

# The Creative Opportunities Grant

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We are in the fourth year of offering the Creative Opportunities Grants! The Collaborative Youth Committee (CYC) is looking for your innovative, progressive ideas to address the issues facing youth in care or youth transitioning from care. Research has shown that these young people face barriers in the areas of employment, education, housing, physical, dental and mental health, personal and community engagement, and permanency and family connections. Now is your chance to be part of the solutions to these challenges!

Young people in care or in transition from care direct and manage the Creative Opportunities Grant priorities and processes. The intention of the 2012 grants is to support innovative projects and partnerships that assist youth in care and the systems that serve them—we encourage agencies, businesses, schools, individuals, and other organizations to propose projects that work creatively with and for these young people. The partners in the Creative Opportunities Grant process include:

***The Maine Youth Transition Collaborative (MYTC)** is a public/private partnership that works at the state and local levels to increase opportunities and improve outcomes for young people aging out of the foster care system. The Collaborative recognizes that young people have a better chance of succeeding if they have strong support from their communities; and if systems partners – both public and private – are best informed of the needs by those young people themselves. There are numerous partners involved with this collaborative around the state, such as Jobs for Maine’s Graduates (JMG), LL Bean, Bangor Savings Bank, Common Good Ventures (CGV), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Casey Family Services, and Hannaford. Key funders are the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative and Maine’s DHHS.*

***The Collaborative Youth Committee (CYC) of MYTC** brings together youth from around the state to direct and manage the Creative Opportunities Grant process and increase opportunities and resources for young people in transition from foster care. The CYC members work in partnership with public/private partners and adult supporters.*

***The Youth Leadership Advisory Team (YLAT)** is an innovative approach to creating change, centered on engaging current or former youth in foster care in partnership with all levels of the system. State and child welfare agencies actively seek the infusion of youth voice in staff development, policy initiatives, and program assessment to understand the full experience of consumers. YLAT members, ages 15-21, and adult partners work to improve outcomes for youth in foster care with a sense of duty, on behalf of all future youth who will come in contact with the system. Maine’s YLAT boasts a portfolio of achievements that includes the passage of legislation, the development and revision of child welfare agency policies, and the development of national standards serving youth in care. [www.ylat.org](http://www.ylat.org)*

***Maine’s Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS)**, as part of the DHHS, joins with families and the community to promote long-term safety, well-being, and permanent families for children. OCFS believes that making children and families safe is a collaborative effort and so creates family teams, consisting of family, staff, and community members to find safe solutions for children. OCFS values listening to children and youth, believing their voices are to be heard, valued, and considered in decisions regarding their lives.*

Together, these partners invite you to apply for funding that will support the innovative projects and partnerships that will ultimately assist youth in care or in transition from care.

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## Priority Focus Areas

The priority for funding will be given to projects focused on creating resources for youth in the areas of employment, education, personal and community engagement, housing, physical, mental, and dental health, and permanency and family connections. Ideas for solutions are suggested below, although additional innovative project ideas are welcome.

### **Employment**

*Young people support themselves by obtaining and retaining steady employment.*

- Events and outreach (e.g., career fair)
- Education and skill development
- Apprenticeship and on the job training

### **Education**

*Young people acquire education and training to enable them to obtain and retain steady employment.*

- School-based initiatives that focus on careers
- Post-secondary education encouragement and assistance
- Initiatives to broaden awareness of education professionals and other youth re: foster care issues

### **Housing**

*Young people have safe, stable and affordable housing and have access to transportation to work and school.*

- Initiatives that reduce utility costs (heat, water, electricity) for youth in transition
- Foster care placements, houses, or apartments for youth in transition
- Initiatives related to transportation (e.g., driver's license support, driver's education, discounted bus tickets)

### **Physical, Dental, and Mental Health**

*Young people have access to physical, dental, and mental health care.*

- Outreach and education to promote awareness re: available health services and resources for youth
- Community-based initiatives that expand access to health care
- Expanded insurance coverage for youth in transition from care

### **Personal and Community Engagement**

*Young people have supportive relationships in the community to achieve their personal goals.*

- Volunteer opportunities for young people that connect them with the community
- Recreation and entertainment for youth
- Outreach and education to promote awareness of local community resources for youth.

### **Permanency and Family connections**

*Young people leave foster care with permanent and lifelong connections.*

- Mentoring opportunities
- Education and outreach to service providers to promote permanency with young people
- Initiatives that promote healthy relationships for young people