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September 16, 2020 - NJ DCF to Launch LifeSet Program for Older Youth in Foster Care

NJ DCF TO LAUNCH LIFESET PROGRAM FOR OLDER YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

Initiative to be Funded by Philanthropic and Federal Funds; Will Ensure Youth are Prepared for Life Beyond Foster Care

TRENTON – As part of an innovative public-private partnership, the New Jersey Department of Children and Families announced today that it will be launching the LifeSet program on October 1. LifeSet, a program of Youth Villages is a nationally recognized, evidence informed social services intervention providing older youth in foster care and young adults exiting New Jersey's foster care system with vital life skills development and relationship coaching to facilitate success in adulthood. Services are available to transition-age youth when family reunification was not possible, and a permanent home was not found.

"The ability to form and maintain strong connections to friends, family and community is vital to the success of every one of us. In child welfare, we strive to support young people's development of their network of caring connections, so that they have a loving, stable relationship to turn to for support after transitioning out of the foster care system," said NJ DCF Commissioner Christine Norbut Beyer, MSW. "The LifeSet model of services for transition-age youth is a proven intervention that provides life skills and healthy relationship coaching through individualized interventions and supports to achieve positive results and promote independent living. We're looking forward to partnering with Youth Villages and the NJ provider community to welcome the LifeSet model into New Jersey, to ensure that youth exiting our care have a safe, stable launchpad into adulthood."

The LifeSet program model is an evidence-based intervention for aging out youth developed by Youth Villages, a national non-profit organization dedicated to working with youth and families. Since 1999, the LifeSet program has assisted more than 20,000 young people between the ages of 17 and 22 who were aging out of State custody or other care arrangements to successfully transition to independence. Through philanthropic support from several donors, including Blue Meridian Partners, a partnership of major US philanthropies, and utilizing matching federal funds, Youth Villages has been able to expand the number of jurisdictions piloting the LifeSet program model via a competitive funding award. New Jersey will be the 18th jurisdiction in the United States to adopt the LifeSet program model.

"Youth Villages brings a wealth of expertise to ensure that services are consistent and rooted in results," said Marc Cherna, Director of the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, which has already adopted LifeSet. "They are invested in having strong partnerships and achieving positive outcomes for youth. In Allegheny County, we use the LifeSet model to engage youth transitioning out of foster care who want help meeting their goals. LifeSet helps youth discern what they want to achieve by setting specific goals and breaking down how to take each step on their path to adulthood."

"The Youth Villages LifeSet program is proving to be an asset for the DC Child and Family Services Agency," said Washington, DC Child and Family Services Agency Director Brenda Donald. "To date, LifeSet Specialists have served 70 youth in this voluntary program since its inception in 2019. In the past year, program participants have shown a 100% reduction rate in illegal activities, with outcomes of 84% of youth reengaging in school or completing an educational program. Survey and reports show youth reporting feeling heard, respected, and empowered by their participation in the program. We are glad to have added the YV LifeSet model to our Office of Youth Empowerment team!"

Through the LifeSet funding award, four contracted program partners in New Jersey – Acenda, Preferred Behavioral Health, Catholic Charities Diocese of Metuchen and Care Plus – will each serve a cohort of 40 youth currently open with the Division of Child Protection and Permanency and preparing to age out of New Jersey's foster care system. Youth participants will receive LifeSet intensive case management services weekly. Services will be offered in the community and tailored to individual needs of youth and their identified goals. According to an independent review of the outcomes from the LifeSet program, youth that have participated in the program in other states were more likely to achieve stable housing, better economic security and stronger interpersonal relationships, and reported better mental health, employment and earnings.

"We are excited to further support youth and young adults in New Jersey through this new collaboration with DCF and Youth Villages" said Dr. Anthony DiFabio, President & CEO, Acenda. "LifeSet is a much-needed resource, as it helps individuals overcome the many challenges of their past and successfully transition into adulthood. Our mission is to ensure that every individual, family and community achieves their greatest potential, and this partnership amplifies our ability to move even more lives forward."

"CarePlus has over 40 years of experience as a behavioral health provider. We have worked in partnership with DCF for over 20 years, offering a wide variety of specialty programs in our continuum of care," stated Joseph Masciandaro, President and CEO at CarePlus NJ. "Our team understands the level of need, and the challenges that these young adults face. We value the importance of this project and well prepared to work with Youth Villages in providing care coordination and social support services."

The launch of the LifeSet program comes at a time when the Department of Children and Families is focused on adopting evidence-based and evidence-supported approaches to child welfare. These approaches more reliably produce results for children and families, and generally demonstrate better return on investment. Through this public-private

partnership with Youth Villages, the Department will be able to support transition-age youth at no additional cost to the DCF budget.

"COVID-19 has put pressure on social services organizations to step up for the people we serve, even while fewer resources are available to support them," said NJ DCF Commissioner Beyer. "Through this innovative philanthropic-government partnership, we can improve critical services at a time they're needed most while being fiscally responsible."

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