RISING OUT OF RECESSION
HOW CONNECTICUT CAN SUPPORT YOUNG ADULTS TRANSITIONING OUT OF THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM IN CHALLENGING ECONOMIC TIMES

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Glossary

Administrative Case Review (ACR): The ACR process includes an assessment of a Department of Children and Families (DCF) case, a case plan, and an Administrative Case Review meeting. The ACR meeting is the time when DCF, youth in care, the family, and any other involved parties discuss: (1) reason for involvement; (2) identifying information; (3) engagement with the child and family; (4) assessment to the date of review; (5) determining the goals and objectives; (6) progress; (7) action steps to achieving goals identified; and (8) planning for permanency. Federal law requires ACR meetings to happen once every six months.

Catalyst Team: The Catalyst Team is a group of individuals working together to help young people create transition plans and make successful transitions into independence. The Catalyst Team includes DCF staff, including the youth’s social worker, the social worker’s supervisor, DCF’s educational consultant, and, when appropriate, liaisons with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and/or the Department of Developmental Services and DCF’s Independent Living Coordinator. The Catalyst Team should also include significant others, friends, family members, the young person’s attorney, and in some instances, DCF Youth Ambassadors.

Chafee: The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program provides grants to states to help current youth and young adults in foster care and young adults who have exited foster care achieve self-sufficiency. States may use Chafee dollars to provide programs related to education, employment, financial management, housing, creating connections with stable adults, and overall stability. The program serves youth in foster care between the ages of 14 and 18, young people who were adopted at age 16 or older, and young people between 18 and 21 who have exited the child welfare system.

Coordinated Access Networks (CANS): CANS are a network of community providers across the state of Connecticut that work to provide services to eligible individuals and households experiencing homelessness.

Department of Children and Families (DCF): This is Connecticut’s agency committed to serving the needs of vulnerable children and families. DCF oversees Connecticut’s foster care system, provides services and supports to help minimize the risk of children entering the foster care system, manages Connecticut’s Behavioral Health Plan for Children and behavioral health services, and provides education services for youth involved in Connecticut’s criminal legal system.

Educational and Training Vouchers Program (ETV): The ETV program was created in 2002 and extended the population who could benefit from Chafee. This program provides vouchers to meet young people’s education and training needs as they prepare to transition out of foster care. The program makes vouchers of up to $5,000 per year available to use for postsecondary education and training for eligible youth.

Housing Choice Vouchers: This is the federal government’s primary program for providing very low-income individuals and families with a voucher that can be used toward rent in a single-family home, apartment, or townhouse on the private market.

Literal Homelessness: The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development defines literal
homelessness as having a primary nighttime residence that is not meant for human habitation, living in a shelter designed to provide temporary living arrangements, or living in an institution for fewer than 90 days and having lived in an uninhabitable primary nighttime residence or temporary shelter immediately prior.

**Permanency:** In the child welfare system, permanency refers to reliable relationships that provide young people stability and foster healthy development. Permanency may encompass legal relationships, bi-directional emotional attachments, and cultural/community relationships.

**Rapid Re-Housing Beds:** These are spaces available within Connecticut’s Rapid Re-Housing program designed to help connect individuals and families with medium-term rental assistance and wraparound services to meet other needs that contribute to economic and housing instability. Participants in this program rent scattered-site apartments from private landlords.¹

**Re-Entry:** DCF has made policy adjustments to help ensure that if youth struggle after leaving the department, they have support and opportunities to re-enter DCF care.² First, DCF has an internal policy extending the age at which a young person can re-enter care up to 22 and the age at which a young person can stay in care up to 23. Second, DCF has modified program requirements to provide more latitude for growth and development. For example, instead of focusing on young people spending 40 hours a week in educational or employment-related activities, young people should maintain 40 hours a week (give or take in any given week) “productively.” Productive hours may include a combination of
class, studying, part-time or full-time work, internships, volunteering, apprenticeships, job training, physical or behavioral health treatment, and transportation to any of these activities.

**Unstably Housed:** This term refers to individuals who may imminently lose their housing, live in a temporary housing situation, or lack the funds to obtain or keep permanent housing. Unstably housed individuals and families may be evicted, couch surfing, living in a motel, being discharged from a hospital or other institution, or living in a seriously overcrowded dwelling.

**V.I.T.A.L. Practice Guide:** V.I.T.A.L. is an acronym to summarize the core components of DCF’s model for transitional age youth: Voice & Choice, Innovative, Thorough & Accountable, Authentic Youth Engagement, and Life Launch. The V.I.T.A.L. Guide is a manual of policies and best practices to guide DCF administrators and social workers in supporting transition-aged youth. DCF publicly unrolled this updated guide in August 2021. The V.I.T.A.L. Practice Guide includes policy adjustments to create a softer cushion for when youth make big mistakes. These policies include extending warm touch check-ins after youth leave care, allowing young people to return to care for an extended time, and allowing more flexibility in how young people can meet work and school requirements when they stay in care past age 18. In creating the V.I.T.A.L. Practice Guide, DCF sought to bolster four specific areas of how they care for youth and young adults: improving the collaborative process that allows DCF to understand a youth’s skills and needs, actively integrating these assessments into case planning, enhanced coaching of social workers to support young people better, and improving planning for safe and stable living arrangements.³

**Young adult:** Individuals who have reached the age of majority but may not have reached full developmental maturity. Young adults are young people between the ages of 18 and 26.

**Young person:** The combination of youth and young adults, ages 12-26.

**Youth:** In this paper, youth refers to 16- and 17-year-old young people.

**Youth Count!** Each year, on a single night in January, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development requires states to conduct the Point-In-Time Count. This is an unduplicated count of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness. State housing systems must collect these data annually by counting people experiencing homelessness who are in emergency shelters, transitional housing, and Safe Havens. In addition, systems must count unsheltered people experiencing homelessness at least every other year. Counting and surveying unstably housed youth and young adults is also part of this process, called the Youth Count! The Youth Count! provides information about the number of youth who need housing, where they live, and their needs. The Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness coordinated the Youth Count! and accompanying youth survey in Connecticut. While it’s impossible to count and survey every homeless young person, the Youth Count! provides an estimate of the number of youth who experienced homelessness or unstable housing during a year and the unique needs of those youth. Year-over-year, it finds that young people who have a history of DCF care are disproportionately vulnerable to experience housing instability. Additionally, young people with prior involvement in the criminal justice system, Black and Latinx young people, and LGBTQ+ young people are disproportionately vulnerable to experience housing instability. Many of these identities are intersectional.
INTRODUCTION

Young people face immense barriers during economic recessions, including the COVID-19 pandemic. Young people aging out of foster care and older youth in foster care during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic face the dual challenges of being in State care and experiencing an economic catastrophe. These compounding challenges could negatively impact the life trajectories of youth. Still, strategic policies and targeted programs can help youth aging out of care gain stability during these challenging times.

Young adults transitioning out of foster care have many obstacles to building independent careers and living situations. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic compounds these obstacles. The University of Pennsylvania’s Field Center for Children’s Policy, Practice, and Research surveyed young people in care and young people who recently aged out of care in July of 2020; the findings were disheartening. Across 32 states, 72 percent of youth surveyed reported that they only had enough money to cover one month’s expenses. Forty-eight percent reported being laid off or having unreliable work hours because of the pandemic. Twenty-one percent of youth said they were in a state of financial crisis. Fifty-five percent reported food insecurity. Forty-three percent reported that they had to leave their living situation or feared that they would soon have to leave. Seven percent were couch surfing or homeless.

While many states, Connecticut included, have had programs and mandates in place to help youth in care achieve stability in their housing, employment, and education, COVID-19’s impact on Connecticut and the U.S. is unprecedented in modern memory. States have had to combine existing policy and practices with creative attempts at supporting youth in times that make transitioning unstable. It is crucial that Connecticut policymakers, agencies, and service providers across the state work to build resources and supports for the most vulnerable youth and young adults. After all, when young people enter the foster care system, the State becomes their legal guardian. In Connecticut, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) is the primary child-serving agency. Still, considering DCF the entire child-serving system does a disservice to young people transitioning into adulthood.

To use a metaphor, consider transitioning out of DCF care and into adulthood a bridge. DCF continues working to create a robust and stable bridge for youth in care. When young people leave DCF care, they stand halfway across the bridge. In some cases, the bridge loses structural integrity and becomes more challenging for young people to navigate independently. If other State agencies bolster their half of the bridge, young people can better navigate from DCF to employment, higher education, stable housing, and overall good health and well-being.

Young people exiting foster care have comparatively worse outcomes than their peers. This fact cannot be separated from Connecticut’s youth in care being disproportionately Black and brown. Figure 1, below, shows that Black and Hispanic young adults make up a third of Connecticut’s young adult population. In comparison, they make up almost two-thirds of youth and young adults in DCF care. A report released by Connecticut Voices for Children (CT Voices) in March 2021 found that Black and Hispanic households were more likely to experience hardship caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic downturns. Black and Hispanic households were more likely to lose employment income, be behind on rent, report food insecurity, and report that a family member had canceled their postsecondary education plans. The pandemic and ensuing economic turmoil compounded many
existing racial inequities in Connecticut. Already vulnerable populations of Black and brown youth and young adults now strive toward independence in an especially precarious environment.

In this report, we examine the potential obstacles in employment, education, and housing faced by young adults transitioning out of the child welfare system; the supports made available to help them achieve independent living; gaps that exist and that have been potentially exacerbated by the current pandemic; and model policies and programs from other states. We also provide recommendations on how Connecticut policymakers can support transition-age youth in foster care and former foster youth to live securely and independently. Policymakers and service providers in Connecticut must act intentionally and collaboratively to provide these young people with what they need to be successful. Supporting the stability of these young people will help them have more fruitful lives, grow the economy, and make Connecticut a more racially just place to live and grow.

Figure 1

Racial and Ethnic Demographics of Young Adults in Connecticut (Outer Circle) versus Young People in DCF Care (Inner Circle)

Note: The patterned outer circle of this graphic represents the racial and ethnic demographics of young people ages 18 to 24 in Connecticut. The solid inner circle of this graphic represents the racial and ethnic demographics of young people aged 16 and older in DCF care in Connecticut.

Sources: Data on the demographics of young people in Connecticut are retrieved from the Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT Data Center. Data on demographics of young people in care are provided by the Connecticut Department of Children and Families Department of Strategic Planning, Performance Management, and Evaluation.
BACKGROUND LITERATURE AND DATA

Since the 1970s, countries worldwide have observed an increasingly large gap in the employment of young people compared to older adults, accompanied by an increasing wage gap. Many economists attribute this gap in employment to external and structural factors. External factors that impact youth employment include young workers being less efficient in job search activities and having smaller professional networks than older adults, both of which are linked to fewer years of work experience. Systemic factors that impact youth and young adult employment include an experience trap, where employers prefer employees with experience over those without experience, even for entry-level jobs.

Youth and young adult unemployment are disproportionately sensitive to changes in business-cycle conditions. An estimate from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development found that youth and young adult unemployment rates change by about 1.79 percent for every one percent change in adult rates. Furthermore, youth and young adult unemployment numbers don’t tell the whole story of the impact of recessions on young people. Young people are more likely than older adults to experience underemployment. A study from the UK found that young people are more likely than older adults to prefer full-time and permanent jobs but work part-time and in temporary employment. They also reported a preference for working more hours than older adults. Young people who were not in the labor force were more likely to say that they wished they had a job than more senior people out of the labor force.

The recession caused by COVID-19 hit young workers particularly hard. Young adults (18-24) in Connecticut were the second age cohort most likely to report being unemployed during the pandemic, only coming in behind adults over 65. Even a year after the onset of the pandemic, sixty percent of surveyed young people reported losing employment as the state struggled with business closures and lockdowns. Given the external and structural factors discussed, young workers are more likely to work in industries and occupations (such as leisure and hospitality) that closed during the pandemic. In addition, a more significant percentage of Black, Latino/a/x, and Asian young adults lost employment than white young adults.

Unemployment is a stressful life event found to reduce individual well-being long-term. Bell and Blanchflower (p. 14-15) summarize the literature on individual outcomes of unemployment: “Unemployment increases susceptibility to malnutrition, illness, mental stress, and loss of self-esteem, and increases the risk of depression.” These negative impacts seem to be even more acute for younger people than older people. The researchers also discuss the propensity for one experience of unemployment to increase the probability of further incidents because employers are less willing to hire workers with a record of unemployment.

High levels of youth unemployment can have adverse social and economic impacts. For example, burglaries, thefts, and drug offenses increase during periods of high unemployment. The individuals punished for these crimes then face reduced employment prospects due to having legal records, which increases the probability of cyclical crime.

Experiencing unemployment has a disproportionate impact on the wages of young people compared to older adults. As discussed, unemployment raises the probability of later unemployment. It also
Depresses wages for young people relative to older people. Experience six months of unemployment at age 22 results in an eight percent lower salary the following year. This depressed wage continues into a person’s third decade. At ages 30 and 31, wages continue to be two to three percent lower than had a person not experienced unemployment.

Early adulthood seems to be the age range during which people’s lifetime wages are most sensitive to and determined by macroeconomic conditions. Graduating college and entering the workforce during a recession negatively impacts wages, impacting the larger economy. College graduates tend to enter into lower-level occupations than their training should allow during recessions. During a recession, most individuals entering the workforce experience lower lifetime earnings than if they entered during a good economic market. For example, Millennials who entered the workforce during the Great Recession lost an average of 13 percent of earnings between 2005 and 2017.

Many young people choose to return to school and build their human capital during economic recessions instead of seeking full-time employment. Unlike past recessions, COVID-19 caused college campuses to shut down. In Connecticut, young people became less likely to pursue higher education due to the COVID-19 recession. As more education moved to remote learning, a larger percentage of students canceled plans to take classes. According to the Census Household Pulse Survey, the most reported reasons why students canceled courses in Connecticut were “having contracted or being afraid of contracting COVID-19,” “not being able to afford classes,” and/or “educational expenses due to loss of income as a result of the pandemic.”

The impact of the COVID-19 recession on higher education was particularly salient for young people of color. On average, Black households were 17 percent more likely than white households to report a member of the household canceling plans to take higher education courses in the fall of 2021. Hispanic households were on average 30 percent more likely than white households to report a member of the household canceling plans to take higher education courses in the fall of 2021.

Loss of employment combined with school closures has left millions of young people across the country in situations of housing insecurity. During the fall of 2020, approximately one in seven young people living in single adult renting households reported being behind on rent. This was much greater for Black young people; one in four Black residents reported being behind on their rent. The increase in housing insecurity has forced millions of young people to move in with their parents or grandparents, of which 80 percent are between ages 18 and 25.

We do not know the long-term impact of COVID-19 and the ensuing recession on foster youth. Still, it stands to reason that young people in State care could experience even more significant adverse outcomes than youth in the general population. In the best of times, the situations that prompt the State to remove children and youth from their families, including abuse and neglect, are traumatic for young people. Preexisting trauma compounds the destabilization or severing of attachment bonds in care and the instability many youth experience when moved between foster homes. Due to preexisting trauma, relational instability, and other unmet needs, young people in State care tend to struggle more when they enter adulthood than young people who grow up with their biological families. These struggles exist across employment, education, and housing.

Multiple studies have documented that foster youth have high unemployment rates upon leaving
care. Researchers from Chapin Hall argue that this gap in employment is due to young people in care having more educational instability and lower social capital and personal capital. Social capital refers to personal relationships that can help facilitate employment—essentially, a social network. Young people in care are less likely to have family members who can help connect them with employers. They are also less likely to have strong bonds with other adults, such as teachers and coaches, due to moving more frequently than young people with permanent families. Personal capital refers to attitudes and behaviors that influence motivation and capacity to work, and trauma can reduce both motivation and capacity.

The Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study, conducted in 2005, found that “after accounting for alumni who were not in the workforce (e.g., full-time students and homemakers), the employment rate was 80.1%. This rate is lower than for 20- to 34-year-olds in the general population (95%)” (p. 2). In addition, the Urban Institute found in 2008 that three out of five young people who aged out of care in California, Minnesota, and North Carolina were working at age 24. This was lower than the national average and a lower rate than a comparison group of youth in low-income families. Finally, a CT Voices study of youth in DCF care in Connecticut in 2016 found that only 42 percent of youth aging out of care had a job when they left, and more than half of those working were part-time. Compared to other young people aged 18-24 in the state, foster youth aging out of care were about 70 percent less likely to be employed. To help address this issue in Connecticut, DCF focused on securing employment and navigating employment challenges as part of their new V.I.T.A.L. model.

The social and personal capital discussed by Chapin Hall researchers impacts foster youth’s employment and higher education success. Casey Family Programs surveyed young adults in State care who dropped out of school and identified several themes: emotional, behavioral, or family problems; need to work for income; pregnancy; getting kicked out; or losing interest in juggling school. The Institute for Higher Education and Policy also cites lacking a mentor while growing up, greater rates of mental health struggles, and learning loss due to foster home changes as reasons why foster youth are less likely to achieve higher degrees. They estimate that foster youth lose an average of four to six months of educational attainment each time they change schools. Foster youth in Connecticut experience an average of 1.07 moves per year. Youth in foster care could end up two years behind their peers throughout high school if they change schools with each move. This learning loss makes graduation and college admission a particularly steep climb.

An Institute for Higher Education and Policy study found that “as many as 70 to 80 percent of foster youth aspire to enter college” (p. 27). Still, despite high motivation, many youth cannot pursue higher education. Compared to a national college attendance rate of 60 percent, foster youth in this study attended college at a rate of 20 percent. Compared to a national rate of degree completion of 20 percent, foster youth in the study completed degrees at a rate of less than five percent. In 2016 in Connecticut, 37 percent of youth still in care three months after turning 18 chose to pursue education or vocational training. Fifteen percent of foster youth achieved a vocational certificate or licensure, three percent earned an associate’s degree, and nine percent earned a bachelor’s degree while in care.

While DCF offers a great deal of financial support to youth in State care pursuing college degrees, college is expensive. The National Conference of State Legislatures found that 95 percent of foster youth enrolled in college earn less than $25,000 per year. This low income makes it “extremely
difficult to pay for college application fees…, entrance exams, and transcript costs. Federal grants rarely cover the full cost of tuition, room and board, books, and living expenses; students must take out costly student loans to cover remaining expenses. Once in college, youth in care often need to work full-time, multiple jobs while attending college part-time, eventually causing them to drop out of college before completion.” Handling these costs without familial support or State support is almost impossible. The costs make achieving a graduate or professional school degree even less likely.

As noted, basic living expenses are a challenge for young people to cover—particularly those not working and those working part-time. Due to the high cost of living in Connecticut, housing is a significant expense that young people aging out of State care struggle to cover. Youth aged out of foster care are thus vulnerable to experiencing homelessness. Nationally, 30 percent of 19- and 21-year-olds who have left the foster care system experience some homelessness, and that number increases to 36 percent by age 26.

Connecticut’s numbers of young people who aged out of care and subsequently experienced homelessness were similar to the national averages as of 2016. Still, Connecticut has worked to strengthen policies and practices to help ensure that youth maintain stable housing in the years after 2016. Data from Annie E. Casey’s analysis of the National Youth in Transition Database, as of 2018, is displayed in Figure 2. These data show that by age 21, 50 percent of Connecticut’s young people in foster care had full-time or part-time employment, compared to 63 percent of Connecticut’s general young adult population. Eighty-six percent of Connecticut’s youth in DCF care had achieved at least a high school diploma or equivalent, compared to 93 percent of the general population. Seventy-three percent of Connecticut’s young people in care had stable housing.
We’ll discuss DCF’s recent revisions to their transition policies and best practices later in this report. Strengthening Connecticut’s housing supports for young people transitioning out of DCF care is critical, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic when many young people in the general population moved in with their parents or grandparents. Many youth in care do not have stable adults who can support them in hard times, so it is up to the State to provide stability as a parent would want to.

Beginning a career in the face of a recession, continued physical distancing, and businesses closing their doors is a daunting task. However, policies can help ensure that this generation of young people has a chance to succeed. Economists studying training programs for disadvantaged young people find that successful programs combine the following characteristics: close links with the local labor market; targeting jobs that lead to careers; a mix of academic education, occupational skills training, and on-the-job training; opportunities to further education or skill-building; support services to support the needs of the young person and their families; evolution to learn from past experiences and mistakes. In addition, policies and programs targeted for specific groups—such as young men and women transitioning from DCF care into other living arrangements—tend to be more successful.
In this report, we review data about the employment, educational, and housing outcomes of young people who are currently in DCF care or who recently transitioned out of DCF care. Next, we review the policies and programs that Connecticut’s State agencies have in place to support youth who are in the process of transitioning out of DCF care. We then review promising policies and practices from other states that Connecticut could utilize to help its young people find stability and success amidst one of the most chaotic and unstable periods current generations have experienced. In each section, we will discuss the three topics of employment, education, and housing in that order. Finally, we recommend policies that could better support Connecticut’s child welfare system-involved youth during and after their transition into independent adulthood.
DATA ON CONNECTICUT’S YOUTH IN DCF CARE

When the COVID-19 pandemic caused the state of Connecticut to shut down in March 2020, the Department of Children and Families had to figure out how to operate within what would soon become known as the “new normal.” In response, DCF combined existing supports with new policies to help support the needs of their youth and young adults. In April 2020, DCF issued a moratorium on youth aging out of care during the pandemic. This means that young people who otherwise would need to transition to care under another agency, young people who were no longer age-eligible for services, and young people who were not actively participating in DCF’s employment or education programming were able to stay in care and receive case management and services during this time. The agency also assisted young people up to the age of 23 to re-enter care during the pandemic. As shown in Figure 3, the number of young adults over 19 in DCF care grew during the pandemic. Due to the moratorium on aging out and DCF allowing young people to opt back into care, many young adults could access DCF case management, housing, education, and employment resources that they usually could not during a critical time. The moratorium ended on September 30, 2021. At this time, a total of 215 young people transitioned out of care. Young people were allowed to seek a time extension, but those that did not immediately transitioned out of care when the moratorium ended.

Figure 3

Age of Young People in DCF Care on ACR Date

Source: Connecticut Department of Children and Families Strategic Planning, Performance Management and Evaluation
Ensuring access to employment and education is vital to creating economic stability and independence for young adults. However, achieving stable employment can be difficult for the young people in DCF care and young adults transitioning out of DCF. Figure 4 displays pre-pandemic data from the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD), a national survey that tracks the outcome of child welfare involved young people who are of transition age, 17-21. In the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, around 55 percent of surveyed young people in Connecticut reported employment at age 21. While this level surpassed the 2011-2015 national cohort, it fell slightly behind the later national cohort. While newer NYTD data for 21-year-old young adults in care is unavailable, Table 1 shows that for those discharged from DCF, reported employment levels have not improved.

Figure 4

Percent of Surveyed Youth Reporting Full-time or Part-time Employment

Source: National Youth in Transition Database Services and Outcomes Reports.
When looking at how the pandemic-induced recession affected employment, **Figure 5** and **Figure 6** show that the pattern of how youth in DCF were affected looked similar to Connecticut’s general youth population. Both youth and young adults 18 and older in care showed an initial drop in employment in the first six months of the pandemic and a recovery period afterward. Part-time work for both age groups recovered to near pre-pandemic levels. Full-time employment for those 18 and older more than doubled from 74 young adults reporting full-time jobs to 160. Having continued access to DCF workforce readiness programs, job search resources, and stable living arrangements may explain this increase in full-time employment. The employment growth may also stem from many services and activities switching to a virtual platform. For some young people juggling competing priorities, virtual appointments remove time and transportation barriers. DCF workers can try to schedule competing priorities with individual young people to maximize young people’s ability to work; however, saving travel time can provide young people additional time for employment. Extended care may not benefit all young people. Still, it may give some the time and resources needed to mature, find a job, and practice the soft skills necessary to maintain a job.

**Figure 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reported either Full or Part-time employment</th>
<th>Youth in Foster Care</th>
<th>Youth Discharged from Foster Care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2019: 19 Year Old Cohort</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020: 17 Year Old Cohort</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021: 21 Year Old Cohort</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: The Department of Children and Families Transitional Supports and Success Division. Note that the data provided for 2021 only includes cohort A, which comprises youth who are no longer in foster care.*
In terms of education, Figure 7 shows that high school diploma attainment during the pandemic grew for 18- and 19-year-olds in DCF care. A greater percentage of young people finished their schooling than in the year pre-pandemic. For adults over the age of 20, there was a slight rise in attainment levels early in the pandemic, but ultimately levels fell to slightly below pre-pandemic levels. It is important to note that percentages are computed based on all youth in care. More youth staying in care (and not being forced to pursue education) may impact the percentage rather than the raw number of youth achieving their degrees.
Additionally, Figure 8 displaying NYTD data from before the pandemic shows that school enrollment for young people leaving foster care decreased over time. Part of this decrease happens naturally, as young people in care age out of and graduate from high school and transition into post-secondary education or vocational training programs. More recent NYTD data provided by DCF in Table 2 shows a continued decrease in school enrollment. Additionally, the data shows an increase in young adults reporting receiving financial aid to cover educational expenses. These could be indicators of the national trend among young adults of delaying college education due to concerns about the pandemic and increasing college cost and those enrolling experiencing more significant financial strain than students in previous years.\textsuperscript{47} Compared to past recessions, young adults with high school or partial post-secondary education are finding better earnings and real wage gains, gravitating more towards the workforce, and deeming higher education less worthwhile.\textsuperscript{48}
**Figure 8**

Percent of Surveyed Young People Reporting Being Enrolled in and/or Attending School

![Graph showing percent of surveyed young people reporting being enrolled in and/or attending school over different age groups and time periods.](image)

*Source: National Youth in Transition Database Services and Outcomes Reports.*

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reported being currently enrolled or attending high school, GED classes, or vocational training</th>
<th>2019: 19 Year Old Cohort</th>
<th>2020: 17 Year Old Cohort</th>
<th>2021: 21 Year Old Cohort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth in Foster Care</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Discharged from Foster Care</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reported receiving financial aid for educational expenses</th>
<th>2019: 19 Year Old Cohort</th>
<th>2020: 17 Year Old Cohort</th>
<th>2021: 21 Year Old Cohort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth in Foster Care</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Discharged from Foster Care</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: The Department of Children and Families Transitional Supports and Success division. Note that the data provided for 2021 only includes cohort A, which comprises youth who are no longer in foster care.*
However, success relative to many young adults in a post-recession workforce is not a clear success. While young adults are entering the labor force at higher rates, the overall rate of young adult disengagement (defined as the total proportion of young adults not participating in school or the workforce) has risen too.\textsuperscript{50} Taken altogether, it is apparent that young adults in DCF care continue to need support both from within and outside the Department.

Stable housing is critical for rising young adults to progress their education\textsuperscript{51} and employment.\textsuperscript{52} Experiencing unstable housing can lead to poor health outcomes\textsuperscript{53} and family insecurity.\textsuperscript{54} Youth and young adults transitioning from DCF to supporting themselves are at an elevated risk for experiencing housing insecurity. As of January 2021, 30 percent of young people expected to age out of DCF care within six months did not have stable housing plans.\textsuperscript{55} Figure 9 presents NYTD data that compares rates of reported experiences with homelessness for Connecticut young people to the national average. NYTD defines homelessness as “the youth has no regular or adequate place to live. This includes living in a car, or on the street, or staying in a homeless or other temporary shelter.”\textsuperscript{56} Connecticut young people are less likely to report having experienced homelessness before leaving DCF care. While their chances of reporting homelessness increased with time, fewer of Connecticut’s most recent cohort reported experiencing homelessness within three years compared to the first Connecticut cohort and both national cohorts.

\textbf{Figure 9}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\begin{tikzpicture}
\begin{axis}[
    title=Percent of Surveyed Young People Reporting Experiencing Homelessness,
    xlabel=Age, ylabel=Percentage of Surveyed Young People,
    xmin=17, xmax=21,
    ymin=0, ymax=35,
    xtick={17,19,21},
    xticklabels={Age 17, Age 19, Age 21},
    ytick={0,5,10,15,20,25,30,35},
    legend style={at={(1,1)}, anchor=north east},
]
\addplot table {data1.csv};
\addplot table {data2.csv};
\addplot table {data3.csv};
\addplot table {data4.csv};
\legend{Connecticut Cohort 1 (2011-2015), Connecticut Cohort 2 (2014-2018), National Cohort 1, National Cohort 2}
\end{axis}
\end{tikzpicture}
\caption{Percent of Surveyed Young People Reporting Experiencing Homelessness}
\end{figure}

\textit{Source: National Youth in Transition Database Services and Outcomes Reports.\textsuperscript{57}}

\underline{Connecticut Voices for Children: Rising Out of Recession}
Newer NYTD data, provided by DCF and displayed in Table 3, shows a continued reduction in the percent of young people who experience homelessness after leaving DCF care. However, in 2021 almost twice as many young people reported having been homeless as reported receiving public housing assistance. This disparity indicates the desperate need in Connecticut for expanded public housing and affordable housing investment and options.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reported Receiving Public Housing Assistance</th>
<th>2019: 19 Year Old Cohort</th>
<th>2020: 17 Year Old Cohort</th>
<th>2021: 21 Year Old Cohort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth in Foster Care</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Discharged from Foster Care</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reported Having Been Homeless</th>
<th>2019: 19 Year Old Cohort</th>
<th>2020: 17 Year Old Cohort</th>
<th>2021: 21 Year Old Cohort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth in Foster Care</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Discharged from Foster Care</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: The Department of Children and Families Transitional Supports and Success division. Note that the data provided for 2021 only includes cohort A, which comprises youth who are no longer in foster care.*

The Department of Children and Families has taken measures to help their young adults find economic and housing stability during the pandemic. DCF utilized federal pandemic response funding (ARPA dollars) to help support young people struggling amidst the pandemic with emergency dollars. Since May 2021, DCF reported providing a total of $23,980.99 in emergency funds for 25 youth ranging from 18 to 26 years old. Youth used these funds for a combination of utility bill assistance, rental assistance, security deposits, purchasing groceries, homelessness prevention efforts such as hotel stays, purchasing weather-appropriate clothing, and purchasing furniture. Sixty-four percent of young people who utilized these funds were female, 44 percent were Black young people, a third were white young people, and sixteen percent were Latino/a/x young people.

Youth who cross both the homelessness and child welfare systems have a high level of need. A data match study of data collected in Connecticut’s Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and DCF data between 2017 and 2019 found over 30 percent of homeless youth during that time frame indicated a history of DCF involvement. Housing providers use the Next Step Tool to examine current vulnerability and future housing stability factors. Data from this tool illuminated that young people entered into Connecticut’s By-Name List database who have prior DCF involvement are vulnerable to experience poor housing outcomes. Forty-six percent of young people with prior DCF involvement were recommended to receive long-term housing supports and high service intensity, and 47 percent were recommended to receive time-limited supports and moderate service intensity. Only seven percent of these young people were assessed as not needing moderate or high-intensity services. Many of these youth received rapid re-housing supports.

*Connecticut Voices for Children: Rising Out of Recession*
Youth Count! data in Figure 10 show that compared to previous years, a bigger percentage of surveyed young people reported experiencing conflict with family, inability to find or keep work, eviction, and struggling to pay rent in 2020. This may reflect the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on young people.59 These increased struggles with economic security suggest that for young people who leave DCF and become homeless, getting on their feet may be more challenging in the current landscape. Conflict with family and living-mates were top contributors to youth and young adults becoming unstably housed or homeless across multiple years. Some of the reasons young people become involved in DCF care do not disappear as youth grow into young adults and instead contribute to involvement in the homelessness system. Policymakers should interpret these findings with caution given that Youth Count! survey methods are subject to change year-to-year. We recommend that policymakers consider this context and continue to monitor these data over time before drawing conclusions.

Figure 10

![Graph showing reasons surveyed youth were unstably housed or homeless](source)

Source: Connecticut Voices for Children Analysis of data from Connecticut Counts Annual Point-In-Time Count and Youth Outreach & Count, 2017-2020, Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness60.
Connecticut has made steps to increase housing placements for unstably housed young people. **Figure 11** shows that Connecticut has increased its short-term and long-term beds designated for minors and youth between 2017 and 2020. In particular, Connecticut drastically increased the number of rapid re-housing beds available for young people. Data from future Youth Count! reports may help illuminate whether this sharp increase in the number of rapid re-housing beds helps decrease the number of youth needing a place to live long-term.

**Figure 11**

![Figure 11: Percent of Total Government-Sponsored Beds Designated for Youth](source: CT Voices analysis of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Continuum of Care (CoC) Housing Inventory Count Reports.)

Additionally, DCF sought to support former foster youth seeking assistance during the pandemic by expanding the START program at The Connection Inc. The START program provides emergency housing, rental assistance, and intensive support services for homeless young people. DCF referred a total of 23 former foster youth for services. Forty-eight percent of youth referred by DCF to START were Black, 17 percent were white, 30 percent were Latino/a/x, and four percent were biracial. These demographics reflect the disproportionate share of children of color in Connecticut’s child welfare system and the disparate impact of the pandemic on people of color. In addition, The Connection, Inc. received 30 requests for housing services for young people found to qualify for the START expansion due to their history in foster care. In total, 53 young people received support through the START expansion. Fifty-five percent of the young people requested one-time assistance with expenses. The rest have continued involvement and case management services.
Figure 12 depicts the services former foster youth requested through the START expansion, reflecting a high level of economic need.

Figure 12

![Bar chart showing the number of young people receiving START expansion assistance.]

Source: The Department of Children and Families Transitional Supports and Success Division.

The need for resources and support to reach stability and independence still exists for the young adults who would have aged out during the moratorium and the many who have aged out since the moratorium ended. These supports need to exist in DCF as they prepare young people to exit care, and they need to exist in other state agencies that oversee the many resources that young people who have transitioned out of foster care and into independence need to access.
Policies, Programs, and Practices that Support Transitional Age Youth

This section explores policies, practices, and proposals that have been put in place to help young people transitioning out of care achieve stability. Here we will explore Connecticut policies and practices that support youth and young adults transitioning from DCF care in the areas of education, employment, and housing security. We will first look at policies from the Department of Children and Families, then those from other Connecticut State agencies, federal programs and policies, and finally, a couple of policies from other states. Connecticut could use these policies as models for serving youth transitioning out of care and former youth in care here.

Notably, Connecticut’s Department of Children and Families has spent years re-working its policies and practice manuals to help ensure that young people exit DCF care with stable plans. DCF staff created layers of tools so that young people understand DCF resources and implemented policies to help young people who struggle upon exiting care. DCF did much of this work in partnership with the Department of Housing (DOH), the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), the Center for Children’s Advocacy, the Partnership for Strong Communities, the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, the Connection, Inc., and CT Voices. Many recommendations discussed by this task force were informed by a 2016 CT Voices report, “The Time to Grow: Meeting the Needs of Connecticut Youth Aging Out of Foster Care.”

In August 2021, DCF publicly unrolled the result of this work in the form of an updated practice manual called the V.I.T.A.L. Practice Guide. The unveiling of this new guide coincides with the expiration of the federal moratorium keeping young people in care due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Given that there has been little time to evaluate the outcomes of these changes, this report will include relatively fewer policy recommendations regarding housing. However, we cannot overstate the importance of these changes made by DCF and hope that future data will reflect the efficacy of these changes through decreased youth homelessness and housing instability upon leaving care as well as increased youth re-entry and utilization of community services for former foster youth.

The Department of Children and Families

Transitional Support Specialists: Transitional Support Specialists are DCF social workers whose caseloads consist primarily of young people ages 16 to 23 years old. These specialists have completed training for certification through the Academy of Workforce Development. Transitional Specialists support young people as they age out of DCF care by helping young people access the various educational, employment, housing, and health services needed. In addition to assisting young people in accessing resources, Transitional Support Specialists are also responsible for helping young people case plan. They work together with the young people to ensure that the young people in their care secure their future living arrangements, educational plans, employment plans, etc. Transitional specialists are also responsible for assisting young people in applying for any Social Security benefits they are eligible for before leaving DCF care.

Service Post Majority (SPM): Young adults in DCF care as of their 18th birthday have their
‘family’ cases closed and are re-opened as Services Post Majority. This allows a young person to continue receiving services and apply for re-entry services before age 23. The young adult’s SPM case contains “the current Individual Case Plan, placement, payments, medical, educational, legal, NYTD, pregnancy/parenting and any other necessary information from the previous case record.”

**Passport:** The Passport is a suggested format for plans to guide youth leadership and social worker support once a young person turns 18. Use of the Passport marks a transition in responsibility for transition planning from DCF to the young adult. During ACR meetings, the young adult and their social worker review the Passport every six months. The Passport includes, at minimum, steps the young adult will take and anticipated dates for completion in the following areas: planning for employment, addressing educational challenges, securing safe and stable housing, ensuring positive relationships, developing short- and long-term goals, maintaining behavioral health supports, opening a bank account, obtaining a driver’s license and insurance, and other needed plans.

**Transfer Conferences:** DCF social workers begin transition planning with youth at age 14. Transfer conference participants include the young person, the young person’s social worker, the social worker’s supervisor, DCF’s educational consultant, and, when appropriate, liaisons with the DMHAS and/or the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). Youth can also bring additional participants for support, such as their attorney, foster parents, biological family members, or other supportive adults. Young people co-lead a discussion with their transfer conference team about the youth’s aspirations for the future, hobbies, interests, and activities; current living arrangements, and ideas about future living arrangements; and permanency. Social workers revisit the plans created through these conversations with youth every six months. The plans build upon themselves to integrate the young person’s strengths, the young person’s dreams and goals, and realistic expectations in determining future living plans and fallback plans.

**Omega Assessments:** Omega is an acronym for Outcomes Mapping for Emerging Adults. Omega assessments are youth-centered functional assessments specifically intended to inform transitional planning. Complete assessments include an hour-long conversation with the young person and the young person’s “Catalyst Team.” Before the discussion, DCF asks young people to fill out a “Get to Know Me” profile and complete a LIST life skills assessment, a Youth Connection Scale, and a Positive Youth Development Sustainability Scale. The conversation’s intended outcome is for the young person to set goals and for individuals at the meeting to leave with sets of expectations for each other. DCF administers a complete omega assessment when youth turn 16 and abbreviated assessments at other federally mandated benchmarks through age 23.

The Omega Assessment covers many critical aspects of a young person’s life, including but not limited to vocational needs, post-secondary education needs, and housing needs. Young people should exit the meeting with a connection to vocational assessment or career exploration tools if needed. If the young person wants a job and is ready for home, the young person should exit with a connection to the Year-Round Employment Program coordinated by the Department of Labor (DOL). Young people should exit the meeting having assessed barriers to graduation, understanding how to recover missing credits; and having a connection to a tutor, advocate, and/or mentor if necessary to ensure postsecondary education success. Finally, regarding housing, young people should have considered whether they can stay in their current living arrangement as long as they want, vulnerability to
housing instability, close relationships with biological family members (who might be able to help young people with living situations), and relationships with other supportive adults who could help.71

**John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood:** The Chafee program is a national program that provides funding to assist youth in foster care and young adults formerly in foster care with financial assistance and services that help them achieve stability in their transition to adulthood. The grants offered to states can cover a wide range of programs and activities aimed at aiding young people with “education, employment, financial management, housing, emotional support, and assured connections to caring adults.” Through the Chafee Foster Care Program, Connecticut’s DCF provides several services for youth and young adults involved in the foster care system.

One of the services designed to help youth achieve employment stability is the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Work to Learn model. The five Work to Learn sites throughout the state provide “youth educational/vocational” training services to youth ages 16-23. In addition to services and training in the areas of “employment skills, financial literacy, life skills, personal and community connections, physical and mental health, and housing,” the program also gives young people the opportunity to take part in “on-site, youth-run businesses.”

Another employment, support, coaching, and case management program maintained by the Chafee program is Youth Village LifeSet. In the early months of 2020, DCF added transitional support LifeSet sites at the Wheeler Clinic and Community Health Resources in Eastern Connecticut.75 The LifeSet model assists “emerging adults with securing stable housing, completing vocational/educational programs, obtaining sustainable employment, developing and maintaining supportive and permanent adult relationships, and developing the necessary life skills to successfully transition from DCF” through comprehensive and specialized case management.
Community Housing Employment Enrichment Resource (CHEER): CHEER provides financial assistance to young people in DCF care that seek to pursue secondary employment training and career development programs. For up to 24 months, eligible young people in DCF care, following their secondary school graduation or GED completion, can choose this program as an alternative to a college or formal vocational training program. The goal of the program is for young people to maintain 40 productive hours per week, with “productive hours” defined as “time devoted to classes, study time, part-time work, internship, volunteering (if approved), training, apprenticeship, treatment activities, transportation time used for these activities, and any combination of these activities.” As the program continues, involved young people learn to budget and manage their resources until they can assume full responsibility.

Work 2 Learn: The Work 2 Learn program is a development model available to youth and young adults involved in DCF between 15 and 21. Our Piece of the Pie (OPP) provides Work 2 Learn programs and serves Greater Hartford and Eastern Connecticut. Young people in DCF care can get the services offered through a referral by DCF social workers. The model matches young people with a caring adult to provide youth development, academic support, and job readiness services. Through Work 2 Learn, young people gain access to vocational training, career tutorial support, job placements, internships, job retention services, high school diploma or GED completion programs, and housing supports. Our Piece of the Pie also works with young people through age 24 to help ensure that young adults in their care have the necessary support to achieve independent living.

Youth Ambassadors: DCF created the Youth Ambassador position within the Office Of Community Relations. In this role, DCF-involved young people receive ombudsman training. In addition, DCF pays Youth Ambassadors to support youth who desire representation at case planning meetings. This program helps young people in care build work skills, networks, and professional references that can assist them in creating a lucrative and stable career trajectory.

Postsecondary Education Services and Support/ Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) Program: Upon reaching the age of 18, young adults in DCF who comply with DCF policy can continue to receive services while participating in an approved educational program. The policy states that “the Department will fund up to the equivalent cost of attendance at an identified in-state university (covers tuition, room and board, books, and fees) at an approved Post-Secondary Institution of the student’s choice.” Therefore, young adults who choose to attend college out of state can receive funding equal to what it costs to go to an in-state university as long as they comply with DCF policy and attend a DCF-approved institution. This funding is available to “youth who have been adopted after the age of 16, sub-guardianship after the age of 16, and current youth in the foster care system.” According to the Family Services Plan for 2020-2024, new requirements extending services to age 26 “are in the planning and preparation phase of implementation.”

The Department of Children and Families also provides academic support for youth and young adults who may need it. The Transitional Supports and Services and the Education Divisions recruit tutors through Wesleyan University volunteers and SUN Scholars, Inc. Additionally, DCF has partnered with the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities System (CSCU) and their Office of Workforce Support for Youth and Young Adults.
Development, Strategic Partnerships, and Sponsored Programs to develop on-campus services for young people in foster care/ former young people in care that provide “mentoring, academic monitoring, tutoring, and support services.”

**V.I.T.A.L. Resources for Youth and their Caregivers Website:** As part of its V.I.T.A.L. toolbox, DCF created a webpage with resources for young people and caregivers of young people. The webpage includes links to a plethora of resources, including but not limited to employment, education, and housing. For example, the employment page contains links to various job posting boards, DOL programs, job training, job search resources, and nonprofits that can help connect young people to jobs. The education page lists information about adult education, colleges and universities in Connecticut, vocational schools, construction trades, and financial aid to access postsecondary opportunities. Finally, the housing page includes information on finding affordable housing, purchasing a home, budgeting, government assistance programs, and homelessness resources.

**Youth Launch Inventory:** The Youth Launch Inventory is an assessment young people complete with their Catalyst Team to ensure the youth’s documentation is accessible and in order. Part of this inventory focuses on referrals to other state agencies for social support, including the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (if appropriate) and Public Housing and/or Housing Choice Voucher programs. Due to the long waiting lists for these programs, DCF social workers help create other housing plans with young people rather than relying on Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher programs as a primary housing plan after leaving DCF care.

**Permanency Pact:** The Permanency Pact is an optional tool created by Foster Club. Catalyst Teams may choose to use this tool to clarify the relationship between young people and supportive adults in their lives and create mutual expectations. The process is formal and facilitated. The end goal is for a supportive adult to provide a young person with a list of specific supports the adult can give the young person on an ongoing basis.

A supportive adult might offer a young person employment opportunities, job search assistance, career counseling, or mentoring. A supportive adult could also provide educational assistance. Housing-related supports that a supportive adult might offer through the Permanency Pact process include a home during breaks from school and on holidays, an emergency place to stay for a few nights, help with finding an apartment/roommates/utilities, apartment move-in help, co-signing for an apartment, or emergency cash.

**V.I.T.A.L. Planning for New Living Arrangements:** In addition to creating structured assessments, planning processes, and programs like the ones discussed in this section of the report, DCF has also built transition planning into other facets of young people’s experiences in DCF care, such as when youth need to move from one placement or living arrangement (such as a foster home) into another (such as a congregate arrangement or independent living). When youth move into new living arrangements, the V.I.T.A.L. Practice Guide urges social workers and supervisors to work with young people to draft a plan for a safe living arrangement. This plan should consider the young person’s strengths and long-term goals. Whenever possible, new placements should scaffold young people in building toward long-term living goals, such as by helping them develop independent living skills or deeper relationships with supportive adults.
S.W.E.T.P.: The Supportive Work Education and Transition Program gives young people an opportunity to learn independent living skills while still in DCF care beginning as early as age 16. This program provides young people the chance to live in a residential environment and focus on developing independent living skills beyond what is provided through the transition planning assessment and goal-setting process.

V.I.T.A.L. Summit and Transition Period: Before young people leave DCF care, either because they choose to go, have finished a program, or are not in compliance with the program requirements (and DCF has been unable to get the young person back on track), they are asked to join a V.I.T.A.L. Summit meeting. During this meeting, the young person presents their launch plan to their social worker and DCF transition specialists and discusses the plan’s details.

DCF and the young person discuss the following topics: where and with whom the young person will live, anticipated income, important adult documents, accessing community resources and services from other departments, transportation plans, emergency contacts, the possibility of and pathways for re-entry, and follow-up by an independent living coordinator for 90 days after the youth leaves. After that meeting, the young person will have a 90-day transition period with active and frequent transition planning. If the young person reports planning to live with someone else, DCF will invite this person to meetings during the 90-day transition period to facilitate a discussion about the parameters of the stay. In addition, a finalized transition plan should identify a specific person the young person can contact if they encounter a barrier implementing their plan. Finally, the manual encourages young people to watch the video “No Place to Put My Stuff.” In this video, young people who recently transitioned out of DCF care discuss their lived experiences. Once a young person leaves care, DCF follows up with each young person at 30, 60, and 90 days following their launch to check-in, provide resource information, and provide crisis intervention if necessary.

Re-Entry: To re-enter care, young people must fill out a DCF-2095 Application for Re-Entry to Adolescent Services Program form, which requires young people to explain their reasons for re-entry, educational plans, work experience, court involvement, and last five residences. It also requires young people to agree to a substance use/abuse evaluation, a mental health evaluation, and a physical health evaluation. DCF currently has plans to remove evaluations as a requirement to re-enter care, which will remove a barrier that may prevent some young people who need support from seeking support.

Assisting Young Persons Missing from Care: Running away is an unfortunately common behavior for youth in foster care, and without intervention, it can increase a young person’s risk of drug abuse, engagement with the criminal legal system, sex trafficking, disengagement from school, and ongoing chronic homelessness. Although empirical understanding of effective strategies for intervention are few, DCF’s V.I.T.A.L. Practice Guide integrates recommendations from the Behavior Analysis Services Program. In this model, behavior analysts work with youth to explore their triggers and underlying reasons for running and tailor interventions to stabilize youth in their placements and schools.
Connecticut State

DCF partners with many other agencies, including the DMHAS, the Department of Social Services (DSS), DDS, the State Department of Education (CSDE), the Office of Higher Education, DOL, and others to provide appropriate, high-quality services for young people in its care. Some community providers and State agencies provide programs and services tailored for young people with a history of child welfare involvement.

Department of Children and Families/Department of Labor Memorandum of Understanding:
To help youth in foster care gain employment and job experience, DCF has a Memorandum of Understanding with DOL “to facilitate placement for DCF young people age 14 and up to participate in the Statewide Year-Round Youth Employment Program.” Through this Memorandum, DCF transfers funds to programs operated by the contractors of the DOL’s five regional Workforce Development Boards (WDBs). The WDBs sub-contract with local businesses and government agencies to provide “6-week on the job employment training programs that include academic instruction, career awareness and work readiness training, career competency training, worksite selection, and development, [and] oversight of program activities.” Funding is available throughout the fiscal year. Part of the funding is reserved for youth who want to continue past the six weeks.
Central’s Academic Readiness and Engagement (CARE) Program Scholars: CARE is a program developed by Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) dedicated to providing students coming from foster care and adoptions with resources to support them throughout their college life. The program offers specialized incoming first-year orientations, year-round housing (including during winter, spring, and summer semesters), tutoring and support services, academic advising, career advising, skill development, peer mentoring, and specialized workshops and discussion forums. DCF plans to continue working with Connecticut State Colleges & Universities to expand the CARE program to all of its 17 colleges and universities.

SUN Scholars Inc.: The SUN Scholars work to improve college outcomes and increase educational equity for young adults who have experienced foster care or adoption. With a staff consisting entirely of former foster and adopted youth, the SUN Scholars provide services to help students succeed in their college environment and beyond. As a part of the SUN Scholars, students receive:

- Academic coaching, in which students are matched with individuals who will support their development of college competencies as well as academic readiness;
- Social equity building opportunities that connect students with their board members, staff, and professionals to help the students develop professional networks;
- Leadership and advocacy workshops and networking events;
- Career competency services and workshops such as career counseling, resume building, and developing interviewing and interpersonal skills;
- Peer mentoring from someone who experienced child welfare involvement to help navigate college and establish a community.

The SUN Scholars seek to ensure their students are prepared and established to build professional careers. SUN Scholars also help students find jobs after graduation and deal with concrete, practical issues such as securing housing and food access.

CAN System Manager for Minors: This is a new position created by the Continuum of Care to help build a compressive system of care for homeless youth in the Fairfield County region. This person will act as a liaison for youth in the homelessness system in Fairfield County. Additionally, this person will collaborate with different providers of homelessness services in the area to lower entry barriers into the care system, manage case conferencing, and create and deliver cross-sector training.

START Program: The Connection, Inc. manages this program to serve homeless young people ages 16-24. Services include street outreach, emergency housing, temporary rental assistance, case management services, financial literacy skill development, life skill development, educational/vocational support, and crisis intervention and counseling services. It is a model program to assist youth in transitioning toward self-sufficiency and stable housing. DCF funded a recent expansion of the program using Chafee dollars that has served a total of 53 former foster youth to date.

Community Care Team Meetings: These are monthly intensive case management meetings with relevant, interdisciplinary providers to analyze the needs of youth within the homelessness system,
discuss resources available for these youth, and identify points of contact for the provision of services. Members include representatives from the homelessness system, education system, child welfare system, faith-based community, LGBTQ+ community, social workers, behavioral health service providers, the Judicial Branch, and local government. This model for youth is based on a model used to serve individuals with complex needs and recurring hospital visits within the behavioral health system. The program is being piloted in CT to address the needs of minors experiencing homelessness and housing instability. Should the pilot prove successful, policymakers and practitioners could consider extending this model to young adults experiencing homelessness and housing instability.

**Case Conferencing for Minors:** This is an early model piloted in Connecticut to identify youth needing housing support and provide targeted solutions to address youth homelessness. The model includes three steps—first, identification and referral of the young person by a local community-based organization. Second, identify needs and resources for the youth at a monthly Community Care Team Meeting. Third, host a small case planning meeting with the youth, and where appropriate, the youth’s family members. At this meeting, a liaison from the community-based organization will present the identified array of services for the youth to consider and work with the young person to plan the next steps.

**Regional Minor Homelessness Pilot Sites:** To appropriately coordinate services to youth, agencies and advocates in Connecticut have determined that a single community-based organization in each region should be designated as a lead. This community-based organization is responsible for identifying homeless youth (and receiving referrals from community partners), collecting and analyzing data about homeless youth in the region, coordinating meetings to determine services youth need, serving as a liaison between service providers and youth, and following up with youth once they have transitioned into a more stable living situation. Under Connecticut’s statutorily created Community-Based Diversion Plan, Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs) are logical partners to serve as regional leads. Still, they need additional funding to bolster their data systems and staffing shortages. Currently, Connecticut is piloting designated leads in three regions.

**Policies in Other States and Federal Policy**

While DCF has undergone an overhaul in supporting transition-age youth, Connecticut lags the national average in the percentage of 21-year-olds transitioning out of care into employment. Also, the percentage of young people who have transitioned out of care and enrolled in education is declining. Connecticut can learn from other states that have connected youth who have transitioned out of care with employment and educational options.

**California’s System-Involved Youth Jobs Plan:** In May of 2021, the State of California applied for a waiver that allows its counties greater flexibility in spending money made available to the state by the National Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The waiver requests that California’s Local Workforce Development Boards be allowed to decrease the federal 75 percent Out-of-School Youth (OSY) expenditure requirement to 50 percent. This would provide California with the flexibility to respond to and prioritize the needs of In-School Youth (ISY) involved in the foster care system, juvenile justice system-involved youth, and youth experiencing homelessness.
The new jobs plan is based on the Los Angeles Performance Partnership Pilot (LAP3). After successfully applying to be a federally designated P3, the City of Los Angeles Local Board received a waiver that allowed them to enroll “ISY foster, juvenile justice, and youth experiencing homelessness, and count the funds spent on the youth towards the 75 percent OSY expenditure requirement.” Between the program year 2016-17 to the program year 2018-19, enrollment of youth in foster care increased by 73 percent, enrollment of youth experiencing homelessness increased by 129 percent, and enrollment of justice system-involved youth increased by 167 percent, despite their ISY/OSY status.

The State plan, which the federal government approved in August of this year, will also establish an application process for Local Boards who wish to access the waiver. Approval will be contingent upon meeting criteria such as establishing:

- “A baseline of systems-involved youth served.”
- “A target percentage of increased enrollments Local Boards will meet over the period of the waiver.”

Connecticut policymakers should monitor the plan’s success and bring together stakeholders, including DCF, DSS, DOL, WDBs, and relevant subcontractors, to evaluate whether creating a similar waiver in Connecticut makes sense given the populations of In-School Youth and Out-of-School Youth served.

**Florida’s Postsecondary Education Services and Supports (PESS):** Former foster youth in Florida who were living in licensed care on their 18th birthday or are currently in licensed care, were at least 16 years old and was adopted from foster care, or spent six months in licensed care before reaching their 18th birthday, and who attend a Florida Bright Future’s scholarship eligible post-secondary education institution are eligible for Postsecondary Education and Support Services. Young adults who qualify receive a monthly payment of $1,256 to help secure housing, utilities, and assist with living costs. The payments can continue until the young adult reaches age 23.

**Family Unification Program (FUP):** This Federal program provides Housing Choice Vouchers for people who fit into one of two types of need categories: families for whom lack of adequate housing may contribute to children being in out-of-home care or youth between the ages of 18 and 24 who have left (or are leaving) foster care. For young adults transitioning out of care and using FUP vouchers, this housing option is only available for up to 36 months. Four agencies in Connecticut received grants for these vouchers, totaling $2,271,064.00, which funded a total of 214 vouchers in 2018. Additionally, Congress appropriated $25 million for FUP in the 2021 fiscal year, which will result in Connecticut receiving fewer FUP vouchers. However, when paired with Foster Youth to Independence Vouchers, the additional $5 million in funding should result in a net increase in vouchers for families and young people.

**Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Vouchers:** This federal program makes Housing Choice Vouchers available to Public Housing Authorities to utilize for young people aged 18-24 referred by the Department of Children and Families and at risk of becoming homeless. Housing provided through FYI Vouchers must also be accompanied by services to reach self-sufficiency. Funding is good for 36 months. Congress appropriated $10 million to serve youth through these vouchers in
October 2020. States are provided with 25 vouchers but may request more if they have a utilization rate of over 90 percent. DCF and DOH partnered to apply for FYI vouchers in Connecticut.

**Transitional Living Program (TLP):** This federally funded program provides long-term residential services to homeless young people between 16 and 22. Living accommodations include host family homes, group homes, maternity group homes, and supervised apartments. In addition, the programs offer life skills training, educational opportunities, job attainment services, and physical and behavioral healthcare services. Connecticut has four TLP sites in Bridgeport, Meriden, West Hartford, and New Haven.\(^{116}\)
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Increasing the stability and security of Connecticut’s young people is ensuring the stability and security of Connecticut’s tomorrow today. Policymakers and State departments should ensure the well-being and access to opportunity for all youth and young adults, especially those directly under State care. Connecticut’s State agencies and departments must all work together to ensure that youth transitioning out of state care can lead thriving, stable, and independently sound lives, even when they no longer qualify for services through DCF.

Because DCF recently overhauled its transition-planning policies and practices to increase housing stability for young people, the following recommendations focus on employment and education outcomes.

**Connecticut should have dedicated liaisons for system-involved young people in departments and agencies relevant to young adult stability, health, and security.**

As young adults age out of care and into independent living, State departments outside of DCF may provide necessary healthcare, housing, and employment guidance. However, navigating State departments is a daunting and sometimes lengthy task. Much of it is learned through simple trial and error. Additionally, the first steps into independent adulthood can be confusing and complicated without the added complications of transitioning out of the child welfare, homelessness, and/or criminal legal systems.

**GOOD POLICY:** To ease the stress of transition and to provide the kind of support and guidance that parents want to provide their transitioning children, State departments, including DOL, the Office of Higher Education, DDS, CSDE, the Office of Early Childhood (OEC), and DSS should have dedicated liaisons that understand the circumstances of young adults who are leaving or have left foster care, homelessness, and the criminal legal system; can personally connect with struggling young people; can help young people access the resources and means to achieve success and stability; and can help young people with State system involvement develop strong housing planning skills. Some of these agencies currently have staff or units that support youth-related policies, practices, and questions. These staff are also responsible for assisting with the transitions of foster youth. However, only DMHAS has a unit (the Young Adult Services program) specializing in helping young people transition out of foster care and into DMHAS services. In the case of DOH, because of the intersectionality between young people in the homelessness system and young people in the child welfare system, the staff member devoted to youth is knowledgeable regarding the child welfare system and the needs of youth leaving care. Finally, the Judicial Branch has youth liaisons within the juvenile detention centers but not within other judicial placements. The Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) should provide funding for each agency to have at least one full-time, permanent, and benefitted liaison for other departments without dedicated staff.

**BETTER POLICY:** To expand stable work opportunities for young people who had contact with the State systems and to build upon lived experience, State departments should hire people who...
experienced State system involvement (child welfare, homelessness, and/or criminal legal system involvement) for these liaison roles. This recommendation is based upon a similar proposal made by homeless young adults brought together through HUD’s Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program in Rhode Island and a recommendation made by Youth Action Hub members regarding the Connecticut Balance of State Youth Navigators. These liaisons must have lived experience. Further recruiting young people with lived experience will help decrease the experience trap for young people with systems involvement.

**BEST POLICY:** Many State Departments provide funding to community-based nonprofit agencies, and these agencies directly serve young people. Examples of this include Connecticut’s five Workforce Development Boards (WDBs), the seven regional CT Youth Services Associations (CYSAs) and Coordinated Access Networks (CANs), and youth group homes that receive funding from the Judicial Branch. These agencies are responsible for outreach to young people, assessing the needs of young people, and connecting young people with appropriate services. In addition to State departments having liaisons to help young people navigate complicated systems, the CGA should mandate that regional providers of essential services (housing, employment and workforce development, Connecticut’s higher education systems, criminal legal diversion and intervention programs, and United Way 211 regions) hire systems-involved youth liaisons. The CGA should provide these nonprofits with appropriate funding to employ new full-time staff members. The Youth Navigators that work within the CAN System under the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program can serve as successful models of liaisons.

Additionally, DOL has tailored their DCF employment program contract to encourage WDBs to develop roles for youth transitioning out of DCF care. These roles should help young people develop leadership skills and begin a career path with WDBs and youth providers. The contract allows paid time for career awareness, exploration, and training, along with work experience.

Community-based nonprofit agencies could better serve young people if given funding to establish liaison roles. When filling these positions, agencies should prioritize people with lived experience navigating the child welfare, homelessness, and/or criminal legal system.

**Connecticut’s State departments should create priority hiring for former young people in foster care.**

Currently, compared to their peers, former young people in foster care are much less likely to succeed in their transition into the workforce, greatly hindering their ability to transition to independent living successfully. Young people who age out of foster care and do secure work earn, on average, less than young people in the general population. Connecticut should find ways to provide greater access to well-paying, stable, professional jobs for young adults under the care of the State through the use of its multiple State departments. Creating priority hiring opportunities can increase the social capital of young people with child welfare system involvement. Connecticut Gen. Statute §4-61oo establishes that current and former foster youth should be given preferential hiring for internship opportunities at State agencies; however, the State can do more to help develop long-term employment and career opportunities.

**GOOD POLICY:** The State should create and implement a policy that gives hiring preference to
current and former foster youth qualified for State government jobs. Currently, DCF prioritizes hiring young people with child welfare system involvement for open positions. While this is a start, working within the child welfare system is not the best choice for many young people because this work can be re-traumatizing. DCF should not hold sole responsibility in the State for helping these young people build stable careers. Additionally, young people’s experiences within multiple systems may prove a boon across State departments. While State departments must hire individuals who have the skills and knowledge to carry out a role, we advocate that individuals who grew up in State care should receive priority consideration for a position among similarly qualified candidates. Reporting DCF involvement should be a voluntary part of the application for State jobs. Furthermore, only individuals who need this information to make a hiring decision should see it. This policy is a natural progression of the policy in Connecticut Gen. Statute §4-61oo.

**BETTER POLICY:** In addition to providing priority hiring among equally qualified candidates, State departments should prioritize hiring current and former foster youth for entry-level positions, particularly those that do not require a college degree. These jobs include part-time and semi-permanent positions across State departments and full-time, permanent, and benefitted positions. To help ensure the success of these young people, agencies should provide job coaching and mentoring within these positions for a young person’s first year of employment.

**BEST POLICY:** In addition to State departments prioritizing hiring formerly system-involved young people, departments at the county and municipal levels should also implement these policies. Additionally, departments should work with DOL to identify the knowledge and skills young people should build to make them most competitive for government positions so that DOL can integrate building the most relevant skills and knowledge into their youth work programs.

**Connecticut should extend its tuition and fee exemption for former foster youth.**

The idea that postsecondary education is a four-year journey isn’t always accurate—only 45 percent of degree-seekers at their first institution graduate within four years. This number sits at 25 percent for Black students and 35 percent for Hispanic students. Only 60 percent of students graduate within five years, and only 62 percent graduate within six years. At the same time, the amount of people seeking professional degrees has only continued to rise, creating added pressure for individuals to continue their education. With the cost of college continuing to grow and the average debt of a graduate degree about double that of a bachelor’s, young adults exiting care and hoping to use a postsecondary degree as a road to stable employment will need additional support past the age of 23.

**GOOD POLICY:** Connecticut should extend its vocational and higher education State Tuition Waivers to formerly DCF-involved young people up to age 30. Many young people in DCF care need to try a few programs before they find the one that’s a good fit for them. It is common for DCF-involved young people to transfer colleges, experiment with various vocational programs, and take time off from higher education to work. As a result, it may take past age 23 to finish their education or training. Even for young people who attend university and stay in it, maintaining a full-time course load may prove impossible at times for young people struggling with trauma. Extending the tuition waiver builds grace time for young people who need it. Young people in DCF care who graduate with a bachelor’s degree may desire to continue their education, but that can prove impossible for
individuals who don’t have savings, family wealth, or a solid line of credit. Extending the State Tuition Waivers to 30 would help former youth in care access graduate and professional education.

**BETTER POLICY:** Connecticut should provide a subsidy for fees, books, and living expenses for youth who transitioned out of care but are still enrolled in higher education. Existing ETVs provide up to $5000 for eligible young people in care between 14 and 26 to utilize for tuition, fees, books, housing, and other expenses. Young people can use this sum across five years total. DCF should create a similar voucher for young adults up to age 30 who have transitioned out of DCF care but are enrolled in a higher education or vocational/certification program. The CGA should provide DCF with the funds to create these vouchers. Connecticut is a high cost-of-living state. While tuition vouchers are incredible support, they do not cover all necessary expenses. Basic living expenses can be an especially high barrier to continuing education for young adults with child welfare system involvement who have children of their own.

**BEST POLICY:** Learning and professional development do not stop at age 30, nor do the lasting impacts of trauma and poverty on one’s ability to excel in education and career. The most helpful policy would be for Connecticut to provide State Tuition Waivers and State-level ETVs for formerly DCF-involved people no matter what age they are. The combination of funds for tuition and enrollment/living expenses would help people who have experienced a multitude of trauma and need time and experience to find their footing, advance their careers, and disrupt the cycle of poverty.
Connecticut should create a system to data match young people who have a history of systems involvement across systems and services; and an advisory council to analyze these data, identify gaps in services for transition-age young people with system involvement, and advise on policies that can fill these gaps.

While youth are within the care of the Department of Children and Families, DCF can connect their young people with services and monitor what they are receiving. However, finding out what former young people in care need and what they are accessing once they leave care can be more difficult. Many of these young people come into contact with other State systems, such as the homelessness and criminal legal systems. In addition, many of these young people may need to access services through other State departments such as the DOL, DOH, and DSS.

Currently, there is no statewide, systemic method for tracking whether young adults with a history of DCF involvement are accessing adult services. Instead, the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Corrections, CSDE, DOH, the DMHAS, and the DSS collect and report data separately. This creates a challenge for targeting wraparound interventions for systems-involved young people and maximizing fiscal resources.

Knowledge from integrated data could lead to more accurately matching young people with appropriate services and better care from providers. An example of this is that when young people who have transitioned out of DCF care become unstably housed, agencies like The Connection, Inc. can refer these young people to the START program, which is specifically designed for young people with a history of DCF involvement. Therefore, identifying a young person who walks through the door as having a history with DCF is critical for providers to match young people to this program.

**GOOD POLICY:** Currently, agencies will data match when it serves a particular project or goal. For example, DCF and DOH matched data in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) in 2019 to understand the overlap between youth with child welfare involvement and young people entering the homeless system. Unsurprisingly, there was a large amount of overlap. DCF has also worked with the Judicial Branch to match criminal legal and child welfare data. The most notable examples of this process are under the Juan F. Consent Decree and more recently as DCF implements an education system for youth with criminal legal system involvement. Legislators could require agencies to partner in data matching regularly (at least every five years) and report findings. Dual-agency data matching would help understand the overlap in accessing services between two agencies, but it would not help understand the larger picture of what young people who have involvement with State systems need and are receiving.

**BETTER POLICY:** Agencies and policymakers could analyze more holistic data by creating a social security number matching system for youth aged out of the guardianship of State systems. Having such data readily available would allow for the creation of targeted policy supports for Connecticut’s young adults after they exit care. This would require, at minimum, providing funding for state agencies to increase their information and data workforce to match data and create reports for policymakers to reference. It might be possible for Connecticut’s P20WIN committee to implement this policy. To protect young people’s rights, the State must obtain informed consent from young people when they exit State care and ensure that young people understand how data are secured and used. The system may also need to exclude data protected by federal regulations, such as data related to health and student education records.
BEST POLICY: Create and staff an advisory council responsible for advising policymakers on the needs of vulnerable young people in Connecticut, similar to the model of the Juvenile Justice Policy Oversight Committee, which contracts with the Tow Youth Justice Institute to match data, analyze data, and report on their findings. Removing this work from individual State departments will lessen the strain on departments and provide a more holistic picture of the issues young people in Connecticut face. This council could then offer recommendations on how Connecticut could target services and programs to specific groups of young people to increase employment, ensure stable housing, and encourage the pursuit of higher education or vocational training.

Connecticut should extend the age at which young people may age out of DCF care.

The shift from adolescence to adulthood is not as seamless as reaching a certain age. Policymakers often mark the transition into adulthood by arbitrary events and accomplishments, such as turning 18 or graduating from school. However, the science of brain development tells us that the picture of what an adult looks like is not so clear-cut. The brain undergoes ongoing changes during adolescence and young adulthood. Hundreds of new neural connections form every second. During this active development period, these brain changes affect the development of young adults’ reasoning, decision-making, impulse control, and emotional regulation. As a result, many young adults’ brains do not reach maturity until their mid-to-late 20s.

Additionally, traditional milestones of “adulthood” and independence are being pushed back for all young adults. More than ever, young adults live with their parents, delay buying homes, delay marriage, and prioritize economic security. More young adults between the ages of 25 and 34 lived with their parents in 2019. The portion of young adults living with their parents during the pandemic surpassed the numbers seen during the Great Depression. During the pandemic, DCF’s moratorium on aging out of care increased young adults opting to stay in care and full-time employment for young adults. Young adults need support beyond the age markers the State has set for them.

GOOD POLICY: Young people in DCF care may opt to leave care as early as 18. Young people who are completing a secondary education credential, pursuing postsecondary or vocational education, or participating in a program to promote employment may opt to stay in care up to age 21. Legislators in Connecticut should allow youth to remain in care to 23. With this time, young adults can continue to mature mentally and build the supports and resources they will need to continue their progression into independent adulthood. Science and circumstance show us that young adults will continue to need support past the age of 21 regardless of their participation in an educational or vocational-focused program. While DCF has provided services to young people through age 23 throughout the pandemic, the current statute only extends care to young people through 21. Changing the law from 21 to 23 will help ensure that when the next economic crisis hits, young people in DCF care have the same support the current Commissioner and administrative team provides. Policymakers should write these legislative changes so that young people who need special services through DDS or DMHAS can still transfer between agencies at the appropriate time.

BETTER POLICY: Connecticut should expand care to all categories eligible under the Fostering Connections Act. The Federal Fostering Connections Act includes five federally reimbursable categories for extended care. Connecticut has officially extended care to three of those categories.
Unfortunately, Connecticut’s expansion leaves out young adults working at least 80 hours a month and people too impaired to accomplish the educational, vocational, or work requirements to stay in care. DCF is in the process of expanding care to young adults who achieve at least 80 “productive hours” a month. This is a significant step toward extending care to young adults working at least 80 hours a month. However, young people with less education and those with disabilities who do not fall under the purview of DMHAS or DDS receive fewer services than their peers after exiting care. As a result, these already vulnerable groups are particularly vulnerable to the long-term adverse effects for former foster youth discussed earlier.

**BEST POLICY:** Young adults’ brains continue to develop and mature well into their 20s. Expanding care to allow young adults to age out at 26 would allow young adults who wish to remain in care to reach important neurodevelopmental milestones before making vitally important decisions about their independence.

**The Federal Government should make pandemic-related changes to Chafee program policies and funding permanent.**

The John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood, created in 1999, provides funding and programming to help transition-age young people with education, employment, financial management, housing, and building connections to caring adults who can assist young people after they leave State care. Prior to the pandemic, Chafee funds remained around $140 million each year. ETV funds provided up to $60 million more, but these funds were discretionary. Both funding amounts proved inadequate for the number of young people in care nationally and the array of supports they need. During the pandemic, federal policymakers tripled their investment in Chafee funding. They also increased the 30 percent funding limit that states could use toward housing, extended the age of eligibility for Chafee services and funds until age 27, and built flexibility into ETV funds so young people could spend money on things that support them remaining enrolled in higher education.

**GOOD POLICY:** Federal policymakers should make Chafee flexibility provisions created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic permanent. These provisions include allowing states to use more than 30 percent of Chafee funds to help youth and young adults in State care achieve stable housing, allowing states to use Chafee funds to provide ETVs and other vital services to young people up to age 27, and allowing young people to use Chafee funds more flexibly to support them remaining enrolled in school. Given Connecticut’s high cost of living compared to many other states (Connecticut is currently the eighth most expensive state to live in), the flexibility of funding makes it far more likely that young people and agencies can meet young people’s most salient needs and provide basic necessities without which young people cannot achieve in their education or employment.

**BETTER POLICY:** Federal policymakers should index the yearly Chafee appropriation and yearly state contributions by inflation. This will help stabilize the cost of running Chafee services in states with a high cost of living. Due to the overall flat funding of Chafee dollars at $140 million between 1999 and 2019 and the funding of ETV dollars only up to $60 million, the purchasing power of Chafee dollars has decreased by almost half since Chafee’s inception. If Chafee dollars had just kept pace with inflation, the mandatory annual appropriation in 2022 would be over $234 million. If ETV
dollars had kept pace with inflation, the annual appropriation in 2022 would be up to $93 million.\textsuperscript{135} Taken together, the federal government should allocate \textit{at minimum} $327 million in Chafee funding to states to continue the original intent of the program.

**BEST POLICY:** Federal policymakers should permanently increase the mandatory annual appropriation of Chafee funds to the level provided during the pandemic ($400 million) \textit{and} index that rate to inflation moving forward. The Annie E. Casey Foundation estimates that nationally there are 539,296 Chafee-eligible young people ages 14-23,\textsuperscript{136} of which only around 20 percent (112,000 young people) receive assistance.\textsuperscript{137} When including young people through age 26, that number of eligible young people increases to 880,967.\textsuperscript{138} The pre-pandemic funding of $200 million divided by the number of eligible young people comes out to less than $230 per youth, which helps to explain why so many young people who could and should receive Chafee funds and services do not. Furthermore, while many states have reduced the number of young people taken into State care, the average level of need of young people when they enter care is now higher. Flat-funding Chafee for so many years left states without adequate resources to provide a solid launch for vulnerable and high-need young people. In December of 2020, federal policymakers infused $400 million into Chafee (Connecticut received $3.49 million).\textsuperscript{139} This infusion of funds allows states to provide direct services, supports, and vouchers to help more young people as they launch into adulthood during the pandemic. Making this amount of funding permanent and indexing it to inflation would help states stabilize young people when the next economic crisis hits.
Due to the workforce factors that disadvantage the inexperienced, young people tend to be disproportionately unemployed and underemployed compared to older adult counterparts. Economic recessions compound these patterns. Young people who transition into the workforce during a recession earn lower incomes throughout their life and are more likely to rely on family for support during their young adulthood. During many recessions, more young people enroll in higher education so that when they do enter (or re-enter) the workforce, they can do so at a higher level of pay to compensate for lost years of potential earnings. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this pattern. Institutions of higher education overwhelmingly transitioned into virtual learning environments. While virtual learning is convenient for some, it can create a barrier to educational engagement and access for others. During the pandemic, young people and families had to pull together to share financial resources, technological resources, and care for their at-home children and ill loved ones. Contrary to past patterns, many young people in families with fewer resources or more pandemic-related disruption did not continue education.

For young people who grow up in the care of the State, becoming a young adult during an economic recession is even more precarious. Child welfare system involvement is associated with multiple layers of trauma. Trauma can impact a young person’s ability to excel in school, find employment, and retain employment. Unlike their counterparts without child welfare involvement, youth who grow up in the State’s care may not have biological families that can pull together and help support them while they are unemployed or underemployed. Therefore, it is the responsibility of all State agencies to work to support the young people who must rely on them for help.

During the pandemic, the Department of Children and Families pivoted its policies and practices to support young people in State care. DCF placed a moratorium on young people aging out of care so that young people could receive services—even young people not enrolled in required educational, vocational, or employment activities. DCF also created mechanisms for young people to re-enter care, and administrators re-wrote many policies to provide extended and more flexible services to youth once the moratorium expired. During this time, DCF saw more young adults opting to stay in care and securing full-time employment. There was also a growing percentage of young people completing their diplomas and a declining percentage of young adults reporting homelessness. However, the moratorium on aging out of DCF care ended on September 1, 2021. On that date, 215 young people entered a very different world from young people in past years. These young people are likely to continue to need State supports to achieve stable employment, complete higher education, and obtain safe, permanent housing.

Agencies in Connecticut could better support young people with systems involvement by embracing responsibility for learning about their unique needs and creating resources that better connect young people to services. Young people transitioning out of DCF care need access to employment networks and priority hiring to increase fruitful employment, and they need extended financial support to access higher education and ensure stable living. They also need people’s help to navigate the dizzying array of services and red-tape that makes accessing services challenging. Currently, providing these supports is next to impossible because the State does not have a way of identifying young people.
and matching them to services after they leave DCF care. Creating a method to data-match young people across agencies and monitor success would help State agencies provide early interventions and reduce redundancy and cost of services provided to young people. Finally, codifying policies that DCF and the federal government implemented during the pandemic in law will help young people in care the next time an economic recession destabilizes Connecticut.
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ENDNOTES


5 At CT Voices, we use the term “Hispanic” when data have been collected by asking individuals whether they have Hispanic ethnicity or heritage. The term “Hispanic” is inclusive of individuals with Spanish origin as well as individuals whose families are indigenous to Latin-American countries and individuals whose families were forcibly brought to Latin-American countries. Throughout the rest of our writing, we utilize the term “Latino/a/x” to refer specifically to people of color from Latin-American countries.


45 Dixon, L. (2021). Data Request by CT Voices to the DCF Department of Transitional Supports & Success. Data available upon request.


62 Dixon, L. (2021). Data Request by CT Voices to the DCF Department of Transitional Supports & Success. Data available upon request.


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134 CT Voices for Children calculation of the inflation of $140 million from 1999 to 2022. Inflation calculator: [https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/](https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/)

135 CT Voices for Children calculation of the inflation of $60 million from 2002 to 2022. Inflation calculator: [https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/](https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/)


