**Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) and Educational and Training Voucher (ETV) program:**

Wisconsin's Independent Living (IL) Program is designed to help system-involved youth age 14 and older develop crucial life skills and achieve outcomes similar to their non-system involved peers. In addition, youth who exit out-of-home care (OHC) at/after the age of 18, or after age 16 via an adoption or court-ordered guardianship, are supported by the program until age 21. The Department also receives approximately $700,000 in Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) funds annually to support youth in achieving their postsecondary goals. IL eligible youth can access this funding for 5 years or up to age 23, whichever occurs first. Services provided are in alignment with the requirements of the federal John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for the Successful Transition to Adulthood. This plan addresses both Sec. 477 (42 U.S.C. 677) (a) of the Social Security Act and Wisconsin’s progress on the Children and Family Services Plan (CFSP) goals.

**Administration**

In 2016 the Department intentionally shifted the use of Chafee funds from the county human services agencies to regional Transition Resource Agencies (TRAs) in order to provide eligible youth with continued support after exiting OHC. The implementation of the regional model was phased, with the last regional agency becoming operational January 2019. All TRAs are selected through a competitive procurement process and there is one TRA per Youth Services Region - [https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/map/il-r](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/map/il-r). Counties utilize their Child and Family Allocation to provide services to youth 14 and over while they are in OHC, which ensures a continuum of service provision for youth 14 to 21 (or 23 for ETV).

To ensure equity in youth accessing services, some Chafee dollars are utilized to support tribes and the Division of Juvenile Corrections (DJC) in providing IL programming to their youth as well. This is accomplished through individual allocations rather than a competitive process. Tribes and DJC identify the youth they intend to serve and the services they will provide via an annual plan for service provision that they submit to the Department. Each completes a budget that identifies what will be needed to support the program and thus far DCF has been able to fully fund the requests that have been made. As federal funds begin to be fully spent, additional state resources may be needed to support the program.

**Description of Eligibility, Continuum of Services and Linkages to Other Services:**

Wisconsin’s IL and ETV Programs provided services and supports to youth aged 14-21 years. Eligibility for Wisconsin’s Chafee services while youth are in care includes the following:

- those youth who are in out-of-home care for at least 6 months any time after the age of 14, for as long as they remain in care;
- those youth who turn 17.5 while in out-of-home care or who are 17.5 or older when they enter care are automatically eligible for as long as they remain in care.

Eligibility for Wisconsin’s Chafee services after a youth exits from care and up to age 21 (23 for ETV) includes the following:

- those youth who are adopted after age 16 (not eligible for room and board supports);
- those youth who enter guardianship under Chapter 48 or long-term kinship care after age 16;
- those youth who exit out-of-home care at age 18 or older, including youth justice youth living in and aging out of an out-of-home care placement setting.
The assessments used by CW agencies to determine the level of life skills development is the Casey Life Skills Assessment and Daniel Memorial Assessment. The Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths assessment, required of all Wisconsin children in OHC provides further information on level of overall functioning, impact of trauma, and youth strengths, needs, etc. Many agencies will also use information from a youth’s Special Education Transition Assessment (if they have one) to inform decisions around appropriate activities.

Services provided by the county focus on promoting normalcy and providing youth with opportunities to learn skills associated with daily living, job readiness, interpersonal relationships, etc. Youth are also supported with obtaining employment, housing, identifying and pursuing education related goals, and remaining connected to caring adults and their communities for ongoing support. TRAs are a resource for county workers serving youth in care, as they are responsible for being aware of and connected to community resources. Youth being served by the county are also encouraged to become involved with the regional YACs.

Wisconsin currently permits foster care extension for youth 18-21 who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and are still in high school. The establishment of the TRAs allowed the remaining eligible youth to be supported through a type of community-based extension of care. In this arrangement, youth are no longer required to be connected to “the system” but they still receive similar supports, such as: individual coaching/case management; support with job readiness and employment; connections to housing and financial assistance, when needed; access to the resources needed to pursue post-secondary educational goals; support and guidance with regard to health, well-being and relationships; and advocacy opportunities through regional Youth Advisory Councils (YACs). At age 17 ½, the caseworker, TRA, youth, and other supportive adults identified by the youth create the Independent Living Transition to Discharge (ILTD) plan and complete the required activities in the 90 days prior to a youth exiting OHC as required under the federal Fostering Connections and Increasing Adoptions act as well as Wisconsin statutes 48.39 and 938.38.

Philosophy and goals

The goal of DCF is for life-skills development and the activities related to successfully transitioning from OHC to adulthood be provided in a timely, flexible, coordinated, and developmentally appropriate way building on the strengths of youth, families, the community and cultural groups, and utilizing the expertise within the home, school and community; as indicated throughout this report.

It is expected that the bulk of life-skills development occurs in the natural setting of the home, school and community as foster parents create teachable moments in the home, encourage involvement in extracurricular activities and meet with the youth and school counselor for career and college advising, etc. For youth in group and residential settings, life skills development should be provided by the group care provider or social worker, as agreed upon by the agency, provider and youth.

For those young people who never achieve permanence, it is critical that significant transition activities and supports are available to meet the individualized needs of youth exiting care to adulthood and throughout the time of transition to age 21, and that outreach to this population is ongoing.
The overarching goals of the Wisconsin CFCPSTA are outlined in the Youth Services Framework (see attached) and include:

Education: Every Youth has a high school diploma or is on track to receive a high school diploma and has the support to pursue and complete post-secondary education, training, and employment.

Employment: All youth have had at least one paid job opportunity before they turn 18 years old. Through training and employment opportunities, all youth have obtained the skills needed for employment that pays a living wage with benefits and a career path.

Housing: All youth are in safe, stable and affordable housing and have access to a range of housing options.

Connections: Youth are connected to supportive adults and to their community.

Well-being: Youth have the opportunity and support for their well-being in its many forms, including social, emotional, mental, intellectual, and physical.

**Services and Outcomes Data**

Over the next five years, DCF will provide services information as documented in eWiSACWIS, as well as data related to targeted outcomes gathered from regional TRAs and the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD).

DCF has begun working to create opportunities for data sharing between DCF and DOC, DPI, DHS, Credit Reporting Agencies and Homeless shelters. These exchanges will yield additional data to shed light on the experiences of youth after leaving out-of-home care. DCF continues to survey all 17-year-olds, every year with the NYTD survey and follow up at 19 and 21 with all youth. DCF plans to share data from NYTD and other sources with a broad range of stakeholders including other Departments, tribes, youth and local service agencies.

A current strength of the program is the number of youth continuing to receive services after exiting OHC. An identified weakness is the lack of housing resources in the state, which increases the difficulty in ensuring young people with no credit or poor credit have access to stable, quality housing. As a result, funding used for housing is minimal. It is also unknown if the service structure that currently exists is working to ensure a continuum of services for young people. For this reason, DCF will be focusing on gathering and strengthening outcome data in the next five years.

**IV-E Foster Care Assistance After Age 18:**

Wisconsin passed legislation to extend foster care for youth who have not graduated from high school, who have an active IEP and are full-time students. This legislation was effective August 2014. All costs related to the extended OHC placement for youth are paid for with state and county dollars, with matching IV-E funds as applicable. Life skills development and practice opportunities will continue to be made available, with young people taking on increased responsibilities commensurate with their age and developmental abilities. DSP is seeking to expand the use of supervised Independent Living placements where youth are able to remain after they leave care as well.
Coordination and Consultation with Stakeholders:

Collaboration regarding the IL Program takes place at various levels of government, educational systems, and individuals in the youth’s life, as documented throughout this plan. Of special note are the following collaborative efforts, many of which are ongoing:

1) BYS regularly convenes representatives from other divisions within DCF, as well as Wisconsin’s other state agencies in order to share information about services available to WI’s young people. The intent is to eventually map youth services, eligibility information, and funding throughout the state departments to assess areas to partner, streamline services and/or address system needs/gaps.

2) Regional Transition Resource Agencies are required to build a pro-youth public/private network of services, providers and supports to meet the needs of youth living throughout the region. As a result, regional partnerships in the areas of education, employment, housing, health and social/emotional well-being exist.

3) BYS staff hold monthly conference calls with at least one representative from each of the IL regions. These serve as an opportunity for DCF to offer direct updates to contracted partners, while also asking and responding to questions. Contracted partners also have the opportunity to network with each other and troubleshoot difficult issues. DCF also invites subject matter experts (e.g. Department of Workforce Development, Department of Corrections, and Department of Health Services partners) to participate on the call to share out information that will help inform contracted partners’ practices.

4) BYS staff hold summits in each of the IL regions. DCF staff facilitate these meetings, but the intent is that they provide an opportunity for different individuals involved with IL service provision to receive updates directly from DCF, ask questions, troubleshoot issues, provide feedback, etc. The summits are held in each region at least once per year. In addition, the questions and conversations that have come up during these gatherings have informed DCF’s work (including updates to eWiSACWIS). County, regional, and tribal partners are all invited to attend.

5) DCF contracts with the University of Wisconsin Madison Survey Center to get assistance in achieving greater and more consistent participation in the NYTD Survey.

6) BYS hosts a biennial Youth Services Conference which brings together DCF staff, county agency staff, contracted providers, and community partners for two days of sessions focused on improving youth outcomes and rooted in the Bureau’s Youth Framework.

7) BYS hosts a Grantee meeting, which includes at least one representative from each of the agencies contracted to provide services via BYS’s Independent Living, Brighter Futures, and Runaway and Homeless Youth Initiatives.

8) BYS staff facilitate the Foster Youth to College (FYC) advisory group. The group, made up of high school and postsecondary representatives, as well as DCF and Department of Public Instruction staff, works to identify the challenges youth formerly in out-of-home care face to enter and succeed in postsecondary programs, and develop resources to increase
positive outcomes. Over the past few years, the group has focused on leveraging existing postsecondary supports to assist this population while also developing resources and creating training opportunities to increase the supports available to the youth.

9) DCF has established a strategic plan with the Department of Public Instruction in order to implement the requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which became effective December 2016. Members of each department meet monthly, at minimum, and work to support the local education agencies and county/tribal child welfare agencies so as to improve educational outcomes for youth in out-of-home care. Joint research projects have been developed to support this work as well.

10) BYS staff support two youth councils, the Youth Advisory Council (young people with child welfare experience) and the Youth Leadership Teams (young people with youth justice experience), to ensure youth voice is represented in the Bureau, Division, and Departments work.

The Wisconsin Youth Advisory Council (W-YAC) is the primary youth stakeholder group that DCF consults with on issues related to OHC and CFPSSTA. Wisconsin encourages youth participation in the Wisconsin State Youth Advisory Council (YAC) consisting of current and former foster youth. Subsidiary YAC groups, supported by Independent Living Transition Resource Agencies (TRAs) are also located in each of the seven Youth Services Regions across Wisconsin. Regional YACs meet monthly to influence policy change and to educate communities and DCF about youth experiences in foster care. Their mission is reaching out to and advocate for young people currently in the foster care system. They do so through presentations, meetings with legislators and participating in trainings and select events.

During 2020-2024 efforts for expanded youth involvement will include:

1. Six statewide meetings per year, as well as monthly regional council meetings.
2. YACs continued service as a Wisconsin Citizen Review Panel under Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), attending the National Conference annually and making recommendations to DCF.
3. DCF sponsoring two Wisconsin foster youth alumni for participation in the Foster Club All-Star Internship. Interns may return to Wisconsin and become an active member of YAC (if not already), and serve as a mentor to peers regarding advocacy, outreach and leadership.
4. The planning and implementation of the annual Hands Around the Capitol event that occurs as part of National Foster Care Month in May.
5. Continued engagement at the state and local level, including meetings with legislators, panels at conferences, and regular consultation regarding child welfare policy.

**Coordination and Consultation with Tribes:**

Of the 11 federally recognized tribes in Wisconsin, 5 are currently receiving funding: Bad River, Ho Chunk, Lac Courte Oreilles, Menominee, and Red Cliff. Two other tribes applied for funds, but determined they were not in the position to develop an IL program; DCF will continue to provide this as a funding opportunity for tribes. Four of the five tribes receiving IL funds have access to the eWiSACWIS Independent Living page, enabling them to directly enter service information for their youth.
DCF has invited tribal representatives to its regional IL summits since beginning them in 2017. The summits are held throughout the state annually to discuss policy/programming initiatives and issues, and to provide technical assistance and consultation to agency IL coordinators; some tribes have elected to attend. Tribes receiving IL funds directly from DCF participate in training and also receive one-on-one technical assistance from DCF including support for new programs in developing policies and procedures, annual program visits, and notifications of resources and culturally relevant trainings.

Additionally, in 2018, DCF awarded an IL innovation grant to the Lac Courte Oreilles tribe to address barriers to driving and transportation for IL-eligible tribal youth. Lac Courte Oreilles reservation is located in northern Wisconsin, where public transportation is not easily accessible, and the cost of adding a youth to their insurance is unrealistic for many kinship providers. Under this grant, Lac Courte Oreilles subsidizes the insurance cost for care providers, covers the cost of driver's education, and teaches basic car maintenance. This grant opportunity was open to both counties and tribes, with awards being made in July of 2018.

Tribal youth in Wisconsin who are not able to access IL services directly through their tribe are able to receive services through the child welfare agency in their resident county while in out-of-home care, and through a regional Transition Resource Agency upon “aging out”. All county agencies serving tribal children confirm collaborative efforts with local tribes. DCF is not aware of any tribes planning to apply directly to ACF for funds. All tribes, whether they receive funding directly from DCF or services from the county agency, are made aware of IL policies and procedures, including eligibility through the DCF Policy and Informational Memo process.

**Health Care Coordination for Youth Aging Out-of-care:**

- Local CW agencies work with youth prior to exiting care in order to ensure they understand their medical needs, get signed up for Badger Care Plus and understand how to get recertified for health care annually.
- DCF collaborated with the DHS to ensure proper implementation of the provision of the Affordable Care Act relating to former foster youth. Youth will be able to sign up electronically or over the phone or by filling out a paper enrollment form. Regional Transition Resource Agencies and local DHS entities are available to assist former foster youth in the process. DCF and DHS also established an agreement allowing all youth who aged out of care in another state and subsequently move to Wisconsin health care coverage under this provision.
- The Medicaid Care4Kids program provides coordinated and comprehensive physical, behavioral and dental care during the period a youth is in out-of-home care and for a year after a youth leaves care, thus providing continuity of care and the benefit of a health coordinator for youth who age out of care.

**Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) Program**

Wisconsin ETV Program eligibility requirements are:

- Education and training vouchers (ETV) will be available to all youth that exit out-of-home care at age 18 or older or those that exited care after age 16 due to adoption, or guardianship for costs associated with postsecondary attendance and participation up to age 23, or for a maximum of five years.
• Continued eligibility is dependent on enrollment in an accredited or pre-accredited postsecondary program, and satisfactory academic progress toward the completion of that program.

Services, equipment and other items beneficial to youth accessing and participating in higher education and training programs are regularly identified and incorporated into the ETV Program. In 2016, the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) began contracting with regional Transition Resource Agencies (TRA) to provide independent living services and some ETV funding to former foster youth between the ages of 18 and 21. Moving forward, these same agencies will have additional flexibility to provide eligible youth with ETV funds, now known in Wisconsin as Brighter Star. TRAs will now serve as “one-stop-shops” for youth eligible for independent living services and supports. All youth eligible for independent living services until age 21 are also eligible for Brighter Star up to age 23, or a maximum of up to 5 years, if they meet the school type and academic requirements.

In addition to the program criteria, defined in section 102 of the Higher Education Act of 1965, Wisconsin instituted the following guidelines in 2018:

• Brighter Star/ETV assistance will not exceed the lesser of $5,000 per year or the total cost of attendance as defined in section 472 of the Higher Education Act.
• Brighter Star may provide funding for any direct costs (i.e., tuition, books, and fees) associated with attending an institution of higher learning. Funds may also be used for the purchase of technical equipment or assistance to include, but not be limited to: computers, books, calculators and supplies associated with coursework.
• Local agencies may provide additional assistance or support necessary for successful completion of higher education, including, but not limited to: tutoring, transportation, child care, housing, program entry testing, registration fees and vocational training activities.
• Brighter Star funds may not be used to pay for post bachelorette education.

State and local agencies partner with secondary and postsecondary institutions and each other to increase awareness of the educational challenges faced by youth aging out of out-of-home care and the Brighter Star through collaborations with DPI and local school districts.

Training

• DCF will partner with the Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System to create a training to assist workers in completing the credit check process and remediating credit.
• DCF will partner with the University of Wisconsin – Madison Division of Continuing Studies will create training for county and tribal CW agencies, foster parents, and contracted providers on the topic of creating the Independent Living Transition to Discharge Plan.
• DCF staff will work to create an Independent Living 101 training for county and tribal child welfare agencies.