
Background and Waiver Overview

Over the past several years the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF), in collaboration with the Department of Mental Health (DMH) has been working to redesign our congregate care system. The Department plans to begin purchasing residential and community-based services as a closely integrated array of services. As we will describe on the pages that follow, this new system offers families continuity of services and service providers whether a child is in a residential program “bed” or receiving services in their community, in order to better support community transitions and strengthen child and caretaker capacity.

This reform was initiated by the families we serve. Through family and youth engagement, we learned that families tired of telling their stories again and again ***and they want continuity and consistency in those who work with them.*** With the goal of meeting this need for families, the Department first looked within its own case practice model and implemented changes that minimize the number of staff assignments during the life of a family’s involvement with DCF. The Department then looked to the Building Bridges Initiative, as well as research in positive youth development and trauma informed systems of care, to reform the service provider system.

Together, DCF and DMH plan to:

- Jointly design, price, and procure residential program models that best support child, family, and system outcomes and incorporate family and youth engagement;
- Implement a structure for cross agency governance, administration and operations of residential services that supports future integration with home and community-based services; and
- Implement performance-based contracts that utilize fiscal incentives where feasible to leverage desired outcomes.

Significant planning, inter-agency collaboration, and stakeholder engagement has already occurred; therefore the Department is prepared to implement the new system over the next 6-12 months. In addition to traditional residential program services, the new service system will offer four new services: Follow Along, Stepping Out, Continuum, and Family Partners, all of which aim to improve transitions into the community, strengthen child and caretaker capacity, and improve continuity of care.

1. Description of the waiver project

Despite Massachusetts being a leader in the development of structures and processes to better coordinate services to create a more seamless service delivery system, Massachusetts Health and Human Services Agencies still have to employ micro-level service coordination strategies to surmount the institutionalized fragmentation of the system that is a consequence of categorical funding streams, separate regulatory requirements, and unique State Agency mandates. When multiplied by the number of state agencies and services that a family may encounter in their journey toward wellness, it is understandable that they are experiencing the system as fragmented. The chief complaint of families is that they have to tell their story over and over, and re-educate each service provider about their history and their strengths and needs. A more efficient way to achieve system integration (greater continuity of