

SOUTH CAROLINA CITIZEN REVIEW PANELS



2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Engaging citizens to improve the outcomes for South Carolina's
children and families affected by child abuse and neglect

Prepared by:

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[SC CRP Website](#)

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LEGAL AUTHORITY

Citizen Review Panels (CRPs) are federally mandated mechanisms for citizen participation in child protection utilizing evaluation and public outreach. Each state is required to have at least one CRP. Volunteer panel members assess their state and local child protective services (CPS) agencies and collect public opinion on CPS policies and services. In South Carolina, there are four (4) panels located in different geographical areas of the state which similarly align with the regions of the South Carolina Department of Social Services. Currently, there are panels in the Upstate, Pee Dee, Midlands, and Lowcountry. Panels review policies, procedures, and practices of the CPS system and make recommendations annually to the South Carolina Department of Social Services. These recommendations are intended to help improve the CPS system and make a difference in the lives of children who are abused or neglected. Citizen Review Panels offer volunteers an effective way to share the community's responsibility to protect the children of South Carolina.

According to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) Sections 106(c)(4)(A)(i) and (ii), each Citizen Review Panel is charged with evaluating the extent to which the State is fulfilling its child protection responsibilities in accordance with its CAPTA State plan by:

- (1) examining the policies, procedures, and practices of State and local child protection agencies, and
- (2) reviewing specific cases, where appropriate.

Additionally, and consistent with Section 106(c)(4)(A)(iii) of CAPTA, a Panel may examine other criteria that it considers important to ensure the protection of children, including the extent to which the State and local child protection system is coordinated with the Title IV-E Foster Care and Adoption Assistance Programs of the Social Security Act.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As the Coordinator of the South Carolina Citizen Review Panels, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to those whose contributions made this work possible.

I extend my deepest gratitude to the **panel members** for their time, diligence, and unwavering commitment to improving outcomes for children impacted by the child welfare system in South Carolina.

I also thank the **South Carolina Department of Social Services** for their partnership and their openness to collaboration and continuous improvement in pursuit of shared goals.

My appreciation goes to the **citizens of South Carolina** for their valuable input, for sharing the issues most important to them, and for engaging with this report.

Finally, I acknowledge the **many individuals, both named and unnamed**, who are dedicated to advancing and strengthening the child welfare system.

Sincerely,

Sharon D. Walker

Sharon D. Walker
SC CRP Coordinator

2025-2026 SC CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

May 20, 2025

CRP Statewide Annual Retreat

Taylor House, Joseph F. Rice School of Law
Columbia, South Carolina



October 16, 2025

CRP Mid-Year Retreat

Richland County Public Library, Main Branch
Columbia, South Carolina

October 23, 2025

CRP Onboarding New Member Training

Teams Platform

February 6, 2026

CRP Meeting

Teams Platform

February 17, 2026

Midlands CRP Meeting

Teams Platform



February 20, 2026

Midlands CRP Meeting Recap

Teams Platform

SC CRP MEMBERS IN THE COMMUNITY

First Steps Parent Summit



School Supplies Collection and Donation

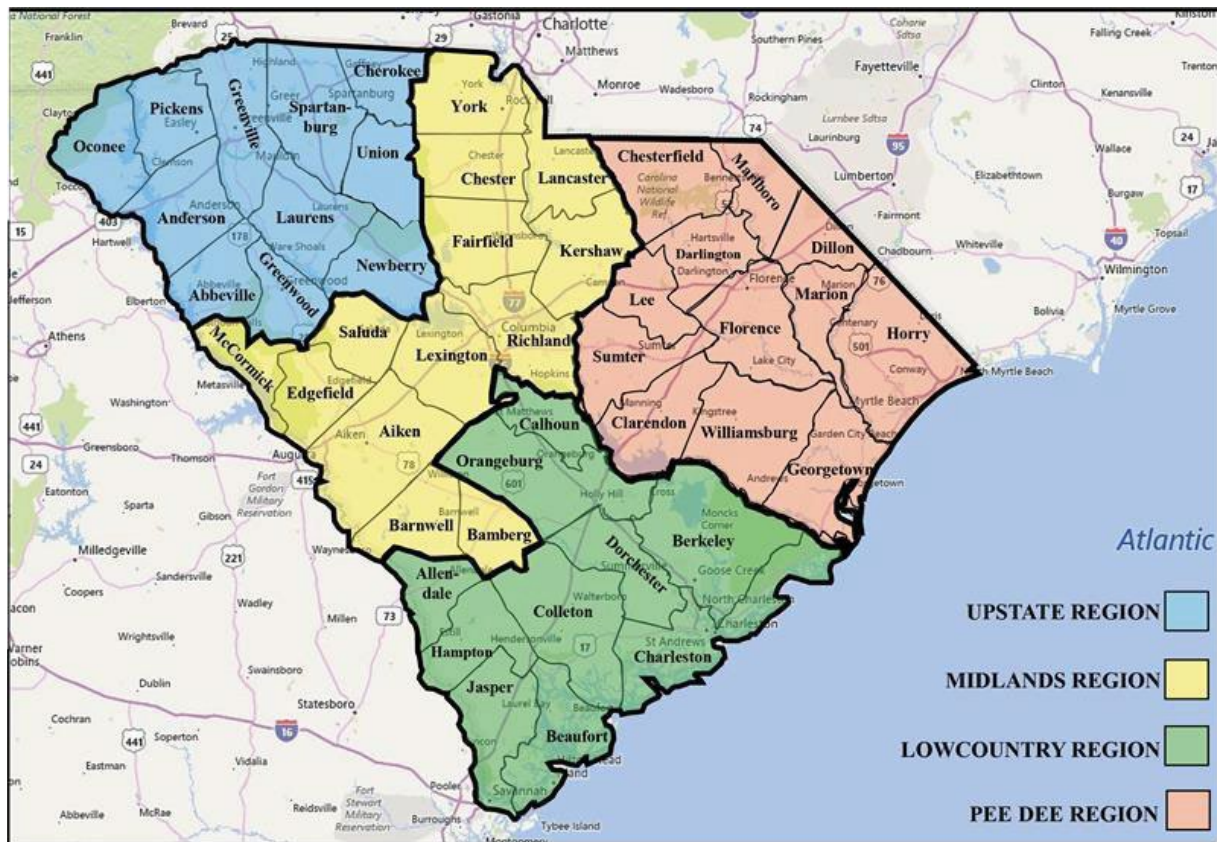


Hygiene Supplies for World Homeless Day



Packing and Stacking Boxes with Serve and Connect for Thanksgiving Donations

SC DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES REGIONAL MAP



SC CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL REGIONAL DIVISION¹

UPSTATE

Abbeville	Newberry
Anderson	Oconee
Cherokee	Pickens
Greenville	Spartanburg
Greenwood	Union
Laurens	

MIDLANDS

Aiken	Lancaster
Bamberg	Lexington
Barnwell	McCormick
Chester	Richland
Edgefield	Saluda
Fairfield	York
Kershaw	

LOWCOUNTRY

Allendale	Colleton
Beaufort	Dorchester
Berkeley	Hampton
Calhoun	Jasper
Charleston	Orangeburg

PEE DEE

Chesterfield	Horry
Clarendon	Lee
Darlington	Marion
Dillion	Marlboro
Florence	Sumter
Georgetown	Williamsburg

¹ Regional grouping is flexible upon the agreement of the Panel Chairs

2026 NATIONAL CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL CONFERENCE

The National Citizens Review Panel Conference is held every two (2) years. The 2026 Conference will return to the Paradise Point Resort in San Diego, California on June 1-3, 2026. This year's theme is "Leading Change Together."



SC CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL TOPIC

What are the strengths and challenges of transition services and supports for youth in foster care ages 14-21 in South Carolina?

INTRODUCTION

The Citizen Review Panels examined transition services and support for youth in foster care ages 14–21 in South Carolina. The panel focused on four key areas: (1) the services provided and how they are administered, (2) strengths and challenges in service delivery, (3) how effectively these services support successful transition to adulthood, and (4) additional supports that may improve outcomes.

This review draws on state policy, program materials, and research to assess South Carolina’s current approach and identify opportunities to strengthen outcomes for youth transitioning to adulthood.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings outlined in this report, the South Carolina Citizen Review Panels identified the following actions to strengthen transition services and improve outcomes for youth exiting foster care:

- Strengthen youth engagement in transition planning through the continued use of Bridge Navigators and Transitional Youth Advocates
- Enhance and standardize training for foster care case managers on available transition services and support
- Expand and formalize partnerships to increase access to housing, post-secondary education, and workforce opportunities
- Expand access to structured, ongoing life skills programming focused on practical applications
- Strengthen cross-system coordination to improve service delivery and reduce gaps
- Improve communication of available services to youth through clear, accessible materials, including distribution of CRP-developed resources

Additional detail and supporting rationale for these recommendations are provided in the full Recommendations section at the conclusion of this report.

The following sections provide additional context, analysis, and supporting evidence for these findings.

OVERVIEW OF TRANSITION PLANNING IN SOUTH CAROLINA

In South Carolina, transition planning for youth in foster care must begin at age 14 and continue through age 21, guided by Department of Social Services (DSS) policy and federal requirements. The process is designed to prepare youth for adulthood through a structured, youth-led and youth-centered approach that evolves over time. Youth are encouraged to identify their goals, build positive self-esteem, and develop awareness of achieving their goals.

Beginning at age 14, youth become eligible for independent living and transition services funded through the Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee Foster Care Program). Planning focuses on building foundational skills and identifying long-term goals, with youth actively involved in decision-making and supported by up to two (2) trusted individuals of their choosing, none of whom can be a foster parent or case manager.

Between the ages of 14 and 16, youth should participate in monthly transition planning sessions to review their progress towards accomplishing their goals and reassessing their skills. Once a youth reaches the age of 17, the transition plan must be implemented, with a formal planning meeting held within 90 days of the youth's 17th birthday to formalize the youth's plan.

Federal policy requires that another formal transition planning meeting is held within 90 days prior to a youth's 18th birthday to review and update the plan. If the youth intends to exit foster care upon turning 18, a final formal transition planning meeting must be held within 90 days of the exit date.

Topics that should be discussed during the transition planning meeting include: after care services (ability to voluntarily remain or return to DSS's care until the age of 21, receive funding from Chafee, etc.); education; employment; financial management; health care; home management/domestic skills; housing; identity protection; life skills; permanency/permanent connections; safety/well-being; special services (if applicable); and transportation.

For youth in extended foster care (ages 18–21), planning shifts to implementation and goal attainment, with continued case management support.

Overall, South Carolina's transition planning framework is structured and comprehensive. Its effectiveness depends on starting early with consistent implementation, coordination, and sustained engagement.

QUESTION ONE: WHAT TRANSITION SERVICES AND SUPPORTS ARE PROVIDED IN SOUTH CAROLINA?

Transition services for youth ages 14–21 in South Carolina are delivered through the Chafee Foster Care Program and the Department of Social Services (DSS) Transition Services and Support (TSS) framework. These services are aligned with the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD), which tracks outcomes across key domains including education, employment, housing, financial stability, health, and supportive relationships (ACF, 2016). South Carolina provides a coordinated, youth-centered system of services designed to support independence and long-term stability. Services are individualized based on youth needs and are documented and monitored to ensure alignment with federal reporting requirements.

Description of Services

Transition services are designed to address the key domains associated with successful adulthood and are introduced beginning at age 14. Core services include:

- **Life skills development**, including budgeting, daily living skills, and decision-making
- **Education**, academic, such as tutoring, GED preparation, post-secondary planning, and access to Education and Training Vouchers (ETV)
- **Employment**, including job readiness training, career exploration, and workforce development opportunities
- **Housing education**, including transitional housing, supervised independent living placements, and financial support for rent and utilities
- **Budget and financial management**, including financial literacy course, credit checks, and access to financial account(s)
- **Health education**, including Medicaid coverage and assistance navigating physical and behavioral health services
- **Healthy permanent support**, including identifying and maintaining relationships with supportive adults and parenting education for youths with dependent children
- **Transportation**, including support for obtaining identification, driver's education, and travel related to employment or school
- **Risk prevention**, including assessments of threats to personal safety due to history of domestic violence, identification as a member of a marginalized or endangered group, suicidal ideations, criminal history, and risk of victimization of trafficking

Youth may also participate in **Extended Foster Care (ages 18–21)**, which provides continued housing, case management, and financial support, as well as **aftercare services** that offer limited assistance after exiting care to support stability in housing and employment.

Delivery of Services

Services are delivered through a coordinated system that emphasizes youth engagement, collaboration, and continuity.

All services are organized through **youth-driven transition planning**, which begins at age 14 and is updated regularly. Caseworkers assess needs, connect youth to services, and monitor progress across domains such as education, employment, housing, and health. This planning process serves as the central mechanism for coordinating services and aligning them with each youth's goals.

Services are delivered through a **multi-provider, team-based approach**, coordinated by the Bridge Navigator along with the DSS foster care or permanency case managers, foster parents, residential providers, community-based organizations, schools, and workforce partners. The Bridge Navigator plays a critical role in building community resources, ensuring youth have access to a broad range of supports across systems.

Transition services are provided on an **ongoing and continuous basis**, rather than as one-time interventions, ensuring that youth receive sustained support as they prepare for adulthood. Bridge Navigators review each youth's case every six (6) months to ascertain the youth's progression towards achieving their goals.

Extended foster care and aftercare services also function as **ongoing service platforms**, allowing youth to continue receiving supports across multiple domains beyond age 18. Their progress is coordinated and monitored by the Transitional Youth Advocate.

Finally, services are supported through **Chafee funding and integrated with community systems**, including education, workforce development, housing, and health care. Service delivery and outcomes are tracked through NYTD, which supports accountability and continuous improvement (ACF, 2016).

QUESTION TWO: WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES IN PROVIDING TRANSITION SERVICES AND SUPPORTS?

South Carolina has established a comprehensive system of transition services aligned with federal expectations and key outcome areas, including education, employment, housing, financial stability, health, and supportive relationships.

Strengths

The state's transition services are supported by a strong policy framework and a broad range of available programs. Key strengths include:

- **Early and structured transition planning**, beginning at age 14 and continuing through early adulthood
- **Access to extended foster care**, which allows youth to remain in stable placements while completing educational and employment goals
- **A comprehensive array of services** addressing education, employment, housing, and health
- **An emphasis on permanency and supportive relationships**, which are strongly associated with positive outcomes
- **Use of data and outcome tracking through NYTD**, supporting accountability and continuous improvement

Challenges

Despite these strengths, several challenges limit the consistency and effectiveness of services in practice.

- **Education barriers**, including school instability and limited support for post-secondary persistence
- **Employment challenges**, including difficulty securing stable, long-term employment and alignment with local labor markets
- **Housing instability**, particularly after youth exit foster care or disengage from services
- **Financial insecurity**, with many youth lacking the income and resources needed for long-term independence
- **Gaps in health care access**, particularly in navigating services and accessing behavioral health care
- **Limited supportive relationships**, with some youth exiting care without committed adult connections
- **Ongoing risk factors**, including higher rates of involvement in the criminal justice system, substance use, and early parenthood

System-Level Challenges

Cross-cutting issues affect all service areas, including variability in service delivery across regions, limited resources relative to need, and challenges engaging youth in voluntary services,

particularly after age 18. In addition, inconsistencies in data collection and follow-up can limit the state's ability to fully assess outcomes and service effectiveness (ACF, 2020).

Stakeholder Observations

Feedback from family court judges reinforces these challenges. Judges identified a knowledge gap between foster care case managers and extended foster care teams and expressed concern that youth may not receive sufficient information about available services and support to make informed decisions. Judges also noted the need for clear, accessible materials that can be shared with youth during permanency planning hearings, particularly for those with a permanency plan of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA).

QUESTION THREE: HOW WELL DO THESE SERVICES SUPPORT SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD?

Transition services in South Carolina provide a strong foundation for preparing youth for adulthood; however, outcomes remain mixed. Services are most effective in supporting short-term stability, particularly for youth who remain engaged in care or participate in extended foster care. Their effectiveness is less consistent in producing long-term stability and sustained independence.

Outcomes by Domain

- **Education:** Many youth achieve high school completion or a GED, reflecting effective baseline support. However, post-secondary persistence and completion remain significantly lower than for peers (ACF, 2016; Courtney et al., 2011).
- **Employment:** Workforce programs improve participation in employment and job training, but many youth experience job instability, underemployment, and low wages (ACF, 2012; Urban Institute, 2020).
- **Housing Stability:** Housing supports reduce the risk of homelessness, particularly for youth in extended foster care, but a significant number still experience instability after exiting care (ACF, 2016; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021).
- **Financial Self-Sufficiency:** Financial literacy services provide foundational skills, but many youth continue to experience low income and financial instability after exiting care (ACF, 2016).
- **Health Care Access:** Medicaid coverage ensures access to insurance, but utilization of services, particularly behavioral health, remains inconsistent (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021).
- **Supportive Relationships:** Many youth report having at least one supportive adult, but a significant number exit care without stable, long-term connections (ACF, 2012; Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2019).
- **High-Risk Behaviors:** Services provide some protective effect, particularly for youth who remain engaged in care longer; however, foster youth continue to face elevated risks compared to the general population (ACF, 2016).

Overall Assessment

Transition services are effective in improving baseline outcomes and reducing immediate risk. However, they are less consistent in achieving long-term stability and upward mobility, particularly in employment, financial independence, and sustained education. This reflects a system that is well-aligned with federal goals but would benefit from more sustained, coordinated, and outcome-focused supports.

QUESTION FOUR: WHAT ADDITIONAL SERVICES AND SUPPORTS COULD IMPROVE OUTCOMES?

In addition to existing transition services, research and state models identify supports that can further strengthen outcomes for youth transitioning out of foster care. These supports address both individual skill development and structural barriers, particularly in housing, employment, education, and long-term stability

Key Areas for Improvement

- **Expanded post-secondary support**, including campus-based programs, coaching, and year-round housing
- **Career pathway programs**, including apprenticeships, paid work experience, and industry-aligned training
- **Long-term housing supports**, including housing subsidies and supportive housing models, including supervised independent living
- **Trauma-informed behavioral health services**, with improved access and continuity of care
- **Permanent connections**, ensuring youth exit care with at least one committed and supportive adult
- **Financial supports**, including asset-building strategies and access to resources
- **Legal services**, to address barriers related to housing, employment, and benefits
- **Ongoing coaching and peer support**, to improve engagement and long-term outcomes
- **Cross-system coordination**, to reduce fragmentation and improve access to services

Lessons from Other States

Other states provide examples of how these supports can be implemented effectively.

North Carolina emphasizes flexibility, continuity, and youth engagement through its LINKS program, which allows youth to access, leave, and re-enter services as needed. The state also provides enhanced postsecondary support through NC Reach, combining financial assistance with coaching and academic guidance. Integrated housing models, team-based planning, and strong cross-system collaboration support sustained engagement and recognize that transition to adulthood is often non-linear.

Georgia emphasizes structured support and expanded access to services through its Extended Youth Support Services program, which allows youth to remain in or re-enter care through age 21. The state also provides enhanced postsecondary support, integrated housing options, and workforce programs that include paid work experience and career pathways. These approaches highlight the importance of re-entry flexibility, embedded supports, and coordination across systems.

Overall Findings

The most effective approaches are sustained, integrated, and relationship based. Outcomes improve when youth have access to stable housing, meaningful employment pathways, ongoing mental health support, and at least one committed adult connection.

While South Carolina provides a strong foundation, expanding these supports—particularly those that are long-term, flexible, and coordinated across systems—could significantly improve outcomes and promote greater stability and independence for youth transitioning out of foster care.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the strengths, challenges, and outcome gaps identified in Questions 2 and 3, the South Carolina Citizen Review Panels recommend the following actions to strengthen the effectiveness, consistency, and long-term impact of transition services for foster youth:

1. **Strengthen youth engagement in transition planning** by continuing the use of Bridge Navigators and Transitional Youth Advocates, ensuring that youth are actively involved in goal setting and decision-making. Increased engagement is critical to improving outcomes in education, employment, and long-term stability.
2. **Enhance and standardize training for foster care case managers** on transition services and supports to improve consistency in service delivery and reduce gaps between policy and practice identified across regions.
3. **Expand and formalize partnerships with community-based organizations** to increase access to transitional housing, post-secondary education supports, and workforce development opportunities, particularly those that lead to sustained employment and housing stability.
4. **Develop and strengthen targeted partnerships with ABLE South Carolina and similar organizations** to ensure youth with disabilities receive specialized, coordinated supports that address barriers to independence and long-term stability.
5. **Expand access to structured, ongoing life skills programming** by implementing regular workshops or programs aligned with the Casey Life Skills Assessment, with incentives to promote participation. Emphasis should be placed on practical application of skills to better support financial stability and independent living outcomes.
6. **Distribute the SC CRP informational pamphlet to family court judges** for use with older youth in foster care with a permanency plan of APPLA, to improve awareness of available services and supports and strengthen connections between youth and resources.

Implementation of these recommendations may strengthen the consistency and coordination of transition services, enhance youth engagement, and improve long-term outcomes in education, employment, housing stability, and overall well-being for youth transitioning out of foster care.

FRONT (OUTSIDE)

YOU HAVE GOALS.

We're here to help you reach them.

- Finish school.
- Get a great job.
- Find a safe place to live.
- Build a strong support system.
- Live a healthy, independent life.

You can do this!

BACK (INSIDE)

STARTING AT AGE 14

WE HELP YOU PLAN FOR YOUR FUTURE.

- Your caseworker will help you create a Transition Plan that fits your goals, including:
- Education & career plans
 - Housing goals
 - Health & wellness
 - Financial stability
 - Supportive relationships

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO THIS ALONE. WE'RE WITH YOU EVERY STEP OF THE WAY.



TRANSITION SERVICES

Ages 14-21

*Skills. Support. Opportunities.
Your Future. Your Way.*

SERVICES TO HELP YOU SUCCEED

EDUCATION SUPPORT

- Finish high school or GED
- College, trade school & vocational training
- ETV (Education & Training Voucher) funding

EMPLOYMENT & CAREER PREP

- Resume & interview help
- Job training & career exploration
- Connections to SC Works

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- Start-up funds & stipends
- Help with school, work, and living expenses
- Budgeting & financial skills

HOUSING SUPPORT

- Supervised independent living (SIL)
- Help with rent, deposits & utilities
- Find and keep safe housing

HEALTH & WELLNESS

- Medical coverage until age 26
- Physical & mental health services

TRANSPORTATION & DAILY NEEDS

- Bus passes, driver's ed
- ID, birth certificate & other essential items

WE'VE GOT YOUR BACK.

South Carolina DSS provides services and support to help you prepare for independent living and a bright future.

YOU CHOOSE.
You have choices and a voice in your plan.

YOU MATTER.
We treat you with respect and believe in your potential.

YOU CAN SUCCEED.
With the right tools and support, you can reach your goals.

**Start early.
Stay connected.
Use your supports.
You got this!**

EXTENDED FOSTER CARE (18-21)

You can choose to stay in care after 18 if you:

- Are in school or working
- Participate in a program that supports employment

You'll continue to receive:

- Housing support
- Financial assistance
- Case management & guidance

AFTERCARE SERVICES

Even after you leave care, we can help with:

- Referrals for housing & jobs
- Short-term financial or counseling support

*Your Future. Your Way.
We're here for you.*

NEED HELP OR MORE INFORMATION?
Talk to your DSS caseworker or visit
dss.sc.gov





HENRY McMASTER, GOVERNOR
TONY CATONE, STATE DIRECTOR

June 25, 2026

Ms. Sharon Walker
South Carolina Citizen's Review Panel Coordinator
Children's Law Center, Joseph F. Rice School of Law
1600 Gervais Street
Columbia, South Carolina 229208

Dear Ms. Walker and the esteemed members of the SC Citizens Review Panel,

Below are our responses to the recommendations outlined in the CRP Annual Report:

1. Strengthen youth engagement in transition planning by continuing the use of Bridge Navigators and Transitional Youth Advocates, ensuring that youth are actively involved in goal setting and decision-making. Increased engagement is critical to improving outcomes in education, employment, and long-term stability.

The agency's transition framework is grounded in a commitment to authentic, youth-centered engagement. Our desired outcome is that Youth and Young Adults maintain meaningful relationships, experience stability, and enter adulthood with preparation, connection, and sustained support. Youth voice is prioritized at every stage of planning and decision-making. Planning is conducted with youth rather than for them, and this principle is reinforced throughout our training modules and practice expectations.

Youth-centered engagement is embedded in core job responsibilities. Staff are expected to deliver empathetic case management, maintain consistent and purposeful contact, and partner with young adults to develop individualized, strength-based transition plans. Tools such as the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) assessment support this collaborative planning process. Staff also facilitate access to community resources, strengthen connections with family and kin, and prepare youth and team members for Young Adult Transitional Teaming to ensure goals and next steps remain youth-driven.

Bridge Navigators play a critical role in advancing youth engagement across the agency. They collaborate with county and regional staff to ensure teens and young adults (ages 14–18) receive timely assessments, transition planning, and team meeting support. Their responsibilities include elevating youth voice, encouraging Extension of Foster Care enrollment, sharing available benefits, and facilitating services that promote education, career development, relational permanency, and overall self-sufficiency.

The continued use of Bridge Navigators and Transitional Youth Advocates reinforces the agency's commitment to a transition system in which youth remain at the center of planning, decision-making, and long-term success.

2. Enhance and standardize training for foster care case managers on transition services and supports to improve consistency in service delivery and reduce gaps between policy and practice identified across regions.

Agency staff are currently trained on policy, practice expectations, and required standards to ensure accountability. Current training modules incorporate updated transition-related policies, including Transition Planning, Aftercare, Extension of Foster Care, Young Adult Transitional Teaming, and Fair Hearings.

The existing Adolescent Development Professional Track further strengthens staff competency by covering Youth Thrive, adolescent brain development, transformational relationships, permanency for older youth, and building supportive networks.

As part of our ongoing commitment to excellence, the agency is consistently seeking ways to better prepare staff to meet the demanding needs of the families we are trusted to serve. We work closely with our training area to identify emerging needs and determine the most effective ways to meet those needs. This collaborative approach ensures that any additional training opportunities are aligned with statewide priorities, grounded in best practice, and responsive to the realities case managers face.

Through this partnership, we will continue strengthening the consistency between policy and practice across regions; staff readiness for transition-related responsibilities; opportunities for targeted skill development; and supportive professional learning pathways

This approach reinforces the agency's commitment to a unified, well-prepared workforce capable of delivering high-quality transition services to youth and young adults statewide.

3. Expand and formalize partnerships with community-based organizations to increase access to transitional housing, post-secondary education supports, and workforce development opportunities, particularly those that lead to sustained employment and housing stability.

The agency has already taken meaningful steps in this direction by hosting Community Conversations in every region, bringing together community-based organizations to strengthen collaboration and expand available supports. These conversations have helped identify local resources, elevate youth voice, and reinforce the shared responsibility communities hold in supporting young people transitioning from care.

This work is further supported by the paper "Caring for Youth in Foster Care: A Community Approach," authored by YEA! leaders Majd Abdallah and Jasmine Shuler, which outlines practical strategies

communities can use to better assist youth during their transition to adulthood. Their insights build on regional discussions and highlight the importance of coordinated, community-driven support.

The agency maintains ongoing partnerships with organizations such as Pendleton Place, Trent Hill Center, Growing Hope, and Rose Leaf Foundation, each of which contributes to expanding access to transitional housing, post-secondary education supports, and workforce development opportunities. These relationships help ensure youth and young adults have pathways to stability, skill-building, and long-term success.

In addition, the DSS Workforce Team provides direct support to youth and young adults who need employment assistance, helping them build job readiness skills, connect with employers, and pursue opportunities that lead to sustained employment and economic stability.

As part of our ongoing commitment to preparing youth for a self-sufficient life, the agency will continue to explore meaningful partnerships with organizations specializing in transitional housing, education, and workforce development. This includes identifying gaps, strengthening collaboration, and expanding access to services that address the complex needs of youth and young adults.

Through these efforts, the agency reinforces its dedication to ensuring every young person has the support, relationships, and opportunities needed to thrive in adulthood.

4. Develop and strengthen targeted partnerships with ABLE South Carolina and similar organizations to ensure youth with disabilities receive specialized, coordinated supports that address barriers to independence and long-term stability.

The agency has a long-standing working relationship with ABLE South Carolina, and this partnership continues to play a critical role in helping youth with disabilities achieve stability and, when possible, self-sufficiency.

Recently, ABLE SC was formally integrated into our Family Resource Connection and Prevention Services (FRCPS) structure. This upstream approach allows us to better identify and address challenges before they progress to foster care, ensuring families receive meaningful, disability-informed support early and consistently. This close working relationship has resulted in a partnership that directly impacts the lives of many families served by DSS, strengthening access to coordinated services and improving outcomes for youth with disabilities.

The agency is consistently looking for ways to improve the lives of youth and young adults by leveraging all available resources aligned with accepted best practice. We will continue to explore opportunities to deepen our collaboration with ABLE SC and other disability-focused organizations to ensure the complex needs of youth and young adults are addressed comprehensively. Our goal is to ensure all avenues are explored to support each young person in our care and to prepare them for a safe, stable, and self-sufficient future.

5. Expand access to structured, ongoing life skills programming by implementing regular workshops or programs aligned with the Casey Life Skills Assessment, with incentives to promote participation. Emphasis should be placed on practical application of skills to better support financial stability and independent living outcomes.

The agency currently offers multiple workshops aligned with NYTD categories, including employment readiness, housing readiness, college readiness, cooking, self-care, healthy relationships, and financial and safety topics. Youth also receive participation stipends for completing life skills activities, reinforcing engagement and supporting practical skill development.

Partnerships with Clemson University further enhance these efforts by providing leadership development opportunities that strengthen confidence, communication, and long-term goal setting. In addition, the CANS assessment now includes an Independent Living module for youth ages 14–21, and provider contracts identify the Casey Life Skills Assessment as the preferred tool for assessing strengths and needs in preparation for adulthood.

The agency is consistently looking for ways to improve the lives of youth and young adults by leveraging all available resources aligned with accepted best practice. This includes ensuring that every avenue is explored to support each youth or young adult in our care as they build the skills needed for a self-sufficient future.

By continuing to explore meaningful relationships with community organizations and strengthening structured life skills programming, the agency reaffirms its commitment to preparing youth and young adults for safe, stable, and self-sufficient lives.

6. Distribute the SC CRP informational pamphlet to family court judges for use with older youth in foster care with a permanency plan of APPLA, to improve awareness of available services and supports and strengthen connections between youth and resources.

The agency welcomes the use of high-quality informational materials that help support our youth and young adults as they transition from care, and the pamphlet provides a strong source of valuable, accessible information that can reinforce connections between youth and critical resources.

To ensure consistency across agency communications, we would need to receive an editable version of the pamphlet. This will allow us to work with our communications team to confirm that the language aligns with current policy, practice expectations, and programming standards, and that terminology remains consistent with other agency documents. Once aligned, the pamphlet may be used as an effective tool for increasing awareness and strengthening resource connections.

We look forward to our continued partnership with the Citizens Review Panel and sincerely appreciate your unwavering support. Your commitment to excellence and community well-being is inspiring and a shared vision. Together, we can and will achieve meaningful progress, and we look forward to what this new year will bring.

Again, thank you for your partnership and valuable contributions to the Department and the children and families we serve.

Should you have any questions please contact Jan Nerud at jan.nerud@dss.sc.gov

Sincerely,

Dawn Barton

Dawn T. Barton
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Director of Policy and Engagement
South Carolina Department of Social Services