



# CHAFEE FOSTER CARE PROGRAM

**John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood** The John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee) program, including the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program, provides flexible funding to support youth who have experienced foster care of age 14 or older in their transition to adulthood.

**Agency Administering Chafee.** DCF administers, supervises and oversees New Jersey's statewide Chafee program. In the years since its inception, DCF has stabilized, grown and developed the infrastructure needed, e.g., workforce, training, data infrastructure, policy development, and CQI, to take on the challenges of – and take advantage of the opportunities associated with – serving children, youth and families. During leadership's recent review of the department's strategic plan and identification of goals and key objectives for achieving service excellence, DCF affirmed its commitment to achieving positive outcomes for youth, committing to effectively support every young person receiving its services in their transition to adulthood.

**Office of Adolescent Services.** DCF's Office of Adolescent Services (OAS), which sits within CP&P, is dedicated to supporting youth and young adults in their transition to adulthood. With an understanding of the unique and often complex needs of youth and young adults, OAS leads case practice, policy initiatives, training and management of contracted providers related to DCF's services and supports for Chafee-eligible youth. In addition, OAS monitors all NYTD activities. OAS works collaboratively with divisions and offices across the Department, including FCP, CSOC and ODEB, to ensure that the Chafee plan is well-coordinated and meeting intended goals. FCP manages several programs for adolescents and transition-aged youth, including adolescent housing and some non-housing contracted Chafee services, e.g., life skills, peer mentoring, the

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<sup>100</sup> [CPP-III-C-3-100.pdf \(nj.gov\)](#), [CPP-III-C-3-200.pdf \(nj.gov\)](#)

Pathways to Academic and Career Exploration to Success programs, and more. CSOC serves children and adolescents ages 0-20 with emotional and behavioral health care challenges, developmental and intellectual disabilities substance use challenges and their families. ODEB is working to promote equitable outcomes for children and families of color, as well as LGBTQIA2S+ children, youth and families.

**Chafee Advisory Group.** In 2019, a statewide Chafee Advisory Group (CAG) was developed to provide leadership and ongoing support and feedback related to the implementation of New Jersey's Chafee program. The CAG is comprised of approximately 20 members, including a youth with lived experience and cross-disciplinary stakeholders with varied experience working with adolescents. The CAG, which meets quarterly, works to inform, guide and monitor progress in the execution of the Chafee program to ensure identified goals and responsibilities continue to be met and executed.

### Description of Program Design and Delivery

**Information Gathering and Program Design Process.** The 2025-2029 Chafee plan was designed with input and feedback from youth and young adults with lived experience, DCF-contracted adolescent community providers, the CAG and child welfare staff. In addition, DCF conducted an extensive literature review to incorporate guidance and information from sources, including but not limited to the Children's Bureau, Casey Family Programs, and Think of Us. The youth and young adults who helped to inform this plan included members of DCF's Youth Council, as well as young people who are connected to the CAG or OAS Chafee Youth Ambassadors. To gather information on how to better support youth, DCF held listening sessions with breakout groups and contracted adolescent community providers disseminated a survey to parenting youth in care to obtain information on experiences, access and barriers to services, as well as needs. All youth who participated were compensated for their involvement either through gift cards or cash payments.

**Program Design and Structure.** In alignment with DCF's vision that all New Jersey residents are safe, healthy and connected, the Chafee program strives to improve well-being outcomes for youth and young adults with a focus on the Social Determinants of Health (SDoH). SDoH include several non-medical factors that influence health outcomes, such as birthplace, race, gender and culture, social class and educational background and work experience. The Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion identifies five key social determinants of health: economic stability, education access and quality, health-care access and quality, neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context.<sup>101</sup> A lack of access to quality social and structural determinants of health and other stressors related to poverty can impact the well-being of children and families and lead to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).<sup>102</sup> In DCF's growing efforts to address systemic issues that adversely affect youth and young adults, the Department strives to provide an array of services and supports to improve SDoH.

To support efforts that improve SDoH, the Chafee program is driven by the Youth Thrive protective and promotive factors framework to promote healthy development and well-being of youth.<sup>103</sup> This framework emphasizes the importance of developing and strengthening social connections, youth resilience, knowledge of adolescent development, concrete supports in times of need, and cognitive and social-emotional competence. Youth served through the Chafee program receive flexibly designed support and services through child welfare and community-based provider staff

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<sup>101</sup> <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health>

<sup>102</sup> <https://www.casey.org/sdoh-legal-advocacy/>

<sup>103</sup> [Youth Thrive - Center for the Study of Social Policy \(cssp.org\)](https://www.cssp.org/)

knowledgeable and trained in Youth Thrive. This shared practice lens incorporates and aligns with the tenets of positive youth development to support youth's goals related to interdependence, self-sufficiency, and healthy lifestyles as they transition to adulthood.

In addition to Youth Thrive, healing is a critical aspect of our work with youth and young adults. Trauma-informed care has been and will continue to be important and meaningful approach to serve children, youth, and families in the child welfare system. There is, however, a recognition that youth served by DCF need to thrive and not just survive. While trauma-informed care importantly helps individuals cope with trauma, DCF seeks to go beyond coping and to truly help individuals to recover and thrive through healing.

DCF acknowledges and is concerned about the disproportionate number and disparate treatment of African American/Black, Hispanic/Latine and other youth and young adults of color in foster care. While DCF embarks on broader efforts to address race and gender equity and institutional and systemic racism within New Jersey's child welfare system, the Chafee program will more closely examine these inequities and utilize an equity-informed lens to update and enhance policy, practice, and programming to youth in foster care. Likewise, the Chafee program will examine and work to eliminate discrimination and disparities that are experienced by LGBTQIA2S+ youth and young adults accessing services and supports.

Beginning at age 13, child welfare casework staff assist youth and other supportive individuals identified by the youth to complete a transitional plan every six months.<sup>104</sup> The transitional plan seeks to develop goals and objectives that are youth-driven and informed by the Youth Thrive survey and other relevant assessments. In addition to identified supports, transitional plans identify the youth's self-identified recent accomplishments, strengths, interests, and future goals. The child welfare caseworker facilitates this teaming process to ensure the youth is linked with and/or empowered to seek out necessary services and resources to best support the implementation of the youth's plan.

Based on the youth's age, experiences in foster care and other factors, DCF offers youth a broad array of services and supports to holistically and comprehensively address their needs. This service array includes programming funded via Chafee and other state and federal resources, as well as community-based programs and services leveraged through other service systems. See Figure 66, *Chafee Services and Eligibility*.

**2025-2029 Chafee Plan: Strengthening New Jersey's Chafee Program.** Based on the information gathering process and priorities described above, DCF intends to deliver and strengthen the Chafee program between 2025 and 2029 through the following five strategies. Additional detail on each strategy follows.

- **Strategy 1.** Increase youth voice in all aspects of youth policy, programming, and practice.
- **Strategy 2.** Provide skill development, learning opportunities, and concrete supports to build economic stability.
- **Strategy 3.** Assist youth and young adults to build social and community networks and connections.
- **Strategy 4.** Ensure youth and young adults have access to quality health care.
- **Strategy 5.** Incorporate a race, gender and LGBTQIA2S+ equity informed lens to update and enhance policy, practice, and programming.

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<sup>104</sup> [CPP-X-A-1-5.43.pdf \(nj.gov\)](#) or [CPP-VI-B-1-300.pdf \(nj.gov\)](#)

**Strategy 1. Increase youth voice in all aspects of youth policy, programming, and practice.**

It is critical to increase opportunities for youth ages 14-21+ who are in out-of-home placement or who have experienced child welfare to inform policy, practice, and programming. DCF will advance this strategy through the following activities:

- a) Collaboration between OAS and OFV for partnership with Youth Consultants.
- b) Provide opportunities for youth and young adults to participate in workgroups and subcommittees, including the CAG.
- c) Develop, in partnership with the Youth Council and Youth Consultants, a survey to be administered annually to youth and young adults, ages 14-21+ to obtain information on their experiences with DCF and contracted providers, outstanding needs, and challenges and successes.
- d) Improve the quality of transition planning with youth and young adults to incorporate their goals and dreams and identify concrete steps to accomplish their goals.

**Strategy 2. Provide skill development, learning opportunities, and concrete supports to build economic stability.**

Economic stability is one of the SDoH and includes the ability to afford safe housing, healthy foods, child care, and transportation. Areas of focus will include ensuring access to affordable housing, developing skills and financial literacy and providing financial assistance. DCF will advance this strategy through the following activities:

- a) Increase the number of youth and young adults who have checking and savings accounts, which will include developing partnerships with banking institutions.
- b) Provide youth and young adults with access to financial literacy websites and applications.
- c) Research individual development accounts and other options for match savings.
- d) Continue to provide financial assistance through Independent Living Stipends and emergency assistance through wraparound funding.
- e) Continue to provide skill development and career and education preparation through contracted services, e.g., transitional and permanent supportive housing, LifeSet, and Pathways to Academic and Career Exploration to Success.
- f) Leverage internal and external resources to identify available funding streams to address youth and young adult housing needs.

**Strategic 3. Assist youth and young adults to build social and community networks and connections.**

Another important area of well-being is a youth's connections to family, friends, schools, and community members. These connections help with healing from trauma and provide opportunities to experience and learn new things. DCF will advance this strategy through the following activities:

- a) Help youth and young adults with lived experience build and maintain connections with one another through a platform or application.
- b) Increase support for youth in out-of-home placement to participate in activities, experiences, and areas of interest.
- c) Assist youth and young adults to prepare for and obtain driver's licenses.
- d) Provide youth in out-of-home placement with peer-to peer-support through contracted services, e.g., Enlightenment.
- e) Work with OOR and FCP to identify community resources and other opportunities for youth to address ACEs, embrace positive childhood experiences and support connections and healing.

**Strategy 4. Ensure youth and young adults have access to quality health care.**

Ensuring youth have access to quality physical and mental health services is another area of focus. Many youth and young adults have experienced trauma, that can be a barrier to obtaining education, maintaining employment, and building and maintaining relationships. It is imperative to provide

them with opportunities to heal, both physically and mentally. DCF will advance this strategy through the following activities:

- a) Continue to provide access to mental health services.
- b) Research and provide information on non-clinical mental health services to support healing.
- c) Continue to provide Medicaid coverage until the age of 26.

**Strategy 5. Incorporate a race, gender and LGBTQIA2S+ equity informed lens to update and enhance policy, practice, and programming.** OAS will partner with DCF's ODEB, youth and other stakeholders to update policy, practice, and programming to reduce inequities related to race, gender or LGBTQIA2S+ status. DCF will advance this strategy by exploring data, leveraging relationships, and incorporating the voices of youth in OAS' process of identifying and combatting factors that contribute to these inequities for youth and young adults in foster care. For additional detail on DCF's plans related to race equity, see Section 3, *Plan for Enacting the State's Vision*. For additional information on services to support LGBTQIA2S+ youth and young adults, see below.

### **Services to Support LGBTQIA2S+ Youth and Young Adults**

DCF is committed to providing appropriate and affirming services to all children and youth regardless of sexual orientation status, gender identity, or gender expression. The Chafee program will examine and work to eliminate disparities experienced by LGBTQIA2S+ youth and young adults as they access services and supports in preparation for adulthood. More specifically, DCF will continue to support LGBTQIA2S+ youth and young adults by:

- Gathering and providing information on LGBTQIA2S+ affirming available services and supports, including mental health, physical health, peer mentoring, and housing.
- Assessing the need to provide additional support and information to resource providers.
- Ensuring youth have access to and choice in an affirming living arrangement.
- Collecting Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) data.
- Providing SOGIE and other related LGBTQIA2S+ training to child welfare staff, providers, and resource providers.

To support and ensure the achievement of these goals, DCF will rely on its LGBTQIA2S+ Safe Space Program and the statewide Safe Space Coordinator, who oversees the program. The Safe Space Program, which launched in 2010, is dedicated to creating a safe, inclusive, and affirming culture for LGBTQIA2S+ individuals served by DCF and its network of contracted providers. While this program benefits all LGBTQIA2S+ children, youth and families served by DCF, it is especially important for LGBTQIA2S+ youth and young adults who are in out-of-home care as they are particularly at-risk. LGBTQIA2S+ children and youth experience higher rates of family rejection and community violence and require access to safe, affirming, and accepting environments to be seen and heard and thus thrive into adulthood.

The Safe Space Program strives to create a system and culture of inclusion for LGBTQIA2S+ individuals by providing specially trained Safe Space Liaisons to be available to support CP&P local and area office staff with advocacy, best practices, and an understanding of local, state, and federal resources, policies, and practices. The Safe Space Coordinator tracks staffing changes internally to ensure coverage is available in all CP&P local offices and provides resources to the NJYR website. Through collaborative work with ODEB, OAS will update and support the Safe Space Program.

In addition, DCF offers statewide trainings related to best serving the LGBTQIA2S+ to its child welfare staff, broader workforce, and provider partners. For examples of relevant trainings, see *Chafee Training* section, below.

### NYTD Data Collection

**Using and Sharing NYTD Data.** DCF makes a concerted effort to analyze NYTD data and identify the most effective methods for sharing the results with internal and external stakeholders, the CAG, and the public. For example, DCF's Office of Applied Research and Evaluation (ARE) analyzed NYTD survey results and Cohort 5's NYTD independent living services for 2017-2021 and published a publicly available data brief.<sup>105</sup> In addition, ARE developed a microlearning video series for all DCF staff, "DCF Data Bite Insights," to share data and research to help inform DCF's programs and initiatives; the first episode highlighted the NYTD data for Cohort 5. OAS, ARE, and young people will work together to develop versions that are youth-friendly and to share information with DCF-contracted adolescent providers and other stakeholders. DCF uses NYTD data to improve services, e.g., services that address youth homelessness and the needs of parenting youth transitioning out of care, and inform planning, including the plan set forth in this CFSP.

**Strengthening NYTD Data Collection.** DCF will strengthen NYTD data collection by undertaking the following:

- Work to create a mechanism to capture NYTD Independent Living Services being provided by resource parents, as well as child welfare staff.
- Continue to incorporate the review of NYTD data during case record reviews and site visits with service providers to ensure that services are being provided and to verify documentation of those services in the youth's record.
- Develop a quality assurance process to ensure timely data collection and submission.
- Updating NYTD policies and make improvements or changes, as needed.

**Using NYTD Data to Measure Success and Improve Service Delivery.** For youth who completed the NYTD survey and received at least one NYTD service, DCF is analyzing NYTD data along with risk and protective factors to determine 1) the factors associated with incarceration, homelessness and adolescent parenthood among youth transitioning out of foster care, 2) the factors that may associate with the completion of high school and obtaining full or part time employment among youth transitioning out of foster care and 3) to what extent participation in Chafee services influences incarceration, homelessness, adolescent parenthood, completion of high school and employment among youth transitioning out of foster care.

Outside of NYTD data, DCF relies on and analyzes additional youth-specific data to improve service delivery, including data from record and qualitative reviews, data available on the Child Welfare Data Hub, educational data through DOE, provider data, and more.<sup>106</sup> DCF will incorporate additional data, including demographic data, e.g., race, ethnicity and gender, from the Chafee youth survey upon development and administration. This additional demographic data will help DCF make tailored program and support improvements related to equity.

### Serving Youth Across the State

**Ensuring that the Chafee Program will Serve Youth Statewide.** DCF's CP&P is the State's child protection and welfare agency. The state-administered child welfare system is composed of nine area offices and 46 local offices. All governing policies and practices, including those related

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<sup>105</sup> <https://www.nj.gov/dcf/adolescent/NYTD-Data-Brief.pdf>

<sup>106</sup> [https://www.nj.gov/dcf/childdata/exitplan/2023\\_CoQI\\_Older.Youth.Brief.pdf](https://www.nj.gov/dcf/childdata/exitplan/2023_CoQI_Older.Youth.Brief.pdf)

to services and supports for youth and young adults, are administered through a centralized statewide authority. DCF operates integrated, rigorous continuous quality improvement systems to ensure that staff receive quality relevant training; that resources for youth and families are robust and available, and that all efforts for an adolescent to achieve permanency are exhausted prior to case closure.

Across the state, youth that experience out-of-home care are recipients of services both to secure permanency and to establish strong pathways to healthy interdependence. DCF offers Chafee program services statewide. Services are primarily located in areas of the state or county where the concentrations of youth are highest. Some services, such as housing, are not located in every county but can be accessed by youth from across the State. Because New Jersey has urban, suburban and rural areas, services may vary due to differences in transportation infrastructure, population density, and/or cost of renting or owning a property to offer services.

**Data Informing Service Variation by Region or County.** In 2025-2029, DCF will continue to analyze NYTD data, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and gender and by county, to determine if there are any differences in services. Additionally, with the increasing implementation of evidenced-informed models, additional data is available. DCF regularly reviews this additional data to assess for any variations.

### **Serving Youth of Various Ages and Stages of Achieving Independence.**

DCF uses the Youth Thrive survey and an SBC transition plan with youth and young adults ages 13 through 21 in foster care. Some services are also available to older youth who are not in placement and involved with DCF to prevent placement. Youth and young adults, with assistance from their child welfare caseworker, complete the Youth Thrive survey annually. The Child welfare caseworker uses the survey, along with other relevant evaluations, e.g., educational, mental health, substance use, cognitive, to assess the youth's protective and promotive factors, assist youth to developing their transition plan, and connect the youth to contracted, community-based or school-based services appropriate to their age and stage of achieving independence. DCF recognizes that expectant and parenting youth, including young fathers, require unique services and supports that both develop them as a young adult and support their role as a parent. Informed by NYTD data and survey responses of parenting youth in care, DCF developed a stakeholder-informed plan to improve practice and policy to better support expectant and parenting youth.

New Jersey has a state-extended foster care program, serving youth and young adults to the age of 21. Many of DCF's contracted programs, including Pathways to Academic Career and Exploration to Success, supportive housing programs, LifeSet and Wraparound, serve youth and young adults even beyond the age of 21. During the COVID-19 pandemic, DCF made LifeSet and Wraparound services available to support youth beyond the age of 21. Recognizing that the additional support between ages 21-23 was necessary, DCF will make this change permanently to serve youth through their 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday.

**Figure 65. Number of Youth Ages 21+ Aging Out of Care**

Exit Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Total Youth 21+</b>	32	36	28	28	26	26

DCF provides services to youth who moved to New Jersey after exiting foster care in another state. Upon contact from a youth or young adult or a representative from another state for services for the youth, DCF works to understand the youth's needs and connect them to the appropriate services and supports.

## Collaboration with Other Private and Public Agencies

**Stakeholder Collaboration.** As is thoroughly described in Section 1, *Vision and Collaboration*, DCF is committed to and relies on ongoing and meaningful collaboration with a variety of stakeholders from the private and public sector in all of its work, including the implementation and management of the Chafee program and services. OAS and FCP regularly create and convene opportunities for collaboration with community-based service providers, including non-contracted agencies. Chafee-specific contracted service providers convene quarterly for updates, trainings and resources on youth-related topics, and for feedback on DCF's services and initiatives. For example, these providers engaged in dialogue about the CFSP and provided recommendations regarding the 2025-2029 Chafee program. Additional stakeholder partnerships include:

- **One Simple Wish.** DCF works closely with One Simple Wish, an online platform that brings national awareness to the foster care system and increases the well-being of children in out-of-home care by granting their unique wishes. This support increases a youth's access to important items, e.g., musical instruments or sports equipment. This program supports youth currently in foster care and youth with experience in foster care ages 21+.
- **Youth Housing.** DCF contracts with several housing programs. One unique housing partnership is with Roots and Wings, a privately funded program that provides safe housing, case management, education, counseling, and life skills to young adults aging out foster care 18+. This is an important program and partnership because the program serves youth up to age 24.
- **Educational Data.** In accordance with the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act, DCF and the New Jersey Department of Education entered into a data sharing agreement that allows DOE to share educational and school data regarding youth in foster care with DCF. This partnership will allow DCF and the CAG to review and analyze trends in students' educational attainment.
- **Juvenile Justice Involved Youth.** To improve outcomes for youth involved with the juvenile justice system or dually involved with both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, DCF participates in several collaborations with the JJC, including the New Jersey Council on Juvenile Justice System Improvement and efforts through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. For additional information on JJC and JDAI, see Section 1, *Vision and Collaboration*.
- **Normalcy Dialogue.** Since the implementation of the normalcy and reasonable prudent parent policies,<sup>107</sup> DCF convenes a large stakeholder group to provide feedback and drive related improvements to guidance, resources, training, and policy. Outstanding issues raised include driving instruction, cellular phones, transportation, and savings accounts. DCF will seek out partnerships with sister state agencies and private agencies to identify potential resources to ensure youth have consistent and easy access to the activities and learning that are necessary and developmentally appropriate for transitioning to adulthood.

**Medicaid.** CSOC's OIHW develops and administers programs that deliver quality prevention, intervention, primary care, and healthcare management services to promote the safety and well-

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<sup>107</sup> <https://dcfpolicy.nj.gov/api/policy/download/CPP-IV-A-4-500.pdf>, <https://dcfpolicy.nj.gov/api/policy/download/CPP-IV-A-4-400.pdf>

being for children and families. OIHW's scope includes child and family health, adult and youth substance use, suicide prevention and Medicaid. This Office is leading DCF's Medicaid continuity of coverage initiative, which includes a requirement that Medicaid be offered to eligible young adults formerly in foster care who move to a new state and who have turned 18 on or after January 1, 2023. DCF and the state's Medicaid agency, the Division of Medical Assistance and Health Services, identified an easy application and attestation process. DCF is codesigning the NJYRS website with Youth Council members to guide young adults moving out of state on how and where to apply in the state they are currently residing.

**Housing Needs of Young Adults.** DCF is undertaking the following actions to address the housing needs of young adults in their transition from care.

- Increasing access to concrete supports and mainstream housing. This includes partnering with communities to bring housing instability for youth aging out of care to functional zero. This includes partnering with public housing authorities, CoCs, and others involved in the homelessness response system to leverage federal funding for youth housing initiatives.
- Increasing access to evidence-informed housing interventions within DCF's housing continuum, including continuing to re-bid existing transitional living programs to evidence-based or evidence-informed models, and refining and manualizing DCF's existing youth supportive housing practice model, Connect to Home (CTH) to include Motivational Interviewing.
- Refining DCF's existing service continuum to better address youth needs and expand the focus of existing efforts, e.g., protective factors, healing-centered engagement and race equity, to include interventions that address the SDoH.
- Improving data collection and integration with system partners. This is intended to improve identification, service coordination and sustainable housing planning for young adults and includes re-initiating data sharing with the New Jersey Housing Mortgage and Finance Agency's Homelessness Management Information System.
- Strengthening stakeholder partnerships, especially with non-traditional stakeholders, e.g., DOL, PHAs, Legal Services, LGBTQIA2S+ partners, and youth-focused grassroots organizations, to escalate access to long-term affordable housing options, aftercare supports beyond DCF involvement, and other economic opportunities.
- Facilitating a mix of process and outcome evaluations, including process evaluations for existing programs to assess whether program activities are being implemented as intended, and outcomes evaluations for newly added evidence-informed programs, e.g., My First Place.
- Applying for federal opportunities that align with identified priorities, as available.

DCF will continue to leverage federal, state, local, and public and private resources to sustain a range of appropriate housing options for youth through the following collaborative efforts:

- Partnering with other state agencies, such as DCA and local PHAs to ensure access to federal housing resources, e.g., Section 8 housing.
- Collaborating with community level CoCs to ensure access to state and county-based housing resources and services.
- Increasing partnership with private stakeholders to ensure access to flexible funding that addresses gaps in the service continuum, e.g., serving youth beyond 24 years old.

DCF will also partner with statewide stakeholders to increase access to affordable housing options for youth aging out of care and bring youth homelessness to functional zero. To support and facilitate the coordination between DCF and PHAs to utilize Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) vouchers, DCF will utilize the following strategies.

- Continue to utilize youth housing need data to support ongoing decision-making, including timely identification and prioritization of FYI eligible youth. This also includes ongoing data collection, in partnership with child welfare staff, to support the identification of youth currently open with CP&P.
- Continue to increase PHA partners' awareness of FYI and related opportunities to partner with DCF through roadshows, presentations, conferences, formal Public Notifications, networking, and more.
- Continue to use a phased approach, based on the varied capacity needs and available implementation supports, to increase PHA engagement and the number of youth served.
- Continuing to provide oversight and facilitate training, e.g., Youth Thrive training, technical assistance and consultation to FYI partners, including PHAs, to support implementation, to ensure the services being provided meet the needs of the young adult population.
- Continue to support the coordination of housing-related concrete support through varied funding resources, including Chafee.
- Initiate data collection to support future process and outcome evaluation efforts. This includes gathering quantitative and qualitative data from youth partners and other stakeholders, including PHAs, related to FYI implementation.
- Standardize the delivery of FYI services.

**Foster Care Verification.** In 2021, DCF developed a Foster Care Verification Letter to provide to youth and young adults who had foster care experience at 13 years of age or older prior to case closure. The letter clearly identifies the young person's former foster care status. DCF reviewed the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 and the ACYF memo, "SNAP Exceptions for Youth Experiencing Homelessness and Exiting Foster Care" and is committed to sharing this information with internal and external stakeholders, including young adults, and via the NJYRS website to ensure access to this support.

### **Determining Eligibility for Benefits and Services**

Child welfare caseworkers are responsible for linking youth and young adults with Chafee services through a youth driven assessment and planning process. The Youth Bill of Rights and the Voluntary Services Agreement, that is used for youth 18+, outline the services and supports that DCF, in partnership with the youth or young adult and their supports, is responsible for providing. Statewide, Chafee-eligible youth and young adults with open or closed cases with the child welfare system access Chafee services through various service providers. In addition, youth may re-enter the child welfare system after 18 and before the age of 21 if they were receiving child welfare services at age 16+. Youth that were in foster care at age 14+ and were reunified with their families are also eligible for Chafee services.

DCF is reviewing the service eligibility process to ensure fairness, equity and access. This review will also assist DCF to ensure that there is not a duplication of services that provide the same skill development and to maximize the number of youth and young adults who can participate in services. OAS is piloting a centralized referral process to explore whether it can help to understand the youth's needs and make referrals to the most appropriate services for that child. The pilot is with the LifeSet program, which is being evaluated through a randomized control trial.

Chafee funds for independent living services and room and board are implemented through

various service providers and leveraged with other funding sources to create a statewide continuum of Chafee services. DCF will not deny eligibility for independent living services to a youth who otherwise meets the eligibility criteria but who is temporarily residing outside of New Jersey. Likewise, DCF will not terminate ongoing independent living assistance solely because a youth is temporarily residing out of state. Figure 66 includes additional detail on eligibility for Chafee benefits and services.

**Figure 66. Chafee Services and Eligibility**

Support	Youth that have experienced foster care at age 14 up to age 21	Youth who aged out of foster care at 18	Youth who exited foster care for adoption or KLG after 16+	2020-2024 Plan for Extended Eligibility Youth who exited care to reunification at 14 or older
<b>General services or supports for youth and young adults</b>				
Youth Bill of Rights	Yes, through child welfare case worker	Yes, through child welfare case worker	No	No
Sibling Bill of Rights	Yes, through child welfare caseworker	Yes, through child welfare case worker	Yes, if there are siblings in care	Yes, if there are siblings in care
SBC Individual and Family Agreement (Part 2, Section B)	Yes, through child welfare case worker	Yes, through child welfare case worker	Yes, through some Chafee specific service providers	Yes, through some Chafee specific service providers
Youth Thrive Survey	Yes, through child welfare case worker	Yes, through child welfare case worker	Yes, through some Chafee specific service providers	Yes, through some Chafee specific service providers
Voluntary Services Agreement	Yes, at age 18, through the child welfare case worker	Yes, at age 18, through the child welfare case worker	No	No
<b>Chafee specific programming for youth and young adults</b>				
Life skills services	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pathways to Academic and Career Exploration to Success coaching services	Yes, at age 16, if eligible for Foster Scholars programming	Yes, if eligible for Foster Scholars programming	Yes, if eligible for Foster Scholars programming	Yes, if eligible for Foster Scholars programming
Peer2Peer Program: EnlightenMENT	Yes	Yes	No	No
Financial literacy through Ever-Fi	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Independent Living Stipend for rent, food, and/or incidentals	Yes, at age 16, if the youth is in an eligible independent living placement	Yes, if the youth is in an eligible independent living arrangement	No	No
Flexible funding to support extracurricular activities, sports, and hobbies	Yes	Yes	No	No
NJFCS ETV and State Tuition Waiver funds	Yes, based on federal and state eligibility requirements	Yes, based on federal and state eligibility requirements	Yes, based on federal and state eligibility requirements	Yes, based on federal and state eligibility requirements
NJFCS Gap Housing (for breaks and summer)	Available to any Foster Care Scholar	Available to any Foster Care Scholar	Available to any Foster Care Scholar	Available to any Foster Care Scholar
Supervised transitional living housing programs	Yes, starting at age 18 up to 21	Yes	Yes, starting at age 18 up to 21	Yes, starting at age 18 up to 21
Transitional living programs	Yes, starting at age 18 up to 21	Yes, starting at age 18 up to 21	Yes, starting at age 18 up to 21	Yes, starting at age 18 up to 21
Permanent supportive housing	Yes, starting at age 18 up to 21	Yes, starting at age 18 up to 21	Yes, starting at age 18 up to 21	Yes, starting at age 18 up to 21
LifeSet	Yes, starting at age 17 up to 21	No	No	No
Wraparound emergency funds up to age 23	Youth are eligible and can apply for funds after the child welfare case is closed	Youth are eligible and can apply for funds after the child welfare case is closed	Yes, after the age 18	Yes, after the age 18

## Cooperation in National Evaluations

DCF will cooperate in any national evaluations of the effects of the programs in achieving the purpose of Chafee.

## I. Education and Training Vouchers Program

DCF, through OAS, is responsible for operating the management of the New Jersey Foster Care Scholars (NJFCS) program, the umbrella program for the State's ETV, Tuition Waiver and "State Option" funding programs. Embracing and Empowering Families (Embrella) oversees and administers the NJFCS program via contract. Through this program, DCF provides ETVs to eligible youth who have aged out of foster care or left care for kinship legal guardianship (KLG)

or adoption. This section describes ETV-eligible youth, methods of operation and coordination related to the ETV program.

### ETV-Eligible Students in New Jersey

In recent years, DCF has awarded unduplicated ETVs to just under 150 to over 200 students. As shown in Figure 67, the percentage of new ETV awards ranged from 31% to 44%.

**Figure 67. Total and New ETV's Awarded**

School Year	Total ETVs Awarded (Regular & Division X funding)	Number of New ETVs
<b>2020-2021 School Year</b> (July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021)	210	66
<b>2021-2022 School Year</b> (July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022)	175	67
<b>2022-2023 School Year</b> (July 1, 2022-June 30, 2023)	147	65
<b>2023-2024 School Year*</b> (July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024)	193	85

\*In some cases, this might be an estimated number since the APSR is due on June 30, the last day of the school year.

DCF regularly reviews demographics of the ETV-eligible students to assess the program functioning. Demographics of the ETV-eligible students during the 2023-2024 academic year follow.

- There were 193 ETV students. Of these, 34% are freshman, 25% are sophomores, 14% are juniors, 11% are seniors. 11% attend technical or career institutions.
- 90% attend an in-state post-secondary institution.
- 13% are connected to the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) Program.
- Less than one percent are registered in remedial courses.
- 43% are currently, or were recently, open with CP&P.

### Methods to Operate the ETV Program Effectively

**Eligibility.** Eligibility for ETV funding under the NJFCS program is based on age and length of time in foster care placement. In New Jersey, qualifying students are 16-21 years of age and were: 1) 14 years of age or older with at least 18 months of foster care placement, 2) 16 years or older with 9 or more months of foster care placement or 3) who exited care for adoption at age 12 or KLG after the age of 16. Students who exited care for adoption between the ages of 12 and 15 are also eligible for NJFCS under a "State Option," which offers the same financial support as ETV via state dollars. Effective during the 2023-2024 academic year, students enrolled in NJFCS and in school when they turn 21 are eligible for ETV funds up to age 26.

**Identification of Prospective Students.** DCF provides internal ETV funding opportunity announcements for staff to share with eligible youth. To facilitate identification of prospective students, DCF produces a monthly data file using an algorithm that captures all youth ages 14-21 years of age with the requisite foster care placement histories, as well as the youth ages 12-15 who exited care for adoption and those who exited care after age 16 for adoption or KLG. This monthly data report is used to qualify students for the NJFCS and determine if the student is eligible for support via ETV, Tuition Waiver or State Option. This report is also used for the targeted recruitment strategies described in the next section.

**Outreach and Recruitment.** Embrella, in collaboration with the Red Hawks Fellows program at Montclair University and other colleges in New Jersey, manages retention and support on campus. It works with Admission Offices and Residence of Life Offices to coordinate housing

efforts and share information and materials to send to students for enrollment requirements. In addition, as a reminder of eligibility and incentive to re-enroll, the NJFCS application is sent to NJFCS students who were enrolled within the past three academic years. The Scholarship Administrative Coordinator conducts outreach to students who are close to aging out of their funding type to re-engage in the program.

**Application Process.** The NJFCS application is web-based, allowing convenient access and an expedited application process. The online application is found on Embrella's website. Students must apply in the fall or spring semester. For those reapplying, an abridged version of the application is available. For new applicants, students must provide:

- A copy of their high school diploma or High School Equivalency,
- For US Citizens: Proof of completed and submitted Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for the academic year, e.g., confirmation email from FAFSA, Student Aid Report, or award letter,
- For Dreamers eligible for New Jersey State Aid and the New Jersey Statewide Tuition Waiver: Proof of completed and submitted New Jersey Alternative Financial Aid Application,
- Proof of acceptance or enrollment from the post-secondary institution they attend or plan to attend, e.g., acceptance letter, registration, or class schedule,
- For students transferring to a new school: proof of the number of credits transferred or a letter explaining why credits did not transfer, and
- For returning students: most recent college/technical school transcript.

Students requesting educational supports, e.g., assistance with books, bus passes, or computers, can apply for these supports at the beginning of each semester. NJFCS have access to a web-based student portal, which allows educational support requests to be made.

**Review and Acceptance.** Upon acceptance, students receive a welcome letter that confirms their acceptance into the NJFCS program and outlines the academic policy and requirements of the student's funding as specified by either ETV or the statewide New Jersey Tuition Waiver legislation. The letter specifically notes that the ETV funding must not exceed the cost of attendance, is limited to \$5,000 per academic year, and must be dispersed in two \$2,500 installments. Students are informed that they must be registered at least half time and in good academic standing to continue to receive funding until they reach the age of 26. The letter advises the student that funding ends after five years (does not have to be consecutive) or the student reaches age 26 regardless of the student's completion of post-secondary education. Upon acceptance, each NJFCS is assigned an Embrella Scholarship Coordinator, who assists the student in understanding funding, communicates with the financial aid offices to resolve financial aid issues, and supports the student in navigating any financial aid requirements.

**Measuring Satisfactory Progress.** Per the academic policy, students must maintain a 2.0 grade point average (GPA) each semester and make Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) as determined by the post-secondary institution. Scholarship Coordinators are responsible for verifying GPA and SAP each semester by using a "Student Account Inquiry Form." For more information, see *Tracking ETV Funding and the Cost of Attendance* section, below.

Students that do not meet the above-stated academic requirements will be placed on probation with the objective of raising their grades to meet the 2.0 requirement for the next semester and are provided a list of resources to support their academic needs. If a student falls below a 2.0 GPA for three consecutive semesters, they are removed from the program. This change was

made for the 2022-2023 academic year to better support first year students and those who need additional academic supports. Upon removal, the Director of Scholarships emails the student, with their formal supports, the NJFCS program lead and their Scholarship Coordinator copied, with an explanation for program removal and information on how to appeal the decision. Students may appeal the removal due to extenuating circumstances and seek reinstatement. The majority of students whose appeals are granted successfully continue in school.

**Tracking ETV funding and the Cost of Attendance.** Embrella uses the Account Inquiry Form to track ETV funding and the cost of attendance and to ensure that ETV funding does not exceed the cost of attendance. Upon a student's acceptance into the NJFCS program and again each semester, Embrella staff emails the inquiry form to the post-secondary institution's financial aid, bursar or student accounting office for completion of cost of attendance (COA) expenses, including tuition and fees, room, and board and financial aid awarded to the student for the semester by the following categories: federal (Pell, Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant), state, and institutional grants, scholarships, loans (subsidized, unsubsidized, private) and personal payments.

Upon receipt of the completed Account Inquiry Form and confirmation that the student's financial aid package does not exceed the COA, the ETV funds may be released to either the institution, the student, or a third-party vendor, depending on the category of unmet need. If the unmet need is tuition fees, and/or on campus room and board, funds are released to the institution if the unmet need is for tuition and fees, and/or room and board if the student is living on campus. If the unmet needs are other education-related expenses, such as transportation, childcare, laundry, incidentals or off campus housing, funds are released to the student via check, debit card or direct deposit. If the unmet needs are for the purchase of a computer or laptop, books or supplies, funds are released to a third-party vendor. Students who are under the supervision of CP&P do not receive ETV funds for food, rent or incidentals; these expenses are provided to the student via CP&P Independent Living stipends.

All financial records are maintained in a secured Microsoft Access database. Fields in the database include COA, payments, payee information, purpose of the payment or purchase, date of payment or purchase, and the type of funding used. The database captures the student's demographic data, GPA by semester, and ETV-related dates, e.g., the date the student began school, disengaged from school (if relevant), resumed school (if relevant) and turns age 26. Students are notified in writing six months prior to their 26th birthday or prior to their 5th year of receiving funds, to remind them that ETV funding will terminate.

**Coordination with Other Education and Training Programs.** DCF and Embrella make every effort to help youth and young adults maximize available financial aid. Embrella also administers New Jersey's statewide Tuition Waiver Program and facilitates funding between these programs. For example, students whose ETV funding is discontinued because they reach the age of 26, but who meet the Tuition Waiver eligibility, i.e., nine months of foster care placement after the age of 16, reside in a DCF or federally funded housing program, or receive Independent Living Stipends from CP&P as an aging-out youth, may then access Tuition Waiver funding to complete their education. This funding is available to students for five years from the date Tuition Waiver is accepted, allowing the student to continue their education up to age 28.

Additionally, DCF works with New Jersey's Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA) to ensure current and former foster youth apply for and utilize available state aid and to improve aid and access to higher education for young adults that experienced foster care. HESAA has oversight of the Educational Opportunity Funding program and various state aid programs,

including the Tuition Aid Grant, Community College Opportunity Grant, the New Jersey Student Tuition Assistance Reward Scholarship program, the Governor's Urban Scholarship Program, and the Governor's Industry Vocations Scholarship. Embrella also coordinates with HESAA to ensure NJFCS' independent status is verified expeditiously, streamlining students' ability to obtain applicable State aid without additional paperwork.

DCF maintains relationships with several of New Jersey's state universities, such as Rutgers University, Stockton University, and Montclair State University. Each University offers unique college support programs for NJFCSs. Embrella and the universities partner around retention and on-campus support. NJFCS Scholarship Coordinators connect students with Education Opportunity Fund offices and the Dean of Students. Each school year, NJFCS and Embrella leadership and Scholarship Coordinators conduct outreach to admissions and financial aid offices to request information about the school and to offer information and materials, on-campus meetings, and presentations about the NJFCS program.

The NJFCSs program is also connected to DCF's PACES program. PACES, which began in September 2017 in partnership with four non-profit agencies, ensures that high school students in foster care are college ready. This includes referring students to college bridge, student support and TRiO programs, such as Upward Bound and the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate programs.

**Method for Determining Unduplicated Services.** DCF relies on the NJFCS database and its various query functions to avoid duplication of benefits under the ETV and other federal and state benefit programs. DCF and Embrella use the database to run reports and assess for duplication. Frequently run reports include all students, ETV-funded students, state-funded students, amount of ETV spending and by spending category, new students per semester, returning students, and students who fell below 2.0 GPA.

### Chafee Training

As is detailed in the Training targeted plan, DCF has a vast training menu that supports various areas of child welfare practice, including several Chafee-specific training opportunities for child welfare staff, service providers, and other stakeholders. These trainings aim to assist participants to effectively implement policy, practice, and programming to ensure high quality and comprehensive services to youth and young adults, including Chafee-eligible youth.

OAS is partnering with DCF's OTPD to develop an adolescent learning path for child welfare staff who work with adolescents. For information on OTPD, see the Training targeted plan. This provides an opportunity to build on the content or structure of the current adolescent trainings to ensure optimal reach to adolescents and integrate healing centered engagement and race equity. To determine the content and training methods of the adolescent learning pathway, DCF is engaged with Rutgers University to conduct an adolescent needs assessment and develop a logic model. The needs assessment inputs included listening sessions held with child welfare, feedback from youth via a survey, and a topical and national scan of available trainings on identified topics and in use in other jurisdictions. The adolescent learning pathway will include relevant topics, such as working with expectant and parenting youth, normalcy, relationship building and engaging adolescents, and financial literacy. While the adolescent learning pathway is being developed, the following adolescent training will continue to be available.

- **Youth Thrive.** The Youth Thrive protective and promotive factors framework training was co-designed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy, OAS, and OTPD to help New

Jersey's young people to thrive. This training is co-led by a seasoned trainer and a trainer with lived experience.

- **Got Adolescents?** Got Adolescents? is a training for child welfare staff primarily serving adolescents and young adults. The training serves as the "101" course on youth specific policy, practice, and programming to best prepare child welfare staff to best engage and team with youth.
- **Youth and Young Adult Assessment and Transition Planning.** This training is designed to provide child welfare staff and service providers with an opportunity to develop a basic competency and understanding of assessment and planning practices with youth in foster care. Content includes the identification and exploration of assets and opportunities, long and short-term goal setting and application of the Youth Thrive Survey in the development of the SBC transition plan. The training focuses on the importance of comprehensive assessment, effective planning, and youth-involvement in assisting youth with their transition into adulthood.
- **Safe Space Training.** DCF educates its entire workforce on proficient, responsive and comprehensive services for LGBTQIA2S+ individuals. Safe Space in-service training features Safe Space liaisons and guest speakers and provides cutting-edge resources, best practices, and LGBTQIA2S+ specific information. For additional information on the Safe Space Program and other supports for LGBTQIA2S+ youth, see Services to Support LGBTQIA2S+ Youth and Young Adults, above.
- **Cultural Competency LGBTQIA2S+ Training.** This training for child welfare staff develops a basic understanding of the needs, challenges, issues, and resources pertinent to LGBTQIA2S+ youth, adults, and families served by the child welfare system, as well as the skills to recognize and meet these needs. Through discussions and activities around terminology, values, and attitudes, the coming out process, safety, and legal issues, participants learn how to best provide services that promote the psychological, social, emotional, and physical health and welfare for all, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.
- **Adolescent Networking Conference.** DCF partners with Rutgers University to hold a one-day biennial conference for youth, staff, service providers, and other interested stakeholders. The conference seeks to identify areas of youth work that may not have training available or may be relevant to improving services and supports provided to youth.

#### Chafee and ETV Related Consultation with Tribes

There are no federally recognized tribes located within the geographic boundaries of New Jersey; however, three tribal nations received state recognition. Chafee and ETV services are available to all eligible youth, including those identified as Indian youth. No tribe has requested to develop an agreement to administer, supervise, or oversee the Chafee or an ETV program with respect to eligible Indian children and to receive an appropriate portion of the state's allotment for such administration or supervision. For additional information on consultation with tribes on child welfare matters, including the Chafee and ETV programs, see Section 5, *Consultation and Coordination Between States and Tribes*.