



Independent Living Services

ANNUAL REPORT

Department of Children and Families

Office of Child and Family Well-Being

State Fiscal Year 2024-2025

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Table of Contents

PURPOSE	2
CONTRACT OVERSIGHT	3
Office of Quality and Innovation Targeted Reviews	4
Monthly FSFN Data Reports	5
National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD)	6
Financial Accountability	7
INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES OUTCOMES	8
Outcome Area 1: Improving Educational Attainment	10
Outcome Area 2: Increasing Connections	14
Outcome Area 3: Increasing Financial Self-Sufficiency	16
Outcome Area 4: Reducing Homelessness	19
Outcome Area 5: Reducing High-Risk Behavior	23
Outcome Area 6: Access to Health Insurance	24
SUPPORTS AND SERVICES	26
Office of Continuing Care	26
Child and Family Well-Being Council, Youth Subcommittee	27
Keys to Independence Program	27
APPEALS	28
RULE PROMULGATION	28
CONCLUSION	29
APPENDICES	29

Purpose

The Department of Children and Families (Department) provides intentional support and wrap-around services to young adults with lived foster care experience. Florida is proud to offer a comprehensive range of services and resources for youth and young adults transitioning to adulthood from foster care including Extended Foster Care, Postsecondary Education Services and Supports, and Aftercare Services. Through these services and resources, the Department has witnessed the resilience and potential of Florida's youth and young adults transitioning from foster care to adulthood.

This report provides accountability information for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-2025 on Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS) and Aftercare Services (Aftercare), referenced in section 409.1451(6), Florida Statutes (F.S.), as follows:

1. An analysis of performance on the outcome measures developed under this section reported for each Community-Based Care Lead Agency (Lead Agency).
2. A description of the Department's oversight of the program, including by the Lead Agency, any programmatic or fiscal deficiencies found, corrective actions required, and the status of compliance.
3. Any rules adopted or proposed under this section since the last report.

Although Extended Foster Care (EFC) is not referenced in section 409.1451(6), F.S., this report also provides outcome and oversight information for young adults continuing in foster care. The Department recognizes the entire umbrella of Independent Living programs as integral to ensuring the success of our young adults.

Postsecondary Education Services and Support s. 409.1451(2) F.S.

Eligible young adults ages 18-23 in Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS) receive \$1,720 per month and other supports necessary to become self-sufficient pursuant to section 409.1451(2), F.S. Eligibility for the program is established based on the young adult's legal custody status at age 18 or achieving permanency through adoption or permanent guardianship at ages 14-17 after a period of placement in licensed care. The expansion of PESS eligibility to include those who achieved permanency at 14 or 15 after 6 months in licensed care became effective July 1, 2024.

Young adults who experience an emergency while enrolled in PESS may use emergency assistance funds to help address the situation and minimize disruption to their participation in the program.

The federal John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood helps fund the program intended to secure participant housing and cover other living expenses necessary while the student is enrolled in a post-secondary education program. Initial eligibility requires students to be enrolled in nine credit hours or the vocational equivalent at a Florida Bright Futures approved school. Students must meet annual renewal criteria by achieving academic progress throughout the year. Some exceptions to credit hours and progress may apply to those students with a diagnosed disability or other recognized challenging circumstances. PESS

provides continued transitional and financial planning that includes assistance in meeting young adults current and future needs.

Aftercare Support Services s. 409.1451(3), F.S.

Aftercare Support Services is designed to be a temporary program that assists young adults in transitioning to self-sufficiency or in establishing eligibility for Extended Foster Care, PESS, Extended Guardianship Assistance Program or Extended Maintenance Adoption Subsidy. Young adults must have turned 18 in the Department's custody or licensed foster care; or have been in out of home care for at least 6 months after the age of 14 and not reunified. Young adults are eligible from the ages of 18 to 23 and must submit an Aftercare Application. A plan is developed with the young adult to identify the goal and establish a path to achieving the plan through identified services and tasks. This plan must be updated and reviewed every 3 months, at minimum.

Aftercare Services can include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Mentoring or tutoring
- Mental health or substance abuse services
- Life skills or parenting classes
- Job and Career skills training
- Temporary financial assistance
- Financial literacy skills training

Extended Foster Care s. 39.6251 F.S.

Eligible young adults have the option of remaining in foster care until age 21. If an eligible young adult has a documented disability that prevents full-time participation in a qualifying activity, the young adult may remain in foster care until age 22. Extended Foster Care (EFC) is a voluntary program for young adults who aged out of the Department's legal custody or were in licensed care on their 18th birthday. Participation requires enrollment in school, employment, or a work training program, and residence in a supervised living arrangement, in accordance with federal and state guidelines. Services include regular case management visits, case planning, transition planning, monitoring of life skills development, and judicial oversight. The program utilizes Title IV-E federal funds to help fund room and board and other allowable expenses such as childcare for young adults who are parenting, clothing for work or school, school supplies, and essential services needed to support the young adult's transition to independence.

Contract Oversight

The Department's contract with Lead Agencies includes expectations to administer all services for youth and young adults in and formerly in care in accordance with federal guidelines, Florida Statutes, Florida Administrative Code, and Operating Procedures. Florida has structured statutory requirements for EFC, PESS, and Aftercare around establishing eligibility, standards of progress, payment disbursement, due process, and appeals. Requirements in the Florida Administrative Code further detail the framework for how the array of Independent Living services is administered, including application and discharge procedures, transition planning, and documentation requirements.

Contract monitoring for the Independent Living population is conducted using multiple methods. Reviewing data from various sources helps strengthen the understanding of service effectiveness

across each outcome area. While most services for this population are delivered by Lead Agencies, each agency operates with a unique structure and approach to implementation. As a result, the Department must monitor overall quality using a range of data points. Measurement tools include quality reviews, data entry analysis, and youth and young adult surveys, which may be assessed individually at each Lead Agency based on their organizational structure.

Results of the various measurement tools outlined below are utilized in several ways in discussion and review with the Lead Agencies surrounding the quality of work and outcomes for the young adults served. After each round of the Office of Quality and Innovation Targeted Reviews, a virtual meeting is hosted by the Department's Youth and Young Adult Services Team along with the Office of Quality and Innovation targeted reviewers, the Lead Agency Independent Living Points of Contact and the Lead Agency Quality Review Teams. The purpose of the joint discussion is to review results on a statewide level, identify barriers, and discuss strategies for improvement. Data from the monthly Lead Agency reports sent from the Florida Safe Families Network is utilized by the Office of Quality and Innovation during contract monitoring with the Lead Agencies to address specific barriers to improving completion percentages. Outcome measurements are continuously reviewed directly with the field during bi-monthly statewide meetings for Independent Living as well as presented during bi-annual in-person training sessions.

Office of Quality and Innovation Targeted Reviews

The Department's Office of Quality and Innovation monitors performance by conducting regular case reviews and evaluating performance metrics. To better support young adults transitioning to adulthood, the Office of Quality and Innovation has collaborated with the Office of Continuing Care to include specific Independent Living questions related to the youth or young adult's life and case history. To ensure the success of young adults, a post-18 case review was created using the Quality Standards Review Guide developed by the Quality Standards Workgroup. The workgroup included input from various stakeholders. The first case review was launched in March 2023 and has served as a data collection tool for Lead Agencies and as a basis for future Department training and curriculum development.

The Office of Quality and Innovation conducted two targeted reviews of Independent Living services during FY 2024–25, in December 2024 and June 2025. Across both reviews, a total of 182 cases actively receiving services were reviewed. One of the most significant improvements during the year was increased accuracy in identifying cases for the review sample that were actively receiving services. The sample was drawn from the Young Adults Receiving Services (YARS) reports and depended on accurate Independent Living program data entry by CBC lead agencies and subcontracted agencies. During the June 2025 review, only 16 cases were excluded because the individuals were not actively enrolled in a program, compared to 45 exclusions during the December 2024 review. Continued improvements in data entry and sampling accuracy will support more reliable data and allow outcomes to be measured more effectively.

Overall, improvements were observed between the first and second review periods during the fiscal year, with the most notable gains seen in the frequency and quality of transition planning across all three Independent Living programs. Evaluations of transition plans for the EFC and PESS programs were nearly 100 percent compliant, compared to prior review scores in the 50–60 percent range.

The My Pathway to Success Plan serves as the central planning tool for young adults transitioning from foster care, functioning as a coordinated hub where services, including housing, education, employment, health, and life skills, come together to ensure each young adult has a clear and supported path forward. By streamlining access to services and fostering collaboration among providers, the plan supports youth in moving from surviving to thriving. The significant improvement in completion and quality of these plans reflects a higher level of service delivery for youth and young adults participating in Independent Living programs.

More detailed findings from the reviews are incorporated into the applicable outcome area sections below. In the upcoming fiscal year, the Department will continue to focus on improving all quality review areas, with particular emphasis on the frequency and quality of home visits for participants in Extended Foster Care.

Monthly Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) Data Reports

Additionally, monthly reports are sent to the lead agencies based on data entered to the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN). These reports analyze the completion percentages for target areas for each Lead Agency and determine a statewide completion rate. FY 2024-25 saw the first full fiscal year that Lead Agencies received detailed and analyzed reports for their agency in the following categories:

- Life Skill Assessments completed annually for EFC young adults ages 18-21
- Transition Plan Completion for young adults 18+ in an Independent Living Program
- Supportive Adult Connections for young adults 18+ in an Independent Living Program

The chart below presents statewide monthly averages for each measured area, along with an overall annual completion percentage. Transition planning completion rates began to be assessed for timeliness in January 2025. Lead Agencies received credit for completion only when transition plans had been completed within the previous six months.

The overall increase in completion rates indicates that Lead Agencies are not only improving compliance with regulatory timeframes, but also effectively using reports to support high-quality work with youth in foster care. Ongoing enhancements to monthly and on-demand reports, including improvements in accuracy, format, and thoroughness, continue to contribute to higher-quality services for youth and young adults. Table 1 below outlines the statewide monthly completion percentages for each area assessed through the Independent Living reports.

Table 1: Monthly Independent Living Report Statewide Completion Percentages

	Life Skill Assessments (EFC 18–21-year-olds)	Transition Plan Completion (18+)	Supportive Adult Connections
July 2024	31%	-	56%
August 2024	35%	-	54%
September 2024	37%	-	69%
October 2024	38%	-	70%
November 2024	44%	34%	72%

December 2024	50%	56%	75%
January 2025	51%	44%	77%
February 2025	56%	46%	76%
March 2025	56%	49%	78%
April 2025	59%	57%	81%
May 2025	64%	58%	82%
June 2025	64%	56%	80%
Annual	49%	50%	72%

National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD)

In 2010, the Administration for Children and Families established the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD), which requires states to comply with two distinct data collection activities:

1. Track the independent living services and supports provided to the youth and/or young adults identified in the state’s served population.
2. Collect outcomes information by directly surveying youth and young adults with the NYTD Outcome Survey.

Florida’s served population is defined as those youth and young adults who are between the ages of 13-22, who have received at least one independent living service during the six-month federal reporting period, regardless of their foster care status or placement type (a young adult who has reached age 23 is no longer considered part of the served population).

The NYTD Outcome survey was developed by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). The survey is part of a longitudinal study that established a “cohort” of young people to survey over a period-of-time. Each NYTD survey cohort is comprised of youth who completed the NYTD survey at age 17 and are surveyed again at ages 19 and 21. The ACF collects outcome information from each cohort across the following six domains: financial self-sufficiency, experience with homelessness, educational attainment, positive connections with adults, high-risk behavior, and access to health insurance. This report continues the focus of these domains with outcome measurements reported in each area.

Since 2010, Florida has reported NYTD Survey Outcomes for three complete cohorts of youth and young adults who completed the survey at ages 17, 19, and 21. During FY 2024–25, NYTD surveys continued with Cohort 5, consisting of young adults turning 19 who were surveyed as part of the baseline population during federal fiscal year (FFY) 2022 (October 1, 2021–September 30, 2022).

Preliminary data indicates that 72 percent of these young adults have obtained a high school diploma, while 19 percent have not yet completed high school. Additionally, 27 percent reported being employed full time.

One notably positive outcome is that 86 percent of respondents reported having a supportive adult in their lives, an area of strategic focus for the Department. Furthermore, only 7 percent of young adults in this cohort reported experiencing homelessness within the past two years, representing a significant decrease from the 32 percent reported by the 21-year-old cohort surveyed in the prior fiscal year.

Additional outcome data from the most recent survey is included in the applicable Outcome Areas below.

Financial Accountability

The Department continues to emphasize financial accountability among Lead Agencies in the management and distribution of Independent Living funds. Accurate eligibility determinations and timely data entry in the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) system directly affects program payments, making consistency and precision in field operations essential. The Department developed guidance for the field in conjunction with the Department’s financial office which was presented at the Spring 2025 Independent Living Statewide Conference.

During FY 2024-25, the Legislature appropriated approximately \$58.9 million for Independent Living programs and services. This funding included a recurring base of approximately \$54 million, as well as nearly \$5 million to address ongoing deficits experienced by Lead Agencies in recent years, related to Independent Living programs. These deficits are largely attributable to rising EFC room and board rates statewide. The total appropriation supports case management services, program administration, and supplements room and board payments to foster parents who provide life skills training and normalcy supports to youth ages 13 through 17. When a Lead Agency exceeds its Independent Living allocation, any overage must be absorbed through its core funding.

Table 2. SFY 2024-2025 Independent Living Service Payments

SFY24-25 GAA	
Independent Living (Recurring Base)	\$ 38,195,652
SB 80/96 Requirements - Rec GR	\$ 1,683,938
IL Case Coordination / Pre-IL Life Skills & Normalcy - Rec GR	\$ 5,710,752
Increase in PESS Monthly Payment - Rec GR	\$ 8,352,000
Foster Parent COLA Growth Rate (EFC) - Rec	\$ 45,891
Independent Living Expansion - Rec GR	\$ 4,894,140
SFY 24-25 Appropriation	\$ 58,882,373

Standardized Needs Assessment

One of the recommendations in the 2024 Annual Report from the Independent Living Services Advisory Council (ILSAC), was the implementation of a standardized needs assessment for EFC. The Department implemented this assessment effective July 1, 2025, through a memorandum issued to all Lead Agencies and system partners. This assessment is intended to determine appropriate levels of financial support based on a young adult’s individual needs, strengths, and readiness for independence.

The needs assessment supports consistent decision-making related to financial assistance while reinforcing expectations for youth engagement and responsibility. Young adults are expected to contribute toward their living expenses as appropriate to demonstrate financial management skills. As independence increases, the assessment is updated to reflect changes in the young adult’s financial contribution.

The FSN Reference Payment Guide defines an allowance as a payment made directly to an EFC young adult for discretionary expenses, such as savings, entertainment, or non-essential transportation. Allowance amounts are determined based on the completed needs assessment, after ensuring that all basic needs are met.

The Department anticipates that consistent use of this tool will help clarify expectations, promote financial literacy, and support young adults' progression toward self-sufficiency.

Independent Living Services Outcomes

Independent Living programs are designed to assist young adults in achieving important milestones as they move toward self-sufficiency. This program review considers the following federal outcome areas: increasing financial self-sufficiency, improving educational attainment, increasing connections to supportive adults, reducing homelessness, reducing high-risk behavior, and improving access to health insurance.

The Department recognizes the complex challenges involved in preparing young adults for adulthood and remains committed to strengthening service delivery and improving readiness for youth transitioning to independence. To better support both young adults and the professionals who serve them, the Department's Youth and Young Adult Services team continues to provide leadership, guidance, and technical assistance to promote the effective implementation of best practices statewide. The Department's ongoing focus remains on comprehensive preparation for adulthood and high-quality implementation of the Independent Living Program to ensure improved outcomes for transitioning youth.

The Department has prioritized building tools to monitor compliance with program requirements and measure outcomes for young adults. Monthly reports are sent to Lead Agencies to monitor compliance with life skill assessments, transition planning, and developing permanent connections, which are all procedural requirements that build positive relationships with youth and young adults. These relationships, in turn, enhance program engagement of the youth and young adults leading to better outcomes on their journey to self-sufficiency. Quality assurance reviews now include relevant Independent Living specific questions, both within the "Life of Case reviews" and as standalone targeted Independent Living program case reviews, launched in March 2023.

Further, the Department continues bi-monthly meetings with all Independent Living professionals and hosts an in-person conference twice a year. These meetings continue to focus on improving the program statewide while building a network of professionals throughout the state.

To improve the consistency of statewide service delivery, the Department introduced an Independent Living Specialty Track training curriculum in August 2024. The curriculum includes specialized training to Lead Agency staff to enhance their understanding of Independent Living requirements, policies, and best practices. At the end of FY 2024-25, 130 staff statewide had completed the curriculum within eleven CBC Lead Agencies.

The curriculum modules focus on the following areas:

- Module 1: Introduction to Independent Living
 - Provides a basic overview of services available to youth and young adults with foster care experience and begins to define the roles of professionals within the system as it relates to services provided.
- Module 2: Independent Living Services for Youth Under 18

Provides a deep dive into the services available for eligible youth under 18 years of age who are in the care of the Department and the role the professionals have in developing the youth's life skills as they transition to adulthood.

- **Module 3: Extended Foster Care**
Provides in depth knowledge of statutes, administrative code, and operating procedures that guide Extended Foster Care, so professionals gain an understanding of services required to assist with the young adult's transition toward self-sufficiency.
- **Module 4: PESS and Aftercare**
Provides a comprehensive understanding of services and supports related to those eligible for PESS and Aftercare while also learning the statutes and administrative code that guides the programs.
- **Module 5: Review and Assessment**
Participants complete a final review activity and then pass an assessment to demonstrate their understanding of the material.

Table 3 presents the number of young adults served in each Independent Living program by Community-Based Care Lead Agency over the past three State Fiscal Years (SFYs).

Table 3: Number of young adults served in each Independent Living Program by lead agency

Lead Agency	2022-2023			2023-2024			2024-2025		
	Aftercare	EFC	PESS	Aftercare	EFC	PESS	Aftercare	EFC	PESS
CBC of Brevard (now known as Family Partnership of Central Florida as of 5/1/2024)	26	44	9	15	42	17	N/A	N/A	N/A
ChildNet Broward	23	140	108	39	122	111	49	126	109
ChildNet Palm Beach	12	105	59	27	104	59	30	116	55
Children's Network Hillsborough	54	82	50	74	81	48	55	90	59
Children's Network of SW Florida	8	41	52	14	39	60	18	55	60
Citrus Health Network	157	240	175	114	232	146	81	204	157
Community Partnership for Children	18	49	40	16	43	55	13	56	63
Communities Connected for Kids	11	24	26	13	24	23	6	25	24
Embrace Families (now known as Family Partnership of Central Florida as of 5/1/2024)	43	136	56	41	128	72	N/A	N/A	N/A
Family Partnership of Central Florida	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	51	169	96
Family Support Services North Florida	20	80	29	14	82	30	29	88	37
Family Support Services Suncoast	44	83	43	49	80	52	33	91	46
Heartland for Children	41	71	29	35	74	41	40	78	56
Kids Central Inc	62	48	38	49	55	39	17	50	50
Kids First of Florida Inc	0	20	12	2	16	13	4	15	13

NWF Health Network-East	20	56	27	12	63	29	20	51	27
NWF Health Network-West (formerly FFN)	12	75	19	21	85	22	25	77	20
Partnership for Strong Families	6	10	5	7	17	7	8	33	6
Safe Children Coalition	30	30	15	13	38	19	13	47	22
St Johns County Commission / Family Integrity Program	1	12	8	0	10	8	1	11	9
Statewide	588	1346	800	555	1335	851	493	1382	909
Previously Reported	467	1733	857	609	1540	879	N/A	N/A	N/A

**Source: OCWDRU #1089, FSFN Data Repository

The data illustrates a 12.5 percent increase in the number of young adults utilizing at least one Independent Living program from FY 2023-24 to FY 2024-25. Because young adults may receive services from more than one program in a given year, the totals may include duplication.

Participation in EFC and PESS continues to increase statewide, while participation in Aftercare services has decreased. This decrease may reflect increased utilization of EFC and PESS as young adults pursue longer-term stability and educational opportunities.

Counts presented in this report reflect only young adults who received services during the applicable fiscal year. Previously reported figures included payments reconciled during the fiscal year, which overstated participation. Corrected counts are presented above, with prior totals noted for reference.

Additionally, the count for EFC participants has increased by an additional 12 young adults compared to the Department's previously submitted Proviso report for FY 2024-25. This is a result of a population of young adults who reside at a specific group home that were inadvertently excluded from previous counts.

Due to the 2020 public health emergency, young adults were not to be terminated from the Extended Foster Care (EFC) program. The federal government temporarily waived the qualifying activity requirement under guidance provided through the Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act, Division X of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (Public Law 116-260), enacted on December 27, 2020, by the Administration for Children and Families. As a result, the number of young adults remaining in the program increased, as individuals who would have otherwise been discharged were permitted to continue receiving services. Some of the discrepancy in participation numbers of EFC from FY 2022-23 to FY 2023-24 were due to the renewed administration of discharge criteria as it relates to participation in qualifying activity. A young adult may have been allowed to remain in the program without enrollment in a qualifying activity but was discharged once program requirements were federally reinstated in 2022.

Outcome Area 1: Improving Educational Attainment

Education plays a vital role in fostering personal growth and self-sufficiency. Young adults who obtain an education are better prepared to face the future job market. A high school and/or college diploma not only increases chances of securing employment but may also open doors to higher-paying jobs and more opportunities for career advancement. Education equips individuals with the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies to navigate the complexities of the modern

world. It instills critical thinking skills and the ability to adapt to new challenges.

Table 4 displays the number of young adults who have achieved a high school diploma or GED in the past three state fiscal years by Lead Agency. By enhancing its focus on education outcomes, providing educational experiences, and tracking progression, the Department continues to prioritize young adults achieving their educational goals.

Table 4. Young Adults who have a High School Diploma, GED Certificate, or Certificate of Completion

LEAD AGENCY	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Brevard Family Partnership (now known as Family Partnerships of Central Florida as of 5/1/2024)	30	N/A	N/A
ChildNet-Broward	110	125	103
ChildNet-Palm Beach	54	84	67
Children’s Network of SW Florida	21	71	66
Citrus Health Network	207	206	196
Communities Connected for Kids	4	3	4
Community Partnership for Children	18	15	44
Family Support Services- Suncoast	71	75	60
Children’s Network Hillsborough	83	81	59
Embrace Families (now known as Family Partnerships of Central Florida as of 5/1/2024)	99	N/A	N/A
Family Partnerships Central Florida (combined for Embrace and CBC of Brevard)	N/A	141	133
NWF Health Network – West (Previously known as Families First Network)	53	56	45
Family Integrity Program	8	8	8
Family Support Services of North Florida	31	26	33
Heartland for Children	20	38	40
Kids Central, Inc.	33	38	44
Kids First of Florida, Inc.	9	5	17
Northwest Florida Health Network-East	58	54	45
Partnership for Strong Families	8	9	11
Safe Children Coalition	25	35	35
Statewide	942	1,070	1,010

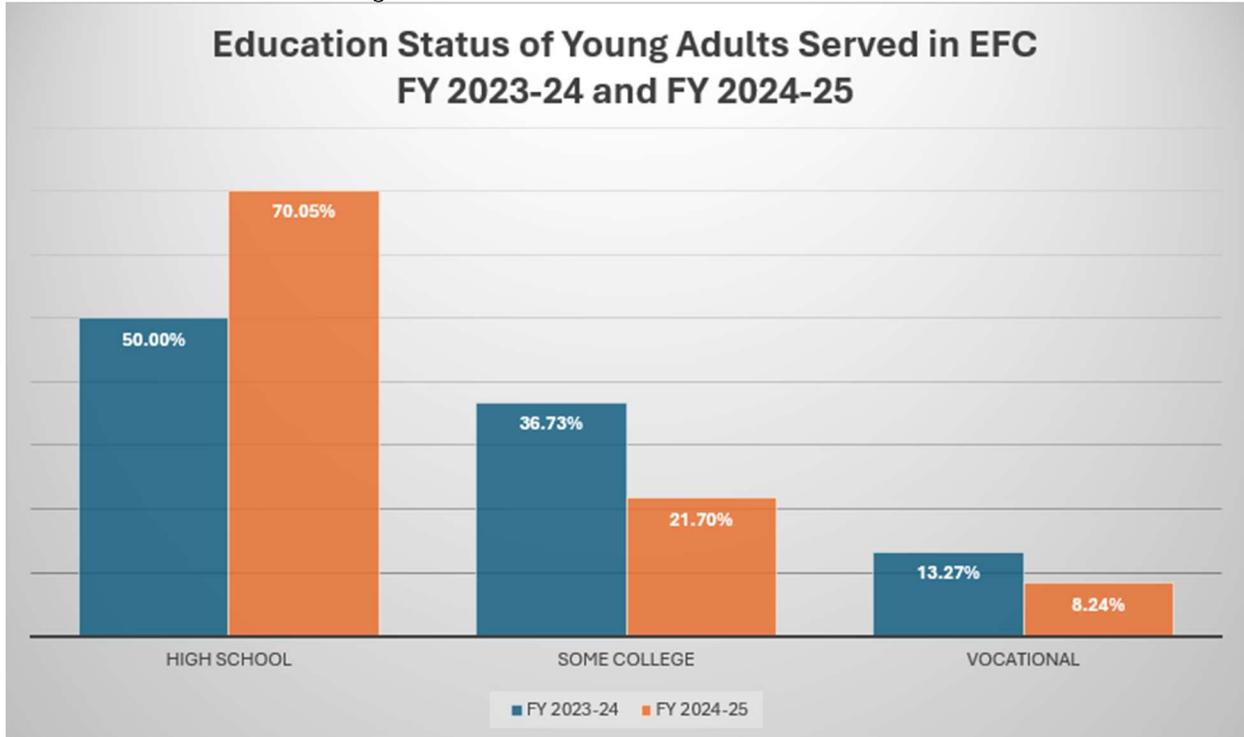
Statewide data indicates a slight decline in secondary educational attainment in FY 2024-25 compared to the prior fiscal year, following an increase observed in FY 2023-24. While several Lead Agencies maintained or increased the number of young adults achieving secondary credentials, others experienced modest decreases, contributing to the overall statewide trend.

Additionally, the variation across Lead Agencies reflects differences in program size, population needs, and local educational partnerships. Continued monitoring of these trends will help inform strategies to support educational attainment and align services with statutory goals related to self-sufficiency and long-term success.

Chart 1 indicates the proportion of young adults participating in EFC services and their present educational status. During SFY 2024-25, 70 percent of EFC participants enrolled in education were working towards a high school diploma or equivalent, a 20 percent increase from the previous FY. The other 30 percent of those enrolled in education as a qualifying activity were working toward post-secondary goals. It should be noted that there are some young adults enrolled in EFC that are not engaged in education as their qualifying activity; these young adults

are not represented in this data chart.

Chart 1: Education Status of Young Adults Served in EFC SFY 2023-24 and SFY 2024-25

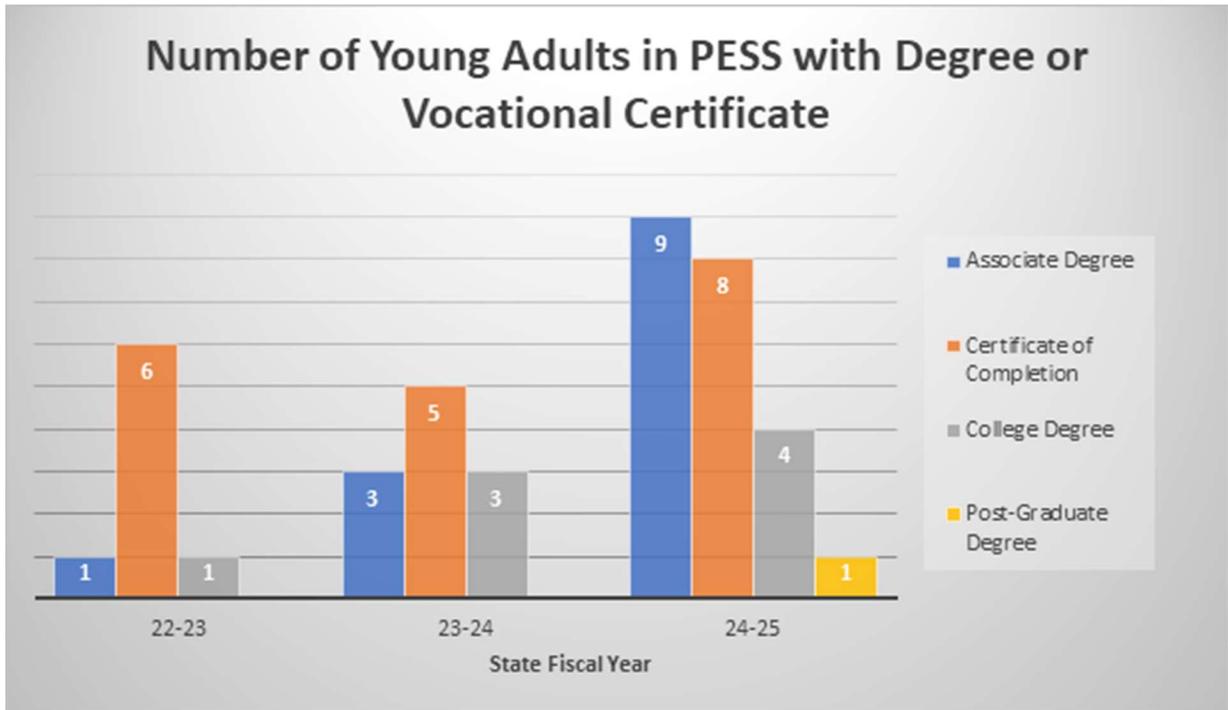


During review of the Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS) education record reports, the Department identified data integrity issues resulting from a change in the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) grade-level coding implemented mid-FY 2023-24. Specifically, students who were enrolled in postsecondary programs but had not yet completed a degree were incorrectly recorded as having attained a college degree. To address this issue, the grade-level distinction was updated to accurately reflect enrollment status using the categories “some college” or “vocational/technical,” which indicate that the young adult is actively working toward a degree or certification.

The review also revealed a need for additional guidance on completing education records to ensure consistent and accurate reporting of postsecondary outcomes. In response, the Department provided targeted guidance to Lead Agencies and field staff, including the distribution of a guidance summary, individualized correction requests, and a series of virtual meetings conducted throughout FY 2024-25 to support accurate data entry and correction.

Chart 2 below reflects the number of young adults participating in the PESS program who successfully obtained an associate degree, bachelor’s degree, post-graduate degree, or vocational certificate of completion. The data presented has been corrected to align with the updated reporting definitions and accurately represent degree attainment for the past two fiscal years.

Chart 2: Number of Young Adults in PESS with a Postsecondary Degree



Results of the targeted Independent Living Review by the Office of Quality and Innovation determined that of the cases reviewed in June 2025, 70 percent of young adults in PESS were on track to graduate with a postsecondary degree or certificate by the time they turned 23. This was an increase from the 59 percent of young adults on track of cases reviewed in December 2024 but still lower than 79 percent in the previous FY 2023-24.

Preliminary 2024 data from the NYTD surveys completed by young adults ages 19 with foster care experience shows that 73 percent of young adults reported receiving a high school diploma/GED, 3 percent obtained some sort of postsecondary education, and 19 percent had obtained neither.

Per section 409.1452, F.S., the Department is required to collaborate with the State University System (SUS), Florida College System (FCS), and the Department of Education to improve outcomes and career transitions for former foster youth who are eligible for the Department's Tuition and Fee Exemption. The Positive Pathways Program is administered by Educate Tomorrow, Inc, who coordinates with and develops a network of postsecondary supports and hosts monthly network calls with representatives from colleges, universities, and Lead Agencies in Florida. This network currently has over 300 members comprised of post-secondary institution staff, community supports, and Lead Agency representatives. In FY 2023-24, Positive Pathways provided over 135 instances of technical assistance to network members and the young adults they serve. Their annual conference, held in Miami in 2025, had more than 100 attendees who received additional support and training. Positive Pathways support of these campus-based programs has a direct link to the young adults working to achieve success with post-secondary education.

Data is received from the SUS and FCS for the previous academic year which does not align with the state fiscal year. Table 5 displays the number of young adults utilizing the tuition exemption form for the 2023-24 academic year based on their eligibility status. The total number of students

utilizing the waiver at a state university or college increased by 201 students for FY 2023-24. A total of 380 young adults utilizing the tuition exemption obtained postsecondary education for the 2022-23 academic year. Table 6 displays the breakdown of young adults who successfully completed a postsecondary degree for the 2023-24 academic year based on their tuition exemption eligibility status. There is a significant increase in the number of young adults who obtained post-secondary education since the last report with 380 students completing in FY 22-23 while 767 completed in SFY 2023-24. The largest increase was among students who had been adopted achieving a Baccalaureate Degree.

Table 5: Number of young adults utilizing tuition exemption for 2023-24 academic year (academic year data is reported a year behind SFY)

	SUS	FCS	Total
Department Custody (Aged Out)	249	1,560	1,809
Adopted	1,014	2,099	3,113
Caregiver Custody	333	265	598
Total			5,520

*Source: Florida Department of Education, April 2025 Briefing on Florida College System Outcomes

Table 6: Number of young adults successfully completing a post-secondary award for 2023-24 academic year (academic year data is reported a year behind SFY)

	Associate in arts degree	Associate in science degree	Baccalaureate Degree	Master's Degree	Career Certificate	College Credit Certificates
Department Custody (Aged Out)	69	24	56	8	*	42
Adopted	116	27	156	33	24	46
Caregiver Custody	*	*	72	7	*	*
Total	272	51	284	48	24	88

Note: An * indicates that values ranged between 1 and 9 and information has been masked to protect student privacy
Source: Florida Department of Education, April 2025 Briefing on Florida College System Outcomes

Outcome Area 2: Increasing Connections

The Department recognizes the critical role that stable, supportive relationships play in the successful transition of young adults from foster care to independence. For young adults with lived foster care experience, supportive adult connections are especially important due to factors such as limited familial involvement, exposure to trauma before and during Department involvement, educational disruptions, and barriers to achieving self-sufficiency. Research consistently shows that the presence of at least one caring and reliable adult can significantly improve long-term outcomes for individuals with trauma histories. Feedback from site visits and training with the Independent Living field further underscores the lasting impact of these relationships.

The Department continues to actively promote the development of supportive adult connections, mentoring relationships, and positive peer networks. Lead Agencies and their providers have expanded efforts to hire young adults with personal foster care experience to serve as peer mentors, offering relatable guidance and support during the transition to adulthood. In addition, youth voice groups continue to expand statewide, playing an important role in shaping improvements to foster care and Independent Living services and informing policy and legislative initiatives.

The enhanced My Pathway to Success Plan, along with statewide training initiatives, places strong emphasis on identifying and strengthening adult support networks. Supportive adult relationships are discussed during plan development and reviewed during subsequent updates. The Department monitors timely plan completion through monthly reporting to Lead Agencies and tracks documentation of supportive adult connections for young adults active in Independent Living programs.

Statewide data for FY 2024–25 demonstrates substantial progress in documenting supportive adult connections. The percentage of young adults with a recorded supportive adult connection increased from 56 percent in July 2024 to 80 percent in June 2025, reflecting a concerted effort to expand and formalize these relationships. In addition to tracking participation, the quality of supportive connections is reviewed through the Office of Quality and Innovation's targeted Independent Living reviews conducted twice annually.

Table 7. Percentage of young adults active in Independent Living program with a supportive adult connection

	Supportive Adults Connections
July 2024	56%
August 2024	54%
September 2024	69%
October 2024	70%
November 2024	72%
December 2024	75%
January 2025	77%
February 2025	76%
March 2025	78%
April 2025	81%
May 2025	82%
June 2025	80%
Annual	72%

Although the statewide average reported on monthly Lead Agency reports continues to increase, targeted quality reviews show a notably lower average for supportive adult connections. Table 8 below presents the ratings for each program based on targeted Independent Living quality reviews completed during FY 2024–25.

This discrepancy reflects differences in measurement: monthly Lead Agency reports capture whether a supportive adult connection is documented in FSFN, while quality reviews assess the accuracy and appropriateness of that documentation. As a result, a young adult may be reported as having a supportive adult connection in the monthly data but receive a “no” rating if the case is selected for a quality review and the documentation does not meet review standards.

To support consistency and accuracy, Lead Agencies receive a reviewer guide prior to each round of quality reviews that outlines the criteria for receiving credit, along with a detailed listing of the supportive adult connections recorded for each young adult on a monthly basis. In addition, the Department will continue monthly reporting on supportive adult connections documented in FSFN.

The combination of enhanced guidance, ongoing education, and aligned reporting is expected to reduce discrepancies between these two related measures over time.

Table 8: Supportive Adult Connections by Program as Scored on the Independent Living Targeted Quality Reviews

Supportive Adult Connections	EFC	Aftercare	PESS
Dec-24	39%	67%	57%
Jun-25	48%	55%	53%

During completion of the NYTD surveys, data is collected regarding the youth/young adult’s self-reporting of an adult in their life to whom they can go to for advice or emotional support. Preliminary data from the 2024 NYTD cohort found that 86 percent of young adults surveyed report they do have a supportive adult.

To continue to support young adults, section 409.1451(5)(b), F.S., requires Lead Agencies to attempt to contact each young adult who has aged out of foster care that is not currently active in an Independent Living program at least annually. The purpose of this contact is to provide information on programs they may be eligible for, provide information on support provided by the Office of Continuing Care, and to inquire as to any needs they may have which can be resolved by another program. This annual contact is another method by which the Department strives to ensure that young adults have opportunities to increase connections to supportive adults.

Outcome Area 3: Increasing Financial Self-Sufficiency

An overarching goal of all Independent Living programs is to increase the young adult’s self-sufficiency, which is largely accomplished by improving their financial security, assessing their financial literacy, improving employability, ensuring available transportation, and reducing reliance on public assistance. For each post-18 program, financial self-sufficiency is monitored in different ways with tools that are currently available.

The importance of financial responsibility of young adults receiving a PESS stipend is underscored by section 409.1451, F.S.; therefore, before a participant can receive funding, a financial plan assessing the young adult’s financial literacy, executive functioning, and self-regulation must be developed to include discussion on their financial management, budgeting, and savings. This financial plan is incorporated into the My Pathways to Success Plan and reviewed every six months in collaboration with the young adult. If opportunities for improvement are identified, the young adult is provided referrals or necessary information to enhance the identified skills.

Results from the Office of Quality and Innovation’s targeted Independent Living Review indicate that, among cases reviewed in June 2025, 97 percent of PESS recipients had a completed financial assessment, while 34 percent had their plans reviewed at least every six months. Both measures reflect improvement compared to the December 2024 targeted quality review. Since reporting on the timeliness of My Pathway to Success Plans for post-18 programs began, monthly Lead Agency reports have also shown progress, with compliance increasing from 44 percent in January 2025 to 56 percent in June 2025.

Employment is a key pathway to financial self-sufficiency for young adults. Although participation in Independent Living programs does not require employment, all programs actively encourage it

due to the broad benefits employment provides across multiple areas of a young adult's life. Table 9 presents Lead Agency data showing the number of young adults participating in Extended Foster Care (EFC) who were employed during the past three state fiscal years. It is important to note that employment is not the sole qualifying activity for EFC eligibility.

Statewide data reflect a gradual decline in reported employment among young adults in EFC over the past three fiscal years. This trend corresponds with increased participation in secondary education, indicating that more young adults are meeting program eligibility requirements through educational enrollment rather than employment. As participants focus on completing high school or earning equivalent credentials, fewer may be simultaneously engaged in employment, contributing to the decline in reported employment.

Ongoing monitoring of employment participation alongside education trends will continue to inform program planning and ensure young adults receive appropriate support in balancing educational attainment, workforce readiness, and long-term financial self-sufficiency.

Table 9. Number of Young Adults in EFC with a Recorded Period of Employment

CBC Lead Agency	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Brevard Family Partnership (now known as Family Partnership of Central Florida as of 5/1/2024)	18	N/A	N/A
ChildNet-Broward	26	29	21
ChildNet-Palm Beach	6	12	15
Children's Network of SW Florida	14	14	10
Citrus Health Network	75	59	48
Communities Connected for Kids	3	5	5
Community Partnership for Children	1	2	8
Family Support Services- Suncoast	24	16	12
Children's Network Hillsborough	44	20	17
Embrace Families (now known as Family Partnership of Central Florida as of 5/1/2024)	59	N/A	N/A
Family Partnership of Central Florida	N/A	73	60
Northwest Florida Health Network-West (Formerly Families First Network)	51	48	37
St. Johns County Commission / Family Integrity Program	9	5	5
Family Support Services of North Florida	33	27	26
Heartland for Children	28	17	20
Kids Central, Inc.	3	11	14
Kids First of Florida, Inc.	8	8	10
Northwest Florida Health Network-East	18	21	10
Partnership for Strong Families	3	5	10
Safe Children Coalition	13	23	24
Statewide	436	395	352

While employment or school enrollment is not an ongoing eligibility requirement for Aftercare services, young adults are expected to engage in activities that support progress toward self-sufficiency. These activities are intended to assist young adults in developing financial stability and preparing for independence. Employment is one indicator of progress toward these goals. Table 10 provides the number of young adults who received Aftercare Services for the previous three FY's who had any employment record entered despite the length of employment.

Table 10. Number of Young Adults in Aftercare with a Recorded Period of Employment

Lead Agency	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Brevard Family Partnership (now Family Partnerships of Central Florida)	9	10	N/A

ChildNet-Broward	5	5	9
ChildNet-Palm Beach	0	2	2
Children's Network of SW Florida	5	0	4
Citrus Health Network	22	41	28
Communities Connected for Kids	0	2	1
Community Partnership for Children	0	2	3
Family Support Services- Suncoast	2	10	8
Family Partnerships of Central Florida (combined Brevard Family Partnership and Embrace Families as of 5/1/24)	N/A	17	10
Children's Network Hillsborough	5	25	10
Embrace Families (now Family Partnerships of Central Florida)	21	N/A	N/A
Northwest Florida Health Network-West (formerly Families First Network)	31	13	8
St. John's County Commission / Family Integrity Program	2	0	1
Family Support Services of North Florida	5	6	6
Heartland for Children	11	10	12
Kids Central, Inc.	1	4	2
Kids First of Florida, Inc.	8	0	1
Northwest Florida Health Network-East	0	2	3
Partnership for Strong Families	0	0	3
Safe Children Coalition	4	7	5
Statewide	131	156	116

Statewide data indicates a decline in recorded employment among young adults receiving Aftercare services in FY 2024-25 compared to the previous fiscal year. This trend may reflect varying levels of engagement with employment activities, differences in service focus, or transitions of young adults into other Independent Living programs. Continued monitoring of employment outcomes within Aftercare will help inform service planning and identify opportunities to better support young adults in achieving financial self-sufficiency.

Preliminary data from the current NYTD survey notes that only 28 percent of young adults reported part time employment. It is worth noting that, through the surveys, approximately 10 percent of young adults surveyed reported receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI).

Step into Success Workforce Education and Internship Pilot Program

Section 409.1455, Florida Statutes, established the Step into Success Act, which became effective on July 1, 2023. The Legislature authorized the program as a three-year pilot designed to provide eligible foster youth and former foster youth with opportunities to develop essential workforce and professional skills, support their transition from Department custody to independent living, and strengthen their readiness for long-term success. Following program development and recruitment, the first cohort launched in May 2024 with 15 participants from the Tallahassee area. A second cohort began in May 2025 with 13 participants, also based in Tallahassee, followed by a third cohort of 9 participants launched in the Orlando area later that year.

The Step into Success program consists of two integrated components. The first is workforce education training, an interactive, youth-focused, in-person curriculum designed to build essential professional and life skills. Training topics include interview preparation, workplace professionalism, teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, and conflict resolution, among others. The second component is a workforce internship experience, which provides participants with an onsite internship of at least 80 hours per month for up to one year. Interns receive a monthly stipend of \$1,517, along with a one-time \$500 clothing stipend to purchase required uniforms or

professional attire. Participants must be at least 18 years old to be eligible for the internship component.

Completion of the workforce education training is required prior to participation in the workforce internship, in addition to meeting all other eligibility criteria outlined in the Step into Success Act.

The annual report required by section 409.1455(11), F.S., on the progress of the Step into Success program is attached as Appendix A to this report. Included in the full report are statutory compliance updates including the rule language and forms to apply for post-secondary credit or career education clock hours from the State Board of Education, a list of participating organizations, a summary of recruitment efforts, a summary of feedback from participants and mentors, recommendations to improve the pilot, and employment outcomes. There are four attachments including rule 6A:10.0245 and forms, position descriptions, workforce education training summaries, and data from cohorts 1, 2, and 3.

Outcome Area 4: Reducing Homelessness

Housing young adults within the Independent Living programs presents ongoing and complex challenges due to varying placement requirements, funding structures, housing availability, and individual readiness for living independently. Requirements differ across programs, which can further complicate housing access and stability.

For young adults in EFC, housing placements must be approved by their Lead Agency and meet the level of supervision identified through the Supervised Living Arrangement Assessment. Approved housing options for EFC include licensed foster homes or group homes, host homes, transitional living programs, shared housing, dormitories, assisted living facilities, residential treatment facilities (such as substance abuse treatment programs or Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children certified safe houses), placements licensed by the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, and individual housing.

In contrast, PESS and Aftercare services do not require Lead Agency approval of living arrangements. As a result, housing challenges for participants in these programs are often more closely tied to limited availability of affordable housing, insufficient income to support their housing, access to appropriate supports, and individual readiness to maintain stable housing. Regardless of program participation, the Department maintains a responsibility to ensure that young adults have access to safe and stable housing to support successful transitions to independence.

The targeted Independent Living reviews completed by the Office of Quality and Innovation assess several areas surrounding reducing homelessness for all three programs. In EFC, there is an assumption that the young adult is not homeless as there is a level of responsibility for the Lead Agency to identify an approved placement. Lead Agencies approve an EFC placement through completion of a Supervised Living Arrangement Assessment which assesses how the living arrangement will meet the needs of the young adult's level of supervision and support. A Shared Living Plan is completed as an agreement with the Lead Agency, the young adult and the placement provider, which outlines the expectations and requirements of the placement. Results from the Independent Living targeted reviews for FY 2024-25 are listed in table 11 below.

Table 11. Scores from Independent Living Targeted Reviews Related to Placement

Review Period	Placement Meets Needs of Participant	Quality Shared Living Plan Developed	Supervised Living Arrangement Assessment Present	Shared Living Plan Approved and Present
Dec-24	100%	55%	48%	100%
Jun-25	100%	66%	63%	97%

While PESS and Aftercare do not have a requirement to approve the young adult’s living arrangement, there is an expectation for the Lead Agency to ensure the young adult has secure housing. The Independent Living targeted reviews assess Aftercare cases to ensure the Lead Agencies provide sufficient efforts to ensure housing resources are identified, and for PESS cases that there were efforts to ensure sufficient housing was obtained for the young adult. The results from reviews completed in SFY 24-25 are detailed in table 12 below.

Table 12. Scores from Independent Living Targeted Reviews Related to Housing

Review Period	Housing Resources Provided for Aftercare Participants	Sufficient Housing Obtained for PESS Participants
Dec-24	100%	86%
Jun-25	100%	100%

Preliminary data from the most recent NYTD survey indicate that 7 percent of young adults reported experiencing a period of homelessness within the past two years. This represents a substantial decrease compared to the prior fiscal year, in which more than 30 percent of 21-year-old respondents reported homelessness during the same timeframe.

For purposes of the NYTD survey, homelessness is defined as having no regular or adequate place to live, including living in a car, “couch surfing,” living on the street, or staying in a homeless shelter.

The following section outlines initiatives implemented to support the reduction of homelessness among both youth currently in care and young adults preparing to exit care.

Housing Trends in Extended Foster Care

Chart 3 presents approved supervised living arrangements for young adults enrolled in Extended Foster Care (EFC) during FY 2024–25. Data for young adults ages 18–20 reflect standard supervised living arrangements, while data for age 21 represent individuals extended to age 22 for an additional year of EFC participation.

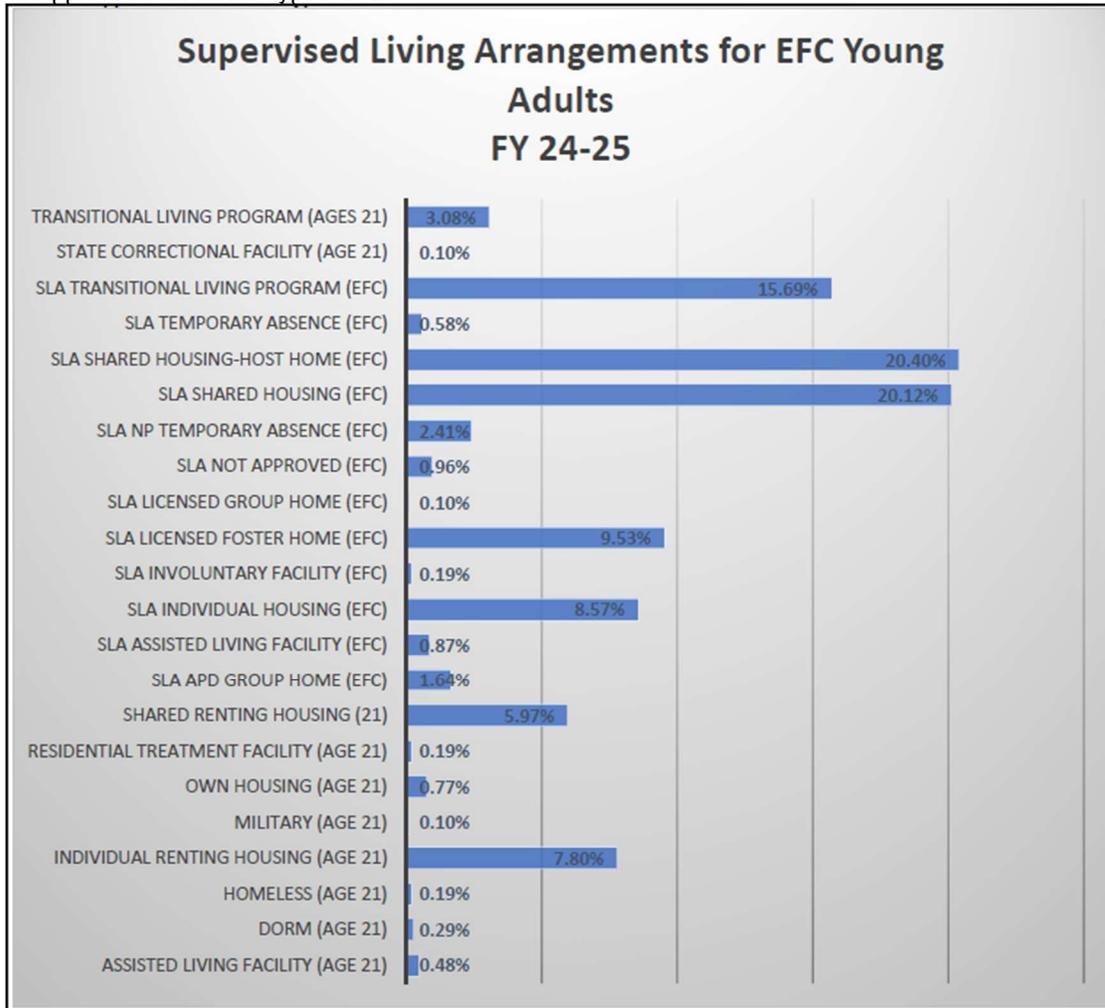
Statewide use of Transitional Living Programs (TLPs) continued to increase, rising from 13.72 percent of placements for ages 18–20 and 2.35 percent for age 21 in FY 2023–24 to 15.69 percent and 3.08 percent, respectively, in FY 2024–25. TLPs provide enhanced supervision, structured housing, oversight of qualifying activities, transportation assistance, life skills development, and access to supportive adults.

Host home placements for ages 18–20 remained relatively consistent with the prior fiscal year, while shared housing increased by approximately 2.5 percent. Placements in licensed foster homes for this age group increased by nearly 3 percent, while reliance on group homes declined substantially, from 2.71 percent in FY 2023–24 to 0.10 percent in FY 2024–25.

Establishing stable housing prior to exit from EFC remains a key program goal. For young adults

ages 18–20, individual housing placements increased from 7.94 percent to 8.57 percent in FY 2024–25. Although individual housing placements for age 21 declined slightly, increases in shared rental housing resulted in a combined placement rate that remained relatively stable across fiscal years.

Chart 3: Approved Placement Types for EFC



Housing Specialist Pilot Program

As previously reported in the Department’s 2024 response to the Independent Living Services Advisory Council’s (ILSAC) recommendation for a statewide housing specialist, the Department implemented a three-year pilot program, providing funding for a Housing Specialist position at three Lead Agencies: Kids Central, Inc., Communities Connected for Kids, and Northwest Florida Health Network. These agencies were selected based on survey data indicating high EFC housing costs, limited capacity to administer Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) housing vouchers, and readiness to integrate a Housing Specialist role.

The purpose of the Housing Specialist position is to strengthen community partnerships, identify housing opportunities and funding sources, and apply creative problem-solving to address housing barriers. To assess the effectiveness of this model and determine scalability, the Department is actively overseeing and monitoring implementation across pilot sites, including tracking, hiring and onboarding timelines, role alignment and consistency in practice. The Department is also gathering lessons learned related to recruitment and retention of the Housing Specialist positions, documenting emerging best practices and innovative strategies and reviewing implementation approaches that support stronger coordination with housing providers and public housing authorities. These elements will inform continuous improvement and guide future statewide planning.

Housing Specialists were fully established at each selected Lead Agency during FY 2024-25 and collectively reported several early successes, including:

- Improved collaboration with local Continuums of Care, which coordinate homelessness response systems under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- An increase of at least nine additional EFC placements through host homes (Kids Central, Inc.: 4, Northwest Florida Health Network: 5)
- Increased community awareness of Independent Living housing needs
- Greater accountability among transitional living programs through enhanced communication and oversight
- Reduced EFC housing expenditures, helping Lead Agencies EFC expenses remain within budget
- Acquisition of a \$15,000 grant from Truist Bank by Kids Central, Inc. to support Independent Living housing needs

As part of the Housing Specialist Pilot, Northwest Florida Health Network implemented a mid-fiscal year referral and tracking process. While the data represents partial-year results, they provide early insight into housing stability outcomes:

- Of 67 housing referrals received, 93 percent of young adults maintained their original placement
- Of referrals submitted, 34 percent requested supportive living arrangements, 25 percent requested shared housing or host homes, and 17 percent requested individual housing.

Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Vouchers and Legislative Updates

The Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Vouchers program is a federally funded housing initiative designed to provide eligible young adults with stable, affordable housing as they transition from foster care to independence. The program partners with public housing authorities to offer housing choice vouchers, along with supportive services, to assist former foster youth in achieving housing stability and long-term self-sufficiency.

The enactment of section 409.14525, F.S., through Senate Bill 584 (Housing Supports for Young Adults), has increased focus on strengthening partnerships among the Department, Lead Agencies, and public housing authorities. The Department remains encouraged that the statutory requirement for formal agreements will expand access to FYI vouchers statewide and continues to monitor both legislative implementation and the effectiveness of the Housing Specialist Pilot in supporting young adults in securing stable housing.

Despite these efforts, the establishment of Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with local public housing authorities remains a barrier across all three pilot agencies. Northwest Florida Health Network has made progress by securing an MOU with the Tallahassee Housing Authority and is currently administering its initial allocation of 25 FYI vouchers.

Outcome Area 5: Reducing High-Risk Behavior

The most effective way child welfare professionals can assist with mitigating high-risk behavior of young adults is through the frequency and quality of contact. Independent Living Specialists at Lead Agencies complete monthly home visits for young adults in EFC while frequency of contact with young adults in Aftercare and PESS is largely based on their assessed needs and to review required plans. Specialists take this opportunity to communicate with the young adult about their challenges, successes, education, employment, life skill needs and development, housing status, supportive adults, and any other service needs the young adult may have. Increasing these areas with the young adult will reduce the likelihood of engagement in high-risk behaviors.

Table 13 below details the results of home visits and contact questions in the Independent Living targeted reviews completed throughout FY 2024-25.

Table 13. Scores from Independent Living Targeted Reviews Related to Contact with Young Adult

Review Period	Sufficient Home Visit Frequency for EFC	Sufficient Home Visit Quality for EFC	Sufficient Contact for Aftercare	Sufficient Contact for PESS
Dec-24	87%	81%	100%	70%
Jun-25	63%	86%	100%	83%

Reducing high-risk behaviors and promoting overall well-being remain key priorities for the Department. During FY 2024-25, a statewide reporting tool was developed to monitor the completion and timeliness of My Pathway to Success Plans, which are central to assessing young adults' current needs and planning for self-sufficiency across all Independent Living programs. These plans address health, education, employment, housing, and other factors critical to successful transitions.

Reporting on plan completion became available in November 2024. Initial data showed that only 34 percent of young adults had a plan completed within the previous six months at the time reporting began. Following implementation of the monitoring tool, completion rates improved steadily throughout the fiscal year. By June 2025, 56 percent of young adults had a plan completed within the previous six months, and 74 percent had at least one plan completed since turning 18.

Table 14. Percentage of completion of My Pathway to Success Plans for young adults in Independent Living programs

	My Pathway to Success Plan Completion (entered within the last 6 months)	My Pathway to Success Plan Completion (at least one entered post 18)
November	N/A	34%
December	N/A	56%
January	44%	59%
February	46%	62%
March	49%	66%
April	57%	71%
May	58%	73%

June	56%	74%
Annual	50%	69%

Continued emphasis on timely plan development and updates every six months is expected to further strengthen service coordination, reduce risk factors, and improve health and well-being outcomes for young adults participating in Independent Living programs.

NYTD outcome surveys offer some insight as to high-risk behavior for young adults that are included in the NYTD cohorts at age 19 and 21. For FY 2024-25, almost 5 percent of 19 year olds surveyed reported alcohol or drug assessment or counseling, almost 5 percent reported some period of incarceration while 4.5 percent of cohort participants were excluded from the survey due to active incarceration, and almost 10 percent reported becoming a parent in the past two years.

Outcome Area 6: Access to Health Insurance

To make sure that young adults in Independent Living receive necessary health and medical services, the Department collects important health information including medical, dental, and vision records, and other crucial data from the My Pathway to Success Plan. By analyzing this information, caseworkers can now identify any early issues or problems and plan interventions accordingly. The Department's continuous real-time data on the health and well-being of young adults in the Road to Independence and EFC programs will enable better monitoring and understanding of their overall health outcomes and needs.

Young adults who age out in Department's custody at age 18 and were receiving Medicaid remain eligible for coverage until age 26. Most young adults are enrolled in Sunshine Health's Pathway to Shine, the Child Welfare Specialty plan. Representatives from the plan play an active role in supporting the young adult's health and well-being by participating in Transition Plan staffings beginning at age 17, providing direct services and assistance, and maintaining ongoing communication with Independent Living field staff to address emerging needs.

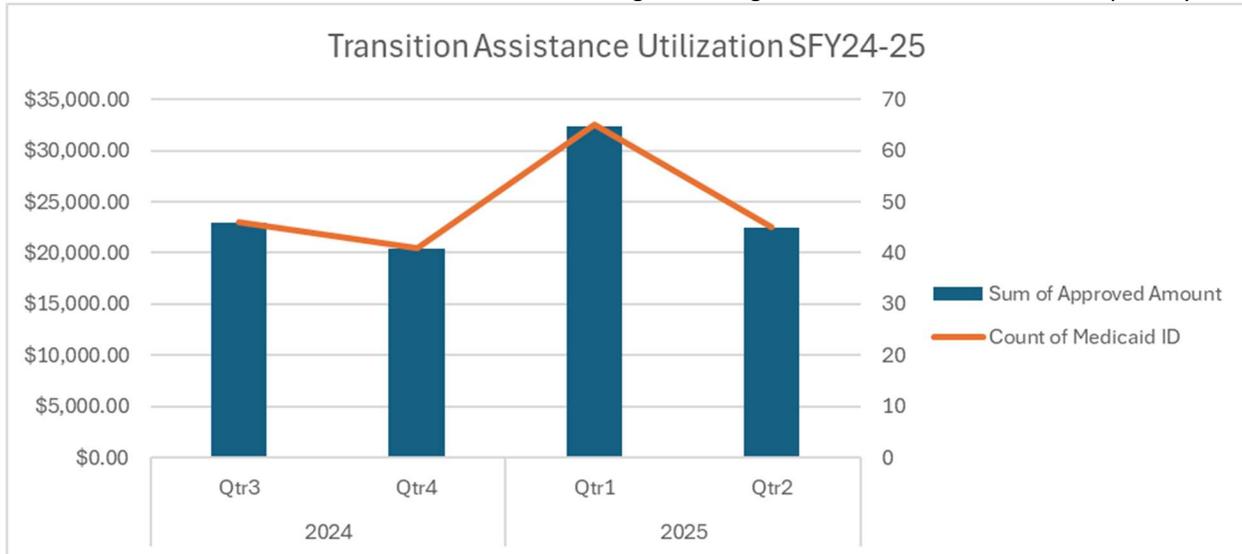
Many young adults remain enrolled in the Pathway to Shine plan until age 21, gaining access to expanded benefits designed to support health, stability, and successful transition to independence. These benefits include:

- Specialized Care Management
- Targeted transition planning in coordination with Lead Agencies to address healthcare needs and social determinants of health, such as housing, education, and employment
- Youth-focused workshops and training on navigating the health care system
- Partnerships and coordination with agencies and programs serving young adults in transitional independent living
- A monthly benefit of \$50 for over-the-counter items, including hygiene supplies, baby formula, medications and vitamins
- Additional supports such as swim lessons, childcare, tattoo removal, education assistance, vital records support, grocery benefits and tutoring assistance and
- Transition Assistance Funds, consisting of a one-time payment of up to \$500 for young adults transitioning out of foster care or EFC between the ages of 18 and 21 to assist with rental deposits, utility connections, or essential household items.

Sunshine Health's Pathway to Shine Child Welfare Specialty Plan serves over 2,000 young adults each fiscal year. During FY 2024-25, 197 young adults received Transition Assistance through

Sunshine Health for a total of \$98,252.61 in benefits which is detailed in Chart 4. Utilization of this benefit increased over 72 percent from the previous state fiscal year.

Chart 4. Utilization of Transition Assistance Grant for Young Adults Eligible for Sunshine Child Welfare Specialty Plan



*Source: Sunshine Health Pathway to Shine

The Office of Quality and Innovation also evaluates each Independent Living program to determine if sufficient efforts were made to assess for the healthcare needs of the young adult and then to provide for the needs. Results of the reviews completed for FY 24-25 are listed in Table 15 below.

Table 15. Scores from Independent Living Targeted Reviews Related to Healthcare Needs

Review Period	Aftercare		EFC		PESS	
	Assess for Healthcare Needs	Provide for Healthcare Needs	Assess for Healthcare Needs	Provide for Healthcare Needs	Assess for Healthcare Needs	Provide for Healthcare Needs
Dec-24	67%	100%	90%	81%	75%	30%
Jun-25	88%	100%	92%	89%	89%	50%

Young adults over the age of 18 years of age who are eligible for Medicaid in other states are eligible to transfer their Medicaid to Florida, and Florida young adults are eligible to transfer their Medicaid to other states. In Florida, if a young adult from another state wishes to apply for Medicaid, then they only need to self-attest that they are a former foster youth to continue Medicaid enrollment status in Florida.

Supports and Services

Office of Continuing Care

The Department recognizes that the transition into adulthood can be difficult for young people. For current and former foster youth, it can be even more difficult without an existing support system. In October 2021, the Legislature created the Office of Continuing Care to offer free, one-on-one help for young people between the ages of 18-26 who are about to or have recently transitioned out of foster care, aiming to make the leap into adulthood a positive experience. The Office of Continuing Care provides the following services for young adults: connection to existing resources in their area to help them thrive as an independent young adult, assists in accessing special services available to them, and gives a support system to help them with the next steps on their path to adulthood.

Between July 2024 and June 2025, the Office of Continuing Care (OCC) received a steady volume of referrals from young adults ages 18–26, with monthly totals ranging from 7 in October 2024 to a peak of 58 in April 2025. Most referrals were from the 18–22 age group, with outcomes including assistance with access to Independent Living services, referrals to Economic Self-Sufficiency liaisons who can assist with eligibility and application for public benefits, housing resources, and connections to Lead Agencies for documentation needs. Tuition Waiver support remained central, with the running total of waivers provided increasing from 882 in January 2025 to 929 by June 2025.

The timeliness of the Tuition and Fee Exemption Waiver process remains a key performance indicator in ensuring young adults receive prompt and uninterrupted access to their educational benefits. Tracking begins on the day the young adult is connected with their Lead Agency, and the request is marked as fulfilled once the Lead Agency confirms that the Tuition Waiver has been provided. The target time for the Tuition Waiver process is within three (3) business days. Performance reached 100 percent in March, April, and May. The six-month average processing time was just over two days, reflecting a strong commitment to efficiency. Table 16 outlines the timeliness of waivers provided by Lead Agencies since the inception of tracking in January 2025.

Table 16: Tuition Waiver timeliness from Lead Agencies January 2025 – June 2025

Month	Average # of days	# Waivers requested	# Waivers processed timely	% timely
Jan-25	2.29	7	4	57%
Feb-25	2.2	5	4	80%
Mar-25	0.6	5	5	100%
Apr-25	0.3	3	3	100%
May-25	1.2	5	5	100%
Jun-25	9	4	2	50%

The Office of Continuing Care launched an Instagram account in December 2022 with a goal of being young adult created and informed, providing a platform for those seeking information about Independent Living Services and supports. The Instagram page titled “@youngadulthoodishard” connects with young people and gives OCC the opportunity to provide young adults with crucial support, tips, and resources for navigating adulthood through a social media platform they are

already familiar with. Some topics that have been highlighted include Independent Living programs and accessibility, life skills, self-care tips, upcoming events, updates to policies affecting young adults, and more. As of June 2025, the Instagram page had 390 followers.

A total of 28 young adults were reviewed for Economic Self Sufficiency (ESS) eligibility and assistance. Of these, 25 clients were connected to the ESS Benefits Liaison for assistance, with several receiving additional guidance such as reapplying for benefits, submitting paystubs, or completing interviews. Three were determined ineligible for Office of Continuing Care services due to adoption, reunification, or lack of an out-of-home care case.

Child and Family Well-Being Council, Youth Subcommittee

The Youth Subcommittee was established in May 2023 under the Child and Family Well-Being Council to provide a structured forum for youth and young adults with lived experience to engage directly with the Department. The subcommittee creates opportunities for participants to share feedback, lived expertise, and perspectives on a wide range of child welfare policies, programs, and initiatives.

Membership includes youth and young adults representing One Voice Impact, Florida Youth SHINE, the Guardian ad Litem CHAMPIONS, and several local councils from across the state. The subcommittee meets monthly to receive Department updates, offer youth-driven feedback, and participate in presentations focused on services and resources available to young people.

Highlights from FY 2024–25 include:

- The Department’s Statewide Human Trafficking Specialist, Marina Anderson, presented the *Human Trafficking 101* curriculum to gather youth and young adult feedback to enhance youth-centered content.
- Kristen Puckett from the Office of Quality and Innovation presented on the Impacted Families Network and the newly developed Academy curriculum for Child Protective Investigators.
- Youth Subcommittee members provided feedback on the Extended Foster Care (EFC) Needs Assessment document.
- Sunshine Health delivered a presentation to educate youth on their Medicaid benefits and additional resources available through their health plan.

Keys to Independence Program

In 2014, the Florida Keys to Independence Act was enacted into law. This program is specifically designed for youth and young adults ages 15 through 21 who are in out-of-home care, Extended Foster Care or PESS. The program seeks to aid its target population in obtaining a driver's license and car insurance. Keys to Independence is currently administered by the FLITE Center through a contract with the Department as of May 2024.

For Fiscal Year 2024-25, Keys to Independence was successful in assisting in the following outcomes for youth and young adults in out of home care or PESS:

1. 408 youth and young adults in the state of Florida have obtained a learner's permit.
2. 270 have obtained a Florida driver's license.
3. 1,082 youth and young adults have been enrolled in the Keys to Independence program statewide and 969 remained actively enrolled in the program as of the same date.

4. Since the expansion to include eligible PESS clients in April 2022, there have been approximately 649 young adults in Florida enrolled in PESS who are currently receiving services through the Keys to Independence Program.
5. 421 youth/young adults have received behind the wheel driving lessons
6. 382 insurance polices were paid for by Keys to Independence
7. 62 percent of eligible youth/young adults are enrolled in the program

In addition to providing support through the Keys to Independence program, young adults can also discuss obtaining or accessing reliable transportation during completion of their My Pathway to Success Plan. Young adults who continue to receive Sunshine Health Pathway to Shine Plan through Medicaid are also eligible for transportation to all medical, dental, and behavioral health appointments as well as three social transports per month. For those young adults in EFC, assistance with transportation costs to their qualifying activity are considered during completion of the needs assessment.

Appeals

Young adults applying for or receiving Independent Living services through EFC, PESS, or Aftercare have the right to receive notice of adverse action and to resolve issues of program eligibility through the fair hearing process under sections 39.6251(9) and 409.1451(4), F.S. The Office of Appeal Hearings reported that there were no appeals granted in FY 2024-25, upholding the program's eligibility determinations made by Lead Agencies. Table 17 details the number of fair hearing requests by program type for the last three state fiscal years.

Table 17. Number of Fair Hearing Appeals for Independent Living Programs

Program Type	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Extended Foster Care	3	27	23
PESS	Not available*	12	11
Aftercare Services	Not available*	1	1
Total	45	40	35

Source: DCF Office of Inspector General

*Previous reporting years did not capture fair hearings for PESS and Aftercare separately. This information was collected per program beginning in SFY 2023-2024.

Of the 35 appeals in FY 2024-25 the outcomes were as follows:

Withdrawn = 17

Abandoned = 9

Dismissed = 3

Denied (Department's action was upheld) = 6

Rule Promulgation

During FY 2024-25, there were no administrative rules adopted that relate to the Independent Living population; however, Senate Bill 564 and House Bill 1083 were signed into legislation effective July 1, 2024. Aftercare Expansion (SB 564) allows for additional eligibility criteria for young adults to receive Aftercare Services. It expands 409.1451(3) to provide youth who were in out of home care for at least 6 months after turning 14 years of age and who did not achieve

reunification eligibility for Aftercare Services; this is in addition to the traditional eligibility criteria of turning 18 in the custody of the Department. The PESS Expansion (HB 1083) amends 409.1451(2) to allow youth that were adopted or placed with a court approved guardian at age 14 after 6 months in licensed care to also be eligible for PESS after turning 18; this is an expansion from the previously required age of 16 to establish eligibility. Updates to Administrative Code for both changes are in progress and are pending rule promulgation.

Conclusion

During FY 2024–25, the Department made measurable progress in strengthening Independent Living program oversight, service quality, and youth outcomes across Extended Foster Care, PESS, and Aftercare. Improvements in transition planning compliance, data accuracy, and the use of monitoring tools, combined with expanded training and targeted quality reviews, reflect a sustained focus on consistent, high-quality practice statewide. At the same time, the Department recognizes continued opportunities for growth, particularly in strengthening the frequency and quality of home visits in Extended Foster Care, improving the accuracy and documentation of supportive adult connections, and expanding housing stability initiatives through stronger partnerships and expanded access to resources such as FYI vouchers. The Department remains committed to continuous quality improvement and to ensuring that youth and young adults exiting foster care have the supports, connections, and services necessary to transition successfully to independence and long-term self-sufficiency.

Appendices

Appendix A: Step Into Success Workforce Education and Internship Pilot Program

Complete report of annual outcomes for the program per section 409.1455(11), F.S.