

Strategic Plan to Develop Resources for Youth with Significant Emotional, Behavioral and Medical Needs

Report to the General Assembly

December 31, 2024

Per Public Act 103-0273 - The Department of Children and Family Services shall develop a written, strategic plan that comprehensively addresses improving timely access to quality in-state residential treatment, evidence-based alternatives to residential treatment, and specialized foster care for youth in the care of the Department who have significant emotional, behavioral, and medical needs. The planning process must be transparent and allow for stakeholder input.

Vision Statement

The Department of Child & Family Services (DCFS) believes Youth with emotional and behavioral health needs should be served in their home communities, in family settings whenever possible. For Youth whose emotional and behavioral health needs that cannot be met safely in a family setting, timely access to high quality out of home care must be available. DCFS resource development is committed to ensuring that there are enough family living arrangements and appropriate support services and for youth and family to be served in family settings and when clinically appropriate, time-limited, high quality out of home treatment.

The Department remains active in developing resources to meet youth and family needs. Activities that resource development have been engaged with and new activities are included in this report. The plan being set forth lays out current goals, initiatives, that will ensure timely and effective intervention for youth and families and desired outcomes in 2025 and ongoing.

Resource Development Plan

Strategic Goal 1	Strategic Goal 2	Strategic Goal 3	Strategic Goal 4
<p>To Expand Therapeutic Residential system capacity targeting identified population type & service needs</p>	<p>Increase current resource utilization (number of youth served) by assuring timely discharge from Residential Treatment & increasing overall system utilization</p>	<p>Expand network of Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC) and community based therapeutic living arrangements.</p>	<p>Increase development and utilization of in-home and community-based stabilization services</p>
<p>Key Initiatives & Activities</p>	<p>Key Initiatives & Activities</p>	<p>Key Initiatives & Activities</p>	<p>Key Initiatives & Activities</p>
<p>Continued implementation of Capital Grant program – both Level of Care & Construction</p> <p>Use a data driven approach to identify specific needs in the Therapeutic Residential system</p> <p>Utilize formal and informal structures to collect information from current providers regarding population needs and challenges</p> <p>Develop and implement with assigned staff support a resource development protocol to assure efficiency.</p>	<p>Identify youth beyond readiness for discharge from</p> <p>Implementation of QRT Alignment work group recommendations</p> <p>Case reviews of youth who have been assessed ready for discharge</p> <p>Develop matching and utilization monitoring system for Spec Foster Care within the Child Placement unit</p> <p>Develop plans for providers not achieving an average of 90% utilization</p>	<p>Continued inter divisional (Child Services, Licensing, Fiscal) to develop resource and complete contracting new resources</p> <p>Support recruitment and development of homes in new contacts</p> <p>Continue to meet with and vet providers interested in developing this level of resource</p>	<p>Develop CQI Process for Intensive Placement Stabilization (IPS)</p> <p>Continued roll out to incorporate Pathways to Success services</p> <p>Continued development and implementation of Enhanced Community Placement Support</p>

Status / Progress Resource Development Plan

Update / Status Goal 1

Benchmarks / Timeline:

- Q2FY26 DCFS with the support from the Children's Behavioral Health Transformation team the Department will have established data gathering methods which will support decisions around capacity needs
- Q2FY26 DCFS will have posted Capital Grant application and actively be involved in recruiting providers to develop identified needs
- Q4FY25 DCFS will have assigned staff of monitor and support efficient and effective resource development.

Stakeholder Involvement:

The Department has engaged the Children's Behavioral Health Transformation team, CWAC High End Sub Committee, Therapeutic Residential Matching Check List Workgroup

Current Progress towards Goal:

Though the Department has expanded and develop new Therapeutic Residential services, specific needs still exist. Through a comprehensive approach to identifying service needs, recruiting, and supporting providers who can provide the service, the Department continues to expand the access to Therapeutic residential Services. The Department is working collectively with the Children's Behavioral Health Transformation team to collect and utilize data that identifies the services needed both geographical location and by clinical needs. Additionally, the Department collaborates closely with current providers to understand and identify current system needs. Once these needs are identified, the Department will be able to recruit potential providers and provide the fiscal support in developing these programs, including the use of Capital Grants when appropriate.

Update / Status Goal 2

Benchmarks / Timeline:

- Q4FY25 Develop a multi – divisional approach to identify youth in residential treatment have a discharge resource identified and a discharge plan in development in a timely manner that assures discharge at readiness
- Q1FY26 Begin evaluation of the multi divisional approach to assuring timely discharge through current available data resources
- Q4FY25 Establish a monitoring plan for each residential provider that target a 90% utilization rate

Stakeholder Involvement:

The Department has engaged CWAC High End Committee, Provider's meeting, Data sharing with providers and other stakeholders concerning utilization, Collaboration with the Children's Behavioral Health Transformation on data collection on utilization

Current Progress Towards Goal:

Currently the Department has a utilization rate of approximately 85% of contracted Therapeutic Residential Beds. Though the actual number of contracted beds has fluctuated over the past three fiscal years, the utilization rate has steadily increased. Through a series of activities, the Department is

targeting to increase the average system utilization to above 90%. One strategy that the Department has begun to develop is a multi-divisional approach to have youth, who are ready to discharge, do so in a timely manner. Strategies to achieve these desired outcomes include targeting specific youth, identified by assessment case reviews, who are ready for step down. These reviews which include case work team, permanency and clinical leadership will work collectively to identify barriers / needs to ensure step down and develop a detailed plan to do so.

Additionally, Permanency and Clinical Leadership have begun to meet to identify system barriers to ensure all those working with youth and families understand:

- Purpose of a residential treatment
- Expectations to support the treatment process including timely discharge
- The necessity to identify discharge resource early in treatment process

To increase utilization of Spec Foster care as both a step-down resource but also to prevent youth from entering Therapeutic Residential Treatment, the Department will develop a tracking system that allows known resources (Spec Families) real time and allow for effective identification of families and placement of youth. Once implemented it will allow for more efficient placement as well identifying areas of need in Spec Foster Care.

Lastly, DCFS Placement Administration continues to utilize monthly data to assess providers ability to meet contracted expectations, analyze current needs and trends and make decisions to best utilize resource available. As providers continue to see stabilization in workforce hiring the Department has set forth the goal for all providers to average 90% monthly utilization. Department Liaison will be expected to engage with all current Providers and develop a plan to meet that goal.

Update / Status Goal 3

Benchmarks / Timeline:

- FY25Q3 Complete contracting and rate work with provider for community based therapeutic living arrangements
- FY25Q4 Serving youth in first 2 new Treatment Foster Care contracts
- FY25Q4 Opening the first of 5 homes in community based therapeutic living arrangements

Stakeholder Involvement:

Open solicitation for development for the development of alternative community base therapeutic placements; discussions and updates in CWAC meetings.

Current Progress Towards Goal:

As stated, the desire is for all youth to remain in a community family setting. Expanding the living and service options for Youth who may have high emotional, behavioral or medical needs is vital to keeping kids in community settings. The Department, through targeted discussions with providers have begun the development and implementation of expanding this network of support.

Through planning discussions with a current provider there is currently development of a “pilot” that will bring 5 homes covering 3 regions that will serve 4 youth in each home. This proven model will target

serving high needs youth, including those dually involved (DJJ / DCFS) in a home setting with all the intensive services of Therapeutic Residential Treatment.

Additionally, the Department continues to expand the use of Therapeutic Foster Care. Currently, the Department has 2 providers who are in the process of recruiting and training families. These models will target youth stepping out of Therapeutic Residential Treatment or prevent youth from needing to enter residential. The Department continues to engage with providers as to ideas and proposal to increase the availability of Therapeutic Foster Care.

Update / Status Goal 4

Benchmarks / Timeline:

- FY25Q4 Implementation and utilization of IPS CQI Process
- FY25Q3 Implements Cohort 3 DCFS youth and Pathways to success
- FY25Q4 Train DCFS Resource team on accessing Pathways and providing support to casework teams
- FY25Q4 Full implementation of Enhanced Community Placement Support contract

Stakeholder Involvement:

A IPS conference (for providers) held in Fall of 24, working with HFS leadership as well as Pathways providers to refine referral and access procedure for DCFS Youth, soliciting and vetting ideas / models from providers for development

In order to maintain youth who may be experiencing a placement instability or need more support for a period of time, the Department is utilizing three distinct interventions (programs) to ensure youth are able to stay in their current living arrangement as they work towards permanency.

Current Progress Towards Goal:

Efforts with the IPS providers have focused on increasing utilization through expansion and developing a CQI process to assure timely access to services. A FY24 investment of \$2 million dollars allowed 16 of the 24 providers to increase capacity. The efforts to implement this expansion took some time. However, by the middle of the current FY the Department is seeing increased utilization and stabilization rates for youth. Efforts to develop a robust and effective CQI system will allow the Department to work with IPS providers to identify strengths and effectiveness in service delivery as well as areas needing development or increased support. The system will also allow real time feedback related to “waiting list” assuring youth and families are receiving timely intervention and support.

During FY24 Health & Family Services rolled out the Pathways to Success for Medicaid eligible youth, Pathways target youth who have complex behavioral health needs. Service includes case coordination as well as access to targeted services for youth and families. DCFS continues to partner with HFS to pilot a roll out for DCFS youth and families. Data collected from pilot is currently being used to implement a state wide roll out including education and support for casework teams as well and youth and families.

The Department is finalizing the roll out of an Enhanced Community Placement Support program. This program in its initial phase will provide in home intensive placement stabilization / preservation service to 4 families in each of the 4 regions. Length of service is 4 – 6 moths provide support and intervention for both youth and families.

Summary

During the past 12 months the Department's resource development has focused on developing services for youth with the most need. The end result for 2024 includes:

- 33 new therapeutic beds for specific youth needs including Developmental Disabilities, Medical Complexity and Dually Involved youth.
- 35 Emergency Placement beds (shelter and emergency foster placements) with 7 of those shelter beds targeting youth with special needs
- Development and execution of Therapeutic Foster Care contracts targeting youth stepping out of residential treatment
- Development of new and expansion of community-based services targeting youth at risk of disrupting current foster care placements

Over the next 12 months the Department is targeting even greater growth. During this time we are targeting fully implement a data driven decision making process concerning needs, further develop CQI processes and continue to grow collaborations internally, with other state agencies and stakeholders as well as new and existing service providers. Though the Department is taking the lead on various resource development projects, the Department is only successful when stakeholders and partners are engaged in the process.