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Charlie and Nadine H. v. Christie

Supplemental Monitoring Report:
An Assessment of Services and Outcomes for
Older Adolescents Exiting DYFS Placements

Center
for the
Study
of
Social
Policy

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I. INTRODUCTION

In July 2006, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) was appointed by the Honorable Stanley R. Chesler of the United States District Court for the District of New Jersey as Federal Monitor of the class action lawsuit *Charlie and Nadine H. v. Christie*.¹ As Monitor, CSSP is charged with independently assessing the State's progress in meeting the requirements and outcomes established in the Modified Settlement Agreement (MSA), approved by the Court in July 2006.

CSSP has issued, to date, eight comprehensive Monitoring Reports assessing the State's progress. The State is currently in Phase II of the Modified Settlement Agreement (MSA). Phase II assesses performance benchmarks related to the provision of services to children and families and the results (outcomes) of the State's interventions in the lives of New Jersey's children, youth and families. ***This supplemental Monitoring Report, based on a review of case records, is focused on outcomes for a subpopulation of older youth regarding their educational achievement, housing, employment and social connection at the point of exit from the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) placement. The report also provides information on case planning and services for this population.***

As discussed in the Period VIII Monitoring Report, over the past four years, New Jersey has created and promoted policies to provide support and services to youth age 18 to 21.² Forty-six DYFS local offices have either an adolescent unit or designated adolescent workers specifically trained to address the specialized needs of the adolescent population in their caseload.³

The independent case record review assesses youth aged 18 or older who had spent at least 60 days in out-of-home care and were considered to have exited from DYFS placement between January 1 and June 30, 2010.⁴ Staff and consultants of CSSP conducted the case review between August 15 and October 31, 2010.

This report is intended to provide baseline information on the MSA requirement that youth exiting DYFS care without being reunified or otherwise achieving permanency have housing and are employed or in a training or educational program (Child and Family Outcome and Case Practice Performance Benchmark #55). Appendix A provides a summary of all the relevant MSA requirements that were examined during this review. Recommendations based on findings of this review were developed after conversations with DCF and Plaintiffs.

¹ *Charlie and Nadine H. et al. v. Christie*, Modified Settlement Agreement, United States District Court for the District of New Jersey, Civ. Action No. 99-3678 (SRC), July 18, 2006.

² *Progress of the New Jersey Department of Children and Families Period VIII Monitoring Report for Charlie and Nadine H. v. Christie*, Dec. 2010.

³ More about the Department of Children and Family's work with this population is discussed in the Monitor's Period VIII report. See, *Progress of the New Jersey Department of Children and Families Period VIII Monitoring Report for Charlie and Nadine H. v. Christie*, Dec. 2010

⁴ One youth in the universe of cases provided to the Monitor was 17, almost 18, and was included in this review. This youth was involved in the juvenile justice system and DYFS was ordered to place him in a treatment program. The youth exited upon completion of the program.

NATIONAL CONTEXT ON ISSUES SURROUNDING OLDER YOUTH EXITING STATE CUSTODY

Nationwide Increase of Youth in Foster Care

While the number of children in foster care has been declining nationally in the past decade, the proportion of older children in care has increased.⁵ Child welfare agencies across the country have had to adjust to this change, and respond to the needs of this older population of children. Federal and state legislation provide targeted funding for services for youth, but in too many cases this population's needs remain insufficiently addressed. New federal legislation expands obligations for states to provide services and supports for older youth and provides more options, but much remains to be done to ensure that youth who have experienced foster care receive the range of services and supports necessary to have the opportunity to successfully transition to adulthood.

Federal Law Provides Support to Youth

Federal law provides specific supports for youth in foster care. Child welfare agencies have access to federal and state funds to facilitate children reuniting with their parents and, when that is not possible, placement in other, preferably permanent living arrangements. In order to be eligible for these funds, states must comply with certain mandates intended to promote safety, permanency and well-being of children, such as the development of written case plans and case reviews and, for youth 16 or older, a description of programs and services to help children make the transition to living independently.⁶

In 1999, the Foster Care Independence Act created the federal Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) to provide funding for youth who are aging out of foster care. With this funding, and a 20 percent state match, states have created independent living programs designed to assist youth with housing, career advancement, education services, counseling, mentoring, and other services. The Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments of 2001 (P.L. 107-133) authorized the Chafee Education and Training Voucher Program for youth who age out of foster care to obtain education vouchers worth up to \$5,000 annually for the cost of full-time or part-time attendance at a college or other secondary school.

Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Fostering Connections) made significant additional changes to previous child welfare legislation, particularly changes related to older youth in foster care. As a result of Fostering Connections, Title IV-E funds are authorized to reimburse states for the cost of providing foster care to youth up to age 21, at the state's option. In order to be eligible, a youth must be completing high school or an equivalent program, enrolled in post-secondary or vocational education or certain employment programs, or employed part-time. Fostering Connections also made CFCIP services available to youth exiting foster care to adoption or kinship guardianship at 16 or older, as well as to youth who age out of

⁵ Adrienne L. Fernandez, *Youth Transitioning from Foster Care: Issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Service, CRS Report for Congress February 12, 2009 (Hereafter referenced as Congressional Report, February 2009)

⁶ Section 475(5)(C), Title IV-E of the Social Security Act

care without a permanent home. In addition, Fostering Connections requires a youth's caseworker or other representative to assist and support the youth in developing a transition plan, which identifies and addresses what supports and services the youth may need after the youth is no longer in the care or custody of the state.

Current Research

Recent studies of former foster youth have demonstrated that at age 21 a significant portion of former foster youth have serious problems adjusting to life as independent adults.⁷ And, while research has shown that a key element to a successful transition to adulthood is connection to a caring, supportive adult, an increasing number of older youth are exiting foster care without being reunited with their birth families or having been connected to another permanent relationship. Nationally, in fiscal year (FY) 2007, approximately 29,000 youth reached majority without a permanent, legal connection to an adult⁸ as compared with 20,000 in FY 2002.⁹

The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth was conducted at various stages of former foster youth's lives before and after they left care. The study found disturbing trends for youth at age 21 who had been in foster care as compared with youth in the general population: they were less likely to have attended college for at least year and more likely to encounter barriers to enrolling or staying in school. They also become parents at a higher rate, lack enough money to pay rent, and are more likely to report having received food stamps.¹⁰ Research also shows that African American foster youth are less likely to have avoided public assistance than their White or Hispanic counterparts, less likely to be employed, and less likely to have earned at least \$5,000 during the past year.¹¹ This study also showed that some young people transitioning out of foster care do well and that relational permanency—strong ties to family or adult mentors—contributes to improved outcomes for these youth.

Work in New Jersey

Beginning in 2004, even prior to Fostering Connections, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) in New Jersey began improving policies and practices for youth in foster care. In 2004, New Jersey changed its policy to permit youth to remain in foster care until they reach age 21. In 2008, DCF created Adolescent Units in DYFS local offices with caseworkers specifically assigned to work with older youth. Stakeholders report that while attention to the needs of adolescents has grown, much work remains to be done.

⁷ Mark Courtney et al., *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 21*, Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago, Dec. 2007. This study examined the experiences of foster youth in Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois who were in care before their 16th birthday, were still in care at age 17, and had been removed from their homes for reasons other than delinquency. Data were collected from the 732 youth when they were 17 or 18, and again when they were 19 (n=603), 21 (n=591), and 23 or 24 (n=602).

⁸ Policy for Results, Center for the Study of Social Policy, PolicyforResults.org, Executive Summary Dec. 2010

⁹ Congressional Report, February 2009

¹⁰ Midwest Evaluation, p.3

¹¹ Amy Dworsky et. al., *Racial and ethnic differences in the outcomes of former foster youth*, Children and Youth Services Review 32(6), June 2010, pp. 902-912.

The New Jersey Child Welfare Citizen Review Panel (CWCRP) recently conducted a survey of 175 youth ages 15 to 21 transitioning out of New Jersey’s foster care system.¹² Surveys were administered between November 2008 and June 2009 to youth and to advocates, volunteers and other professionals who work directly with youth, such as Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), Law Guardians, and caseworkers, supervisors and executive management from Care Management, Youth Case Management and Family Support organizations. Some of CWCRP’s findings are encouraging and are consistent with some of the findings in this report. For example, of the youth who responded to CWCRP’s survey, close to 93 percent indicated that they have an adult in their lives who cares about them and who they use as a support system. Two-thirds of the youth reported maintaining regular contact with their birth or adoptive parents and their siblings.¹³ Other CWCRP survey findings are less positive and support the conclusion that much more must be done in New Jersey to prepare youth for the transition out of foster care and into the community as successful adults.¹⁴

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS OF MONITOR’S CASE RECORD REVIEW

Similar to the Midwest Evaluation, the Monitor’s review found that youth exiting care fell into one of four categories: youth who were functioning well and connected to caring adults, school and/or employment; youth who were struggling to be connected to school and/or employment but generally avoiding extreme hardship; youth struggling in their role as parents; and youth that were “troubled or troubling,” that is, youth with significant involvement in the criminal justice system, limited education, unemployed and/or homeless.¹⁵ The review also found many instances of DYFS caseworkers making continued attempts to engage with youth who wanted to exit from DYFS placement and close their case prior to turning 21. In some instances DYFS caseworkers were successful in keeping the youth engaged in services, in other instances not. Such engagement efforts are critical as national data show that youth who remain in care until age 21 have an increased likelihood of pursuing post-secondary education, increased earnings, delayed pregnancy and delayed homelessness.¹⁶

The findings and recommendations of this case review are intended to be useful to the State as it further develops its adolescent programs and supports as well as the responsibilities of the workers trained to address the needs of older youth. This report assesses the services and outcomes for youth age 18-21 who exited DYFS *placement*. Although their placement episode ended, 77 percent of these youth continued to receive some service and supports from DYFS in

¹² Child Welfare Citizen Review Panel, *NJ Youth Aging Out of Foster Care*, April 2010.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Of the 27 percent youth with cases closed at the time of the survey, 56 percent said that they wanted their case closed, while 44 percent said they did not. A significant number of the youth (31%) said their case was closed when they were 14 years of age or younger. The youth and the professionals that took part in the survey indicated that there are not enough housing options for transitioning youth. While most of the youth report that they are working either in full or part time positions, 78 percent of the youth report that no one assisted them in finding employment. Too many youth (68%) reported never completing a life skills program, and 69 percent indicated never being referred to one.

¹⁵ Jim Casey Youth Opportunity Initiative Convening, Mark Courtney Presentation, *The Transition to Adulthood for Youth in foster care: Taking stock and moving forward*, November 15-17, 2010.

¹⁶ Ibid.

the months that followed.¹⁷ The following findings listed below should be considered with this in mind.

Outcomes measured in this review fall into four categories: housing, education, employment and permanency. Similar to findings in the Midwest Evaluation, many youth whose cases were reviewed face significant struggles and require more focused attention from DCF and its partners in order to be better situated to live independently.

Housing

While many youth appeared to have housing upon exit from placement, for more than one fourth of exiting youth, there was no documentation of a housing option. Five of the youth left DYFS placement to a shelter.

- Of the seventy-two percent (72%) of youth who had housing identified upon exiting DYFS placement, the largest numbers were living with their biological or adoptive parents (18%) or relatives (17%).

Education

Upon exit from placement, too often youth were not connected to educational opportunities, and were not counseled as to how to take advantage of funding possibilities to pursue higher education. More needs to be done to help youth enroll in college, pay for it, and stay in school once they get there.

- Upon exit, 45 percent of youth had a GED, high school degree or higher.¹⁸ However, less than half of all youth (41%) were enrolled in school at exit.
- Fifty-nine percent of youth exiting DYFS placement and in college were participants in the NJ Scholars program. Reviewers found documentation in 17 percent of cases that youth received information about the New Jersey Scholars program, a program that provides funding for post- secondary and vocational education for youth in foster care.¹⁹

¹⁷ This assessment did not solely focus on older youth with closed cases as that would miss a number of youth who had exited DYFS placement. According to DCF, a youth by himself/herself is not considered a “case”, rather a youth is a participant in a case. The family is considered the “case.” Looking at closed cases only would miss youth who exited placement but the “case” remained open because other family members remain active with DYFS services. In consultation with DCF, the Monitor determined that examining youth who exited DYFS placement provides more information about the experience of older adolescents.

¹⁸ Specifically, 24 percent had a high school diploma, 5 percent had a GED, 15 percent had some college education, and less than 1 percent had an associate’s degree.

¹⁹ Not all 205 would be eligible for NJ Scholars participation because they must have completed high school and be accepted into college. However, the Monitor was interested in understanding how many youth were informed of this support.

Employment

Far too many youth (68%) were unemployed at the time of exit from placement. Despite economic realities, the State must do more to assist youth in career counseling and employment services.

- Forty percent (40%) of youth were neither employed nor in school at the time of exit.
- One hundred thirty-nine youth (68%) were unemployed at the time of exit from DYFS placement; and of those youth employed, 78 percent held part time jobs.²⁰

Permanency

Many youth (72%) were connected to a caring adult upon their exit from DYFS placement.

- However, case stories documented that many of these caring adults to whom youth were connected struggled with their own mental health or substance abuse issues.
- Of the youth who were not connected to a caring adult, reviewers found evidence of efforts by DYFS workers to find permanent connections for 49 percent of youth.

Specific Populations: Criminal Justice, Mental Health, Substance Abuse, Developmentally disabled, and Pregnant and Parenting Teens

There is a high rate of juvenile or adult criminal justice involvement of exiting youth.

- Of the universe of 205 youth, 43 percent had been or were currently involved with the juvenile or adult criminal justice system (53% of males and 35% of females).

Many youth had documented mental health needs and a significant portion of these youth were not connected to mental health services at exit.

- Forty-four percent (44%) of youth had documented ongoing mental health needs. Of those youth, 39 percent were not connected to mental health services, 34 percent refused such services and 28 percent were connected to such services.

Similarly, youth with documented active substance abuse problems were not consistently connected to treatment.

- Twenty percent (20%) of youth had an active substance abuse problem at the time of exit from DYFS placement. Of those youth, 41 percent were not connected to substance abuse treatment, 36 percent refused such services, and 24 percent were connected to such services.

A small number of youth qualify for public services for adults developmental disabilities.

- Three percent (3%) of youth qualified for services through the Division of Developmental Disabilities, but case stories show many more will need support in adulthood due to cognitive delays, mental health and other problems.

²⁰ Of those 139 youth, 56 (40%) were enrolled in school.

Nearly one-fifth of youth exiting care were pregnant or were parents.

- Nineteen percent (19%) of the youth were pregnant or were parents; 16 percent of those parents were identified as fathers. Reviewers found very little documentation about the role adolescent fathers played in their children's lives or what services they were offered or received.

Case Planning, Assessments and Services

- *Ninety-four percent (94%) of youth exiting DYFS placement had case plans with an identified case goal. Fifty-eight percent (58%) had a goal of independent living; 22 percent individual stabilization;²¹ seven percent family reunification; two percent adoption; one percent kinship legal guardianship, and six percent family stabilization.*
- *Thirty-one percent (31%) of the youth had an independent living assessment completed upon exit from DYFS placement and 69% did not.²²*
- *Sixty-six percent (66%) of the youth participated in independent living skills activities, and 34 percent did not. Forty-three percent (43%) participated in life skills assessment and/or training. Of the youth who did not participate in independent living skills activities, 50 percent had never been referred to such services.*
- *Twenty-three percent (23%) of youth were assisted with obtaining a driver's license prior to exit from placement.*
- *Twenty-two percent (22%) had a savings or checking account upon exit.*

In general, the findings in this report are consistent with national data that suggest that youth exiting placement at age 21 have unacceptably high chances of ending up homeless, incarcerated, or otherwise experiencing problems severe enough to prevent them from becoming successful and functioning adults.

²¹DCF states that the independent living goal applies to youth 16 to 18 years old after the goals of reunification, adoption, and kinship legal guardianship have been explored and ruled out. The youth must be enrolled in, or completed independent living skills and requires support from DYFS. Individual stabilization applies to youth 18 to 21 who are being transitioned to an independent living program or other setting, have agreed to a continuation of services, and for whom no other goal is appropriate.

²² An independent living assessment is a web-based tool to be completed by the youth and/or caregiver. The MSA requires that 75 percent of youth age 14-18 have such an assessment. The MSA also requires that 18-21 year olds should receive services similar to ones previously available to them when under the age of 18. Thus, the Monitor expected to find these assessments for youth in the universe of cases reviewed.

II. METHODOLOGY

The case record review (Review) was conducted between August 15 and October 31, 2010. The Review Team consisted of Monitor staff and consultants hired by the Monitor. A total of five individuals reviewed cases.

The CSSP case record Review Team designed a sampling plan, developed a structured data collection instrument, trained the Review Team members, employed a quality assurance approach to ensure inter-rater reliability, and utilized Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for data analysis. These activities were accomplished as follows:

1. Sample Plan and Implementation

The universe of children for the review was every youth between the ages of 18 and 21 who had been in care at least 60 days and who exited DYFS placement between January 1 and June 30, 2010. The Review Team read the case records of all (212) youth who met these parameters. Seven cases were dropped from the universe because, upon review of the case file, they failed to meet the criteria.²³ In sum, the analysis presented here includes a review of the case files of 205 youth.

The Review Team used a structured instrument (see Appendix B) for data collection. Each team member had access to NJ SPIRIT (New Jersey's statewide automated child welfare information system) and the auxiliary paper copies of Ansell Casey Independent Living Assessments²⁴ to confirm and gather data needed to complete each case record review.

2. Data Collection

The structured data collection instrument used to review the case records was produced using Survey Monkey, an online software tool used for creating surveys and questionnaires. This instrument was designed in collaboration with Troy Blanchard, Ph.D. of Louisiana State University. Drafts of the instrument were reviewed by DYFS staff. Two CSSP staff pilot tested the instrument in early July 2010 and made adjustments as necessary. Remote data collection took place August 15 – October 31, 2010.

3. Reviewer Training

Each reviewer participated in a four hour training facilitated by a CSSP senior staff member. The training included: reviewing the data collection tool, learning to navigate NJ SPIRIT, and reviewing an example case record. The results of the test case record were discussed in-depth to ensure uniformity in data collection and decision-making.

²³ The cases dropped involved children who were not in DYFS custody at all or not in care for the full 60 days, a youth who died from natural causes and a duplicative record.

²⁴ The Ansell Casey Independent Living Assessment is an online tool to be completed jointly by the youth and/or caregiver. The tool captures information about a youth's understanding of financial decision making, work and study skills, self care, social relationships and other life skills.

4. Quality Control and Assurance

During the review period, Monitor staff checked data collection instruments for completeness and internal consistency prior to data entry and analysis. For the first two cases reviewed by each reviewer, each record received a full second review by Monitor staff to ensure consistency and inter-rater reliability. Subsequently and throughout the data collection period, Monitor staff conducted random second reviews of cases for consistency and completeness. Of the 212 records reviewed, 21 received a full second review.

5. Data Analysis

The data collection instruments were coded into a format that allowed statistical analysis using the SPSS computer program. Review Team comments were also captured and reviewed to gain a greater understanding of each case.

6. Limitations of Case Record Review

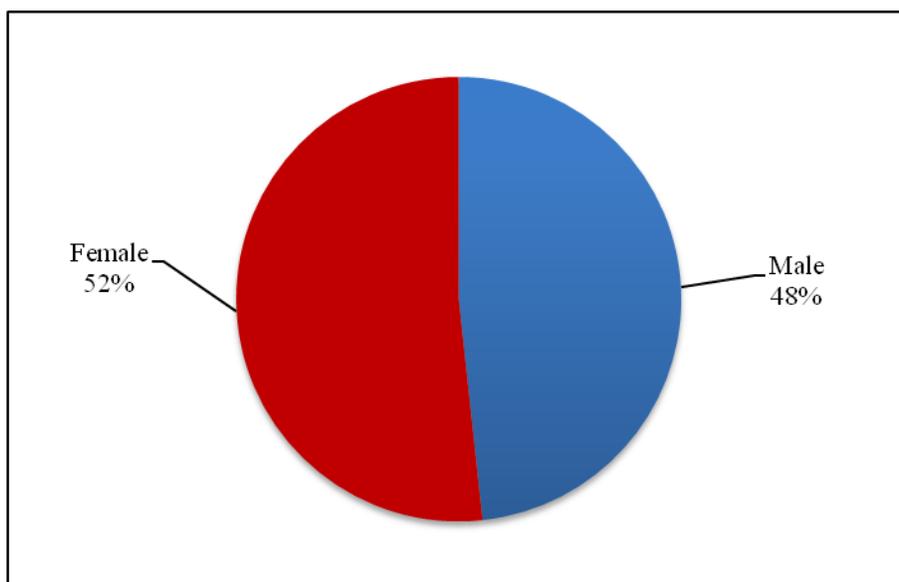
The case record review relied exclusively on documentation in NJ SPIRIT and copies of Independent Living Assessments. The Review Team found many instances of incomplete documentation. The Review Team concluded that there may have been additional efforts to plan for and secure services for older youth exiting placement that were not documented and therefore not credited in the review. Additionally, case record reviews in general have inherent limitations in assessing the comprehensiveness and quality of service delivery.

III. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON CASES REVIEWED

Gender

As shown in Figure 1, of the 205 youth in the universe of cases reviewed, 106 (52%) were female and 99 (48%) were male.²⁵

Figure 1: Gender Distribution of Youth in Cases Reviewed
N=205 youth



Source: CSSP case record review, 2010

Race/Ethnicity

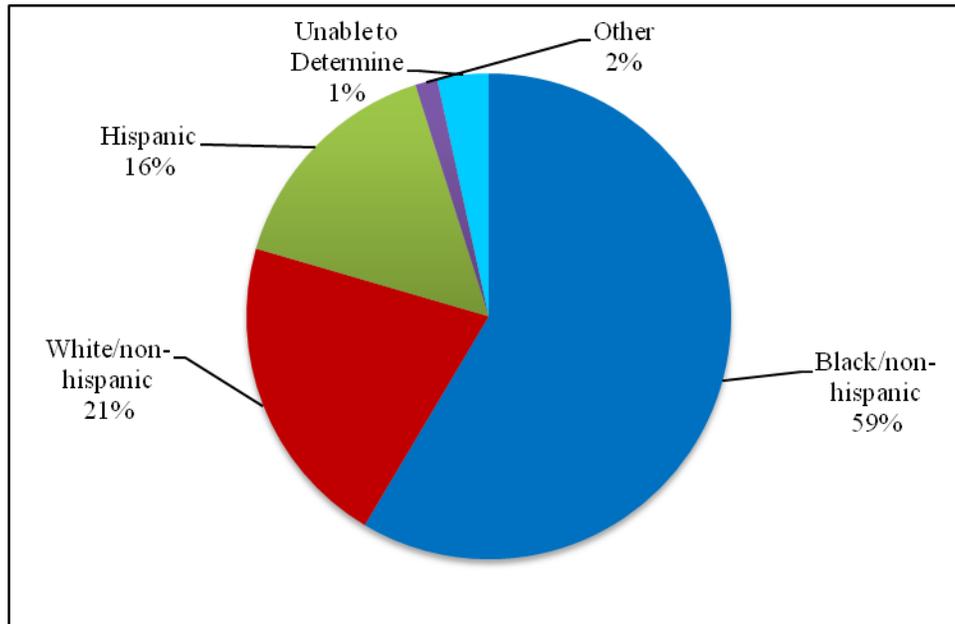
As shown in Figure 2 below, 120 youth (59%) in the universe were identified as Black, non-hispanic; 43 (21%) were White; 32 (16%) were Hispanic; 3 (2%) were identified as another race/ethnicity and for 7 youth (1%) the race/ethnicity was unable to be determined.²⁶ DCF has significantly improved its ability to capture the race/ethnicity of youth since the Monitor's 2009 Health Care Case Record Review when 11 percent of children's race/ethnicity was unknown or unable to be determined.²⁷

²⁵ This data is comparable to DCF's report that on June 30, 2010, of the 7,861 children in out-of-home placement, 48 percent were female and 52 percent were male.

²⁶ Total percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding. Because these race/ethnic categories are used by New Jersey, the Monitor uses these categories as shortened to Black, White and Hispanic.

²⁷ Appendix C of *Progress of the New Jersey Department of Children and Families: Period VI Monitoring Report for Charlie and Nadine H. v. Christie*- January 1 to June 30, 2009, Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Social Policy, December 22, 2009. See, <http://www.cssp.org/publications/child-welfare/class-action-reform/11-18-class-action-reform-new-ones/charlie-and-nadine-h-v-corzine-supplemental-mointoring-report-an-assessment-of-provision-of-health-care-services-for-children-in-dyfs-custody-december-2009.pdf>.

Figure 2: Race/Ethnicity of Youth in Cases Reviewed
N=205 youth



Source: CSSP case record review, 2010

Age

The universe of youth examined ranged in age from 17 to 21. The majority of youth in this case record review were age 18 (51%). The following table lists the ages of youth as of August 1, 2010.

Table 1: Age of Youth

Age	Number in Universe	Percentage
17	1	1%
18	104	51%
19	63	31%
20	33	16%
21	4	4%
Total	205	100%

Source: CSSP case record review, 2010

*Percentage is greater than 100 due to rounding.

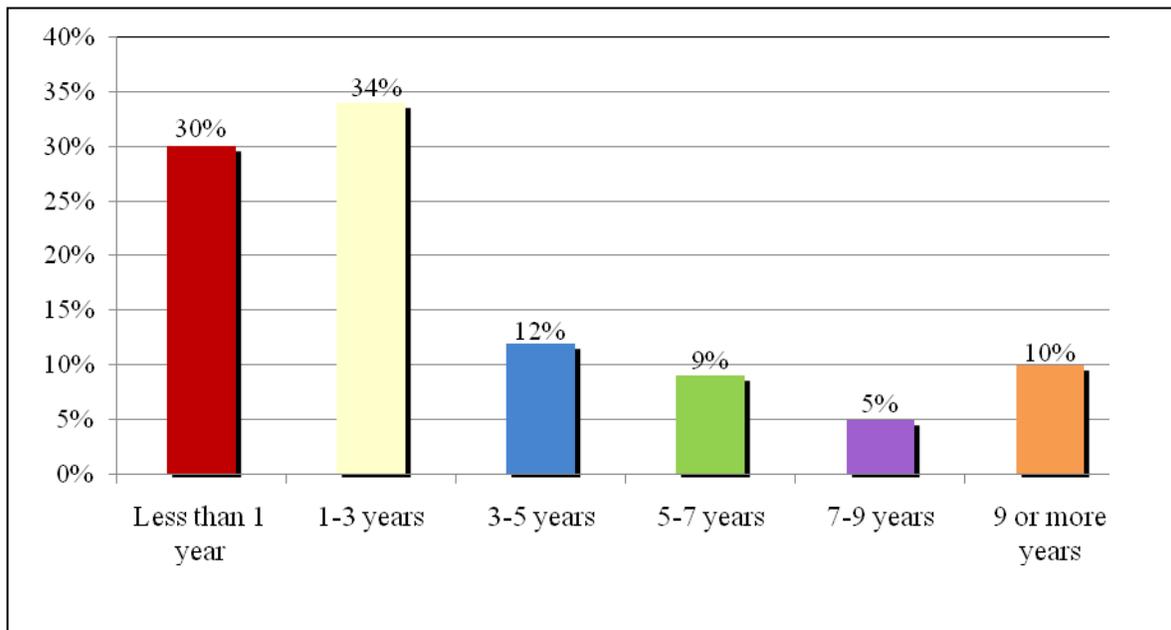
Previously in DYFS or other state custody

This record review examined the most current child protective custody placement or episode for each youth in the universe. Over half (108 youth or 53%) of the youth in the review, had previously been in DYFS or another state child protective custody, exited care, and then reentered. For 69 youth (34%), this was their first child protective custody episode and for 28 youth (14%) reviewers were unable to determine if the youth had previously experienced child protection interventions.

Length of Stay

The majority of youth exiting DYFS placement had been in care three years or less for the current child protection placement episode. Figure 3 below shows the variation of the length of stay in DYFS out-of-home placement for the youth. Of these 205 youth, 62 (30%) had been in this placement episode for less than one year before exiting DYFS placement and 49 (24%) had been in care for five or more years at the time of exit.

**Figure 3: Length of Stay for Current Placement Episode for Youth in Cases Reviewed
N=205 youth**



Source: CSSP case record review, 2010

Type of placement prior to exit from DYFS placement

Prior to exit from DYFS placement, the greatest number of youth were living in a non-relative foster home (55 youth), in transitional/independent living housing (47 youth), or with relatives (21 youth). Other living arrangements included: group homes (18 youth), residential treatment (14 youth), therapeutic foster homes (16 youth), shelter (8 youth), friend's home (6 youth),

relative foster home (5 youth), own apartment or college housing (3 youth), substance abuse treatment facility (3 youth), psychiatric hospital (3 youth), pregnant/parenting program (2 youth), or prison (2 youth). Reviewers were unable to determine the living arrangement for two youth. See Table 2 below.

Table 2: Type of Placement of Youth Just Prior to Exit from DYFS Placement

Type of Placement Upon Exit	Number of youth	Percentage
Non-relative Foster Home	55	27%
Transitional/Independent Living	47	23%
Living with Relatives (not formal foster home placement)	21	10%
Group Homes	18	9%
Residential Treatment	14	7%
Therapeutic Foster Homes	16	8%
Shelter	8	4%
Friend's Home	6	3%
Relative Foster Home	5	2%
Own Apartment or College Housing	3	1%
Substance Abuse Treatment	3	1%
Psychiatric Hospital	3	1%
Pregnant/Parenting Program	2	1%
Prison	2	1%
Unable to Determine	2	1%
Total	205	100%

Source: CSSP case record review, 2010

Of the 205 youth, 128 (62%) had been in their current placement for less than one year before exiting DYFS placement.

Assignment of Adolescent DYFS worker

DCF has designated certain workers as *Adolescent workers* who are assigned specialized caseloads of older youth. Adolescent workers have, at a minimum, completed the first three modules of specialized Adolescent Training. Of the cases reviewed, 118 youth (58%) had an Adolescent worker as their most recent caseworker, 87 (42%) had a different type of worker, usually a Permanency worker.²⁸

²⁸ The Monitor provided DCF with a list of the last know worker for each youth and DCF determined if the worker was an Adolescent worker.

IV. FINDINGS

A. *Exiting DYFS Placement*

The Review Team found that determining the date at which a youth technically exits foster care and ends his or her DYFS involvement was difficult. While the cases reviewed were by definition youth who were considered by DYFS to have exited placement, there was evidence that the majority of youth continued to receive some type of supports or services from DYFS beyond the NJ SPIRIT-generated “exit” date.

DYFS defines youth as ending a placement episode when one of the following occurs:

- “The child is returned to the permanent care of the parent(s)/caregivers(s) or relative(s), or is otherwise discharged from any and all out-of-home placement settings;
- Adoption or Kinship Legal Guardianship has been finalized;
- An adolescent, over the age of 18, is no longer in out-of-home placement, ages out, or becomes emancipated;
- The child has run away from the placement and has been missing for at least six months;
- Responsibility for the care of the child is transferred to another agency, such as Corrections/Juvenile Justice.” DYFS Policy, IIA 4000.3

Of the 205 youth identified through NJ SPIRIT as exiting DYFS placement between January 1 and June 30, 2010, there were case notes documenting 158 youth (77%) continued to receive services and had DYFS caseworkers involvement in their lives after ending their placement episode. Forty-three youth (20%) were not receiving services post-exit and reviewers were unable to determine if four youth were connected to DYFS after the exit date provided by NJ SPIRIT.

The types of services and supports to youth who had exited placement, but remained connected to DYFS, varied significantly. Some youth regularly sought support from DYFS caseworkers; others maintained more distant and episodic contact with caseworkers. Reviewers saw evidence in case files of monthly visits by caseworkers, financial assistance with housing and transportation, purchasing of laptops, and referrals to services, job and training opportunities. Thus, the Review Team determined that DYFS has numerous opportunities to intervene and support youth who clearly remain connected to DYFS, but have technically exited from placement.

Over two-thirds of youth were counseled about the benefits of staying involved with DYFS past the age of 18.

DYFS policy requires that eligible youth may continue to receive DYFS services up to age 21 and that youth are to be counseled about their right to continue to receive services until their 21st birthday. Of the 205 youth, there was evidence that 16 did not receive this counseling because the youth relocated to another state, the youth was missing or had run away, or the youth was involved in the criminal justice system and did not have the option to continue DYFS involvement. Thus, a total of 192 youth should have received such counseling. Of the 192

youth, 134 (70%) were counseled about the benefits of staying involved with DYFS. For 42 youth (22%), there was no evidence that they were counseled about these benefits.²⁹

Adolescent closing agreements

An “adolescent closing agreement” is the document that the DYFS caseworker and youth sign after a decision is made to close the case.³⁰ Closing agreements are a means of ensuring that youth understand that if they are under the age of 21, they can continue to receive services. It also provides youth other information such as contact information for Medicaid. When a youth exits DYFS placement prior to age 21 but still receives case management services, the form will not be completed. Of the youth who had exited DYFS placement, 77 percent continued to receive supports from DYFS and may not consider their case to be closed even though they exited placement. Of the total cases reviewed, 22 percent had signed an adolescent closing agreement and in 15 percent of cases, reviewers were unable to determine if an agreement was signed.³¹

B. Outcomes for Youth Exiting Placement

The MSA requires DCF to ensure that youth exiting placement without achieving permanency through reunification, adoption or legal guardianship have housing and be employed or in a training or educational program (See Appendix A, Performance Benchmark #55). The review examined these outcomes for youth as well as explored whether youth were connected to caring adults.

The majority of youth had housing upon exit from DYFS placement, but for more than one-fourth of exiting youth, documentation on housing was unclear.

Of the 205 youth, 148 youth (72%) had housing upon exiting placement. Although a large number of youth had housing, the long term stability of housing was questionable for many youth. Five youth were living in a temporary shelter and other youth had informal living arrangements with friends and relatives, but in some cases, the contact notes showed that the housing was not stable and youth did not know how long they could remain in their housing. The reviewers found no documentation in the case file of a housing option for 57 (28%) youth when they exited DYFS placement. Stable housing is a significant problem for many youth exiting DYFS placements.

Table 3 below describes the type of housing youth were in, or had plans to go to, upon their exit from DYFS placement.

²⁹ For an additional 13 youth (7%), no counseling occurred because they had turned 21 or had exited to permanency.

³⁰ See Appendix for an example of the Adolescent Closing Agreement.

³¹ Percentages do not add up to 100 because of rounding.

Table 3: Type of Housing After Exiting DYFS Placement

Type of Housing	Number of Youth
(Own) Apartment	10
Biological Parent(s)/Adoptive Parents Home	37
College Dormitory or Other College Affiliated Housing	7
Home with Friends	28
Home with Relatives	35
Shelter	5
Transitional Housing/Supported Independent Living	14
Other Housing (e.g., job corps, Mommy and Me)	7
Unable to Determine type of housing	5
Total	148
No documentation of housing	57
Total	205

Source: CSSP case record review, 2010

More needs to be done to help youth enroll in college, pay for it and complete their degree.

Over half of youth exiting DYFS placement are not educationally prepared to succeed. Of the 205 youth, 92 (45%) had a GED, high school degree or higher at the time of exit. Less than half (45%) of the 205 youth were enrolled in school at the time of exit.

The following table describes the highest level of educational achievement for youth upon exit from DYFS placement.

Table 4: Youth's Highest Level of Educational Attainment

Highest Level of Education	Number of Youth	Percent
Associate's Degree	1	>1%
Some College	30	15%
High School Diploma	50	24%
GED	11	5%
GED Preparation	9	4%
Some High School	93	45%
Some Junior High School	1	>1%
Unable to Determine	10	5%
Total	205	100%

Source: CSSP case record review, 2010

Of the 205 youth, 121 (59%) were not enrolled at school upon their exit from DYFS placement, 84 (41%) were enrolled. The following table describes the type of school the 84 youth were attending at the time of their exit from placement. The greatest number of these youth were enrolled in high school (33 youth) or community college (22 youth).

Table 5: Type of School

Type of School	Number of Youth	Percent
4 year College	12	14%
Community College	22	26%
High School	33	39%
GED	4	5%
Alternative High School	10	12%
Other	3	4%
Total	84	100%

Source: CSSP case record review, 2010

The New Jersey Scholars Program (NJ Scholars) is a federally and state funded initiative by which youth intending to participate in secondary education can receive funding assistance for tuition, books, and related school expenses. In previous Monitoring Reports, the Monitor has expressed concern about the low and decreasing numbers of youth involved in this program.

Of the youth in the universe, reviewers found documentation that 20 (10%) were participants in the NJ Scholars program. Reviewers found evidence that an additional 32 youth (16%) received information about the program.

Recognizing that not all youth would be eligible for the NJ Scholars program, the Monitor looked at youth enrolled in high school and college (community or 4-year college). Looking specifically at the 66 youth enrolled in community college, four year college, or high school, there was documentation that 15 (23%) received information about the NJ Scholars program.³²

Table 6: Number of Youth in High School or College Who Received Information About NJ Scholars Program
N=66

Youth Received NJ Scholars Information?	Enrolled in High School or College
No	51
Yes	15
Total	66

Source: CSSP case record review, 2010

³²The Monitor examined the sharing of NJ Scholars information for the 67 youth in high school, including GED, or college. In one case, a response to this question was missing.

Forty percent of youth exiting DYFS custody were not connected to either education or employment.

Such lack of connection increases a youth's risk of poor outcomes related to housing, future employment, and involvement with the criminal justice system. Of the 205 youth, 83 (40%) were neither employed nor continuing their education. Some youth relied on public assistance programs for support, others relied on a network of extended family and friends, and for others it was unclear how they were able to meet their basic needs.

Of the 205 youth in the universe, 139 (68%) were unemployed, 45 youth (22%) were employed, and reviewers were unable to determine the employment status of 21 youth (10%). Of the 45 employed youth, 34 (78%) held part-time jobs, 8 (18%) had full time paid positions, one (2%) had a part-time unpaid position, and reviewers were unable to determine the type of employment for two youth (4%).

Table 7: Youth School and Employment Status Upon Exit

	Youth Enrolled in School	Youth not Enrolled in School	TOTAL
Youth unemployed at exit	56	83	139
Youth employed	28	17	45
Unable to determine	9	12	21
TOTAL	93	112	205

Source: CSSP case record review, 2010

The majority of youth exiting placement were connected to a caring adult.

Of 205 youth in the universe, 148 (72%) were connected to at least one caring adult at the time of exit. Thirty-nine youth (19%) were not connected to an adult, and reviewers were unable to determine whether 18 youth (9%) were connected to a caring adult. Of the 148 youth who were connected, 83 youth were connected to a biological parent and 101 youth were connected to a relative (or fictive kin). Other caring adults included former foster parents, older siblings, boyfriend/girlfriend, family friends from their church or neighborhood, and DYFS staff (caseworkers and nurses) reviewers noted that many of these connections were tenuous due to the adult's challenges with mental health, substance abuse or other issues.

Of the youth who were not connected to a caring adult, the reviewers found that DYFS caseworkers tried to find a permanent connection for 19 of the 39 youth (49%). For the remaining 20 youth, there was no evidence that DYFS tried to connect them to a caring adult.

NJ SPIRIT case files showed that the majority of youth did not have Medicaid or other medical coverage upon exit from DYFS placement. However, in a separate analysis, DCF determined the overwhelming majority of youth had health insurance at exit.

Of the youth who exited placement, there was evidence in NJ SPIRIT that 69 had Medicaid coverage and eight had another type of health insurance (through parents, employer or school). Reviewers were unable to determine from NJ SPIRIT the Medicaid coverage for 67 youth, and 64 youth did not appear to have Medicaid health insurance coverage.

In addition to the information reviewers found in the NJ SPIRIT case record, DCF provided the Review Team with information about the health care enrollment status by type of Medicaid for the youth in the universe.³³ The following table compares the data reviewers found in NJ SPIRIT with the data provided by DCF. In contrast to what reviewers found, DCF indicates that 199 of 205 youth were connected to Medicaid or another health insurance source upon exit. While it is positive that nearly all youth appear to have health insurance coverage at exit, it is critical that workers document and continue to track the health insurance status of youth who exit and remain connected to DYFS.

Table 8: Medicaid Status for Youth Exiting DYFS Placement³⁴

		Is there evidence that the youth had Medicaid coverage upon exit?			Total
		Yes	No	Unable to determine	
Medicaid Type at Discharge	AFDC/NJC	1	1	1	4
	DYFS-Federal	67	62	62	195
	Other	1	1	1	2
	None	0	2	2	4
Total		69	66	70	205

Source: CSSP case record review, 2010

Outcomes for specific populations:

As previously discussed, the Midwest Evaluation study identified four categories of youth exiting foster care: youth who are faring well; youth who are struggling with key pieces of independence (e.g., no housing, no employment), but are generally avoiding extreme hardship; struggling parents; and youth who are “troubled or troubling.” As part of this review, the Monitor examined factors that contribute to youth being disconnected from caring adults, school

³³ DCF reports that Medicaid data was provided as a result of interfacing NJ SPIRIT data with Division of Medical Assistance.

³⁴ Health insurance for youth exiting care included insurance through Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC/NJC), health insurance through Chafee Medicaid (DYFS-Federal) and other (through the youth’s work or school).

and their communities (youth who are “troubled or troubling”) and youth who are struggling as parents. Specifically, the review looked at the experience of youth with the criminal justice system; the connection of youth to mental health and substance abuse treatment services; the types of services received for expectant or current youth-parents; and supports for youth who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

Many youth had documented histories of loss, trauma, abuse and neglect. Providing services and supports to this population can be challenging and there were many cases where youth were unable to become engaged in services despite DYFS’ efforts. However, despite the challenges, the data show why the State and DCF need to be concerned about their futures as many are especially vulnerable to homelessness, adult incarceration and lack of connection to school or community.

Eighty-nine youth (43%) had been or were currently involved with the juvenile or adult criminal justice system.

Fifty-three percent of males and 35 percent of females in the universe were involved with the juvenile or adult criminal justice system. Black youth were more likely to be involved in the juvenile justice system than White or Hispanic youth. Of the Black youth in the universe, 50 percent were involved in the juvenile justice system, as compared to 31 percent of White and 34 percent of Hispanic youth.

The level of detail documented in NJ SPIRIT regarding a youth’s involvement in the juvenile justice system varied. Reviewers were usually able to determine from case notes the nature of the youth’s criminal charges and whether the youth was currently on probation. Documentation of charges included shoplifting, assault of another student at school, running away from a DYFS placement, assault of a youth at a residential treatment facility, possession of or dealing drugs, possession of firearms, and sexual misconduct. At least two youth were considered sex offenders and under Megan’s Law were on a sex offender registry.³⁵ Details about the length and requirements of probation were frequently not documented in case files, even though caseworkers were often in contact with probation officers or taking youth to court and therefore in possession of more information than what was reflected in the case files. Moreover, details of those interactions and implications for case planning were also missing.

Of the 205 youth, 91 youth (44%) had documented, ongoing mental health needs and 25 youth (28%) were connected to mental health services at exit.

Of the 91 youth with documented, ongoing mental health needs, 35 (39%) were not connected to needed mental health services, 25 (28%) were connected, and 31 youth (34%) refused services. In the universe of cases reviewed, 48 percent of girls and 40 percent of the boys had ongoing mental health needs. Forty-four percent of Hispanic, 35 percent of Black, and 64 percent of White youth had ongoing mental health needs.

³⁵ Passed both federally and in New Jersey in the early 1990s, Megan’s Law requires those convicted of sex crimes maintain updated address and employment information with local law enforcement. In some jurisdictions, this registry is available to the public.

Upon exit, 55 of the 205 youth (27%) were prescribed psychotropic medication. However, two-thirds (65%) of these youth were not connected to a provider who could monitor medication or prescribe additional medication if needed.

Forty-two of the youth (20%) had a documented, active substance abuse problem at the time of exit, but less than half of them were connected to treatment at exit.

Of those 42 youth with a documented, active substance abuse problem, 17 (41%) were not connected to substance abuse treatment, 10 (24%) were connected, and 15 (36%) refused services.

In the universe of cases reviewed, 23 percent of boys and 18 percent of girls had a substance abuse problem. Twenty percent of Black youth, 25 percent of Hispanic, and 17 percent of White youth had a documented substance abuse problem.

The following tables summarize the above information. In particular, the data raise questions which deserve further analysis about which populations (by race, ethnicity, and gender) struggle more with interactions with the criminal justice system and which have ongoing mental health needs (or may have undiagnosed mental health needs).

Table 9: Criminal Justice, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Challenges by Gender

	Percentage (Number) of Male N= 99	Percentage (Number) of Female N= 106
Involved in juvenile justice system	53% (37)	35% (52)
With ongoing substance abuse problems	23% (23)	18% (19)
With ongoing mental health needs	40% (40)	48% (51)

Source: CSSP case record review, 2010

Table 10: Criminal Justice, Substance Abuse and Mental Health by Race/Ethnicity

	Percentage (Number) of Whites N = 42	Percentage (Number) of Blacks N = 120	Percentage (Number) of Hispanics N = 32
Involved in juvenile justice system	31% (13)	50% (60)	34% (11)
With ongoing substance abuse problems	17% (7)	20% (23)	25% (8)
With ongoing mental health needs	64% (27)	35% (42)	44% (14)

Source: CSSP case record review, 2010

Very few youth qualified for services from the New Jersey Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), although several additional case files indicated significant developmental delays and mental health issues that show youth will need support into adulthood.

The DDD funds services and supports for youth and adults with many types of developmental disabilities. Only seven youth in the universe (3%) qualified for DDD services. Of those seven, five were connected to the adult DDD service system at the time of exit from DYFS placement. However, case stories of several additional youth suggest the need for ongoing adult supportive services. In one case, DYFS was actively appealing the denial of DDD eligibility; in other cases it was not clear if DDD eligibility restrictions precluded these youth getting help or if the necessary referrals had not been attempted.

One-fifth (38) of exiting youth were pregnant or already parents.

DYFS assists in providing a variety of services to teenage pregnant and parenting teens in custody. Services to pregnant or parenting teenage girls documented in the review included housing services with specialized programs for expectant teen mothers, tracking prenatal care, support and monitoring from a DYFS nurse, assistance with day care, parenting classes, and connection to community-based programs such as Healthy Families. Additionally, the review found that DYFS sometimes requests and is granted court-ordered “care and supervision” of the babies of teenage mothers already in DYFS placement. In two cases, contact notes indicated that court orders were sought for payment and placement purposes only, not because there were concerns about the safety of the baby.

Case files contained very little documentation about workers identifying whether teenage boys in their caseload were fathers. Of the 38 youth in the review identified as expectant or current parents, six were fathers. Services to fathers appeared minimal. In one case, the youth was connected to a parenting program. In two other cases, the parenting services consisted of counseling the youth to get paternity testing or suggesting (but not ensuring) visitation with their children. For example, one teen father, whom DYFS had placed in a residential treatment facility, told his worker that he had a two year old child. The worker documented that she planned to ask the youth’s mentor to arrange visitation, but there is no indication that the worker followed through with the mentor or whether these visits occurred. In the three remaining cases, documented services related to parenting were absent altogether.

Nine youth (4%) were identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth in foster care often have added challenges and experience more frequent disruption and dislocation. In recognition of these challenges and as part of the MSA, DYFS has developed a specific plan for addressing the unique struggles experienced by this population.³⁶

³⁶ The MSA requires that “the State will develop a plan for appropriate service delivery for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth, and thereafter begin to implement plan.” (Section II.C.4).

Of the nine cases of youth who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ) in the review, three had found their own supports (groups through their school or their community) to deal with issues related to sexual orientation. In one case, a worker attempted to secure a mentor for the youth, but the youth left placement before the worker could make the connection.

In the remaining five cases, there was no documentation of LGBTQ supports offered of any kind. In one case, a bisexual youth entered DYFS custody because her mother physically assaulted her when she learned of her daughter's sexual orientation. Contact notes did not reflect any efforts on the part of the caseworker to provide support for the girl or her family about her sexuality despite the fact that the youth returned home. In two cases, documentation reflected that youth were in placements in which they experienced teasing because they identified as gay but there was no evidence of response on the part of DYFS or the staff at the placement to assist the youth.

C. Case Planning and Assessments

The review examined files to ensure that timely and ongoing case planning and services were provided to youth. *The MSA requires DCF to provide youth ages 18 to 21 with services comparable to those available to youth under the age of 18, unless the youth formally requests case closure.* (See Appendix A, Performance Benchmark #54).

One hundred ninety-two youth (94%) had a case plan with an identifiable case goal.

DYFS had developed case plans for the youth in 94 percent of the cases reviewed. One hundred and nineteen youth (58%) had the goal of independent living and 46 (22%) had the goal of individual stabilization. DCF reports that the independent living goal applies to youth 16 to 18 years old after the goals of reunification, adoption, and kinship legal guardianship have been explored and ruled out. The youth must be enrolled in, or completed independent living skills and require support from DYFS. Individual stabilization applies to youth 18 to 21 who are being transitioned to an independent living program or other setting, have agreed to a continuation of services, and for whom no other goal is appropriate. Other goals included family reunification for 15 youth (7%); adoption for 3 youth (2%); kinship legal guardianship for 2 youth (1%); and family stabilization for 6 youth (6%). Reviewers were unable to determine a case goal or find a case plan in 13 cases.

For the three youth with the goal of adoption, one youth achieved adoption and then exited care. For the 15 youth with the goal of reunification, 10 were reunified after their 18th birthday.

The majority of youth exiting DYFS placement did not have an Independent Living Assessment.

New Jersey uses the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment to understand a youth's capacity for independent living. These Independent Living Assessments (ILA) assess the youth's life skills in areas including:

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- communication and social relationships (ability to relate to others both now and in the future)
 - daily living (including basic skills, like nutrition, grocery shopping, meal preparation)
 - home life (home management, home safety)
 - housing and money management (savings, income tax, banking and credit, budgeting)
 - self care (personal hygiene, health, alcohol, drugs and tobacco, and sexuality),
 - career planning, and
 - work and study skills (employment, decision-making).³⁷

The ILA is a web-based tool to be completed by the youth and/or caregiver. *The MSA requires that, by December 2010, 85 percent of youth age 14-18 are required to have an ILA* (See Appendix A, Performance Benchmark #53). The MSA also requires that 18-21 year olds receive services similar to ones previously available to them when under the age of 18 (See Appendix A, Performance Benchmark #54). Thus, the Monitor expected to find ILAs for youth in the universe of cases reviewed.

Of 205 youth, there was no documentation of an ILA in the file for 141 youth (69%). For 64 youth (31%) there was documentation of an ILA. Of these 64 youth, 57 had evidence of one ILA and 7 youth had evidence of two ILAs. Of the 64 youth with an ILA, 44 (69%) participated in the creation of the assessment or created it themselves. The only 17 year old who exited DYFS placement in this cohort had an ILA. Of the 104 eighteen year olds who exited placement, 38 (37%) had an ILA and 66 (63%) did not.

In the last Monitoring Report DCF reported that as of June 30, 2010, 83 percent of youth aged 14-18 in out-of-home placement for at least six months had an ILA.³⁸ The Monitor cannot explain why the findings from the review on ILAs differ to such a large degree from DCF data, despite some differences in age cohort and timeframes. The Monitor will be exploring this discrepancy with DCF.

D. Services

The MSA requires DCF to provide youth ages 18 to 21 with services comparable to those available to youth under the age of 18. (See Appendix A, Performance Benchmark #54). Those services include activities ranging from help with life skills such as financial management and budgeting to employment and college readiness programs as well as support to access medical and mental health care, employment and housing.

The majority of youth participated in independent living activities.

One hundred thirty-five youth (66%) participated in independent living activities, 70 youth (34%) did not. Eighty-nine youth (43%) participated in life skills assessment and/or training. A smaller number of youth participated in driving lessons (22), budget and financial management

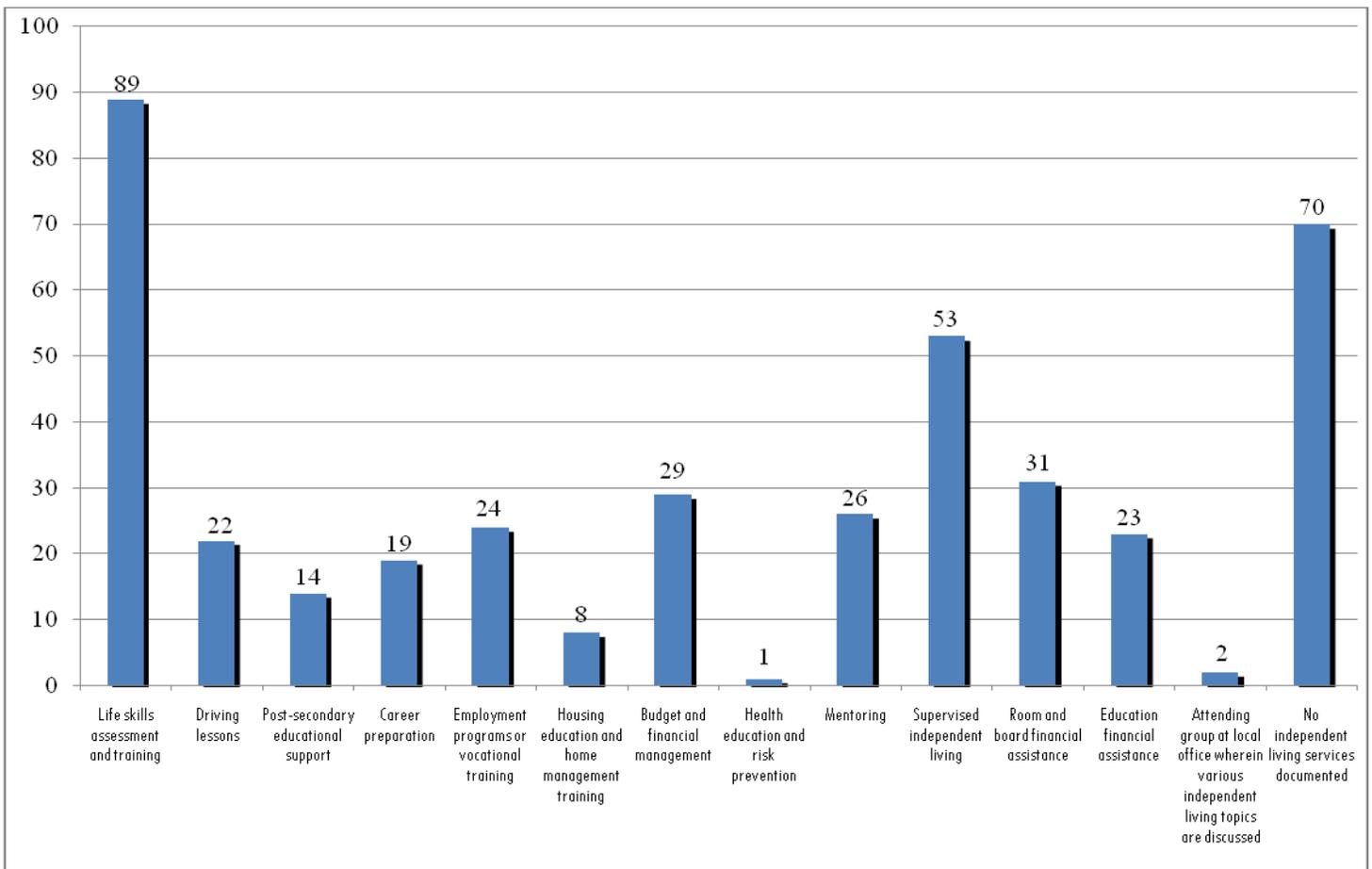
³⁷ <http://www.caseylifeskills.org/pages/assess/whatis.htm>

³⁸ *Progress of the New Jersey Department of Children and Families: Period VIII Monitoring Report for Charlie and Nadine H. v. Christie- January 1 through June 30, 2010*, Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Social Policy, December 16, 2010.

(29), and mentoring (26). Other types of independent living activities included supports through supervised independent living programs, Aging Out seminars across the state conducted by Rutgers University, food shopping and cooking support from foster parents, and college preparation activities.

Of the 70 youth who did not participate in independent living services, 35 youth (50%) had not been referred to independent living services and 24 youth (34%) had been referred but did not participate. Reviewers were unable to determine whether referrals existed for 11 youth (18%). Of the 24 who were referred for independent living services but did not participate, contact notes document that 11 youth refused services. Other reasons youth did not participate in services include the youth had run away from placement, were in an inpatient substance abuse treatment facility, left the state, or worked more than one job.

Figure 4: Independent Living Activities
N=205 youth*



Source: CSSP case record review, 2010

*Note: Youth may have been involved in more than one activity.

As part of examining a youth's preparedness to live independently, the review also examined whether eligible youth were assisted in obtaining a driver's license or if they had a savings or checking account.

Forty-seven youth (23%) were assisted with obtaining a driver's license, 158 were either not assisted or were not eligible to obtain a license.

Forty-four youth (22%) had a savings or checking account, 161 (79%) did not.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In recognition of the challenges and importance of helping older youth in foster care launch themselves as productive and stable adults, DCF began last year to assess its work and determine how to improve outcomes. The DCF Commissioner created a new Office of Adolescent Services (OAS), a department-level unit with a new director reporting directly to the Commissioner. With a staff of 14, the OAS is working to enhance the practice of staff throughout the agency who are a part of adolescent units or manage adolescent caseloads. The OAS has begun a strategic planning process with other agencies, community partners, and youth and parents to better understand the needs of this population and identify and prioritize effective interventions. Further, OAS plans to review all "life skills" and "mentoring" contracts to determine if the services most adolescents need are being provided effectively and in ways that are accessible and valued by youth in care.

The recommendations below are based on the findings of the Monitor's case record review and ongoing discussions with DCF about current efforts underway to effectively serve and support older adolescents. The Monitor hopes that the specific recommendations below are considered in DCF's strategic planning process and receive focused attention in plans and actions going forward.

Youth voice

- DCF should continue to expand its efforts to solicit and incorporate youth voice into all aspects of work with older adolescents. DCF has already included youth voice in the development of its strategic plan and in some ChildStat reviews. DCF also proposes to train youth to participate in the Qualitative Reviews of case practice currently underway throughout the state. Youth should always be actively involved in planning for their own futures and consulted about DCF policy and practice developments.

Education

- Youth in foster care must be better prepared to enter and succeed in higher educational settings.
 - DCF should ensure that preparation work with youth and caregivers begins as soon as possible, but at least by the 9th grade. Both youth and caregivers must be aware of and supported in accessing classes, tests, and other activities required for the youth to be prepared for college or other post-secondary options.

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- DCF should continue to support and expand Foster and Adoptive Family Services' (FAFS) outreach efforts to recruit youth to participate in the NJ Scholars Program; FAFS efforts should be tracked and evaluated to ensure outreach and support of youth is adequate.
 - DCF should reexamine and seek to modify as needed the NJ Scholar Program requirements to ensure that they do not exclude youth who are interested or are already participating in higher education.
 - DYFS caseworkers or other contracted providers should ensure all youth have adequate assistance in completing the federal financial aid forms for post-secondary education.
 - Public/private partnerships should continually be explored to make sure that every youth in foster care who wants to attend a post-secondary program (including college) has sufficient resources.
 - DCF and its partners should link with local community colleges to develop strategies to support youth, particularly in their first year.
 - DCF and its partners should ensure that every youth who exits DYFS placement and who attends college has housing for school breaks and summer.

Career Development and Employment Training

- Strategic planning with the Department of Labor and Workforce Development and other public and private partners is needed to ensure that there are school-to-career workforce pipelines and opportunities for youth exiting foster care.
- Exiting youth who are not in school or in career development programs should be linked to a job coach/mentor to help them access meaningful employment.

Housing

- OAS should review existing transitional living programs in terms of location, program models, and availability of mental health and support services to ascertain that these programs match the presenting needs of this population. Based on this review, contracts should be modified as needed and additional programs with appropriate services and locations developed. Further, as part of their ongoing assessment of services, OAS should survey youth who have lived in current programs to understand how their needs were met.
- DCF should develop a strong partnership with the Department of Community Affairs to increase access to public housing, vouchers, and other housing initiatives so that youth exiting DYFS custody have multiple housing options and are effectively linked to stable housing.

Work with specific populations

- *Pregnant and parenting teens:* DCF should at a minimum keep data on youth who are pregnant or parenting. DYFS workers should routinely inquire of young men whether they are in a relationship and are fathers. Specific work must be done to support young fathers in maintaining healthy connections with their children. All pregnant and parenting teens should be linked with Family Success Centers, high quality early child care and education programs, and other community providers who can support them in understanding and meeting the developmental needs of their children.

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- *Youth involved in the criminal justice system:* Cross agency collaboration is necessary to effectively intervene with youth involved in the juvenile or adult criminal justice system. The ability to work together on joint case plans should be explored and older youth must be assisted in expunging juvenile records.
 - *Youth with mental health or substance abuse issues:* Additional analysis is needed to understand why so many youth with mental health and/or substance abuse problems disengage from services as soon as they exit DYFS placement. While these are clearly challenging populations to serve, additional efforts need to be made to understand this disengagement from the youth's perspective and to determine if there are more effective strategies that can be used to engage and serve these youth. Existing youth advisory boards (YABs) should be asked to participate in this assessment and make recommendations.
 - *LGBTQ youth:* DCF should know how many youth in foster care identify as LGBTQ. DCF should continue to work with Safe Space liaisons to ensure that LGBTQ youth feel safe speaking frankly to their workers or other DYFS staff. Further, DCF should reach out to LGBTQ youth to understand any specific barriers they have to finding permanency or accessing services.

Case planning

- When working with older youth, DCF must ensure early and ongoing activities to find and/or build permanent, loving adult connections. This may include additional training of workers to appropriately engage with older youth and approach youth with a sense of hope and possibility for their future. Further, for older youth reconnecting with their biological family, support may be needed to help them establish positive, healthy connections.
- OAS is currently working with DCF's Information Technology and Reporting department to collect reports regarding documentation of case planning activities, including independent living assessments and other data related to life skills activities, health insurance, housing and education. Results of this analysis should be shared with leadership.
- DCF should work to ensure that older youth, not just those 14-18 years old, understand the value of completing independent living assessments (ILAs). Results of these ILAs should be shared with youth and integrated in case plans.
- Child Health Units nurses should continue efforts to educate 18-21 year olds about the importance of health insurance, choosing a provider, and being the drivers of their own health care.

While the Monitor recognizes that many of these recommendations will require significant time and planning, some of these recommendations and hopefully other ideas by DCF, youth, parent groups, and community partners should be implemented quickly. These youth cannot wait. Inadequately investing in these youth before they exit DYFS placements can have drastic consequences in terms of their ability to be productive taxpayers, good parents, and engaged citizens.

APPENDIX A
MSA Requirements Related to Older Adolescents

Reference	Quantitative or Qualitative Measure	Benchmark	Final Target	June 2010 Performance ³⁹	December 2010 Performance ⁴⁰	Requirement Fulfilled (Yes/No/Ongoing) ⁴¹
<i>Services to Older Youth</i>						
CPM	53. <u>Independent Living Assessments</u> : Number/percent of cases where DCF Independent Living Assessment is complete for youth 14-18.	a. By December 31, 2009, 75% of youth age 14-18 have an Independent Living Assessment. b. By December 31, 2010, 85% of youth age 14-18 have an Independent Living Assessment.	By December 31, 2011, 95% of youth age 14-18 have an Independent Living Assessment.	As of June 30, 2010, 83% of youth aged 14 to 18 in out-of-home placement for at least six months had an Independent Living Assessment.	As of January 2011, 87% of youth aged 14 to 18 in out-of-home placement for at least six months had an Independent Living Assessment.	Yes

³⁹ In some cases where June 2010, performance data are not available, the most recent performance data are cited with applicable timeframes. In other cases, the Monitor provides a range of data over the monitoring period because these data are more illustrative of actual performance. More detailed information on DCF performance on specific measures is provided in subsequent chapters of the report.

⁴⁰ In some cases where December 2010, performance data are not available, the most recent performance data are cited with applicable timeframes. In other cases, the Monitor provides a range of data over the monitoring period because these data are more illustrative of actual performance. More detailed information on DCF performance on specific measures is provided in subsequent chapters of the report.

⁴¹ “Yes” indicates that, in the Monitor’s judgment based on presently available information, DCF has substantially fulfilled its obligations regarding the requirement under the Modified Settlement Agreement for the July 1 to December 31, 2010 monitoring period, or is substantially on track to fulfill an obligation expected to have begun during this period and be completed in a subsequent monitoring period. The Monitor has also designated “Yes” for a requirement where DCF is within one percentage point of the benchmark or there is a small number (less than 3) of cases causing the failure to meet the benchmark. “Partially” is used when DCF has come very close but has not fully met a requirement. “No” indicates that, in the Monitor’s judgment, DCF has not fulfilled its obligation regarding the requirement. “Improved” indicates that while DCF has not fulfilled its obligation regarding the requirement, the performance shows significant improvement from the last monitoring period.

Reference	Quantitative or Qualitative Measure	Benchmark	Final Target	June 2010 Performance ³⁹	December 2010 Performance ⁴⁰	Requirement Fulfilled (Yes/No/Ongoing) ⁴¹
<i>Services to Older Youth</i>						
CPM	54. <u>Services to Older Youth</u> : DCF shall provide services to youth between the ages 18 and 21 similar to services previously available to them unless the youth, having been informed of the implications, formally request that DCF close the case.	a. By December 31, 2009 75% of older youth (18-21) are receiving acceptable services as measured by the QR. b. By December 31, 2010 75% of older youth (18-21) are receiving acceptable services as measured by the QR.	By December 31, 2011, 90% of youth are receiving acceptable services as measured by the QR.	To be assessed in the future. ⁴²	To be assessed in the future. ⁴³	Data Not Available.
CPM	55. Youth Exiting Care: Youth exiting care without achieving permanency shall have housing and be employed or in training or an educational program.	a. By December 31, 2009 75% of youth exiting care without achieving permanency shall have housing and be employed or in training or an educational program. b. By December 31, 2010 75% of youth exiting care without achieving permanency shall have housing and be employed or in training or an educational program.	By December 31, 2011, 95% of youth exiting care without achieving permanency shall have housing and be employed or in training or an educational program.	For youth exiting DYFS placements between January 1 – June 30, 2010, the Monitor’s Review found 72% of youth have housing; 60% of youth were employed or in some type of educational program. ⁴⁴	Not Available	Not assessed in this report

⁴² Qualitative measures will be assessed through the Qualitative Review process which is currently in the pilot phase.

⁴³ Qualitative measures will be assessed through the Qualitative Review process which is currently in the pilot phase.

⁴⁴ This measure looks at the total percentage of youth employed and/or in some type of educational program. The total percentage of youth employed and/or in school is 60%. More specifically, of the total sample, 32% of youth were employed. Of the total sample, 45% of youth were in some type of educational program. Some youth were both employed and in school; 40% of the total sample were neither employed nor in school.

Ongoing Phase I and Phase II Requirements

The following are additional MSA requirements that DCF must meet:	June 2010 Performance	December 2010 Performance	Fulfilled (Yes/No) ⁴⁵
II.C.4 The State will develop a plan for appropriate service delivery for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth, and thereafter begin to implement plan.	A plan was developed by June 2007. Implementation of the plan continues.	Yes	Yes
II.C.5 The State shall promulgate and implement policies designed to ensure that the State continues to provide services to youth between ages 18-21 similar to services previously available to them.	Policies have been promulgated and DCF continues its work to expand services to this population.	Yes	Yes

⁴⁵ “Yes” indicates that, in the Monitor’s judgment based on presently available information, DCF has substantially fulfilled its obligations regarding the requirement under the Modified Settlement Agreement for the July 1 to December 31, 2010 monitoring period, or is substantially on track to fulfill an obligation expected to have begun during this period and be completed in a subsequent monitoring period. The Monitor has also designated “Yes” for a requirement where DCF is within one percentage point of the benchmark or there is a small number (less than three) of cases causing the failure to meet the benchmark. “Partially” is used when DCF has come very close but has not fully met a requirement. “No” indicates that, in the Monitor’s judgment, DCF has not fulfilled its obligation regarding the requirement.

APPENDIX B Adolescent Case Closing Agreement

DYFS Form 5-66: Instructions

8-13-2007

PURPOSE AND USE

Use this form in conjunction with the [DYFS Form 5-67](#), Adolescent Case Closing Checklist. This agreement allows the Worker to review and document a discussion held with the adolescent about limitations on service eligibility, once his or her DYFS case is closed. The form allows the adolescent to give a written explanation and documentation as to why he or she would like his or her DYFS case closed. The form cannot be used/does not apply when DYFS has custody of the child or when the adolescent is receiving services based on child abuse/neglect.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING THE FORM

The DYFS Form 5-66 is completed by hand.

The Worker:

1. Enters additional specialized services and/or payments that the adolescent will not be Entitled to once his or her case is closed.
2. Reviews the closing agreement with the adolescent.
3. Helps the adolescent to articulate his or her thoughts and reasons for requesting case closure.

The Adolescent:

1. Writes why he or she would like his or her DYFS case to be closed.
2. Signs his or her name on the signature line, and dates the signing.

The Worker:

1. Witnesses the adolescent's completion of the form by signing his or her name on the signature line, and dating the signing.

DISTRIBUTION

Original (White) - Case Record
Copy (Yellow) - Adolescent CPRB, Law Guardian, Independent Living Placement or Contract Agencies

State of New Jersey
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
Division of Youth and Family Services

Adolescent Case Closing Agreement

I understand that upon the closure of my case, I will no longer be eligible for child welfare/out-of-home placement services provided by the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) under the Department of Children and Families (DCF), such as, but not limited to: resource/foster home placement, independent living stipend, clothing allowances.

Additionally, I will not be eligible for other specialized services, such as: _____

I further understand that in signing this agreement prior to my 18th birthday, I may not be eligible for Medicaid.

By signing this agreement while I am between the ages of 18 and 21 years, I will continue to receive Medicaid until my 21st birthday by contacting Medicaid Extension for Young Adults, toll free at 1-888-235-4766. I may also be eligible for transitional housing, after care services, and scholarships. My Worker will give me information about these services upon my request.

I have received the items initialed and checked off on the Adolescent Case Closing Checklist, attached to this agreement.

I am requesting that my case with DYFS be closed for the following reasons: _____

Adolescent's signature Date Worker's signature Date

APPENDIX C NJ Instrument

Exiting Youth Record Review NJ August 24, 2010

1.

1. Please enter Review Case #:

2. Please enter Case Record/SPIRIT #:

3. Please enter NJ SPIRIT Person ID #:

4. Please enter DYFS Local Office:

5. Please enter reviewer name:

6. Case could not be reviewed because:

- Not applicable-case CAN be reviewed
- Not within age range (under the age of 17 or over the age of 22)
- Most recent placement episode was less than 60 days
- Youth's case never closed
- Unable to access NJ SPIRIT record
- Other (please specify)

2.

7. Please enter the gender of the child:

- Male
- Female

8. Please enter the child's date of birth:

Date of Birth MM DD YYYY
 / /

Exiting Youth Record Review NJ August 24, 2010

9. Please specify the race of the child:

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian/Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
- Unable to determine
- Other (please specify)

10. Please specify the child's ethnicity:

- Non-Hispanic
- Hispanic
- Unable to Determine

3.

11. Date of youth's most recent entry into out-of-home placement:

Date of placement / /

12. Date of youth's exit from out-of-home placement:

Date of exit / /

13. How was the exit date determined?

14. Did the youth sign an adolescent closing agreement?

- Yes
- No
- Unable to determine

Exiting Youth Record Review NJ August 24, 2010

15. Has the youth previously been in DYFS (or other state) custody prior to the most recent entry into out-of-home placement?

- Yes
- No
- Unable to determine

16. What type of placement was the youth in PRIOR to his/her exit from out-of-home placement?

- Non-relative Foster Home
- Biological Parent(s)' Home
- Transitional Housing
- Home with Friends
- Home with Relatives
- Shelter
- (Own) Apartment
- College Dormitory or Other College Affiliated Housing
- Unable to Determine
- Other (please specify)

4.

17. For how long had the youth been in this placement?

- Less than 1 year
- 2-3 years
- 4-5 years
- 6 or more years
- Unable to Determine

5.

Exiting Youth Record Review NJ August 24, 2010

18. What was date of the most recent case plan?

Date of plan MM DD YYYY
 □ / □ / □

19. What is the permanency goal of the most recent case plan?

- Reunification
- Adoption
- Kinship Legal Guardianship
- Independent Living (16-17)
- Individual Stabilization (18+)
- Other Long Term Specialized Care
- Unable to determine

Other (please specify)

6.

20. Was the permanency goal of the case plan achieved when the youth exited care?

- Yes
- No, the identified permanency goal was not achieved, but another one was
- No, no permanency goal was achieved
- Unable to determine

7.

21. Is there evidence in the record that the youth was counseled about the benefits of staying in DYFS' custody?

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable – youth exited at age 21 or youth exited to positive permanency (e.g. reunification, adoption, kinship legal guardianship)
- Other (examples include youth missing or on runaway status, youth in criminal justice system and does not have the option to stay in custody, youth relocated to another state)

Exiting Youth Record Review NJ August 24, 2010

8.

22. Is there evidence that the youth affirmatively chose to remain involved with DYFS past his/her 18th birthday?

- Yes
- Unable to determine
- No (please explain why)

9.

23. Please enter the name of the youth's last caseworker:

24. Is this worker an adolescent worker?

- Yes
- No
- Unable to determine

25. Is there documentation of an independent living assessment?

- Yes
- No

10.

26. How many independent living assessments were found in the youth's record? (please note independent living assessments only go back to 9/2007 in SPIRIT – please look back to age 14 or length of time youth is in care)

27. When was the most recent independent living assessment?

Date of assessment MM DD YYYY
 / /

Exiting Youth Record Review NJ August 24, 2010

28. Is there documentation that the youth participated in the independent living assessment?

- Yes
- No

11.

29. Is there documentation that the youth participated in independent living activities?

- Yes
- No

12.

30. Please specify which independent living activities (check all that apply):

- Life skills assessment and training
- Driving lessons
- Post-secondary educational support
- Career preparation
- Employment programs or vocational training
- Housing education and home management training
- Budget and financial management
- Health education and risk prevention
- Mentoring
- Supervised independent living
- Room and board financial assistance
- Education financial assistance
- Attending group at local office wherein various independent living topics are discussed
- Other (please specify)

13.

Exiting Youth Record Review NJ August 24, 2010

31. Is there evidence that the youth was referred to Independent Living activities?

- Yes (See comment box below)
- No
- Unable to Determine

If yes, please specify why youth is not participating?

14.

32. Is there evidence that the youth had Medicaid coverage upon exit?

- Yes
- No
- Unable to determine

15.

33. What type of Medicaid?

- Chafee (aka Medicaid Extension for Young Adults)
- TANF (aka Board of Social Services, municipal or county welfare)
- Other (See comment box below)
- Unable to Determine

If other, please specify:

16.

34. Is there evidence that the youth had other types of medical insurance?

- Yes (See comment box below)
- No
- Unable to Determine

If yes, please specify:

17.

Exiting Youth Record Review NJ August 24, 2010

35. Is there documentation that the youth was enrolled in school at exit?

- Yes
- No

18.

36. What type of school?

- High school
- Alternative high school
- GED
- 4 year college
- Community college
- Vocational training/employment training program
- Other (please specify)

37. Was the youth actively participating in their education?

- Yes
- No
- Unable to Determine

19.

Exiting Youth Record Review NJ August 24, 2010

38. What was the youth's highest level of educational attainment?

- Some Junior High School
- Some High School
- High School Diploma
- GED Preparation
- GED
- Some College
- Unable to Determine
- None of the above (please specify)

20.

39. What was the youth's functional educational attainment/other comments about youth's educational experience? (This is an opportunity to comment on examples such as the youth graduated from high school, but has an 8th grade reading level.)

40. Was the youth a participant in the NJ Scholars program?

- Yes
- No

21.

41. Was there evidence that the youth was given information about the NJ Scholars program?

- Yes
- No

22.

42. Did the youth have housing at exit?

- Yes
- No

Exiting Youth Record Review NJ August 24, 2010

23.

43. What type of housing?

- Non-relative Foster Home
- Biological Parent(s)' Home
- Transitional Housing
- Home with Friends
- Home with Relatives
- Shelter
- (Own) Apartment
- College Dormitory or Other College Affiliated Housing
- Unable to Determine
- Other (please specify)

44. Was the youth paying for part or all of the costs of their housing?

- Yes
- No
- Unable to Determine

24.

45. Was the youth employed at exit?

- Yes
- No
- Unable to determine

25.

Exiting Youth Record Review NJ August 24, 2010

46. What type of job?

- Full time (paid)
- Full time (unpaid)
- Part time (paid)
- Part time (unpaid)
- Unable to determine

26.

47. Was there documentation in the record that the youth was connected to caring adults at exit?

- Yes
- No
- Unable to determine

27.

48. Please identify who the youth was connected to at exit?

- Biological parent
- Relative/Fictive Kin
- Teacher
- Mentor
- Other Caring Adult

49. What was the nature of the relationship? (strength of connection, types of support adult is providing to youth—emotional, financial, etc.)

28.

50. Is there any evidence that DYFS attempted to make a connection to a caring adult for the youth?

- Yes
- No

Exiting Youth Record Review NJ August 24, 2010

29.

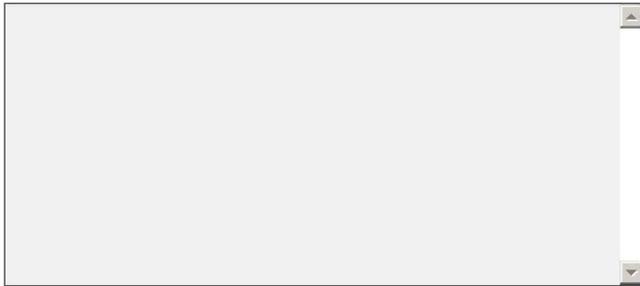
51. Was there documentation in the record that this youth was a parent (or going to be a parent) at exit?

Yes

No

30.

52. Please record any information about services/supports made available or used by youth to support his/her role as a parent.



31.

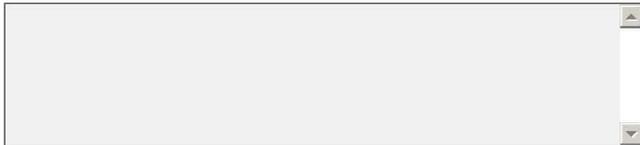
53. Was there any documentation that the youth identifies as GLBTQI?

Yes

No

32.

54. Please record any information about GLBTQI-related services that were made available to or used by the youth?



33.

Exiting Youth Record Review NJ August 24, 2010

55. Is there documentation that the youth had a savings or checking account at exit?

- Yes
- No

56. Is there documentation that the youth had current/past involvement with the criminal/juvenile justice system?

- Yes
- No

34.

57. What type of involvement (e.g. whether current or past involvement, need to expunge a juvenile record, etc.)?

35.

58. Is there documentation that the youth had a driver's license or was assisted in obtaining one if eligible?

- Yes
- No

36.

59. Is there documentation that the youth had continuing mental health needs that required ongoing attention?

- Yes
- No

37.

Exiting Youth Record Review NJ August 24, 2010

60. Is there evidence that the youth was connected to needed mental health services?

- Yes
- No
- Youth refused services

38.

61. Is there evidence that the youth was prescribed psychotropic medication at the time of exit from care?

- Yes
- No

39.

62. Is there evidence that the youth was linked to a provider who could renew psychotropic medications?

- Yes
- No

40.

63. Is there documentation that the youth qualified for DDD services?

- Yes
- No

41.

64. Was the youth connected to adult DDD services?

- Yes
- No

42.

Exiting Youth Record Review NJ August 24, 2010

65. Is there evidence that the youth had substance abuse issues at the time of exit from care?

Yes

No

43.

66. Is there evidence that the youth was connected to needed substance abuse services?

Yes

No

Youth refused services

44.

67. Any further comments? (Include any information about use of flex funds to support youth, SIJS, involvement with DCBHS)

