

# Investing in Transition Age Foster Youth to Prevent Homelessness: The Massachusetts Model

Exploring Child Welfare Agencies' Role in Ending Youth Homelessness Presentation to National Alliance to End Homelessness Conference  
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# Challenges Transition Age Youth Face

**29,471 young people left  
foster care in 2009**

(U.S. Department of Health and Human  
services, 2010)

## Significant Life Decisions

- Where to live
- How to pay for housing
- Who to contact in case of  
emergency

## Limited Emotional & Financial Support

- Face additional hurdles
- Have limited resources
- Difficult choices: housing  
healthcare transportation  
emergency funds

# Challenges Transition Age Youth Face

## Access to Secure Housing

- 32% of former foster youth report changing living situations 5 or more times within 2-4 years after discharge (Casey Family Programs, 2008)
- 12-26% of former foster youth experience homelessness (White & Rog, 2004)

## Financial Stability

- 41% of parents provide some level of financial assistance to their children ages 23-26 (Charles Schwab, 2010)

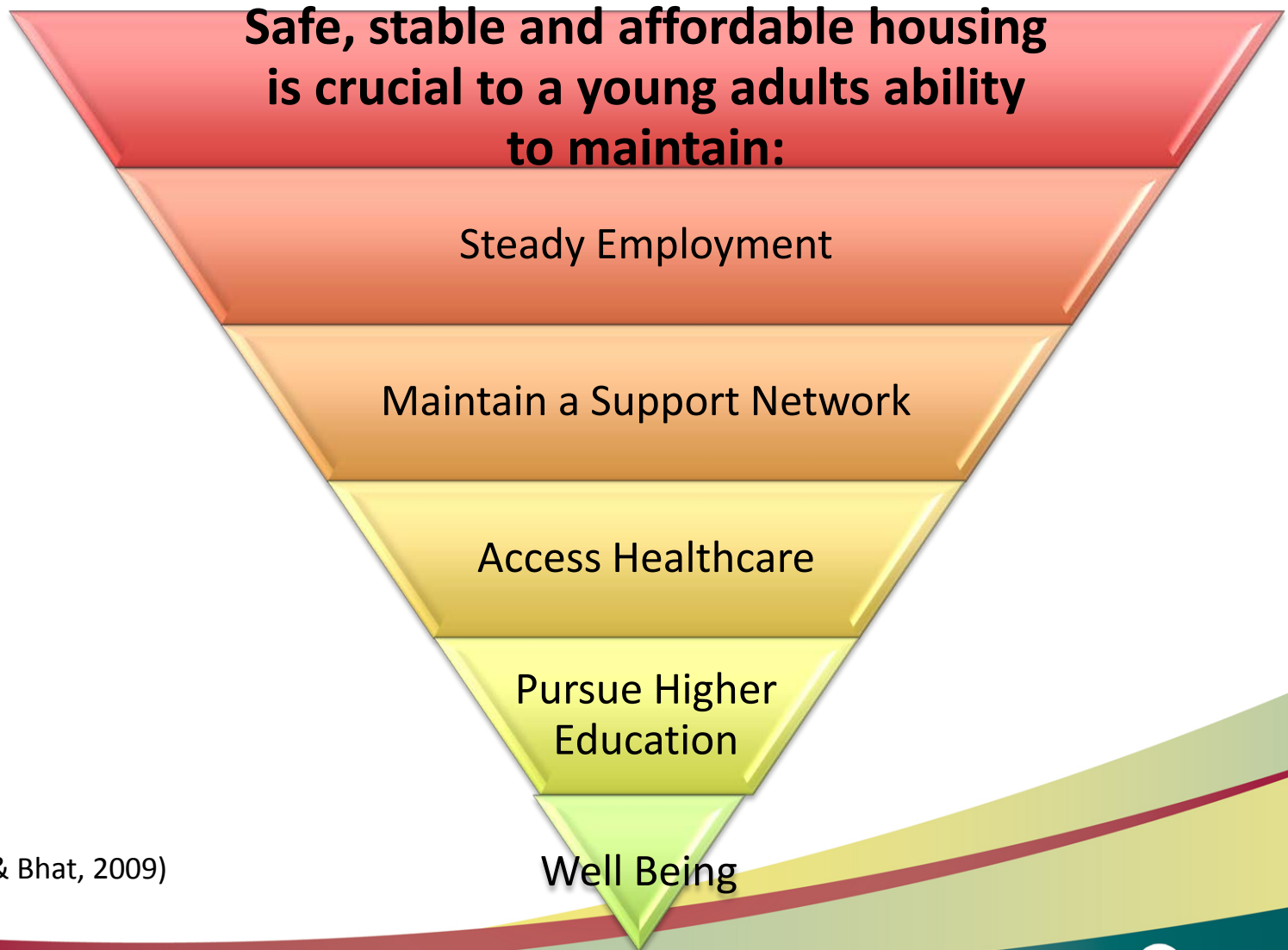
## Access to Health & Mental Healthcare

- 33% of former foster youth reported no health insurance after leaving foster care (Casey Family Programs, 2008)
- 1 in 4 foster youth were still coping with symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder after exiting foster care (Casey Family Programs, 2005)

## Employment & Educational Success

- 80% of foster youth hope to experience post secondary education (Courtney, et. Al, 2004)
- 3% former foster youth graduate from college (NAPCWA, 2010)
- 16% of foster care alumni completed a vocational degree (Pecora et al., 2005)

# Housing is Critical to Successful Transition



(Torricono & Bhat, 2009)

# Massachusetts' Strategic Response to Preventing Transition Age Youth Homelessness

# MA Strategic Priorities for Preventing Transition Age Youth Homelessness

## Pursue Permanency

- Achieving permanency and strengthening connections to family provides transition age youth with the safety and stability they need to be successful.

## Extend the Transition Safety Net

- Extending the safety net for transition age foster youth is vital to their stability today and their future success; it is a wise and responsible investment, one that will help prepare them to live as healthy, productive adults.

## Focus on Achieving Well-Being

- We know that success for youth is multi-dimensional—housing, employment and educational achievements without permanent caring relationships with adults is not sufficient to sustain youth into adulthood.

## Implement the Fostering Connections Act

- Leveraging the provisions of FCA to strengthen and codify into legislation longstanding DCF agency policy and practice.

# Priority #1 - Permanency

**A Permanent Family** – Massachusetts has increased its efforts to find permanent families for transition age youth

**Permanency Options** - include the full range of options available to younger children: Reunification, Guardianship, Adoption, Restoring Parental Rights

**Improving Results** - Since 2004, the number of children over 12 with a goal of adoption has grown from 308 to 537, increasing from 12% to 21% of the total number of children with a goal of adoption.



# Extended the Foster Care Safety Net

## *Creating New Cultural Expectations*

**Sustaining Financial Commitment** - Despite the Great Recession, Massachusetts maintained a commitment to supporting transition age youth; “not a nickel was cut from the DCF transition age youth budget in five years.”

**Extension of Foster Care up to age 22** - nearly 1,700 transition age youth are in DCF care, pursuing employment, educational and vocational goals and enhancing their skills for coping with the challenges of adulthood. Massachusetts allows youth to sign back into Foster Care up to age 21.

**Creating a New Cultural Norm** – 75-80% of our foster care youth at the age of 18 choose to continue voluntarily with the Department of Children and Families. Foster care alumni actively encourage their younger counterparts to request DCF assistance.



# Extended Foster Care Safety Net

## *Key Programs & Services*

### Housing

- Continued foster care placement
- Extending Independent living programs
- Family Unification Program (FUP Vouchers) – up to 18 months
- Extended FUP Program – up to 3 additional years

### Financial Support

- Continuing foster care payments
- Adolescent Support Payments
- Individual Development Accounts (matching savings)
- PAYA : Budgeting & Finance Management Training
- Tuition and Fee Waivers at State colleges

### Emotional Support

- Assigned Social Worker continues
- Adolescent Outreach Worker serves as secondary worker focus solely on the youth
- Foster Care Alumni Association
- Mentors
- Annual Youth Leadership Conference

# DCF Housing Support Response

## *Aligning & Leveraging Key Resources*

### Housing Supports

- Rental Assistance
- Security deposit
- First & Last Months Rent
- Help maintain existing tenancies
- Utilize transitional programs to build housing resumes
- Donations of Furniture & Household necessities
- Young Parent Program, Teen Parent Program

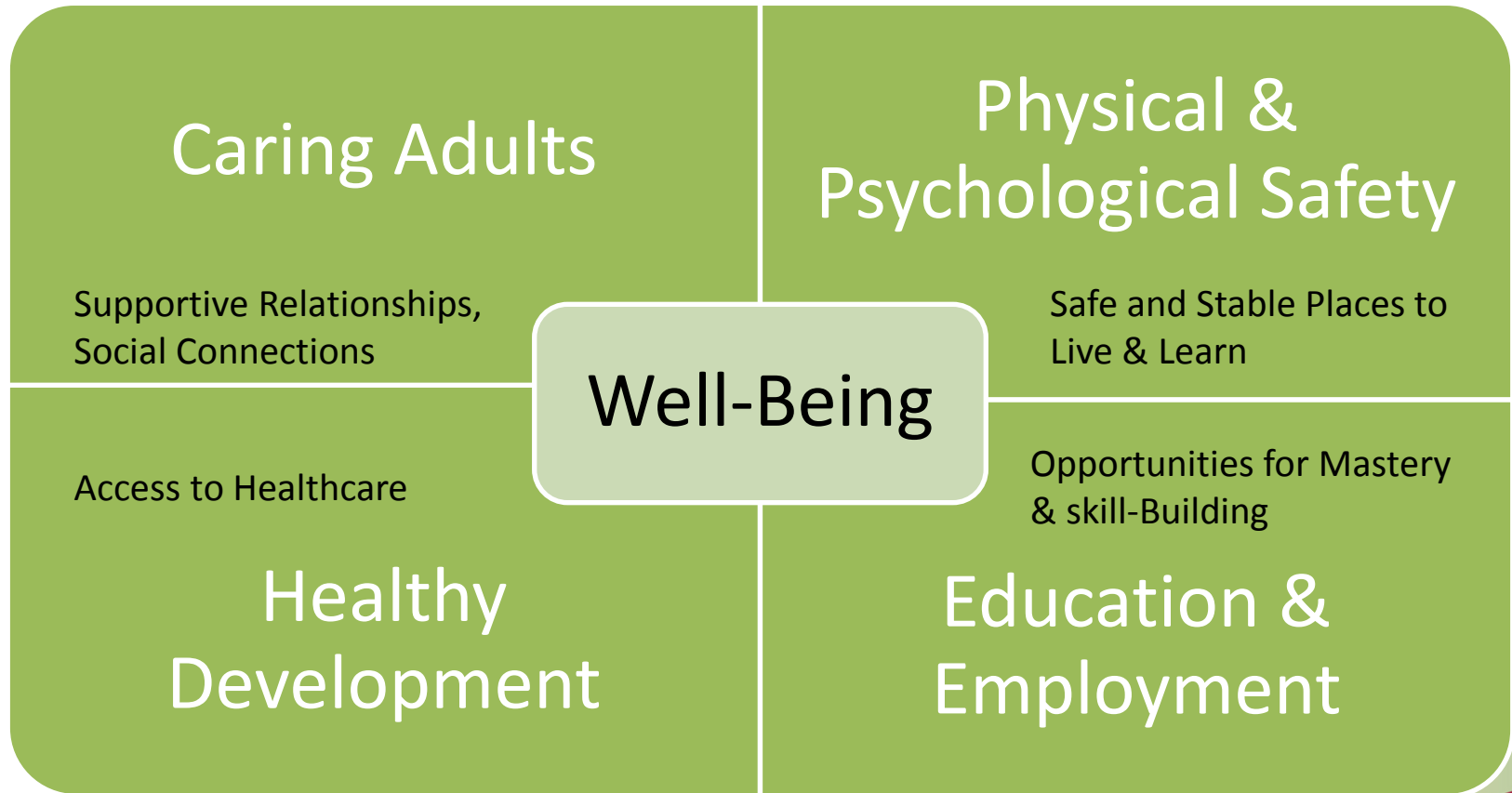
### Supportive Case Management

- Works to assure stabilization through housing assistance
- Help find & coordinate resources in the community
- Works with landlords and housing partners
- Provides encouragement, guidance and emotional support
- DCF Housing Stabilization Unit (available to consult on all DCF involved youth)

### Economic Self Sufficiency

- Provide flexible resources to ensure housing stability
  - Moving Cost
  - Rapid Rehousing rental Assistance
  - Rent arrearage
- Asset development
- Employment
- Scholarships/federal assistance
- DCF Kids Fund

# Focus on Well-Being



# Focus on Well-Being, Programs & Services

## Family Unification Program

- FUP Vouchers to address the housing and support needs of youth aging out of foster care. 20% set aside for Transition Age Youth. Partnered with DHCD on the development of an extension program for youth who have successfully completed their 18 month FUP voucher., serves 10 new youth each year.

## Healthcare Coverage Program

- Extended Medicaid coverage to all former foster care through the age 21

## Employment Assistance

- Assist youth in gaining work experience by partnering with businesses to provide jobs and internships. 55% of the youth develop a mentoring relationship with the employer which continues beyond the internship.

## Discharge Support Program

- Outreach support (budgeting, home management, and employment) and financial stipends to youth discharging from foster care. These funds can be used for rent, security deposit, and utilities.

## Education Financial Support Programs

- each year between 550-600 youth graduate from high school or post secondary education; 700 youth receive financial support for post-secondary education
- tuition and fee waivers to foster youth attending Mass public colleges; and Foster Child Grant Program and the federal Education and Training Vouchers are available to youth attending any public or private institution.

# Implement Fostering Connections Act

## Extended Eligibility for Title IV-E Payments

- Guardianship, Adoption, Foster Care
- \$5-\$7M Annually

## Transition Plans

- 90 Days prior to 18<sup>th</sup> birthday or at discharge
- State Legislation requiring Annual Permanency Hearings

## Extending Independent Living Services & Programs

- Via Chafee

## Extended Eligibility for Educational Resources

- Up to age 23

## Anthony Borrows, 27, a foster care alumnus, put it this way

“After I turned 18 is when the Department had the biggest impact on my life. Without the critical financial support, the caring guidance from social workers, and, most importantly, the knowledge that I wasn’t own my own, I would not have had the confidence to try when there was a chance of failure. By extending care, the Department gives foster youth a fighting chance at a successful adulthood.”

# NASW Recommended Resources

- Fostering Connections Act
- Chafee Foster Care Independence Program
- College Cost Reduction Act
- Family Unification Program
- Higher Education Opportunity Act
- Workforce Investment Act
- Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program
- Special Immigration Juvenile Status

*for more information: [www.socialworkers.org](http://www.socialworkers.org)*



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