

Youth Empowerment

A social worker's guide to services and support



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OYE:

Your Partner in Serving District Youth in Care

The DC Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) is currently presiding over a groundswell of older youth in care, with fully 60 percent of the out-of-home caseload composed of teens and young adults, ages 13 to 21. All of us serving these youngsters have two critical obligations to them.

- **Permanence:** Everyone needs and deserves a family. Our first obligation is to find permanent homes with caring people for our youth in foster care through reunification with their birth families, legal guardianship (often with relatives), or adoption. At the very least, we must ensure every young person in care develops a relationship with a caring adult committed to providing life-long guidance and support. Rekindling family bonds or forging new relationships for these young people is critical since public agency support ends for them at age 21.
- **Preparation for adulthood:** Meanwhile, while these young people remain in our care, we have an obligation to prepare them for adulthood. Although a public agency can never be the optimum parent, the fact is that we are raising these young people. In addition to the same developmental needs as all modern teens, youth in foster care face a host of special challenges through no fault of their own. These young people especially need and deserve quality nurturing, guidance, and support and all the same opportunities good parents provide for their own children.



Toward that end, CFSA's Office of Youth Empowerment (OYE) provides a host of programs and growth experiences for District teens and young adults in foster care. In partnership with social workers, foster caregivers, and the community, OYE's goals are to teach, train, and guide these young people—and ultimately to help each one recognize and develop his/her unique potential.

Case-carrying social workers, this guide introduces you to the primary ways in which OYE can help you serve and support older youth on your caseload. Teaming with your counterpart—a skilled Youth Empowerment (OYE) Independent (IL) Specialist—forges a professional partnership that will benefit both you and our older youth in care.

Youth Empowerment (OYE) Specialists partner with you to:

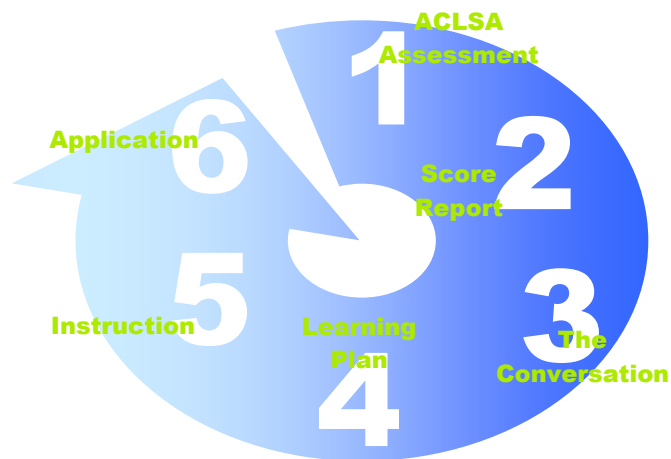
- Assess youth progress in developing life skills and tailor a Learning Plan to meet individual needs.
- Engage youth and their caregivers in planning and achieving skill development goals.
- Make information and training opportunities available to youth and their caregivers.
- Access community resources for youth and caregivers.
- Help youth forge life-long connections that will continue outside of and beyond the child welfare system.
- Facilitate Youth Transition Planning (YTP) meetings for youth ages 18-21.
- Track youth progress through meetings and FACES.NET.



For youth ages 15 to 21 on your caseload, reach out to OYE. You'll be opening the door to a range of services that will help you improve youth preparation and engineer a smoother exit from the child welfare system. Two milestones for engaging with OYE are key: ages 15 and 18.

Age 15: Assessing Needs/Developing Skills

At the center of working with older youth in care is the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA). This evidence-based series of instruments (from Casey Family Programs of the Annie E. Casey Foundation) highlights areas in which a youth has mastered critical life skills—and where s/he needs additional



OYE's Six-Step Process for Youth

development. This insight then serves as the basis for a comprehensive individual learning plan. Connecting with OYE allows every youth on your caseload to take advantage of this powerful six-step process as soon as s/he reaches age 15.

STEPS
1/2 *Arrange for the youth and his/her caregiver to take the ACLSA.*

The ACLSA allows youth in care to identify their needs, interests, and talents. Standardized instruments reveal mastery of basic skills and vocational aptitudes, providing a firm basis for individualized attention and growth. Here's how it works.

As the social worker, you register in FACES and take the mandatory ACLSA training. The OYE Independent (IL) Specialist assigned to your area or agency then assists the youth and caregiver in completing the ACLSA. It generates score reports that identify the youth's individual life-skill strengths and areas in need of further development.

STEPS
3/4 *Meet with the youth and caregiver to review ACLSA results and develop a learning plan.*



Kinship and foster parents, congregate care staff, and other caregivers all have important roles to play in preparing youth for

adulthood. Let your OYE Independent (IL) Specialist help you engage, motivate, and support them. The OYE Independent (IL) Specialist facilitates a conversation among the youth, caregiver, and you about results of the ACLSA. The youth and caregiver share what they see as the youth's strengths and areas for growth. This gives the group a basis for collectively developing a learning plan that takes a customized approach to building and strengthening the youth's life skills. Based on results of the ACLSA, items in the learning plan may fall into any or all of nine critical domains:

- **Career Planning**
- **Communications**
- **Home Life**
- **Daily Living**
- **Housing & Money Management**
- **Self Care**
- **Social Relationships**
- **Work Life**
- **Work & Study Skills**

Youth are directly involved in developing plans and working to fulfill their goals.

The ACLSA divides several of these domains into skill levels. Each skill cluster has a series of learning goals (competencies) and related expectations. This approach recognizes that learning takes place over time and that youth progress through a series of stages on the learning curve. Expectations describe what the youth should be able to do when given good instruction and guidance and indicate how to achieve the learning goal. This process provides the foundation for a meaningful case plan for the youth.

STEPS
5/6 *Access training and other services to help the youth develop critical life skills and reach his/her goals.*

The OYE Independent (IL) Specialist assigned to your CFSA administration or private agency assists and supports you by:

1. Collaborating to devise strategies for connecting with youth for maximum results.

2. Making home or site visits to engage youth and their caregivers in working on Learning Plans and providing one-on-one guidance and instruction.
3. Connecting youth to community and in-house trainings and workshops that will help them meet their Learning Plans.
4. Helping to monitor individual youth activities and progress.

OYE regularly offers workshops characterized by lively discussion that provide guidance on a wide range of topics of interest and importance to young people today. Throughout the year, youth in care can attend sessions that cover health and self-care, relationships, safe sexual behavior and pregnancy prevention, money management, educational planning and study skills, finding and keeping a job, communication, and career planning. A popular workshop raises awareness about the legal ramifications and dangers of “sexting and texting” via cell phones and the Internet to help youth make good choices about their behavior.

Age 17.5: Transition Planning

When a youth reaches age 17.5, the time has come to focus intensively on transition planning. The youth has his/her first Pre-conference to prepare for Youth Transition Planning meeting, which is a teaming approach to:

- Identify the youth’s needs and goals with an emphasis on his/her perspective.
- Provide collaborative mentoring, training, and tools to help the youth meet his/her goals.
- Ensure successful outcomes by conferencing regularly and as often as needed until the youth exits care.

The OYE Independent (IL) Specialist partners with you to hold a planning meeting with the youth, primary caregiver, mentor, guardian *ad litem* (GAL), court-appointed special advocate (CASA), and/or others important to the youth. Among topics for discussion are:

- Explore family resources in the youth’s life.
- What the youth wants to do after high school.
- Expectations and responsibilities leading up to exit from care.
- The youth’s developmental progress, strengths, and needs.

Team meetings take place every six months until the youth reaches age 20. During the final year of involvement in the child welfare system, the team meets quarterly or as often as necessary to prepare and support the youth in making a smooth transition out of care.

Reach Out to OYE for Expert Support in Serving Youth



OYE supports you in providing excellent service to every youth in care on your caseload. The OYE staff and program are based in the community in the former Paul Robeson School, 3700 10th Street NW. We conduct programs for youth at this location, which is a short walk from the Georgia Avenue-Petworth metrorail station on the green line.

You are welcome to visit our office. OYE Independent (IL) Specialists will also come to meet with you at your location. To find out the name of the OYE Independent (IL) Specialist assigned to your area of CFSA or your private agency—or to learn more about programs and services we offer for youth, please call.

202-727-7500