

Department of Children and Families Provider Lead Agency Overview

DCF Accounts 4800-0030 and 4800-0038
March 2021

LEAD AGENCIES

Since Fiscal Year 2005, Lead Agency staff have been providing a critical family engagement function that supports DCF's mission of protecting children, family reunification, permanency, and well-being. Co-located in each of DCF's 29 Area Offices, Lead Agencies serve as DCF's local partners to assist youth and families in navigating the complexities of the child welfare system, coordinate with families and DCF social workers to facilitate Family Team Meetings, arrange for and monitor services, advocate for enhanced interagency collaboration, and provide resources to remove barriers to successful implementation of treatment plans. In addition, Lead Agency Education Coordinators work with children involved with DCF to identify and access the most appropriate educational services.

During FY 2020 and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Lead Agencies staff never stopped working. They are in daily contact with families, DCF staff and providers, ensuring that children and families who need services are able to access them without delay. This critical facilitation of access to services, support, treatment, brought care to thousands of families in the Commonwealth who might otherwise not have found it.

Among the most important responsibilities of a Lead Agency is the coordination and facilitation of a Family Team Meeting. A Family Team Meeting, conducted every four months, is the opportunity for a youth and his/her family to have a voice in establishing treatment goals, and discussing progress towards these goals. Family Team Meetings have become even more critical during the COVID-19 pandemic where in-person contact by social workers and service providers with DCF families has been limited due to governmental directives. **In FY 2020, Lead Agencies facilitated over 25,000 Family Team Meetings.**

FY22 BUDGET REQUEST

\$16M in account 4800-0030 with continued transfer language in account 4800-0038, bringing the total funding to \$21M.

\$21M would restore total funding for Lead Agencies to pre FY09 levels when 9C cuts reduced funding to the present level of \$13.5M (This includes \$8,037,425 in account 4800-0030 and \$5,502,497 transferred from account 4800-0038.) **The FY09 cuts resulted in a 50% reduction in staff as 95% of funding for Lead Agencies is for staff positions.**

Although Lead Agency staff continue to ensure Family Team Meetings occur, **staff reductions necessitated shortening the time allotted for Family Team Meetings.**

INCREASED LEAD AGENCY FUNDING IS OF CRITICAL IMPORTANCE TO SAFETY PERMANENCY AND WELLBEING

The proposed increase in funding will address:

- **Safety:** Increased family engagement and care coordination means more frequent “eyes on” contact with families and more thoughtful and supported transitions and reunifications.
- **Decreasing Length of DCF Involvement:** Increased community connections and resources leads to continuity of care and achievement of service plan goals.
- **Appropriate Placement:** Placement of youth in programs that can meet complex needs coupled with high risk behaviors is key to effective treatment and reduction of multiple placements.
- **Youth “stuck” in higher levels of care:** Increased multisystemic coordination (hospitals, District Attorneys, DMH, DYS, etc.) leads to fewer kids waiting in hospitals and faster coordination of appropriate services to transition youth to community-based settings or home.
- **Increased Caseloads:** In some Area Offices, DCF caseloads and caseworker staff hiring has increased by 30% or more, proportionately increasing referrals to the Lead Agency. Yet, Lead Agency staffing has remained unchanged for over 12 years.
 - In the VanWart Area office (Springfield), the Lead is funded to serve approximately 289 families. The Lead’s caseload is currently at 434 with a request to go higher.
- **Waitlists:** Family Team Meetings are the single-entry point to access DCF services. An increase in staff to facilitate meetings will result in families receiving services faster, decrease waitlist times, and provide services to more families.
- **Use of services:** Engaging the family at the onset increases their voice in decision making, engagement in services, and willingness to accept support from DCF.
- **Length of Stay:** More staff will decrease caseloads, allow for more cost-effective service coordination, and increase frequency of progress review and discharge planning.

The creativity and dedication of Lead Agencies significantly impacts the lives of families involved with DCF. Leads play a pivotal role in helping families receive the support they need to reunify without systemic delays and remain together safely.

Department of Children and Families Provider Lead Agencies: A Closer Look

March 2021

Since Fiscal Year 2005, the Lead Agencies have continued to offer important and effective services to youth and families navigating the child welfare system.

- Lead Agency Education Coordinators have obtained “cost shares” from Local Education Agencies (LEAs) for close to 100% of eligible youth, thereby ensuring involvement and accountability of LEAs in a youth’s education during and after their involvement with DCF.
- Lead Agencies have also strengthened and promoted seamless communication and service delivery between state and private, non-profit entities, promoting accountable community and home-based outcomes for children and families, and avoiding costly out-of-home placements.
- Lead Agencies engage in quality assurance of provided services through quarterly utilization review meetings.

ONGOING WORK WITH YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Lead Agency staff have very specific knowledge of each family member and the type of care, placement, or service they need and/or are receiving. They are engaged on many levels to initiate placements, ensure that the placement is meeting the need of the child, and facilitate a change to a more appropriate type or level of care as needed.

INPATIENT HOSPITAL MEETING

The Lead Agency attends inpatient hospital meetings to assist with placement of children who are “stuck” awaiting community placement in Family Networks services or out of home placements such as STARR, Comprehensive Foster Care, or Congregate Care. Depending on the acuity of the child’s need, these meetings can occur twice per week and take approximately 4-5 hours of time.

CONTINUUM SERVICES

The Continuum is a collaborative initiative between the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Department of Mental Health (DMH) to provide services to families with children with serious behavioral or mental health challenges who are between the ages of 6-18 and are at risk of long-term out-of-home placement. Families must be committed to participating in intensive community-based services with the goal of the youth remaining in or returning to live in the community.

Lead Agencies are charged with initiation of Continuum services a process which requires a high level of family engagement, service oversight, and communication about managing all performance concerns. Leads meet monthly with Continuum providers to review open services, assist with placements, and transition planning.

EMERGENCY PLACEMENTS

Because the foster homes are frequently full, Lead Agencies assist Family Resource Units at DCF to find and facilitate emergency placements in Comprehensive Foster Care Homes when an open foster home is not available. This work was not an original component of the Lead Agency model, but the high demand for emergency placements has made it a major part of the Lead Agency role. In some cases, Lead Agency staff meet 2-3 times daily to review placement needs for the day.

SHORT TERM ASSESSMENT AND RAPID REINTEGRATION (STARR)

Youth requiring STARR placement have complex needs including significant histories of trauma and engagement in extremely high-risk behaviors as well as associated behavioral health conditions. The intensity of these youth's needs and the inadequate supply of STARR beds makes placement highly challenging. The process of searching for beds, negotiating temporary night to night placement solutions and active discussions with state agencies and STARR providers to review youth and programmatic issues is intensive. Unfortunately, this work is frequently ongoing because these placements often fail.

EDUCATION COORDINATION

Lead Agency Education Coordinators are a daily resource for DCF Social Workers supporting non-Family Networks involved families. The Education Coordinator participates in Best Interest Decision meetings to help determine whether a child should remain in/return to their school of origin or enroll in a new district. They are also responsible for coordinating the *Every Student Succeeds Act* requirements for the education of DCF involved children including: transportation, best interest placement, and transfers to new educational districts when placements occur.

In addition, Education Coordinators work directly with the DCF Area Resource Coordinators to identify which youth qualify for Chapter 688 services. They schedule and attend meetings with DMH and DDS to ensure that mutually involved youth receive the necessary services prior to aging out of DCF.

COMMERCIALLY AND SEXUALLY EXPLOITED CHILDREN (CSEC)

Commercially and Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) have emerged as a new group of high risk, acute, and complex cases for all DCF Area Offices. The Lead Agencies assist in providing emergency placements, assessment, and long-term planning for this group of children. This has dramatically increased the workload of the Lead Agencies because of the need for coordination with DCF, schools, law enforcement and courts to ensure safety and appropriate placements, family work and follow up.

QUARTERLY REVIEW

The Lead Agency schedules and facilitates Congregate Care, Continuum, and Comprehensive Foster Care Quarterly Reviews. These are in addition to the treatment reviews held for each of the above services.

TRAINING

Lead Agency Directors and Education Coordinators train new DCF Social Workers to explain Family Networks function, services available, and referral process. The Education Coordinator facilitates Foster Parent Support groups and provides quarterly training to DCF Staff.

LEAD AGENCY PROVIDERS

Bay State Community Services

Communities for People

18 Degrees, Inc.

Justice Resource Institute

MSPCC

YOU, Inc., a Division of Seven Hills Foundation

Roxbury Youthworks

The Home for Little Wanderers

The Key Program, Inc.

Luk, Inc.

Wayside Youth and Family Support Network

Riverside Community Care

Lead Agency Updates

Cape and Islands

On Average the Cape Area Office monitored 150 support and stabilization services per month during FY20. Monitoring consisted of family teams and quarterly utilization reviews with providers. As a result, we were successful with closing 246 support and stabilization services allowing authorization of 272 new services while maintaining budget allocations.

Currently we are servicing 159 families in support and stabilization and coordinating out of home placements for 69 youth (38 Congregate care and 31 in Intensive foster care). We are seeking placement for an additional 12 youth. Current total **Caseload total 240**

Additionally the lead supported 41 departmental foster homes with Support and Stabilization or Unbundled services for a total of \$301,869.

Brockton

On average the Brockton Area Office Lead Agency monitored **183** Support and Stabilization services per month throughout FY20. Monitoring of support and stabilization services consisted of facilitating family team meetings, quarterly utilization reviews with providers, and managing service referral and budgetary operations. As a result, we were successful in closing **321** Support and Stabilization services allowing us to **authorize 284** services while maintaining budget allocations.

Through the utilization of comprehensive and diversion Support and Stabilization services we were able to **maintain 124 high-risk youth** at home with their families and avoid placement in higher levels of care. The Lead also provided 20 foster families with services in order to further support placement and ensure the needs of foster youth and families were being met to provide placement stability and decrease placement disruption.

We are currently servicing **162 families** in Support and Stabilization and are coordinating care for 50 youth in out of home placements (31 youth in Congregate Care and 19 in Intensive Foster Care.) The Lead is also currently seeking placement for 11 youth. Total **caseload to date is 223..**

Taunton

On Average the Taunton Office monitored 209 support and stabilization services per month during FY20. Monitoring consisted of family teams and quarterly utilization reviews with providers. As a result, we were successful with closing 340 support and stabilization services allowing authorization of 352 new services while maintaining budget allocations.

Currently we are servicing 162 families in support and stabilization and coordinating out of home placements for 68 youth (40 Congregate care and 28 in Intensive foster care). We are seeking placement for an additional 17 youth. Current total **Caseload total 247.**

We increased our services in support and stabilization by 12 on average since November and have been able to decrease our total number of youth in congregate care by 10 from 51 to 41. Furthermore, the lead continued to provide foster parent support services to 45 DCF foster homes.

Combined Wait list *

In home recovery- 5

Parent aid- 8

Intensive Family support -6

Visitation 1

Placement diversion-1

Most services are being processed within two days of being referred to the Lead.