



VOLUNTARY EXTENSION OF CARE PROGRAM



Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families

VOLUNTARY EXTENSION OF CARE

The Voluntary Extension of Care (VEC) Program supports young adults in DCYF care at age 18 who want continued help as they begin their adult lives. Any young adults who left DCYF care when they were 18 who wants to come back to DCYF is welcome to do so as long as they are under 21.

The VEC program's goal is to support young people in becoming self-sufficient, independent, and thriving adults. The program is youth-driven where the young adult, with the assistance of a social case worker, works on setting their own goals for housing, education, employment, emotional support systems, and future success. DCYF provides financial assistance for housing as well as money to help with the youth's personal needs throughout their participation in this program.

DCYF's VEC staff works with others to aid young adults who choose to participate in the VEC program with this transition and to provide access to other supports and services.

How Young Adults Are Identified

Referrals to the VEC program are initiated by the youth's social case worker and reviewed for meeting the program criteria. Once a determination as to acceptance is made, an intake meeting is scheduled with the youth, the social case worker and appropriate providers, and natural supports. If there is missing information and/or concerns with the referral packet, VEC works with the Family Services Unit (FSU) team to address it and begin planning.

Any young adult interested in re-entering DCYF care can contact Denise Zolnierz, Joan Harmon, or call DCYF's Family Support Line. Others making referrals can also reach out to these contacts.

Denise Zolnierz

Casework Supervisor
Hours: M-F, 11am-6:30pm
Denise.Zolnierz@dcyf.ri.gov
(401) 528-3895

Joan Harmon

Regional Director,
Joan.Harmon@dcyf.ri.gov
(401) 528-3745

DCYF Family Support Line

1-888-743-2659

Who is Eligible for VEC?

Any young adult who was in DCYF care on their 18th birthday is eligible for the VEC program until they reach age 21. This includes any youth who may have left DCYF care and now wishes to return.

The VEC Administrator and VEC Supervisor review any referrals made to the program with FSU administrators as needed. VEC staff then follow-up with the assigned DCYF direct services staff and young adult to arrange an initial meeting with any others involved in with the youth to discuss the program and determine how to proceed. As this is intended to be a youth driven process, the focus is on helping the young adult determine how they want to proceed. Youth who participate in VEC will be assigned to a VEC social worker who will be available to assist them in reaching their goals. DCYF provides financial assistance for housing as well as money to help with the youth's personal needs throughout their participation in this program.

To participate in VEC*, a young adult must be one of the following:

- In the care of DCYF due to a dependency, neglect, or abuse petition on the young adult's 18th birthday, and must voluntarily agree to participate,
- 18-20 years old and was in the care of DCYF due to abuse, neglect, or a dependency petition on their 18th birthday and is now closed to DCYF and is voluntarily agreeing to again be supervised by DCYF and the Rhode Island Family Court through the VEC program,
- 18-20 years old and was in the care of DCYF on their 18th birthday and had been a VEC participant but participation ended. The young adult may voluntarily agree to re-open with DCYF to participate in VEC,
- A young adult adopted or placed in legal guardianship from DCYF care on or after the youth's 16th birthday and – after turning 18 and before turning 21 – the young adult's relationship with their adoptive home or guardian was disrupted so the young adult can no longer live with them.

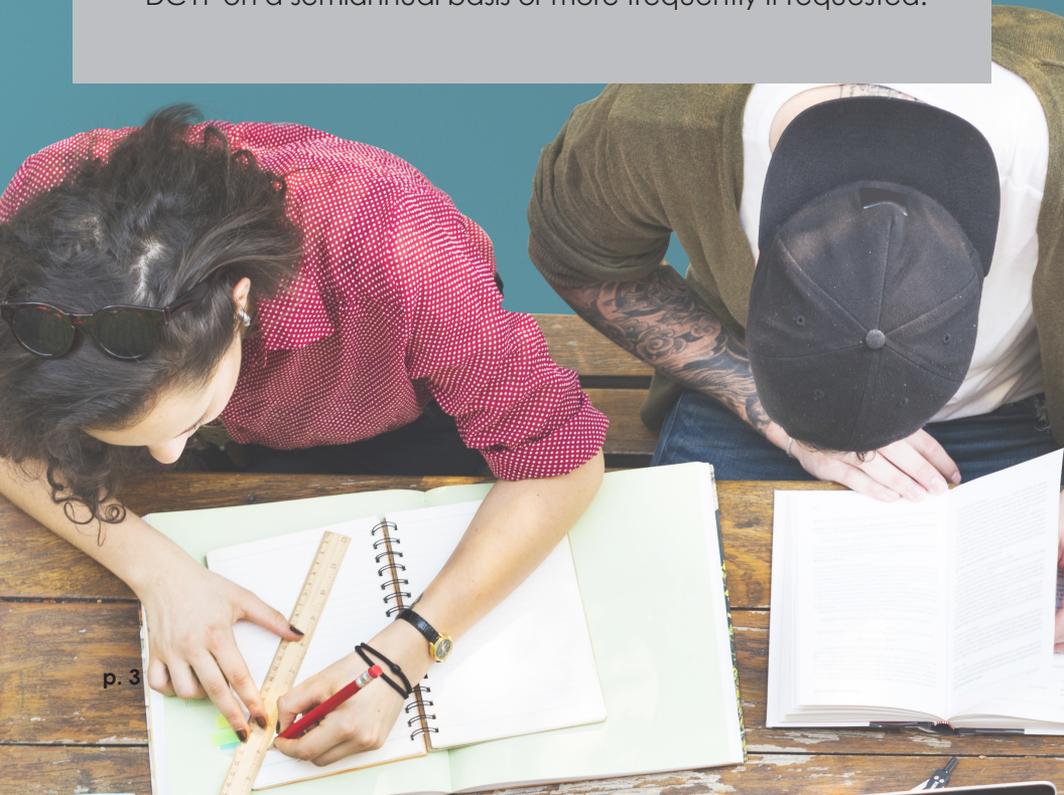
**Young adults who choose to participate in VEC are open or re-opened to DCYF for care and placement services and are under the supervision of the Rhode Island Family Court.*

Young Adult Responsibilities

Before becoming a VEC participant, young adults will review and sign an “*Agreement for Participation in the DCYF VEC Program,*” which outlines expectations for participation.

To be part of the VEC program, young adults are responsible for continuing their education and pursuing career opportunities that support their long-term goals. Young adults who participate must meet and maintain at least one of the following requirements:

- Continue attending high school or an alternative program if they have not received a high school diploma or equivalent (e.g., GED);
- Be enrolled and participating in a college or vocational program;
- Be enrolled and participating in a job training program or an activity designed to remove barriers to employment;
- Be working a paid job at least 80 hours per month; or
- Have an approved medical waiver from DCYF based on the recommendation of a medical professional. Documentation from a licensed medical professional must be provided to DCYF on a semiannual basis or more frequently if requested.

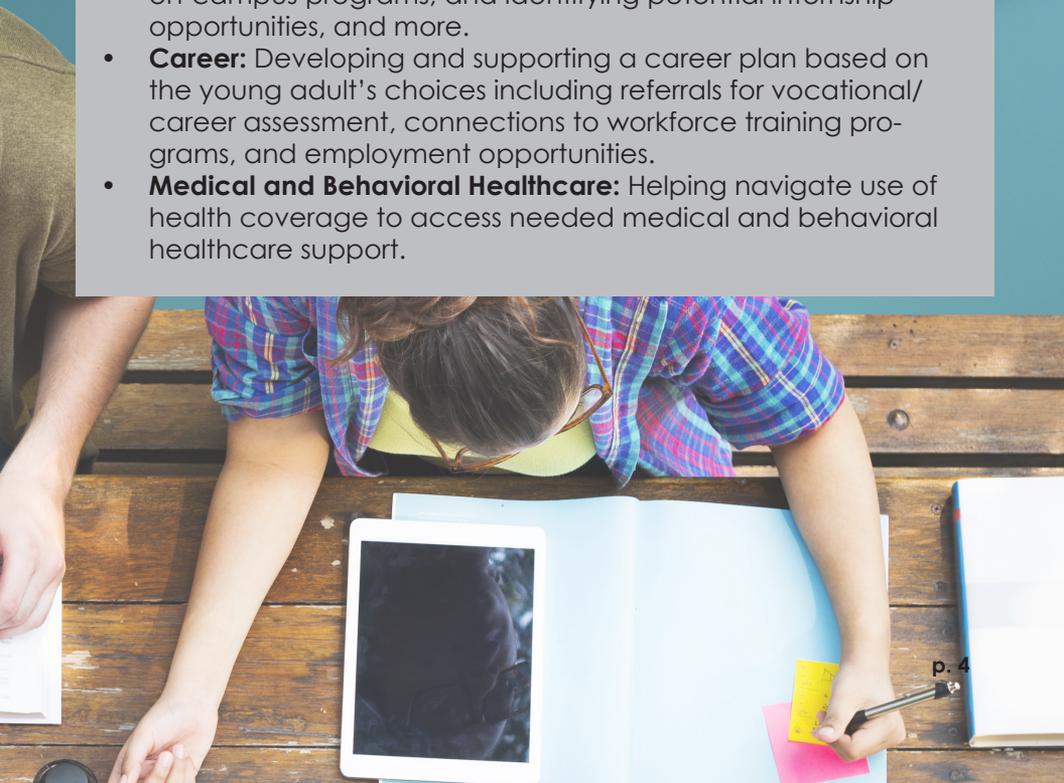


What Youth Can Expect from VEC

The VEC program will support young adults by providing support for and access to housing, education, employment, medical and behavioral health care, and other benefits and services. Each young adult will have a VEC caseworker who will work with the young adult and help them be prepared to live independently at age 21.

Young adults will receive guidance and assistance with:

- **Transitioning:** Developing and implementing a transition plan.
- **Housing:** Identifying, securing, and maintaining an appropriate supervised living arrangement (SLA).
- **Financial:** Cash assistance for help with rental costs and assistance with daily living expenses.
- **Benefits and Supports:** Accessing other supportive services for which the young adult might be eligible such as SNAP, cash assistance, heating assistance, WIC, Child Care Assistance Program, and more.
- **Education:** VEC will work with the young person to identify educational needs and goals. Supports can include educational planning, applying for college financial aid, accessing on-campus programs, and identifying potential internship opportunities, and more.
- **Career:** Developing and supporting a career plan based on the young adult's choices including referrals for vocational/career assessment, connections to workforce training programs, and employment opportunities.
- **Medical and Behavioral Healthcare:** Helping navigate use of health coverage to access needed medical and behavioral healthcare support.



Enhanced Case Management

VEC caseworkers will help VEC participants navigate many situations and needs. Potential additional supports include but are not limited to:

- Accessing workforce assessments and career development opportunities to ensure employment stability,
- Housing support, including effective tenant/ landlord communication,
- Developing and effectively utilizing skills to address identified relationship issues, including challenges with roommates, family members, friends, and significant others, and
- Assistance accessing and effectively utilizing a range of community-based supports and services, including services offered by private or other public agencies to aid the young adult in living independently in the community.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Where can VEC participants live?

VEC participants can live in the home of a supportive adult (i.e. former foster parent, relative, or mentor), an apartment with roommates, an apartment with a spouse/partner, an apartment on their own, or a dormitory. These must be supervised and approved by the DCYF VEC caseworker.

What does it mean to be supervised?

The VEC Program requires the young adult to live in a Supervised Living Arrangement (SLA). This means the assigned DCYF VEC caseworker provides regular supervision (visits to the home and check-ins with the young adult), another agency provides supervision, supervision is provided by the adult supporter (for example a kinship parent) with whom the young adult lives, or a Resident Advisor in a dormitory may provide supervision.

Why do young adults have to be supervised where they live?

State and federal law require VEC participants to live in supervised settings but gives DCYF some latitude in deciding what that means. The assigned VEC caseworker will be visiting with and checking the home of the young adult at least once a month. Visits may be either announced or unannounced.

Can the young adults live anywhere they want?

Their choice is important. However, DCYF has to approve their choice. Cash assistance amounts are dependent on the amount needed to equally share costs with others sharing the rental.

Can young adults live with anyone they want?

Within reason, yes. DCYF will make the final approval and may require background checks.

FAQs continued...

Can young adults live with their partner or spouse?

Yes, but partners and spouses will be expected to cover their proportional share of rent and utilities. Anyone the young adult lives with must also be aware a caseworker will come visit the home at least one time each month.

What help will young adults get for rent and utilities from DCYF?

First, VEC will prioritize an affordable supervised living arrangement for young adults. Whether young adults will be living in an apartment with a roommate(s) or independently, our goal is to find housing with utilities included.

Do young adults have to stay in VEC until they turn 21 years old?

No. Young adults may decide to leave programming. The VEC caseworker will discuss this decision with the young adult, and if desired, their attorney. Together, they may decide what to communicate with the RI Family Court. The RI Family Court must release all participants from the program. At the same time, if young adults don't uphold their responsibilities, DCYF may ask the RI Family Court to discharge the young adult from the program if they no longer meet eligibility requirements. The court may also make an independent decision at any time.

If a young adult leaves, can they come back?

Yes, young adults who were in DCYF care on their 18th birthday, and who are not yet 21, can come back into the VEC program. Previous participants can contact VEC to meet and discuss re-entry to programming. Caseworkers should ask why release was originally given and motivations for returning to VEC. Young adults will have to sign a new VEC agreement and DCYF will ask the RI Family Court to allow the young adult to re-enter programming. If approved, the young adult will have the same expectations as any other participant.

What happens when young adults leave the program?

DCYF helps young adults plan for this future event. If young adults leave programming quickly without much notice, it will be difficult to have a quality plan prepared for departure. Ideally, young adults will be active participants in planning. The Department's goal is for all young adults to be adequately prepared when the time comes to exit VEC programming.

Do young adults get medical insurance?

Young adults in DCYF care - living in a foster home, group home, or independent living arrangement, or another residential program - on their 18th birthday continue to be eligible for and receive Medicaid insurance until their 26th birthday as long as they remain a Rhode Island resident. Young adults must ensure their address is up to date with the state's Medicaid office (a letter is sent to their address once a year and requires a response). Youth can speak to their social workers regarding contacting their assigned eligibility tech to confirm medical status until the age of 26. Youth not eligible for Chafee can contact the Department of Health Services at 1-855-840-4774 with questions about health coverage, or the DHS Call Center at 1-855-MY-RIDHS (1-855-697-4347).

What happens when a young adult is struggling with behavioral health issues and cannot maintain their education or work program?

DCYF understands young adults sometimes struggle with behavioral health issues and may need additional assistance. VEC caseworkers will work to help identify and access resources which may include Enhanced Case Management services.

How does VEC support young or expecting parents?

VEC staff work with participants to identify and access supportive resources in the community. For pregnant and/or parenting young adults, this may include help with accessing services such as home visiting services, prenatal and perinatal services, WIC, Early Intervention and Head Start/Early Head Start services.



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