



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New Bridges Program to Help Former Foster Youth Achieve Independence

COLUMBUS, OHIO – A new program launching this week will help former foster youth more successfully transition to independence, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and the Child and Family Health Collaborative of Ohio announced. The voluntary program, called Bridges, extends housing and other supportive services to eligible young adults who leave foster care on or after their 18th birthday but are not yet 21.

“Few of us have the skills, tools and wisdom we need to live on our own and make informed career decisions when we turn 18,” said Cynthia Dungey, director of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS), which is administering Bridges through a contract with the Child and Family Health Collaborative of Ohio. “Bridges will provide the helping hand many youth need during an often turbulent time. It will help former foster youth become successful, self-sufficient adults.”

The Collaborative is working in partnership with local service-providing agencies that have demonstrated expertise in helping young adults transition from the child welfare system to adulthood. Through regular meetings with Bridges representatives, participants will develop goals, learn skills and access services related to everything from employment and education to health care and household maintenance.

“We are proud to have been selected by ODJFS to support these young adults on their journey into adulthood,” said Mark Mecum, CEO of the Collaborative, which is part of the Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies. “We’re committed to working with the young adults to help them achieve their education, career and life goals.”

To be eligible, former foster youth must be in school, working, participating in an employment program, or have a medical condition that prevents them from going to school or working. If they don’t qualify for Bridges, or if they choose not to participate, they still can seek supportive services from their county public children services agency. Ohio’s county agencies are required to provide services and supports to 18-, 19- and 20-year-olds who aged out of foster care and who request help. Ideally, these services will help youth become eligible for Bridges so they can get additional supports toward independence.

Bridges was made possible by Gov. John R. Kasich’s signing of Substitute House Bill 50 in 2016. For more information about the program, visit bridgestosuccess.jfs.ohio.gov.