

# Evaluation of a Housing Stabilization and Support Program for DCF-Involved Youth and Young Adults: FY22 Update

Presented to:

**The Office of the Child Advocate,  
the Unaccompanied Homeless  
Youth Commission (UHYC), and  
the HSSP Implementation Team**

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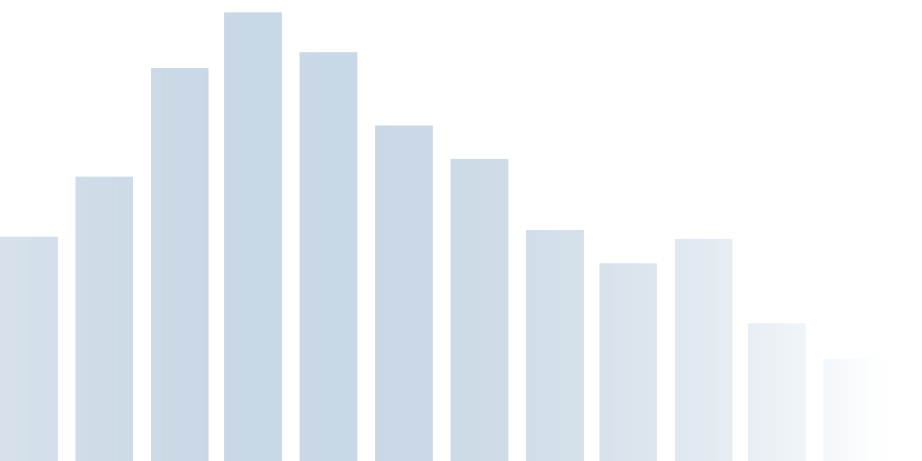


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# Overview: Housing Stabilization and Support Program



# Housing Stabilization and Support Program (HSSP)

- Young adults (YA) in DCF custody who opt-out or age-out of post-18 DCF care are vulnerable and at a risk for:
  - Homelessness; disrupted education; unemployment; behavioral health challenges; limited resources and more
- A cross-agency team in MA has been working to create a better safety net for these vulnerable YA
- The COVID-19 pandemic created an imperative for a targeted effort to address the needs of this group
- The HSSP Pilot was launched in early 2021 to connect YA to housing, education, employment, income, other supports, and to provide on-going support as needed

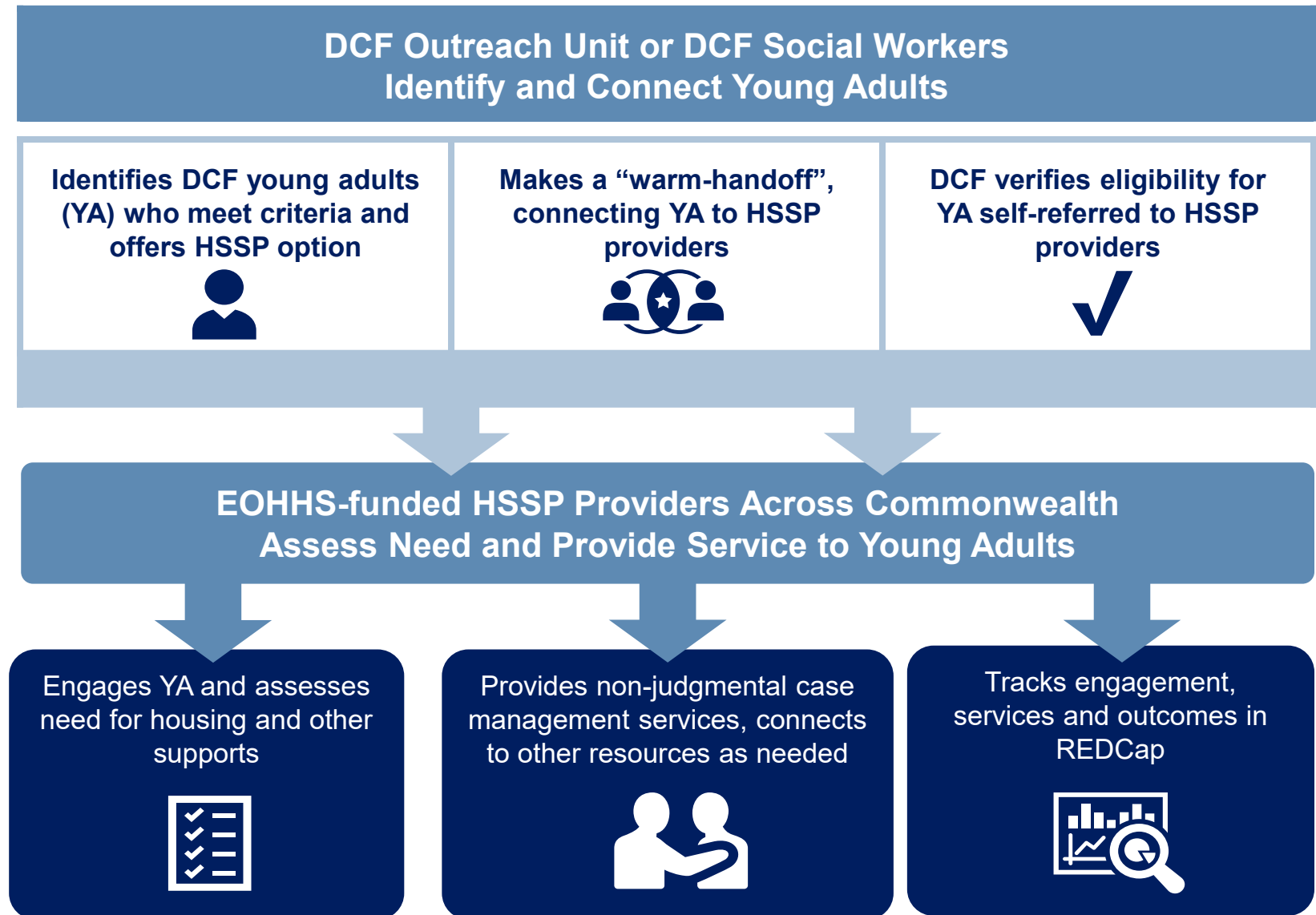
# Housing Stabilization and Support Program (HSSP)

- HSSP is provided by EOHHS-funded community-based organizations via a dedicated YA Housing Stability Specialist
  - YA referred by DCF Outreach Unit or DCF Social Workers
- **Eligible Young Adults**
  - YA referred to HSSP by DCF who are:
    - Age 17 and over who opted-out or are unlikely to remain in DCF care, or
    - Other DCF-involved YA (18 to 22) who could benefit from HSSP services, or
    - DCF-involved YA approaching age 22 who will “age-out” of DCF care
  - DCF-involved YA who self-refer or are referred by other organizations are confirmed eligible by DCF
- **HSSP Pilot Phase I**
  - Launched in January 2021 with two organizations in Worcester and Springfield targeting YA whose DCF cases were “closed” during pandemic
- **HSSP Pilot Phase II**
  - Expanded statewide in December 2021 with 11 organizations targeting eligible YA

# HSSP Partners

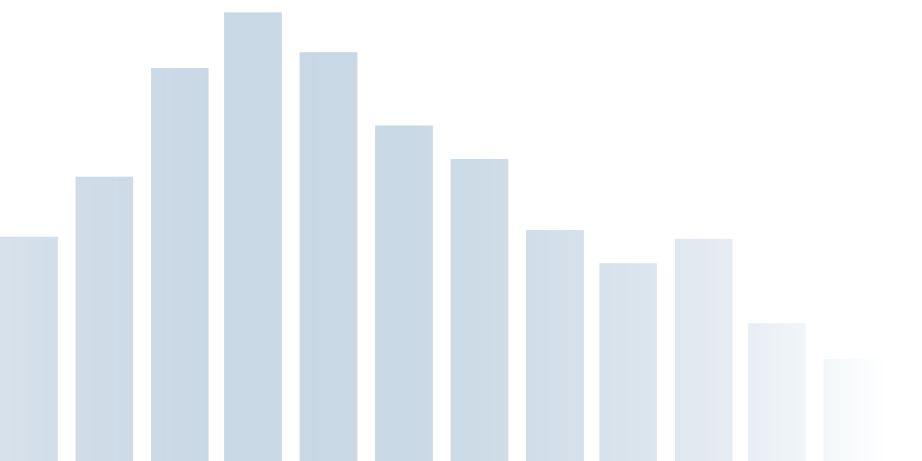
- **MA Office of the Child Advocate**
- **MA Exec Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS)**
  - DCF, DMH, DYS, DDS, DTA and MassHealth
- **Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness**
  - MA Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Commission
- **UMass Chan Medical School**
- **HSSP Provider Organizations**
  - Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority
  - Dial/Self Community Services
  - Center for Human Development
  - LUK
  - Catholic Social Services
  - Housing Assistance Corporation on Cape Cod
  - Old Colony YMCA
  - Lynn Housing and Neighborhood Development
  - Community Teamwork, Inc.
  - Wayside Youth and Families
  - The Home

# HSSP Implementation



# Evaluation Methods:

## Led by UMass Chan Medical School





# Quantitative and Qualitative Methods

All methods reviewed and approved by UMass Chan IRB

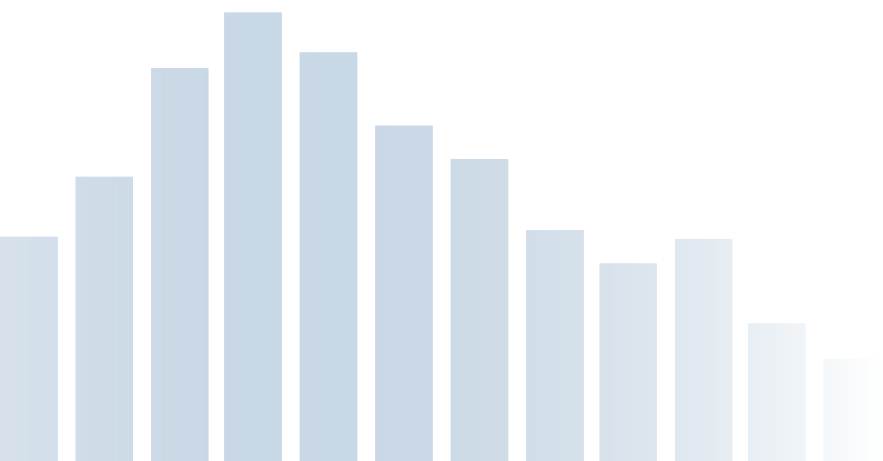
## Quantitative Approaches

- Evaluators developed a secure web-based REDCap Database to track:
  - Characteristics of YA served by HSSP
  - YA service engagement, assessed needs, referrals to other services
  - YA quarterly outcomes and reasons for discharge
- Data entered by HSSP providers; no YA identifying info included
- Evaluators provide REDCap training and support to providers
- Evaluators generate statistics on HSSP data

## Qualitative Approaches

- Evaluators conducted interviews/focus group with stakeholders
  - YA receiving services; service providers; State agency staff
  - Interviews/focus group audio-recorded, transcribed and thematically analyzed

# Quantitative Findings: YA Referred and Engaged in HSSP February 2021 to June 2022



# YA Referred and Engaged in HSSP to Date

- 184 YA referred to HSSP from February 2021 to June 2022
  - 85% (n=156) referred by DCF Social Worker or Outreach Unit
  - 15% (n=28) referred by other entity or self-referred
- 86% (n=158) of YA referred to HSP had at least one engagement with a provider

# Characteristic of HSSP YA Served to Date (n=158)

## Age

Mean = 20, range 17-28

- 26% age 17-18
- 57% age 19-21
- 17% age 22 and older

## Gender Identity

- 63% Female
- 35% Male
- 2% Non-binary/other

## Sexual Orientation

- 81% Heterosexual
- 14% Gay/bi/pansexual/queer
- 5% not listed

## Trans Identity

- 3% Trans

## Race/Ethnicity Identity

- 40% White
- 36% Latinx
- 20% Black
- 3% Multi-racial
- 1% Asian

## Primary Language

- 92% English
- 8% Spanish

## Level of Education

- 30% Less than high school
- 48% High school/HiSet/GED
- 18% Tech training/some college

## Disability Status

- 19% have a disability

## Parenting Status

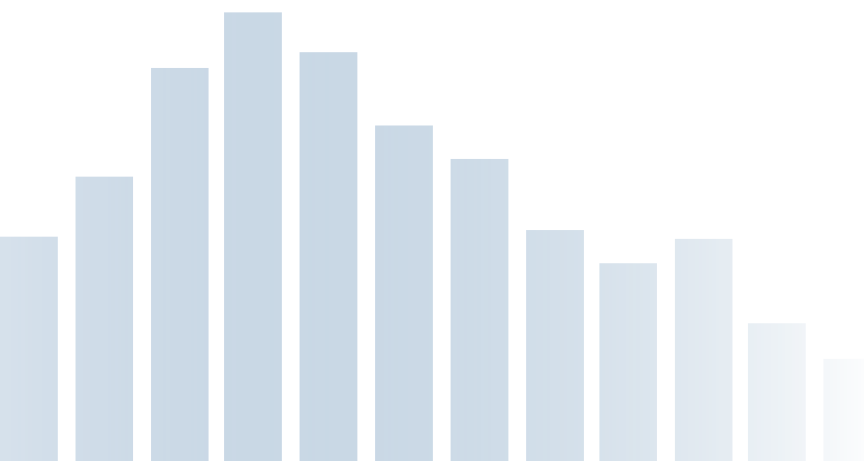
- 22% parenting, pregnant, expectant father

**77% of engaged YA had an open case with DCF at HSSP intake**

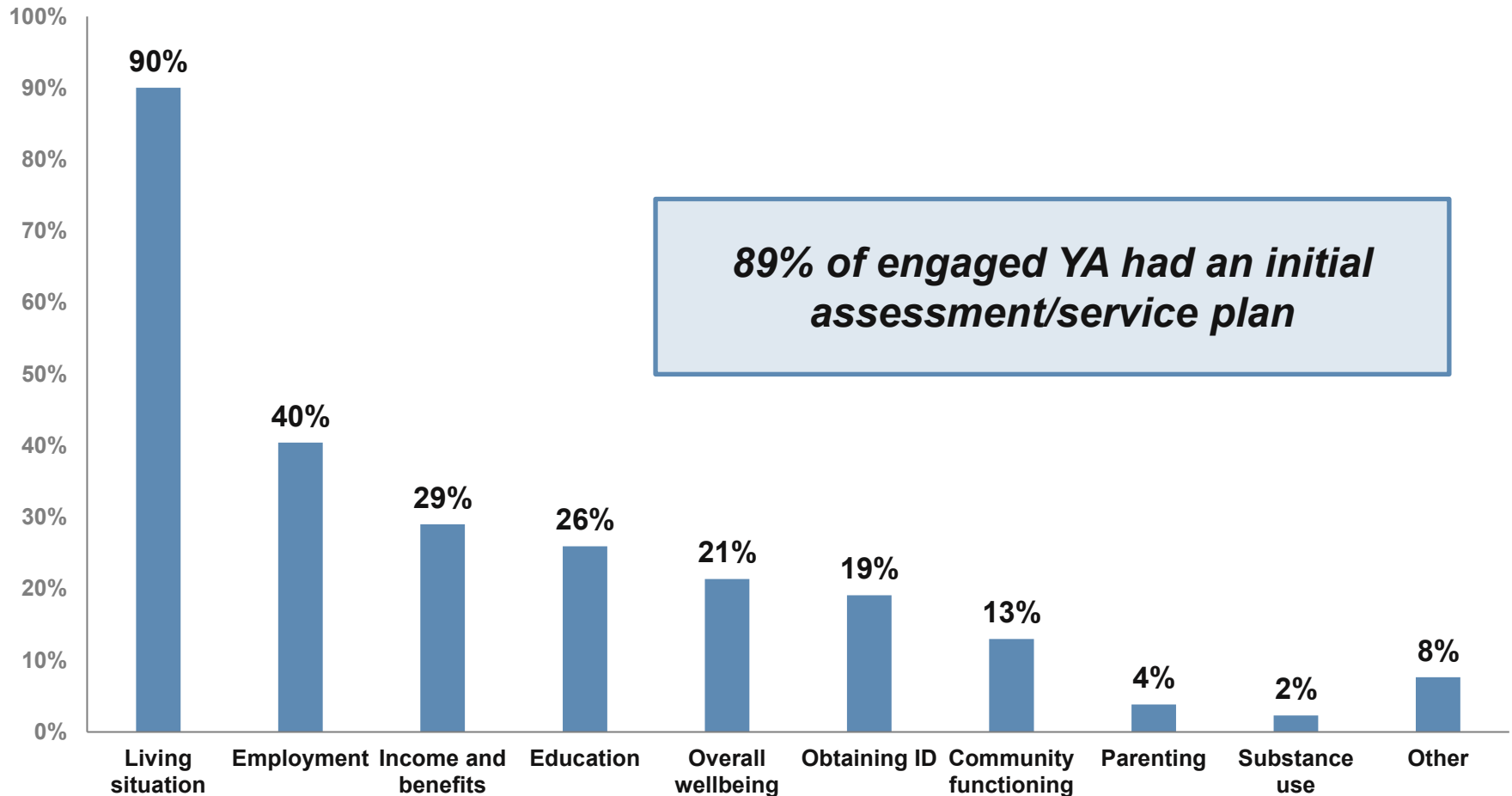
# Engagement of YA in HSSP to Date

- Engagement with and on-behalf of YA
  - Total of 1,261 engagements
  - 73% were remote/virtual with YA
  - 12% were in-person with YA
  - 24% were with others, on behalf of YA
  - Mean=11 engagements per YA (range=1 to 64)
- Engagement activities included initial outreach; assessment and service planning; regular check-ins; referrals and warm hand-offs to other services; working on service plan; providing flex funds

# Quantitative Findings: Services Provided by HSSP February 2021 to June 2022

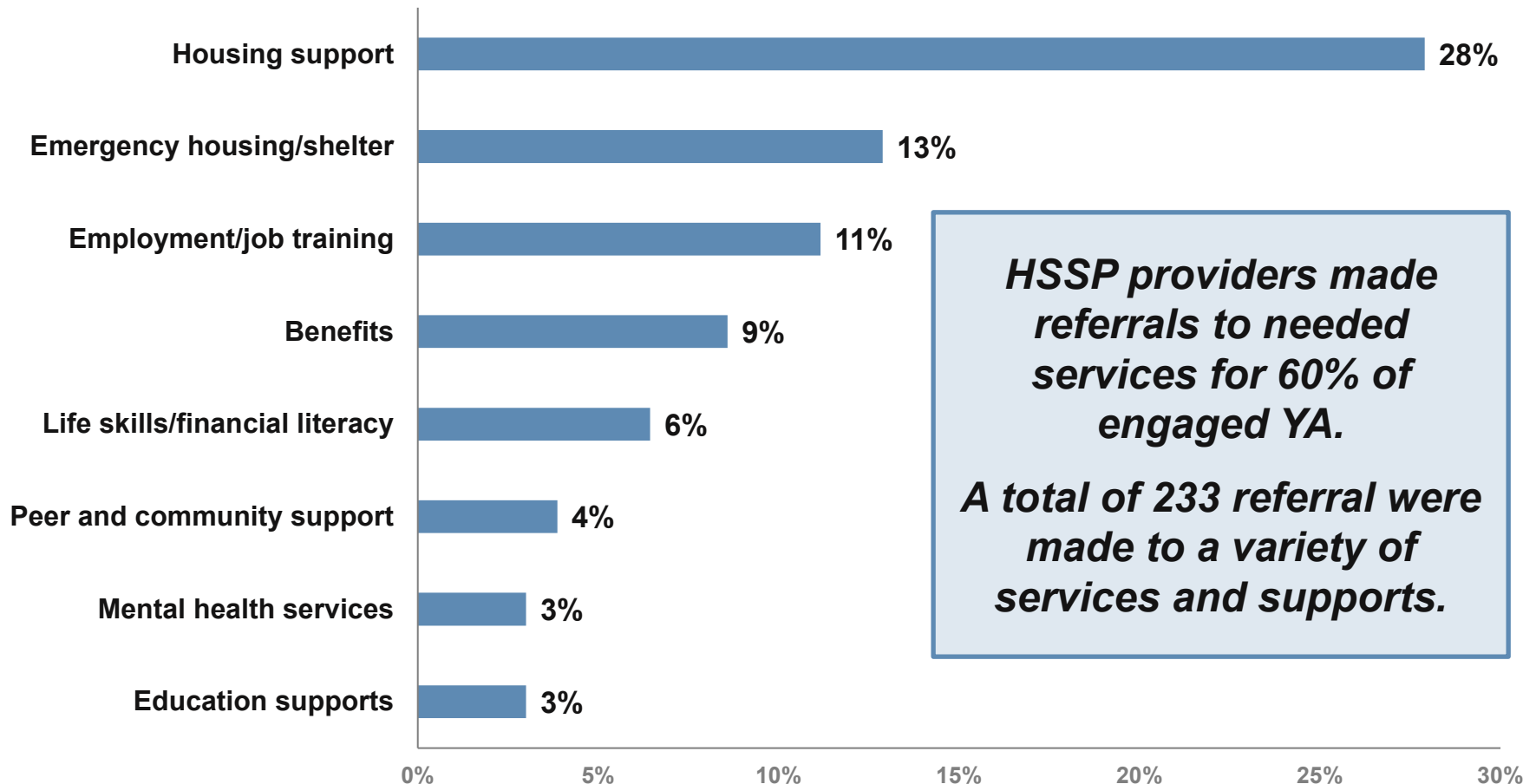


# Areas of YA Need Identified in HSSP Service Plan





# Types of Referrals Made on Behalf of YA in HSSP



Other included health services; transportation; health insurance, legal services; recreational activities; domestic violence services; furniture assistance

# Results of Referrals Made by HSSP Providers

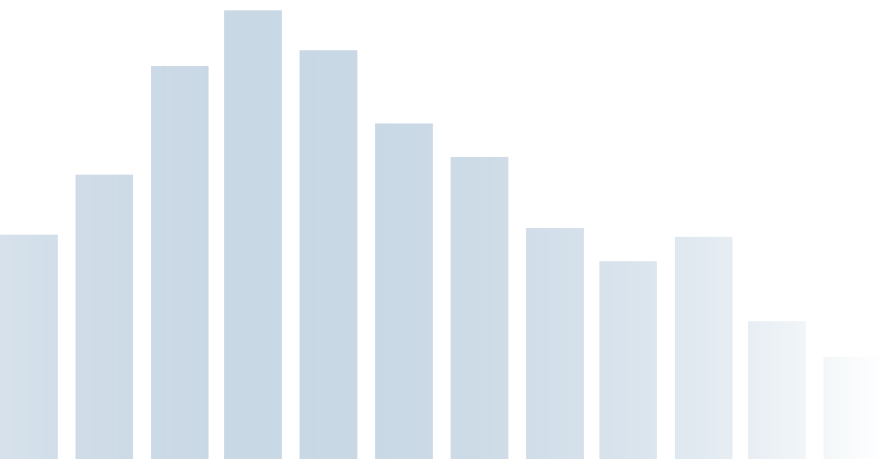
Majority of referrals made on behalf of YA have been successful

- 61% of referrals resulted in YA connecting with and receiving services
  - Most common successful connections related to housing and emergency shelter, health insurance, employment and benefits
- 15% of referrals were “refused” by YA
  - Most commonly emergency housing/shelter services
- 8% of referrals resulted in YA being “wait-listed”
  - Most commonly housing
- 3% YA was determined not eligible for referred service
- 14% were unknown/other

# Quantitative Findings:

## Outcomes Among YA Served by HSSP

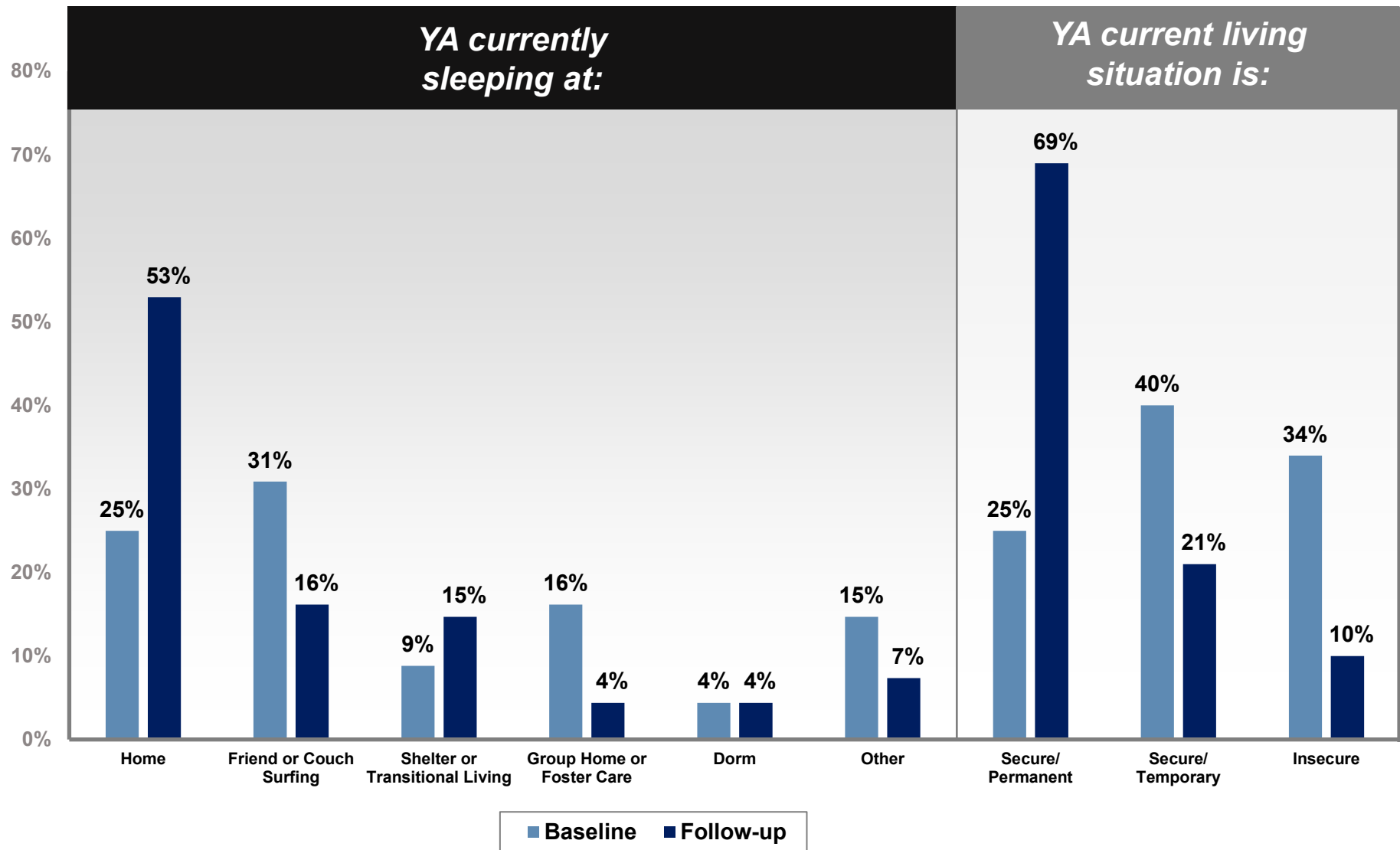
### Baseline to Most Recent Quarterly Follow-up (n=68)



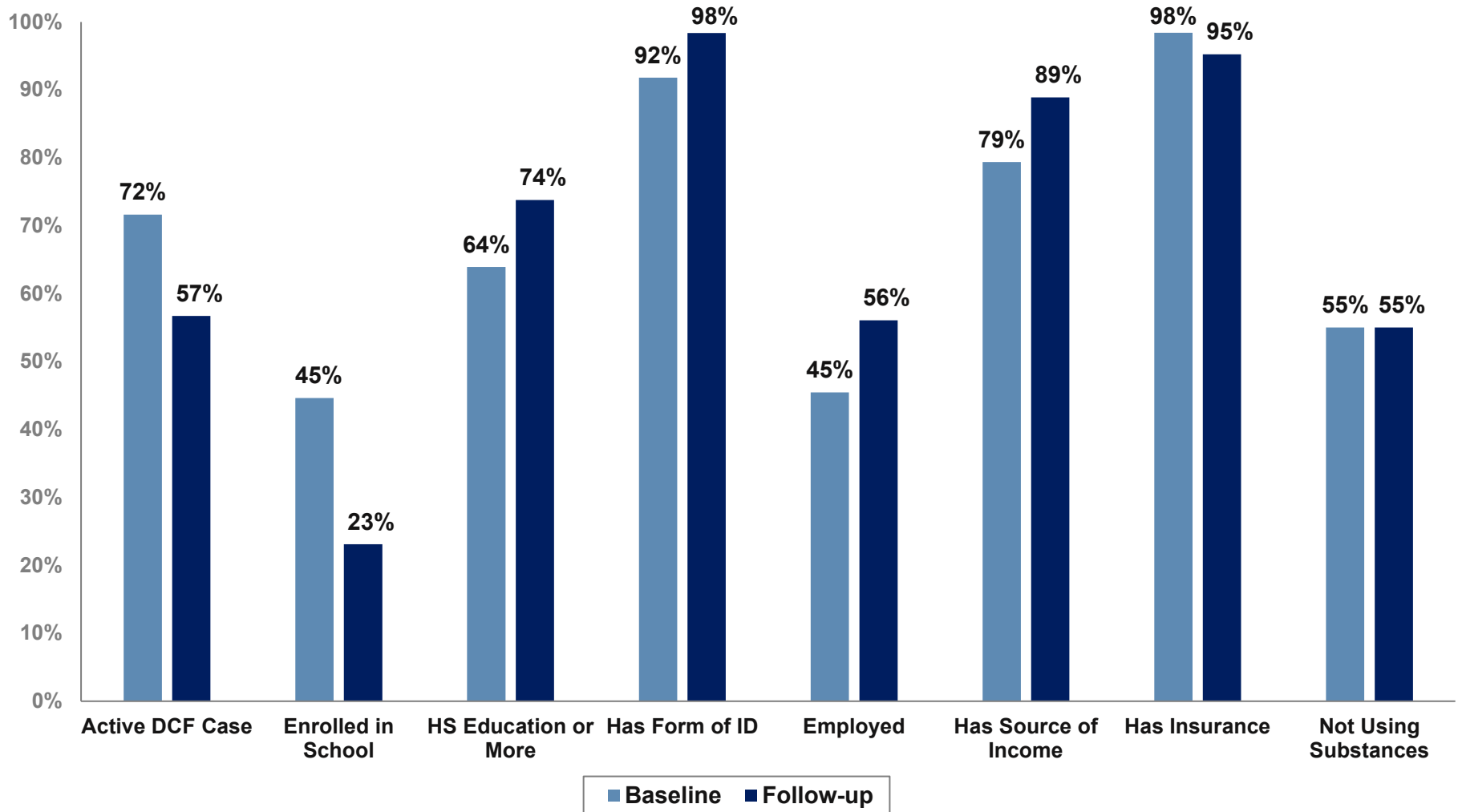
# Assessing Outcomes for HSSP YA

- We examined outcomes by comparing YA status at their initial engagement (baseline) in HSSP to their status at the **most recent quarterly follow-up** assessment in terms of:
  - Living situation
  - Involvement with DCF
  - Education and employment
  - Having a source of income, forms of identification and insurance
  - Substance use
- To date (June 2022), outcome data are available for 68 YA
  - These YA have been enrolled in HSSP long enough to have both baseline and at least one quarterly follow-up assessment
  - 30% were first engaged during Phase I of HSSP
  - 70% were first engage during Phase II of HSSP(Some YA leave HSSP before quarterly follow-up data can be collected)

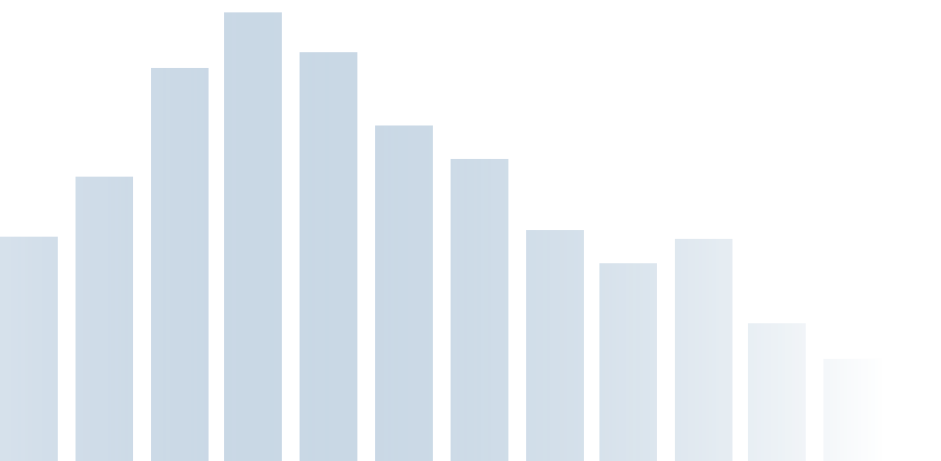
# YA Outcomes: Living Situation at Baseline and Follow-up



# YA Outcomes: Other Areas of Need at Baseline and Follow-up



# Quantitative Findings: YA Discharge from HSSP (n=109)



# Reasons for/Status at Discharge from HSSP (n=109)

Reason for Discharge	%
Lost contact with YA	29%
YA connected to other services	29%
YA declined further service (received at least one service)	18%
YA declined any service (refused services after intake)	13%
YA moved	13%
YA service needs met	11%
HSSP never made contact with YA	10%
Other	6%

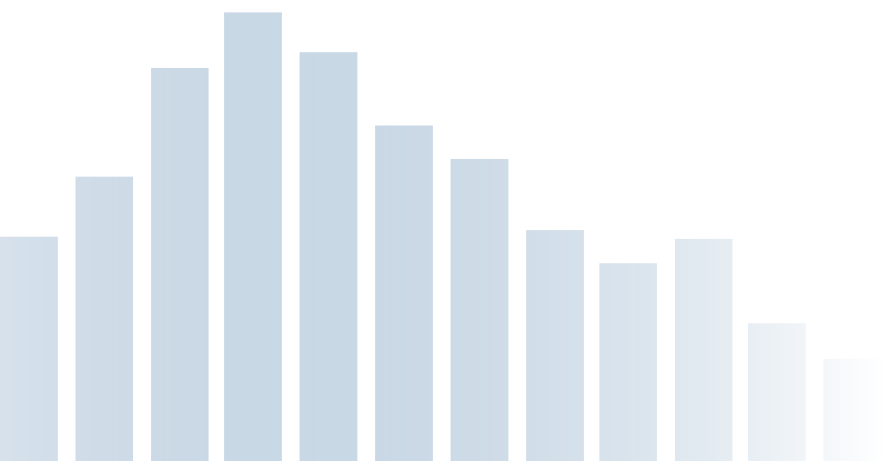
YA has supports needed to do well at discharge*	%
Strongly agree	16%
Agree	31%
Not sure	43%
Disagree	7%
Strongly disagree	3%

\*HSSP provider rating of YA status at discharged

Some YA are discharged from HSSP before quarterly follow-up assessment data can be collected



# Qualitative Findings: Perspectives of Young Adults Receiving HSSP Services



# Interviews with Young Adults Receiving HSSP Services

- During interviews, YA described:
  - Reasons for signing out of DCF
  - Their service and support needs
  - Their experiences with HSSP
  - Reasons for re-connecting to DCF
- YA also offered recommendations for improving the program

# YA Reasons for Signing-Out of DCF

*I was in a program... and I signed out because I wanted to be home with my parents. I was 18, wanted to go back home and have more freedom. I ended up going home to have that freedom. I could not be with my Mom, she could not be with me, she kicked me out, I am just putting this out there.*

*I just did not see myself going to school and they were getting more and more aggressive about going to school and I wanted to be less hands on.*

*Prior to turning 18... I was 'on the run' because they tried to send me to a group home. I was not ready to go back because I had bad experiences with that. [After] returning to the department I ended up staying at my mom's house for a while, but I was unable to stay with her... because she has mental illness.*

# Housing is a Critical Need for YA

*Currently I'm staying with friends. Hopefully not long term. I think I can enroll in one of [provider] apartment programs.*

*I was in the shelter... I'm in my own apartment now... it's working out good.*

*Before, I was going couch to couch. I was living with a friend... then I decided to leave because she was also in housing, and I did not want to mess her lease up and get her kicked out for whatever I was going through. And then...I started sleeping at my boyfriend's house who I have been with a couple of years, and I am comfortable with his family. And it is just pretty much back and forth between my boyfriend's house, my friend, and then my mom's house sometimes but not all the time.*

# YA Have a Range of Other Support Needs

*I want to stick my feet in [a job] and see what I can get done since I'm not that confident education-wise.*

*When they had open apartments, they called me... they were like unfortunately you can't get the apartment if you don't have a job, because I needed an extra \$200-300 of income.*

*I needed help with the college application process... submitting paperwork, transcripts, GED stuff*

*I needed money, did not have health insurance. Transportation was a big thing. Pharmacy, food stamps, unemployment.*

*When you turn 18 everyone expects you to know everything. They don't even teach you in high school... like how to fill out a census or how to do taxes.*

*She helped me make an appointment to get a new psychiatrist, a therapist, and long-term therapy.*

# YA Find Connecting to HSSP Quick and Easy

*My attorney forwarded me to the service as I was signing out of DCF... I was scrambling for options. I didn't know what to do with myself.*

*My mom was the one who told me about [HSSP]. I called, and they called me back. From there they wanted to meet with me and start an application.*

*I would say it was pretty easy. We walked in and immediately the first day starting working on unemployment and food stamps.*

*The process to me was easy. [HSSP] knew what she was doing.*

*It was fast, within a week or two. We meet through Zoom or google chat... sometimes in person.*

*I decided to participate because I have had a lot of instances in the past where a social worker will ask what I need, and then would not reach out for a couple of week. But... with [HSSP]... they were basically right off the bat with everything.*

# HSSP is Responsive to YA Needs

*[HSSP] has been very helpful. Helping me get to appointments... helping me get a handle on, I want to say 'adulthood'.*

*It's been hard to juggle everything... whether it's unemployment, food stamps... just breaking down things. [HSSP] has really helped me get a grasp on becoming a man.*

*I have a lot of things on my plate, and [HSSP] helps me organize and shows me how to get things done. It's a lot, especially coming from foster homes and programs where everything is just fed to you.*

*[HSSP] helped me get the confidence to go and do my stuff.*

*[HSSP] knew what she was doing. I got so comfortable over there... she was respectful.*

# HSSP is Responsive to YA Needs (continued)

*[HSSP] connected me to housing agency. They are helping me pay my first and last, my deposit... my housing payments. They're helping me get furniture. If it wasn't for them, I wouldn't even be in this apartment.*

*Best thing about it is that usually young adults don't have support after the age of 18, so knowing there is a program specifically for young adults is really nice.*

*They can help you with much more than you can think, like I did not even think they could get me in housing, I did not think they would help me as much as they did, like with the food shopping and stuff.*

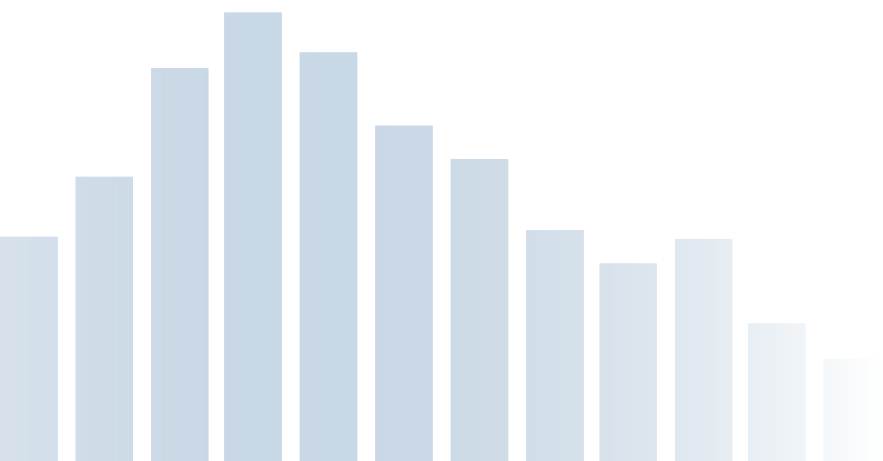


# YA Sign-Back/Stay with DCF for Financial Support

*I decided to sign back in [for financial support] but I did not know how to get the resources, who to contact, stuff like that.*

*I'm voluntary with DCF until 22 in order to get payments I am getting. All I need to do is go to school or have a job which I am actually planning to go to college this Fall and I have the job for the meantime and I do have a social worker. I have to do monthly check ins with them but I am not really in touch with my social worker. She kinda just refers me to these people and I meet with them mostly rather than with her.*

# Qualitative Findings: Perspectives of HSSP Service Providers



# Interviews/Focus Group with HSSP Service Providers

- During discussions, providers described:
  - The DCF referral process
  - Approaches to engaging YA in HSSP
  - HSSP YA service needs
  - How HSSP YA compare to other YA served
  - The need for effective transition planning
- Providers also offered recommendations for improving the program

# Communication/Coordination with DCF is Helpful

*Sometimes SW will provide a little blurb either in email or on the referral... sometimes there is not much information. We try to reach out to SW if there is information we need prior to speaking to YA.*

*There is a SW who is responsible for sending the referrals to us. At first, we had some difficulty meeting up with the YA, but we work with DCF... We call the SW, and she works with us to create that relationship.*

*I think there is a little more trust of the SW than of an outsider... and then once that happens things start to move a little bit better. The YA is more willing to hear what we are saying.*

*Some SW are amazing. They are on every Zoom and are in constant communication with us. Where others are just like, they refer and they disappear and we can't get in touch with them. I would say that more SWs are in communication with us and happy to get on Zoom, but the ones that aren't in touch are the ones that we actually really need.*

# Engaging YA Needs to be Youth-Friendly

*For intake, we always use Zoom, most YA do not put the camera on, nice when they do but fine if they don't.*

*YA do not want to be on video and texting is how to reach them.*

*We created a Google line for our YA. Allows us to reach YA through text, and we share the line so either of us can respond to it.*

*DCF referrals coming via email without phone numbers have not gone anywhere. Email is not a way to engage a YA.*

*We connect with some YA immediately, and a few that take a lot of reaching out and even a month or two to connect. When we do, we get a better idea of why they have not responded. One YA just had a lot of stuff going on, she was prioritizing what she could handle and once we spoke with her, we totally understood that her world was crashing down and she was in survival mode.*

# YA Need a Flexible Case Management Approach

*We need to understand what they can commit to and what they want to do and go from there. If they're not on board, it will not work.*

*We work with them... going over what is your situation and asking them what they see as their options. Sometimes that is the best place to start and then we can build from there.*

*Some YA are more independent and want to make the call themselves. Others are like... 'can you help me'.*

*The more they push us away the more we say, 'we respect that you don't want us around. We are here... when you come back, we open the door with open arms. No judgement, no criticism. At your pace.'*

*We don't pretend to be [the parent]. We make sure that the YA knows we are not the curators of their life, we are just the scaffolding. Holding things together while you figure it out.*

# Housing is a Vital Service Need for these YA

*When it comes to housing, we need more of more. Housing is the #1 need.*

*Every YA that comes through the door is like ‘you’re going to help me get an apartment, right?’ Doesn’t work that way, but I do love the confidence.*

*I always recommend not putting all your eggs in one basket... I frame it as steppingstones... transition from one to another to get to the place they want to be.*

*There is a huge housing crisis. A lot of the housing authorities that we apply to don’t even have one-bedroom apartments. All the Section 8 [waiting] lists are up to 6 to 8 years right now.*

*For supportive or rapid rehousing, the expectation is that people have income... and these YA don’t have that.*

*The market the way it is, makes it really hard to get a landlord to rent to YA. They want credit, rental history, income.*

# YA Need Support Around Independent Life Skills

*Most homeless YA don't have jobs. But getting this service allows them to be stable enough to think about employment.*

*Employment is huge... just the basic needs of having an apartment, you know, budgeting, financial literacy and things like that.*

*We help with application, or role play interview, if they need clothing for the interview or a ride, we will help them. Our presence lowers their anxiety to go to the interview.*

*Some YA are still looking to further their education, whether it be a certificate program or community college*

*Many have mental health issues. We need to think systemically about how YA needs can get met much earlier on.*

*Many need basic life skills... are they able to advocate for themselves? How will they know if they are running short budget-wise to keep the apartment? Community resources... food pantries and furniture. Help with phones.*



# DCF-Involved YA Have Unique Needs

*YA transitioning out of DCF are some of the most vulnerable... there is not one person who has not had a mental health issue.*

*Once they turn 18, they are expected to be self-sufficient but the system they are coming from did not create a road map for them to move into that role.*

*Their level of trust is so low; it is hard to get them to buy into the idea that we are here to help.*

*Sometimes transitioning to biological parents... trauma and family dynamics... understanding how to navigate them all puts these YA at a disadvantage.*

*Transition back to DCF is not always smooth. It can be a long process. There is paperwork. For a YA with a child... what does the eligibility process look like?*

# YA Need Effective Transition Planning

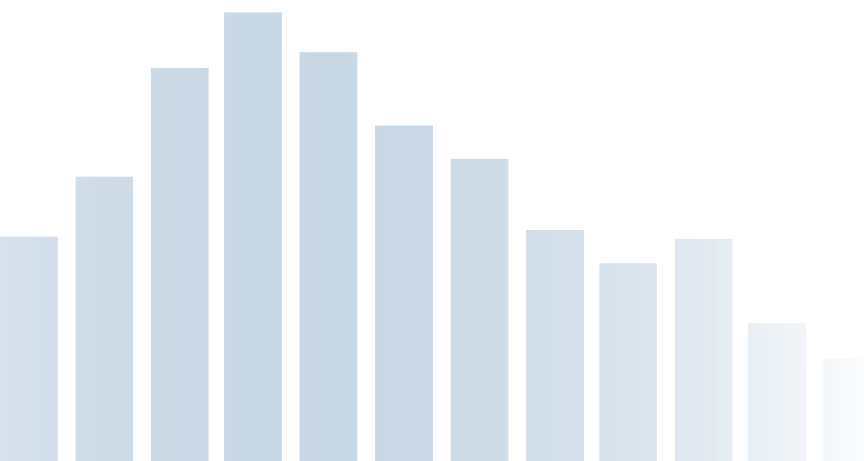
*We sometimes get referrals from DCF for YA that are aging out within the month that have no plan and no housing set up. So almost panic mode. I don't think any of us could find housing for a YA, let alone a YA that has children, within 30 days.*

*Most of our YA referrals are approaching aging out at 22. Seems like there are some SW who think there is some magic out there and that these YA can get transitioned seamlessly into an ideal setting and it is not like that.*

*I wonder if something can be done to make it a little more supportive for YA. Some YA say, 'my SW is not doing anything for me'. We hear that a lot. I know its just one side of the story but shows that communication is not as good as it should be.*

*Some SW don't really understand the extent of the assistance that the TAY housing folks can provide. So, I think there is some work to be done systemically around communication.*

# Qualitative Findings: Perspectives of State Agency Staff



# HSSP Provides a Safety Net for Vulnerable YA

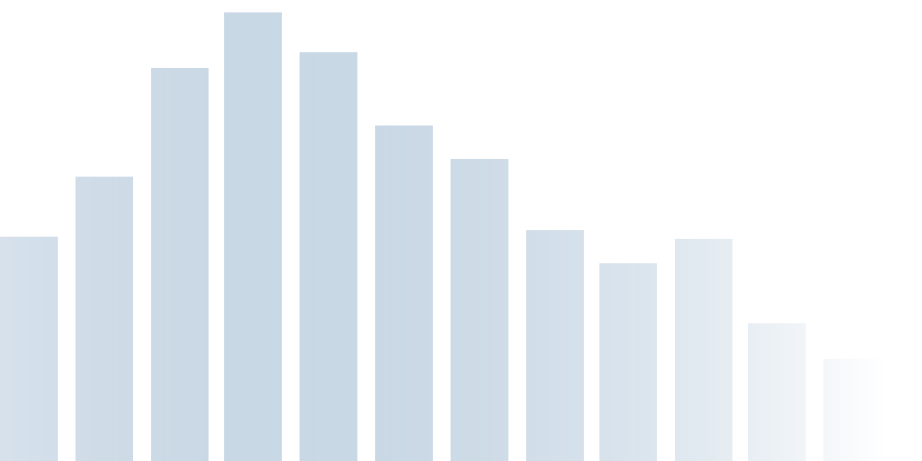
*These YAs are not super different from the YA [providers] already serve. But [HSSP] is making the connection earlier, so YA is not floundering. They're getting connected sooner to provider and wraparound supports.*

*It has provided a valuable safety net. Social workers were excited to hear about the program. We're trying not to have an all or nothing approach... you're in this system or not.*

*It is a huge relief for [DCF SW] in those regions to have a place to point YAs to. To say, 'if you don't want to call me, please call this community agency'.*

*[For the future], we need to figure out if we are trying to serve these kids outside the [DCF] system. We're working to make sure YA have adequate transition planning... so if they want [to close], we take a look at what's outside system that they still need for support.*

# Stakeholder Recommendations and Evaluation Findings



# YA Recommendations

- Gift cards for essentials like underwear and socks
- More hands-on help with getting jobs; help with transportation
- More help with basic living skills
  - *Something for young adults to learn how to do those basic things like taxes, the census, and voting. Just all stuff you don't really learn from school.*
- Contact for support “after hours” – evenings and weekends
  - *I'm having short-term trouble... and I just need someone to talk to.*
- Expand the service
  - *I don't know how much money they had to put out... it is a very helpful thing and it's free of charge. It is an overall blessing... maybe more workers so more people get blessed.*

# HSSP Provider Recommendations

- Enhance the ‘warm hand-off’ with face-to-face introductions to HSSP providers by DCF social workers
- Involve HSSP and other community providers in transition planning before YA opts-out or ages-out of DCF care
  - *DCF needs to help them as young teens. Not always easy to determine who will remain and who will move on...but in any event they deserve to have someone putting things in place for them no matter what their outcome is going to be.*
- Establish ongoing communication between DCF SW and HSSP providers so both understand the full range of supports available to YA
  - *It would be good to know what other things DCF can offer...life skills fund, Young Adult Support (YAS) payments, discharge payments. Who has Foster Youth to Independence (FYI), who has other vouchers. We don't know about these resources until they come to us.*

# Summary of Findings

- A high percentage of YA referred to HSSP connected to and were served by providers – youth-friendly strategies are needed to engage YA
- HSSP connects YA to a range of needed services – housing is the most critical need
- HSSP appears to result in positive changes in key domains – housing, education, employment, income – for YA served
- YA experience HSSP providers as helpful, supportive, respectful – overall they were very happy with the service
- HSSP provides an important safety net for DCF-involved YA, with easy access to needed services and supports
- Many YA continue involvement with DCF, primarily for financial support
- Good communication/coordination between HSSP and DCF is essential



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