providers contacted young adults, explained the study to them, and upon the approval of participants, provided contact information to the researcher. Study participants were either receiving transitional services through the foster care system or were foster care alumni. Due to confidentiality regulations, names and contact information of foster care youth and alumni are not readily available so this was an ideal method of reaching potential participants. Participants were interviewed at locations of their choice. Interviews took place in the homes of participants, libraries, and in one case a visiting room offered by the referring DCF office. Two interviews were conducted over the phone. Interviews lasted one to two hours. Participants self-

identified pseudonyms in place of their real names for use in the study. Participants were asked a series of questions designed to elicit the telling of their experiences with transitioning or discharging from DCF care. (See Appendices B, C, D)

Limitations to this study were that all transitioning and DCF alumni interviewed were female. The researcher intended to include more than 6 male and female transitioning/DCF alumni in the study but was limited to those who were referred and were available to interview during the time frame of the study. With a larger participation rate anticipated, the researcher initially planned on conducting focus groups with transitioning/DCF alumni along with individual interviews. The small number of participants did enable the researcher to conduct in depth interviews yet prompted the elimination of planned focus groups.

Background and Review of Literature

Youth exiting DCF do not have the support of their families to rely on during their transition to independent adulthood. While some youth choose to remain in care and take advantage of transitional services offered beyond the age of 18, many are eager to distance themselves from the stigma of DCF involvement and choose to leave care before they are ready. Others do not meet the criteria to remain in care beyond the age of 18. In Connecticut for example, where the sample for this study was selected, the following policies for allowing young adults to remain in care beyond the age of 18 apply:

Key to continued Department services at age eighteen (18) and beyond is:

- *prior committed status (abused, neglected, uncared for)*
- *continued full-time school attendance*
- *sustained cooperation with the Department*
- *adherence to the treatment plan and post-secondary CHAP contract, and*
- *maintenance of a 2.0 grade point average (GPA).*

Age Eighteen (18)

In general, a youth committed to the Department will pass from care at the age of eighteen (18).

Age Twenty-One (21)

A youth may continue under care, voluntarily, through the school year of the twenty-first (21) birth date, if such youth:

- *has completed high school or other accepted, full time education/vocational program and plans to continue his/her schooling*
- *is completing high school and plans to continue full-time, post-secondary education and/or vocational training.*⁴¹

If youth desire to remain in DCF care, they need to complete an application for extending care beyond the age of 18 and sign a contract with DCF agreeing to meet the above requirements.

(See Appendix E) The educational requirements alone are often a deterrent for youth to remain in care. Connecticut has implemented a re-entry option for youth who left care following their 18th birthday and want to re-enter DCF care, however the program guidelines make it very difficult for youth to successfully re-enter.

Eligibility

A youth may apply for re-entry to the Adolescent Services Program if the youth:

- *was committed, at the time of their eighteenth (18th) birthday, to the Department as abused, neglected, or uncared for*
- *is not married*
- *is not on active duty with any of the armed forces of the United States*
- *left the Department's care after the age of eighteen (18) but before the age of twenty-one (21), and*
- *is between the ages of eighteen (18) and twenty-one (21) but has not yet reached his/her twenty-first (21) birthday.*⁴²

These eligibility requirements exclude youth who left care before the age of 18. This occurs frequently with teenagers who leave DCF care and are considered runaways or are legally emancipated prior to the age of 18. In addition there is a bureaucratic process youth must follow for submission and possible approval of to re-enter care. Youth are required to contact the DCF

⁴¹ <http://www.ct.gov/dcf/cwp/view.asp?a=2639&q=327784>

⁴² <http://www.ct.gov/dcf/cwp/view.asp?a=2639&Q=327788>

hotline, wait for an application to be mailed to them, complete the application, submit it by mail, and then wait to hear back from DCF. The process can be intimidating for youth, especially those unable to provide a mailing address due to housing instability. (See Appendix F) While it is understandable that a state organization will have processes such as this one, the problem is that youth applying to re-enter DCF are likely couch surfing and do not even meet the basic criteria of having a mailing address of which to get the required form. Youth who have unmet basic needs are the likely population willing to apply for re-entry into DCF care. Those who are in stable living situations are not likely to seek re-entry.

Educational Issues

*If a youth applying for re-entry is between the ages of twenty (20) and twenty-one (21) years, he or she must be scheduled to complete one (1) year of college (24 Credits) through the school year of his or her twenty-first (21) birthday to be eligible for the Continued Education Beyond Twenty-One Program. Any youth applying for re-entry must enroll in an interim educational program if there is a waiting period to enroll in the program or college of his or her choice.*⁴³

The education requirement disqualifies those who may have already earned a high school diploma or GED but are not prepared for the demands of full time college attendance. The Continued Education Beyond Twenty-One Program provides educational funding for youth ages 21-22 who meet the criteria for extended care beyond the age of 21 and have exhausted all other financial aid resources.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, youth have an average of one to two home placement changes per year while in DCF care.⁴⁴ Along with these placement changes are academic disruptions. *The 2005 Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study* found that of 479 foster care alumni in Oregon and Washington, 65 percent experienced seven or more school changes from elementary through high school. Studies also conclude that every time

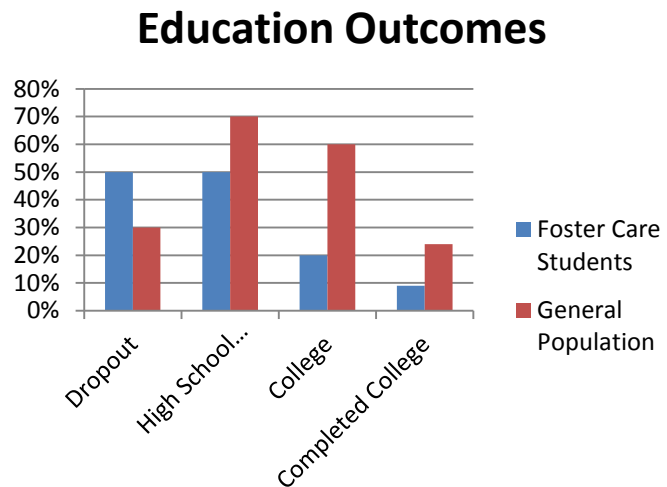
⁴³ <http://www.ct.gov/DCF/cwp/view.asp?a=2639&Q=327788>

⁴⁴ http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/school_stability_youth_fostercare.pdf?pt=1

a student changes schools, it can take four to six months to recover academically.⁴⁵ Given that disruptions in education are part of lifecycle of foster care, there is a greater likelihood that youth will not be prepared to meet the demands of full time college study by the time they reach the ages of 18-20 than there is of them being ready for college.

The top reasons alumni drop out of school are:⁴⁶

- Emotional, behavioral, or family problems
- Pregnancy
- Need to work for income
- Losing interest in being in school
- Getting kicked out of school



<http://www.ed.gov/sites/default/files/FC%20EDWebinar%209-2011.pdf>

The 2010 *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Ages 23 and 24*, followed 602 young adults for eight years who aged out of the foster care system. The report found that at age 23 and 24, former foster youth are more likely than their peers to be:⁴⁷

- Unemployed — Less than half were employed.
- Homeless — Almost 25 percent had been homeless since exiting foster care.
- Pregnant — More than 75 percent of young women had been pregnant since leaving foster care.
- Uneducated — Only 6 percent had a 2 or 4 year degree

Presentation and Analysis of Data

⁴⁵ http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/school_stability_youth_fostercare.pdf?pt=1

⁴⁶ http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/pdf/ImprovingFamilyFosterCare_FR.pdf

⁴⁷ <http://www.chapinhall.org/research/report/midwest-evaluation-adult-functioning-former-foster-youth>

The median age at entry to foster care was 10.5 with the mean length of stay in care being 9 years. Participants were asked about their placement history during their time in foster care.

The mean number of placements reported was 7.5. Participants were also asked about the number of schools they attended. The mean number of schools attended from elementary through high school was 9 which included schools attended before and during their time in foster care.

The table below provides an overview of study sample participants.

Table 2: Study Participants

Participant	Age at Entry into DCF	Number of Years in DCF	Number of Placements	Number of Schools Attended	Highest Educational Attainment	Age at DCF Discharge	Parenting or Pregnant
Sarah Age 21	12	9	6	5	Certificate in Food Service	21	No
Tanya Age 20	13	7	14	11	Currently in GED classes	Receiving Transitional Services	Yes
Lillian Age 25	7	13	9	10	Culinary Arts Certificate	20	No
Christina Age 20	9	9	4	8	GED	18	Yes
Nicky Age 21	15	4	5	13	High School Diploma	19/Re-entry through age 20	No
Tiffany Age 20	8	12	7	8	High School Diploma	Receiving Transitional Services	No

Housing

The two participants still receiving transitional care were residing in apartments paid for by DCF. The remainder of participants live with current or former boyfriends/girlfriends. For all but one foster care alumna, housing arrangements were temporary and participants anticipated a move in the near future. The one participant that identified housing as being stable has been

living with her fiancée and his parents for the previous five years. The others were either actively searching for more permanent housing or planned to in the near future. The primary barrier to permanent housing was income. Sarah is living with her girlfriend as an unauthorized tenant. The apartment is low income housing provided to her girlfriend and if the provider finds out that Sarah is also living there, they both risk losing housing. Sarah told me that she met her girlfriend while they lived together in a DCF placement which tells me her girlfriend is also a DCF alumna. Because she struggled in school, she chose a certificate program which was less demanding than a degree program but also had a shorter completion time. Once she finished the program, she no longer qualified for DCF services. In her words, “Because I finished school, they considered my educational major done, so once you turn 21, they don’t support you anymore.”

The topic of housing also indicated the risk of for engaging in unhealthy relationships. This came through in my interview with Nicky. She moved in with her girlfriend but they have since broken up. In her words, “We are not together anymore but we live together. We fight a lot but we can’t afford to move.” Nicky left DCF when she was 19 but found herself homeless soon after. With the help of a program provider she had worked with while in care, she was able to re-enter DCF. In her words, “It’s hard to re-enter DCF after you leave, they put me through obstacles and if I didn’t have Katie,⁴⁸ I wouldn’t have made it back in. Not everybody had her. I got lucky.” Upon re-entry to DCF, she was placed into supervised transitional housing where she lasted a few months. In her words, “I liked it but there was too much structure and I have ADHD. So staying in class was hard and the rules were like going backwards from being in college. Before that and I was on academic probation so DCF didn’t want to pay for school if I didn’t live there so I left.”

⁴⁸ Program Director of youth services organization, name changed to protect identity of participant

Christina left her last placement, a group home, on her 18th birthday. Like many young people in DCF she was desperate to have a relationship with her biological mother, and now an adult she could finally make the decision to be with her mom. Christina's mother urged her to come live with her so Christina, longing for the relationship, moved in with her mother the day she left the group home. In her words, "My mom wanted me to come stay with her. I stayed there for two weeks, then my mom said there wasn't enough room for me so she kicked me out. Then my father's ex-wife let me stay with her. I stayed there about a year, then I moved in with my fiancée and his parents." Considering her disappointment with the attempt to live with her mom, I was not surprised when she said, "I missed the group home after I left. After I left the group home, I was like, now what?" She also shared that she was in the process of getting an apartment because she and her fiancée are expecting their first child soon, and they need more room for the baby. She was approved for low income housing and looked at an apartment but she found out that they do not accept dogs and because they have a pit bull, they will probably not take the apartment but she planned on still looking.

Income

Income was a major concern for participants. They worried about their current income as well as future income needs. Tiffany, who is receiving transitional services, told me she has a job right now but the store she works for is closing in January so she is worried about getting another job. Her goals for the future included, "finding full-time employment so I am able to provide for myself." Her living expenses are paid for by DCF but she knows this is time limited and she is already worried about her future income security. Christina is receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits but she is taking online classes to become a Veterinary Technician so she plans on finding work once she gets her certificate and after she gives birth.

She identified her greatest challenge as, “Only having one source of income and trying to make it day by day with everything we need, especially with the baby coming.”

Lillian currently lives off of social security death benefits which she started receiving after her father died. She explained that her father worked with an attorney while he was in hospice and arranged for her benefits to be put into an account with a payout schedule of smaller monthly payments that remain active for a longer than usual period of time. She is looking for a part-time job but has not found anything. She is worried that she will struggle financially once her social security benefits run out.

Sarah receives a weekly stipend of \$20 from the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. This is her only source of income. Due to her mental health issues she was able to qualify for this support after leaving DCF. She did say that she was scheduled to begin working at a retail store the day after our interview.

Nicky has been working full-time at a fast food restaurant for almost a year and was promoted to a manager position three months after starting her job. She takes great pride in her ability to earn a living. She states, “From work, it really feels good to have everything you want and everything I need. Every once in a while I spend money on myself after the bills are paid. Now I really know what it’s like to be an adult.” Nicky’s income however, does not enable her to move out of her ex-girlfriend’s apartment. She went on to say, “I want to save money but it’s hard when I don’t even have enough money to pay for everything.” When I asked her what she would do if she suddenly needed \$300.00 to cover an emergency, her response was, “I have a hard time asking people for help. Money is a big thing. I would ask someone I know trusts me. I

would ask my friend Sharon⁴⁹ because she knows she can trust me and I would give it to her.” This indicated that although she is earning a paycheck, she still faces income insecurity.

Education

All but one participant had attained a high school diploma or GED and had some college or vocational training experience. The one participant without this credential was taking GED preparatory classes at the time of the study. Nicky did not complete her degree requirements but plans to pursue higher education in the future. Aside from struggling with ADHD, she attended 12 different schools before she entered DCF. Her parents lived in different states and she grew up moving back and forth between them. She also revealed that her father was sexually abusing her while she lived with him and she was involved in a gang while she lived with her mother. Her priority was survival, not school.

Although studies cite pregnancy as a reason for dropping out of school, only one of the transitioning participants was a parent and one alumna was pregnant at the time of the study. Both women viewed parenting as their first priority but expressed that education was necessary to be good parents. All participants placed a high value on education and viewed education as a means to self-sufficiency. Their academic challenges began long before they entered DCF and if haven't caught up to their peers within the DCF age limits, they are ineligible for educational resources offered by DCF.

Support

“I felt like the support system just got less and less. Less people in my life, that became an issue.” This was Sarah’s response to a question asking participants to identify their greatest

⁴⁹ Name changed to protect identity of participant

challenges/struggles since leaving the foster care system. Adjusting to life after foster care and the sudden loss of caring adults in their lives left some participants feeling unprepared to handle the sudden change in their support system. In Nicky's words, "I used to call my DCF worker but I can't anymore, she was only 5 years older than me, she was like an older sister to me but we got really close and I was hurt when I didn't have her in my life anymore."

Christina expressed the adjustment to life after care by stating, "The freedom of leaving DCF seems good at the time but the fun eventually ends and then you're left on your own." When I asked about her what she would do if she was suddenly put in the position of the DCF Commissioner and she was now in charge of DCF, her response was, "I would definitely change that there should be more workers. They put too many kids with one worker and they don't get the things they need, they usually get the voicemail and it doesn't make you feel good." Others shared this same sentiment about trying to contact social workers and getting their voicemail.

At the age of 13, Tanya was present when her mother committed suicide in their home. She went to live with her maternal grandmother right after her mother's death but she began to have behavioral problems and with her grandmother grieving, the household proved to be unstable and she was placed with DCF. Tanya is receiving transitional support from DCF for her and her 8 month old son. When I asked her, "If you suddenly needed \$300.00 to cover an emergency situation, what would you do? Her response was, "Ask my family but get nowhere with that, maybe ask my cousin and if it was an absolute emergency, he might Western Union it." She told me that her brother, who was her primary source of support, was murdered a few months before we met. Two weeks before we met, she lost her job of three years because her son's father showed up at her job and assaulted her. She also recalled that before she was placed in a residential home, she "never smoked weed or got drunk before until I went there." When

asked if she could speak to the Commissioner of DCF, the highest position in the state, her response was, “I would thank them for supporting me now especially that they were very lenient about me not going to school after my brother was murdered.”

Other transitioning/alumna used their networks as a source of support. Nicky states, “My boss is very supportive and encourages me to stay and keep moving forward, he is like a big brother and I have made new friends that are like family.” She also maintains contact with a former program provider whom she says is very busy but she can call her if she really needs support. Lillian relies on the support of her fiancée and her future in-laws. I met with her in their home where she lives and was able to meet her fiancée and his mother. Her future mother-in-law has served as her parental figure since she moved in with them. She says if she needed money she would ask her future mother-in-law who at times will let her charge purchases on her credit card and Lillian always pays her back. She also said that her mother-in-law does not mind because she earns points on her credit card purchases. It appears that her fiancée’s family has fully embraced her and is providing some long awaited stability and security.

Normalcy

The quest for normalcy was expressed by both transitioning/alumna as well as from the DCF social worker.

“It’s hard because you want to do your job and protect these kids but at the same time you want to give them a normal life. I have a 17 year old kid. He’s built like a refrigerator. I’m not going to run a background check on his friend’s parents if he wants to spend the night at his friend’s house on the weekend. He can protect himself. I don’t have to worry about him but that’s what

DCF requires and they don't understand that this is not a normal life for kids." DCF Social Worker

I met Tanya at the referring DCF office. Upon my arrival, I had to pass through a metal detector, hand my bag over to the security guard, then stretch my arms out and spread my legs open for the guard to wave the security wand around the parameter of my body. When Tanya arrived with her 8 month old son, she had to follow the same procedures as well as hand over her son's diaper bag and allow the guard to physically check her son. She brought her brother's girlfriend with her to keep an eye on her son in the waiting area while we met in a private visiting room. These rooms are designed for non-custodial parents to visit with their children. All visitors, adults and children alike need to go through a security check upon entering the space. There are no pictures on the walls which are painted off white and have many nicks, gouges and marks in them. The restroom resembled an old high school bathroom with chunks of the wall missing where there were once soap dispensers. This is where DCF youth go to meet with their social workers who serve as their parents.

The quest for normalcy can also hinder DCF alumni's ability to seek out and accept help, even when they need it most. Sarah states, "I'm kind of like over asking people for help. I'm just trying to go with the flow and make it on my own." She went on to say one thing she would have done differently in her transition from DCF was, "I would have chosen a different major so I could get DCF services a little longer. Because it was basically in food service, DCF said I could get a job after I graduated, but I couldn't find a job." In describing her life in the transitional apartment versus the group home, Tiffany stated, "It's amazing to wake up and you don't have like seven girls screaming. I have the freedom to do what I want and get my school work done."

Lillian recalls that, “A lot of times DCF didn’t even tell me I was moving until the day or two before, or the same day. They just showed up with bags and told me we were leaving. I didn’t even know where I was going until I was in the car.” She shared that at one placement, the staff presented her with a bag with her initials embroidered on it which for her symbolized kindness and made future moves easier. Other participants talked about the structure of group homes and how the rules inhibited them from having normal teenage experiences. Some would have liked to stay at friend’s houses but due to the requirement of DCF to perform a background check on their friend’s parents prior to approving an overnight, they chose instead to avoid embarrassment and therefore missed out on these activities as well as potential support systems.

Motivating Factors

A theme of motivation that came through with each of the participants was the importance of believing in themselves when they felt no one else did. Christina, who received her high school equivalency diploma through an online program after leaving care stated her reason for doing so as, “I heard the staff at the group home always talking about me saying I was never going to graduate so I wanted to prove them wrong.” She also shared that she sent a copy of her high school diploma and her acceptance letter to the Veterinary Technical Training School to the staff at the group home. She was extremely proud of these accomplishments and even more so that she was able to do them after leaving care, or in her words, “on her own.”

When asked to identify their greatest accomplishments since leaving foster care, a common theme that came through was survival and resiliency. When I asked Lillian if she had a plan for what she would do when she left DCF, her response was, “To start fresh, to let the past disappear behind me and not let my past define me and do what I want to do without anyone

holding me back.” One of her greatest accomplishments was, “Just knowing I can do anything I put my mind to. I never knew that when I was in DCF.”

Study participants were hopeful for the future but identified barriers to achieving their goals as needing to meet their basic needs before they can focus on their goals. They also shared that parenting either currently or in the future was a motivator for them to accomplish their goals. As Nicky put it, “I want to work and go to school so when I’m ready to have kids I will be ready for them.”

Conclusion

Studies show that beyond emotional support, young adults receive material support from their families that foster care alumni do not have access to. These are all beneficial in assisting young adults in their transition from youth to adulthood, and represent basic necessities usually taken for granted by the general public but sorely missed by foster care alumni. According to a recent Forbes poll, 59% of parents were providing financial help to their adult children ages 18-39 to pay for:⁵⁰

Housing (50%)	Living expenses (48%)
Transportation costs (41%)	Insurance coverage (35%)
Spending money (29%)	Medical bills (28%)
Emergency money (19%)	Loan assistance (16%)
Credit card debt (10%)	Down payment for a home (7%)

A 2011 study of transitions of former foster care youth estimated the age that young people leave their parents’ home to be 23 and found that young adults often return home after their initial attempt to make it on their own and do not permanently move out until the age of

⁵⁰ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jennagoudreau/2011/05/20/parents-provide-financial-support-money-adult-children/>

28.⁵¹ In addition, the 2005 Casey Family Programs Northwest Alumni Study found that Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) rates for foster care alumni were twice as high as those for U.S. war veterans.⁵²

For foster care alumni the effects of life changes can be catastrophic whereas other young adults of the general population can lean on their families in times of need and get through events such as job losses, car break downs, and romantic break ups without jeopardizing housing, or disrupting their goals. *“We try to work with them to overcome the traumas of their past. Most teenagers make mistakes and they have never been through what these kids have. We do the best we can with the time we have.”* DCF Administrator

In order to make a more level playing field between foster care youth and the general population, policy advocates need to consider the unique challenges faced by youth in care when designing policies that directly affect them. Foster care youth need time to catch up to their peers emotionally and academically before they can focus on higher education. The traditional route to college makes sense for most students, but for those who grow up in the system this is yet another struggle for normalcy. Some foster youth make it in college. For those who don't, leaving the dream behind can be more comforting than jumping through hoops just to get there. Ready or not, foster care youth need to go directly to college after obtaining a high school diploma, or in most cases a GED, if they want to take advantage of educational funding. Veterans on the other hand are given 15 years from their military discharge date to use GI Bill money for higher education.⁵³ This allows time to recuperate from the effects of PTSD, adjust to life outside of service, reunite with family, and decide their path of study rather than being

⁵¹ Children and Youth Services Review 33 (2011) 1919–1929

⁵² http://www.casey.org/resources/publications/pdf/WhitePaper_ImprovingOutcomesOlderYouth_FR.pdf

⁵³ http://www.gibill.va.gov/resources/benefits_resources/benefit_comparison_chart.html

rushed into a degree program. While there is nothing traditional about the academic experiences of foster children, they are expected to follow the traditional route to college. In an effort to normalize their educational experiences, policy advocates have made the push for directing foster care youth to college immediately following high school diploma or GED attainment, but they fail to keep in mind that for many foster youth, this only leads greater marginalization.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Lay Summary/Consent Form

Participant Consent for Qualitative Research Project

The Center for Public Policy and Public Administration

University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Research Topic: Post Department of Children and Families (DCF) care outcomes

Researcher: Rose Egan, 2013 Candidate for Master of Public Policy and Administration
egan.rose1@gmail.com/ 413-341-7233

Research Supervisor: Professor Krista Harper: kharper@anthro.umass.edu/413-577-0661

Life After DCF

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to determine outcomes for DCF care alumni (adults who were in the care of DCF as youth). I am primarily interested in determining what alumni identify as successes in their lives and how they attain their goals. I am also interested in alumni's identification of supports and barriers to success in life after DCF care. I am conducting this study through The Center for Public Policy and Administration, UMass, Amherst. I will be interviewing adults, over the age of 18, who are or were previously in the care of the Department of Children and Families (DCF).

The results of this study will be used to assist me in determining what paths DCF care alumni take after they leave care, whether or not there are trends in their decisions making patterns, and what they identify as their needs beyond care. The information gathered will be used to guide further research on the needs of individuals who are, will be, or have already transitioned from DCF care to independence. Participants were selected using the network sampling method. I do not foresee any risks to study participants. The benefits of this study are an increase in understanding of outcomes for this population and have the potential to inform DCF policy. The benefits to you are the opportunity to assist in developing a greater understanding of the needs of DCF alumni by telling the story of your experience with life after DCF.

I agree not to disclose any identifying information to administrators, care providers, other participants, or anyone not involved in the study. In my report of this study, participants will not be identified. Pseudonyms (fake names) will be used in place of real names. I encourage you to come up with your own pseudonym.

Each individual interview will take approximately 90 minutes. During individual interviews, I will be using a digital recorder to document our meetings. The audio will be destroyed following written transcription of the materials. You do not need to answer all questions of the study in order to participate. If at any time, there is a question you do not wish to answer, you can choose not to and we will move on to the next question. You always have the option of going back to a previous question if you would like to clarify or elaborate on your response. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If at any time you choose not to continue your participation, simply let me know and I will remove you from the participant list as well as destroy any information you have already provided.

By signing below, you agree to participate in the study outlined above.

Printed name of participant _____

Signature of participant _____ Date _____

Printed name of researcher _____

Signature of researcher _____ Date _____

Appendix B: Interview Questions for Alumni

Tell me about your current living situation. Who you live with, what type of residence?

How long have you been out of DCF? How old were you when you left?

How old are you now?

So it's been how long since you left?

I'd like to know about the time you spent in DCF care. How long were you in care (how many weeks, months, years)?

How old were you when you entered DCF care?

How many placements have you been in? What types of placements were you in? (foster homes, shelters, relative care, group homes, residential)

How many schools did you go to and what is the highest grade/level you completed?

What was your last placement? And when did you leave?

Why did you leave? (Did you age out, get emancipated, decide to leave on your own, go to college, move back home, AWOL?) How old were you at the time?

Where did you go when you left? Did you have any money?

Did you have a plan for what you would do after DCF? How did that work out?

How do you spend your time now? (school, work)

How do you get things you need? (a place to stay, food, clothes, transportation, health care)

What are your greatest accomplishments since you left DCF?

What about some of your greatest challenges/struggles?

What are your plans/goals for the future? How will you attain them? How will you get there?

What do you see your biggest need to be right now? What about future needs?

How would you handle an emergency or crisis in your life right now? (apartment fire, car breaks down, job loss, breakup)

Is there anyone that you feel you can rely on when you need support? If so, tell me about her/him.

If you suddenly needed \$300.00 to cover an emergency situation, what would you do?

Have you had any legal trouble (police/law enforcement/courts) since leaving DCF?

If you could speak to young people who are currently in DCF, what would you say?

.

What if you could speak to the Commissioner of DCF (the highest position in the state) what would you say/tell them?

If you were suddenly put in the position of the Commissioner of DCF, what is the first thing you would do? Would you change anything or leave things as they are? What are some other things you would do with as Commissioner of DCF?

Is there anything else you would like to share/tell me?

Appendix C: Interview Questions for Transitioning Youth

Tell me about your current living situation. Who you live with, what type of residence?

How long have you been in DCF?

How old were you when you entered DCF care?

So, it's been how long since you've been in DCF?

How old are you now?

How many placements have you been in? What types of placements were you in? (foster homes, shelters, relative care, group homes, residential)

How many schools have you gone to and what is the highest grade/level you completed?

Did you have a plan for what you will do after DCF?

How do you spend your time now? (school, work)

What are some of your greatest accomplishments?

What about some of your greatest challenges/struggles?

What are your plans/goals for the future? How will you attain them? How will you get there?

What do you see your biggest need to be right now? What about future needs?

How would you handle an emergency or crisis in your life right now? (apartment fire, car breaks down, job loss, breakup)

Is there anyone that you feel you can rely on when you need support? If so, tell me about her/him.

If you suddenly needed \$300.00 to cover an emergency situation, what would you do?

Have you had any legal trouble (police/law enforcement/courts)?

If you could speak to other young people who are in DCF, what would you say?

What if you could speak to the Commissioner of DCF (the highest position in the state) what would you say/tell them?

If you were suddenly put in the position of the Commissioner of DCF, what is the first thing you would do? Would you change anything or leave things as they are? What are some other things you would do with as Commissioner of DCF?

Is there anything else you would like to share/tell me?

Appendix D: Interview Questions for DCF Administrator and DCF Social Worker

Tell me about your role within DCF.

What do you see as some of the biggest challenges/struggles faced by DCF youth?

What are some challenges/struggles you have in your role in DCF?

Can you tell me about educational challenges or successes for youth in care?

Is there anything else you would like to share/tell me?

Appendix E: DCF form 779 Notice At Age of Majority

Name of Youth: _____ DOB: _____
 Address: _____ Phone: _____
 City, State & Zip: _____ LINK #: _____

Within the next three months, you will reach your 18th birthday. As of that date, you will no longer be committed to the care and custody of the Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families or required to accept DCF services. However, you may continue to receive services from the Department up to your 21st birthday as long as you remain in full-time attendance at:

- a secondary (high) school
- a technical school
- a college or
- a stated-accredited job training program

AND consent to remain in care by participating in services as documented in your case plan.

I WISH TO:

- Voluntarily continue by participating in services offered by DCF and set forth in my case plan.
- attend a high school or technical school attend a 2 or 4 year college
- attend a state-accredited job training program

Transfer to: Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
 Department of Developmental Services

Signature of Youth	Date	Signature of DCF Social Worker	Date
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OR Leave DCF care on my 18th birthday. I understand that DCF will terminate money payments and placement services on that date.

Date to review Transition Plan: _____

Signature of Youth	Date	Signature of DCF Social Worker	Date
			Signature of DCF Youth’s Attorney or GAL
			Date

Faxed to DCF/MAU Medical Assistance Unit @ (203) 427-2880

Appendix F: APPLICATION FOR RE-ENTRY TO ADOLESCENT SERVICES PROGRAM

Please fill out completely and return to: **The Bureau of Adolescent & Transitional Services**

505 Hudson Street

Hartford, CT 06106

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Youth's Name: _____

Address: _____
Street City State Zip Code

Phone #: _____ Social Security #: _____

D.O.B. _____ Age: _____ Sex: _____ Race: _____

Name

Phone Number

Medical Provider _____

Dental Provider _____

Attorney _____

DCF INVOLVEMENT

Most Recent DCF Worker or Office: _____ Phone #: _____

Reason for Re-Entry Request: Please explain why you are requesting to re-enter DCF services and why you should be considered for re-entry.

EDUCATION

School: _____ Grade: _____

School Type: College Vocational High School

Other (Please explain): _____

In the past 12 months have you: (Please check all that apply.)

- Attended school regularly
- Received passing grades
- Been suspended from school
- Performed to potential
- Been truant from school
- Been expelled from school
- Received poor grades
- Been disruptive in school

Post High School Education Plans: _____

Completed a Life Skills Program: Yes No If yes, please specify which program: _____

FAMILY/FRIENDS

What family, friends and/or other adult support do you have in place? _____

Name

Phone Number

Parent/Guardian: _____

Parent/Guardian: _____

Spouse: _____

Sibling: _____

Sibling: _____

Sibling: _____

Sibling: _____

Adult Support: _____

Other: _____

Other: _____

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Clubs/Organizations Volunteer Participates in Religious Activities Mentoring

Paid Employment Other (please specify): _____

LEGAL/COURT INVOLVEMENT

Court Involved and/or Court History: Not Applicable Currently on Probation Probation Completed

Probation Officer: _____ Phone: _____

Attorney: _____ Phone: _____

Reason for Court Involvement: _____

Criminal Charges, if any: _____

Do you have any pending criminal charges? Yes No If yes, please explain:

WORK EXPERIENCE

Currently Employed?: Yes No If yes, please complete.

Name of Employer: _____ Hours Worked Weekly: _____

Previous Employment History: Yes No If yes, list employer(s) and dates.

Employer	Dates Employed	
	From:	To:
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

RESIDENCE HISTORY

Please list the places where you have lived in the past year.

Name and type of Residence (family, friend, DCF Placement, etc.)	Dates of Placement	
	From:	To:
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

I understand that this application will be reviewed for up to 30 days to assess whether or not I will be able to re-enter the Adolescent Services Program. Failure to answer these questions truthfully may result in delay, further review, or denial of the application.

Signature

Date



DEPARTMENT of CHILDREN and FAMILIES
Making a Difference for Children, Families and Communities



MEMORANDUM

To: All Staff
From: Joette Katz, Commissioner
Date: Tuesday, July 26, 2011
Subject: What Happens When a DCF Youth Turns 18?

Within the next 30 days, please review all cases in which a youth is over the age of 18 to ensure his or her continued eligibility for DCF services.

A youth who has reached his or her 18th birthday may continue to receive DCF services through his or her 21st birthday only under the following conditions:

Committed abused, neglected, uncared for or for whom the Commissioner is the statutory parent as of his or her 18th birthday and the youth:

- is in full-time attendance in
- a secondary school, a technical school, a college or a state-accredited job training program; and
- consents to remain in care. (1)

Secondary school means high school. It does not mean a GED program.(2)

Full-time attendance means meeting the full required course load for the school, college or program in which the youth is enrolled. It also means that the youth must be maintaining good attendance and have a passing average.

Consent means that the youth agrees to accept and fully participate in post-18 services by signing the DCF-779.(3)

Admitted as a Voluntary Services client as of his or her 18th birthday:(4)

- provided that the Commissioner, in her discretion, determines that the youth will benefit from further care and support from DCF.

This means that whether the youth can benefit from further care and support is completely up to me or my designee.

Youth adjudicated delinquent:

A youth adjudicated delinquent who has not reached his or her 18th birthday by the time the delinquency commitment ends may be admitted to the Voluntary Services Program or committed as neglected, abused or uncared for to continue receiving services beyond age 18 under the conditions set forth above. (If I am the youth's statutory parent, he or she may also continue to receive services as though he or she is a committed child.)

Debunking myths:

- The fact that a youth has or is eligible for an **Individualized Education Plan (IEP)** is irrelevant to the analysis. The youth's school is solely responsible for implementing an IEP, whether or not the youth remains in DCF care. What's important to our determination of whether the youth continues to receive services after age 18 is whether or not he or she is attending school full time, regardless of whether or not the youth has an IEP.
- The **Probate Court** cannot force DCF to keep a voluntary services client beyond age 18 if the agency has determined that the youth may not benefit from continued services. If you have a case in which the Probate Court orders services beyond age 18, bring it to the attention of DCF legal staff immediately.
- DCF Policy 36-95-1 regarding **incarcerated youth** is being revised (5) to more clearly reflect the statutory criteria. The following reflects the agency's statutory mandates:
 - If an incarcerated Voluntary Services youth reaches age 18, the case must be closed if he or she cannot benefit from continued services. If no services can be provided to the youth in prison, the case must be closed.
 - If an incarcerated youth who has been committed or for whom I am the statutory parent turns 18, then the youth must attend a United School District #1 school (operated by Department of Correction) full time. If the youth has already graduated from high school or has enough credits to graduate or has a GED, or if the youth fails to maintain proper attendance and grades, he or she does not meet the statutory criteria for continuing to receive services and the case must be closed.
- The **MOUs with DMHAS and DDS** are not in conflict with the statutory language.
- **Young adults over age 21** are not statutorily entitled to DCF services. However, we do have a budgetary allowance to pay some or all of the costs of post-secondary education for young adults who are already in such a program when they turn 21. See DCF Policy 36-94 for eligibility details and limitations on what can be provided to these young adults.

Prior to the youth turning 18:

- **Committed abused, neglected or uncared for:**
 - At the last Administrative Case Review before the youth's 18th birthday, determine whether the youth is attending a qualifying full-time educational program.
 - If so, meet with the youth to explain post-18 services and gain his or her consent.

- Monitor the youth's attendance and grades and keep LINK updated as to the status of his or her educational programming and his or her willing to continue to participate in other DCF services.
- If at any time it is determined that the youth is no longer satisfactorily participating in a full-time educational program or the youth is no longer willing to participate in the services offered, meet with the youth to explain that the case will be closed, develop a Transition Plan as outlined in DCF Policy 36-5,(6) and issue the DCF-800 (7).

➤ **Voluntary Services cases:**

- At the last Administrative Case Review before the youth's 18th birthday, determine whether the youth will benefit from continued support and services from DCF at age 18 using the guidelines set forth in the DCF Regulations and Policy. This decision must be approved by the Regional Director.
- If the youth will benefit from continued support and services, document the specifics in LINK and in each successive case plan.
- At each successive ACR, determine whether the youth will benefit from continued support and services from DCF.
- If at any time it is determined that the youth can no longer benefit from continued support and services, meet with the youth to explain that the case will be closed, develop a Transition Plan as outlined in DCF Policy 36-5, (8) and issue the DCF-800 (9)

➤ **Delinquent youth:**

- At the last Administrative Case Review before the youth's 18th birthday, determine whether he or she should be referred for Voluntary Services or committed neglected, abused or uncared for.
- If so, process the necessary documentation.
- If I had been the statutory parent for the youth prior to the expiration of the delinquency commitment, treat the youth as committed neglect, abused or uncared for youth.
- If neither of the above conditions applies, explain the reunification plan to the youth and his or her family, discharge the youth and close the case.

➤ **Incarcerated youth:**

- Review each case at least every three months and document in LINK the details outlining how the youth meets the criteria for continuing DCF services.

➤ **Youth with developmental delays:**

- Six months prior to the youth's 18th birthday, assess whether he or she will

need a legal guardian as an adult due to his or her developmental delays. If so, consult with DCF legal staff on the procedure and make the appropriate application to the Probate Court.

Remember:

Exceptions to this memorandum must be justified in writing and approved personally by me. For example, it may be appropriate to permit a youth to remain care after age 18 while he or she completes a GED program rather than a secondary school program. Requests for exceptions must detail why a statutorily-authorized program is not appropriate and what the next steps are for the youth after the GED is earned.

Every DCF staff member is responsible for understanding and applying the law and policy that impact the youth on his or her caseload. When in doubt, consult with your chain of command or DCF legal staff.

Regional Directors are responsible for ensuring that the cases of youth who no longer qualify for DCF services are closed in a timely manner.

(1) Sec. 46b-129. (j) ... The commissioner shall be the guardian of such child or youth for the duration of the commitment, provided the child or youth has not reached the age of eighteen years or, in the case of a child or youth in full-time attendance in a secondary school, a technical school, a college or a state-accredited job training program, provided such child or youth has not reached the age of twenty-one years, by consent of such youth...

(2) GED programs may be approved in lieu of secondary school on a case-by-case basis. See "Exceptions" at the end of this memo.

(3) "Notice at Age of Majority. This form is being revised to more clearly reflect the legal criteria.

(4) Sec. 17a-11. (g) Notwithstanding any provision of sections 17a-1 to 17a-26, inclusive, and 17a-28 to 17a-49, inclusive, any person already under the care and supervision of the Commissioner of Children and Families who has passed such person's eighteenth birthday but has not yet reached such person's twenty-first birthday may be permitted to remain voluntarily under the supervision of the commissioner, provided the commissioner, in the commissioner's discretion, determines that such person would benefit from further care and support from the Department of Children and Families. Any person remaining voluntarily under the supervision of the commissioner pursuant to this subsection shall be entitled to a written plan for care and treatment, and review of such plan, in accordance with section 17a-15.

(5) I am aware that there may be additional existing policy that conflicts, or appears to conflict, with the above statutes. We are in the process of re-writing the entire policy manual and these discrepancies will be cleared up. However, if you notice something in policy that appears not to be consistent with this memo, please bring it to the attention of the Agency Legal Director for clarification.

(6) Required by the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 to be completed within 90 days of the youth's discharge from DCF care.

(7) "Notice Of Proposed Denial, Suspension, Reduction, Or Discontinuance Of Department Of Children And Families Benefits"

(8) Required by the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 to be completed within 90 days of the youth's discharge from DCF care.

(9) "Notice Of Proposed Denial, Suspension, Reduction, Or Discontinuance Of Department Of Children And Families Benefits"