



Collaborative Quality Improvement

Division of Child Protection & Permanency

2024 BRIEF #2: YOUTH TRANSITIONING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

OVERVIEW

The Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P) is New Jersey's child protection and child welfare agency within the Department of Children and Families (DCF). DCF's vision is to assist all New Jersey residents to be safe, healthy, and connected. DCP&P is responsible for investigating allegations of child abuse and neglect and, if necessary, arranging for the child's protection and connecting families to appropriate services and supports.

CP&P serves a wide range of families and youth, including young adults, aged 18-21, who are transitioning out of the foster care system. At the juncture between adolescence and adulthood, young adults have unique developmental needs. CP&P is committed to supporting them to achieve economic self-sufficiency, interdependence, and healthy lifestyles. To do this, the Division conducts casework with youth that includes transition planning and independent living assessments, and partners with community-based provider agencies to connect youth with comprehensive, specialized services, such as housing, life skills training, mentoring, career preparation and employment training, educational support, advocacy, and healthcare.



OFFICE OF
QUALITY





METHODS

DCF's Office of Quality (OOQ) conducts annual case record reviews to ensure that CP&P provides ongoing, high-quality support that meets the needs of older youth transitioning out of foster care and to identify quality improvement opportunities. The case record review assesses the quality of CP&P's work with young adults as it relates to documentation of outcomes achieved prior to transition out of foster care, including housing stability, education, and employment. It also assesses the quality of supervisory case conferencing, assessment of needs, short and long-term planning with the young adult, and whether supportive individuals and services were in place for the young adult at case closure.

For the 2024 review, OOQ assessed the cases of all young adults, aged 18-21, that had cases closed with CP&P during the 2023 calendar year, without achieving legal permanency; 64 total cases met these criteria. Youth were 52% male and 48% female. The majority (61%) were 21 years old at the time of case closure. Nearly half identified as Black non-Hispanic (47%), 11% identified as white non-Hispanic, and 33% identified as Hispanic of any race.

AREAS ASSESSED

Quality of CP&P Service Delivery

Documentation: CP&P maintains detailed and comprehensive documentation that reflects youth's housing, employment, and educational status, and CP&P's work to support these outcomes.

Supervision: Supervisory case conferences include discussions of the youth's needs as they transition into adulthood.

Assessment: CP&P accurately assesses the needs of the young adult to connect them to appropriate supports and services.

Collateral Information: CP&P collects meaningful collateral information to understand the young adult's progress toward goal attainment and preparation for adulthood.

Youth Outcomes

Housing: Youth have housing prior to exiting care or there is documented evidence of consistent efforts to help youth secure housing.

Education: Youth is currently enrolled in a training or education program.

Employment: Youth is currently employed full or part-time or there is documented evidence of consistent efforts to help the youth secure employment.

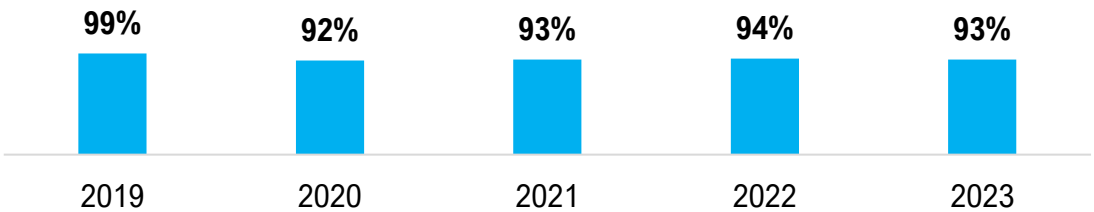
KEY FINDINGS

OUTCOMES:



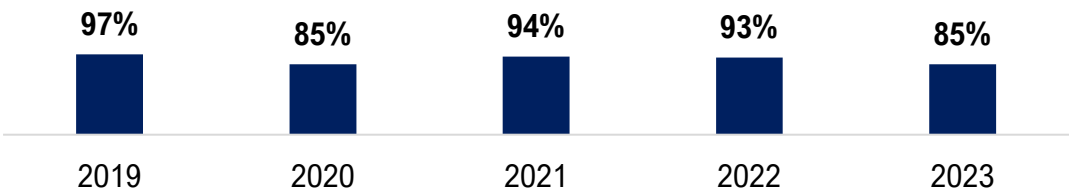
93% of youth were **stably housed** at the time of case closure, similar to 2022 (Figure 1). More youth resided with family or friends (33%) or in their own apartments (16%) than in other types of living arrangements, which include resource care, residential/medical facilities, military settings, group homes, or transitional living programs.

Figure 1.
Percent of Youth Transitioning out of Foster Care who were **Stably Housed**



85% of youth were engaged in **education or employment** at the time of case closure. This percentage is down from the prior year (Figure 2) but remains close to the general population; the most recently available data (2023) show that 91% of NJ's young adults, aged 16-24, were in school or working.ⁱ The youth served by DCF were either enrolled in college, post-secondary educational or vocational training programs, or employed full or part-time.

Figure 2.
Percent of Youth Transitioning out of Foster Care Engaged in **Education or Employment**



QUALITY OF CP&P SERVICE DELIVERY:

- In the vast majority of cases, reviewers noted one or more case practice strengths related to assisting and linking youth with housing (**97%**) and assisting and linking youth with education and employment (**94%**). These practices include engaging the youth, engaging the youth's family, when applicable, exploring all options with the youth, engaging mentors and other supports, identifying resources and programs to support these goals, and following up at various steps in the process.
- Reviewers noted at least one additional case practice strength in **89%** of cases, and in two thirds of cases, multiple strengths were noted. The following represent areas of strength noted at the end of the review: strong documentation, meaningful collateral support in place for the youth, accurate and comprehensive assessment of youth's needs, high quality planning with the youth, and high-quality conferences between the supervisor and caseworker.
- Reviewers also noted opportunities to further enhance documentation in **36%** of cases, suggesting that the quality of documentation varies across cases. Additionally, reviewers noted further opportunities to improve the assessment of the youth's needs in 30% of cases.



SUMMARY

The 2024 review highlighted strengths and areas for growth in CP&P’s work with youth transitioning out of care. In the vast majority of cases reviewed, youth were stably housed (93%) and engaged in employment or education (85%). The review also produced evidence of high-quality casework. For example, in 97% of cases, at least one case practice strength was noted in connecting youth to stable housing, and in 94% of cases, at least one case practice strength was noted in linking youth to education and/or employment resources. The review also uncovered opportunities to improve documentation and the assessment of youth’s needs.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹Annie E. Casey Foundation. February 2025. *Youth not attending school and not working by age group*. (2023) Kids Count Data Center.
<https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/9292-youth-not-attending-school-and-not-working-by-age-group#detailed/2/2-53/false/2545/4123/18399,18400>

WHAT’S NEXT?

DCF has taken a multi-pronged approach to improve its practice with older youth and young adults. Initiatives include enhanced training for direct-service staff, leveraging the experts in DCF’s Office of Adolescent Services to consult and collaborate with CP&P staff serving older youth, enhancing the existing collaborative quality improvement process focused on older youth, and continuing to implement evidence-based programming that promotes positive outcomes.

Enhanced Training: To better prepare CP&P caseworkers and other direct-service staff to serve and meet the evolving needs of older youth and young adults and ensure accurate comprehensive assessment, DCF has worked with Rutgers University to enhance adolescent-related training. Efforts are currently underway to explore funding to manage training design and implementation.

Consultation and Collaboration with Adolescent Specialists: The Office of Adolescent Services (OAS), within DCF, aims to support adolescents in transitioning to adulthood, achieving interdependence, and engaging in healthy lifestyles. OAS has designed a bi-monthly case practice check-in process during which OAS staff will engage CP&P supervisors working with adolescents. The goals are to assist CP&P staff in improving documentation and assessment and provide them any needed technical assistance and case practice support. This process will involve monthly tracking of youth’s progress related to employment, housing, social connections, health, financial literacy, and other goals essential for the transition to young adulthood.

Collaborative Quality Improvement (CoQI): As part of DCF’s CoQI process, the Office of Quality continually reviews open cases involving older youth, works with CP&P to identify strengths and challenges, and works with CP&P to implement improvement strategies that promote positive outcomes, especially in the areas of housing, education, and linking young adults to supports and services (see: [CoQI Description](#)). In future rounds of CoQI, OAS will provide feedback on case record review results and conduct additional case reviews, as needed, to ensure that young people are receiving transitional support. As part of this process, OAS will share resources with CP&P staff to increase awareness and utilization of all viable methods of support for older youth.

Evidence-Based Programming: DCF is committed to implementing evidence-based interventions for older youth and young adults to support positive outcomes. One example is [LifeSet](#), an intensive individualized program that supports youth in their transition from foster care to independent living. LifeSet specialists meet with young people face to face at least once per week to assist them in various areas of independent living like education, employment, housing stability, healthy relationship, physical and mental health, and others. Since its launch, LifeSet has served over 596 young adults in New Jersey. The most recent performance data show that for the 134 youth who discharged between July 2023 and June 2024, over 90% of youth had a safe place to stay, 95% had employment or educational stability, and 98% of youth avoided legal involvement or arrests during their time in the program. The LifeSet pilot included a randomized control trial evaluation called the Young Adult Services Study (YASS), to learn about the effectiveness of the intervention. A full evaluation report is expected in 2026.