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Florida Department of Children and Families  
**COMMUNITY BASED CARE**

**KEYS TO INDEPENDENCE**

ANNUAL REPORT

June 2016



Mike Carroll  
Secretary

Rick Scott  
Governor

Mission: To Work in Partnership with Local Communities to Protect the Vulnerable, Promote Strong and Economically Self-Sufficient Families, and Advance Personal and Family Recovery and Resiliency

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## I. PROGRAM SUMMARY

The Keys to Independence Act, authorized in 2014 by the Florida Legislature (section 409.1454, Florida Statutes), recognizes that a young adult will be less likely to be fully independent without a driver’s license. A driver’s license enables a youth to have a job, go to school, engage socially and contribute to their community. The Keys to Independence Act Pilot Program is intended to create opportunities and solutions to help youth in foster care overcome barriers to getting a license, including reimbursing the cost of licensure, driver’s education, other costs incidental to licensure and motor vehicle insurance for children in licensed out-of-home care who have successfully completed a driver’s education program.

Prior to the authorization of the Keys to Independence Act, few adolescents and young adults in Florida’s foster care system had achieved a driver’s license. Estimates provided by the 2013 My Services Survey indicate that just 20 youth (ages 16 and 17) had obtained a driver’s license.<sup>1</sup> Florida began widespread adoption of ‘normalcy’ practices in the years ahead of the legislation and is committed to proactively engaging youth in meeting this vital milestone.

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<sup>1</sup> Florida Department of Children & Families. *My Services Survey*, Spring 2013. P. 63.  
<http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/programs/indliving/docs/MyServicesSpring2013SurveyReport.pdf> The My Services Survey captures information from youth ages 13-17 related to independent living services and outcomes.

Community Based Care of Central Florida (CBCCF) was selected through a competitive bid process to manage the development and implementation of this statewide pilot. The resulting contract for the ‘Keys to Independence’ program was executed on September 17, 2014 between CBCCF and the Department of Children and Families (DCF). CBCCF was given a 30-day period to develop a detailed Pilot Program and Implementation Plan, and began accepting applications for enrollment on October 15, 2014. CBCCF’s commitment to making the program user-friendly and getting as many youth in foster care driving as possible is detailed in sections II and III in this report.

As of June 30, 2016, CBCCF will complete its second year (comprising 20.5 total months) of operations of the three-year pilot program. The following status report is reflective of both the most recent year as well as cumulative operations beginning in 2014.<sup>2</sup>

## II. STATUS REPORT

### Enrollment

CBCCF publicizes the availability of Keys to Independence through many outlets, including through a dedicated website, social media, targeted emails, and at trainings and outreach events held throughout the state. Program staff have conducted in-person trainings in 100% of Florida’s community-based care lead agency (CBC) regions, offering multiple presentations to groups of case managers, Guardians ad Litem, foster parents, residential providers, CBC staff and other stakeholders.

“Without the program [my client] would have had to change schools in the middle of her senior year. Being able to continue to attend the school she had been in all her high school career means that she will be enjoying prom, graduation, and her other senior activities with familiar classmates.”

- Harriet, Guardian ad Litem

As of May 31, 2016, 689 youth have been enrolled in the program, an increase of more than four times the number of youth over the previous year. As of the same date, 571 remained actively enrolled.

Per statute, youth eligible for enrollment are those in licensed foster care. DCF set targets for enrollment in the Keys to Independence contract.

### A. Statewide Application Activity, Year One & Year Two<sup>3</sup>

	Year 1 Target	Year 1 Actual	Year 2 Target	Year 2 Actual
<b>Submitted</b>	95	144	180	446
<b>Rejected</b>	n/a	11	n/a	25
<b>Accepted</b>	85	133	168	421

Program procedures dictate that an application must be acknowledged within 48 hours and assessed within 30 days. Program staff have far exceeded this measure. To process an application

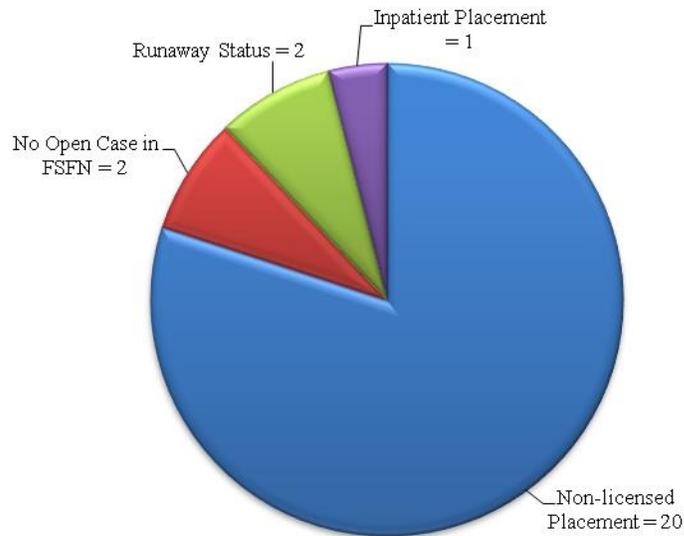
<sup>2</sup> Names have been changed within testimonials by participants to protect privacy.

<sup>3</sup> As of May 31, 2016. Program staff will continue to accept applications.

(reviewing provided materials, verifying information in the Florida Safe Families Network [FSFN] database, and communicating with the youth and his/her caregiver and case manager), the average turnaround time is 2.8 days.

As during the inaugural program year, the majority of denials were issued due to the youth not residing in licensed care. Rather, the applicant youth were in relative or non-relative (non-licensed) placements.

### B. Reasons for Application Denial, Year 2



The primary reason applications are denied is because the youth is not in a licensed placement. Twenty applications have been denied for this reason in the most recent fiscal year. In addition, the program has received numerous calls and requests from youth, caregivers, case managers, Guardians ad Litem and others inquiring about eligibility for those in non-licensed placements. Youth moving to non-licensed placement is also the No. 1 reason for enrolled youth being deemed no longer eligible for the program.

Approximately two-thirds of the enrolled youth are between ages 15 and 17. Based on available data, this represents approximately 28% of youth of this age statewide who meet the basic eligibility criteria for the program of being in licensed out-of-home care. The reach of Keys to Independence ranges from 95% of eligible youth under CBCCF-Seminole, to just 3.25% of eligible youth under Our Kids of Miami-Dade/Monroe.

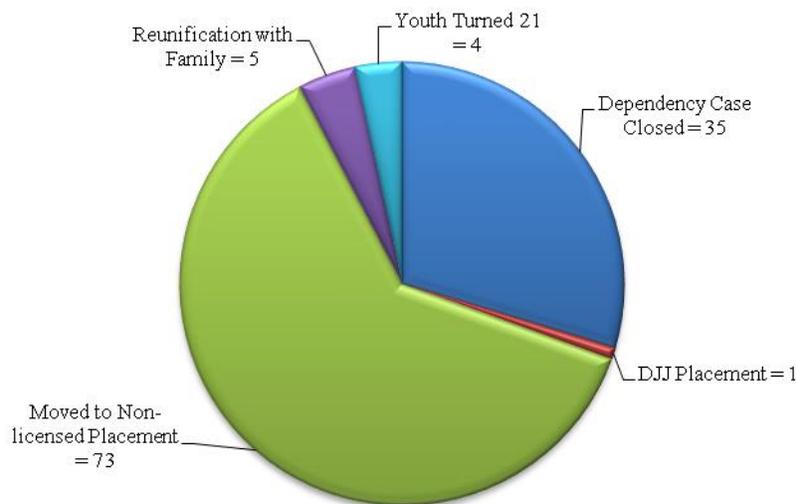
**C. Statewide Program Penetration Report by Circuit  
Youth Ages 15-17 in Licensed Out-of-Home Care<sup>4</sup>**

<b>Circuit</b>	<b>Counties</b>	<b>Lead Agency</b>	<b># Enrolled Youth</b>	<b># Eligible</b>	<b>% Enrolled</b>
1	Escambia, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, Walton	Families First Network	16	80	20.00%
2,14	Bay, Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, Wakulla, Washington	Big Bend CBC	13	59	22.03%
3, 8	Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Suwannee, Taylor, Union	Partnership for Strong Families	23	35	65.71%
4	Clay	Kids First of Florida	5	15	33.33%
4	Duval, Nassau	Family Support Services of North Florida	37	40	92.50%
7	St, Johns	St. Johns County Board of Commissioners	5	8	62.50%
7	Flagler, Putnam, Volusia	Community Partnership for Children	43	53	81.13%
5	Citrus, Hernando, Lake, Marion, Sumter	Kids Central	23	73	31.51%
9	Orange, Osceola	CBC of Central Florida	43	88	48.86%
10	Hardee, Highlands, Polk	Heartland for Children	36	62	58.06%
18	Seminole	CBC of Central Florida	19	20	95.00%
18	Brevard	Brevard Family Partnership	12	52	23.08%
6	Pasco, Pinellas	Eckerd Community Alternatives	26	117	22.22%
12	DeSoto, Manatee, Sarasota	Sarasota Family YMCA	9	45	20.00%
13	Hillsborough	Eckerd Community Alternatives	25	123	20.33%
20	Charlotte, Collier, Glades, Hendry, Lee	Children's Network of Southwest Florida	13	86	15.12%
15	Palm Beach	ChildNet	10	116	8.62%
17	Broward	ChildNet	26	182	14.29%
19	Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee, St. Lucie	Devereux Families	18	28	64.29%
11, 16	Miami-Dade, Monroe	Our Kids of Miami-Dade/Monroe	5	154	3.25%
<b>Total</b>			<b>407</b>	<b>1436</b>	<b>28.34%</b>

<sup>4</sup> Dept. of Children & Families. Florida Safe Families Network. OCWDRU Report #1005 "Children and Young Adults in Out-of-Home Care or Receiving In-Home Services by Age." As of May 1, 2016.

Because participation in Keys to Independence is statutorily restricted to dependent youth in licensed out-of-home care placements, a number of enrolled youth are occasionally closed from the program. While there are several reasons for closure, the most common cause is that the youth moved to a non-licensed placement, typically with a relative. Extensive research has demonstrated that youth in relative placements tend to experience better long-term outcomes than those in group care facilities or even with licensed foster families. Unfortunately, such a placement excludes these youth from continued participation in Keys to Independence. To date, 118 cases have been closed, of which 61.9% are closed due to such a placement change.

#### D. Reasons for Case Closure, Year One & Year Two



Regardless of the reason for case closure, if a youth returns to a licensed placement, the youth is eligible for re-enrollment in the program. The youth and caregiver will need to complete an updated Application, including the Participant Roles & Responsibilities form, which emphasizes the reasonable and prudent parenting standard.

#### Outcomes

The legislative mandate of this pilot program is to assist youth in foster care in overcoming barriers to achieving a driver's license. Very few of the eligible youth have ever had access to driving. In spite of taking the step to enroll in the program, many youth need time to learn that they have access to practice driving. Likewise, many caregivers require considerable prompting and coaching to feel comfortable giving youth access to driving.

For those under the age of 18, the State of Florida requires a 12-month probationary period to pass between obtaining a learner's license and testing for the driver's license. The vast majority of youth enrolling in Keys to Independence enroll without a learner's license (72.3%). To obtain the learner's license, youth must take the four-hour Traffic Safety and Substance Abuse Law course and pass the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) Knowledge Exam with a score of at least 80%.

“I have been able to improve and learn new driving skills that have helped me drive more safely on the road...with my daughter in the car. With the money I have been reimbursed, I have been able to save for my transition into my own apartment. Thanks to the K2I Program, I was able to afford my security deposit for my apartment and save money away for emergencies and maintenance on my car.”

- Alison, Participant

After obtaining their learner’s license, youth are expected to practice driving with a licensed driver (age 21+) for a minimum of 50 hours behind the wheel, of which 10 hours must be at night. The practice driving should include a variety of settings, including on residential streets, city thoroughfares and highways.

Though it is not required by state law, Keys to Independence procedures encourage youth to take a comprehensive driver’s education course during this period. A comprehensive course includes a minimum of six hours of behind-the-wheel driving time with a professional instructor, as well

as classroom instruction. To be reimbursed for insurance, all Keys to Independence participants must complete a driver’s education course.

Once the 12-month anniversary date of the learner’s license has passed, the youth may take the Road Test with the DMV or a DMV-approved provider to obtain his/her driver’s license. If the youth turns 18 before the anniversary date, he/she may take this test at any time. If an eligible young adult over the age of 18 does not yet have a learner’s license, Florida law allows the young adult to take the four-hour course, Knowledge Exam and Road Test without any probationary learner’s license period, moving immediately to the driver’s license. In such cases, Keys to Independence still requires the youth to complete driver’s education prior to receiving insurance reimbursement.

Based on the process of licensure, CBCCF measures progress of enrollees by event achieved.

#### E. Count of Events Achieved, Year One & Year Two

	Year 1	Year 2	Total
4-hour Course	116	76 <sup>5</sup>	192
Learner’s License	47	79	126
Driver’s Education	32	54	86
Driver’s License	31	59	90
Insurance <sup>6</sup>	11	28	39

#### Outreach & Trainings

During the initial program year, CBCCF placed emphasis on trainings to case managers and caregivers – those adults who are in the greatest decision-influencing roles with eligible youth – while broadly advertising the program to other stakeholders. In Year One, 33 such trainings were held in every CBC Circuit area around the state, reaching more than 1,800 attendees.

<sup>5</sup> This number is underrepresented of actual achievement due to the exclusion of 4-hour courses paid in bundled packages with driver’s education.

<sup>6</sup> The number of insured youth counted by the program is only those for whom premiums are reimbursed. Many youth exit care soon after they receive their license and do not qualify for subsequent insurance reimbursement.

Transitioning into the second year, it was the intent to focus trainings to areas of the state where enrollment was relatively low compared to the eligible population. However, program staff discovered that due to the high rate of turnover among dependency case managers, even the areas that had been strong during Year One required training for new staff. In Year Two, the Marketing & Technical Assistance Consultant conducted 21 new trainings, reaching an audience of more than 500. Additionally, a webinar recorded in Year One for the Quality Parenting Initiative remains online and accessible for any interested caregiver, case manager, Guardian ad Litem, or any other interested stakeholder in Florida.<sup>7</sup>

### III. OPERATIONAL ENHANCEMENTS

As a pilot program, the core team involved with Keys to Independence meets frequently to discuss program outcomes and opportunities for improvement. In Year Two, CBCCF made the following operational enhancements to ensure that youth were being served efficiently and equitably around the state:

#### Personnel Additions

From inception, Keys to Independence operated with a sole Initiative Support Manager, in addition to the contracted Marketing & Technical Assistance Consultant. By the end of the first year, with more than 150 youth enrolled in the program, it was evident that the Initiative Support Manager was unable to maintain such a large caseload – which should include working with the youth and their support teams to move forward on the path to licensure. The volume of new applications required that the Initiative Support Manager spent almost all of his time processing applications and reviewing reimbursement requests, leaving little time for direct contact with the previously enrolled youth and his/her support team.

“I have found that the Keys to Independence program has been a very simple process to navigate. From completing the application to submitting a reimbursement form, the system is user-friendly, and the documents are straight forward. There is always someone available to assist you through phone calls or emails in the event you have any questions...With the support of the Keys to Independence program, what was once an unattainable dream for some youths, has now become a reality.”

- Erica, Residential Group Home Provider

CBCCF requested an amendment to its contract for two additional Initiative Support Managers, with the first beginning in late October and the second in early December of 2015. While each of the Initiative Support Managers share the same primary duties, the new employees have areas of expertise which augment the program’s operation: data collection and analysis, process improvement, fluency in Spanish (written and verbal), and dependency case management.

As of May 31, 2016, the three Initiative Support Managers support 571 enrolled youth, a caseload of approximately 190 each.

<sup>7</sup> See <http://centervideo.forest.usf.edu/qpi/keystoindependence/start.html>.

## Database

During the second year of operations, Keys to Independence benefited from the use of a new database system. The database is purchased through a licensing and services agreement with CBC of Central Florida – Holdings, Inc. This agreement is not funded with DCF-contracted funds for the Keys to Independence program. In addition to more efficient tracking of outcomes, benefits of using the database include:

- Systematic method to make and retain contact notes
- Cross-check ability for reimbursed expenses against the general ledger
- A tickler system for prompt and appropriate follow-up
- Paperless filing system
- Sorting ability, allowing for strategic contacts based on participant category, birthdays, learner’s license anniversary, etc.

## Spanish Language Resources

The Keys to Independence website was established shortly after contract execution in 2014 ([www.keystoindependencefl.org](http://www.keystoindependencefl.org)). Functionality of the website includes not only program information, frequently asked questions and helpful documents; it also includes the ability to submit new applications and reimbursement requests online. In early 2016, CBCCF developed a Spanish-language version of the website. The Spanish-language site can be accessed by selecting the orange “Español” button on the English-language site, or by navigating directly to <http://www.llavesparalaindependencia.org/>.

When changes are made to the English-language site, the program’s bilingual Initiative Support Manager ensures that concurrent updates are made on the Spanish-language site.

Though language has not shown to be a major barrier to participation in Keys to Independence, CBCCF is bolstering availability of these resources as they are hopeful to enroll more youth in Year Three from areas in which Spanish is spoken with greater prevalence (see Lead Agency Support, page 12).

## Communications & Social Media

Throughout the year, Keys to Independence has released e-newsletters to a growing list of stakeholders throughout the state, including enrolled youth and their caregivers, case managers, DCF personnel, lead agency personnel and Guardians ad Litem. The most recent newsletter, issued in April, was distributed to 695 unique email addresses, with an open rate of 33%. Further, the click-through rate (anyone who clicks on a link in the newsletter to read further information) was 20%. Both of these rates are considered above average by social marketing standards. Newsletters include information such as success stories, upcoming trainings, staff news, special promotions and program outcomes.

Additionally, Keys to Independence staff have begun actively utilizing social media (Facebook and Instagram) to actively engage with participants and other stakeholders. In addition to

promoting program happenings and outcomes, the pages promote traffic safety and upbeat messages for those involved in child welfare.

The Initiative Support Managers have found that youth, case managers and caregivers most readily communicate via email or text message. In April 2016, Key to Independence staff tested a mass texting service to promote an incentive program (discussed in more detail on page 13). Although the service was relatively inexpensive, the majority of responses still came via email. Initiative Support Managers will continue to utilize email as its primary mode of communication for follow-up, in addition to initiating regular phone calls.

In the final year of the pilot, CBCCF will explore ways to encourage use of the secure My JumpVault app to store vital information such as driver's license copies and insurance information for participant youth.

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#### **IV. BARRIERS TO LICENSURE**

As administrator of a pilot program, CBCCF seeks to identify and mitigate barriers related to licensure, particularly those barriers unique to youth in the foster care system. Above and beyond the expense of testing, driver's education and insurance premiums, Keys to Independence has found resolution to several barriers and continues to press forward on others.

- Foster Parent Concerns: While most licensed foster parents are generally supportive of youth in their care participating in the program, many have concerns about liability should the youth be involved in an accident. Even if a youth in foster care has his/her own auto insurance policy, should the youth have an accident while driving a household vehicle, Florida law dictates that the insurance of the owner's vehicle may be sued for damages. Fortunately, the law also provides two explicit protections for foster parents. First, s. 409.1454, Florida Statutes, prohibits a caregiver from being liable if the caregiver uses a prudent parent standard in approving a youth's activities. Second, s. 322.09(4), Florida Statutes, exempts foster parents of a minor, an authorized representative of a residential group home at which the minor resides, or the caseworker at the agency from assuming any obligation or liability for any damages by signing the license application.

Keys to Independence staff actively discuss these protections during trainings and with caregivers and case managers during the enrollment process. Detailed information is also available on the website. These proactive measures have successfully assuaged the majority of caregiver inquiries.

In the event of an accident, Keys to Independence will reimburse up to \$1,000 of the deductible. Notably, no such incident has occurred since program inception.

During the second year of the pilot, Keys to Independence was able to gain clarity on insurance laws for drivers under age 18 in Florida. If a youth is residing with a foster family, the youth will be automatically added to the foster family's existing auto insurance policy, even if the youth procures a separate insurance policy. The only method around this is to request the court grant a Disability of Non-Age Order specific to auto coverage. Information and forms for this are available on the program website. However, once the Initiative Support Managers detail the reimbursement process to the foster parents, most are comfortable with the youth being added to their policy. Keys to Independence reimburses only the portion of the premium attributable to the participant driver. Average turnaround time for reimbursement requests is seven days.

"One of the biggest positive outcomes that I have seen is that case workers are more aware of the importance that our state is placing on youth in foster care obtaining permits and licenses. They have been more cooperative about signing parental consent forms and sending original documents...I want to personally thank the individual or group of people who are responsible for initiating this program. I believe that these youth need to experience as many 'normal' teenage rites of passage as possible."

- Pam, Residential Group Home Provider

- **Reimbursement vs. Direct Payment:** Though the program was intended to be primarily on a reimbursement basis, the team has found that fronting the licensure-related expenses is a major barrier to most participants, particularly the costly driver's education courses (averaging \$300-\$500). Accordingly, the program works to directly pay as many of these charges as possible, which has in turn fostered positive relationships with driver's education vendors around the state. Additionally, the program has been able to purchase 'codes' for the online, four-hour Traffic Safety & Substance Abuse Law course, distributing these directly to youth so that paying this charge is not an additional barrier.

The only cost that remains a consistent barrier is to the Florida DMV (in some counties, this role is fulfilled by the tax collector). While most foster parents are willing to be reimbursed for the cost of license testing, those youth who visit the DMV with some other adult must find another way to pay the cost. The willingness of case managers to front this expense – even using agency credit cards – varies widely, with some representing particular circuits refusing to do so altogether. CBCCF is continuing to work with both the DMV to explore pre-payment options as well as impressing upon partner CBCs the responsibility to shoulder some of these reimbursable expenses.

- **Case Manager Turnover:** High staff turnover rates are, unfortunately, common in child welfare, particularly among case management staff. Though program staff conducted trainings throughout every circuit area of the state in Year One, it was found that many of the attendees at Year Two trainings were new case managers. CBCCF will continue to deliver training as needed and hopes to embed this program opportunity into the delivery of life skill services training. The Initiative Support Managers are currently collaborating with CBCCF

lead agency staff to design curriculum that will be available for foster parent (i.e., PRIDE) and case manager trainings.

- Driver's Education Availability: Keys to Independence has relationships with many drivers' education providers throughout the state, and maintains a contact sheet for the 26 school districts that offer some form of driver's education in the schools. However, some areas of the state – such as Key West – suffer from a scarcity of DMV-approved providers. In such cases, the team has been able to create custom contracts with providers from as far away as two hours, who drive to the youth to complete the necessary hours.
- Required Practice Driving Hours: Before attempting a driver's license Road Test, an adult must certify to the DMV that the youth has completed a minimum of 50 hours of practice driving, of which 10 must be at night. While the certifying adult may be a caregiver, case manager or Guardian ad Litem (all of whom are protected from liability under s. 322.094(4), Florida Statutes), this is rarely the individual who commits to all 50 hours of practice with the youth. Particularly for youth in residential settings, having access to a vehicle as well as a licensed adult driver (age 21+) for these hours is difficult. In some cases, CBCCF has been able to pay an additional fee to driver's education providers to complete the hours with the youth. The agency is also working to build a network of young adults (age 21+) formerly in foster care who will commit to assisting those with learner's licenses in meeting their practice driving requirement, for a reasonable rate. Such a structure would be beneficial because it not only allows the young adult an opportunity to earn extra income and model positive choices; the participant youth also is able to gain hours while spending time with a mentor figure who has a unique understanding of the youth's circumstance.
- Lead Agency Support: As evidenced in Illustration C, Statewide Program Penetration Report by Circuit, (see page 3), utilization of the program by CBC lead agencies is unbalanced. Many, such as Family Support Services of North Florida and Community Partnership for Children, have been consistently enrolling youth since program inception, and seem to have embedded Keys to Independence into their transition plans for older youth. However, some lead agencies continue to be minimally responsive in efforts to enroll youth, in spite of staff efforts to offer additional trainings, demonstrate timeliness of reimbursements and address outstanding concerns. Unfortunately, some of these lead agencies represent large populations of eligible youth.
- Placement in Non-licensed Care: Section 409.1454, Florida Statutes, which authorizes the Keys to Independence pilot program, restricts enrollment to youth who are in licensed out-of-home care. Older youth in foster care often move placements among relatives and licensed settings. For 73 such youth previously enrolled in Keys to Independence, a change to a non-licensed placement – generally seen as a positive step – has caused the youth to become ineligible for the program. Further, program staff routinely receive calls from case managers and non-licensed caregivers inquiring about enrollment. Relative and non-relative caregivers who agree to care for these children may feel twice-disadvantaged, as they are not eligible for the full board rate a licensed foster parent is given, and their youth is not able to enroll in

Keys to Independence.<sup>8</sup> Finally, many youth are enrolled in the program as 17-year-olds, obtain their permit and are anxiously awaiting their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday to take the Road Test. Unfortunately, if they do not remain in a licensed extended foster care placement after turning 18, they are also deemed ineligible for continued enrollment. For these reasons, the Department strongly recommends future inclusion of youth in all out-of-home care settings for enrollment, as well as for previously enrolled youth for a period of six months after reaching permanency or turning 18 years of age.

Because youth who turn 18 are expected to begin accepting increased responsibility, CBCCF supports limiting Keys to Independence assistance to 18- to 21-year-olds to overcoming barriers related only to licensure. Florida law only requires insurance for drivers who do not own vehicles if the driver is under age 18; if over 18, a participant can utilize the program to pay for licensing fees and driver's education, but does not require the insurance reimbursement.

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## V. GIFT CARD INCENTIVE PROMOTION

After months of encouraging enrolled youth to move on to the next stage of licensure, the Initiative Support Managers came to a simple conclusion: The primary barrier to youth in foster care obtaining a driver's license is often the youth themselves. They are coming of age during a time when driving and having one's own car is less popular: In 2014, only 24.5% of 16-year-olds nationwide had a license, a 47% decrease from 30 years prior.<sup>9</sup> Youth in foster care are perhaps more influenced by the major factors the general population cites for not getting a license, including the time and expense of acquiring and maintaining a vehicle, and concerns about sustainable employment.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, Keys to Independence staff have found that many caregivers, case managers, etc. have completed the enrollment application without the youth's full support. While the youth signs off on the application, the youth's willingness (or understanding) to move forward on the path to licensure is difficult to gauge.

As an experiment, the Initiative Support Managers requested the ability to incentivize youth with \$50 gift cards upon obtaining their learner's or driver's license.<sup>11</sup> CBCCF requested to utilize contract funding for this purpose but was advised the expense was not authorized. Instead, members of the CBCCF Board of Directors offered the funds to enable the promotion.

The gift card promotion ran April 11 – May 31, 2016; only participants enrolled by the start date were eligible. Prior to the promotion, an average of 2.57 learner's licenses or driver's licenses were being achieved per week. The results were dramatic:

- 16 Learner's Licenses achieved, a 40% increase in the weekly average
- 11 Driver's Licenses achieved, a 39% increase in the weekly average

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<sup>8</sup> Relative and non-relative caregivers are eligible for benefit payments, but the amount is less than the \$515 monthly board rate that licensed foster parents receive. Additionally, licensed foster parents receive their board payments automatically through a lead agency process, while non-licensed caregivers must meet eligibility through DCF's Economic Self-Sufficiency Program.

<sup>9</sup> The Atlantic. *The Decline of the Drivers License*. 1 January 2016. <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/01/the-decline-of-the-drivers-license/425169/>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Youth were offered a choice between Target and Walmart gift cards. Gift cards were sent via Certified Mail within seven days of submitting proof of a newly obtained Learner's License or Driver's License.

Notably, this promotion was conducted toward the end of the school year, which may have inhibited its potential for even greater success. Many foster parents and residential group home providers requested that the incentive be extended into the summer so that youth who were focused on final exams do not miss out on their chance to earn a gift card.

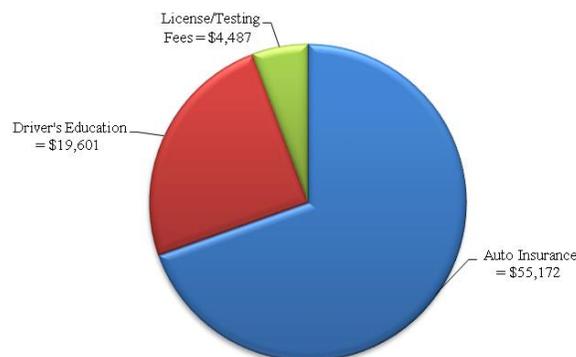
A \$50 investment is small compared to the benefit of moving a youth forward on the path to self-sufficiency and independence. CBCCF is committed to extending the incentive to youth eligible for the learner's license or driver's license and plans to seek legislative authority to use funds from the pilot project appropriation to support it.<sup>12</sup>

## VI. FINANCIAL SUMMARY

The Keys to Independence Act, authorized in 2014, was funded with an appropriation of \$800,000 per year for a three-year pilot period. Upon commencement of Year One, CBCCF expressed that the appropriate level of funding for a fully-vested program may actually be lower. Because the path to licensure is restricted by the 12-month Learner's License period, many youth do not obtain their license until they are close to age 18. At this age, they are more likely to leave licensed care and are therefore not eligible for insurance reimbursement. Reimbursement of insurance premiums is the most costly financial assistance category; when its use is limited, a lower-than-expected amount of financial assistance is needed.

Year-to-date through April 2016, CBCCF has utilized approximately \$330,129 in its contract for Keys to Independence. This includes approximately \$79,260 in financial assistance directly related to the costs of obtaining a license and insurance.

### F. Financial Assistance Expenditures, by Category Fiscal Year 2015/16



The majority of the contract expense is for direct service personnel, which includes three Initiative Support Managers and the contracted Marketing & Technical Assistance Consultant. Year-to-date, these expenses consume approximately 45% of utilized funds, or \$122,659.

<sup>12</sup> Utilization of the gift card incentive will require that the youth obtain a Learner's License or Driver's License (as appropriate) within 45 days of enrollment, within 45 days after reaching the one-year anniversary of a Learner's License, or within 45 days of turning 18.

In its first two years of operations, Keys to Independence has begun to establish a reliable history of data to project future client expenditure needs. In Year Three, CBCCF will devote considerable resources to refining these projections so that any appropriations for future program years could accurately reflect needed funds.

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## VII. LOOKING AHEAD

Florida is believed to be only the second state in the nation to initiate a program empowering youth in foster care to achieve their driver's licenses, and the first to fund a pilot project which allows for exploration to find the most effective ways of helping vulnerable youth in meeting this milestone on their path to adulthood. In just a short period of time, the number of Florida youth in foster care (ages 16 and 17) with a driver's license has tripled.<sup>13</sup>

The Department recommends the following improvements that will ensure the program reaches full effectiveness in reducing barriers to licensure:

- Inclusion of dependent youth in non-licensed care
- Inclusion of previously enrolled youth for six months after reaching permanency or turning 18
- Limitation of insurance reimbursement to youth ages 16-17 only
- Authority to use funds for incentives

Keys to Independence is one of the nation's most promising initiatives rooted in the intrinsic value of older youth in foster care and their unique needs as they strive to become independent, successful adults. The Department of Children and Families looks forward to a continued partnership with the Florida Legislature, CBCCF and the community-based care lead agencies, and caregivers on this important endeavor.

"As a mother to not just one but five teenage children at once, I cannot overstate the value of this program....I cannot even imagine how our family would have been able to cover the cost of insurance and licensing for that many teens at one time. Four of the children now have the ability to drive themselves to practices, school functions, tutoring and jobs.

The only wish I could ask for is that the program be extended to teens being adopted in care. We will soon be adopting our three new family members...and we will be sad to lose this invaluable program."

- Renee, Foster Parent

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<sup>13</sup> Of the 90 driver's licenses issued while participants were enrolled in the program, 45 were to youth while 16-17. An additional 45 were issued to young adults 18-20.