

## BRIEF REPORT

### Status of CP&P Young Adults Exiting Care Without Achieving Permanence

#### FOCUS

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) uses data and outcome measures to inform decision making and support the culture of a self-analyzing and self-correcting learning organization. DCF utilizes Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) to identify and analyze strengths and areas needing improvement. The CQI process is designed to evaluate, implement, provide feedback, learn from, and revise solutions designed to improve the quality of services. There are several CQI tools/activities that are utilized to collect data, one of them being targeted reviews.

In August 2014 and February 2015, the Department of Children and Families' (DCF) Office of Performance Management and Accountability (PMA), Division of Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P), Office of Adolescent Services (OAS), and the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) jointly conducted a two-part targeted case record review that specifically concentrated on outcomes for young adults who did not achieve legal permanence.[1] In this review, case records for young adults involved with CP&P between the ages of 18-21 years who were discharged from a CP&P placement without achieving legal permanence and subsequently had their CP&P case closed between January 1 and December 31, 2014 were examined. The main focus of the review was to gain an understanding of outcomes in the areas of housing, education or vocational training and employment.

The goal for children and youth who experience foster care is for them to achieve legal permanence which is defined as being reunified with a parent, adoption or achieving kinship legal guardianship. [2] For young adults who do not achieve that goal by age 18, the concurrent plan is to offer comprehensive services to support adolescents in their transition to adulthood to achieve economic self-sufficiency, interdependence and engage in healthy life-styles. Stable housing and a reliable income source through employment are pivotal towards those ends. Additionally, continuing academic or vocational training is also viewed as fundamental for future employment success.

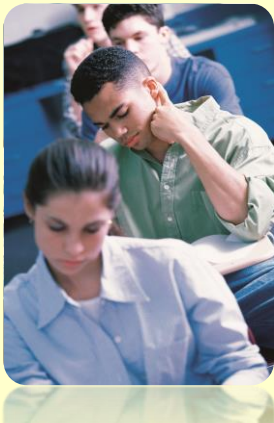
#### METHODOLOGY

For 2014, the cases of 160 young adults were reviewed. Since the number remains relatively small, the cases of all those meeting the cohort criteria were reviewed. Through a series of questions in a web-based review instrument following an in-depth case record review, reviewers were tasked to extract the documented outcomes for these young adults while considering the quality of the CP&P caseworkers' efforts to support those outcomes. Two reviews were conducted to capture the young adults whose CP&P case was closed during a specified period. The first review covered January 1, 2014 – June 30, 2014 and was conducted in August 2014. The second review covered July 1, 2014 – December 31, 2014 and was conducted in February 2015.

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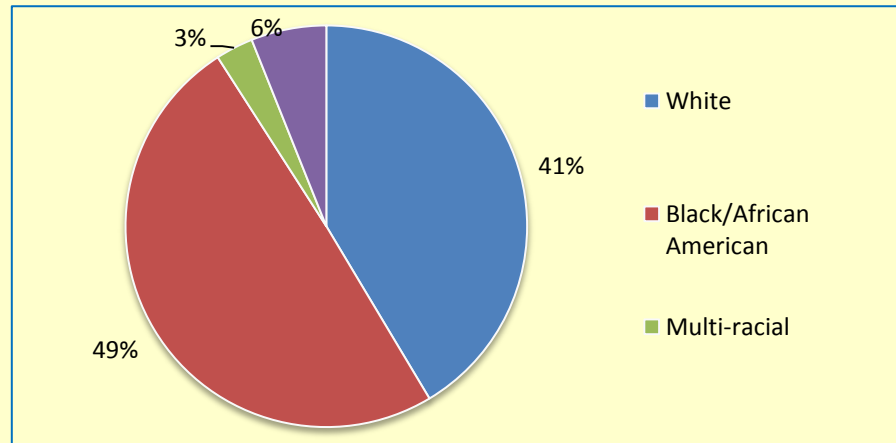
**The dominant reason for case closing (68 cases/43%) was "Youth turned age 21" (the maximum service age for this population).**



## Overview of Youth Reviewed

The August 2014 review involved the cases of 73 young adults and the February 2015 review assessed 87 cases. Males comprised 71 (44%) of the group; 89 were females (56%). Figure 1 reflects the racial composition of the group.

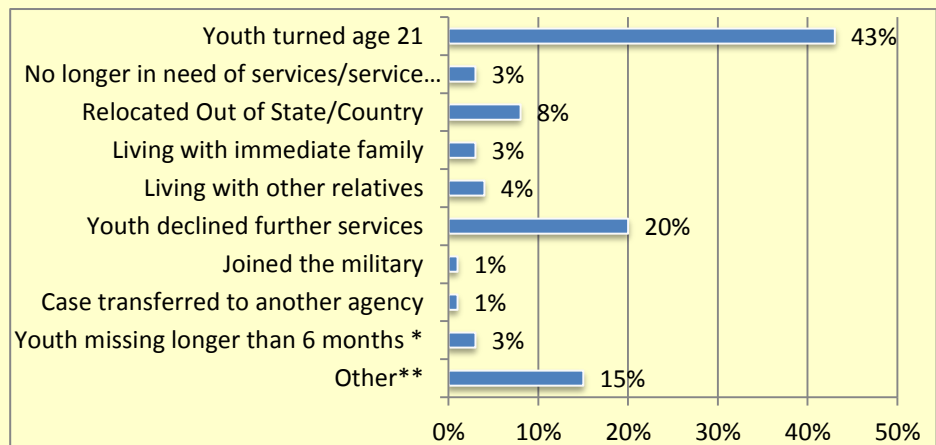
Figure 1: Race (n=160)



Note: American/Indian/Alaska Native, Asian and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander were not represented.

The dominant reason for case closing (68 cases/43%) was "Youth turned age 21" (the maximum service age for this population) followed by "Youth declined further services" (32 cases/20%). Figure 2 reflects all the closing reasons collected.

Figure 2: Primary Reason for Case Closure (n=160)



\*"Missing" means that CP&P was completely unaware of the whereabouts of the youth.

\*\* "Other" includes but is not limited to young adult was incarcerated, missing < 6 months and lack of response.



## Housing Findings

The results of the combined reviews indicate that 138 young adults (86%) had housing prior to case closure and a plan for future housing. By comparison, in 2013 the housing performance was 93 percent. The most frequently cited housing choices included: *Own apartment/room* (28 cases/18%); *Home with relatives* (27 cases/17%); and *Home with Friends/Shared Housing* (22 cases/14%). Thirteen young adults (8%) were residing with a biological parent(s) or previous guardian at the time of last contact with a CP&P caseworker. [3] The remaining 22 young adults (14%) with no apparent current housing or housing plan were mostly comprised of those whose whereabouts were completely unknown to CP&P and/or had departed the state without declaring to a caseworker a firm plan for future housing. Some youth remained in care through the DCF Children's System of Care (CSOC) or other State-funded adult service. Table 1 illustrates the various housing arrangements.

**The results of the combined reviews indicate that 138 young adults (86%) had housing prior to case closure and a plan for future housing.**

**Table 1: Type of Housing Prior to Case Closure (n=160)**

HOUSING SETTING	PERCENTAGE
Own apartment/room	18%
Home with relatives	17%
Home with friends/shared housing	14%
Missing/Unknown	14%
Resource Home-Related and Unrelated	13%
Biological parents/guardians home	8%
Treatment Home	4%
Supervised Transitional Living Program	3%
Youth in Jail/Prison	3%
Residential Treatment Facility	2%
College Dormitory	2%
Independent Living Program	1%
Group Home	1%
Military	1%
Medical/Rehabilitative Setting	1%

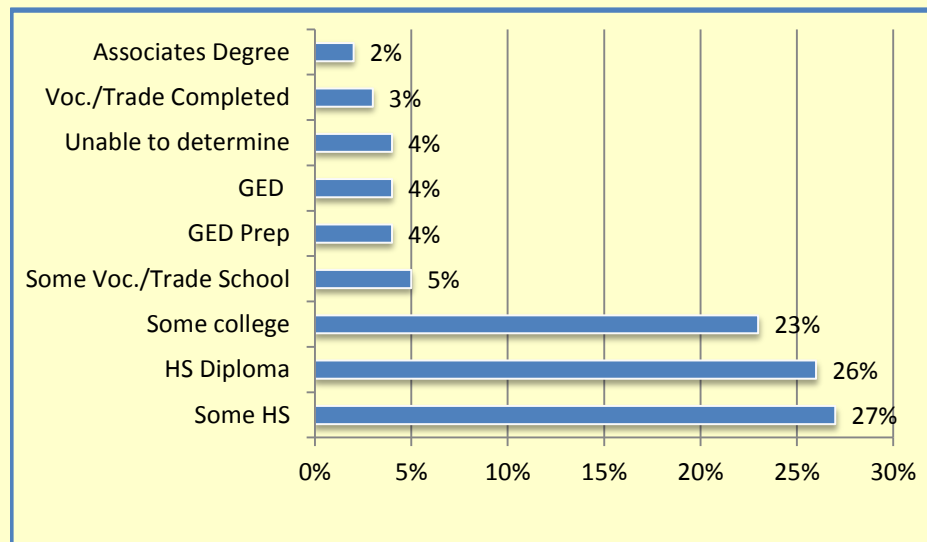
Eighty-three percent of the young adults expected to have the same housing arrangement in the future as they had prior to case closure. For the 17 percent that expected a change, the two dominant responses accounting for 50 percent of the total were equally divided between *Home with friends/Shared Housing* (25%) and *Home with Relatives* (25%). Other responses included: *Biological parents/guardians home* (7%); *Own apartment/room* (4%); *Independent living Program* (4%); and *Youth Shelter (18-21)* (4%).

The final Modified Settlement Agreement (MSA) performance target for housing is 95%. [5]

## Education and Employment Findings

The young adults in the review had varying levels of educational attainment as illustrated in Figure 3. The *Junior High School* and *College Completed* responses were not represented.

Figure 3: Highest Level of Educational Attainment (n=160)



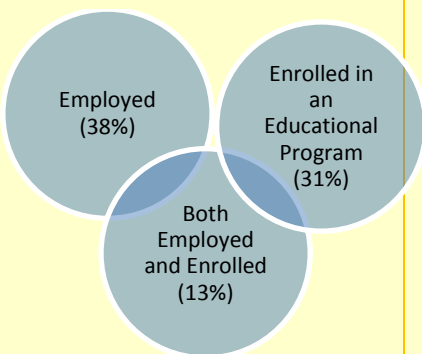
Thirty-one percent (50) of the young adults were enrolled in school or a vocational training or employment training program. Thirty-eight percent (61) were employed either full-time (24) or part-time (25). Twenty-one young adults (13%) were both enrolled in an educational/vocational program AND employed.

Ninety-four (69%) of the applicable 136 young adults were either employed or enrolled in a school or vocational/employment training program. [4] By comparison, the 2013 employment or educational enrollment performance was 65 percent. The final Modified Settlement Agreement (MSA) performance target for is 95%. [5]

DCF recognizes that there are external forces that have an impact on youth successfully securing housing and pursuing educational and employment goals and that New Jersey is not exempt from the national economic and social factors affecting this age group. Almost one quarter of all 19 year old youth who exited foster care nationally reported having been homeless at some point since their 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. The national estimate for youth aging out of foster care (ages 17-23) with full or part-time employment is 34 percent. [6] This review revealed that 38 percent of the CP&P 18-21 year olds were employed, which is better than the national estimate.

The percentage of "disconnected youth" nationally, defined as 16-24 year-olds who are not working or in school, is 15 percent. That percentage increases to 23 percent for African-American youth. [7] While this measurement cannot be precisely correlated with the CP&P "disconnected youth" outcome of 31 percent from this review due to the difference in the age classification, it does however suggest that improvements can be made in the supports/services provided to youth in an effort to improve outcomes.

**Ninety-four (69%) of the applicable 136 young adults were either employed or enrolled in a school or vocational/employment training program.**



## CONCLUSIONS

**Specialized training to help caseworkers understand normal adolescent development and the impact of trauma may help to improve outcomes.**

The purpose of this review was to assess the quality of CP&P performance with respect to achieving the preferred outcomes for CP&P young adults in the areas of housing and employment or education. Since services are voluntary for young adults involved with CP&P after the age of 18, young adults have the right to end CP&P services even if staff believe they can benefit from ongoing services and supports. The housing performance score of 86 percent was affected by some young adults whose whereabouts were completely unknown to CP&P and/or exited the system without declaring to a caseworker a firm plan for housing. We know that adolescent years are filled with transitions and young people trying to exercise their independence. As a result, specialized training to help caseworkers understand normal adolescent development and the impact of trauma may help to improve outcomes. Additionally, more robust documentation may lend itself to obtaining more information regarding the education and employment outcomes. Tables 2 and 3 provide an overview of the primary DCF performance strengths and areas needing improvement with the number of cases applicable.

**Table 2: Strength of Performance in Securing Housing and Employment/Education (n=160)**

Strengths of DCF Performance	Number of cases-Housing	Number of cases-Employment/Education
All options were explored with the youth	42	38
Record indicated engagement with youth.	105	100
Record indicated engagement with youth's family, as indicated.	48	37
Record indicated that mentors & others were facilitated to support the youth.	46	44
Record identified resources and programs for the youth.	86	90
Record indicated necessary follow-up at various steps in the process.	57	46

\*There were no strengths related to securing housing in 16 cases. There were no strengths related to securing employment/education in 18 cases.

**Table 3: Areas Needing Improvement in Securing Housing and Employment/Education (n=160)**

Areas Needing Improvement in DCF Performance	Number of cases-Housing	Number of cases-Employment/Education
More timely documentation.	23	28
More community resources available to achieve the goal.	35	39
Improved overall case documentation.	41	46
Improved necessary and appropriate follow-up casework.	45	49
Improved engagement with youth.	48	52

\*No improvement was necessary related to securing housing in 65 cases. No improvement was necessary related to securing employment/education in 56 cases.

Note: In both tables, the numbers will exceed the n value as more than one response can be selected.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**DCF is exploring interventions to identify and secure sustainable housing options through the efforts and findings of the Connecting YOUth federal planning grant activities seeking to prevent and address homelessness for youth with experience in CP&P care.**



- DCF needs to provide information to all parties working with the adolescent about **concrete supports and resources/services** for youth in high school once the youth's interest(s) and needs have been assessed and linking them to the appropriate service/resource by:
  - Researching existing federal and community programs that assist adolescents in completing high school and pursuing post-secondary education;
  - Exploring various educational programs/settings such as Career and Technical Education Programs and alternative schools to ensure the needs of the adolescent are met; and
  - Linking adolescents to pre-apprenticeship and service learning opportunities in order to gain work experience.
- DCF needs to **review existing policy** to look at requiring young adults, ages 18-21 who are open with CP&P, to either be working or actively pursuing, an educational/vocational training program, or other productive activity (i.e. volunteering, internship, treatment) as is required in other states. The current policy does not stipulate that a young adult be working or in school or pursuing one of those areas.
- DCF needs to **provide CP&P local offices with a list of 16-17 year olds** so they can begin to emphasize work related to education/employment before services become voluntary at age 18. Although work around education is ongoing once a child/adolescent becomes involved with CP&P, this is a pivotal point in the life of an adolescent. It will be beneficial to assess and re-focus efforts if necessary.
- DCF needs to assist adolescents in **identifying an educational mentor/advocate** who would have the role of keeping track of the youth's educational progress and providing support as they move through secondary education and post-secondary education. The mentor/advocate can be someone the youth knows such as a teacher, coach, or other community support.
- DCF needs to re-emphasize the importance of **documenting education information** in NJ SPIRIT within the young adult's Health/Education Record. [8] In addition, DCF will continue to work with the NJ Department of Education regarding data sharing, similar to the new partnership between Camden City Schools and DCF where educational data is being shared. [9]
- DCF will continue to develop and refine the service array and structure to ensure that youth receive **necessary supports and adequate programming and resources**, including housing, which are accessible and appropriate to meet the needs outlined in the *Transition Plan for YOUth Success*. DCF is exploring interventions to identify and secure sustainable housing options through the efforts and findings of the *Connecting YOUth* federal planning grant activities seeking to prevent and address homelessness for youth with experience in CP&P care.
- DCF needs to continue efforts to pilot and launch the **Youth Thrive protective and promotive factors training** for staff. This training will strengthen knowledge regarding adolescent development and the impact of trauma.



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## Notes:

- [1] The term "young adult" is preferred when referencing the 18-21 DCF age group.
- [2] In N.J.S.A. 3B:12A-2: "Kinship legal guardian" means a caregiver who is willing to assume care of a child due to parental incapacity, with the intent to raise the child to adulthood, and who is appointed the kinship legal guardian of the child by the court. This person shall be responsible for the care and protection of the child and for providing for the child's health, education and maintenance.
- [3] Permanency status of the young adult is established for this review from NJS data at the time of discharge from the CP&P placement.
- [4] Twenty-four young adults (15%) were exempted from the employment and education requirement due to such factors as a medical/developmental disability or youth declined to participate in the activity.
- [5] The full text of the MSA can be found at:  
[http://www.nj.gov/dcf/documents/home/Modified\\_Settlement\\_Agreement\\_7\\_17\\_06.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/dcf/documents/home/Modified_Settlement_Agreement_7_17_06.pdf)
- [6] Data brief #3: Highlights from the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD), Federal Fiscal Year 2013. National Youth in Transition Database. 2014.
- [7] Source: One in Seven. Ranking Youth Disconnection in the 25 Largest Metropolitan Areas. Published by Measure of America, Social Science Research Council.
- [8] NJ SPIRIT is the CP&P comprehensive, automated case management tool that integrates various aspects of case practice in a single statewide system, including intake, investigation, case planning, case recording, resource management, service delivery tracking, and financial management.
- [9] Under an Agreement between DCF and Camden City School District, the school district will electronically share educational data for the purposes of developing the child's case plan, supporting student engagement and to ensure appropriate services to promote the academic achievement of school aged children and adolescents being mutually served by DCF and Camden City School District.

The survey instrument is available for viewing at:

[https://www.surveymonkey.com/create/survey/preview?sm=pxTkRk5VuN0qAvZSPs45guyx7MF9vfNleeKDfHwwB60\\_3D](https://www.surveymonkey.com/create/survey/preview?sm=pxTkRk5VuN0qAvZSPs45guyx7MF9vfNleeKDfHwwB60_3D)

For more information on DCF services available for adolescents visit <http://www.njyrs.org> or <http://nj.gov/dcf/adolescent/>