



2025 Youth Transitions Advisory Council Annual Report



Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Overview	3
2024 Youth Transitions Advisory Council Recommendations	7
Department of Children’s Services	9
Data on Youth Transitioning from Foster Care.....	9
Independent Living & Bright Futures Care Data.....	13
Youth Villages LifeSet.....	25
Helen Ross McNabb Center’s Project NOW!	27
Monroe Harding Youth Connections	31
River City Youth Collective	33
SMA, Inc.	35
Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services	39
Tennessee First Episode Psychosis Initiative (FEPI- OnTrack TN).....	39
Every Child TN – Transition Priority Update	43

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Overview

In accordance with T.C.A. 37-2-601 – 37-2-606 the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth is pleased to provide the 2025 Annual Report of the Youth Transitions Advisory Council. The Youth Transitions Advisory Council brings dedicated advocates together from across the state who are developing and implementing new strategies to meet the challenges of engaging former foster youth and other young adults as they make the critical transition from adolescence to adulthood. This report outlines the work of the Youth Transitions Advisory Council as the members continue to develop strategies to assist these young adults as they prepare for success in the lives ahead of them. Included in this report are six recommendations for continued improvement in providing services for former foster youth and other young people facing challenges in their daily lives.

The choices we make and the goals we set regarding education, career and interpersonal relationships shape the opportunities and outcomes available to us later in life. As we all know from experiences with the young adults in our lives, and as a growing body of research confirms, the human brain continues to grow and develop well past the age of 18. Brain executive functions such as good judgment and understanding the consequences of our actions are among the last to develop, often in the mid-twenties. Additional research shows that trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) affect the outcomes of many of young people.

For former foster youth, the challenge of that transition is even greater because they often lack the important emotional and financial support nurturing parents provide their adult children. Prior to the advent of extension of foster care services, former foster youth often were left to fend for themselves upon aging out of state custody. Estranged from their families, lacking adequate education and social skills, many of these young people found themselves in dire circumstances, unable to meet their daily needs, continue their education, compete for jobs, find suitable housing, or access adequate health or mental health care services. Many former foster youth experience homelessness, unplanned pregnancies or have encounters with the criminal justice system because they aged out of custody without the proper tools to face the challenges of modern life most adults experience today. Extension of foster care services allows these youth the opportunity to complete or continue their education with access to health care, housing assistance and other supports to help them succeed in life, while at the same time playing an important role in achieving the goals Tennessee has set for improving graduation rates, increasing educational attainment, building stronger families, and creating safer communities.

Youth with special healthcare needs, behavioral health, and substance abuse issues face many of the same barriers to success as they transition from child- to adult-serving systems. Young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have additional challenges. Services funded by the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services and TennCare play an important role in

meeting the needs of these young people.

In FY 2025, 949 young people turned 18 years of age in state custody, a substantial increase from the previous year

Of the 949 youth aging out, 826 were eligible for Extension of Foster Care Services (EFCS) with 531 accepting the services, an uptake rate of 64 percent. A total of 1100 youth were served by EFCS in FY 2024-25 with 1011 adjudicated dependent/neglected, 27 unruly and 62 delinquent as their last custodial adjudication upon exiting. All of these figures are increases from FY 2023-24. It is important to note that the Department of Children’s Services officially changed the name of Extension of Foster Care to Bright Futures after much advocacy from youth with lived experience in the program. Therefore, Extension of Foster Care will be referred to as Bright Futures in the remainder of this report.

	Total Aged Out	Total Aged Out Eligible for EFCS	Eligible Population Accepting EFCS	Percent Accepting EFCS
FY 2012-13	1,017	768	301	39%
FY 2013-14	984	779	312	40%
FY 2014-15	932	731	353	48%
FY 2015-16	996	815	388	48%
FY 2016-17	935	793	349	44%
FY 2017-18	961	790	367	46%
FY 2018-19	876	741	332	41%
FY 2019-20	876	755	338	45%
FY 2020-21	717	626	335	54%
FY 2021-22	801	680	297	44%
FY2022-23	861	736	369	50%
FY2023-24	854	711	408	57%
FY2024-25	949	826	531	64%

The average length of stay in Bright Futures was 352 days, higher than 280 days in 2024. The median length of stay in Bright Futures was 253 days, up from 186 in 2024. Those who did not maintain employment comprised the most significant group losing services, other than those who aged out at age 21, in FY 2024-25, followed by those who moved out of state. The number who aged out of the program at

age 21 were actually the largest group and actually increased, which is interpreted as a positive trend. Two scholarships are available to DCS youth, the federally funded Education and Training Voucher and the state-funded Bright Futures Scholarships. In FY 2025, 224 young people received these scholarships, a slight increase from 2024.

To improve Authentic Youth Engagement, DCS created a statewide Leadership Board called the Young Adult Advisory Council “YAAC” that serves as the foundation for all youth engagement work throughout the state. The council consists of current and former Bright Futures young adults from across the State of Tennessee. During FY 2025 the YAAC was instrumental in advocating for the expansion of Bright Futures services to age 23 as well as the importance of changing the name of the program from Extension of Foster Care to Bright Futures.

The primary support service offered to young adults who exit Bright Futures is Youth Villages’ YVLifeSet program, designed to assist young adults between the ages of 17 and 22 who are transitioning from

child welfare and juvenile justice services to adulthood to learn the skills needed to live successfully. YVLifeSet specialists carry a small average caseload of 8-10 and have multiple contacts weekly with each young person to engage on a high level. Focal areas of YVLifeSet include permanency, education, employment, housing (through natural supports), basic independent living skills and engagement. The program uses evidence-based interventions and best practices in the following areas: trauma, pregnant/parenting youth, substance abuse issues, physical and mental health, domestic violence, financial literacy and basic independent living skills. In FY 2025, YVLifeSet served a total of 1,225 youth, with 1 more participating in the program than in FY 2024. At a 12-month follow-up, 94% were living with family or independently; 91% were either in school, had graduated, or were working; and 92% were not considered to be in legal trouble.

DCS, along with community partners, provide Resource Centers for the youth in EFC, including Monroe Harding, Memphis' Dream Seekers (South Memphis Alliance), Knoxville Project Now (The McNabb Center) and River City Youth Collective in Chattanooga (The Partnership for Families, Children and Adults). Each Resource Center, though truly unique to their region, provides a set of core services to assist youth: The Opportunity Passport™ financial management classes, high school equivalency prep, post-secondary education planning, sexual health education and assistance with finding housing and employment. Resource Centers are also supported by numerous community partners through programming, internships, part-time employment and other supports. Each Resource Center shares information in this report describing the services they provide.

The Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services currently implements three initiatives addressing the needs of transition age youth: Tennessee Healthy Transitions, First Episode Psychosis and Tennessee Clinical High Risk for Psychosis.

The Tennessee Healthy Transitions: Improving Life Trajectories (HT-ILT) Initiative is a five- year, \$5 million discretionary grant awarded to the TDMHSAS by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in March 2019. The purpose of the Tennessee HT-ILT is to assist Tennessee youth and young adults aged 16 to 25 with or at risk of developing a serious mental health condition and/or co-occurring disorder to improve their health and wellness, lead self-directed lives and reach their full potential.

In the FY 2014 appropriation, Congress allocated additional funds to SAMHSA to support “evidence-based programs that address the needs of individuals with early serious mental illness, including psychotic disorders.” States were required to set aside five percent of their Mental Health Block Grant (MHBG) allocation to support this evidence-based program. TDMHSAS’ proposal approved by SAMHSA included provisions for a First Episode Psychosis (FEP) treatment program to implement in a seven-county area in the northwest corner of Tennessee using a Coordinated Specialty Care model. The program, titled OnTrackTN, serves youth and young adults between the ages of 15 and 30 who are experiencing psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations, unusual thoughts or beliefs or disorganized thinking, with symptoms present for more than a week but less than 24 months. Congress increased the set-aside again in 2016 and 2018 allowing expansion of OnTrackTN to northwest Tennessee, Davidson, Hamilton, Knox and Shelby counties.

The Tennessee Clinical High Risk for Psychosis Initiative (CHR-P) is a five-year \$1.6 million discretionary grant awarded to the TDMHSAS by SAMHSA in October 2019. The purpose of the CHR-P Initiative is to

assist Shelby County, Tennessee youth and young adults ages 12 to 25 who are at clinical high risk for developing psychosis to improve symptomatic and behavioral functioning, delay or prevent the onset of psychosis and minimize the duration of untreated psychosis so they can resume age-appropriate social, academic, and/or vocational activities.

Every Child Tennessee (ECTN) is a statewide public-private partnership led by the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (GFBCI) in collaboration with the Department of Children's Services (DCS) and community organizations. Established in August 2024, ECTN works to ensure children, youth, and families are supported before, during, and after foster care through four priority areas—Preservation, Recruitment, Retention, and Transition. The Transition Priority has emerged as a central focus, addressing the needs of youth aging out of foster care who often lack stable housing, mental health care, and consistent adult relationships. Through a partnership with Belmont University's Innovation Labs, ECTN is using research, design, and venture-philanthropy to create scalable, data-driven solutions that improve long-term outcomes for young people transitioning into adulthood.

The Youth Transitions Advisory Council and the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth would like to thank the members of the General Assembly for their commitment to enhancing the lives of young people. We are grateful for the crucial funding allocated to the Departments of Children's Services, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, and the Bureau of TennCare, which is vital for supporting these youth during this critical period in their lives. We hope you will continue to secure the resources needed to fund essential services, ensuring that all Tennessee youth can reach their full potential.

2025 Youth Transitions Advisory Council Recommendations

1. **Tennessee should consider contracting with an established mentorship agency to create programs that increase positive adult connections for foster youth transitioning into adulthood.** A supportive adult connection is the best indicator for youth to have a successful transition into adulthood. Adolescents and transition aged youth need more mentorship opportunities to enhance their interpersonal relationships prior to reaching adulthood. While there are some mentorship programs within Tennessee, there remains a need for a statewide mentorship program that can consistently provide this population with supportive adult connections.
2. **Tennessee should consider developing emergency housing options for foster youth who are transitioning into adulthood.** While there are housing resources for former foster youth, the need to increase emergency housing remains. Foster alumni often struggle with financial insecurity and employment opportunities during their transition into adulthood. This likely impacts their housing situation, among youth exiting care in Tennessee without targeted supports, 31% experienced homelessness. Due to this population's high risk for experiencing homelessness, the need to integrate emergency housing with wraparound services (case management, mental health supports, employment assistance, and educational supports) remains.

(Belmont Innovation Labs. (2025). Foster Youth Transitions and Housing Stability in Tennessee: Impact Case Study. Belmont University. <https://www.belmont.edu/stories/articles/2025/new-innovation-labs-impact-case-on-foster-care-project.html>

3. **Tennessee should consider increasing funding for existing Youth Resource Centers to expand their capacity to better serve foster youth across the state, including those in rural communities.** As outlined in Tennessee Code Annotated § 37-2-603, Resource Centers currently operate in Chattanooga, Knoxville, Memphis, and Nashville. These centers serve as vital "one-stop shops" that offer services such as educational support, job readiness, life skills training, financial literacy, and case management for current and former foster youth. While these centers have expanded virtual services in recent years, not all youth thrive in virtual settings, and some essential services—such as hands-on job readiness training or in-person counseling—are most effective when delivered face-to-face. Furthermore, limited staffing and budget constraints may restrict how far current centers can reach into rural areas.
4. Federal regulations currently restrict youth aging out of foster care to either opting into or remaining in the Bright Futures Program or receiving FYI Vouchers, but not both. **The Tennessee General Assembly should consider pursuing a Joint Senate and House Resolution requesting that this policy be reevaluated at the federal level. The resolution should be submitted to the Tennessee Federal Delegation for their consideration and potential action.**
5. **The Tennessee Bar Association and Access to Justice should establish a pro bono legal services program geared toward 18-24-year-olds who need assistance.** Transitioning youth throughout the state need assistance resolving legal issues, including housing, such as leases and evictions;

family legal issues, such as child custody or divorce; and potential criminal activities. Minor offenses on a young adult's juvenile record can present barriers to education, housing, employment, or military service. Successful models implemented in Tennessee include the Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland, which provides attorneys to address legal issues for transitioning youth, and the Knoxville Leadership Foundation which assists youth who have been in custody to pursue expungement of misdemeanor charges acquired before the age of 18.

6. Current resources are often not enough to cover the total cost of attending a 4-year post-secondary program. **Tennessee should consider policy changes and additional resources to mitigate these issues for youth in foster care or exiting foster care after their 16th birthday.**

Department of Children's Services

Data on Youth Transitioning from Foster Care

Strategies To Access and Track Effectiveness of Bright Futures Services and Resource Center Operations

The Tennessee Department of Children's Services (DCS) provides the John H. Chafee Foster Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood through the Office of Independent Living Program (IL) which also monitors and implements the provisions of Bright Futures Services (formerly Extension of Foster Care Services (EFCS)). As a part of the federal mandate, IL is charged with building a network of appropriate supports and services for youth transitioning out of care and for those who are likely to remain in care. The primary objectives of Tennessee's service network include:

- helping to ensure youth build connections with caring adults.
- developing youth to be productive individuals within their communities.
- assisting youth with acquisition and maintenance of gainful employment.
- supporting youth through their achievement of educational/vocational goals; and
- providing opportunities for financial assistance and skill development for DCS youth and exiting young adults.

Any youth, including those of Native American heritage, who have been or were in the custody of DCS and who meet eligibility criteria as outlined in policy, can request and access IL services.

The Department's goal is to provide each young person in foster care, age 14 or older, with supports, services, experiences, and opportunities that are individualized, based on the strengths, and needs of each individual youth, that are important to healthy adolescent development, and to help the youth successfully transition to adulthood. Strengths and needs of a 14-year-old who is four years from legal independence are generally different from those of a 17-year-old who is facing the imminent assumption of adult rights and responsibilities. The planning and provided services for these youth must be tailored on that basis.

DCS uses Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood funds to staff 15 Independent Living Program Specialists (ILPS), within each region of the state. The DCS ILPS work directly and collaboratively with Family Service Workers (FSW), foster parents, contracted providers, youth, and the public. They are responsible for local program coordination, service delivery, community resource development and ongoing consultation to agency staff, foster parents, and youth. Although the primary function of the ILPS is to provide support and technical assistance to staff and resource adults, they also provide direct services and support to youth and young adults through life skills training classes, processing of the Independent Living Allowance, assistance with securing financial aid (FAFSA), the federal Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) and other scholarship applications, and support and coordination of local statewide youth leadership boards and other leadership activities.

Ongoing program purposes for the Office of Independent Living include:

- Help youth likely to age out of foster care successfully transition to adulthood and self-sufficiency by providing supportive services.
- Help youth likely to age out of foster care receive the education, training, and services necessary to obtain gainful employment.
- Help youth likely to age out of foster care prepare for and enter post-secondary training and educational institutions.
- Provide personal and emotional support to youth aging out of foster care through mentorship opportunities and the promotion of interactions with dedicated adults.
- Provide financial, housing, counseling, employment, education and other appropriate support and services to former foster care recipients between 18 and 21 years of age to complement their own efforts to achieve self-sufficiency and to assure that program participants recognize and accept their personal responsibility for preparing for and then making the transition into adulthood.
- Provide leadership opportunities for youth in care to advocate for system changes and improvements, build a network of peer support and bring youth voice and authentic engagement to entities that create and implement youth-centered programming.

The Department of Children’s Services continues to be committed to data-driven decision making. DCS continued to measure specific variables over the past fiscal year, which is reflected in this report.

Educational Outcomes for Youth in Custody and Bright Futures (formerly Extension of Foster Care)

DCS continues to promote educational opportunities for youth in custody and those who leave custody at an older age. Graduation data is for the school year 2025, youth in DCS custody who received

Educational Outcome	Number
High School Diplomas from In-House Schools	207
HiSet from In-House Schools	31
High School Diplomas from Wilder Youth Development Center	1
HiSet from Wilder Youth Development Center	2
Total Secondary Graduates	241

a high school diploma from the in-house provider agency schools, youth in congregate care who received HiSET, or a high school diploma or HiSET from Wilder. Data is collected by the DCS Office of Education, as these programs fall under DCS as the Local Education Agency (LEA). Young adults receiving Bright Futures Services who completed secondary education during state fiscal year 2024-25 included:

- High School: 130
- HiSet: 7

Source: Master-Regional Secondary Graduates 2024-2025 report

During FY 2025, 7 DCS scholarship recipients completed post-secondary education. The following represent the post-secondary programs completed:

- Arnold's Beauty School
- Tennessee School of Beauty
- Genesis Career College
- Tennessee College of Applied Technology @ Dickson
- Tennessee College of Applied Technology @ Morristown
- Tennessee College of Applied Technology @ Livingston

In an effort to increase retention and graduation rates among youth and young adults with foster care experience pursuing their post-secondary education, DCS worked collaboratively with the Tennessee Board of Regents, Higher Education Commission and public institutions of higher education to develop a Foster Care Liaison Program on campus. This is also in response to Senate Bill 722 which was signed into law. Since the 2022 launch of foster care liaisons on 11 Tennessee college campuses, this initiative has expanded to having established liaison at the following institutions:

- Chattanooga State Community College
- Cleveland State Community College
- Columbia State Community College
- Dyersburg State Community College
- East Tennessee State University
- Jackson State Community College
- Middle Tennessee State University
- Motlow State Community College
- Nashville State Community College
- Northeast State Community College
- Pellissippi State Community College
- Roane State Community College
- Southwest Tennessee Community College
- University of Memphis
- University of Tennessee at Knoxville
- University of Tennessee at Martin
- Volunteer State Community College
- Walters State Community College

Both Youth Development Centers (YDCs) and providers of in-house schools provide a full high school curriculum that leads to a regular high school diploma. Opportunities for credit recovery, self-paced learning and mastery learning are also made available. In instances where students leave the YDC or an in-house school prior to completing graduation requirements, there are 15 Education Specialists across the state (at least one in each DCS region) who help students transition back into public schools or into adult education programs to finish their course work and earn a regular high school diploma. DCS staff, providers of in-house schools and public schools are trained to consult these Education Specialists to assist in the transition process.

Students who are educated in provider in-house schools or a YDC who are significantly behind in credits and are at least 17 years old are provided the opportunity to earn a High School Equivalency Diploma by passing an exam called HiSET. The decision to allow a student this option for obtaining a high school credential is made by the Child and Family Team (CFT). A High School Equivalency Exam Recommendation form (formerly referred to as a waiver) is submitted for students who are approved by the CFT. Wilder, the last remaining YDC, can prepare and administer the HiSET to their students on-site. Currently, students in most provider in-house schools must be transported off site to take the exam; however, the DCS Education Division and the Department of Labor and Workforce Development continue to work together to develop on-site HiSET testing programs at provider schools. Duncan Academy, Wayne Academy at Mountain View, Natchez Trace Youth Academy, New Heights Academy, Magnolia Learning Center, River Academy, Valley Academy, Wayne Academy in Wayne County, and Wayne Academy in Davidson County have now completed the necessary requirements to become HiSET computer-based test centers, and at least four other provider in-house schools are working toward this. Our hope is that this will allow a significant number of students to leave custody with the opportunity to pursue a post-secondary education, enroll in vocational training programs or enter the workforce.

The Office of Independent Living (IL) is focused on ensuring education goals remain a major focus in

transition planning. Both IL and Education encourage young people to advocate for their education to be successful in their future educational endeavors and get involved in school programs, including Tennessee Promise, that help support their educational well-being.

National Youth in Transition Database

The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) collects information on youth in foster care (via a survey) who are 17 years of age, including sex, race, ethnicity, date of birth, and foster care status. It also collects information about the outcomes of a sample of those youth when they turn ages 19 and 21.

DCS utilizes the NYTD to help understand the circumstances of our transition aged youth. The most recent NYTD submission contains data for youth in foster care who were surveyed during the six-month period they turned 21 years of age, October 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025. This submission included the following data:

- Of 109 youth eligible to be surveyed, 80 participated in the NYTD 2025A Follow Up survey.
- Non-participants included 28 reported as Unable to Locate/Invite and 1 reported as incarcerated.
- Among respondents, 93 percent reported having connections to an adult.
- Among respondents, 5 percent reported having children.
- Among respondents, 19 percent reported being homeless at some point in the past two years.
- Among respondents, 35 percent reported incarceration at some point in the past two years.

While recommending caution extrapolating this data based on the small sample size, responses indicate notable decreases in young adults reporting having children, and homelessness, since the last report (2024A Age 21 Follow Up NYTD survey). There was a slight decrease in young adults responding they'd been incarcerated during the past two years.

Independent Living & Bright Futures Care Data

EFC Criteria Expansion Project

Tennessee's EFCS program successfully expanded the eligibility criteria during FY 2023 as outlined in the Fostering Connections guidelines. The eligibility criteria now include:

- Completing secondary education or a program leading to an equivalent credential; or
- Enrolled in an institution that provides post-secondary or vocational education; or
- Participating in a program or activity designed to promote or remove barriers to employment; or
- Employed for at least 80 hours per month; or
- Incapable of working or enrolling in an approved academic program due to a medical condition, including a developmental or intellectual condition.

Since the expansion of service eligibility in 2023 further expansion advocacy has continued. During FY 2025 Tennessee passed state legislation to expand the age of eligibility from 21 to 23 years old. The legislation also includes eligibility for young adults between the ages of 18-23 who exited DCS custody via Adoption or Subsidized Permanent Guardianship at or after the age of 16. This expanded eligibility will begin on July 1, 2025.

Strategies for Maintaining Accurate Numbers of Young Adults Served by Bright Futures

In addition to using TFACTS data, Independent Living Program Specialists maintain data that demonstrates overall provision of EFCS via monthly reports that are submitted to central office. This report includes certain identifying information on the clients and dates of service. The monthly reports are compiled upon the conclusion of each fiscal year to produce each year's data. Data reported for youth in custody are derived from TFACTS system records. Data related to IL staff participation in CFTMs, and training provided by such staff, is tracked manually.

Services Available to Youth in State Custody and Those Who Receive Bright Futures

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Post-Secondary Application Fees• Testing Fees (SAT, ACT, GED)• Tutoring• Educational Fees• Independent Living Class Stipend• Graduation Package• Yearbooks• Membership/Activity Fees for Extracurricular or Leadership Activities• Senior Event-Related Transportation• Honor/Senior Class Trips (School Related Activity)• Housing Application/Fees for Post- | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Custody• Materials/Uniforms for Vocational Studies• Completion of Job Readiness Training• Employment Readiness• Job Start-Up Costs• Driver's Education Class Fees• Driver's Testing Fees• Car Insurance• Transportation Grant• Car Repairs• Housing Related Fees• Tools/Equipment (Technical/Vocational Programs) |
|--|--|

- Other Special Needs Unique to Youth Services
- Child Care Assistance
- Youth Leadership Stipend
- Independent Living Allowance
- Educational and Training Voucher (Scholarship)
- YVLifeSet
- Placement Services
- Household Furnishings
- BrightFutures (State Funded) Scholarship
- Opportunity Passport™ (per the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative provided via the Resource Centers)
- Case Management

Young Adults Receiving Services and Length of Stay in Bright Futures during FY 2025

TN DCS provides youth aging out of state custody services through multiple sources. This is based on their eligibility, and services are provided by DCS as well as through DCS contracts with private providers and community agencies.

YVLifeSet served 935 youth in FY25 as follows:

- 788 youth were DCS funded at some point during FY25.
- 147 youth did not receive DCS funding at any point during FY25. These received private funding only.
- Please note: Youth included in the DCS funded count may have received both types of funding at different points during FY25, but not simultaneously. These counts do not include youth that were dual enrolled in both LifeSet and EFC.
- Extension of Foster Care Services: 1100 Individuals/1111 EFCS Episodes.

Sources: Grantee Reports, Independent Living Monthly Report, Independent Living Scholarship Report

Bright Futures Retention Days

The decision was made to remove Median and Mode measures from this year’s report. In FY 2025, the mean number of days in Bright Futures was 350, which is up from last year, when the mean was 280. This data is based on EFCS episodes that ended July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025.

Region	Mean (Days)
West	340
Mid West	358
Mid State	367
TN Valley	390
East	356
Northeast	291
Total (Days)	350

Program Exits

The most common reasons for exiting Bright Futures during FY25, other than aging out of the program, were inability to maintain employment and moving out of state. Academic ineligibility and self-termination of services were also common reasons.

The primary support service offered to young adults who exit Bright Futures is YVLifeSet. YVLifeSet continues working with the youth after Bright Futures ends and can assist youth to re-establish Bright Futures depending on the reason for exiting.

Youth who exit to adult services that have an established SSI qualification could receive mental health and behavioral health services in coordination with the state’s Medicaid Waiver program, TennCare, or services through the state’s Employment and Community First/Project Transitions program.

Termination Reason	Total
Turned Age 21	78
Not employed	72
Moved out of state	59
Academic Ineligibility	54
Self	55
Could not be located	41
Transitioned to Adult Services	36
Criminal Charges/Incarcerated	17
Not engaged in an Employment Program	16
Risk to Self/Others	8
Social Security Benefit (No ILA)	8
Entered Military Service Full Time	3
Deceased	1
Total	448

Termination Reason	East Region	Mid State Region	Mid West Region	Northeast Region	TN Valley Region	West Region
Academic Ineligibility	9	7	7	11	9	11
Could not be located	9	12	6	6	0	8
Criminal Charges/Incarcerated	0	6	4	1	1	5
Deceased	0	0	0	0	1	0
Entered Military Service Full Time	0	0	0	0	0	3
Moved out of state	8	14	12	10	9	6
Not employed	14	11	13	20	6	8
Not engaged in an Employment Program	1	7	1	4	3	0
Risk to Self/Others	0	4	1	3	0	0
Self	7	15	9	17	3	3
Social Security Benefit (No ILA)	3	0	1	2	0	2
Transitioned to Adult Services	5	9	3	10	4	5
Turned Age 21	14	19	12	10	10	13
Total	70	104	69	94	46	64

Youth Exiting State Custody with Post-Secondary Scholarship Assistance from DCS in FY 2025

The Department offers young adults who are in foster care, exited foster care, who at age 18, or exited foster care to adoption or subsidized permanent guardianship at or after age 16 the opportunity to continue to receive a variety of supports and services, including post-secondary scholarships, to help them successfully transition to adulthood. The Department of Children’s Services is the sole administrator of Education and Training Vouchers in Tennessee. The Office of Independent Living has an Independent

Living Services Specialist who manages the ETV funds available as well as a state funded scholarship called Bright Futures. Scholarship applicants are required to provide documentation of total cost of attendance and the financial aid package for the programs they are enrolled into the Independent Living Services Specialist, who reviews this information and establishes ETV awards accordingly.

DCS provides a scholarship each semester or term as long as the student continues to meet eligibility requirements, maintain academic progress and be within the applicable age range for the service. Scholarships are capped at 5 academic years of utilization. The program will continue looking at ways to maximize the impact of funding and involve communities and individual colleges and universities in providing increased opportunities for this population. Data is currently being reviewed to help determine reasons for fluctuations in ETV awards to inform strategies for maximizing utilization. The Bright Futures State Funded Scholarship awarded through the Governor’s Office will continue in the coming year with \$500,000 allocated by the state legislature.

The following represents the unduplicated number of individual students who received a scholarship, of each type, from DCS during FY 2025 and the type of educational institutions the students attended. There was an increase in the number of students who received scholarships during FY 2025.

Post-Secondary Institution	2024			2025		
	ETV	BF	Total	ETV	BF	Total
Tennessee 4-Year University (own boards)	49	17	66	59	19	65
Tennessee Community Colleges	76	14	90	77	8	82
Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology	22	2	24	19	4	23
University of Tennessee System	17	4	21	14	4	14
Private & Out of State 4-Year Colleges	15	0	15	30	0	0
Non-State Technical Colleges	11	0	11	11	0	0
Total Individuals Awarded	192	37	211	211	34	224

Source: Independent Living Scholarship Report

Scholarship data is reported based on payments in a valid status of processing, and not just awards.

*The totals vary because each school category represents individual students who were awarded for each, but the same students may have attended more than one school during the fiscal year. Some students were awarded ETV and Bright Futures during the fiscal year but in different semesters. Those students are unduplicated in the grand totals.

Number of Bright Futures Young Adults Served in FY 2025 by Adjudication, Gender, Race/Ethnicity and Region

Adjudication (at exit from DCS custody)	Youth Served
Delinquent	62
Dependent/ Neglect	1011
Unruly	27
Total	1100

Region	Youth Served
West Region	157
Mid West Region	174
Mid State Region	266
TN Valley Region	149
East Region	171
Northeast Region	183
Total	1100

Gender	Youth Served
Female	582
Male	518
Total	1100

Ethnicity/ Hispanic Origin	Youth Served
Declined	0
No	956
Unknown	53
Yes	91
Total	1100

Source: Tennessee Department of Children’s Services TFACTS

Race	Youth Served
American Indian/Alaska Native	2
American Indian/Alaska Native, Black/African American, White	1
Asian	4
Asian, Black/African American	1
Asian, White	6
Black/African American	306
Black/African American, Multi-Racial - One Race Unknown	3
Black/African American, Multi-Racial - One Race Unknown, White	1
Black/African American, White	55
Declined	4
Multi-Racial - One Race Unknown	2
Multi-Racial - One Race Unknown, White	12
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, White	1
Race Unknown	4
White	698
Total	1100

Independent Living Wraparound Services—Custodial Population

Service	Cost	Instances of Service	Youth Served*
Driver's Education	\$23,993	41	37
Driver's Testing Fees	\$20	1	1
Educational Fees	\$1,609	5	5
Employment Readiness Program	\$2,375	38	7
Extra-Curricular Leadership Activity/Membership Fees	\$7,063	31	29
Good Grades Incentive	\$910	13	12
Graduation Package	\$28,218	86	71
Honor/Senior Class Trip	\$1,085	8	7
IL Class Stipend	\$1,475	31	31
Other Special Needs	\$8,727	31	29
Post Secondary Application/Registration Fees	\$60	2	2
Post-Secondary Housing Application Fee	\$300	1	1
Testing fees (GED, SAT, ACT)	\$69	1	1
Yearbooks	\$1,895	20	20
Youth Leadership Stipend	\$700	12	12
Total	\$78,499	321	213

Independent Living Wraparound Services—Bright Futures Population

Service	Cost	Instances of Service	Youth Served*
Auto Insurance	\$30,834	57	50
Driver's Education	\$12,495	22	22
Educational Fees	\$1,584	4	4
Employment Readiness Program	\$4,375	69	8
Employment Start-Up Costs	\$669	4	3
Extra-Curricular Leadership Activity/Membership Fees	\$2,350	7	7
Good Grades Incentive	\$200	3	2
Graduation Package	\$24,099	74	63
Honor/Senior Class Trip	\$1,060	6	5
Household Furnishings	\$21,240	35	34
Housing Start-up Cost	\$47,711	52	44
Other Special Needs	\$17,464	33	27
Post Secondary Application/Registration Fees	\$75	1	1
Testing fees (GED, SAT, ACT)	\$63	1	1
Transportation Grant	\$3,107	53	29
Vehicle Repairs	\$7,564	14	14
Yearbooks	\$1,051	12	11
Youth Leadership Stipend	\$475	9	5
Total	\$176,417	456	234

**Represents unduplicated clients; some youth received more than one type of service during FY 2024. Source: Tennessee Department of Children’s Services – TFACTS*

Youth did not receive Bright Futures Services and the Reasons Given

The Youth Engagement Lead continues to develop strategies to connect with aged-out youth who did not accept or are unable to continue services. The main reasons young people give for not accepting Bright Futures continue to be a desire to work instead of continuing education goals, did not want to be involved with DCS and could not be located. The Office of Independent Living also collected the reasons why youth did not accept Bright Futures, which reflected the above top reasons.

Reason	Number
Refusal	118
Did Not Meet Any Other EFCS Requirement	56
Could Not be Located	49
Moved Out of State	21
Unknown	21
Not employed (completed secondary education)	13
Social Security Benefit (No ILA)	5
Criminal Charges/Incarcerated	4
Excess Countable Resources	2
Not engaged in an Employment Program (completed secondary education)	2
Transitioned to Adult Services	2
Deceased	1
Risk to Self/Others	1
Total	295

Bright Futures Services Uptake, Total and by Region

During FY 2025, more youth aged out and were eligible for Bright Futures. Sixty-four percent of the total eligible population accepted Bright Futures, up from last year’s 57 percent. Detailed breakdown of Bright Futures uptake by other factors is available upon request.

Region	Aged Out	Aged Out Eligible	Accepted EFCS	% EFCS Uptake
East Region	129	118	73	62%
Mid State Region	206	187	133	71%
Mid West Region	144	134	86	64%
Northeast Region	148	141	89	63%
TN Valley Region	132	117	71	61%
West Region	190	129	79	61%
Total	949	826	531	64%

Source: Tennessee Department of Children’s Services – TFACTS and Independent Living Monthly Report

Young Adults Receiving Bright Futures placements

A total of 1036 youth receiving EFCS were in placements and/or received an Independent Living Allowance during FY25.

EFC youth receiving the Independent Living Allowance during FY 2025: 605

EFCS Placement Service	Young Adults Per Service
Contract Foster Care Extension of Foster Care	160
Expedited Foster Care Placement-Paid	2
Graduated Rate Extension of Foster Care	4
Independent Living Assistance - Parenting	63
Independent Living Residential Extension of Foster Care	176
Level 2 Congregate Care Extension of Foster Care	88
Level 2 Continuum Extension of Foster Care	12
Level 2 Special Population - Education Extension of Foster	2
Level 3 AS-ND RTC Extension of foster Care	3
Level 3 Continuum Extension of Foster Care	7
Level 3 Continuum Special Needs Extension of Foster Care	5
Level 3 Enhanced (Formerly A&D) Extension of Foster Care	5
Level 3 Enhanced Sex Offender Treatment Extension of Foster Care	1
Level 3 Extension of Foster Care	8
Level 3 SED-PRTF Extension of foster Care	2
Level 4 Special Needs Extension of Foster Care	3
Regular Board Rate Extension of Foster Care (18-20)	119
Regular Rate Extension of Foster Care	556
Total Individuals Served	1036

Some young adults received more than one type of service and/or were in more than one type of placement during the fiscal year. **Sixty-four young adults received Bright Futures who did not have a placement service, or verified payment for such a service, during FY 2025.**

- Had a Bright Futures episode during the Fiscal Year but no Bright Futures placement: 51
- Bright Futures episode ended on or after July 1, 2024, but the placement service ended on or before June 30, 2024. Or, the last payment date was in the last fiscal year (ending June 30, 2024): 3
- Placement during the fiscal year wasn't paid for by DCS (example: in-patient hospitalization): 3
- Placement was completed but payments did not generate or pull to the report 7

Source: Tennessee Department of Children's Services – TFACTS

Child and Family Team Meetings

The Department continues to focus on training efforts, increased outreach to young people; youth engagement to improve practice, increase services (paid and non-paid life skills development); increase housing opportunities and overcoming barriers to serving special populations.

Participation by Office of Independent Living staff in Child and Family Team meetings to provide information on independent living services, Bright Futures Services and to assist with the development of Independent Living and Transition Plans is also a focus.

Office of Independent Living staff participated in thousands of Child and Family Team Meetings during State Fiscal Year 2024-25. Additionally, Independent Living staff assisted with the development of 139 Independent Living Plans and 754 Transition Plans based on manual reporting.

Child and Family Team Meeting Type	Number of CFTMs Attended by IL Staff
Progress Review Custody	1,096
Discharge/Exit Custody	670
SS – Permanency Plan Revision (Custody)	454
Transition to Adulthood	390
EFCS – Progress Review	389
Special Called	202
Discharge/Exit Extension of Foster Care	163
EFCS- Initial Extension of Foster Care	133
SS – Initial Permanency Plan (Custody)	117
JJ/SS Planned Placement Stability	61
EFCS – Permanency Plan Revision	37
JJ – Permanency Plan Revision (Custody)	23
Initial Custody	21
JJ/SS Unplanned Placement Stability	20
JJ – Release to Aftercare	12
JJ – Discharge from Probation/Aftercare	10
JJ – Initial Permanency Plan (Custody)	7
Permanency (Adoption Only)	6
Plan Revision (IPP)	6
JJ - Reclassification	2
JJ – Initial Family Permanency Plan (Non-Custody)	1
YDC-Quarterly IPP Review	1
Total	3,821

The Office of Independent Living trained participants in several related agencies or groups, as follows.

- DCS: 188
- Youth: 251
- Provider Agency: 40
- Other: 64

Source: Independent Living Monthly Report

Youth-Involved Advocacy and Engagement Activities

The Office of Independent Living Central Office staff addressed over 100 inquiries submitted via the Formstack online transmission form and responded to a significant volume of phone and email referrals. These inquiries regarding services and resources were matched with local Department of Children's Services (DCS) and Central Office personnel, who connected the youth or their representatives to pertinent resources and information within their respective areas of Tennessee. Commonly provided resources included YV LifeSet, Opportunity Passport, Bright Futures re-establishments, community resource referrals, ETV/Bright Futures Scholarships, and TennCare. In certain instances, DCS also facilitated connections for former Tennessee foster youth seeking services in other states after relocating.

During FY 2025 child welfare leaders, Opportunity Passport providers, and youth with foster care experienced gathered in Charlotte, North Carolina for the 2024 Jim Casey Initiative Network Convening. The theme was, Reimagining and Rearranging for Possibilities, focused on innovative ways to support teens and young adults with foster care experience. The Tennessee team included DCS IL Director, DCS Director of Permanency, Monroe Harding Director of Young Adult Engagement and Opportunities, and four young adults with lived experience aging out of foster care in Tennessee. Members of the Young Adult Advisory Council were instrumental in the legislation passage to expand Tennessee's Extension of Foster Care program. Three members were present for the Governor's bill signing of the new law.

IL Leadership Camps

The Office of Independent Living and Harmony Family Center hosted the following camps. On June 26, 2024, we hosted youth from SteppenStone at Harmony's Camp Montvale. On October 14, 2025, a camp was hosted at St. Columba in Memphis. This camp was a collaboration with Youth Villages. Two camps were held on April 1 and April 3, 2025 at Camp Montvale. Youth from Smoky Mountain Children's Home attended these camps. On June 26, 2025, youth from My Friends House and Tallwood attended camp at Gratitude Ranch in Franklin, Tennessee. The theme of this year's camps was Create Your Own Luck. Every camp was different due to locations and available activities. Some of the activities included budgeting, equine therapy, climbing wall, yoga, self-care, healthy relationships, and car maintenance.

Graduation Celebrations

The Office of Independent Living and multiple community partners hosted the 2nd annual Graduation Celebration regional events in June and July of 2025 for foster youth and young adults who completed their secondary and post-secondary education during the 2024-2025 academic year. With over 150 graduates in attendance, the events featured recognition ceremonies, inspiring keynote speakers, and numerous booths providing information on post-secondary education, employment opportunities, and essential resources. These ceremonies were a wonderful opportunity to celebrate our graduates' accomplishments and offer support for their future endeavors.

Oasis Center-Teen Outreach Program

The Department of Children's Services through Oasis Center continues to administer the federal Personal Responsibility Education Program to support the implementation of Wyman's Teen Outreach Program (TOP), an evidence-based Social Emotional Learning model, in selected Level

II and III residential treatment centers, Metro Nashville Juvenile Detention Center and in Upper East TN communities/schools through a Juvenile Justice Reform Act project. One thousand and thirty-four (1034) adolescents participated in TOP in these settings during FY 2025. High staff turnover continues to be an issue at several sites. By prioritizing the health and well-being of both staff and youth while also implementing innovative solutions, we are continuing to support and encourage the use of TOP programming within each agency we serve.

TOP supports Social Emotional Learning and takes a broad youth development approach to the prevention of pregnancy and other risky behaviors by engaging youth in curriculum-guided discussion groups as well as youth-driven community service-learning projects.

TOP provides important opportunities for youth to participate in “normalized” activities, consistent with the federal mandate that youth in custody have access to developmentally normative experiences as much as possible. TOP nurtures the key factors research identifies as protective from risk and adversity, including social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, sense of purpose, high expectations and opportunities for participation.

TOP service-learning activities are particularly powerful vehicles for enhancing protective factors and building social and emotional skills. Youth in care provided over 480 hours of service to Tennessee communities. Young people donated: collecting food and bedding for the local animal shelter, packing snack and hygiene bags for the homeless, cleaning stalls and horses for Small Miracles, delivering gift bags to nurses and teachers, etc. In TOP, youth plan as well as carry out their service-learning projects, practicing skills like planning, decision-making, budgeting, and teamwork.

Oasis Center provides training, technical assistance and oversight of the TOP implementation initiative. In FY 2025, TOP was implemented at twenty-six (26) locations across the state. Staff conducted individual site visits to 92% of those sites. Thirty (30) staff from implementing agencies participated in 5 TOP Facilitator Trainings across the state, gaining skills in effective youth engagement and high-quality group facilitation. Feedback from youth workers continues to be very positive on the training they receive and the impact it has on the youth in their care.

New Resources, Services and Other Interesting Updates

- The Office of Independent Living added Employment Readiness Program to its WrapAround service array. Youth in foster care age 14 and older and those in the Bright Futures Program can participate in Employment Readiness services funded by DCS.
- The Office of Independent Living has received increased requests from community partners to support youth aging out of foster care, and staff has met with several partners to discuss. Many of the inquiries have expressed interest after becoming engaged with Every Child TN and their public campaigns.
- Meritan Foster Care agency opened a new Supervised Independent Living program for females in Memphis, TN. This is the first female SIL housing program in Memphis.
- In efforts to improve Authentic Youth Engagement, DCS created a statewide Leadership Board entitled Young Adult Advisory Council that serves as the foundation for all youth engagement work throughout the state. The council participates in speaking engagements and meetings to share their foster care experience and offer input on policy and practice

improvement. They are also instrumental in participating on foster parent panels for new foster parents. The council consists of current and former Extension of Foster Care young adults from across the State of Tennessee. DCS is currently in the process of recruiting new members for the council.

- The Office of Independent Living continues to distribute laptops to eligible youth in foster care or receiving EFCS utilizing a portion of the Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act funding. Priority populations include youth/young adults who had a recent or upcoming secondary high school or HiSET graduation, youth/young adults who are entering a post-secondary program, and any youth in a foster care placement age 14 or older with a verified need for a laptop. An additional batch of laptops are planned to be requested for youth in need.
- The Office of Independent Living has worked collaboratively with the TN Board of Regents, the TN Higher Education Commission, and public institutions of higher education to develop a Foster Care Liaison Program on campus in response to the passing of Senate Bill 722. The pilot program has established foster care liaisons on select post-secondary institutions in Tennessee in an effort to increase retention and graduation rates among youth and young adults with foster care experience pursuing their post-secondary education.

Supervised Independent Living Residential placement options for EFCS young adults

- Free Will Baptist Family Ministries in Greeneville, TN accept males.
- Holston Homes for Children in Greeneville, TN accepts males.
- Partnership for Children, Families, and Adults in Chattanooga, TN accepts males.
- Chambliss Center for Children in Chattanooga, TN accepts both males and females.
- Monroe Harding in Nashville, TN accepts both males and females.
- Omni Visions in Nashville, TN, Jackson, TN, and Memphis, TN accepts both males and females.
- TN Children's Homes in Clarksville, TN accepts both males and females.
- Wayne's Halfway House in Waynesboro, TN accepts males.
- Meritan in Memphis, TN accepts females.

Opportunities

- To increase housing options for youth transitioning out of foster care, eligible housing authorities across the state should partner with DCS to offer HUD's Foster Youth to Independence Housing Voucher Program.
- While there are some excellent services for some of the state's more complex youth, there are fewer developmentally appropriate services available for those young adults with a borderline IQ or certain mental health diagnoses. In some instances, youth have needs that are going unaddressed due to gaps in the array of services and housing.
- DCS continues to strive toward increasing employment opportunities for youth in care. Employment Opportunities for adolescents are necessary to assure economic self-sufficiency and generate self-esteem.
- Integrate preparation for adulthood with improved, quality Transition Planning to include the use of peer support young adults who are current or former Extension of Foster Care participants.



Youth Villages LifeSet

Youth Villages' LifeSet program is designed to assist young adults between the ages of 17 and 22, who are transitioning from child welfare and juvenile justice services to adulthood, in learning the skills needed to live successfully. A successful transition includes maintaining safe and stable housing, participating in an educational/vocational program, developing life skills necessary to become a productive citizen and remaining free from legal involvement. LifeSet specialists (directly providing the services to the young adults) carry a small average caseload of 8-10 and have multiple contacts (via phone or face-to-face) weekly with each young person in order to engage on a high level. The program is based on a multiple systems approach meaning services are aimed not only at the individual but at all the areas (systems) that may affect the youth (e.g. community, peer group, family, and school/work).

Young adults in the LifeSet program are assigned a specialist responsible for aiding youth in every step of the transition process. Specialists are responsible for teaching skills and lessons associated with the focal areas and will ensure that young adults can access community resources such as medical attention, housing, and financial support, if necessary. Specialists are available to the young adults 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They also make a minimum of one face-to-face contact per week with the young adult. The number of sessions can be increased based on individual needs.

The focal areas of LifeSet include permanency, education, employment, housing (through natural supports), basic independent living skills, and engagement. To support youth in their transition to adulthood, the program uses evidence-based interventions and best practices with regards to the following areas: trauma, pregnant/parenting youth, substance abuse issues, physical and mental health, domestic violence, financial literacy and basic independent living skills.

Since the program was created in 1999, it has helped **14,323** young adults in Tennessee (and **34,495** nationwide) build independent and successful lives for themselves. Youth Villages began providing LifeSet services in Tennessee over 20 years ago and has effectively replicated the program in numerous locations. Today, through direct services and partnerships, LifeSet serves **2,692** young adults daily across Tennessee and **twenty-two other states and the District of Columbia**, with a success rate (defined as living independently or with family) of **84 percent at Discharge, and 90 percent at 12-month follow-up**.

Partnership with DCS

For more than 20 years, Youth Villages has been providing comprehensive services to young adults aging out of care and other at-risk youth in Tennessee through its YVLifeSet program. In 2007, the Tennessee Department of Children's Services partnered with the Day Foundation and Youth Villages to reach more youth across the state. That public/private partnership was expanded in 2013 when Youth Villages stepped forward and offered to match dollar-for-dollar state funding for services. Youth Villages offered to contribute \$3 million in private dollars if the state would match those private dollars

with \$3 million to provide comprehensive services for young people aging out of foster care. This continued partnership provides the opportunity for every youth aging out of care in Tennessee to receive services. In 2019, Youth Villages began providing the case management portion for Tennessee's youth who have chosen to accept Extension of Foster Care Services.

Tennessee LifeSet Data FY 2025

- LifeSet served about **502** youth daily
- **1,225** youth participated in the program
- At 12-month follow-up:
- **94 percent living with family or independently**
- **91 percent in school, graduated or working**
- **92 percent had no trouble with the law**

Clinical Trial

From October 2010 to October 2012, Youth Villages' LifeSet Program participated in an independent, random assignment evaluation conducted by MDRC, a non-profit, non-partisan research and policy group that specializes in this type of evaluation. MDRC has an outstanding reputation in the field for methodological rigor and for translation of evaluative findings to policymakers. Dr. Mark Courtney, a researcher with Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, led the study as principal investigator. The study, which took place in Tennessee, included more than 1,300 youth, making it the largest random assignment evaluation of this type of program for young adults in this critical transition phase.

The evaluation examined the difference that Youth Villages' LifeSet program makes for youth aging out of care – its impacts on a range of outcomes, including education, employment, mental health, and financial security. One-Year [*Impact Findings*](#) from the evaluation were released in 2015, and show that participation in the LifeSet program boosted earnings by 17 percent, increased housing stability and economic well-being (including a 22 percent decrease in the likelihood of experiencing homelessness), and improved some of the primary outcomes related to health and safety (including improvements in mental health and a decrease in intimate partner violence). The program was found to be equally effective across different subgroups of youth, including youth with and without histories of juvenile justice custody, as well as urban and rural youth.



Helen Ross McNabb Center's Project NOW!

History

The McNabb Center is a premier, non-profit provider of behavioral health services in East Tennessee. Since 1948, the Center has provided quality and compassionate care to children, adults and families experiencing mental illness, addiction and social challenges. The mission statement of our organization is "Improving the lives of the people we serve and well mind, well-being".

The McNabb Center has over 75 years of experience working with runaway, homeless and at-risk youth, over 25 years of providing outreach services to youth in local schools and over 20 years of offering transitional living services for youth and young adults services aging out of foster care and residential treatment. The McNabb Center is accredited by CARF (Commission on Accreditation for Rehabilitation Facilities). Following a merger with Child & Family Tennessee in August 2013, The McNabb Center assumed administration of the Opportunity Passport Program named *Project NOW* as well as the PREP Program (originally named Sisters/Manhood) renamed to *Youth Now* in 2024. In 2024, both programs were completely restructured with a new location, additional staff, new materials and most notably a fresh social media space to engage youth more effectively.

Core Services

Project NOW (Navigating Opportunities that Work) is one of the many programs operating under the umbrella of the McNabb Center. Over the past year, *Project NOW* has provided Resource Center services to youth in the Grand East Division of the State (including Knox, Blount, Claiborne, Cocke, Grainger, Hamblen, Jefferson, Sevier, Anderson, Campbell, Loudon, Monroe, Morgan, Union, Roane, and Scott counties). The McNabb Center refers to all youth and young adults served as clients. The Resource Center provides financial education through *Opportunity Passport* in the Project Now program. Also included are groups and individual counseling in life skills, work projects and transitional living resources. Additional topics of programming include resource linkage, opportunities with local business and industry and post high-school information, as well as study skills and opportunities for the youth to give back to the community. These programs have close partnerships with local provider agencies, banking agencies and businesses that create opportunities for employment. Financial literacy is provided within a 12-module course through the *Jim Casey Foundation*. The Foundation provides training for staff in guiding towards leadership opportunities for youth and financial assistance. An additional program advantage is that youth and young adults (YYA) can complete forms for asset matches when they meet the saving criteria for an asset purchase and after completing all financial modules. Clients can also benefit from the *Youth Now* program which is housed in the same Resource Center as Project Now. Youth Now provides sexual health and pregnancy information for youth and young adults ages 14-24 utilizing the Love Notes curriculum which was newly purchased and approved

in 2024. The Prep program was formally the *Manhood 2.0 and Sisters Saving Sisters Programs*.

Project NOW works hand in hand with the Department of Children’s Services. DCS provides the majority of program referrals as well as Youth Villages, foster parents, and foster youth themselves that are introduced to the program through other McNabb Center programs and through peer referrals. Other community and private entities also refer youth to this program. Several organizations have provided services through training programs and information sessions for a positive experience for youth in the program. Case managers from Project Now and Youth Now travel to the McNabb Residential and Foster Care programs to complete classes for youth ages 14-18 on site. Additional classes are held on site at the resource center either virtually or in person with an average two classes per week being offered. The program has partnered with several local Knoxville banks and employers over the years. For adult education options the program has partnered with Knoxville Center for Applied Technology to help youth with HISET/GED and further education. The program has also partnered with the Health Department to help youth obtain vital records and the local DMV for state IDs. Community collaborations include: Street Hope, Grow Free Tennessee (CCAHT), ICAM (Integrated Community Agency Meeting), Metro Drug Coalition, YAB Youth Advocacy Board, CAC Community Action Coalition, Youth Villages LifeSet Program, Knoxville Area Rescue Ministries, Salvation Army, Serenity House, Hope House, House of Compassion, Bryant’s Bridge, Fig Tree, several local churches, Panera Bread, the Knoxville Leadership Foundation and the Knoxville Homeless Coalition; all providing interagency support to transitioning youth. The Job Corps and Knox Works Programs have become a resource for many of the youth aging out and needing postsecondary training as well.

Local Partnerships

- Panera Bread
- First TN
- Regions Banks
- Plato’s Closet
- Wendys

Successes

In January 2024 the resource center moved to a new space in convenient downtown Knoxville on the city bus line! There are 4 different programs located in the resource center that include Project Now (Opportunity Passport ages 14-21 youth in foster care or aging out), Youth Now (PREP ages 14-21 youth in foster care of aging out), Host Homes (Safe Place-Runaway youth ages 12-17), Street Outreach (SOP-Homeless youth ages 18-21).

The McNabb Center *Project NOW* underwent staff restructuring in 2024 with the addition of a new team leader position over the resource center programs. An additional Youth Now case manager position was also created as both the Project Now and Youth Now programs have grown considerable and are serving more clients than ever. New social media has been established and it has been very successful as it keeps youth and young adults engaged with the program and program staff. We now include social media safety, which is highly problematic for young adults and youth in today’s society, leading to many issues in mental health.

Youth Circle was created in 2023 as a leadership meeting for YYA youth and young adults within the resource center that are striving to make change and become effective leaders. They meet on average

once per month and new trust has been established as they get to know one another and complete youth lead activities together. Program staff consult them often on important ideas and changes that need to take place and value their opinions.

Challenges and Barriers

The Knoxville-based Resource Center has its own unique population, differing some from other centers throughout the state. Youth referred to *Project NOW* are from rural areas, homeless youth, and youth in foster homes. Transportation to the Center is an issue for youth who do not drive and many are spread across east Tennessee over 50 miles from Knoxville. We have installed free Wi-Fi for youth and young adults to utilize in the center on their phones and this has helped with in person engagement as they enjoy being linked to technology as well as job searching and resource materials etc. Additionally, the programs offer a hybrid in person or virtual options throughout the month, so youth have more opportunities to participate. Class participation seems to continue to be a challenging area for our programs and we have offered several extra bonus reward classes with increased incentives to continue to engage youth as well as serving food.

Next Steps

The team leader and case managers will continue to look for and engage in new partnerships while also deepening the relationships with current partners. Local organizations both public and private should continually be educated on the services and goals of the Resource Center and outreach is a priority. The Center will continue to support all young adults and youth aging out of foster care in acquiring life skills, completing requirements for a high school diploma and in selecting post-secondary training that best meets their needs and career goals. Continued collaboration with local employers and continuing banking relationships are goals to increase program awareness with DCS workers and other providers. Our goals are to support our current clients and to engage more youth and young adults than ever in the next year.

Knoxville Resource Center	July 1, 2023- June 30, 2024	July 1, 2024- June 30, 2025
Opportunity Passport/Project Now/Knoxville		
Number of new youth enrolled	19	77
Number of Financial Literacy Classes offered	40	104
Number of Asset Specific Classes offered	2	6
Percent of youth with favorable post- test outcome	No data	No data
OPPS Surveys		
Percent of youth completing an OPPS survey (April & October only)	88%	88%
Community Partnership Boards		
Number of board meetings	3	3
Number of new door openers created	9	21
Life Skills Classes		
Number of life skills classes held	12	12
Total number of participants in life skills classes	9	14
Percent of youth showing increased proficiency pre to post assessment	No data	No data
Youth Leadership & Engagement		
Number of youth leadership activities offered	6	12



Monroe Harding

Homes • Healing • Opportunities

Monroe Harding Youth Connections

History

Since 1893, Monroe Harding has been changing young people's lives. We step in as a family, providing resources for Homes, Healing, and Opportunity that are vital to helping young people succeed. Today, through our foster families and our Supportive Housing programs we provide safe, loving and supportive homes. Our Resource Center is for young people aging out of care, a place where they can find encouragement through academic support, financial literacy, workforce development and learn the life skills that young adults need to succeed. Monroe Harding is the only agency in Middle Tennessee providing a comprehensive continuum of services for current and former foster youth from birth to age 26.

Monroe Harding Core Services

For the past 17 years, the Resource Center has been dedicated to delivering high-quality services aimed at empowering young adults aged 16-26 transitioning out of care, along with other vulnerable youth. The center offers a range of support, including financial management through The Opportunity Passport™, career readiness and job engagement via Works Wonders™, high school equivalency preparation, post-secondary education planning, group and individual counseling, and housing assistance. Additionally, the center features an in-house thrift closet exclusively for young adults. This year, Monroe Harding launched its social enterprise, Monroe Gardens, designed to provide hands-on work experience for young adults. Our programs promote personal stability and foster a smooth, healthy transition into adulthood.

Local Partnerships

Monroe Harding continues to collaborate with the Department of Children's Services (DCS) and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. Through its workforce development program, Monroe Harding partners with local businesses and leaders such as Crossroads Pet Shop and Adopt, Goodwill, TVA, Urban League, SNAP Employment and Training, and Persevere. These partnerships offer young adults valuable experiential learning opportunities, including internships and job shadows, to help them prepare for the workforce. Additionally, Monroe Harding works with organizations like Oasis Center, Martha O'Bryan Center, One Simple Wish, Judge Dinkins Educational Center, Woodbine Community Center, Youth Villages, Mental Health Cooperative and Omni Visions to provide services to young adults who do not qualify for DCS custody.

Successes

Monroe Harding was able to serve 424 unique individuals last year. Many of these clients participated in more than one program. Offering classes in-person, virtually, on site at partner locations, and in hybrid formats has allowed us to reach more participants than ever before. We continue to offer cornerstone programs including financial literacy, career development, education classes, monthly programming for justice involved youth, on-site groups and counseling sessions and on-site assistance obtaining resources such as SNAP, housing, and essential documents.

Additionally, the Works Wonders™ Career Readiness program, now in the sixth year, provided paid internships in fields including social work, law, cosmetology, and healthcare while our education programs have helped 30 young adults earn diplomas and certificates. Monroe Harding awarded 10 scholarships totaling \$10,000. The participants were able to use their scholarship money for tuition, rent, transportation, or needed supplies for their post-secondary training. Students enrolled at several different higher education institutions including Trevecca University, Nashville State Community College, TCAT, Austin Peay and MTSU.

This year, the Resource Center has offered several networking and learning events for young adults including paid internships and volunteer experience in our new social enterprise, Monroe Gardens, dance classes, an art event, a Skills Fest for clients to learn new skills and hobbies, and a job fair specifically for young adults.

Challenges and Barriers

Many young adults who contact Monroe Harding for services continue to lack support systems to assist them with navigating the challenging period of transitioning to adulthood. They are often unemployed, lack transportation, are dealing with current and past abuse (emotional, physical, and sexual), have had insufficient future planning and are sometimes homeless or in danger of becoming homeless. Many of these issues make it difficult for the young adults to remain focused on completing the goals that they have set for themselves. Monroe Harding has resources in place to assist with these challenges. We continue to offer barrier assistance in the form of providing transportation either by a staff member or providing bus passes and/or gas cards, paid internships, assistance with accessing mental health resources, and assistance with needed supplies and equipment for employment.

Monroe Harding's Resource Center	FY 24-25
Young Adults Served at the Resource Center	349
Number of New Clients Served	180
Barrier Assistance Provided	254
Opportunity Passport™ Participants	111
Percent of Youth Completing an OPPS Survey (April & October)	96%
Diplomas and Certificates Earned	30
Enrichment Activities Offered	79



History

The Partnership for Families, Children and Adults has been serving the Tennessee Valley community for 140 years through professional counseling, crisis intervention, and prevention services. It began with the 1877 establishment of the Ladies Aid Society, which later became the Florence Crittenton Home. Under the direction of United Way, The Florence Crittenton Service, Family Service Agency, and Travelers Aid Society merged into Community Services of Greater Chattanooga, Inc. in 1973. In 1981, the agency assumed the name Family and Children's Services of Chattanooga, Inc., and in 2003 became the Partnership for Families, Children and Adults. Today, the Partnership has grown to become the region's largest and most comprehensive human services agency serving 19 counties in Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama.

The River City Youth Collective (RCYC) is one program that is included in services offered through Partnership. RCYC officially began in 2018 and believes all people have the right to live stable, healthy lives. RCYC is committed to supporting youth and young adults in their transition from adolescence to independence. RCYC is a collective, safe space where youth and young adults can find acceptance, support, and opportunities to learn and grow from and with one another.

Core Services

The Resource Center supports the Love Notes sexual health education and relationship management curriculum for young women and men. The Resource Center continues to offer the Opportunity Passport financial literacy curriculum and the Jim Casey Match Program. We also provide door openers for our youth to connect with various agencies in the community, Youth Leadership and Engagement Opportunities, and Life Skill Classes.

Community Partners

- Girls Inc. of Chattanooga
- Tennessee Valley Federal Credit Union
- Chattanooga State Community College
- UT Extension Program
- Economy Honda
- Family Justice Center
- Rise Up Cooperative
- Chattanooga Public Library
- Partnership Planning Committee
- Consumer Credit Counseling Services of Chattanooga
- American Job Center
- Hamilton County Health Department
- Hamilton County School Systems
- Blackwell Automotive
- Chambliss Center for Children
- Tennessee Valley Authority
- Community Advisory Board
- Mary Kay

Successes

- Made 2 matches for a car in with the MATCH Program, totaling 6,000 dollars in savings for youth involved
- Increased Community Partnerships, one being with Tennessee Valley Authority, creating a pipeline for youth apprenticeship program
- 83% Opportunity Passport survey completion in April 2024
- Aging Out Panel for Youth/Young Adults held in February 2025

Challenges and Barriers

Communication continues to be a barrier with youth, as there is a struggle with the maintenance of numbers and emails. Transportation also is a barrier with class participation and attendance as some youth lack the ability to transport themselves due to not having licensure and/or do not own a vehicle and must rely on others. Consistent involvement has also been a barrier as participation has waxed and waned. This ultimately has impacted class attendance and youth engagement.

Next Steps

In the new fiscal year, RCYC will continue to build relationships with community partners to strengthen the community partnership board and continue to develop new Door Opener opportunities. RCYC plans to tailor classes and events offered to better suit the needs of the demographic they are serving and to enhance feedback from active program participants. RCYC also plans to increase the direct one-to-one contact and relations with participants.

RCYC Report	FY 2025
Number of new youth enrolled	49
Number of Financial Literacy Classes Offered	10
Number of Asset Specific Classes Offered	10
Percentage of youth completing October 2024 OPPS survey	31%
Percentage of youth completing April 2025 OPPS survey	83%
Number of new door openers created	14
Number of Life Skill Classes Held	25
Total Number of Participants in Life Skill Classes	127



SMA, Inc.

SMA

SMA was founded in 2000 with the mission of helping to organize neighborhood associations in South Memphis’s urban communities. Over time, SMA recognized the growing needs of the community and expanded its focus to serve youth in foster care, families in crisis, and residents seeking resources and support. While civic engagement remains at the heart of SMA’s work, our programs have evolved to provide essential services that empower individuals and strengthen communities.

Programs & Services

SMA serves current and former foster youth, young adults transitioning into independent living, and families throughout the region. Our key programs and services include:

Dream Seekers Program – An umbrella program offering life skills, goal setting, financial literacy, sexual health education, teen pregnancy and parenting support, mental health support, career assessments and essential resources to youth ages 14–25.

Opportunity Passport – A comprehensive financial literacy and asset-matching program designed to help young adults build lasting financial stability. Through targeted financial education, participants learn the importance of budgeting, credit building, and responsible money management. The program emphasizes the value of having and maintaining a bank account as a foundation for financial independence. Young people can also take advantage of a matched savings opportunity, where their savings toward approved assets—such as housing, education, transportation, or starting a business—are matched dollar-for-dollar, helping them reach their goals faster and build long-term security.

Will-Work Program – Workforce development and entrepreneurship training for young adults ages 18–30.

Social Suds Resource Center & Laundromat – A community hub providing a laundromat, community resources, a children’s Pinwheel playroom, and a computer lab. Also, through our partnership with Happy Nest, we’re making life a little easier for those we serve by offering reliable, professional laundry services. SMA laundry associates picks up, washes, dries, folds, and delivers clothes back to customers.

Community Resource Diaper Room –Providing foster youth and young adults with diapers, wipes, and baby supplies.

Health Education & Testing – Through partnerships like HOPEHOUSE, offering free HIV testing and health education.

SMA is proud to partner with the **Shelby County Health Department**, leasing our Health Hub as a distribution site for over 4,000 essential commodities to serve our older adult population. Together, we're making access to resources easier and helping our seniors live healthier, supported lives.

Expanding Our Reach

As SMA continues to grow, we are proud to announce our rebranding initiative. Originally named South Memphis Alliance, SMA was focused on Memphis and Shelby County, SMA now serves communities across West Tennessee. This expanded reach reflects our commitment to empowering more individuals, bridging resource gaps, and fostering strong, connected communities throughout the region.

For over two decades, SMA has been a trusted partner and advocate for youth, families, and communities. As we move into this exciting new chapter, our mission remains the same: to uplift, educate, and empower, ensuring that every individual can thrive.

Emergency Services

Through **SMA's partnership with LINK 211** and **The South Memphis Project**, participants and community members can access critical emergency services.

SMA connects individuals to these resources with the help of **Lauren, LINK 211's Resource Manager**, who works out of three South Memphis libraries to provide in-person support and guidance.

Available Services:

- **Food Vouchers** – Assistance for individuals and families in immediate need of meals.
- **Bus Passes** (Dream Seekers Program) – Transportation assistance for youth and young adults enrolled in Dream Seekers.
- **Clothing/Uniform Vouchers** – Support for work, school, or essential clothing needs.
- **Housing Location Assistance** – Help identifying safe and stable housing options.
- **Rental & Utility Assistance Referrals** – Connection to programs that can help prevent eviction or utility shut-off.
- **Gas Cards** (Dream Seekers Program) – Fuel assistance for transportation to work, school, or essential appointments.

- **Essential Needs Assistance** – Diapers, formula, feminine hygiene products, and personal hygiene supplies through our partnership with **Mid-South Food Bank – Bare Needs Diaper Bank.**

Local Partnerships

- Tennessee Department of Children’s Services
- Southern College of Optometry
- Excel Center
- Cummins, Inc
- United Way of the Mid-South
- Shelby County Office of Re-Entry
- Omni Visions
- Porter Leath
- Kemmons Wilson Family
- Paragon Bank
- Meritan Inc.
- Shelby County Office of Childhood and Youth
- Southwest TN Community College
- CD Council
- Memphis Public Library
- The Assisi Foundation
- Memphis Artists for Change
- Shelby County Health Department
- The University of TN Martin
- The Women’s Foundation of a Greater Memphis
- Youth Villages
- First Horizon Bank
- State of Tennessee (Shelby County) Community
- Urban Child Institute
- BLDG Memphis
- CONCORDE Career College
- Lemoyne-Owen College
- Community Alliance for the Homeless
- Cathedral of Faith
- TVA
- Omni Visions
- Center for Employment Opportunities
- Shelby County Juvenile Court
- RISE Memphis
- The Grizzlies Foundation
- Hope House
- St. Jude Research Hospital
- The University of Memphis
- GMFEC
- Mid-South Food Bank

Successes

- As part of our Dream Seekers Program, SMA received \$27,350 in sponsorships, grants, and donations to assist our clients with supportive services, back to school supplies, and baby items.
- Our Opportunity Passport Dream Seekers had 95% survey completion for April 2025. We are anticipating 100% for October 2025.

Challenges and Barriers

- Housing shortages consistently impede engagement. As a result of their lack of housing, young people move multiple times a year. Often, they cannot connect with needed resources because their addresses and phone numbers change frequently.
- For the population served by SMA, transportation is a barrier. Despite providing bus passes to participants, the public transportation system in the area is insufficient. As part of our Will Work program, dream seekers are also offered a gas card. As a result of an overwhelming transportation demand, quantities are, however, limited.

- Furthermore, youth who enroll in the program at satellite sites often find it harder to participate in group activities due to on-going transportation issues.

Next Steps

As young people transition out of care, SMA continues to seek innovative housing options. To help our Dream Seekers find emergency housing, SMA has partnered with the Community Alliance for The Homeless. SMA also has a scheduled meeting to meet with Ashley Cash, who serves as Director of Housing and Community Development with the City of Memphis. WE will explore housing opportunities for our young people.

Success Story

At SMA, we are committed to supporting and empowering young people on their journey toward success. Today, we are proud to highlight the incredible achievement of one of our young people who have overcome obstacles and taken bold steps to secure a brighter future for herself and her family.

T.B. Last year, we reported she had earned her Hi-Set (High School Equivalency Diploma) and was enrolled at Gould's Hair and Nail Academy. On May 15, 2025, she received her certification as a nail technician. It's official: she's a certified nail technician.

She embodies perseverance and dedication, and we are honored to have played a role in her journey. She inspires us all to continue working toward breaking down barriers and creating opportunities for young people in our community.

Memphis Resources Center Report		
	Previous Year	Year to Date
Opportunity Passport		
Number of new youth enrolled	20	13
Number of financial literacy classes offered	8	4
Number of financial literacy classes offered	85%	85%
OPPS Survey		
Percent of youth completing April/October OPPS survey	100%	95%
Community Partnership Boards		
Number of board meetings	4	2
Number of new door openers created	4	2
Lifeskills classes		
Number of Lifeskills classes held	8	6
Total number of participants in Lifeskills classes	50	15
Percentage of youth showing increased proficiency pre to post test	85%	90%
Youth Leadership Engagement		
Number of youth leadership activities offered	5	3
Number of asset specific classes offered	8	4



Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

Tennessee First Episode Psychosis Initiative (FEPI- OnTrack TN)

In the 2014 appropriation, Congress allocated additional funds to SAMHSA to support “evidence-based programs that address the needs of individuals with early serious mental illness, including psychotic disorders.” States were required to set aside five percent of their Mental Health Block Grant (MHBG) allocation to support this evidence-based program. The Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (TDMHSAS) began planning for the implementation of the five percent set-aside to address early intervention programming as soon as the 2014 budget legislation passed. The proposal approved by SAMHSA included provisions for a First Episode Psychosis (FEP) treatment program focusing on a rural area of Tennessee using a Coordinated Specialty Care (CSC) model. The proposal provided a beginning budget, staffing and implementation model designed to be flexible in the face of the challenges of implementing an urban program in a rural area. With innovations focusing on the use of technology and a one-provider arrangement, the proposal was approved, and implementation began within 30 days following approval.

The program, titled OnTrack TN and modeled after OnTrack NY, serves youth and young adults between the ages of 15-30 who are experiencing symptoms of psychosis, such as hallucinations, unusual thoughts or beliefs, or disorganized thinking, with symptoms present for more than a week but less than 24 months. In the months following the approval of the proposal, TDMHSAS contracted with Carey Counseling Center, Inc. (Carey) to implement the program in a seven-county area in the northwest corner of Tennessee. The counties in the service area are Lake, Obion, Weakley, Benton, Carroll, Gibson, and Henry. In the spring of 2016, Congress increased the set-aside in the State Mental Health Block Grant program from 5 to 10 percent for first-episode Psychosis programs. TDMHSAS submitted a proposal to expand the First Episode Psychosis Initiative (FEPI) through the 10 percent set-aside, which was approved by SAMHSA. The proposal identified the following two priorities: (1) Expand the OnTrack TN program to two additional sites in Tennessee, and (2) Create a statewide FEPI Learning Collaborative consisting of, at minimum, all three OnTrack TN sites.

In May 2016, TDMHSAS released an Announcement of Funding requesting proposals to implement OnTrack TN in two counties within Davidson, Hamilton, and Shelby. A review panel scored the proposals, and contracts were awarded to Mental Health Cooperative, Inc. in Davidson County and Alliance Healthcare Services in Shelby County. In 2019, TDMHSAS partnered with Helen Ross McNabb to implement an OnTrack TN team in Knox County. As a result of the 2018 federal appropriations, there was an increase in the SAMHSA Mental Health Block Grant which resulted in additional funds being available through the 10 percent set-aside. Because of this increase, TDMHSAS released an additional Announcement of Funding

in September 2019 requesting proposals to implement OnTrack TN in Hamilton County. A review panel scored the proposals, and a contract was awarded to Helen Ross McNabb. All programs were trained in the OnTrack NY model. Additionally, the increase in funds was used to bring on a Statewide Youth/Young Adult Best Practices Trainer and Consultant through the Vanderbilt Center of Excellence. This position provides support and training to the OnTrack TN sites and will provide fidelity checks to ensure fidelity to the OnTrack model.

At the end of 2021, additional funding was made available for the OnTrack TN program through COVID and ARPA funds. As a result, TDMHSAS released an Announcement of Funding in June 2021 requesting proposals to implement OnTrack TN in Rutherford, Anderson, and Montgomery counties. A review panel scored the proposals, and in August 2021 (FY2022), awards were made to: Volunteer Behavioral Health Care System in Rutherford County; Ridgeview Psychiatric Hospital and Center, Inc. in Anderson County; and Mental Health Cooperative (MHC) in Montgomery County. Contracts began in November 2021.

At the end of 2022, additional funding was made available for the OnTrack TN programs through ARPA and the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. TDMHSAS contracted with Park Center to house the Statewide Youth and Young Adult Best Practices Trainer/Consultant. The trainer aimed to provide training, coaching, technical assistance, consultation, and fidelity monitoring on best practices (e.g., OnTrack) to current and new youth and young adult programs funded by the State, with a special emphasis on early psychosis programming (OnTrack TN and the Clinical High Risk for Psychosis program). Funding was also used to expand FEPI service coverage areas to Loudon & and Monroe counties. Service implementation was carried out by the Helen Ross McNabb Center.

Team members from TDMHSAS regularly attend YTAC meetings to provide updates on progress toward goals. Some of the successes during 2025 include:

- OnTrack TN teams served 243 youth and young adults experiencing a first episode of psychosis.
- The Ontrack TN teams collectively improved participant symptoms; 80% of participants had improvement in symptoms over time
- The Ontrack TN teams achieved a 78% reduction in hospital bed days, reducing the average number from 1,243 days at intake to 269 days at the recent follow-up
- 99% of participants enrolled in an Ontrack TN program reported that they were satisfied with the services provided, and 53% of the participants stated that they felt better about their lives after being enrolled in Ontrack TN.

OnTrack TN services provide youth, young adults, and their families with the support they need during one of life's most challenging periods. These services are part of a continuum of care that bridges the gap between early identification and long-term recovery, ensuring that young people receive the right care at the right time. The department's investment in early psychosis care not only transforms individual lives but also strengthens Tennessee's overall behavioral health system, fostering healthier communities and a brighter future for our state.

Tennessee Clinical High Risk for Psychosis Initiative (CHR-P)

The Tennessee Clinical High Risk for Psychosis Initiative began as a four-year \$1.6 million discretionary grant awarded to the TDMHSAS by SAMHSA in September 2018. Services for this grant ended September 29, 2022, with evaluation activities continuing through January 2023 by a No-Cost Extension awarded by SAMHSA to TDMHSAS. The 2018-2022 CHR-P Initiative had one service delivery site in Shelby County that was implemented by CMI Healthcare Services. Centerstone Research Institute provided evaluation of the CHR-P Initiative. Services and support were designed based on the OnTrack model and included care coordination utilizing the Transition to Independence Process (TIP) Model, Supported Employment and Education utilizing the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Model, family peer support and young adult peer support services. In 2022, TDMHSAS applied for a second four-year, \$1.6 million discretionary Clinical High Risk for Psychosis grant (CHR-P 2.0) by SAMHSA. TDMHSAS was awarded the CHR-P 2.0 grant in September 2022 and began implementation in 2023.

The purpose of the Clinical High Risk for Psychosis (CHR-P) Initiative is to assist Shelby County, Tennessee youth and young adults ages 12 to 25 who are at clinical high risk for developing psychosis to improve symptomatic and behavioral functioning; delay or prevent the onset of psychosis; and minimize the duration of untreated psychosis; enabling them to resume age-appropriate social, academic, and/or vocational activities. This goal will be accomplished through the development of a stepped-model of care that ensures easy access to evidence-based services and support for young adults, and their families. As of 2023, CHR-P 2.0 offers service delivery in Shelby County implemented by Alliance Healthcare Services who also implements the OnTrack TN program in Shelby County. Services and supports are based on the OnTrack model and will include care coordination utilizing the Transition to Independence Process (TIP) Model, Supported Employment and Education utilizing the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Model, family peer support and young adult peer support services. TDMHSAS provides program evaluation of the CHR-P 2.0 grant anticipated to end in 2027.

Some of the successes during 2025 year include:

- The CHR-P team is fully staffed, has screened 208 young people, and provided outreach to 529 people.
- The CHR-P team has provided workforce development for 664 people in the mental health and related workforce trained in mental-health-related practices/activities consistent with the goals of the grant to prevent and treat early psychosis.

The CHR-P program strengthens Tennessee's behavioral health system by making sure services are designed to meet the unique needs of this population. By focusing on early identification and timely support, the CHR-P team not only promotes recovery but also builds a more sustainable system of care that gives young people the best chance to thrive. These efforts also reduce the risk of developing psychosis and shorten the duration of untreated symptoms by connecting individuals to First Episode Psychosis programs, ensuring they receive treatment through a seamless continuum of care.

Promoting the Integration of Primary and Behavioral Healthcare Initiative (Collaborative Care College Initiative- PIPBHI)

In 2025 the youth and young adult department was awarded a new federal grant called the Promoting the Integration of Primary and Behavioral Healthcare Initiative, also known as the Collaborative Care College Initiative. The program aims to tackle the significant mental health disparities affecting college students by integrating behavioral health services into three university health clinics across Tennessee. Specifically, this initiative will improve mental health outcomes by providing targeted services such as mental health screenings and assessments, individual and group counseling, medication management, and care coordination. The behavioral health services are embedded within the health clinics at Tennessee Tech, UT Martin, and Bethel University. Our collaborative partners in this initiative include Volunteer Behavioral Health, Carey Counseling, and Hometown Health.

Some of the successes during 2025 year include:

- Each team is fully staffed and has begun enrolling participants
- Since program implementation in April 2025, the program has enrolled 19 college students
- The PIPBHI Team has provided mental health screenings to 297 young people since the program inception

The PIPBHI team is dedicated to promoting wellness, improving access to treatment, and giving young people the tools they need to succeed in both school and life. At TDMHSAS, expanding programs for youth and young adults means ensuring a variety of services are available for them at the right time and place. On college campuses, where stress and mental health challenges can often interrupt education, these programs provide essential resources that help students stay on track and thrive. By investing in these services, we are creating a stronger, more sustainable system of care that responds to the unique needs of youth and young adults while shaping a healthier future for our communities. These efforts not only strengthen behavioral health support for college students but also grow the young adult peer workforce, ensuring peers are equipped to guide others through their recovery journey.



Every Child TN – Transition Priority Update

Overview and History

Every Child Tennessee (ECTN) is a statewide public-private partnership led by the **Governor’s Faith-Based and Community Initiative (GFBCI)** in collaboration with the **Tennessee Department of Children’s Services (DCS)** and community-based organizations. Its mission is to ensure that Tennesseans are supporting children, youth, and families before, during, and after foster care.

Since its founding on August 26th, 2024, ECTN has centered its work around **four priority areas** that define a child’s full journey through the system: **Preservation, Recruitment, Retention, and Transition**. These priorities guide efforts to strengthen families, grow and sustain quality caregivers, support youth during their time in care, and ensure that every young person successfully transitions to adulthood with stability, purpose, and connection.

Within this framework, the **Transition Priority** has emerged as a critical focus, recognizing that each year, hundreds of young Tennesseans age out of care into adulthood without the relationships, housing, or mental health support needed for long-term success. The work is guided by the **Every Child TN Transition Leadership Council** and powered by a multi-year collaboration with **Belmont University’s Innovation Labs**, with support from diverse state and community partners.

Transition Priority

To tackle the complex challenges of youth transition, ECTN partnered with **Belmont University’s Innovation Labs**, bringing research, design, and innovation together under one coordinated statewide effort.

This partnership is unfolded through a three-phase process:

1. **Discover:**

Conducted over **250 hours of research** and **75+ stakeholder conversations**, including interviews with youth with lived experience, DCS staff, and service providers. The resulting **2024 Tennessee Foster Care Landscape Study** identified the most urgent barriers to successful transition: lack of stable housing, mental health care access, and consistent adult relationships.

2. **Design:**

The **2025 Impact Case Report** translated these findings into a strategic investment framework, validating potential pilot programs and identifying funding models that align private philanthropy, public resources, and local innovation.

3. **Deploy (in progress):**

The partnership is now advancing **venture-philanthropy pilots** that test scalable solutions for transition-age youth across Tennessee, designed to align measurable social impact with community collaboration.

This coordinated effort marks one of Tennessee’s first attempts to unite data, lived experience, and cross-sector investment around youth transition outcomes statewide.

The Challenge

Each year, approximately 850 youth in Tennessee age out of foster care at age 18. Within three years:

- **70–80%** experience homelessness, incarceration, or substance use,
- Only **16%** enroll in postsecondary education, and
- Just **52%** are employed.

These outcomes represent a **lifetime cost of roughly \$300,000 per individual**, or nearly **\$255 million annually** in public spending. Behind those numbers are young people striving for independence without the consistent supports most of their peers rely on.

System Gaps and Opportunities

Through its Landscape Study, Belmont identified **three foundational needs** that, if addressed, can transform the transition experience from crisis to opportunity:

1. **Supportive Relationships** – Establishing enduring, caring connections between youth and trusted adults.
2. **Safe and Stable Housing** – Creating affordable, youth-centered housing with wraparound supports.
3. **Accessible Mental Health Care** – Integrating trauma-informed care and consistent therapeutic access for all transition-age youth.

The partnership emphasizes that lasting impact requires **relational permanency, not program dependency**, helping youth find belonging, not just services.

Pilot Innovations

The Reconstruct Challenge: Thriving Youth

A statewide **venture-philanthropy fund** designed to identify, finance, and scale innovative solutions that address housing, mental health, and supportive relationships.

- **Investment Goal:** \$1.5 million
- **Funds Committed to Date:** \$720,000
- **Timeline:** Launching Fall 2025 with 8–10 pilot initiatives
- **Model:** Combines capital investment with technical assistance and impact measurement to scale what works.

Lumen Flats – Knoxville Pilot

A flagship pilot repurposing a senior living facility into **youth-designed, transitional housing** for young adults accessing **Extension of Foster Care (EFC)** services.

- **Project Cost:** \$3.1 million
- **Funding:** \$1 million from the City of Knoxville; \$550,000 in equity investment sought.
- **Features:**
 - Permanent housing vouchers
 - On-site mental health and educational supports
 - Integrated faith-based and community mentorship
 - **Projected Launch:** January 2026

Both pilots reflect ECTN’s strategy of combining **youth voice, cross-sector collaboration, and measurable social return** to create lasting systems change.

Measuring Progress

ECTN’s Transition Priority is guided by outcome-based metrics developed with DCS, youth, and community stakeholders. The focus is not on compliance measures but on **real-life stability and belonging**.

Core Success Indicators:

- A sustained, supportive adult relationship
- A stable and safe housing plan
- Access to effective, ongoing mental health care

These metrics are being integrated into existing DCS frameworks (such as TFACTS and the National Youth in Transition Database) to align data collection with meaningful impact tracking and reduce duplication across agencies.

Looking Ahead

The Transition Priority represents a turning point in Tennessee’s foster care landscape—moving from fragmented services to an **integrated ecosystem of opportunity**. With continued leadership from GFBCI, DCS, and statewide partners, the initiative will:

- **Expand pilot programs** across multiple regions,
- **Scale proven models** for relational support, housing, and behavioral health, and
- **Leverage new investment tools** to sustain innovation over time.

Ultimately, Every Child TN envisions a Tennessee where no young person ages out of foster care alone, each one surrounded by supportive adults, safe housing, and a clear path toward independence and hope.