**John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (the Chafee Program)**

**This document is a draft of Section 6 of the Massachusetts Child and Family Service Plan for Fiscal Years 2020-2024. Per program guidelines, the draft is made available for review and comment prior to submission. Please provide comments via e-mail to Michelle Banks, Director of Adolescent Services at** **michelle.banks@massmail.state.ma.us****. Comments must be provided no later than May 29, 2019.**

**Agency Administering CFCIP (section 477(b)(2) of the Act)**

The state agency that will administer the CFCIP is the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families. The administration of Chafee funds and services rests in the Adolescent Services Unit at DCF Central Office. In SFY20 the name of this Unit will change to the Adolescent and Young Adult Services Unit to better capture the breadth of services and consumers that use them. This Unit houses the Adolescent Outreach Program. Outreach Workers are stationed in the one of the Department’s 29 area offices. The Outreach Workers are supervised by Adolescent Outreach Supervisors who also sit in area and regional offices across the Commonwealth.

**Description of Program Design and Delivery**

The Department has designed programming to address the varied service needs of the youth and young adults in the agency’s care and/or custody. This programming is supported by the Department’s Foster Child Bill of Rights (2009) and the Sibling Bill of Rights (2012), which support the goals of permanency, positive youth development, and life skills attainment. The DCF s Permanency Planning Policy encourages permanency, sibling connections, transition planning, and extended voluntary care for transition age youth to support optimal goal achievement.

As part of the Department’s Permanency Planning Policy, all youth ages 14 years and older in out of home placement must receive life skills training. Contracted care providers and Adolescent Outreach Workers are required to utilize the Young Adult Readiness Assessment Tool to guide and document this work. This tool captures skill development that is connected to short and long-term goals identified by the youth. The tool also captures lifelong connections as well as other supportive adults that will assist youth as they pursue their goals.

The Chafee funded programs are based on the principles of positive youth development and address each of the purpose areas of the Program:

1. To support all youth who have experienced foster care at age 14 or older in their

 transition to adulthood through transitional services such as assistance in obtaining a high school

 diploma and post-secondary education, career exploration, vocational training, job placement

 and retention, training and opportunities to practice daily living skills

 substance abuse prevention, and preventive health activities;

2. To help children who have experienced foster care at age 14 or older achieve meaningful,

 permanent connections with a caring adult;

3. To help children who have experienced foster care at age 14 or older engage in age or

 developmentally appropriate activities, positive youth development, and experiential learning

 that reflects what their peers in intact families experience;

4. To provide financial, housing, counseling, employment, education, and other appropriate

 support and services to former foster care recipients between 18 and 21 years of age

 to complement their own efforts to achieve self-sufficiency and to assure that program participants

 recognize and accept their personal responsibility for preparing for and then making the transition from

 adolescence to adulthood;

5. To make available vouchers for education and training, including postsecondary training

 and education, to youths who have aged out of foster care;

6. To provide the services referred to in this subsection to children who, after attaining 16

 years of age, have left foster care for kinship guardianship or adoption; and

7. To ensure children who are likely to remain in foster care until 18 years of age have

 regular, on-going opportunities to engage in age or developmentally-appropriate activities (as

 those terms are defined in section 475(11) of the Act.

**Service Design**

The following services are funded with the Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transitions to Adulthood funds and are available to eligible youth and young adults across the Commonwealth.

**Adolescent Outreach Program**

The Adolescent Outreach Program delivers intensive, individualized life skill assessment and training to current foster youth and young adults ages 14-21 from across the state to assist them in developing necessary relationships, skills, and supports to achieve their potential. Per grant guidelines, program services are also available to youth who were left care in a guardianship or adoption after age 16 and to former foster youth who discharged from DCF between ages 18-21.

Outreach services seek to address each of the purpose areas of the Chafee Program: assisting youth with life skill development, access to education, vocational training and other services necessary to obtain employment, support through connections to family, including siblings and lifelong supports.

The services provided are specific to the needs of each individual, including LGBTQ youth and young adults. Staff members participate in training and professional development to ensure that our services affirm the cultural, sexual orientation, and gender identities of our youth/young adults.

The Outreach staffs also assist youth with planning for and succeeding in post-secondary educational settings as well as vocational training programming. These efforts are supported by ETV program staff that facilitate the transition to post -secondary education as well as supports students through the duration of their academic programs.

Outreach Program staff support youth and young adults to identify and pursue long and short-term goals. The strength-based approach and focus on youth engagement with a positive youth development foundation have enabled the staff to successfully engage youth in the service. Feedback from the youth and young adults served confirms that this model is a significant factor in the program’s success. This same strength-based approach has inspired the Department's internship program as well as the ETV support model. DCF believes that youth and young adults are essential partners in their own goal setting, service planning, and life skill training, a key factor, which facilitates their successful transitions into the community. Youth and young adults are encouraged to practice newly acquired skills and utilize problem-solving techniques effectively within a safety net of positive adult supervision and support. Assisting youth in identifying their educational/vocational goals and developing strategies to realize their potential are critical tasks for program staff.

Youth are also supported in handling mistakes, disappointments, and failures. Overarching goals are to equip youth to live a successful life with long term, personal connections within the community. Outreach strives to help youth develop self-advocacy skills and to experience adolescent and young adult milestones in a healthy, normative way. Through focused discussions on decision-making/problem-solving, community-based activities and goal-focused skill building tasks, youth work to develop the skills necessary to cope with the challenges of adulthood and live self-sufficiently in their communities. Adolescent Outreach staff works closely with the DCF primary case managing social workers, foster parents, congregate care providers, community service providers and adults important to the youth to offer opportunities for youth and young adults to learn life skills through practical activities and achievements in their communities – making efforts to normalize their experiences. The Outreach Workers utilize other Chafee funded programs described below to help youth and young adults to reach their goals.

**Preparing Adolescents for Young Adulthood Curriculum and Incentive Program**

The Department’s own life skill curriculum, Preparing Adolescents for Young Adulthood (PAYA), has been successfully used by the foster parents, congregate care programs and comprehensive contracted foster care agencies for more than 20 years to help ensure continuity in the life skills training for youth in out-of-home placement. The components of the PAYA curriculum include five (4) life skills modules, each of which incorporates a number of related skill areas as described below:

* Module 1: Money, Home and Food Management
* Module 2: Personal Care, Health, Safety and Decision-Making
* Module 3: Education, Job Seeking and Job Maintenance
* Module 4: Housing, Transportation, Community Resources, Laws and Recreation

The Adolescent Services staffs provide life skills and youth development training statewide. All DCF staff contracted and state agencies, community partners, and foster parents are invited to attend these trainings, which address the use of the curriculum and the implementation of the program services. The training presents strategies for working with adolescents around readiness for community living and teaching the wide range of life skills. The practice of the newly acquired life skills well as the inclusion of activities of normalcy whenever possible are essential components of this work with youth. Transition planning and the after-care needs of youth are also addressed in the training.

Foster parents, providers, and staff are encouraged to integrate the information and activities suggested in the modules into the daily learning opportunities for youth in their care. The PAYA incentive program is also available to these youth. Quality life skill training will be experiential for youth and young adults and will utilize current tools including mobile phone apps to help youth organize and enhance their learning. The PAYA curriculum will be updated for the third time in the coming years to reflect the need to incorporate modern technological and other tools and resources. The PAYA curriculum will also be widely distributed via flash drives and made available via the DCF web page.

**PAYA Incentive Program**

Since the implementation of the PAYA Program, the Department has utilized incentives to reward adolescents for their successful completion of a skill module, encourage their development of self-esteem, and empower them to continue their efforts of enhancing their life skills. The youth also learn to set goals for themselves and work toward their achievement – as well as the tangible reward. In order to qualify for an incentive, a youth must master the skills addressed in the individual life skill module. Youth may request $50 for a life skill related item or a one-time payment of $500 toward driver education training. In order to increase access to driver’s education programs, the PAYA incentive program increased its driver’s education incentive award from $300 to $500. At the suggestion of the DCF Joint Youth Advisory Committee, a new incentive will be built into the PAYA program. Youth who are engaged in life skill development will be able to submit for a one time incentive payment of $500 to be put towards the cost of the purchase for a furniture or dorm item.

**Life Skills Support Program**

The Department is committed to facilitating youths’ connection to school and community activities and utilizes Chafee Program funds for this purpose through the Life Skills Support Program. . Life Skill Support Program funds are used for a variety of positive youth development activities such as team athletics/uniforms, senior class expenses, SAT prep courses, high school activity fees, short-term transportation, computers, etc. DCF plans to continue this program and extend eligibility for the service to age 23.

**Employment**

The Department has continued its partnership with Cantella, Inc., a Boston financial firm over the past year. Cantella continues to host Career Nights for foster youth. Professionals from a variety of careers including nursing, finance, education, law enforcement, computer science, entrepreneurship, human resources and the law present information about their work and answer questions the youth. Youth receive advice on resume development, interview tips, networking and much more. Based on the success of this partnership, DCF plans to engage a larger network of private businesses in other areas of the Commonwealth to build off of and replicate the Career Night model.

Adolescent Outreach staff has collaborated with local Workforce Investment Boards in the Southern Northern, and Greater Boston Regions of Massachusetts. Outreach Workers participate on Workforce Investment Boards and are able to connect youth with WIA funded employment services that have resulted in DCF youth gaining both seasonal and yearlong part-time and full-time employment. DCF will continue to fully engage in this collaboration.

This year the Department has continued its development of a partnership with private businesses and community-based organizations to provide internship opportunities for DCF youth with the goal of assisting youth to develop job skills and gain exposure to careers in which they have expressed an interest. Such access to internships is a developmentally appropriate resource for foster youth, particularly as the Outreach staff provides the support in helping the youth/young adult identify their area of interest as well as potential placement sites. The Outreach staffs provide on-going supervision – meeting with the youth/young adult weekly -assessing the youth’s current employment skills and providing support around job readiness in areas such as appropriate dress, workplace ethics, time management and transportation. Outreach workers can also support the internship supervisors to address any needs or concerns that may arise during the placement. Staffs use the PAYA Life Skill Curriculum Module 3 to assist youth with employment readiness skills.

DCF youth are paid a stipend by the Department (Chafee funds) for their participation in this program. The average youth initially works 40 hours with an opportunity for a 40-hour extension. The youth receives an $8 an hour stipend. The internship program has been a successful way to introduce youth to a vocational or professional work setting and motivates them to continue with their educational goals. As of April 2019, 41 youth were matched with internship placements. The job market in Massachusetts has been strong, affording many youth the opportunity to be employed. In FY20, the internship program will be modified to allow youth to participate by working alternative hours or to combine learning related work and professional mentorship opportunities with their paying jobs. As the minimum wage in Massachusetts is now $12 an hour, the internship stipend will be raised to $10 an hour.

**The Discharge Support Program**

The Discharge Support Program, managed by the Adolescent Services Unit of DCF, supports start-up costs (i.e. first month’s rent, security deposit, essential furniture, household items, bedding, etc.) for young adults who have left agency care and are in need of such support. These are the expenses that DCF considers room and board payments for former foster youth. Funds may be paid directly to theyoung adultorto the landlord**.** If the young adult’s behaviors are such that providing money without his/her willingness to work with Outreach staff would likely jeopardize the youth’s safety, then the young adult is informed of the program and given contact information so that he/she may call at any time and request assistance in the future. As Chafee funds cannot be used to support the room and board costs for foster youth in agency custody/care, and DCF provides voluntary care and placement for so many young adults age 18 and older, Massachusetts spends less than 5% on room and board through Chafee and is not challenged by the 30% cap set by the program in this area.

As Massachusetts seeks to expand access to transition services to young adults to age 23, a goal will be to increase utilization in all of these programs. Strong focus will be on the Discharge Support Program as the DCF Youth Advisory Board identified it as a critical need.

**Supported Housing Programs**

*FUP*

Since 2009, DCF and the MA Department of Housing and Community Development have jointly applied to HUD for Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers– a portion of which has been assigned for "transition age" youth. These vouchers are limited to a 36-month period, unlike the standard FUP vouchers. Since 2009, Massachusetts has maintained 28 vouchers for the transition age youth. Outreach staff is assigned to work with each recipient to support them with educational pursuits, money management, employment, housing and other needs that may arise. The young adults must be eligible for Chafee funding; however, they do not have to be in the voluntary care of DCF.

*Youth Transitioning to Success Program (YTTSP)*

The Department of Housing and Community Development and DCF partnered to develop the Youth Transitioning to Success Program (YTTSP) following feedback from focus groups of young adults who participated in the Family Unification Program (FUP) for transition age youth as well as input from DCF Outreach staff. This program was implemented in 2011 and expanded in 2017. Some of the features are subsidized rent; a special needs account for approved emergency expenses as well as an escrow account to assist youth to save for the future. The participants are required to be enrolled in a post-secondary degree program/vocational training program and to work at least 12 hours weekly. YTTSP also includes assigned DCF Adolescent Outreach workers to assist the young adults with managing the responsibilities of money management, education, employment and housing. This year the program served 22 young adults.

In the coming months, in collaboration with DHCD, DCF will be revisiting the MOU to determine if eligibility criteria can be expanded in order to serve additional youth. Funding, staffing, and consideration of the benefits and challenges of model of care will be reviewed before making any changes to the program.

**Youth/Young Adult and Stakeholder Involvement in the CFSP**

The Joint Youth Advisory Committee, which includes members of the DCF Youth Advisory Board, participated in focus groups and included the Massachusetts CFSP in the agendas of their spring 2019 meetings. Feedback was also solicited from the Massachusetts Network of Foster Care Alumni and the Massachusetts Financial Aid Advisory Board as well as current and former foster parents of adolescents and young adults. Current Adolescent Outreach Workers and Outreach Supervisors staffed via Chafee also provided feedback via a focus group. In all groups all Chafee programs and ETV were discussed and NYTD data was presented. Support for the Adolescent Outreach Program was consistently present in all discussions as was the common understanding of the need for permanent family connections. Consumer youth, young adults, and the professionals that serve them from external organizations and schools felt Outreach and permanency work are critical services for the transition age youth population.

The Massachusetts Financial Aid Advisory Board provided critical feedback about engaging a larger amount of on campus professionals from a greater variety of disciplines. Financial Aid and student support professionals may be engaged, but the group felt that there were many more professionals on campus that could be helpful to students and that the agency should expand its work around connecting with these stakeholders.

The Massachusetts Network of Foster Care Alumni quarterly board meeting in March 2019 was dedicated to the review of Chafee programs that are available and the Department’s future plans to support youth through the programs. The board members and other attendees provided feedback about engaging youth in services and connecting the work of skill development to permanency work happening in various areas of a youth/young adult’s case. The group provided a variety of ideas to strengthen the pipeline of youth and young adults in care to join the Network for continued support as they leave care. The group also focused much of its discussion on advising about ways to strengthen job readiness and mentoring opportunities through Chafee funded programs. Regarding ETV, the group felt that the multiple resources available for post secondary funding were an asset to the state and should be protected via communication and advocacy.

Youth Advisory Board Members provided valuable feedback about employment and internship initiatives as well. They requested that the stipend for the Chafee funded Internship Program of $8 an hour be increased, as the minimum wage in Massachusetts is now $12 an hour. Youth would like the opportunity to practice job skills in as small a timeframe as over one weekend or alternatively take an internship that would otherwise be unpaid for the entire summer. As a result, the Internship program will increase its stipend to $10 an hour. In addition, the program will become more flexible and it will increase the ability for youth to participate in more or less than the average 40 hours. Greater emphasis will be put on developing and supporting mentoring relationships within these internship placements.

The Youth Advisory Board Members felt that Outreach Workers helped them the most by assisting them with system navigation. They felt that as young adults they experience multiple systems and agencies and that without the help of a professional, they would not be as successful in their living situations, jobs, and academic programs. Members also expressed deep appreciation for the presence and support of their foster parents and recognized the support they provide not just in times of need but in times of accomplishment as well. The agency will commit to providing foster parents with training and support to understand positive youth development and the impact their presence has on youth as they enter young adulthood. Youth and young adult presence and participation as trainers at foster and adoptive parent training (MAPP) will continue to be supported by the Department to address positive youth development.

Other critical feedback was that youth would like to be able to participate in the Discharge Support Program beyond age 21. Students who are receiving ETV are now able to receive support until age 26 if needed. For those young adults who are working and not going to school and leaving care over age 21, assistance with housing start- up costs are crucial. Youth have also indicated that furnishing a dorm or new apartment is a hardship when leaving a foster home. As a result of this feedback the Department will add a new type of incentive to the PAYA program noted in Services section below.

As a result of this feedback Massachusetts is seeking to extend Chafee funding to age 23 in the Commonwealth. Due to the increased focus on supporting young adults beyond age 21, the Adolescent Services Unit will be renamed, the Adolescent and Young Adult Services Unit. All written materials including e-newsletters that are distributed to college students and adolescent care providers, as well as all training materials and the DCF website will be updated to reflect the change the eligibility criteria.

**CFCIP Services Across the State**

The following services are funded with the Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transitions to Adulthood funds and are available to eligible youth and young adults across the Commonwealth. In area offices where there is not an Adolescent Outreach worker assigned, the Regional Outreach Supervisor will provide the access to Chafee funded services and supports.

The Chafee funded services are the same in each of the 5 regions of the state. The particular focus of the services is based on the individual youth/young adult’s needs. Former foster youth ages 18-21 are offered the same Chafee services as those under age 18. Former foster youth who leave DCF care after attaining age 18 may access Outreach services and other Chafee Program funded services, i.e. internships, discharge support, assistance with educational services. The Department is committed to staffing more rural areas with Outreach. In the past twelve months, two rural area offices, Cape Cod and the Islands, and Berkshire Area offices have been staffed with Outreach Workers. A goal of the program is to meet the needs of youth who may not have transportation, employment, or education readily available to them due to their living in remote areas.

**NYTD**

Massachusetts utilizes a contractor to survey youth who have left care and Adolescent Outreach Workers to survey youth who are in DCF care in out of home placement. Massachusetts has met the compliance standards of NYTD since the implementation of the program. The staff that participates with the NYTD effort, the Youth Advisory Boards, agency management team members and other stakeholders have been apprised of the review schedule as well as reported outcomes. Other notable activities are below.

* DCF has shared the NYTD data with statewide managers and executive leadership to continue assessment of the implementation of the Permanency Planning Policy and our efforts to support permanency, life skills development, and safety for all foster youth. Discussions continue regarding all the data components of the survey.
* DCF has shared the NYTD survey outcomes and information with the Massachusetts Network of Foster Care Alumni, the Joint Youth Advisory Committee, and local Area Boards. Discussions continue on strategies to maintain focus and positive outcomes for permanency, education, employment readiness/work experience and overall well-being for our foster youth.
* NYTD outcome data has been shared with members of the Youth Advisory Boards since the initial data was available. At the 2018 Youth Leadership Academy, Youth Advisory Board Members reported on the experience of participating in the survey process as well as on ideas to engage more out of care youth to take the survey.
* DCF has continued its effort to improve NYTD data collection using a variety of opportunities such as provider meetings and internal agency forums to inform and remind staff, foster parents and providers of the importance of assisting the agency in accessing the youth/young adults to administer the surveys. Outcome data has been shared and discussed at these meetings and forums.
* In September 2018 DCF made two technological upgrades to its NYTD survey process.   In the first, a link to the NYTD survey was made more easily accessible via the [www.mass.gov](http://www.mass.gov) website as part of its overall improvement plan.    Second, the NYTD survey was ported over into DCF’s web-based case management application, i-Familynet.  This change made it possible for Adolescent Outreach Workers and other staff to enter NYTD surveys from their state-issued iPads or other mobile devices, increasing the number of surveys recorded.

Outcome data from the NYTD surveys is regularly shared with Massachusetts stakeholders including court personnel. Efforts are underway to ensure the two Massachusetts tribes are fully aware of what NYTD data is showing regarding how Massachusetts foster youth are faring into young adulthood Data shared with internal management and external stakeholders includes the following:

Highlights of Survey Responses of 218 Young Adults Turing Age 21 in FY2015

* 90% of the young adults responded that they had at least one adult in their lives (other than their DCF social worker) to whom they could go to for advice and emotional support;
* 50% of the young adults reported that they were enrolled in an educational program;
* 29% of the young adults reported that they had a part-time job;
* 18% of the young adults reported that they had a full-time job;
* 16% of the young adults reported that they were receiving Social Security payments;
* 34% of the young adults reported they had an experience of homelessness in the past two years

NYTD data has been particularly helpful with recent efforts to assist the housing and homelessness provider community to develop programs and care models geared toward transition age youth. Massachusetts is currently above the national average for youth from care experiencing episodes of housing/homelessness. Program development is underway across the state to better serve former foster youth with housing resources (noted in housing section).

Future plans for NYTD utilization data includes creating a parallel data focus for youth/young adults who have received intensive Adolescent Outreach services to determine how this particular service may impact the outcomes measured through NYTD.

**Youth at Various stages**

Since 2017, Massachusetts has regularly revisited permanency efforts made on behalf of adolescents in care. While serving these youth with transition services starting at age 14 per the Department’s Permanency Planning Policy, the Department is also looking at reviewing permanency goals and permanency efforts for youth 14 and older who are freed for adoption but unmatched and youth 15 and older who have a plan goal of APPLA or have a plan goal that may be changed to APPLA in the near future. Concurrent efforts and planning are taking place for this group of adolescents. In 2019 staff will be trained to conduct Permanency Roundtables. When Roundtables begin, this cohort of youth will be prioritized to receive the service. In addition to permanency services, adolescents as young as 14 years old are able to access Chafee funded life skills support, PAYA incentive, and internship programs.

From July 2018 to April 2019, the Outreach staff served 1209 youth and young adults. Of these, 438 youth and young adults received or are presently receiving intensive, weekly-individualized life skill assessment to identify their strengths, life skills training to address their needs, as well as assistance in developing and strengthening lifelong connections to caring adults. These services support the youth in mastering the skills they will need to live successfully in the community upon discharge from agency care. The other 771 youth and young adults received assistance from Outreach staff to assist with job search, education, financial aid/college applications, housing support, MassHealth applications, and referral/resource information. A goal of the program is to increase the annual amount of youth and young adults served by 10% by the year 2021.

The Outreach Program focuses its work with youth/young adults in Departmental foster care, kinship care, those who are receiving Young Adult Support Payments and youth eligible for guardianship/adoption. Contracts require that youth/young adults in Comprehensive Foster Care or congregate care be provided similar life skill preparatory services in their placements. To avoid duplication of services, the Outreach workers generally do not work intensively with youth while they are in these placements unless a social worker specifically requests the additional support. Also, per Chafee Program guidelines, youth/young adults who received initially decline services may return for intensive or short-term focused services at any time prior to age 21.

Generally, youth/young adults are referred to the Outreach Program by the primary case managing social worker. Outreach workers also identify prospective clients by reviewing a report of youth in placement provided by the DCF Office of Management, Planning, and Analysis. The average age of youth receiving Outreach weekly service is 18 years old. The weekly intensive model focuses primarily on the needs of youth/young adults ages 16 and older for two reasons: present staffing levels would not currently support the expansion of services to youth ages 14 and 15 and youth in those age brackets are typically a better fit for contact Outreach support and other departmental programming. However, the Outreach staffs do serve 15-year-olds when the program may meet their needs. The PAYA life skills curriculum, Life Skills Support, and Employment programs are available to all youth in DCF placements age 14 and older.

Eligibility for Chafee-funded services remain the same for youth/young adults whether they are open with DCF for placement, former foster youth who left DCF after attaining age 18 or left DCF placement after age 16 for guardianship or adoption. The referrals to the Outreach Program for the youth in guardianship or adoptions are less frequent, though there are currently three such consumers being served on the active caseload.

Given the changes to Chafee language, Adolescent Outreach Workers will be supported to provide greater outreach to caregivers of younger adolescents to ensure they have access to all appropriate programming. The age of recipients of each program will be collected as a data point and reported.

**Collaboration with Other Private and Public Agencies**

* DCF maintains its participation in the New England Youth Collaborative – a regional youth group dedicated to improving the services/resources and outcomes for foster youth. Each New England state has 2 youth representatives and adult supporters. This year the group has been working on methods for strategic sharing and the Driving to Success Program advocating for support for foster youth to receive a driver’s license.
* The Massachusetts Network of Foster Care Alumni, initiated and funded through DCF, has grown into a vital partner to DCF and the youth and young adults from foster care. Its purpose is to illuminate the diverse needs of alumni of foster care in the state by advocating for appropriate services and supports, by promoting a healthy peer community, and by developing opportunities for service and leadership. Each year the membership grows and the activities expand across the state providing foster care alumni many opportunities to connect with one another and benefit from the community of support. The NFCA has engaged the City of Boston to establish foster care awareness week in May 2019.
* DCF Adolescent Outreach works collaboratively with the state Department of Mental Health (DMH) to facilitate access to services for youth and young adults.  A new initiative that the Department has been involved with is the Transition Age Youth and Young Adults System of Care Access Initiative (TSAI) Grant. The TSAI grant goal is to increase access for transition age youth & young adults (ages 16-21) to mental health and substance use treatment on their own terms, in service of their own goals. The priorities of this grant include promoting policies and practices that best support the needs of young adults, developing low barrier referrals and enhancing young adult connections to employment, education & housing and amplifying young adults’ voice Statewide; while using culturally relevant approaches to engage youth of color & LGBTQ young adults.
* DCF continues its collaboration with the state Department of Housing and Community Development to manage the Family Unification Program Vouchers (FUP) for housing for transition age youth and the newer program, the Youth Transitioning to Success Program (YTTSP).
* The collaboration between the DCF and the MassHealth has supported Massachusetts’ utilization of the federal Chafee Provision allowing states to provide Medicaid coverage for youth who discharge from placement at or after age 18. This benefit is provided up until their 21st birthday without re-application. DCF and MassHealth have been working to facilitate the continuation of Medicaid coverage to eligible young adults so that they do not experience a gap in coverage from “in placement” Mass Health to their adult Medicaid benefit (up to 26). DCF now employs medical social workers to assist with care coordination.
* DCF Adolescent Services staff members have continued to work collaboratively with staff at the Department of Higher Education, the state universities, and the 2-year public colleges as well as the staff of the campuses of the University of MA. These collaborations have been very helpful in resolving issues on behalf of our shared students. DCF has continued its presence on campuses and work in partnership with higher education (in the areas of support services, financial aid, registrar, etc.) to enhance the availability of and access to needed resources for our students.

* DCF also works closely with the state Department of Transitional Assistance to assist transition-age youth access SNAP benefits and Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) for parents whose children are not in the custody/care of DCF and may qualify.
* DCF works collaboratively with the state Department of Mental Health (DMH) and the Department of Public Health (DPH) to facilitate access to services for youth and young adults with mental health and/or substance abuse histories. The Department's Caring Together Initiative allows DCF to contract for congregate care and support services jointly with DMH. DCF has also extended this partnership model to contracting for comprehensive foster care with the Department of Youth Services.
* DCF Adolescent Outreach Workers are continuing their communications with local housing and homeless care providers in an effort to identify any young adults who may qualify for DCF and/or Chafee services. Outreach workers reach out to local shelter programs to ask staff to call them if they identify a young adult who identifies as a former foster youth. Our goal is to connect with the young adult to offer Outreach services and other services as appropriate.
* DCF’s 29 Education Coordinators are affiliated with each of our geographical area offices to provide assistance, training and support to workers and families for all education and special education related concerns that impact our children and youth. Their focus includes school enrollment, transportation coordination with districts, school engagement and supporting transitions for youth who are hospitalized or returning from congregate care placements. They fulfill a critical role in fostering educational stability and progress for our youth.
* DCF Outreach Program staff members have continued their efforts to strengthen connections with Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funded agencies and career centers with the goal of accessing services and supports for our foster youth. Targeted outreach to foster youth for summer job hiring continues.
* DCF’s partnership with a large local business, Jordan’s Furniture, has grown significantly over the last five years. In an effort to support youth moving into their first apartments, Jordan’s Furniture provides gift cards so the youth can buy furniture.
* DCF and it’s partner, Jordan’s Furniture host the Youth Achievement Celebration honoring youth who graduated from high school, college, a vocational training program or received a GED. More than 450 graduates and their guests celebrate their educational achievements, and share food, activities and a movie. The graduates are also given gifts to commemorate their accomplishments. The DCF Regions will also hold local celebrations for their graduates during the months of May and June at local venues.
* The MA Department of Youth Services (juvenile justice) and DCF have continued the collaboration to identify transitioning youth connected with both agencies that are eligible for Chafee and/or state-funded resources. In April 2019, DCF partnered with DYS and other youth serving agencies to present a transition age resource workshop at a conference provided by MASOC (Massachusetts Society of a World Free of Sexual Harm by Youth). Chafee funds are made available to eligible youth who have experienced care and placement in both systems. DCF plans to ensure child welfare representation at this annual conference in order to reach provider and court personnel.
* More than 200 foster youth, foster/adoptive parents, providers and staff attended this year’s statewide College and Career Expo on April 17, 2019. Attendees learn about the opportunities of post-secondary education as well as the state and federal financial support available. Representatives from more than 30 colleges and post-secondary educational programs attended along with a representative from the Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority and the Massachusetts Education and Career Opportunities, Inc. In an effort to also engage potential employers of youth, included in this year’s expo were the The U.S. Census Bureau, Armstrong Ambulance Company, and Building Pathways to Boston, a program that connects women to professional trades.
* DCF staff collaborates with Ascentria Care Alliance and provides ongoing training in order for the staff to assist DCF youth who have immigration/refugee status with post-secondary education need and life skill development needs.
* Adolescent Outreach staff collaborates with local Workforce Investment Boards in the Southern Northern, and Greater Boston Regions of Massachusetts. A goal of the Department is to engage WIA services in all regions of the state.

**Determining Eligibility**

On a monthly basis, the Adolescent Outreach staffs review a report of youth and young adults in DCF placement in order to identify eligible consumers. Young adults who apply for services after discharge from care are able to attain services through Adolescent Services Unit staff members. These staffs have access to cases through the Department’s i-family net data system and can be checked for eligibility through that system. Youth who are temporarily living out of state are not denied services solely for that reason.

**Cooperation in National Evaluations**

Massachusetts DCF participated in the first round of the National Evaluation of CFCIP Programs and continues to lend technical support and availability to evaluation efforts.

**Training and Technical Assistance**

The staffs of the Adolescent Support Services Unit have continued to provide focused training to new staff and technical assistance to staff, providers and foster parents to strengthen understanding and effective practice with transition age youth. These opportunities for training and technical assistance will continue. The following is a list of the trainings offered jointly by the Massachusetts Child Welfare Training Institute and the DCF Adolescent Services Unit in the past 18 months. The Department’s plan to is to incorporate these trainings as regular professional development opportunities.

* *Transition Planning for Supervisors with Adolescents in Out of Home Placement -* This training helps supervisors to support social workers to work with youth to create and document effective transition plans in accordance with Permanency Planning Policy. Utilizing the Young Adult Readiness Assessment Tool, PAYA services, and accessing youth development services and funds available to youth and young adults are reviewed.
* *Young Adult Support Payments -* Social Workers gain skills to support youth who receive young adult support payments to budget and maximize their housing resources.
* *Permanency and the Young Adult -* This training helps social workers and supervisors understand permanency goals including APPLA and how to continue to pursue permanency for older adolescents and young adults in care.
* *PAYA for DCF staff –* In this training, DCF staff gains a deeper understanding of the PAYA curriculum and its role in transition planning. Agency expectations for congregate care and foster care service providers are reviewed and care providers learn how to identify effective life skills training work and engage youth and their caregivers in the work practice.
* *Foster Youth and Post-Secondary Attainment -* This training focused on the basics of the college planning process as well as alternative paths such as vocational training and certification. Information related to academic and social-emotional planning as well as financial aid and financial literacy for post-secondary students are reviewed.
* On a regular basis, Adolescent Services staff provided life skills and youth development trainings statewide. There were seven PAYA certification trainings (teaching participants how to teach youth life skills) across the state this year and three trainings on supporting foster youth in post- secondary education. All DCF staff, contracted agencies, appropriate other state agencies, community partners, and foster parents are invited to attend these trainings. The agency will continue to plan to offer 10 trainings a year in these areas.
* Outreach staffs issue a newsletter for professionals and supporters of college-age foster youth. The publication includes training opportunities and dates as well as resource and referral information for professionals supporting youth in post-secondary education.

**Consultation with Tribes (section 477(b)(3)(G)**

Adolescent Outreach in the Southeast Region continues to provide support and consultation on issues related to transition age youth to the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe and the Aquinnah Wampanoag Tribe. Both tribes have dedicated staff that serve as contacts for transition age youth and the Adolescent Outreach staff that serve them. Training and consultation on Chafee funded services including the availability of Adolescent Outreach is made available to Tribe serving professionals and Tribal youth in placement. In 2018 the ICWA Director of the Mashpee Wampanog Tribe communicated with DCF that there were no immediate plans to access Chafee funds this year. DCF regularly checks in with both tribes, a May 2019 meeting is planned with the Aquinnah Wampanoag Tribe so new staff are fully informed about the Chafee funded programming at DCF. Updated referral forms and applications are regularly made available to tribal staff that assist the transition age population. Where utilization of Chafee funded programs is very low by Tribes in Massachusetts, communication among youth serving professionals in the Tribes and DCF is very strong.

**EDUCATION AND TRAINING VOUCHER PROGRAM**

The ETV program in Massachusetts reaches close to 500 students each year, maximizing its budget and helping young adults from foster care attain post secondary education. The ETV application in Massachusetts requires an accompanying tuition bill and financial aid award letter from the student’s school in order to ensure that a student’s ETV award does not exceed the cost of attendance. An account of all awards made to individual students is maintained by the Commonwealth to ensure no student is able to access ETV for more than 5 academic years and to ensure no student is awarded more than $5,000 in any one academic year. DCF is able to provide an unduplicated number of ETV’s that are awarded each academic year (see chart below). Chafee funds are used for two staff that are dedicated to coordinating ETV’s and supporting youth in post secondary education.

The activities below have been found to be successful and will thus continue as part of the ETV program:

* In an effort to serve more students and to respond to feedback provided by ETV recipients, Education and Training Specialists held individual meetings with students and their social workers. In addition to these private consultations, 12 college advising events were held on 9 campuses this past academic year. Students from foster care were served through these events via attending an advising day, meeting privately with ETV Social Workers or through advocacy on their behalf to college financial aid or student support personnel. Students were assisted with financial planning, housing, academic progress and social/emotional needs. Group advising also provided an opportunity for interested students to meet peer mentors from foster care who attend the same academic institutions.
* The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has developed a Single Point of Contact Network (SPOC) on college campuses. These individuals are staff volunteers from varying departments on college campuses that will work with students at risk of not completing school due to challenges that are not academic in nature. Together DCF staff and the campus SPOCs assist foster youth with needed support and resources. DCF staff trained SPOCS and guidance counselors from across the state on supports services and programs offered through DCF to guide post-secondary students on sustaining their education and establishing lifelong connections in their community.
* Education and Training Specialists work closely with MA Educational Finance Authority (MEFA) and offer training through a webinar to MA guidance counselors on post-secondary education. This training included financial planning, choosing the right school, academic guidance, sustaining their education, campus resources, and establishing permanency through the campus community. Counselors were provided with contacts at the Department of Children and Families and given information on how to access the DCF educational support programs.
* Education and Training specialists collaborated with the Wellness Center and clinicians at Bridgewater State University to promote well-being for foster youth on campus. Together the team discussed strategies on increasing access to mental health services, medical needs, as well as life skills and creating campus connections. DCF Education and Training Specialist and staff members from the Wellness center work together to promote positive youth development and self-awareness for youth on campus creating opportunities to participate in different housing, employment, clubs and organizations on campus through advising.  Bridgewater State University currently has 53 students from foster care enrolled in their Bachelor’s program.
* DCF continues to publish a newsletter for ETV student recipients to invite input from college students and educates readers on resources and events geared toward post-secondary success.

Guidance from the Youth Advisory Board members and DCF college students will continue to be solicited to ensure the information is relevant to the needs of the students and presented in a manner that will engage students.

**State Funded Post Secondary Education Programs**

*Foster Child Tuition and Fee Waiver Program*

The Foster Child Tuition and Fee Waiver Program provide waivers for undergraduate tuition and fees for state-supported classes at the in-state rate to foster children at any one of Massachusetts' 29 state universities and community colleges. Initially approved by the Board of Higher Education in June of 2000 for tuition waivers, this program was expanded to include fees in July of 2008. Youth eligible for the state college undergraduate or certificate tuition and fee waivers include:

* A current or former foster child who was placed in the custody of the DCF and remained in custody through age 18 without subsequently being returned home. The youth must have been in custody for at least six months immediately prior to age 18;
* Youth adopted through DCF; and
* Youth who have been in the custody of the DCF and whose guardianship was sponsored by DCFs through age 18.

*Massachusetts Foster Child Grant Program*

The Foster Child Grant Program was developed in January 2001 and provides up to $6000 of financial aid for current and former DCF youth (in custody via a C&P) who have left care at age 18 or older without returning home. This aid may be used at any IV- E eligible public or private college. The MA Board of Higher Education manages these grants, determining the level of funding per student**.**

*William Warren Scholarship Program*

The Department issued five William Warren Scholarships this year to youth served by the agency who were attending four-year colleges and who demonstrated need beyond financial support programs available at the state and federal level. These scholarships were financed with donated funds and nominally by the State Ward account. Many of the youth who apply for the program are also eligible for the Massachusetts Tuition and Fee Waiver and other higher education support programs such as ETV. Applicants who qualify for other forms of student aid are supported by DCF workers to access such aid.

*Hope Worldwide Dr. Martin Luther King Essay Contest*

DCF has continued its partnership with Hope Worldwide, an agency that sponsors an essay contest annually to celebrate the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King. College students from foster care are invited to compete in an essay contest where they reflect on their public service. More than $3500 in scholarships was awarded to foster youth enrolled in college. The winners were honored at a service dedicated to Dr. King.

The ETV Program funding is particularly helpful to the DCF foster youth who were not in protective custody (as they are not presently eligible for the state-funded Foster Child Grant) and to those youth who were adopted from foster care or youth who were placed in a guardianship with kin after attaining age 16. The ETV Program has provided significant post-secondary assistance to eligible foster and adopted youth and has assisted them with making more manageable and safer transitions to adult living.

Annual Reporting of State Education and Training Vouchers Awarded

Name of State: Massachusetts

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Final Number: | **Total ETVs Awarded** | **Number of New ETVs** |
| **2017-2018 School Year**(July 2016 to June 2017) | 481 | 226 |
| **2018-2019 School Year** | 493 | 239 |

 \*Number of vouchers awarded as of May 2019.