



Transitional Living Program Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q: What is the Transitional Living Program?

A: The Youth Villages Transitional Living Program provides young adults leaving the foster care, juvenile justice and mental health systems the intensive in-home support and guidance they need to make a successful transition to adulthood. Program success is defined as young adults' maintaining stable and suitable housing, remaining free from legal involvement, participating in an educational/vocational program, and developing the life skills necessary to become a successful, productive citizen. The Transitional Living program not only works with young adults who are "aging out" of state custody but also works with the young people's families and support systems to ensure a more successful transition. Youth Villages' outcome data show that the program significantly reduces the risk of homelessness, poverty and illegal behavior among the young adults served.

Q: Why did Youth Villages create the Transitional Living Program?

A: A growing body of research across the country shows the many obstacles that face young adults when they "age out" of the foster care system. Unprepared to meet the demands of independent living, often without support from family and no financial resources, coupled with often significant and debilitating mental health issues, these young adults face higher rates of homelessness at some point in their lives, post-traumatic stress disorder and unemployment than young people who have not been touched by the system. Former foster youth also in higher rates than others fail to achieve a high-school or higher education. Within the past decade, the proportion of American children entering state care has risen, and this trend may continue, with children entering foster care earlier and staying longer. It has been estimated that at least one in four foster care children will exit care unsuccessfully due to runaway, incarceration or psychiatric hospitalization. Due to their lack of support and resources, many former foster children return on their own to live with a family member -- often the very ones they were originally removed from, possibly due to abuse or neglect. For this reason in particular, young adults aging out of custody need programs that will help them address family/support system issues, as well as teach them independent living skills so that these vulnerable young people can learn the tools to build stable, successful adult lives.

Youth Villages tracks the success of its programs by following up with young people and families for up to two years after program discharge. The need for intensive support services for former foster youth was apparent in the data collected by the organization, as well as in data available from other studies conducted by researchers across the country.

In 1999, Youth Villages responded to the need for services for former foster youth by creating the Transitional Living Program with help from a private donor, The Day Foundation. The Youth Villages Transitional Living Program was entirely privately funded until 2007 when the state of Tennessee began making funds for this crucial and successful program available to help this most vulnerable population.

Q: When and where did Youth Villages' Transitional Living Program originate?

A: The Youth Villages Transitional Living Program began in 1999 in West Tennessee.

Q: Where does Youth Villages currently provide the Transitional Living Program?

A: The Transitional Living program currently serves more than 400 young adults per day across the state of Tennessee. Recently, Youth Villages began providing Transitional Living services to young adults in Washington, D.C., Texas, North Carolina, and Massachusetts.

Q: How many young adult adults have been served by the Transitional Living Program?

A: Transitional Living has served more than 2,300 young adults since 1999.

Q: What is the age range of young adults who can be referred to the Transitional Living Program?

A: The typical age range of young adults in the Transitional Living Program is 17-22. In some cases, Youth Villages continues to serve young adults past the age of 21 if they are in need of further services. Because funds are typically not available for young adults older than 21, Youth Villages uses private donations to continue services for these cases.

Q: What makes the Youth Villages Transitional Living program unique and different from other Independent Living Programs?

A: While there are some programs that serve young adults who have aged out of foster care, these programs are typically office-based and do not provide intensive in-home support and guidance in the community as does the Youth Villages Transitional Living Program. Transitional living specialists are available to the young adults 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They make a minimum of one face-to-face contact per week with the individuals at the youth's home, job, or wherever is most convenient for the young person. The number of sessions can be increased based upon the individual needs of each young adult.

Services are aimed not only at the individual but at all the areas (systems) that may affect the young adult (e.g. community, peer group, family and school/work). Transitional living specialists help young people find and hold jobs, find affordable and safe housing, continue their education by applying for scholarships and pursuing state funding when available, accessing health care and organizing a support network for the young people, among other things based on each young person's individual circumstances and needs.

The Youth Villages Transitional Living Program collaborates with other programs/agencies to provide an intense network of services to the young adults in the program.

Another unique aspect of the Transitional Living Program is that the family (or other support system) is considered a vital part of the young adult's path to success. When possible, Youth Villages helps young people reconcile with viable family members.

The intensity and comprehensiveness of Youth Villages' Transitional Living services sets this program apart from other existing services.

Q: What makes a young adult ineligible for the Transitional Living program?

A: Children and young adults with a diagnosis of being suicidal, homicidal, or psychotic without medication stabilization at time of referral are not appropriate for the Youth Villages Transitional Living program.

Q: How many young adults does a Transitional living specialist have on his or her caseload?

A: Transitional living specialists maintain caseloads of about six to ten young adults depending on the intensity of the case.

Q: How often does the assigned Transitional living specialist see the young adults?

A: Transitional living specialists are available to the young adults 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They make a minimum of one face-to-face contact per week with the individuals at the youth's home, job, or

wherever is most convenient. The number of sessions can be increased based upon the individual needs of each young adult.

Q: What is the relationship between Transitional Living and the referral source?

A: Transitional living specialists work closely with all individuals and agencies involved with the young adult, including the referral source. The transitional living specialist often communicates and collaborates weekly or monthly -- as appropriate or needed -- with the referral source, court system, the employer and others closely involved in the case. Weekly and monthly progress updates are provided, as well as written discharge summaries and recommendations.

Q: How long is the average length of treatment in the Transitional Living Program?

A: Program participation usually lasts from 6 to 12 months, with an average of 7-9 months.

Q: What are the typical components of a family counselor's treatment strategy?

A: Self-sufficiency skills, community reintegration, education, vocational skills and job training/experience are the major focal areas within the program. The proposed program will provide the young adult with the knowledge and skills necessary to:

- Maintain safe and stable housing
- Achieve or maintain work and/or education
- Remain free from legal involvement
- Become self-sufficient

Q: How common is it for a young adult in the Transitional Living Program to have children of their own?

A: Youth Villages currently serves more than 400 young adults per day in the Transitional Living Program. About 20 percent of those young adults have children or are pregnant. Transitional living specialists provide parenting education, assist the young parent in arranging for child care, and help the young adult with any other barriers related to being a healthy and productive parent. In addition, all young adults in the program receive pregnancy prevention training.

Q: Does Youth Villages provide funding to the young adults in the Transitional Living Program for basic needs such as rent, utilities, transportation, food?

A: Youth Villages does not provide the young adults in the Transitional Living Program with a place to live or with funds to pay for their livings costs. Instead, Youth Villages helps the young people make their own arrangements for independent living, with the goal to teach young adults the skills they need to live successful, independent lives. In the majority of cases, Transitional Living assists the young adult in finding a place to stay with a friend or family member when the young person is unable to make living arrangements for him- or herself due to lack of funds. However, in roughly 10 percent of cases, young adults simply have no family member or friend to support them. In these cases, Youth Villages will assist them with housing costs -- provided they are taking the necessary steps to work toward absorbing those costs on their own by a certain date. Also, in rare cases, Youth Villages will assist with utility bills, food, and other basic-needs purchases.

Q: How are the counselors in the Transitional Living Program organized, trained and supervised?

A: A vital component of Transitional Living is the level of training and supervision for transitional living specialists. Specialists, with caseloads of 6-10 young adults, are supervised by a clinical supervisor who is responsible for a team of 4-5 specialists. A highly structured specialist training-and-development process includes an initial three or five-day training, quarterly booster trainings, weekly clinical consultation, weekly team supervision, weekly individual supervision and development, and field supervision.

Q: Does Transitional Living collaborate with other agencies who may be involved with the young adults?

A: Yes. In addition to providing individual and family counseling, the Transitional Living staff works closely with other agencies, as well as any existing programs and services of benefit to the young adult to ensure that the young adults served are linked with all appropriate community resources. At the inception of every case, Transitional living specialists seek input from the young adult's referral source, extended family members and friends, teachers, employers, peer group, neighbors, and others involved with the young adult and family, such as probation officers and mental health workers. Transitional Living Specialists "check in" with these key people in the community on a typically weekly basis and at least monthly throughout treatment. All outside contacts made are made with the young adult's consent and only after release forms have been signed.

Q: What are the hours of operation for the Transitional Living Program?

A: Transitional living specialists work flexible schedules to meet the needs of each young adult and to be there in cases of emergency. Transitional Living Specialists are available to the young adult 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Transitional Living staff work in teams and rotate an on-call pager on the weekends and on holidays to ensure that young adults can always get in touch with a transitional living specialist.

Referrals are generally accepted during normal business hours, although emergency referrals may be accepted at other times.

The format for the Transitional Living program's services does not change during holidays or other times during the year.

Q: Does the Transitional Living Program provide crisis intervention services?

A: Yes. Crisis intervention and prevention services are available to young people and their families 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In the preventive stages, the clinical team (clinician, supervisor, consultant, and regional supervisor) track "red-flag" behavior, identifying potential problem areas and designing interventions to prevent a possible crisis. In case of a crisis, young adults may contact specialists at any time, and either their specialists or an equally trained team colleague will respond to the young adult. Crisis resolution may include responding by phone and/or in person regardless of the hour or day of the week. Transitional Living specialists are trained in de-escalation techniques to resolve crises. Specific steps are in place for runaways, designing and implementing safety plans on an immediate basis, and formulating short-term strategies to prevent recurrence of the crisis incident. Transitional Living specialists alert the clinical supervisor as soon as is possible for support and guidance. Transitional Living specialists notify regional supervisors immediately if further support and guidance is needed.

Q: What are the qualifications of staff in the Transitional Living program?

A: Qualifications for Transitional Living positions are as follows:

- Specialist – master's degree in social science field preferred, bachelor's accepted with experience. More than 9 years of data from the Transitional Living program show no significant difference in bachelor's- or master's-level staff in regard to outcomes.
- Clinical Supervisor – master's degree in social science field preferred, bachelor's accepted with experience. Experience in training and providing Transitional Living services required.
- Clinical Consultant – master's degree required, as well as extensive experience providing Transitional Living services and extensive ongoing training.
- Regional Supervisor – master's degree in social science field preferred, bachelor's accepted with experience. Experience in training and providing Transitional Living services required.

Q: Does Youth Villages have experience starting up the Transitional Living Program in new locations?

A: Yes. Youth Villages has successfully and quickly rolled out our intensive in-home services program and Transitional Living in many new areas and states, most recently across the state of Tennessee, North Carolina, Texas, Massachusetts, and the District of Columbia. Youth Villages has its own team of

specialists -- each with years of experience-- who provide case consultation to therapists and intensive development training to clinical supervisors. Many management-level staff have experience starting up programs in new cities and states. The process of starting up in a new location involves some combination of leadership working on-site and traveling between locations on a weekly basis.

Q: How long does it take Youth Villages to start-up the Transitional Living Program in a new location?

A: Generally, it takes about six months to provide full services. The first two months of starting up a new program are typically consumed by hiring and training staff, conducting meetings with stakeholders, other providers, community services and others, and establishing the referral and admissions process. During the third and fourth months, Youth Villages completes the hiring and training processes, admits the first round of cases, and continues meetings with stakeholders. During the final two months of start-up, Youth Villages continues training new staff and communicating with stakeholder agency staff to resolve any potential or actual service barriers. Youth Villages begins serving cases at full capacity during months five and six.

Q: Does Youth Villages have a quality assurance plan in place for Transitional Living?

A: Yes. The Transitional Living program's treatment model naturally lends itself to in-depth quality monitoring of outcomes and ongoing processes due to the program's vigorous supervision structure and adherence measures. Youth Villages has implemented additional structure and processes to ensure that counselors adhere to the treatment model. High-risk cases receive extra supervision, as warranted by each individual case. Critical events trigger additional attention to the problem case. Clinical oversight is provided through field supervision by the clinical supervisor, review of taped counseling sessions (with the youth's consent), database-generated scorecards of the counselors' and supervisors' performances, and clinical-services quality is further ensured through quarterly booster trainings on specific areas, such as intervention development and family engagement, among others.

Program success is monitored weekly and monthly, measuring key data to ensure success or make crucial changes in treatment wherever needed. Youth Villages' goal always is to provide the best services possible, and Youth Villages continuously measures outcome data to ensure services provide the best help to young people and their families.

In addition to measuring outcomes and following up with clients post-discharge, Youth Villages continually assesses and refines specialists' clinical skills in group supervision, individual supervision, clinical consultation, and regional consultation.

Q: Does Youth Villages track the outcomes of young adults/families who participate in the Transitional Living Program?

A: Yes. Youth Villages collects data on all young adults served by the Transitional Living Program. Data is collected at point of discharge and 6, 12, and 24 months after discharge. Data collected show whether the young person lives in a home, is in school or working, has had any involvement with the law, and more. Research staff not affiliated with the Transitional Living program conduct follow-up research with children, young adults and families to monitor program effectiveness.

Key outcome data collected includes:

- Living arrangements at discharge and during the following 24 months to assess whether the young person is successfully living in a home or has been hospitalized, in jail, has run away, or has been referred to a residential or other treatment program.
- Criminal/ Legal Involvement
- Use of mental health services
- Employment
- Educational Status
- Social Support /Life Skills

Q: Does Youth Villages provide any support for youth after discharge?

A: Youth Villages' TL specialists remain available to the young adult beyond the discharge date via office phone and pager. In cases where the young adult begins to experience struggles or new problems arise, Youth Villages will assess the situation to determine the best course of action. Examples of remedies include additional sessions without readmission, referral to an outside therapist or case manager, and in some cases, readmission to the Transitional Living Program.

Q: Do you have references specific to this program?

A: Yes.

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Q: What is the rate for a young adult in the Transitional Living Program and what does that rate include?

A: Transitional Living services include individual and family counseling and support services provided by the transitional living specialist, as well as management of the case while in the program. Because Transitional Living is an in home-services program, the primary expense is personnel-related. Travel reimbursement for direct-service staff is the most significant operating expense beyond traditional overhead for office space, utilities and equipment (computers, telephones, etc.).

A monthly rate per youth receiving Transitional Living services is calculated uniquely for each service area.

Q: What if funding runs out and the young adult is not ready for discharge or the young adult is no longer eligible for the program due to age?

A: Youth Villages is currently raising funds through the private sector to make continuing services possible for any young person who needs these intensive services. An annual internal fund-raising campaign that allows Youth Villages' staff to give back a percentage of their salary to the organization also helps raise significant funds for the Transitional Living Program, specifically for young adults who otherwise would not qualify for funding to receive services.

For additional information about the Youth Villages Transitional Living Program, please contact Mary Lee at mary.lee@youthvillages.org.