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CHFS Launches Summer Program for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

FRANKFORT, Ky. (May 31, 2016) — Young adults aging out of the foster care system now have the opportunity to access employment, job training and leadership skills through a collaborative program that places young people in entry-level positions in Department for Community Based Services (DCBS) offices around the state.

Governor Matt Bevin, First Lady Glenna Bevin and Health and Family Services Secretary Vickie Yates Brown Glisson made the announcement today in Louisville where they joined several program participants and state leaders who have helped launch the initiative.

"The reason this program has come to fruition is because it is the right thing to do," Gov. Matt Bevin told the audience gathered in the auditorium of the L&N Building. "(The program) isn't simply 10 weeks. It is a way to integrate these kids into other facets of state government, into the private sector and beyond. It's an opportunity for Kentucky to truly be the beacon of light on how this can work and should work in America. It's starting today. It's starting with this program, with these people. "

Designed to help young people with skills and experience to prepare them for future employment, the summer youth program begins June 1 and will run for 10 weeks serving Kentucky's foster youth between the ages of 17 and 23. Program participants must have a high school diploma or the equivalent to be selected.

"As of today, there are 8,180 children and youth in the foster care system in Kentucky. A significant number of these young people will not be placed in permanent homes and, sadly, are not likely to have the support and skills needed to carry them to adulthood," said Sec. Glisson. "This program is designed to address that and better prepare these young people to not only cope, but thrive as they become independent adults."

The summer youth program is a statewide pilot project placing young people in Office Support Assistant positions in local DCBS offices. To participate, youth were required to complete a state application for interim employment and selection process prior to receiving their official employment and job assignment. Over 100 individuals are expected to be served by the program.

"We see this program as not only providing each youth a job, but also providing a future, and potential link to further educational and training opportunities," said DCBS Commissioner Adria Johnson.

The goal of the summer youth program is to improve outcomes and build employment and skills for those who participate.

"Thank you to this administration for making the wonderful opportunity a reality — not only for me but for many of the youth here today who will use this experience as a stepping stone and, mostly importantly, as a 10-week relationship builder," said program participant Duke Brown, who entered foster care at age 13. "As we all know, (building) a relationship is the key to getting into anyone's heart."

Another program participant, Glenda Wright, also addressed the audience and encouraged young people to believe in themselves.

"Other people can motivate you and inspire you to be what you want to be in life, but do you know who my biggest motivator was? Myself. I'd like to say to every youth and every person in this room: You need yourself to motivate you to be a better you. Without that, you're never going to reach that goal," said Wright. "No matter what people have told you in the past, no matter what your story is, there's no limit to who you can be. You are your biggest motivator — so continue to be."

According to Annie E. Casey Foundation, national statistics on foster care show;

- In Fiscal Year 2014, an estimated 238,230 young people exited foster care. Nine percent of those emancipated or aged out of the system.
- Of the 238,230 children who exited foster care, five percent spent five or more years in care.
- One in five young people in foster care will become homeless after the age of 18.
- Only 58 percent will graduate high school by the age of 19.
- Seventy-one percent of young women are mothers by age 21.
- At age 24, only half are employed.
- Fewer than three percent will earn a college degree by age 25.
- One in four will be involved in the justice system within two years of leaving foster care.

Participants in the summer youth program will work in the state's local DCBS offices. They will support Department staff through customer service, clerical duties and potentially offering peer support to other youth transitioning from the state foster care program. Program participants will be matched with mentors who will serve as role models in public service who can help navigate the network of state government and its partnerships.

[View](#) the full press conference.

The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state's human services and healthcare programs, including the Department for Medicaid Services, the Department for Community Based Services the Department for Public Health and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.