

# Graduation Rates Soar for Youth in Foster Care

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**ATLANTA** —This Spring, a record number of Atlanta-area youth graduated high school. While many pass this milestone with ease, it is often a challenge for youth in foster care. A local non-profit is partnering with a state agency to change that.

Since 2017, the Multi-Agency Alliance for Children (MAAC) has worked with the Georgia Division of Family & Children Services (DFCS) to administer the Learn, Educate, Achieve, Dream and Succeed (LEADS) program. This program provides wraparound educational support services to high school aged youth in care. It is focused on supporting grade promotion and graduation.

More than 1,500 youths have participated in the LEADS program, many of which have pursued post-secondary education. This year, an astounding 58% of graduating seniors are preparing for college with several others entering trade school, the military or the local workforce.

“We are tremendously proud of the young people in this program,” said Division Director, Tom Rawlings, “Their accomplishments demonstrate the power of education, mentorship and community support.”

Program participants recently celebrated their graduation with a parade that brought students and program leaders together for the first time since schools closed due to COVID-19. The caravan of vehicles traveled throughout metro-Atlanta so that each student could be celebrated in their community.

MAAC has been honored to work with DFCS to support these amazing young people on their journey to completing high school. **The 73% graduation rate proves how effective strategic, individualized support is for students in foster care. As one student said, “It really can change lives, it definitely helped me.”**

Even as we celebrate the success of this year’s graduates, leaders at both organizations are uncertain about the future of this initiative due to looming budget cuts for state fiscal year 2021. The DFCS Deputy Division Director of Strategy, Innovation & Engagement, Dahlia Bell-Brown, is working to identify opportunities for philanthropic entities to step in.

“This program plays an important role in our child welfare system, and we are committed to doing what we can to ensure it continues,” she says, “We are working closely with MAAC to pursue alternative funding sources that can serve as a bridge to maintain program operations until DFCS funding can be restored.”

As these graduates move on to the next phase of their lives, DFCS and MAAC are working to find ways for future youth in care can benefit from this program and others like it. High school graduates help build thriving communities and their accomplishments inspire others—particularly those in care—to persevere through difficult circumstances. To learn about how you can help ensure that youth in foster care receive educational support services visit: <https://www.maac4kids.org/> today.

### **About the Georgia Division of Family & Children Services**

DFCS administers foster care for children removed from their homes for their protection when they have been subjected to abuse and neglect. It is responsible for the investigation of reports of child abuse; recruitment of foster homes for abused and neglected children; issuance of SNAP, Medicaid, TANF and childcare assistance to low-income families; assistance for out-of-work parents to help them get back on their feet as well as multiple support services and programs to help families in need.

### **About the Multi-Agency Alliance for Children**

For over 20 years, the Multi-Agency Alliance for Children (MAAC) has addressed major areas of need for youth in foster care with innovative solutions through our network and collaboration with partners. The mission of the Multi-Agency Alliance for Children (MAAC) is to coordinate people, resources, information, and a network of quality providers to create positive outcomes for vulnerable youth and families. Our vision is that all youth impacted by child serving systems receive coordinated care and support to experience permanency and wellbeing.

The Multi-Agency Alliance for Children (MAAC)

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