



THE EXCHANGE

News from FYSB and the Youth Services Field

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FOSTERING SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD THROUGH COLLABORATION

Ask any five grantees of the Family and Youth Services Bureau's Transitional Living Program (TLP) how they collaborate with the Children's Bureau's Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) and you may get five completely different answers.

Why? Because they all know this important fact: By working together, programs can improve outcomes for the youth they serve.



To improve among TLPs and CFCIPs even further, the Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF), which oversees both the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) and the Children's Bureau, is working with the Interagency Council on Homelessness on a new awareness campaign.

"We want to make sure that TLPs and CFCIPs are pooling as many resources as they can in order to provide the most comprehensive services to the youth they serve," says Joan Ohl, commissioner of ACYF.

The TLP and CFCIP programs are natural allies. Founded separately in the 1980s, they were created by Congress to provide critical support and independent living skills to young people without a home who aren't yet prepared to live on their own. These young people—runaways in the case of TLP and foster youth in the case of CFCIP—were winding up homeless, on welfare, or in the juvenile justice system in large numbers rather than making successful transitions to higher education or careers.

In order to provide these at-risk young people with the skills they need to live and thrive on their own, TLPs and CFCIPs offer housing and an array of services, including basic life skills training, vocational or educational support,

(continued on page 3)

TLP/CFCIP AT A GLANCE

Legislative History

1986

Independent Living Program enacted as part of Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. Administrative oversight given to the Children's Bureau within ACYF.

1988

Transitional Living Program enacted as an amendment to the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. Administrative oversight given to the Family and Youth Services Bureau within ACYF.

1999

The Foster Care Improvement Act replaced the Title IV-E Independent Living Program with the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP).

2001

Educational and Training Vouchers (ETV) Program enacted as part of the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments, providing vouchers of up to \$5,000 per year for postsecondary educational assistance for foster and former foster care youth.

2003

The Transitional Living Program reauthorized by the Runaway, Homeless, and Missing Children Protection Act.

2008

The Transitional Living Program up for reauthorization in September 2008.

Eligibility

TLP—Runaway and homeless youth, ages 16 through 21, who are not in the foster care or juvenile justice systems. Homeless pregnant and parenting young people are also eligible for services through maternity group homes. Former foster youth can access these services, provided they are no longer under the care of the State.

CFCIP—Foster or former foster youth up to age 21.

FY 2007 Funding

TLP—190 grantees across the U.S. and Guam received \$35.2 million through a competitive process. Grants can be up to \$200,000 a year for 5 years. Find TLP grantees online at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb>.

CFCIP—\$140 million in formula grants to the 50 States, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. Funding is allocated based on the number of foster youth in the State according to AFCARS (Adoption, Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System) data. States have flexibility in deciding how grant money is spent.

ETV—\$46 million in formula grants to the 50 States, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. Funding is allocated based on AFCARS data. States have flexibility in deciding how grant money is spent.

health care, and counseling. Foster youth can also receive additional educational support through the Chafee Educational and Training Voucher (ETV) Program (see article on page 9).

Despite the intersection of their missions and services, collaboration is not without its challenges. While

TLP funding is awarded as discretionary grants to community-based organizations, CFCIP funding is provided as a block grant to States to administer locally. Eligibility and rules vary, so TLPs need to do their own research and outreach to the independent living coordinators in their particular State.

“States may have different approaches to serving youth in at-risk situations, but our goals are the same,” says Curtis Porter, acting associate commissioner of FYSB. “We want to make sure young people have all the tools and opportunities available to them so that they may succeed.”

TLP/CFCIP COLLABORATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Chafee Foster Care Independence Programs (CFCIPs) and transitional living programs (TLPs) both help youth move toward self-sufficiency. They work with young people with similar developmental needs. They offer many of the same program components, such as life skills training, counseling, and job readiness training. And they both have limited resources.

Why, then, don't they work more closely together?

Discrete eligibility requirements may be part of the puzzle. Homeless youth are not eligible for CFCIP services unless they become a part of the foster care system, which is a complicated process and not always in the best interest of the young person involved. Youth in foster care are not eligible for TLP services unless they are discharged from care and find themselves homeless, which, of course, is not the desired path for any young person.

Administrative differences also pose some challenges to the two programs working together. TLPs, typically private, nonprofit organizations that provide shelter care and other services to runaway and homeless youth, have historically



considered themselves to be an alternative to the traditional child welfare or juvenile justice systems.

CFCIPs, funded and operated by public departments of child welfare and social services, are subject to the constraints of any local government agency. They sometimes cannot act as quickly because there are many layers in the approval process.

Despite these challenges, there are plenty of opportunities for collaboration. At Volunteers of America in South Dakota, for example, youth in the CFCIP and TLP receive life skills education, employment assistance, and other support services together, in a coordinated effort.

“These young people haven't necessarily taken the same path, but now they are dealing with so

many of the same challenges,” says Stephanie Graeb, independent living program director at Volunteers of America. “It makes a lot of sense to integrate the two programs.”

Here are some ideas:

- Put together and disseminate a contact list of the TLPs and CFCIPs in your State. You can't collaborate if you don't know each other! TLP providers are posted on the Family and Youth Services Bureau Web site (www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb). A list of State independent living coordinators can be found at http://www.nrcys.ou.edu/yd/state_pages.html.
- Become experts in each other's program requirements and restrictions. Graeb suggests that TLPs ask for a copy of the State's CFCIP plan and really understand the ins and outs of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program.
- Attend stakeholder meetings. Volunteers of America's TLP staff are currently giving feedback on young people's service needs in South Dakota and providing input on the State's next 5-year

plan. At the same time, State independent living coordinators can actively seek input from community youth service providers.

- Get to know the independent living coordinator in your State. That way, when there's a question about eligibility or getting services for a particular young person, you can easily pick up the phone and ask.
- Sit down together and hash out what a potential TLP/CFCIP collaboration might look like, no strings attached. You may want

to consider goals and activities in the areas of direct services, available and needed resources, staff development, funding needs and potential sources, and policies and procedures. Develop a collaboration workplan.

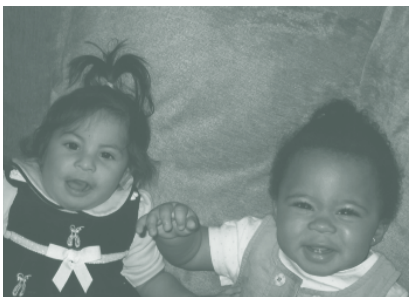
- Conduct regular collaborators' meetings to discuss program updates, successes, and barriers, refine workplans, and evaluate collaboration activities.
- Assess the training and technical assistance needs of collaborators and set a plan to address

them. Consider offering joint training to CFCIP and TLP program managers and staff. At Community Youth Services in Washington, for example, both CFCIP and TLP staff learn to administer the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment. This allows programs to give uniform assessments to youth in both programs and communicate with each other in the same language.

- Get buy-in from all parties, including the people who will actually be doing the work, such as case managers and line staff.

CREATIVE COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS: MAKING YOUR COMMUNITY WORK FOR YOU!

When Judith Dittman left for yet another conference, little did the executive director of Alternative House in Dunn Loring, Virginia know that her organization's Assisting Young Mothers (AYM) program was about to welcome a new addition.



Young residents of Alternative House

After a conference session where she and various other directors described their FYSB-funded transitional living programs, Dittman was approached by a representative of Christian Relief Services, who asked, "If you had more housing, could you put up more girls?" Absolutely, was her reply. And a

collaboration leading to three new townhomes was born.

In these days of shrinking dollars and tighter budgets, transitional living programs (TLPs) and Chafee Foster Care Independence Programs (CFCIPs) across the country continually seek new funding sources to better meet the needs of the young people they serve. Programs like AYM are finding community connections and leveraging them in creative ways. By doing so, they can increase the financial, human, and social resources for youth moving toward self-sufficiency.

To meet the diverse needs of its young mothers, for example, AYM collaborates with a range of organizations: Dress for Success and Women Giving Back provide professional clothing for young women starting their first jobs; WEAVE (Women Empowered Against Violence) teaches about

relationship violence and abuse; a local church provides daycare; Skill Source provides employment training; Healthy Families teaches about preventing child abuse; and the Northern Virginia AIDS Ministry educates residents about HIV/AIDS.

At the Ain Dah Yung Center in St. Paul, Minnesota, residential director Anthony Drews, says, "We are not only working in the community, we are part of the community." As a TLP with a Native American mission, Ain Dah Yung strives to showcase their culture to the community. They invite community agencies, businesses and the general public to pow wows, sweat lodges, and drumming and dancing events held throughout the year. These venues provide networking opportunities and can lead to both collaborations and donations.

"We research many different areas of resources for the youth



Ain Dah Yung staff

we serve,” says Meghan Huebner, residential services director at AYM. She believes working with other community organizations and agencies opens the doors for sharing information and creating new resources and connections.

Tips for building successful collaborations in your community:

- Become familiar with other agencies, businesses, and faith-based organizations in your community. Invite potential partners and decision makers to start a dialogue about how you might join forces.
- Before the first meeting, think about how your groups can work together, and come up with a plan, including:
 - What are the advantages to both programs or agencies?
 - What are the advantages to the youth being served?
- If you don’t have a well thought-out plan, brainstorm some ideas before the meeting with staff, and continue brainstorming with potential partners. Get creative!
- Educate potential partners about your organization’s mission

and what kinds of services you provide day-to-day. If partners understand the big picture of the collaboration as well as the details, they may be more willing to commit to teaming up with your organization.

- Once you have some ideas for how you might collaborate, draft a memorandum of understanding. Outline what’s expected and who’s responsible for each part of the collaboration. Ensure there will be clear communication.
- Schedule regular meeting times to work on the partnership and review how things are going. Be open to making changes and working out details that might be causing problems.
- Expect that collaboration will take more than one meeting and the process might take months. Be patient.
- Showcase your program and what it does. Talk to anyone who will listen. Someone may be looking for you!

R.I.S.E.: THE ONLY WAY IS UP

Responsibility. Independence. Support. Empowerment. These are the fundamental principles of the R.I.S.E. program at Community Youth Services (CYS) in Olympia, Washington. And while the “C” in *CYS* stands for *Community*, it could just as easily represent the organization’s firm commitment to *Collaboration*.

CYS manages over a dozen programs in its efforts to support

youth and families, including a transitional living program, or TLP, for homeless youth or those living in unsafe living situations, and a Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, or CFCIP, that provides basic life skills and support to youth who are, or have been, in foster care.

Based on a Positive Youth Development model, both of these programs aim to help

youth achieve their goals and move toward self sufficiency, and “because they were both housed under one roof, we saw it as a natural collaboration,” says program director Maureen McLemore.

Both programs operate under the R.I.S.E. umbrella. Working with other *CYS* programs as well as other community agencies, R.I.S.E. has created an environment where services, such as life skills training,



R.I.S.E. transitional living house

employment and educational assistance, and service learning opportunities are provided to all youth, over 70 each year, in a collaborative environment.

“Our participants don’t even know that they are in two different programs,” McLemore says. “If you asked them, ‘Are you in an independent living or transitional living program?’ They’d look at you and say, ‘What?’”

CYS staff members enjoy the collaboration. Washington State’s independent living program coordinator attends staff meetings “and does case consultation for any youth that we are co-serving,” says McLemore.

And now, thanks to a staffing shift, CYC has an independent living case manager who works full-time with the R.I.S.E. program and leads all the independent living workshops attended by both CFCIP and TLP participants.

R.I.S.E. is a busy program. They usually handle 40 to 50 applications at any given time for the 48 available

slots. Staff divide the applicant list into “active” and “inactive”—since youth are supposed to keep in touch while waiting for an opening. But R.I.S.E. program staff start case management before youth even enroll to give them a head start on the program.

“We make referrals, we begin a discussion about what their plans are and what they can do to prepare,” McLemore says. Youth might enroll in GED classes or begin looking for work. During this time, they are also able to attend life skills workshops offered to youth already enrolled in the program.

All of the youth who enter the R.I.S.E. program, “whether they’ve been in foster care or not,” are evaluated using the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment to determine the youth’s independent living skills. Using the results, the youth, with guidance from their case managers, create an individual living plan that outlines their goals and what they must do to reach them.

Once in the program, youth are expected to be working on those goals—whether that means pursuing employment, attending school, or going to parenting classes—or trying to resolve their barriers to success.

Youth who have been in foster care also have an independent living case manager. McLemore views this relationship as invaluable to those young adults. The case manager

can be there “as an advocate, as a mentor, as a teacher, as someone to listen when things aren’t going well.” The independent living case manager can also help former foster care youth navigate the paperwork required to apply for education and training vouchers or to access funds to help with rent.

R.I.S.E. collaborates with many other programs under the CYC umbrella, including the runaway shelter, drop-in center, street outreach, and CareerTrek, a program to help low-income youth develop a career plan. Through other collaborations, youth can access a variety of other services onsite, including an alternative school, mental health and drug and alcohol assessments, plus referrals and weekly screenings from the health department.

Cooperation continues outside the walls of CYC too. “We collaborate with many agencies in our area,” McLemore says. “And I think what happens is...you add a whole new dimension to your program.” Collaborations provide resources above and beyond the abilities of discrete programs, and provide youth “a larger safety net,” she says.

Collaboration is considered critical to the wraparound services CYC provides. “It’s just working beautifully,” McLemore says. The TLP/CFCIP collaboration “enriches both programs,” she says. And, undoubtedly, that enrichment extends to many young lives.

“...because they were both housed under one roof, we saw it as a natural collaboration.”

—Maureen McLemore, R.I.S.E. program director

EXPANDING EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH

The phone rings at Volunteers of America in South Dakota. It's a guidance counselor from the local high school. He knows a student who's been missing school and falling asleep in class. He suspects the student might be homeless. What should he do?

That's where Stephanie Graeb steps in.

"We go to the school, talk to the student about his situation, and if appropriate, we let him know what kind of help we can offer," says Graeb, the independent living program director at Volunteers of America.

Recognizing that education helps facilitate successful transition to adulthood, programs like Volunteers of America are increasingly collaborating with high schools, colleges and universities, and vocational schools. Through legislation such as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act and the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP), transitional living programs (TLPs) and CFCIPs are helping to promote and expand education opportunities for youth moving toward self-sufficiency.

Graeb has built such strong relationships with schools in her community that they are now one of the primary referral sources for TLP and CFCIP youth at her agency. And she, in turn, knows that the schools will do all they can to help these homeless young people succeed.

McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act

Graeb and her colleagues have the McKinney-Vento Act to thank for much of the progress in seeing homeless young people through to their high school diplomas. The Act was designed to reduce barriers such as transportation and residency and documentation requirements (birth certificates or proof of immunization) that have often stymied these youth from enrolling, attending, and succeeding in school.

McKinney-Vento gives youth who are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, or "unaccompanied youth," the right to attend the school either nearest to where they are living or where they were last enrolled ("school of origin"). Decisions regarding school placement are to be made in the best interest of the young person. Unaccompanied youth also have the right to:

- go to school with students who are not homeless—students cannot be separated from the regular school program because they are homeless;
- obtain a written statement of their rights when they enroll;
- enroll immediately without school, medical, or similar records;
- get transportation to their school of origin;
- participate fully in school activities;

- have the opportunity to meet the same high academic achievement standards as all students;
- be automatically eligible for Title I services, such as free lunch, as well as services designed to meet the unique needs of homeless youth that are above and beyond the regular Title I programs.

States, however, have different timelines for meeting these objectives and may also define the needs of homeless youth differently than service providers.

If a State or local school district has laws or policies that conflict with the McKinney-Vento Act, the Act overrules those laws or policies. If you feel a school has not followed the McKinney-Vento Act's requirements:

- Call the homeless education liaison at your local educational agency (LEA) or the State coordinator for homeless education.
- Contact the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) at 1-800-308-2145 or homeless@serve.org.

According to the McKinney-Vento Act, children and youth "awaiting foster care placement" are eligible to receive services; however, States and districts have wide-ranging interpretations of the term. NCHE recommends discussing the eligibility of youth in foster care with your school district's homeless education liaison.

MAKING MCKINNEY-VENTO WORK FOR YOU

- ◆ Work on building a strong collaborative relationship with the LEA homeless education liaison. Liaisons help identify and ensure that unaccompanied youth have a smooth transition into school and receive the support services they are guaranteed under law. To identify the liaison, contact your State coordinator for homeless education. A list of State coordinators can be found online at www.serve.org/nche/downloads/sccontact.pdf.
- ◆ Discuss with the homeless education liaison issues regarding youth guardianship, case management, the school enrollment process, transportation, and existing policies that may pose a barrier to youth receiving educational services.
- ◆ Become familiar with your school district's policies about enrolling unaccompanied youth. Some districts allow youth to enroll themselves while others permit service agency personnel or the local liaison to sign for them.
- ◆ Develop relationships with truancy officials and other school personnel and train them on how to recognize school absences that may be the result of homelessness.
- ◆ Educate school administrators, teachers, and counselors about the needs of homeless students and those in foster care. As school personnel gain a broader understanding of the needs of these youth, they will be better able to implement policies and practices that ensure access to school and support success in school.
- ◆ Introduce your agency and the services you provide to school personnel. That way, you can help establish your agency as a resource, so school staff will feel comfortable making referrals to your agency for assistance.
- ◆ Work with school officials to ensure that the needs of homeless students and those in foster care are included in the school improvement plans.

Tips for working with young people

- ◆ Inform young people upon intake about their rights to an education and how they can access educational services. This should include their right to appeal school enrollment decisions.
- ◆ Decide how to introduce the youth to the school and how to best represent the student's interests in the educational planning process. Listen to what young people say they want and need in school to be successful.
- ◆ Be aware of alternative school options for youth, such as vocational education, credit-for-work programs, and flexible school hours. Your LEA liaison should be able to explain specific programs in your area.

Chafee Foster Care Independence Program: Educational and Training Vouchers

Many young people involved in the child welfare system face the same educational challenges as youth who are homeless. Youth in foster care often are separated from family members and friends, move around a lot, and face unfamiliar home and school environments.

To support postsecondary education and training for foster and former foster care youth, the Chafee Educational and Training Voucher Program provides up to \$5,000 per year to eligible youth attending universities, community colleges, and vocational schools. Youth otherwise eligible for services under a State's Chafee Foster Care Independence Program are eligible to receive vouchers.

That voucher and a little encouragement from program staff can go a long way. This spring, 23 young people in Sasha Bruce Youthwork's CFCIP and TLP, along with a half-dozen staff, will board a bus in Washington, DC and head south. After visiting six historically Black colleges in Alabama, Georgia, and Florida, the prospective college freshmen should have a pretty realistic view of the academic and social opportunities that await them in college.

Erica DeBardeleben, educational advocate at Sasha Bruce, has been planning the annual week-long college tour and preparing the young people going on the trip. They discuss

topics such as application essays, interviewing skills, preparing for college, possible majors, and financial aid. "How to pay for college is definitely a big concern for the young people we work with," she says.

Deborah Shore, executive director of Sasha Bruce, thinks youth in both the TLP and CFCIP have benefitted from having a full-time educational advocate on staff.

In the fall, DeBardeleben helped arrange a college fair for young people at her agency. Eighteen local colleges and vocational programs came and talked about the programs they offer. Students could apply onsite and get on-the-spot decisions. One young woman was particularly excited to be accepted to the cosmetology school of her choice.

DeBardeleben, who works so closely with these young people, shares their enthusiasm at each success. "Because they've had so many challenges," she says, "some people think that helping these kids get through high school or earn a GED is a 'big enough' achievement. But I know they can do more."

College tours and college fairs help young people imagine a life beyond their present circumstances, she says. Chafee education and training vouchers can help them achieve it.



UNDERSTANDING EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING VOUCHERS

Legislative History

The Promoting Safe and Stable Families Act of 2001 authorized money for education and training vouchers through the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program.

Sponsoring Agency

Children's Bureau of the Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services

Eligibility

Youth otherwise eligible for CFCIP services, and youth adopted from foster care after turning age 16.

The State may allow youth participating in the voucher program on the date they turn age 21 to remain eligible until they reach age 23, as long as they are enrolled in a post-secondary education or training program and are making satisfactory progress toward completion of that program.

Funding

The law authorizes \$60 million for payments directly to the 50 States, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia.

NORTHERN EXPOSURE: ALASKA'S EFFORTS TO PROMOTE SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD

As Alaska's statewide independent living coordinator, Jefty Prather has a lot of ground to cover.

For the Office of Children's Services (OCS), Prather and his four regional independent living specialists work to safeguard the futures of kids aging out of the foster care system in a State more than twice the size of Texas, but with a total population of just 670,000—less than San Francisco.

In such a vast but sparsely populated environment, collaboration isn't just a nice bonus, it's crucial to keeping young people safe. Without the support of transitional living programs (TLPs), Native organizations, and local communities, Prather's job would be not just challenging, but impossible.

About 200 youth in Alaska's foster care system are between the ages of 16 and 20; and about 40 age out of the system each year. While OCS can keep youth in custody until age 19 and even allows them to stay on until 20, "that doesn't happen very often," Prather says. "Most of them don't want to be in custody after they're able to leave." But, he says, sometimes his office can make a difference: "To a few of them we're able to say, 'Oh, man, do you really want to do this? Because you're not really prepared to be on your own.'" On a good day, the youth heeds that advice.

It is at that critical time that Alaska's TLPs come into play. Currently, there are only three TLPs in the entire State, offer-

ing about 50 beds. Juneau Youth Services (JYS) in the State's capital of Juneau and Covenant House in Anchorage are the largest. They both provide numerous services to homeless youth, including street outreach, shelter, life skills, and job training and education assistance. "We desperately need their programs to put our youth into when they leave custody, when they're not ready to live on their own," Prather says.

Many parts of Alaska are accessible only by air or sea. For youth in these remote areas, communication is the key. "As huge as Alaska is, there's a lot of sharing of information," Prather says. "So the resources that are available, most people know about them." If a regional coordinator knows a youth is about to leave custody, the phone calls begin—to see if there are any available beds at the TLPs.

TLPs are used to getting these calls. "We're a very tight knit community in terms of State agencies, the city, the school district, the behavioral health organizations," says John Heimbuch, community services director at JYS. "One of the nice things about a place like Juneau is, many of these people on your teams are also your neighbors, so it's relatively easy to know who to call."

Many foster care youth also arrive at TLPs directly from the streets. "We have a lot of youth that, when they leave OCS, don't want to be involved with us again," Prather says. "But, on the other hand, they know about the homeless shelters

for youth and they're comfortable going there." When the shelter determines the youth was formerly in foster care, they then contact OCS. "They know that there are funds available that we can help them with," he says, "and we can coordinate to provide services and training."

The State's Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) and Covenant House TLP, for example, collaborated on a grant from the Department of Labor through the Workforce Investment Act to hire an employment coach and mentor. This person provides additional life skills training in areas like finding a job, resume writing and interviewing, and then keeping a job once employed. "Our youth tend to be more difficult to maintain in jobs sometimes, because they don't have a lot of work history and things like that," says Prather. "So, they require a little bit more hands-on support than most of the job training programs have available." With the help of this grant, both CFCIP and TLP youth get some extra guidance.

Otherwise, Alaska's OCS does not provide funding directly to TLPs that are serving former foster care youth. The State's Chafee funding earmarked for room and board is distributed through independent living funds, directly to the youth. Employed youth who cannot afford rent can apply for these funds that will cover 100 percent of their first two months' rent, 50 percent of the third month, and 25 percent of the fourth month.



Foster youth who are in a TLP can apply for independent living funds to use for things such as small furniture, household goods, tutors, cultural development and sometimes, even travel. A few years ago, these funds were used to bring a youth to JYS from a remote village to live in a supervised apartment and learn various life skills. She then returned to her home community to live independently.

Fortunately, case managers can help youth with making decisions about using independent living funds. “We will help them use that money wisely,” says Rick Driscoll, family services program coordinator at JYS. “We will help them do things like secure a deposit for a rental or identify education needs—to use the money in a manner that’s beneficial.”

Once in a TLP program, Prather notes that “youth are very good

about contacting us when they need us.” There is also a youth advisory group, Facing Foster Care in Alaska, made up of current and former foster youth who meet quarterly to recommend improvements to the State’s foster care system. Prather attends these meetings and notes that they are a good way to keep up with everyone and make sure they are doing well.

Another collaboration that Prather’s office calls upon is with tribal communities. Over 60 percent of the youth in Alaska’s foster care are Native Americans, so it’s important to work with those communities in providing services. In the Juneau area, the Tlingit and Haida tribes operate their own central council government, and OCS works with them and JYS to provide independent living skills classes to youth in both transitional living and independent living situations from both communities.

In Anchorage, Southcentral Foundation is an Alaska Native-owned healthcare organization that operates a TLP with 12 beds. Many youth leaving foster care head to this program, which serves Alaska Native and American Indian youth in an environment that, according to Prather, feels like a family. That environment is beneficial because many Native youth “come from really small villages—where they’re used to having more extended family and cultural connections—so they kind of need that,” he says.

The primary challenge facing Prather’s office is probably universal in the TLP/CFCIP world: “We just don’t have enough beds.” There used to be more than the current three programs, but funding and city subsidization come and go. A new TLP is currently starting up in the city of Sitka, so soon there will be four. Prather realizes Alaska’s remote location and small population don’t help matters.

Despite the fiscal and geographic challenges, Prather is positive about the services his independent living group and their network of TLPs and communities provide. “Everybody works really hard at it, and I think that, for the most part, we’re pretty successful,” he says. Small town spirit in the Nation’s largest State.

Independent living programs for foster care and homeless youth—both CFCIPs and TLPs— provide young people with the critical support and skills they need to successfully cross into adulthood. These programs have made an enormous difference in the lives of countless youth.

That’s why the Administration on Children, Youth and Families has initiated a campaign to encourage further collaboration between these two programs. Because despite challenges, TLPs and CFCIPs have found that working together can lead to even greater outcomes for the youth they serve.

The Exchange is developed for the Family and Youth Services Bureau; Administration on Children, Youth and Families; Administration for Children and Families; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services by JBS International, Inc., under contract number GS10F0285K to manage the National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth.

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What's Inside

Learn how the Transitional
Living and Chafee Foster
Care Independence
Programs can work together
to improve outcomes
for youth.

THE EXCHANGE

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