The Home for Little Wanderers’ Young Adult Resource Network (YARN), formed late in 2010, has become a place to turn to for many Boston youth who are still involved with the Department of Children and Families and who lack the resources to live self-sufficiently within their communities.

Almost all young people need a little encouragement – even inducement – to pay attention to their well-being, to think about what they want, and to make positive decisions that will help them in later life. Leaving “the nest” can be difficult even for youth from stable and supportive families. Those without any permanent family to rely upon are particularly at risk for poor outcomes such as homelessness, unemployment, incarceration, early pregnancy, and substance abuse. “Aging out” of state systems of care impacts approximately 600 youth in Massachusetts each year.

The Home for Little Wanderers is the nation’s oldest and one of New England’s largest nonprofit child and family service agencies, with roots dating back to 1799. The mission of The Home is to ensure the healthy behavioral, emotional, social and educational development and physical well-being of children and families living in at-risk circumstances. We achieve this through a series of integrated programs that include early childhood services, family-focused clinical therapy, special education, therapeutic residential and respite treatment, adoption, intensive foster care, and independent/transitional living.

With a staff of more than 600, a full continuum of care that can be accessed at any point based on need, and a commitment to advocacy, The Home touches the lives of thousands of children and families each year. Our programs are an integral part of the communities in which they reside and children and families can receive services in the locations that are most appropriate for them. This could be in their own home, or in a school, clinic, hospital or therapeutic residential setting.

The Home links policy, practice and program research to measure the impact of its work. What we learn helps us to develop and enhance our programs and supports our goal of being a strong voice for all children and families, not just the ones we serve directly.
About YARN

The Young Adult Resource Network (YARN) fosters resiliency and independence for youth aging out of the foster care system through building positive, trusting relationships, and connecting young adults to community resources in hopes they can lead fulfilling and productive lives.

YARN is a “wraparound” support program that assists youth involved with the Department of Children and Families, aged between 17 and 22, navigate the paths to living independently in their community.

The hub of the program is the Community Advocacy Center in Dorchester. The Center is a welcoming place where youth can choose to participate in activities such as skill-building workshops, do homework, access resources, connect with peers, or simply shower, do laundry, eat a healthy meal, check email or relax in the “family room.”

Above all, residents feel safe and supported by trained and caring Life Coaches who provide services tailored to each young person’s needs.

The Need

The statewide Task Force on Youth Aging Out of DCF Care, for which The Home is co-chair, commissioned the first-ever study of former foster youth in Massachusetts. Findings revealed that upon aging out in the commonwealth, these youth faced poverty, social problems, and homelessness:

- 37% reported experiencing homelessness
- 54% were unemployed
- 25% had been arrested and 8% had been incarcerated within the last 12 months
- 43% had been pregnant or fathered a child

YARN is the first program of its kind ever created to specifically address the needs faced by youth leaving the state systems of care and facing adulthood without adequate support systems and guidance.

The program is strengths-based, focused on resilience and rooted in empowering young people to take the lead in determining how to improve their own lives. Emphasis is placed on supportive relationship building that ensures positive growth through mentoring and referrals out in the community. YARN’s philosophy is grounded in the belief that these young people have been incredibly courageous throughout their young lives. This model is successful in attracting and engaging young people to the program.

Services and Areas of Assistance at YARN:

- Housing
- Health and wellness
- Substance abuse
- Educational growth
- Career and vocational choices
- Social skills
- Life skills
- Safety planning
- Recreational activities

In addition to the work at the Center, staff go out into the community to provide services where the youth reside.

Examples of activities and events offered at the Center:

- Computer lab
- Sound Production Studio
- Outings to see documentaries and theater
- Opportunities for advocacy work
- Presentations by local community agencies catering to the needs of this age group

Youth can be referred to the YARN program by their DCF social workers through the resource coordinators at their specific DCF area office. For more information on the program, please contact the Assistant Program Director at 617-287-0160.

The music studio (left) and the family room at the Center.