

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

AMONG

THE DELAWARE STATE HOUSING AUTHORITY

THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION

THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

THE DEPARTMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND THEIR FAMILIES

I. PURPOSE

Youth who age out of foster care face many challenges in achieving self-sufficiency. Many experience physical or mental health issues, which will have a life-long impact on their ability to lead productive and stable lives. It remains vitally important that the state ensures services are effectively coordinated among agencies and that funding is used as efficiently as possible.

The federal government through the enactment of the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program and the Fostering Connections and Increasing Adoptions Act directs that states should provide financial, housing, medical, employment, training, and other appropriate supports to young adults between the ages of 18 and 21 exiting foster care to increase their opportunities to successfully transition to adulthood.

The Cabinet Secretaries of the Delaware State Housing Authority (DSHA), Department of Correction (DOC), Department of Education (DOE), Department of Labor (DOL), Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families (DSCYF), will work together to better coordinate efforts and resources to address the comprehensive needs of foster care youth. With better coordination and shared responsibility existing supports and available funding will be utilized more effectively to address the needs of this relatively small, yet incredibly vulnerable population.

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II. AUTHORITY

1. Department of Services for Children, Youth & Their Families (DSCYF)

As required by Title 29 Del. C. Ch. 90 § 9006, Title 16 Del. C. Ch. 9 § 901, and Title 31 Del C § 302, DSCYF shall take necessary action and provide comprehensive protective services for abused and neglected children. The child protection system seeks and promotes the safety of children who are the subject of child abuse and neglect reports.

2. Delaware State Housing Authority (DSHA)

As required by Title 31 Del. C. Ch. 40 § 4002, DSHA shall:

- Efficiently provide, and assist others to provide, quality affordable housing opportunities and appropriate supportive services to responsible low- and moderate-income Delawareans;
- Coordinate the housing and redevelopment activities of state agencies and other public agencies; and
- Encourage persons and families benefiting from housing-related services to become economically self-sufficient by assisting in the delivery of social, educational and other supportive services and programs.

3. Department of Corrections (DOC)

As required by 11 Del. C. §6502(a), the Department of Corrections is established to provide for the treatment, rehabilitation and restoration of offenders as useful, law-abiding citizens within the community. To achieve these purposes more effectively in a coordinated and united manner, the Department is completely responsible for the maintenance, supervision and administration of adult, as well as juvenile to adult detention and correctional services and facilities of the State, which include institutional facilities & programs of the State, as well as probation and parole services.

4. Department of Education (DOE)

As required by Title 14 Del C. Ch 2 §202(c), are afforded protection and support under the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvement Act. Title 14 DE Admin Code 901 further clarifies support educational support under McKinney-Vento. Title 14 DE Admin Codes 910 and 915 govern education options for students choosing to complete their secondary outside of their school/district.

5. Department of Labor (DOL)

In addition to statutory requirements as defined in Title 19, Chapters 1-35 directing the Department to establish and protect the rights of the state's employed and unemployed population, the Department of Labor consistently seeks to develop relationships and programs with federal funding agencies, local community agencies, and the business community to develop training, apprenticeship and employment opportunities for unemployed and underemployed Delawareans.

Through the federally-mandated activities of the Delaware Workforce Investment Board such as the Youth Council, as well as activities such as the Mobile One-Stop, and existing training and apprenticeship programs which currently exist between DOL and DSCYF, DOL will continue to coordinate with DSCYF, and DOE programs to ensure maximum training activities and employability opportunities for this population of youth aging out of foster care.

6. Department of Health & Social Services (DHSS)

DHSS provides services to all Delawareans as set forth in Title 16 of the Delaware Code. DHSS will provide services to youth aging out of foster care in a manner that will facilitate and empower individuals and communities to gain healthy outcomes, both in physical wellness and emotional well being; gain economic self sufficiency, which will eliminate or limit long term reliance on government, and to protect and support those citizens most vulnerable due to issues such as advanced age, neglect, poverty, and disabilities, and produce positive outcomes for the individuals we serve.

III. RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Interdepartmental Recommendations

A. Exchange of information as permitted by law and training by DOL, DHSS, DOE and the Housing Authorities with DSCYF and contract agencies to ensure providers are fully aware of the resources available to this population through the agencies within those Departments.

2. The Delaware State Housing Authority

Housing is one of the most pressing needs for youth exiting foster care. The demand for affordable and safe housing choices outpaces supply leading to lengthy waiting lists. To be successful, these youth need to transition from foster care into affordable housing coupled with intensive case-management services. Stable housing is essential to the youth's success in every other area.

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- A. It is imperative that the preservation of existing housing units remain a top priority during these challenging economic times. Expansion to meet the actual need should be examined when economic circumstances improve.
- B. DSHA has allocated 30 rental assistance vouchers under the Family Unification program and will maintain and seek to expand this base level of assistance so long as there is a demand for the vouchers and federal funds remain available.
- C. DSHA created the Step-Up program as a pilot program to demonstrate how state funding could be used to assist former foster youth with rental assistance. While the program has been a success DSHA will work with DSCYF and DHSS to explore creating an expanded state rental assistance program.
- D. DSHA will work with the public housing authorities, non-profits, and other state agencies to seek increased federal funding to expand the availability of the state-wide continuum of low-income housing options. The availability of housing opportunities that are supported with a strong case management component should be considered a necessity for youth ages 18-21 that age out of foster care.
- E. DSHA already allows for youth as young as 16 years of age to register themselves on its waiting lists for subsidized housing. DSHA will help to coordinate with other housing authorities in Delaware and encourage them to adopt similar waiting list policies.

3. The Department of Correction

DOC ensures Chaffee eligible incarcerated youth receive Independent Living skills preparation through DOC.

4. The Department of Education

One of the major goals of the Delaware Department of Education is to ensure that students are college and/or career-ready. The Department will engage districts/schools in collaboration with other agencies to help students overcome barriers to their success in achieving life goals. Special emphasis will be placed on supporting foster care students who are in DSCYF care to ensure all educational plans are in place before they leave foster care services.

- A. DDOE will coordinate with DFS staff to ensure identification of students in foster care paying specific attention to those students who will “age-out” of care.

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- B. DDOE will provide training to schools/districts on the issues surrounding students in foster care to include sensitivity to the special needs of students who are about to exit DSCYF care.
- C. DDOE will ensure students have a 5-year plan called Student Success Plan.
- D. DDOE will provide professional development and information to DFS caseworkers on enrollment/registration of foster care students, how to access and participate in the Student Success Plans, how to access the Parent Access Center, how to participate in school conferences and course selection, and other issues as requested by DSCYF.
- E. DSCYF and DOE will work together to create options that will address individual needs of foster children aging out of care while preparing them for a 21st Century workforce and post-secondary education
 - 1. For those students not returning to local district schools, DSCYF and DOE/Adult Education will collaborate to ensure that these youth have information pertaining to the completion of their secondary education through the Adult Education system. This includes students who are participating in YRS activities. The Adult Education system has flexible instructional delivery formats that can accommodate work and family needs scheduling while allowing students to attain the GED or diploma necessary for entry into post-secondary education and/or training opportunities.
 - a. Students who choose not to complete their secondary studies in their local districts can enter Adult Education services. These students will follow the regulations stated in Title 14 of the Delaware Administrative Code, 900 and 915.
 - i. Be at least 16 years of age.
 - ii. Have formally exited the K-12 system as evidenced through documentation citing the student's exit from his/her local school district.
 - iii. Submit required applications.
 - iv. Student placement within an Adult Basic Education (ABE) Program or a James H. Groves Adult High School will be determined by student achievement scores in Math or Reading recorded on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE).

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1. Students scoring below a 567 in Reading and/or 565 in Math will be placed in the appropriate level of ABE instruction in preparation for GED testing.
 2. Students scoring 567 in Reading and/or 566 in Math will be placed in Groves Adult High School courses in order to accumulate the credits necessary for attainment of their diploma or in pre-GED classes leading to GED attainment.
 - b. Information regarding community Adult Education programs will be provided to case managers including locations and contact numbers for Adult Education registration and orientation process.
 - c. Presentations will be conducted as needed to acquaint DSCYF staff with the various programs available through Adult Education.
 2. ABE and Groves courses will be available to eligible DSCYF/Youth Rehabilitative clients (Ferris, Detention Centers, and Cleveland White School students) through services provided by the Delaware Center for Distance Adult Learning (DCDAL). These services will include orientation, assessment, and virtual instruction in pursuit of a GED or a high school diploma.
 3. Upon release from DSCYF/Youth Rehabilitative Services, information regarding Adult Education services available in the community will be provided to students. Since the Adult Education placement and progress monitoring system is uniform throughout the state, academic records will be transferred to the community provider for continuation of studies in accordance with the Delaware Adult Education Assessment Policy.
5. The Department of Labor

Prior to turning 18, foster care youth are given the opportunity to develop basic employment skills. When they exit care, they must quickly become financially self-sufficient. Despite this fact, nearly 60 percent of youth leaving Delaware's foster care have not participated in an apprenticeship, internship, or other employment-training program within the past six months.

- A. DFS and DOL will coordinate to seek funding to develop a job coaching program for the youth who go directly into the job market rather than

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continuing their education or training. Due to limited options, efforts should be made to ensure that youth with juvenile criminal records are eligible for these programs.

B. Partnerships between DSCYF, DOL and businesses will be established to develop job shadowing and training opportunities specifically for this population.

C. Recommendation for DSCYF:

1. DFS should ensure that all 17 year old foster youth participate in an employment preparation program so that they exit care with at least basic “soft” employment skills. Young adults should not be allowed to emancipate from their care without this preparation.

6. The Department of Health and Social Services

A. Health Care

Because foster youth must re-apply for Medicaid benefits when they age out of care, this population can experience breaks in health coverage that may result in significant ramifications. They incur huge medical expenses or refuse to seek treatment because of lack of coverage. They may be prevented from getting a mental health evaluation required for a housing program, and/or lose mental health or substance abuse treatment during a critical phase in their lives.

1. DHSS will work with DSCYF to maintain uninterrupted Medicaid or other health coverage for eligible members of this population until age 21.

B. Teen Parenting

Despite available resources through schools and community, too many youth exit care without basic knowledge regarding pregnancy prevention and safe sex practices. Many foster youth would benefit from an individualized approach to sexual education: one that takes into consideration their unique needs (developmental disabilities, previous sexual abuse, etc.). Alarming, national research indicates that over 70 percent of female youth aging-out of foster care become pregnant by age 21 (more than three times the national average of non-foster care youth).

C. Interdepartmental Recommendation:

1. DFS should work with DHSS to develop and implement a family planning curriculum that addresses the unique needs of this population. This program should be provided to youth in care as young as 14 years of age.

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2. Prior to exiting care DFS should supplement basic sexual education provided by schools to ensure each youth has the understanding and knowledge to make good choices after exiting care.
 3. DFS should ensure that every youth has a mental health evaluation (with Axis 1-4 diagnosis) completed during their 17th year.
7. Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families
- A. DFS will ensure that case workers are involved in the educational planning of students in their care. This would include, but not be limited to, enrolling and registering; viewing and approving Student Success Plans; reviewing information in the Parent Access Center; attending schools conferences/meetings related to academic success and course selection; and requesting the appointment of an Educational Surrogate Parent for students with special education needs.

IV. CONFIDENTIALITY

It is understood that information exchanged by any Department or respective Division shall be restricted to youth record reports and documents clearly pertinent to the youth's needs or indicated problems. Any information exchanged shall only be used to facilitate efficient and timely evaluation, the provision of services and/or resolution of the youth's needs. Each Department or respective Division assures that the confidential character of exchanged information will be preserved and, under no circumstances will exchanged information be shared with any agency, program or person not party to this agreement without the express written consent of the youth or by the authority of Family Court.

No information in any form can be exchanged about drug or alcohol abuse treatment or sexually transmitted disease information without specific written consent by the individual being served by transitional services under this MOU. Information about HIV testing or HIV status can only be shared with specific consent or if the Division of Family Services holds legal custody of that child.

V. ADMINISTRATION OF MEMORANDUM

Each agency agrees to assign appropriate program staff to serve as the points of contact for the purposes of effective and efficient management of the children and families served under this MOU.

It is expected that these staff will meet on a quarterly basis to ensure that the intent and spirit of this MOU is fully implemented.

MOU Attachments include:

- Attachment 1 – Department Liaison Contact Information

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This agreement is proposed and executed with the greatest spirit of cooperation and desire for client-centered activities. All agencies recognize that certain action steps may be altered based on specific individual's needs.

This Memorandum of Understanding will be reviewed annually.

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Carl C. Danberg, Commissioner
Department of Correction

Rita Landgraf, Secretary
Department of Health and Social Services

Lillian Lowery, Secretary
Department of Education

John McMahan, Secretary
Department of Labor

Vivian Rapposelli, Secretary
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