

CHILD WELFARE FACT SHEET

July 2020

RHODE ISLAND'S VOLUNTARY EXTENSION OF CARE PROGRAM: UPDATE

Youth who age out of foster care are at risk of becoming disconnected adults who fare poorly in employment, access to health care, educational attainment, housing safety and stability, and criminal justice involvement when compared to their peers in the general population. Permanency is a critical piece of establishing child well-being. Youth who exit the child welfare system without a permanent and stable family face life challenges with limited resources and guidance and enter homeless, mental health, substance abuse, employment services and criminal justice systems at disproportionate rates.^{1,2,3,4,5}

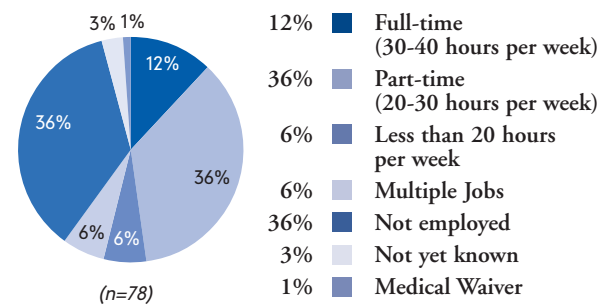
VOLUNTARY EXTENSION OF CARE (VEC)

In 2018, VEC was established to allow youth previously in the care of the Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) to voluntarily participate in extended services until age 21. Youth can participate in VEC until age 21 if they were in the legal custody of DCYF on their eighteenth birthday or if they are former foster youth who were adopted or placed in guardianship after age 16. To participate in VEC, youth who are medically capable are required to participate in educational and work opportunities, such as high school, post-secondary or vocational programs, job training, or employment for at least 80 hours per month. While in VEC, youth work with caseworkers to set goals for housing, education, and employment to prepare them for independent living at age 21. **As of October 31, 2019, 78 youth had approved court petitions enrolling them in VEC.**^{6,7,8}

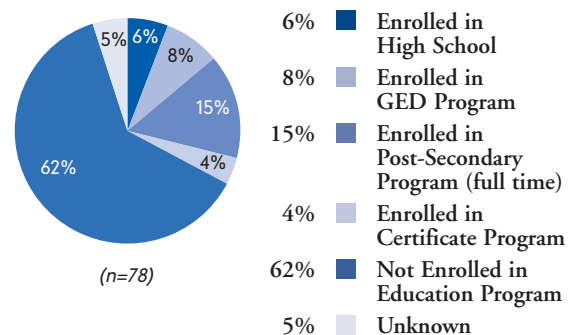
During the COVID-19 crisis, youth in extended foster care are navigating the transition to adulthood during record unemployment, housing instability, and educational disruption. To address these challenges, Governor Raimondo issued Executive Order 20-26 on April 15, 2020 allowing all youth eligible for extended foster care to continue receiving services until 60 days after termination of the emergency declaration. The order offers youth in DCYF's VEC and Foster Forward's YESS Aftercare programs the option to remain in extended foster care, and it waives educational and work requirements. On June 30, 2020, Governor Raimondo issued Executive Order 20-51 allowing youth who turn 21 during the COVID-19 public health crisis to continue receiving services through August 28, 2020.^{9,10}

YOUTH IN THE DCYF VEC PROGRAM

SELF-REPORTED EMPLOYMENT STATUS, OCTOBER 31, 2019



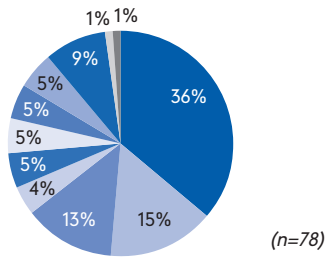
SELF-REPORTED EDUCATION STATUS, OCTOBER 31, 2019



Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, November 2019. Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

YOUTH IN THE DCYF VEC PROGRAM

SUPERVISED LIVING ARRANGEMENTS BY TYPE OF SETTING, OCTOBER 31, 2019



- 36% ■ Living With a Relative or Kin
- 15% ■ Living in an Apartment/Home Alone
- 13% ■ Living in an Apartment/Home With Roommates
- 4% ■ Living in an Apartment/Home With Spouse/Partner
- 5% ■ Living in an Apartment/Home With Child(ren)
- 5% ■ Living in an Independent Living Placement
- 5% ■ Living in a Dormitory
- 5% ■ Living in Temporary Housing
- 9% ■ Homeless/Couchsurfing
- 1% ■ Adult Correctional Institution (ACI)
- 1% ■ Not Applicable

Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, November 2019.
 Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

PROGRAMS AND SUPPORTS FOR YOUTH IN EXTENDED FOSTER CARE

DCYF's VEC and Foster Forward's YESS Aftercare programs offer housing, education, employment, financial, and medical and behavioral health care supports and services. VEC participants also receive cash assistance for daily living expenses. Caseworkers help participants access additional public benefits including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), cash assistance, Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and navigate health coverage for medical and behavioral supports. Youth can also access enhanced case management services through provider agencies in the community, including accessing workforce assessments and career development opportunities, housing support and effective tenant/landlord communication, and skill development for effective communication and conflict resolution. **As of May 2020, 82 youth were enrolled in VEC with DCYF, and 35 youth were enrolled in Foster Forward's YESS Aftercare.**^{11,12,13}

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Build awareness about the VEC Program through distribution of collateral and presentations in the community.
- Strengthen communication with community providers and advocates.
- Ensure National Youth in Transition Database data collection in Rhode Island is consistent, thorough, and results are shared regularly with the community.
- Collaborate with community-based agencies and service providers to support youth age 18 to 21.
- Ensure all youth in DCYF care are supported in continuing to work toward permanency.
- Identify supportive adults who can provide consistent and permanent support to youth age 18 to 21.
- Track and publicly report the number of youth eligible for VEC, the number who enroll, and education, employment and housing outcomes.
- Continue to include Foster Forward's YESS Aftercare program as a provider of tailored supports and services for youth enrolling in extended foster care.

References

- ¹ *Supporting youth in foster care: Research-based policy recommendations for executive and legislative officials in 2017.* (2017). Washington, D.C.: Child Trends.
- ² Courtney, M.E., Dworsky, A., Brown, A., Cary, C., Love, K. & Vorhies, V. (2011). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 26.* Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
- ³ *Cost avoidance: The business case for investing in youth aging out of foster care.* (2013). St. Louis, MO: Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative.
- ⁴ Salazar, A.M. et. al. (2018). Defining and achieving permanency among older youth in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 87 pp.9-16.
- ⁶ Rhode Island General Assembly. 7200 Sub A as amended – Article 15. Regular Session (2018).
- ⁷ Youth Development Services and Voluntary Extension of Care Program Brochure, Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families. No date.
- ⁸ Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families, Youth Development Unit/Voluntary Extension of Care Program Data Summary, November 2019.
- ⁹ Executive Order 20-26. Enacted by Governor Gina M. Raimondo on April 15, 2020.
- ¹⁰ Executive Order 20-51. Enacted by Governor Gina M. Raimondo on June 30, 2020.
- ¹² Foster Forward, YESS Aftercare Program Data, 2020.
- ¹³ Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families, RICHIST, 2020.



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