

Flexible funding for youth formerly in out-of-home care to help them reach their goals!

What is Brighter Star?

The federal government recognizes that young people transitioning from out-of-home care to post-secondary education have unique insights and barriers that can make their journey different than their peers. In 2002, Education and Training Voucher (ETV) funds were added to an existing federal law called the [John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program](#) that allocates funds to states specifically for supporting older youth who have spent time in out-of-home care in their transition to adulthood.

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.

As a state, we recognize that planning for post-secondary education is important. The goals of this change are to increase the number of youth accessing Brighter Star, maximize the amount of funding each eligible youth receives, and reduce their financial burdens while pursuing their post-secondary goals.

The chart below contains information regarding who to reach out to about Brighter Star. These contacts also offer other services and supports, and can help youth with things like budgeting, finding an apartment, filling out the FAFSA, and more! If you have general questions about Brighter Star, contact DCF at DCFILCoordinator@wi.gov. Youth who receive Brighter Star funds through a TRA are in no way obligated to participate in other services.

Region	Counties Included	Tribes Included	Agency	E-mail	Phone
1	Adams, Forest, Lincoln, Langlade, Marathon, Oneida, Portage, Vilas, Wood	Forest County Potawatomi, Lac du Flambeau, Sokaogon	Wood County in collaboration with CW Solutions	independentliving@changewithin.net	(715) 421-8927
2	Brown, Calumet, Door, Florence, Fond du Lac, Green Lake, Kewaunee, Manitowoc, Marinette, Menominee, Oconto, Outagamie, Shawano, Sheboygan, Waupaca, Waushara, Winnebago	Stockbridge-Munsee, Menominee, Oneida	Bay Area Workforce Development Board	ILPCoordinator@bayareawdb.org	(920) 431-4107
3	Milwaukee	N/A	SaintA	ETV@sainta.org	(414) 465-5750
4	Kenosha, Racine, Walworth	N/A	KHDS	ILsupport@khds.org	(262) 657-3330
5	Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Grant, Green, Iowa, Jefferson, Lafayette, Marquette, Richland, Rock, Sauk, Washington, Ozaukee, Waukesha	N/A	Workforce Development Board of South Central WI	klarson@wdbscw.org	(608) 249-9001
6	Buffalo, Chippewa, Clark, Crawford, Dunn, Eau Claire, Jackson, Juneau, La Crosse, Monroe, Pepin, Pierce, St. Croix, Trempealeau, Vernon	Ho Chunk, St. Croix	Family and Children's Center	PostSecondaryFundingL@fccnetwork.org	(608) 785-0001 ext. 350
7	Ashland, Barron, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Iron, Polk, Price, Rusk, Sawyer, Taylor, Washburn	Bad River, Lac Courte Oreilles, Red Cliff	Workforce Resource	DCFscholarship@workforceresource.org	(715) 232-7380 ext. 1411

Frequently Ask Questions (FAQ)

Q. How do I know if a youth is eligible for Brighter Star funding?

A. Did the youth already, or will they in the future:

1. "Age out" or leave one of the following court-ordered placements on or after their 18th birthday?
 - Foster home
 - Residential care center
 - Group home
 - Court-ordered placement with a relative
2. Be adopted or placed in subsidized guardianship after the age of 16?

If so, they are likely eligible for Brighter Star funding!

Brighter Star funding is money specifically for youth formerly in court-ordered out-of-home care who are attending an accredited or pre-accredited school for a:

- 4-year degree
- 2-year degree
- Technical Diploma
- Apprenticeship
- Professional license/certification (some short-term programs may apply)

Not sure if the program the youth is interested in falls into one of these categories? Contact the Transition Resource Agency Brighter Star contact and ask!

Q. How much funding is available for each youth?

A. Eligible youth can receive up to \$5,000.00 per academic year to put towards specific expenses as youth determine with the Transition Resource Agency.

Q. What can youth use this money for?

A. We know youth's needs vary greatly. Some things Brighter Star funds can be used for are: tuition, books and school supplies, child care costs, housing, transportation, rent, and food.

Q. Can Brighter Star funds be used to help pay for expenses at post-secondary schools out-of-state?

A. Absolutely! As long as an eligible youth is attending a program that is accredited or pre-accredited, Brighter Star funding can be used.

Q. How do these changes impact the DCF Scholarship?

A. The DCF Scholarship no longer exists in its previous form, however, the same amount of money is available to youth previously in out-of-home care and will be easier to access than ever!

Historically, ETV funding Wisconsin received from the federal government was separated into two pots of money – the DCF scholarship and local ETV funds that Transition Resource Agencies provided to clients. This process resulted in duplicative work, time delays, and underspending. In 2019 and onward, recombining the two pots will better serve the youth and maximize fund allocations. Youth who have accessed the DCF Scholarship before can now contact the Brighter Star contact in their region (see chart on Page 1) to continue to receive post-secondary supports.

Q. Who do I contact to get more information about Brighter Star?

A. Find the Transition Resource Agency Brighter Star contact information for your area by looking at the chart on Page 1. If you don't know which county a youth was placed in out-of-home care with, don't worry – connect with a Transition Resource Agency anyway! They will be able to help point you in the right direction. If a youth experienced court-ordered out-of-home care placement with Juvenile Corrections, contact Renee Jahnke at renee.jahnke@wisconsin.gov.