**Protocol for LifeSet Youth Focus Group**

**Hello everyone, welcome and thank you for joining today.** We would like to invite you to participate in a focus group that will last about 90 minutes.We are going to discuss various topics today and are excited to hear your perspectives, ideas, and experiences. This focus group is part of the Young Adult Services Study (YASS), and we are interested in learning more about your experiences in the LifeSet program and the role LifeSet has had in your lives. We will use this information to better understand the services young adults leaving foster care receive in New Jersey.

As a reminder, your participation in this focus group is voluntary. You can choose not to answer any question or not participate in the focus 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**

**Let’s go around the room and begin by introducing ourselves.** I’ll start by introducing myself [facilitator gives name, position, and time at Urban]. **Can** **each of you please share:**

* Name, whatever you prefer to be called and preferred pronouns
* Age
* When you participated in the LifeSet program
* How long you have received services from the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P)

Thank you everyone for sharing.

**Experience with LifeSet services**

***I’d like to start today by learning about your experience in the LifeSet program.***

1. Does anyone remember their first impression of LifeSet and what that was like? Would you mind sharing your experiences with us?
2. Can someone please describe what a typical meeting with their LifeSet Specialist was like?
   1. Where and how often did you meet?
   2. How long were the meetings?
   3. Is that the same for everyone here (in the focus group)? [If no] Would you mind sharing what was different about your meetings?
3. Did anyone contact their Specialist between meetings? If so, how often and did you text, email, call, or something else?
4. What are some things a LifeSet Specialist might work with young adults on or help them with? We’d like to get a list going, and hear any examples either of your own experiences or what you’ve heard from others. What help did they provide or activities did they do with you? [Probe on specific services if not raised by participants]:
   1. Is there help with housing? If yes, what kind of help [Examples to use as probes: finding, paying for, staying in, advocating, advice etc.] What does someone in the program need to do to get that help?
   2. Is there help with getting or keeping jobs? Yes? What kind of help? [Examples to use as probes: served as a reference, resume help, transportation, interview prep, clothing, etc.] Has anyone had a particular experience with that that they’d like to share?
   3. And what about help with school or training? [Examples to use as probes: starting, finishing, enrolling, paying for, applying, course advice, financial aid, campus visits, etc.]
   4. Is there help with parenting or childcare? What kind of help? [Examples to use as probes: diapers, crib or stroller, finding or paying for daycare, parenting advice, etc.]
5. What does someone have to do to officially complete the LifeSet program? In other words, how is it decided that someone is ready to leave the program?
6. If someone stops LifeSet before finishing the program, are they allowed to come back and finish it?
   1. Can someone share what LifeSet staff do when someone stops before finishing the program? Do they leave people alone or try to encourage people to come back? How do they encourage people to come back?
   2. [If a specific example is shared] Thank you for sharing. Does anyone have a different experience or example to share?
7. If you were the one hiring LifeSet Specialists, what traits would you look for in that person? What things make someone a good LifeSet Specialist?
   1. [Probe on specific examples/stories given] Why is [trait mentioned] important? How does it make someone a good Specialist?
8. What negative experiences have people had with LifeSet Specialists? This can be your own experience or that you've heard from others.
   1. What traits are not helpful in a LifeSet specialist?
9. We all have our strengths and weaknesses. Would you say LifeSet built upon your strengths or were they too focused on your weaknesses?
   1. Can someone give an example?
10. If you had to describe LifeSet and what to expect to other youth in foster care, what would you say?

**Supportive Relationships**

***We have heard that one goal of the LifeSet program is to help participants build relationships with supportive adults. We'd like to learn more about how the program may, or may not, do this.***

1. First, would someone be willing share how they would define what a supportive adult is? For example, who can be a supportive adult and what do they do?
   1. [If needed] Can it be a service provider, a friend, coworker, family member? Is a supportive adult different from a caseworker or other service provider?
   2. Do others agree with that definition? If not, what would you change or add?
2. How important is it for young people preparing to leave foster care to have relationships with supportive adults? Can you give a thumbs up if it is important, thumbs down if not important, and sideways if not sure?
3. [If any thumbs up] Would someone who gave a thumbs up be willing to share why they think it’s important to have relationships with supportive adults? Is that the same for others who gave a thumbs up?
4. [If any thumbs down] Would someone who gave a thumbs down be willing to share why think it’s not important? Is that the same for others who gave a thumbs down?
5. In your opinion, does LifeSet help youth build relationships with supportive adults?
   1. [If yes] Would someone be willing to share, based on your experience or what you’ve heard from others, how LifeSet does do this?
   2. [If no] Would someone be willing to share, based on your experience or what you’ve heard from others, how LifeSet doesn’t do this?

**Experience with other transition-aged services**

***Next, I’d like to learn about other DCP&P programs or services youth may receive after turning 16 to help them as they become a young adult.***

1. What other programs or services are available to help youth prepare to age out of DCP&P services? We’d like to get a list going, and hear any examples from either from own experiences or what you’ve heard from others.
2. [Examples to offer to kick things off if needed] Some examples we know of are life skills or PACES. Has anyone of heard of those? Yes? Are there other programs like those?
3. [Probes] Are there programs or services for housing? Education or training? Getting a job? Parenting or childcare? Healthcare?
4. How is LifeSet different from these other programs or services?
5. [If needed] For instance, is LifeSet more or less helpful or better or worse than other services or programs? Can you give an example?

**Experience with DCP&P services**

***Now I’d like to switch gears a bit talk about your experience as a young adult*** ***with the DCP&P.***

1. How often are you in contact with your DCP&P caseworker? Or, if you have aged out, how often were you in contact with them?
2. Are (or were, if you’ve aged out) these contacts in person or virtual (such as text, video, phone call)?
3. What types of things do caseworkers do to help young adults in foster care?
   1. [Examples to offer if needed] Share information about services you can receive? Refer you to other programs? Help with needs like housing, education, parenting, etc.?
4. What traits make someone a good DCP&P caseworker?
5. What traits are not good for a caseworker to have?

**Experience in the Transition to Adulthood**

***The last few questions are about adulthood and becoming an adult.*** ***It’s not always an easy time and often it can be hard and challenging.***

1. What are some challenges you have experienced since turning 18 that you would warn your 15 or 16 year old self about if you could?
2. [Probes if not mentioned] We talked earlier about housing, jobs, and education, have any of those been a challenge? For anyone who might be a parent, has parenting or finding childcare been a challenge? What about legal challenges or getting health care? Relationship challenges with friends, family, or significant others?
3. [If not already covered] Did LifeSet, or something you learned during the program, help you overcome any of those challenges? In what ways?
4. And what kind of support has been most helpful as you’ve become a young adult?
5. What kind of support do you wish you’d had but didn’t get?
6. We’ve covered a lot of ground on challenges, but there are positive experiences with becoming an adult, too. Looking back over the last year, could each of you name at least one accomplishment you are proudest of?
7. [If needed] Accomplishments may be things like getting a diploma or certificate, getting a job, managing intense emotions like anger, learning to cook, getting a driver’s license, or similar things.
8. In what ways did LifeSet or DCP&P help you succeed in those areas?
9. What do you wish DCP&P knew about young adults preparing to age out of DCP&P services?

**Closing**

Thank you so much for your time today, it is much appreciated.

Is there anything that I didn’t ask that you think is important for us to know?

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.*