

2010 Short- and Long-term Recommendations From the Children's Cabinet Advisory Board Workgroup on Disconnected Youth

RECOMMENDATION 1: Charge executive agencies to prioritize the needs of disconnected youth via funding, policy making and continued cross agency collaboration.

STRATEGY:

- Issue an Executive Order or letter jointly signed by state agencies endorsing this funding priority.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Structure state funding opportunities across multiple state agencies to maximize services for disconnected youth.

STRATEGY:

- Replicate models that have proven effective such as the 'master contract' – a contract that combines multiple state funding streams into one contract with a non-profit provider to simplify administration and increase flexibility for the service provider.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Facilitate the attainment of youth's vital records (including birth certificates, social security cards and DMV photo identification) to enable successful community reintegration.

STRATEGIES:

- Centralize 'how-to' information for providers and youth (e.g, enroll in school/college, obtain vital records, obtain employment, etc.).
- Develop and implement any necessary policies and Memorandums of Agreement to issue identification for youth released from care or incarceration.
- Develop a Youth in Care Web Site (providing a one-stop web site for 'how-to' info).
- Explore the use of technology to allow youth virtual access to their vital records.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Institutionalize (at the state level) uniform discharge planning requirements for adolescents leaving juvenile justice, foster care, and criminal justice settings.

STRATEGIES:

- Require a discharge plan for all youth returning to the community that specifically identifies and facilitates stable, permanent housing, enrollment in school, an evaluation of eligibility for public benefits, and other necessary services.
- Require that any youth discharged from out-of-home placement to a setting other than his or her family is connected with a network of stable adults who will be long-term permanency resources for the youth.
- Begin collecting outcomes information for youth for future development and participation in the National Youth in Transition Database.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Ensure that eligible youth continue to receive Medicaid once they return to the community.

STRATEGIES:

- Issue a Department of Health (DOH) General Information System regarding Medicaid coverage for youth adjudicated as juvenile delinquents being released from Office of Children and Family (OCFS) custody.
- Institute necessary system edits to increase the number of Medicaid eligible youth returning to the community from voluntary agency placements receiving Medicaid upon return.
- Continue to explore an automated process to ensure that youth have an open Medicaid case the day they are released to the community.
- Continue to explore a process to ensure Medicaid enrollment for Medicaid eligible juvenile offenders returning to the community.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Enhance educational stability, attachment, and achievement among disconnected youth.

STRATEGIES:

- Provide Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) equity for foster care youth and non-foster care youth.
- Continue the collaborative efforts between OCFS and the State Education Department (SED) to ensure that credits earned by youth in an OCFS facility are accepted by the local educational systems.
- Collaboratively develop an OCFS/SED plan to ensure educational stability for children in out of home care.

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- Require schools to expeditiously enroll at risk youth returning to their communities.
- Require that all youth – who are under the age of 21 and entitled to educational services under NYS Education Law – participate in educational programming while incarcerated. A youth's stay in a correctional facility can be as long as several years and should be viewed as an opportune time for intense immersion in education and training.
- Promote Foster Care Higher Education On-line Resources. Launch an on-line resource of all the higher education tuition assistance programs available to youth who have been in foster care jointly developed by OCFS and Higher Educational Services Corporation.
- Explore opportunities for more timely transfer (electronic solutions) of student data (SED / OCFS).

RECOMMENDATION 7: Increase disconnected youth's access to employment opportunities.

STRATEGIES:

- Seek additional federal funds for the Summer Youth Employment Program and conduct outreach to ensure expanded participation by disconnected youth.
- Expand use of Department of Labor's (DOL) CareerZone in juvenile justice facilities and in local correctional facilities, and by aftercare providers.
- Create a New York State Career Guide for youth and adults that will serve as a companion to the CareerZone and JobZone websites. The Career Guide will provide information to build lifelong career decision-making skills to connect youth and jobseekers to resources covering all aspects of career exploration, and to outline what is necessary for success in the 21st century learning and work environments.
- Work with SED to require school districts to use CareerZone as part of the school curriculum.
- Fully utilize and publicize the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, particularly the new provisions that expand federal eligibility to disconnected youth.
- Increase employment readiness for students incarcerated in local correctional facilities in a partnership with Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), SED, and DOL.

RECOMMENDATION 8: Ensure supportive housing for homeless adolescents.

STRATEGIES:

- Develop a cross agency vision for developing and maintaining supportive housing for homeless, disconnected youth, with a clear lead agency and clear partner agency roles—particularly Division of Housing and Community Renewal, Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, and OCFS.
- Prepare a report that will include a needs assessment, an existing housing inventory, key elements of successful models, costs and potential funding sources.

RECOMMENDATION 9: Highlight and address the needs of children with incarcerated parents across state agencies that have varying levels of responsibility for these youth.

STRATEGIES:

- Issue an Executive Order to institute cross-agency collaboration to address the needs of children with incarcerated parents and designate DCJS with lead responsibility.
- Develop and adopt, across agencies, a set of 'guiding principles' for agencies and localities working with children of incarcerated parents.
- Provide training on best practice protocols (e.g., DCJS training curriculum) for those working with children of incarcerated parents.
- Conduct workshops throughout the state to raise awareness of the issues.

RECOMMENDATION 10: Gather data regarding children of incarcerated parents to identify these often hidden children and learn more about the services that can benefit them and their family members.

STRATEGIES:

- Conduct survey of Department of Correctional Services' inmates to determine the number of children with incarcerated parents and the issues faced by these children.
- Explore the use of the Division of Probation and Correctional Alternatives county data.

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RECOMMENDATION 11: Promote connectivity between incarcerated parents and their children.

STRATEGIES:

- Pilot the use of videoconferencing as a visiting option for children in foster care.
- Expand creative connectivity opportunities, e.g., parents recording books on tape.

RECOMMENDATION 12: Develop a plan to reduce teenage births and improve outcomes for teenage parents and their children with a special emphasis on the needs of high-risk foster care youth.

STRATEGIES:

- Provide comprehensive training to adults who work with foster care youth on sexual risk-taking behavior.
- Provide all foster care teenagers access to needed mental health services.
- Develop strong connections between comprehensive home visiting programs and pregnant/parenting foster care teens.
- Replicate successful models that provide an array of services for parenting teenagers in foster care and their children (including home visiting).
- Provide sex education and access to reproductive health services, including contraceptives, to all children and youth in foster care.
- Evaluate pregnancy prevention programs for their effectiveness in the foster care population.
- Collect data on pregnant and parenting youth and youth who have aged out of foster care.
- Fund pregnancy prevention and parenting programs that provide coordinated mentoring experiences.