

Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families :

State Plan Application for Funds under the Education and
Training Vouchers Program under the John H. Chafee
Foster Care Independence Program

Amendment to Child and Family Services Plan

Request for Education and Training Voucher Funds

FY 2006

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Part I - Education and Training Voucher Program Plan Narrative .

This Application for FY 2006 Education and Training Voucher Program funds will assist Rhode Island to continue to strengthen and expand its post secondary educational assistance program to achieve the purpose of the Education and Training Voucher program (section 477(a)(6) of the Act) to: a) help youth make the transition to self-sufficiency; and b) help youth receive the education, training and services necessary to obtain employment, by providing funding to supplement state efforts and other federal educational funds.

Vouchers in amounts not to exceed \$5,000 per youth per year will be provided to eligible youth (as identified in Section 477(i)) for education and training programs. The Department's current efforts to enhance the educational and vocational opportunities for youth will be greatly expanded through this program.

The Department supports the transition of all children and youth from publicly supported care with the skills and competencies in place to ensure stability and permanency.

RI Department for Children, Youth and Families is committed to assisting youth to leave the Department's care prepared to transition successfully to adulthood. As part of that commitment, we are dedicated to enhancing the educational outcomes of youth, including increasing the numbers of youth who complete high school and enter post-secondary programs. This commitment is reflected in several current activities:

An annual Education and Planning Conference is provided to youth in foster care, in grades nine through twelve and those youth pursuing a GED. This conference is aimed at motivating youth to pursue higher education and at assisting youth with educational planning. Information regarding entrance requirements for two and four year post-secondary educational programs is provided and recommended courses of study for youth in high schools is reviewed. Information regarding the college application process and the application for financial assistance process is reviewed. Workshop leaders review the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Assistance) application and advise students on time lines and other information that will assist with their successful completion of Financial Aid forms. Information regarding federally funded programs designed to assist youth in successfully completing their secondary and post-secondary education, including Upward Bound, Talent Development and Preparatory Enrollment Programs as well as, resources, such as, the Educational Opportunity Center, Access to Opportunity and the Minority Mentoring Programs is provided in keynote presentations, workshops and printed material.

An Annual Graduation Celebration honoring youth in foster care who have earned their high school or college diplomas, GED, or who have completed a post secondary vocational program is held for the graduates and their guests. The event has been provided for the past four years. In 2004, sixty seven graduates and their guests,

including foster and biological families, DCYF staff, friends of the graduates, and group home staff, were honored. In 2004, two college graduates were also honored. In 2005 over 90 students were identified as graduating from high school, vocational school, or college or obtaining a GED.

Training regarding post-secondary resources and application processes is provided to DCYF social workers annually on a regional basis, by Youth Development Consultant, Kathi M. Crowe and staff from the Educational Opportunity Center. Information regarding PSAT, SAT schedules and fee waivers and financial aid, including completion of the FAFSA is presented. RI DCYF Higher Education Incentive Grant application is reviewed. Information regarding additional resources, such as, The Orphan Foundation, is also provided. Information regarding the Education and Training Voucher Program, including eligibility and application information is included in these trainings.

The Rhode Island DCYF Higher Education Opportunity Incentive Grant Program was enacted through state legislation passed in 1999. The grant provides \$200,000 of state funds to supplement what youth in the custody of DCYF receive in state and federal financial assistance and scholarships. The funds can be used for youth to attend state schools, including Rhode Island College, the University of Rhode Island, and the Community College of Rhode Island. The funds must be used for youth who have been in custody for a minimum of two years and who attend school full time. The legislation was passed with tremendous support of the RI DCYF Youth Advisory Board. The program is administered as part of the Independent Living Program of DCYF.

RI has expanded its post-secondary educational assistance program by including opportunities for youth to attend additional colleges and universities, private and public, in state and out of state, as well as, vocational training programs directed at assisting youth to gain the training necessary to obtain employment and achieve financial self-sufficiency in an increasingly difficult job market. Many of our youth do not wish to attend college and are more appropriately supported by gaining access to a skilled field of employment. ETV funds have allowed for the development of expansion of Rhode Island's efforts in that area.

We also have requests from youth who wish to attend local private schools such as Johnson and Wales, Brown University, Providence College, Dean College, etc. and have had no funds available to assist with these requests. The funds available through the Education and Training Voucher Program will help to close that gap and expand the range of opportunities for our youth.

Previously, no assistance was available for vocational programs. The Education and Training Voucher Program have been used to expand current program efforts to include post-secondary vocational programs.

As part of the Case Plan process, for youth in foster care at the age of sixteen and

older, a Transitional Living Plan must be developed, which identifies specifics regarding the youth's preparation for self-sufficiency, including post-secondary employment and educational goals. This program will be promoted and included as part of that Transitional Living Plan process and the Independent Living Policy of DCYF will be amended to reflect the Educational and Training Voucher Program. The Transitional Living Plan is developed with the youth and other significant people to insure there is agreement and it is representative of the real needs of each youth.

Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families currently implements the RI DCYF Higher Education Opportunity Incentive Program through an application and monitoring process managed by the Independent Living Program. A youth wishing to apply for those grant funds, completes an application which establishes their status as youth in foster care, in the care of the Department, the length of time in foster care, a copy of their letter of acceptance into the post-secondary school, a copy of their Financial Aid award letter, and a signed confidentiality waiver that will allow Independent Living staff to review grades and other pertinent information from the school on a regular basis to ensure compliance with the conditions of the tuition assistance.

The funds provided through the Education and Training Voucher Program are managed and monitored in a similar manner. Applications are used which establish the student's eligibility as established in the Act and grants will not exceed the amount determined by the Act (\$5,000 per year per youth) or the total cost of attendance. Students total financial aid packages and the total cost of attendance will be reviewed for each youth in foster care by their social worker to ensure duplication is avoided. Youth who have been adopted after age sixteen have their applications and financial aid award packages reviewed by their Adoption Unit Worker. Financial aid award packages of former foster care youth are reviewed and monitored by the Independent Living Program staff.

Voucher implementation protocols are reviewed with DCYF Management and Budgeting and additional systems established as recommended.

Rhode Island has no political subdivisions. The RI Department of Children, Youth and Families services youth and families statewide, with four Regional Offices located across the state.

All eligible categories of youth are served through the Education and Training Voucher Program, including current and former foster youth, youth adopted after age sixteen. The program is advertised and promoted statewide. Applications are available at all DCYF Regional offices, at the RI Foster Parents Association, and at all adoption agencies in Rhode Island. There is one major newspaper in Rhode Island the Providence Journal which will be used to advertise the program to foster parents and adoptive parents as well as former foster youth. Radio stations will also be recruited to assist in the promotion of the program to eligible youth, especially former foster youth.

Additionally, information will be sent out to foster and adoptive families by DCYF staff and via Foster Parent Association and Adoption RI newsletters. Information will be distributed as soon as the Education and Training Voucher Program funds are awarded. Training will be provided to DCYF administrators and Family Service and Adoption Workers to assist them in the identification of eligible youth in all categories, including current and former foster youth, and youth adopted after the age of sixteen. Information packets will then be sent out to youth, group homes, foster and adoptive homes to assist in the identification of eligible youth. Applications will be returned to the Independent Living Program for processing and to ensure compliance with the Certifications identified on Attachment B.

DCYF has determined no State statutory and/or administrative barriers that has inhibited the administration of this program.

During the current year, 40 youth have received ETV Grants, with a range of colleges and vocational programs represented.

It will be necessary to increase the number of youth who can utilize this funding if we are to assist all youth to leave care ready to lead productive lives. Before student can be successful at the post secondary level, students must be prepared and successful entering and completing high school. They must have supports to achieve and problem solve and sustain positive outcomes. This will require better support from all parts of the system, including caseworkers, group home staff, foster and adoptive parents

There must be a full range of opportunities with information and interested people to stimulate ideas and provide encouragement, skills training and support for the long haul. In order to build the depth and breath required, it will take increased collaboration at all levels. Every youth in our care needs and deserves the opportunities to learn a skill and to be able to earn a living. There are no exceptions. Everyone has to be somewhere at the end of the day and needs to be a success.

In order to accomplish the above, we again need to make the entire system responsible for change and for the steps necessary for our youth to be successful, planning needs to begin at least at 14 and the beginning of high school. As more youth become successful and able to take advantage of the ETV's, there must be a means to expand the amount to each student and expand the number of student able to receive such funds.

Goals and Objectives for 2005-2006

- **Improve and increase promotion and awareness of the program**

- **Increase and enhance collaboration with other agencies and educational facilities**
- **Integrate education, job training and job placement**
- **Involve more youth in planning and promotion**
- **Increase mentoring for youth receiving ETV's**
- **Improve and expand funding from multiple sources to assist youth attending private colleges to avoid loans**
- **Enhance relationships with ORS, Job Corp, The Children's Crusade, and DLT One Stop Centers**
- **Increase and enhance mentoring available**
- **Recruit and nurture involvement of administrators from among the schools and colleges students are choosing to attend to be part of a planning effort to produce success for those students**