



Thrive@25 is Maryland’s Youth At-Risk of Homelessness (YARH) Implementation Grant, funded by the Children’s Bureau. This grant (9/15-9/18) focuses on building the capacity of Maryland’s child welfare system to prevent homelessness among the most at-risk youth and young adults with current or prior child welfare involvement histories.

Led by The Institute for Innovation & Implementation at the University of Maryland School of Social Work, in partnership with the Department of Human Resources (Maryland’s child welfare & social services agency), the Talbot County Department of Social Services on behalf of the five local departments of social services on the rural Mid-Shore (Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne’s, and Talbot Counties), and the National Center on Housing and Child Welfare, Thrive@25 is installing, implementing, refining, and evaluating an intervention model that is grounded in Implementation Science, Positive Youth Development, and a commitment to trauma-informed care to improve four core outcomes: stable housing, permanent connections, education/employment, and social-emotional well-being.

The Thrive@25 team is implementing a multifaceted intervention responsive to the individual needs and strengths of youth transitioning from foster care—one that is culturally responsive to the needs of minority and LGBT youth and relevant to rural and non-rural communities across Maryland and the nation. The primary intervention for Thrive@25 is individualized, youth-driven transitional planning using the Achieve My Plan (AMP) practice model. Foster care workers and supervisors in the Mid-Shore will be certified in AMP, and Family Involvement Meeting (FIM) facilitators will be certified in a modified version of AMP.

During the Phase I evaluation, youth, child welfare workers, and others identified a lack of transportation and other resources for youth in foster care on the Mid-Shore, including educational support and hands-on training for youth transitioning to adulthood. Workers identified a significant need to ensure follow up from transitional planning meetings; both workers and youth identified transitional planning meetings as a source of frustration based on lack of engagement and follow up. Youth also reported a disconnection between their transitional plan and the planning process/meetings. As of April 1, 2017, 63% of all youth in out-of-home placement in the 5 Mid-Shore LDSS are ages 14-21. Although there are only 81 youth in out-of-home placement in these five LDSS, this high proportion of youth who are 14 and older necessitates a comprehensive approach.

	TOTAL # OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT	14-21 IN OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT	% 14-21 IN OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT
CAROLINE	29	14	48%
DORCHESTER	22	20	91%
KENT	5	5	100%
TALBOT	21	9	43%
QUEEN ANNE	4	3	75%
TOTAL	81	51	63%

As of April 1, 2017 (data provided by LDSS Directors to Thrive@25 staff)

This has been part of an important shift in the intervention in Phase 2—moving from serving only those youth identified as high risk to supporting all youth ages 14-21 in out-of-home placement.

AMP, an evidence-informed intervention developed by Portland State University in partnership with youth and young adults, was selected as an overlay to the transitional planning process because it provides workers with the necessary skills to engage meaningfully with youth around their own transition plans. The Thrive@25 team believes that an individualized, youth-guided transition planning process will result in plans that are more successful, more sustainable after care, and improve outcomes for youth.

Thrive@25 also includes a focus on resource development, including implementation of year-round youth employment programs and support for the Thrive House. A part-time housing navigator provides support to LDSS to identify appropriate housing solutions for youth in care and anticipating an exit from care. Other areas of focus include providing individualized flexible funds to meet the needs of older youth in foster care, engaging with youth with foster care histories to identify interventions to prevent homelessness, and exploring strategies to address transportation challenges. Thrive@25 is piloting a risk screen to identify those youth most at-risk of homelessness and is utilizing the CANS-TAY module in conjunction with the CANS currently in use for youth in foster care.

A comprehensive formative evaluation is underway that includes administrative data, youth and worker surveys and interviews, and focus groups.

For more information, please contact:

- Deborah Harburger, MSW, Co-Principal Investigator & Project Director:
dharburger@ssw.umaryland.edu
- Elizabeth Greeno, PhD, LCSW-C, Co-Principal Investigator & Lead Evaluator:
egreeno@ssw.umaryland.edu

Context

Maryland requires transition planning Family Involvement Meetings (FIMs) either annually or biannually for transition-aged youth (TAY; ages 14-21) in foster care. This may be insufficient to effectively respond to the changing needs of these youth. While youth currently participate in these FIMs, youth voice and choice does not drive this process, and caseworkers and facilitators often lack the training and expertise to engage youth in their transition planning. This results in transition plans that do not reflect youth voice and choice, and are less sustainable – resulting in housing instability less than a year after youth exit foster care (See Thrive@25 Phase I Report).

Thrive@25 is implemented in five rural counties on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. The local departments of social services are comprised of a small, generalized workforce with modest caseloads. As of April 2017, TAY comprised 63% of youth in foster care. Community supports for youth are limited; however, a variety of resources, including a housing expert and youth employment program, are being developed to support youth transitioning out of care and enable them to remain in their community.

Assumptions

- An individualized, youth-driven, strengths-based transition plan will be more successful in preparing youth to exit foster care.
- The services and supports youth need in their transition from foster care are available and accessible within the local community.
- Youth need support to engage in and drive the transition planning process, and caseworkers need the framework and tools to provide this support.
- When youth are actively engaged and driving the transition planning process, they will develop essential life skills that they will be able to apply in other areas of their life and that will help them to be successful after they leave foster care.

Intervention

- An individualized, youth-driven, strengths-based transition planning process
- Increased frequency of youth transition planning meetings (≥ 1 every 3 months)
- Achieve My Plan (AMP) training and coaching for caseworkers, facilitators, and stakeholders
- Prep work with youth to support them in identifying goals and supports, and driving their transition planning process
- CANS-TAY and Thrive@25 Risk Screen tools to inform transition planning

Preconditions

- **Caseworkers** have and utilize skills to support youth to engage in their transition planning, to promote youth skill discovery and learning, and to provide youth with opportunities to practice the skills needed to achieve their goals
- **Caseworkers** explore the youth’s hopes, dreams, goals, and strengths with the youth
- **Youth** build the skills to identify their hopes, dreams, goals, and strengths, and share these with their caseworker and transition planning team
- **Youth** identify natural supports to be a part of their transition planning team
- **Youth** engage in the transition planning process
- The youth’s transition planning team is youth-driven and youth-focused
- An individualized, youth-driven, strengths-based transition plan is developed

Short-term Outcomes

- **Caseworkers** seek out and incorporate youth voice and choice
- **Caseworker** partnership with **youth** increases
- **Youth** voice and choice consistently informs transition planning
- **Youth** build and practice the skills to drive the transition planning process and support achievement of their goals
- **Youth** use the transition planning process to seek out knowledge and supports needed to achieve their goals
- Identification and engagement of natural supports increases
- The transition plan keeps the team accountable and focused on the youth’s goals
- Progress on youth transition plan goals increases

Intermediate Outcomes

- **Youth** demonstrate knowledge and skills needed to support achievement of their goals
- **Youth** are engaged in leading their transition planning team
- **Youth** are able to cross-apply the skills developed through the transition planning process and extrapolate from their transition plan when needed
- **Youth** have increased positive connections to people and community, stable housing, and education/employment

Long-term Outcomes

- **Youth** have safe and stable housing
- **Youth** are on the path to their desired career/vocation and maintain a living wage (including ability to pay for housing)
- **Youth** have sustained relationships, a social network, and belong to a community
- **Youth** demonstrate independence, resiliency, self-determination, and self-efficacy
- **Youth** maintain physical and behavioral health
- **Youth** avoid involvement with the criminal justice system