

DCF Caseworker Focus Group Site Visit #3

Instructions

Hello everyone, welcome and thank you for joining today. We would like to invite you to participate in focus group that will last about 90 minutes. We are conducting an evaluation of LifeSet, and today we'd like to learn more about the services DCF provides for older youth preparing to leave foster care. Specifically, we will talk about your role as a DCF caseworker, the services provided to youth preparing to leave foster care, the community supports available, and the challenges and successes youth face as they leave foster care. We will use this information to better understand how services for young adults operate in New Jersey.

Your participation in this focus group is voluntary. You can choose not to answer any question or not participate in the group at all. There will be no consequences to you if you choose not to participate. We will keep the information you provide private and will not share it with anyone except for research staff working on the study. Additionally, federal law states that an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB number for this data collection is 0970-0577 and the expiration date is XX/XX/XXXX.

Background and Role

Let's go around the room and briefly introduce ourselves. I'll start [facilitator then other project team present introduces themselves]. Please share the following:

1. Your name
2. Your title
3. How long have you worked at DCF?
4. What is the size of your caseload?
5. How many older youth (17-21-years-old) are on your caseload?

For our discussion today, when I use the phrases "youth," "older youth," or "youth preparing to leave foster care" I am referring to youth aged 17 through 21 who have an open DCF case. These youth may be in the custody or guardianship of DCF or, if they are over 18, they may be receiving voluntary services. Does anyone have any questions before we begin?

Service Delivery

First, I'd like to learn about the work you do with older youth and the services available them.

Services as usual

6. What is the average length of time that you typically work with youth after they turn 18?
 - a. What affects how long you work with the youth? In what ways does this depend on the youth?
 - b. Are older youth able to stop and start services with DCF?
 - i. If so, how typical is that? Why does this occur?
7. How often do you meet with older youth, and are the meetings in-person or virtual, or something else?
 - a. Could someone describe what these meetings are typically like? For example, what topics are discussed or what supports do you provide?
8. What services or programs are available to prepare older youth to leave foster care?
 - a. Which services or programs are provided by DCF staff and which are provided by other agencies? [if needed, other agencies may be contracted providers, non-profits, or other state agencies].

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9. Do you complete an assessment or other tool to identify older youths' service needs?
 - a. [If yes] Can someone briefly describe the assessment or tool?
10. Will someone describe in general how older youth get referred to services? What is your part in the referral process?
 - a. What is weighed when deciding what services to refer youth to (for example, assessment results or accessibility)? Who makes these decisions?
 - b. Are wait lists typical? If so, how long do youth typically have to wait?
 - c. Is there anything you would change about how youth are assessed or referred to services?
11. What does a typical case plan look like for youth over age 18?
 - a. Can someone describe how this plan is created? For instance, who decides what goals and services will be part of the plan?
 - b. How often is the case plan referred to? For example, are there check-ins/monitoring for the plan?

Difference between LifeSet and SAU

Now I'd like to ask you some questions about how a specific program, LifeSet, compares to the other programs and services that older youth may receive.

12. By a show of hands, who here has heard of a program called LifeSet?
 - a. [If some have heard of LifeSet] By a show of hands, who has had a youth on their caseload participate in the LifeSet program?
13. In what ways is LifeSet similar to or different from other services or programs usually provided to youth leaving foster care?
 - a. [Probes if needed] Types of services offered, intensity or duration, program philosophy or values
14. From your perspective, do older youth who have been in LifeSet do better, worse, or about the same than youth who received other programs or services?
 - a. [if applicable] In what ways do they do better?
 - b. [if applicable] In what ways do they do worse?
15. Are some youth a better fit than others for LifeSet? If so, what makes youth a good fit for LifeSet?

Community and Service Context

The next few questions are about what it is like in New Jersey for young adults preparing to leave foster care.

Climate for youth transitioning out of care

16. In general, would you say that things have improved, worsened, or stayed the same for youth preparing to leave foster care in New Jersey over the last couple years? In what ways? Why?
 - a. [Probe on policies and services, if not mentioned] For example, have there been changes in DCF policies? Changes in available services for older youth? Or similar things that have made it easier or harder for youth transitioning out of foster care?
17. What differences occur when serving youth in urban versus rural locations? For example, differences in number or type of services available or ability of youth to access services.

Next, I'd like to learn about the support youth need and whether services are responsive to youths' unique backgrounds.

Youth challenges and needs

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18. What would you say are the primary challenges that youth face in preparing to leave foster care?
19. Are the services offered by DCF able to meet the needs of all older youth in foster care?
 - a. If not, what other supports or services do youth need?

Cultural responsiveness and disparities in services

20. In what ways are DCF services responsive to youth's unique demographic and cultural backgrounds, such as youths' race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, language, religion, or citizenship status?
 - a. In what ways are DCF services not responsive to youth's demographic and cultural backgrounds?
21. Do youth of all backgrounds have equal access to services? In other words, are youth from some demographic or cultural groups more or less likely to receive certain services?
 - a. Can you describe in what ways access to services is unequal?
 - b. What actions can be, or are being, taken to ensure youth have equal access?

Reflection on Older Youth Services

Finally, I'm interested in your perspective on what is "success" for older youth in DCF services.

22. What does success look like for older youth on your caseload? How often do you see it? And after how long?
23. What impacts whether older youth are able to successfully transition to adulthood?
 - a. What services and supports are critical for older youths' success? Why?

Closing Questions

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. Before we end, I have a couple closing questions.

24. Is there anything that I did not ask about that you think I should know about DCF services or LifeSet?
25. Do you have any final questions for me about the study, or about the research team?

The Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This collection of information is voluntary and will be used to evaluate the programs and services provided to young adults who are currently or were previously in foster care. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 90 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection of information. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB number and expiration date for this collection are OMB #: 0970-0577, Exp: XX/XX/XXXX. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Michael Pergamit at mpergamit@urban.org