

Improving Stability for Youth Exiting Care



Senate Bill 6560 required Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) and the Office of Homeless Youth (OHY) to develop a plan that ensures **no young person will be discharged into homelessness from a system of care**. This bill required multiple agencies to do things very differently, which was a new approach to our work. This document provides a high-level update on work to date and suggested funding and resources to move the needle.

2019

OHY submitted a report to the Legislature with the following priority recommendations: **Effective Transitions From Care, Community Connections and Housing**. Find more detail in the full report located online at www.commerce.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Youth-Exiting-Systems-of-Care.pdf.

2020

DCYF's draft strategic plan includes a specific focus around a youth-centered planning process that prepares youth for adulthood through education, employment, housing, life skills, permanent connections, and appropriate behavioral health treatment. Read the full draft strategic plan online at www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/COMM_0058.pdf.

HOUSING

HOUSING NAVIGATORS:

Juvenile Rehabilitation (JR) hired three housing program specialists to help youth obtain housing before release. The goal is to have one specialist in each DCYF region. Additionally, DCYF's Adolescent Programs (AP) division hired an Adolescent Housing Program Manager to enhance and develop a housing service array for youth exiting DCYF care.

HOMELESS CASE MANAGEMENT: JR is partnered with community agencies in Spokane and Wenatchee to provide dedicated living units and case management to youth and young adults who are unstably housed or homeless.

VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT: OHY supported the Youth for Youth Board of the rural Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program to develop and pilot an assessment in coordinated entry tailored to the unique vulnerabilities experienced

by young people. The assessment screens for any current or prior involvement in public systems as a prioritization criteria for accessing housing services.

PILOT PROGRAMS AND GRANTS: OHY launched a Transitional Living Program pilot to provide 15 beds of longer-term housing to youth ages 16-17. Through a public-private partnership, OHY has funded a total of nine System of Care grants since 2018 to test new innovations that prevent youth from exiting systems of care into homelessness.

OHY CONTRACT WITH DSHS: Research and data analysis were conducted to develop a data dashboard that tracks the housing status of young people six and 12 months after exit from state systems. Data is used to analyze the prevalence and demographics of youth who experience housing instability after exiting public systems.



MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

COMMUNITY SUPPORT: Department of Commerce and Health Care Authority (HCA) partnered to have one grant-funded WISE engagement coordinator support all JR youth with mental health needs. This position helps youth access WISE services and gain acceptance by the WISE program in the community. The goal is to add an additional engagement coordinator.

TREATMENT: Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery (DBHR) will continue to explore Recovery Case Management Medicaid State Plan options for Substance Use Disorder treatment as full integration continues to develop.

OUTREACH: DBHR continues to partner with OSPI to ensure that behavioral health related resource linkages from OHY and the Division are shared for dissemination to the Educational Service District (ESD) navigators in each region, supporting positive community development.



PROGRAM EXPANSIONS AND STAFFING

HOUSING AND TRANSITION SERVICES: In January 2019, DCYF created the Adolescent Programs (AP) division. AP has prioritized staffing and program resources to address the recommendations in the 6560 report. Specifically, systemic focus on housing and transition services needed to exit youth into safe and stable housing.

FLEXIBLE FUNDING: OHY expanded the availability of diversion assistance by making it an allowable activity in all of its outreach grants and by funding a Centralized Diversion Fund in four communities as part of the Anchor Communities Initiative. Diversion provides flexible funding and creative problem-solving to help young people quickly secure housing.

PREVENTION: Re-envisioning Family Reconciliation Services to better align with the intent of state statute, with a true prevention focus on resolving family conflict to keep families together.

HOUSING POLICY SUPPORT: Health Care Authority (HCA) hired a Transition Age Youth Stable Housing Policy Lead. This position supports the goal of OHY and DCYF to prevent youth from being discharged from behavioral health care into homelessness by providing policy analysis, research, and legislative support to the DBHR Child Youth and Family Section and the Interagency Work Group (IAWG) partners.

Immediate Legislative Action

2021 Session

- Funding for youth and young adult housing – Arlington Drive Youth Campus, Anchor Community initiatives.
- Expand placement options for young people in extended foster care.
- Support the legislative priorities of the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Work Group, which include expansion of youth mobile crisis services and respite care for youth with behavioral health challenges.
- Expand community transition supports – DCYF requested legislation and funding to support transitions for young people exiting JR. Currently, 50% of youth release from JR with no support. Increasing access to needed transition supports will:
 - Provide needed housing assistance.
 - Connect youth to community-based behavioral health treatment, independent living, employment, education, and family and cultural opportunities.



ADDITIONAL STATE INVESTMENT NEEDED

- Expand housing.
 - More housing resources for young adults, ages 18-24.
 - Expand master leasing programs to remove barriers to housing such as criminal records, lack of rental history, lack of credit, etc.
- Expand treatment options.
- Fund Independent Living Skills Program.
- Fund/implement new transition process from child welfare and JR.
- Expand community transition services.
- Expand funding for OHY's System of Care/ Innovation grants, which test innovative approaches, services, or program models that provide stability and prevent youth and young adults from experiencing homelessness after exiting public systems.



COVID-19 PANDEMIC RELIEF

OHY transferred \$1 million in CARES Act funding to DCYF to support youth who exited the extended foster care program at age 21, between March 1-December 31, 2020. This funding allowed DCYF to provide housing stability to 185 youth.

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