

FY2024 Transitioning Youth in Care Report

This report is being submitted by the Department of Children and Family Services (the Department) pursuant to Public Act 101-0167 and the Children and Family Services Act, 20 ILCS 505/43.

Section 43, Intergovernmental agreement; transitioning youth in care, which requires the Department, the Department of Human Services (DHS), the Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS), the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), the Department of Corrections (DOC), the Illinois Urban Development Authority, and the Department of Public Health (DPH) enter into an interagency agreement for the purposes of providing preventative services to youth in care and young adults who are aging out or have recently aged out of the custody or guardianship of the Department. The interagency agreement shall require the agencies listed above to the following:

1. Establish an interagency liaison to review cases of youth in care and young adults who are at risk of experiencing homelessness, incarceration, unemployment and other similar outcomes; and
2. Connect such youth in care and young adults to the appropriate supportive services and treatment programs to stabilize them during their transition out of State Care.

Reporting Mandate No. 1

The statute requires that the Department and each agency listed above submit a report to the General Assembly, on or before January 1 each year on the following:

- a. The number of youth in care who were intercepted during the reporting period and the supportive services and treatment programs they were connected with to prevent homelessness, incarceration, or other negative outcomes.
- b. The duration of the services the youth in care received in order to stabilize them during their transition out of State care.

Reporting Mandate No. 2

The statute also requires the Department to submit a report to the General Assembly, on or before January 1 each year on the following:

- 1) The number of youth in care who are aging out or have aged out of State care during the reporting period.
- 2) The length and type of services that were offered to the youth in care who are aging out or have aged out of State care during the reporting period and the status of those youth in care.

INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT

The Department fully executed an Interagency Agreement (Agreement) with DHS, HFS, ISBE, DJJ, DOC and DPH pursuant to the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act, 5 ILCS 220/1 et seq., in connection with Illinois Public Act 101-0167 on March 16, 2020 to provide preventative services to youth in care and young adults who are aging out of or have recently aged out of the custody and guardianship of the State's care.

The Agreement expired in 2023 and is in the process of being renewed; however, the aforementioned parties agreed to the following:

- 1) Form an Interagency Team, each agency designating a liaison to serve, to review cases of youth in care and young adults who are at risk of homelessness, incarceration, or other similar outcomes and connect such youth in care and young adults to the appropriate supportive services and treatment programs to stabilize them during their transition out of the State's care.
- 2) The Interagency Team shall meet on a quarterly basis to discuss housing, educational and employment supports to assist youth in the planning of transitioning out of the State's care.
- 3) The Department shall identify youth in care who attended their first Countdown to 21 meeting (C21) at age 19 and would request that each youth sign a consent for the release of information to the Interagency Team.
- 4) The Department shall provide the list of names and the outcomes of the C21 meetings, for all youth who have consented, with the Interagency Team.
- 5) The parties of the Agreement shall work together to submit an annual report to the General Assembly as required.

The Department has designated appropriate staff to serve as liaisons on the Interagency Team for purposes of identifying aging out youth at risk for experiencing homelessness, incarceration, and unemployment as well as those in need of educational or other supportive services that will help to stabilize them during the transition out of the State’s care.

The Department continues to work toward renewing the Interagency Agreement which expired in 2023 and coordinate efforts to improve provision of services delivered to transitioning youth through state agencies and community partners.

The Department assigned a point person who shall connect with DHS, HFS, ISBE, DJJ, DOC and DPH to update and renew the required Agreement for the continued collaboration and provision of services.

AGING OUT TOTAL FOR FY24

For purposes of this report, “aging out” is defined as any youth who has attained the age of 18 years or older and those 18+ youth who have exited the State’s care to any discharge at the end of the fiscal year.

Reporting Period	Number of Youth
FY24	836

When youth are in the custody or court-appointed guardianship of the Department services are available up until the end date as determined by the Juvenile Court; however, the Department has multiple services that are afforded to Alumni Youth that carry over and beyond including, but not limited to, services available through Family Advocacy Centers and Child Welfare Referrals for their lifetime.

TYPES OF SUPPORTIVE SERVICE REFERRALS

Educational Support

The Educational Supportive service includes resources for the completion of high school, GED prep and testing, post-secondary planning and enrollment. This also includes access to post-secondary educational services that provide mentoring and financial assistance to current and former youth in care seeking various post-secondary options. The Department’s post-secondary programs (available post-care) are as follows:

- **Tuition and Fee Waiver Program** | Tuition and mandatory fee waivers available to Illinois public universities or in-district community colleges. Benefits are available for up to 5 consecutive years.
- **Education Training Voucher (ETV) Program** | Assists youth with the cost of attendance, and post-secondary educational-related expenses not covered by financial aid grants or the Tuition

and Fee Waiver Program. This program includes up to \$5,000 in assistance annually towards educational-related expenses such as tuition, fees, books, supplies, uniforms, equipment and transportation not otherwise covered by other grants and scholarships. Youth are eligible for a maximum of five years, whether consecutive or not, until they reach age 26.

- **Scholarship Program** | Provides scholarships each year. Scholarship recipients receive monthly board payments, a Medicaid card (Illinois students), tuition, a mandatory fee waiver to an Illinois public university or in-district community college and reimbursement for the cost of books not covered by financial aid. Benefits are available for youth for up to five consecutive years. **In FY24, a record-breaking 357 scholarships were awarded to youth, marking an increase from the 259 scholarships awarded in FY23.*

Financial Literacy Support

Youth are encouraged and recommended enrollment in the Department’s Financial Literacy curriculum “*Get Real: Financial Decisions in the Real World*”.

Other Supports

- **UCAN’s Teen Parenting Service Network (TPSN)** | Provides oversight and service coordination to pregnant and parenting youth in care and their children statewide by linking youth and their child/children to an array of services including case management teams, education and employment support, parenting and clinical support, comprehensive discharge planning, advocacy, health care, early learning, home visiting, day care coordination for their children and other specialty services. The TPSN provides risk reduction training across the state that focuses on safe sleep, how to select a good childcare provider, how to identify if a child has been mistreated and infant brain development. Includes referrals for expectant and/or parenting youth in care in need of parenting support which include infant equipment, childcare assistance, home visiting and counseling.

- **Family Advocacy Centers | DCFS Alumni Drop-In Centers**

Alumni Youth are defined as an adult that is under the age of 30 at the time of connecting with a Family Advocacy Program and having spent at least 1 day in foster care in the Illinois system. Family Advocacy Centers are contracted to provide financial and other types of assistance including community linkages that Alumni are expected to need. Alumni are eligible to receive any services offered at the Family Advocacy Center nearest their home locations.

- Contracted services include the following:
 - Bus or gas cards to support employment and continued assistance at Family Advocacy Centers.
 - Assistance with obtaining Birth Certificates, Medical Records, Driver’s License or State IDs (each Family Advocacy Center reserve funds to cover the costs of these expenses).
 - Financial assistance to purchase items that support education and employment.

- Financial assistance to cover other costs not listed here.
- Community linkages include the following:
 - Local food pantry programs
 - Local clinics that provide free or low-cost checkups
 - Substance abuse treatment programs
 - Mental/Behavioral health supports
 - STI/STD testing services
 - Other state agency providers for assistance services
 - Legal Aid groups for alumni who are undocumented residents
 - Youth Housing Assistance Coordinators
 - Homeless youth prevention planning grants
 - Support through individual case management/future planning

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES REFERRAL SUMMARY FOR FY24

The chart below lists the types of supportive service referrals recommended by Countdown to 21 facilitators to address youth-determined concerns identified during transitional planning which is the beginning preparation process and includes staffing from age 17.

Type of Support	Number of Youth Referrals
Tuition and Fee Waiver Program	103
Educational Training Voucher (ETV) Program	131
Financial Literacy	229
Teen Parenting Support Network	352
Family Advocacy Center Alumni Drop-in Center	99

Housing Support | Housing support includes referrals to the Department’s Housing Advocacy Programs and other services to reduce barriers to achieving housing stability.

Youth Cash Assistance Program | The Youth Cash Assistance program provides support for young individuals transitioning out of the Department’s care to acquire essential items for stabilizing their housing situation. Youth are eligible for services up until they attain the age of 21. Youth referred to a federal housing subsidy program can be served up until they attain the age of 23. The Department’s contracted private agencies provide services.

**Due to federal pandemic funding, the Department was able to expand the eligibility criteria and assist youth up until they attain the age of 27 in FY21 and 22. This funding was discontinued in FY22 and the Department resumed pre-pandemic eligibility criteria. Despite the unavailability of*

this special funding, the Department was able to authorize \$331,142.68 in assistance to serve almost as many youth in FY24 as were served in previous fiscal years.

Youth Housing Advocacy Program

The Youth Housing Advocacy program provides a housing advocate to assist youth who are aging out or have aged out of the State’s care locate, obtain and maintain adequate housing. Youth are eligible for services up until they attain the age of 21. Youth referred to a federal housing subsidy program can be served up until they attain the age of 23. Contracted private agencies provide services.

Family Unification Program (FUP)/Fostering Youth Independence (FYI) Initiative

FUP and FYI provide housing choice vouchers to youth who have not yet turned 25 and are within 90 days of aging out of or have aged out of the State’s care. The local housing authorities administer the program. The Department partners with the local housing authority and the local homeless continuum of care to administer the program. All referrals to the program must be made by the Department. The Department partners with 12 housing authorities to administer FUP in Chicago, Cook County, DuPage, Joliet, Lake County, Madison, Rock Island, Rockford, Springfield, Will County, Williamson County and Winnebago County.

The Department partners with five housing authorities to administer FYI in Champaign, Chicago, Mt. Vernon, Oak Park and Peoria. In FY25, HUD approved FYI funding for three additional housing authorities: DuPage, Joliet and Winnebago County. The Department continues to work with local housing authorities to expand FYI in Illinois.

FY24 SUMMARY OF SERVICES PROVIDED TO AGING OUT YOUTH

Type of Service	Number of Youth Served
Youth Cash Assistance Program	214
Youth Housing Advocacy Program	342
Family Unification Program/Fostering Youth Independence Initiative	232