

Independent Living Services Advisory Council



2015

Report of Independent Living Services
for Florida's Foster Youth

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Program Overview

History and Background

The Chafee Foster Care Independence Act (1999)

In 1999, the federal government enacted the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act. This legislation gave states increased funding to provide foster teens and young adults who have “aged out” of the foster care system better access to programs that are designed to promote the development of adult self-sufficiency. Available Independent Living training opportunities, programmatic supports, and direct services covered by the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act include: educational training and supports; preparation for post-secondary education; daily life skills training; employment training; substance abuse services; pregnancy prevention and preventive health activities; and programs designed to connect foster teens and young adults who have aged out of foster care with positive and permanent adult mentors.

Road-to-Independence Act (2002)

In 2002, Florida passed the Road-to-Independence Act. This state based program established a system of independent living transition services to enable older children in foster care and young adults who exit foster care at age 18 to transition to self-sufficiency as adults. The Road-to-Independence (RTI) Program also is designed to provide direct stipend payments to young adults who have aged out of foster care while they pursue fulltime educational opportunities in the areas of continuing adult education (GED), vocational training/certification, or post-secondary associate/bachelor degrees.

This program has been grandfathered in by the Nancy C. Detert Act, described below. Any young adult who had been receiving RTI benefits as of January 1, 2014 has been able to remain in the program provide they retain program eligibility.

Nancy C. Detert Common Sense and Compassion Independent Living Act (2013)

In 2013, Florida passed the Nancy C. Detert Common Sense and Compassion Independent Living Act which allows for young adults in or formerly in foster care to voluntarily extend their time in foster care up to the age of 21. The young adults must be attending school on a full time basis, working a minimum of 80 hours per month, or have a recognized disability that prevents full-time participation in educational or employment opportunities. The act limits the use of Road-to-Independence payments to post-secondary educational opportunities and shifts life skills training responsibilities to foster parent and group home providers. The act also eliminated the categories of Subsidized Independent Living and Transitional Support Services. The act took effect on January 1, 2014.

Some of the most in depth changes within the law change the focus of how we “parent” as a foster care system. There is great emphasis in the new law to “empower all foster care caregivers” to provide quality parenting. That includes foster parents and group home/congregate care providers.

Some aspects of quality parenting focus on allowing foster care caregivers to make decisions about the children in their care including approving/disapproving “normalcy activities” based on the reasonable and prudent standard.

The law also stresses the importance of quality caregivers and the requirement that children can only be placed with caregivers who are willing and able to meet the quality parenting standard. As part of the continued focus on quality parenting, life skills or those skills that we all need to acquire to make the successful transition to adulthood are now the responsibility of the caregivers (again both foster parents and congregate/group care providers). Learning will be “in the home”; however, the Child welfare agencies will still be accountable for ensuring services are provided and supporting caregivers with resources.

The law also created the Road to Independence; Extended Foster Care and Postsecondary Educational Support Services or PESS. During fiscal year 2014-2015, a total of 3,173 young adults (unduplicated count) participated in these services.

Extended Foster Care (EFC)

Quick Facts:

- Florida is an “opt-out” State. Children aging out of care automatically remain in care, through EFC, unless they sign paperwork opting out of care before the court
- Provides young adults with additional and continued case management and support
- Allows for more time between ages 18 – 21 for young people to prepare for adulthood
- Provides assistance with school, work and safe housing
- Provides a plan for gradual transition to full responsibility
- 24-hour emergency support available
- The housing “placement match” must meet the developmental/maturity level of the young adult
- Extended Foster Care ends on the young adult’s 21st birthday [Age 22 for youth with a documented disability]
- Payments for housing and services are made directly to foster parents/providers with smaller amounts provided to the young adult for allowance

Eligibility:

- EFC is a voluntary extension of services
- Young adults in EFC must have a court approved case plan/transition plan. Young adults will be required to participate in the development of the plans and maintain compliance with the court
- Young adults will have a case manager who will regularly meet with youth. The case manager will provide support and services and the youth and case manager will operate as a team
- The young adult must live in an approved living environment that is chosen to provide the necessary supervision that is consistent with their assessed needs.
- The young adult must engage in one of the listed activities, unless a documented condition impairs the ability to do so.

- Failure of the young adult to meet eligibility requirements results in discharge from the program, with access to a fair hearing for the young adult to contest the discharge. If discharged, the young adult will be offered alternative services if eligible.

Data Trends:

- In Fiscal Year 2014-2015, 1,013 young adults participated in Extended Foster Care.
- The majority (81%) of young adults participating in EFC are 18 or 19 years old.

Statewide Highlight For Extended Foster Care:

To best assist young adults who decide to leave a group home, foster home, or other supportive living arrangement at 18 years old, agencies across the state have sought private funding for a Housing Coordinator position to give these young adults additional support as they enter the housing market. For example: Palm Beach, Broward and other counties have found these positions to be invaluable for young adults and case managers. Older foster youth received a knowledgeable support person about the housing options in their area, and case management receives a central point of housing coordination for older foster youth. This creates a savings of time and effort to best help young people with housing beyond 18 years old.

The FLITE Center, the first One Stop Resource Center in Florida for youth transitioning out of the child welfare system, has worked to meet housing needs for 819 individual youth in the last four years. At the FLITE Center (Fort Lauderdale Independence Training and Education Center) the Housing Coordinator acts as a resource expert, advocate, and liaison in the coordination of locating safe, affordable housing for transitioning youth between the ages of 18-23 living in Broward County. Overall this position is responsible of working with program participants, provider staff, landlords and property owners to ensure that all young people have adequate shelter during the transition from out of home care to independence and help them sustain permanent, affordable, and quality housing.

In Palm Beach County, Vita Nova Independent Living Services have begun a pilot to pair older foster youth ages 21+ to serve as peer mentors to new EFC candidates. Peer mentors provide in-home life skills training related to cleanliness, lease agreements, and budgeting using life lessons garnered from their experience after leaving child welfare. Life skills sessions occur three times a week with the intention of helping EFC youth avoid evictions, thereby preserving their placements and stability.

Postsecondary Educational Support and Services

Quick Facts:

This program is available to the following:

- Young adults who turned 18 while residing in licensed care and who spent a total of 6 months in licensed out-of-home care;
- Young adults who were adopted or placed into guardianship after age 16 after spending at least 6 months in licensed care within the 12 months immediately preceding such placement or adoption.

- Young adults who have earned a standard high school diploma, or its equivalent
- Enrolled in a Florida Bright Futures eligible postsecondary institution (i.e.: vocational/college/university)

Pess is not a needs-based program, unlike its predecessor, Road to Independence; PESS participants receive \$1256 per month financial stipend;

Case Management services are available, although there is no formal procedure.

Eligibility:

- Must maintain full time enrollment in post secondary setting (minimum of 9 credit hours)
- Must make forward progress as defined by the educational institution and by earning a minimum of 18 credits within the annual renewal period
- Must provide monthly proof verifying enrollment. This is usually done by signing a release and providing case manager access to school, via website or other means.

Data Trends:

- In fiscal year 2014-2015, 1,563 young adults participated in Post-Secondary Educational Support Services (PESS).
- Whether or not the Legislature intended this result, extended foster care tends to serve the 18 and 19-year-old population, while PESS participants tend to be older. Seventy-seven percent of the PESS participants in fiscal year 2014-2015 were 20 years of age or older.

Aftercare Services

Quick Facts:

- Aftercare is designed to function as a “bridge” between care and independence. For example, if a young adult has not completed high school or obtained their GED upon aging out and chooses to opt out of EFC, they may receive funding and other services on a short-term basis to help them settle into independence. Aftercare is also available for those returning to EFC but prior to their eligibility, or those exiting PESS.
- Aftercare provides short term/limited support. Aftercare Services may lead to more stable services
- Aftercare services can include housing, car repairs, employment assistance, education expenses, clothing, food (financial or community resource referrals)
- Emergency funding is available to help prevent homelessness
- Mental health or substance abuse services are included in the service array
- Case Management may be provided, depending on the service provider

Eligibility:

- A young adult must turn 18 while in a licensed placement
- A young adult must be under the age of 23

- Young adults cannot access Aftercare if they are in extended foster care or PESS

Data Trends:

- A total of 467 young adults received aftercare services that included a documented payment to the youth or for services in fiscal year 2014-2015. It is important to note that many aftercare services do not include a specific payment made by the community based care organization. These services may include linkage to resources and services that are available to the youth in the community and are funded through various systems and organizations (e.g., United Way services, mental health and substance abuse services, domestic violence services, etc.).

Statewide Highlight for After Care Services:

Innovations within aftercare services were sporadic from region to region. While most areas follow the intent of the statute it was apparent that these services were mostly about establishing a dollar amount to assist a young adult in a crisis.

It was clear that circuits employing an innovative approach took it upon themselves to find solutions beyond issuing a check to resolve a crisis a young person was experience. In many cases this meant that agencies would remain in contact with a young adult during an extended period of time to ensure additional services can be provided before, during and after a crisis situation.

For example, at Devereaux Community Based Care a thorough plan is created with the young person that utilizes resources in the community along with advocacy from the staff to help young adults become more stable. In some cases these services last 90-days to give staff and the young adult enough time to find a lasting resolution with school, work, health, or employment issues.

Another good example of combining aftercare services with community resources is from the Community Based Care of Central Florida (CBCCF). Leadership and staff have a different outlook on aftercare services, as they do not consider these services to be a cash assistance program. Key elements include:

- **Emergency Housing:** CBCCF has negotiated with providers who are willing to provide short term bed space for our youth who are facing homelessness. If a youth says they are without a bed, a referral should be made to one of these providers. After a young adult is housed, there will be a thorough assessment of the needs of the youth and consideration of re-entry into extended foster care, if appropriate.
- **Mental Health Services:** CBCCF makes referrals to targeted case management who take over primary responsibility for accessing these services for youth including crisis counseling and medication management.

- The greatest needs of youth served by CBCCFI are housing, employment and education. There are identified specialists that work in each of these areas directly with the youth to assist them in becoming self sufficient.

Independent Living Data Review

Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP) Outcomes Report for Young Adults from Foster Care

The Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP) is a data collection and consumer reporting system established by Florida Statutes Section 1008.39 to provide follow-up data on former students and program participants who have graduated, exited or completed a public education or training program within the State of Florida. This information is part of the performance accountability processes for all parts of the K-20 system and serves as an indicator of student achievement and program needs. It helps educators and parents better prepare and counsel students for success in their future education or career choices. The most recent published FETPIP data follows¹:

KIDS AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE (ACTIVE) - FALL 2014 FINDINGS

TOTAL INDIVIDUALS 9,727 TOTAL WITH OUTCOME DATA 7,089 73%

FLORIDA EMPLOYMENT DATA (4th QTR)

FOUND EMPLOYED	2,906	30%
AVERAGE EARNINGS - ALL	\$2,872	
FOUND EMPLOYED FULL-TIME	727	25%
FULL-TIME AVERAGE EARNINGS	\$6,466	

Percent working full-time is of those employed.
Full-Time Earnings = earnings of at least \$4,123 per qtr (min. wage x 13 wks. x 40 hrs)

EARNINGS BY LEVEL*

Number of employed earning:

Less Than \$7.93 per hr (Qtrly Wages less than \$4,123)	2,179	75%
Wages Between \$7.93 and \$14.37 Inclusive (Qtrly Wages at least \$4,123 but less than \$7,475)	576	20%
Wages Between \$14.38 and \$20.81 Inclusive (Qtrly Wages at least \$7,475 but less than \$10,826)	120	4%
Wages at Least \$20.82 per hr. (Qtrly Wages at least \$10,826)	31	1%

*Levels determined by qtrly wage /520 hrs (40hrs. x 13 wks.)

FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT DATA

CIVILIAN EMPLOYMENT (U.S. Post Office, U.S. Civil Service)	****	****
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FLORIDA CONTINUING EDUCATION DATA

TOTAL CONT. THEIR EDUCATION (Unduplicated)	1,766	18%
...IN DISTRICT POSTSECONDARY	336	19%
...IN FLORIDA COLLEGE SYSTEM	1,352	77%
AA Program	673	50%
AS Program	133	10%
AAS Program	****	****
Adult Vocational Certificate	28	2%
Vocational Credit Certificate	16	1%
Other	501	37%
...IN STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM	174	10%
...IN PRIVATE COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY	11	1%

Students may be in multiple settings, therefore,
sum of detail may exceed total unduplicated count.

OF TOTAL CONT. ED. THOSE FOUND EMPLOYED	805	46%
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RECEIVING PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Food Stamps

RECEIVING TANF	203	2%
... & EMPLOYED	72	35%
RECEIVING FOOD STAMPS	5,067	52%
... & EMPLOYED	1,736	34%
RECEIVING TANF &or FOOD STAMPS	5,077	52%
... & EMPLOYED	1,737	34%

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS DATA

INCARCERATED	438	5%
COMMUNITY SUPERVISION	567	6%

¹ This data, and language, comes to DCF directly from Florida Department of Education. For more information about FETPIP, go to: <http://www.fldoe.org/accountability/fl-edu-training-placement-info-program>

The Federal National Youth in Transition Database [NYTD]

The Foster Care Independence Act (FCIA) of 1999 established the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, commonly referred to as the Chafee Program, to appropriate state funding for services, supports, and trainings in an effort to better prepare youth in foster care for the transition to adulthood. The FCIA required the Administration for Children and Families to create a National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) to:

- Track the independent living services each state provides to youth in foster care
- Assess each state's performance in providing these independent living/transition services as measured by the outcomes of youth between the ages of 17-21 who received or are currently receiving these services while in foster care.

To meet the mandates for NYTD, the Administration for Children and Families requires states to comply with two distinct data collection activities in order to collect data on independent living service provision and youth outcomes.

Data Collection Activity 1: Independent Living Service Provision

The Administration for Children and Families established six-month reporting periods in which data is transmitted from the statewide Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) system to the federal NYTD system. Florida is required to send data on the type and frequency of independent living services provided to each youth who meets the definition of Served Population. If a youth receives at least one independent living service during the six-month reporting period, the youth is in the Served Population.

For the Served Population youth, specific information on independent living services is collected across the following eleven categories:

- Independent Living Needs Assessment
- Post-Secondary Educational Support
- Employment or Vocational Training
- Health Education and Risk Prevention
- Family Support and Healthy Marriage Education
- Supervised Independent Living
- Housing Education and Home Management Training
- Academic Support
- Career Preparation
- Budget and Financial Management
- Mentoring

In addition to capturing independent living services, states must also collect youth specific demographic information, along with the youth's foster care status, educational level, special education services status and information on whether the youth has or has not been adjudicated delinquent. States are also required to report financial assistance provided to the youth. Examples of financial assistance include room and board, education assistance through PESS and funding received through Aftercare.

Data Collection Activity 2: NYTD Survey-Youth Outcomes

Since 2010, youth outcome data has been collected through the NYTD self-report survey developed by the Administration for Children and Families. In Florida, NYTD survey outcome data is collected and reported for youth in relative, non-relative, and licensed placements. Youth in foster care are first surveyed at age 17 to establish the baseline population cohort.

Youth in the baseline population cohort are administered the follow-up NYTD self-report survey when they turn age 19 and again at age 21, regardless of whether they are receiving any kind of foster care or independent living services. The NYTD self-report survey data must be collected directly from the youth and not from any type of administrative records. The NYTD self-report survey is comprised of approximately 22 questions and states can decide on the survey method. Florida utilizes a combination of methods for survey administration including online, telephone, paper, email, and even social media.

Under federal rule, states are required to meet a follow-up NYTD self-report survey participation rate of 60% for youth who are no longer in foster care and a participation rate of 80% for youth who are still in foster care at ages 19 and 21, or be subject to a financial penalty. Every three years, states will establish a new age 17 baseline population cohort.

The NYTD self-report survey collects information that is used to assess each state's performance as measured by the six youth outcome indicators established by the Administration for Children and Families. The six youth outcome indicators are:

- Financial Self-Sufficiency
- Educational Attainment
- High-Risk Behavior
- Experience with Homelessness
- Positive Connections with Adults
- Access to Health Insurance

Expanding the NYTD Survey: NYTD Plus+

The Administration for Children and Families identified the required questions that must be asked of youth taking the NYTD self-report survey; however, states may add on their own questions or even use an expanded version of the self-report survey called NYTD Plus+.

The NYTD Plus+ self-report survey was developed as part of a collaborative initiative launched by the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA), Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago and the Center for State Foster Care and Adoption Data. One of the objectives of this APHSA/Chapin Hall NYTD Initiative was to design a survey instrument that states could use to go beyond the minimal federal data collection requirements of NYTD in order to fully collect and measure youth outcomes in greater depth and comprehension.

A National Advisory Committee, comprised of experts in the field of child welfare and representatives from state child welfare agencies, was established to oversee and provide guidance to the APHSA/Chapin Hall NYTD Initiative. Florida Department of Children and Families Deputy Secretary Don Winstead was appointed to chair the National Advisory Committee. According to Winstead, "The reason to do NYTD Plus+ and to take the most robust

approach possible—is not the federal mandate. If we do it only because of the mandate, we’re missing the point. We have accepted responsibility for these youth, and everything that we do know says that we need to do better by them. And in order to do better, we need to understand better and develop better ways to meet their needs.”

In 2010, Florida became the first state to implement the expanded NYTD Plus+ self-report survey.

Florida’s Department of Children and Families: Listening to Every Youth...Every Year - Beyond the Federal Requirements

The Florida version of NYTD Plus+

Although the federal NYTD requirement is to survey a cohort of youth at ages 17, 19, and 21, Florida implemented the administration of the NYTD Plus+ self-report survey for all youth ages 18-21 who aged out of Florida’s Foster care system. The Florida version of the NYTD Plus+ survey includes the questions in the NYTD Plus+ survey tool developed through the APHSA/Chapin Hall NYTD Initiative as well as questions DCF added from the 2007-2009 DCF IL Checklist survey tool. The Florida version of the NYTD Plus+ has been administered annually since 2011.

An overview of each year’s survey responses is published in a report on the DCF website, and CBC specific survey data is available to each CBC lead agency through a DCF data portal link.

The Florida Version of My Services

In 2010, DCF contracted with Cby25 Initiative, Inc. to modify their existing My Services on-line self-report survey tool to include questions specific to Florida’s child welfare system. The Florida version of My Services contains questions added by DCF to address the key issues of employment, normalcy and the Quality Parenting Initiative. Also included are questions from the 2007-2009 DCF IL Checklist survey tool.

These additions have increased the size of the Florida version of My Services to almost 200 questions. In order to ensure youth continue to have a quality and thoughtful experience when taking the survey, the Florida version of My Services is broken down into ten 15-minute topic modules.

Making certain youth ages 13 – 17 have a thoughtful experience during their feedback sessions is of great importance to the quality of data received; therefore, it is vital to ensure that CBC Lead agencies administer the Florida version of My Services correctly. The survey was not designed nor intended to be completed all at one time while sitting in a caseworker or IL staff office. The survey is web-based and should be completed within the home or community. The administration period is a two-month span in which youth can complete a module or two at their discretion, save their answers and return to complete the other modules.

During a recent series of webinar trainings on administering the Florida version of My Services, Cby25® Initiative guided participants to first ask youth the following question before putting a survey administration plan in place. According to Cby25® Initiative, *“the most important issue is not the size of the survey or the number of questions- the most important piece of information we can gather is whether or not our youth in care have access to the internet, because having access to the internet is no longer a luxury – it is a necessity. Teachers and school systems are using the internet to communicate homework assignments, educational events, and student grades. Many employers now have web-based application systems.*

If our youth are not educated in internet use and internet safety, it will be another area of learning and social capital where youth in foster care will not be equal to their same age peers. This is not about our youth knowing how to “text”; this is about access to the internet. The first question that should be asked and answered prior to the survey is: Over the next 60 days, if the youth had to access the internet on six occasions for 15 minutes each time, how would they do that? Where would they go? What equipment would they use? What internet access options are available within the home; within public spaces or private spaces that offer free internet access?”

The screenshot shows the website www.policyforresults.org/youth/support-youth-transitioning-from-foster-care/strategies/youth-engagement. The page features a navigation bar with links for HOME, BLOG, RESOURCES, and CONTACT, along with a search box. The main content area includes the Center for the Study of Social Policy logo and the tagline "POLICY for RESULTS.org Better results for kids and families through research informed policy". A "STAY INFORMED" section prompts users to enter their email address. The main navigation menu includes links for About, Early Childhood, Youth, Health, Education, Child Welfare & Family Supports, Poverty & Economic Stability, and Community Change. The current page is titled "STRATEGIES" and features a large image of a hand holding a butterfly. The main heading reads "Create Opportunities for Youth to Be Listened to, to Be Informed, to Be Respected, and to Exert Control over Their Lives". Below this, there are sections for "IN THIS SECTION" and "WHAT CAN POLICYMAKERS DO?". A sidebar on the right titled "STATES" highlights California's Senate Bill 933, which established the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman.

<http://www.policyforresults.org/child-welfare/support-youth-transitioning-from-foster-care/strategies/youth-engagement>

Data Collection and Survey Results

Education

Source: My Services Survey - Responses by youth ages 13-17.

Caseworker reviews school grades and report cards	Year	Spring 2011	Spring 2012	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015
	Percentage Yes	73%	69%	71%	67%	66%
	Number Yes	1,139	1,189	943	858	735
	Total	1,560	1,712	1,319	1,272	1,112

Youth has an Education & Career Path [This may be your EPEP]	Year	Spring 2011	Spring 2012	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015
	Percentage Yes	52%	35%	36%	29%	25%
	Number Yes	818	599	475	368	320
	Total	1,560	1,712	1,319	1,272	1,300

Youth has an Individualized Education Plan [IEP]	Year	Spring 2011	Spring 2012	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015
	Percentage Yes	43%	41%	41%	39%	34%
	Number Yes	669	709	543	501	445
	Total	1,560	1,712	1,319	1,272	1,300

Youth has changed schools at least once during the school year	Year	Spring 2011	Spring 2012	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015
	Percentage Yes	47%	47%	49%	49%	46%
	Number Yes	734	800	650	626	600
	Total	1,560	1,712	1,319	1,272	1,300

Employment

Source: My Services Survey - Responses by youth ages 14-17 spring 2010 and ages 13-17 for all other years.

Currently Employed	Year	Spring 2011	Spring 2012	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015
	Percentage Yes	8%	6%	7%	8%	9%
	Number Yes	95	74	66	64	72
	Total	1,198	1,199	930	842	847

Earns extra money by babysitting, mowing lawns, cleaning yards and other activities	Year	Spring 2011	Spring 2012	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015
	Percentage Yes	74%	65%	49%	50%	48%
	Number Yes	532	794	649	632	620
	Total	1,361	1,712	1,319	1,272	1,300

Responses by youth ages 14-17 spring 2010 and 13-17 all Others

Completed a life skills training program on how to get a job-including job interviewing skills, completing a job application and resume	Year	Spring 2011	Spring 2012	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015
	Percentage Yes	47%	46%	55%	48%	39%
	Number Yes	417	330	296	269	218
	Total	883	711	453	556	563

Only asked of youth ages 15-16

Health and Dental Care

Source: My Services Survey - Responses by youth ages 14-17 spring 2010 and youth ages 13-17 for all other years.

Youth receiving needed medical care	Year	Spring 2011	Spring 2012	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015
	Percentage No, I am receiving the medical care I need	86%	86%	85%	86%	86%
	No, I am receiving the medical care I need	1,338	1,479	1,124	1,095	1,121
	Total	1,560	1,712	1,319	1,272	1,300

Youth receiving needed mental health care	Year	Spring 2011	Spring 2012	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015
	Percentage Yes	87%	85%	88%	84%	53%
	Number Yes	934	897	734	721	688
	Total	1,072	1,057	836	855	1,300

Youth receiving substance abuse treatment services	Year	Spring 2011	Spring 2012	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015
	Percentage Yes	61%	61%	66%	56%	19%
	Number Yes	345	353	299	252	242
	Total	568	579	451	448	1,300

Youth taking prescription medication	Year	Spring 2011	Spring 2012	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015
	Percentage Yes	44%	44%	49%	50%	46%
	Number Yes	682	753	646	639	593
	Total	1,560	1,712	1,319	1,272	1,300

Youth who have seen a dentist in the last year	Year	Spring 2011	Spring 2012	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015
	Percentage Yes	85%	86%	89%	87%	89%
	Number Yes	1,330	1,472	1,171	1,115	1162
	Total	1,560	1,712	1,319	1,272	1,300

Youth who have had an eye exam in the last year	Year	Spring 2011	Spring 2012	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015
	Percentage Yes	81%	68%	66%	67%	75%
	Number Yes	1,271	1,164	873	858	976
	Total	1,560	1,712	1,319	1,272	1,300

Normalcy

Source: My Services Survey - Only asked of youth age 16-17.

Youth can spend time with friends WITHOUT adult supervision	Year	Spring 2011	Spring 2012	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015
	Percentage Yes	74%	65%	62%	63%	65%
	Yes	1,115	1,117	822	807	848
	Total	1,560	1,712	1,319	1,272	1,300

Responses by youth age 14-17 spring 2010 and 13-17 all others

Youth can spend the night with friends from school or social group.	Year	Spring 2011	Spring 2012	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015
	Percentage Yes	51%	45%	46%	48%	48%
	Yes	650	542	426	408	409
	Total	1,269	1,119	930	842	847

Only asked of youth age 15-17 except for fall 2011 age 16-17

Receives a personal allowance each week.	Year	Spring 2011	Spring 2012	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015
	Percentage Yes	54%	53%	57%	56%	54%
	Yes	845	901	758	711	698
	Total	1,560	1,712	1,319	1,272	1,300

Have a Florida Identification	Year	Spring 2011	Spring 2012	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015
	Percentage Yes	38%	39%	41%	38%	35%
	Yes	593	675	540	480	454
	Total	1,560	1,712	1,319	1,272	1,300

Responses by youth age 14-17 spring 2010 and 13-17 all others.

Have a Learners Permit	Year	Spring 2011	Spring 2012	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015
	Percentage Yes		10%	9%	12%	12%
	Yes		117	88	97	99
	Total		1,119	930	842	847

Only asked of youth age 15-17.

Successfully completed a driver's education course	Year	Spring 2011	Spring 2012	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015
	Percentage Yes	5%	12%	17%	15%	23%
	Yes	40	139	110	129	132
	Total	853	1,119	687	842	582

Only asked of youth age 16-17.

Have a Driver's License	Year	Spring 2011	Spring 2012	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015
	Percentage Yes		3%	3%	2%	5%
	Yes		22	20	13	29
	Total		862	687	591	582

Juvenile Justice System Involvement

Source: My Services Survey - Responses by youth age 14-17 spring 2010 and 13-17.

Been arrested in the past 12 months	Year	Spring 2011	Spring 2012	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015
	Percentage Yes	29%	28%	28%	24%	22%
	Yes	554	482	366	302	281
	Total	1,560	1,712	1,319	1,272	1,300

Currently on probation or under DJJ supervision	Year	Spring 2011	Spring 2012	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015
	Percentage Yes	21%	22%	23%	18%	17%
	Yes	333	379	308	223	220
	Total	1,560	1,712	1,319	1,272	1,300

Juvenile Justice System Involvement by Age

Source: My Services Survey - Responses by youth age 13-17.

Been arrested in the past 12 months	Age	13	14	15	16	17	Total
	Percentage Yes	11%	17%	27%	26%	23%	22%
	Yes	21	45	72	77	66	281
	Total	188	265	265	298	284	1,300

Currently on probation or under DJJ supervision	Age	13	14	15	16	17	Total
	Percentage Yes	7%	14%	18%	20%	21%	17%
	Yes	14	38	49	60	59	220
	Total	188	265	265	298	284	1,300

Survey responses by young adults age 18 – 22

Education

FL NYTD-Responses by young adults age 18-22.

Completed Grade 12 or Graduation Equivalency Diploma	Year	Florida NYTD 2011	Florida NYTD 2012	Florida NYTD 2013	Florida NYTD 2014	Florida NYTD 2015
	Percentage Yes	54%	57%	56%	64%	72%
	Yes	1,093	1,041	1,011	912	905
	Total	2,015	1,821	1,852	1,424	1,288

Completed Post-Secondary Education	Year	Florida NYTD 2011	Florida NYTD 2012	Florida NYTD 2013	Florida NYTD 2014	Florida NYTD 2015
	Percentage Yes	3%	7%	5%	12%	13%
	Yes	54	65	96	175	171
	Total	2,015	1,821	1,852	1,424	1,288

Employment

Responses by young adults age 18-22.

Any job: part-time, full-time, temporary or seasonal	Year	Florida NYTD 2011	Florida NYTD 2012	Florida NYTD 2013	Florida NYTD 2014	Florida NYTD 2015
	Percentage Yes	14%	19%	49%	20%	27%
	Yes	195	346	907	290	349
	Total	1,398	1,821	1,852	1,424	1,288

Full-time job	Year	Florida NYTD 2011	Florida NYTD 2012	Florida NYTD 2013	Florida NYTD 2014	Florida NYTD 2015
	Percentage Yes	4%	4%	4%	4%	7%
	Yes	61	72	83	61	90
	Total	1,398	1,821	1,852	1,424	1,288

Minimum Wage	Year	Florida NYTD 2011	Florida NYTD 2012	Florida NYTD 2013	Florida NYTD 2014	Florida NYTD 2015
	Percentage Yes	40%	35%	28%	24%	20%
	Yes	97	109	86	71	71
	Total	244	310	312	290	348

Supportive Services

Responses by young adults age 18-22.

Connected to an adult mentor (Question changed to: Do you currently have a relationship that is trusting, supportive, and unconditional with at least one adult who will always be there for you?)	Year	Florida NYTD 2011	Florida NYTD 2012	Florida NYTD 2013	Florida NYTD 2014	Florida NYTD 2015
	Percentage Yes	76%	83%	82%	74%	79%
	Yes	1,596	1,392	1,419	1,048	949
	Total	2,013	1,812	1,852	1,424	1,288

Health and Dental Care

Responses by young adults age 18-22.

Youth has health insurance coverage	Year	Florida NYTD 2011	Florida NYTD 2012	Florida NYTD 2013	Florida NYTD 2014	Florida NYTD 2015
	Percentage Yes	85%	86%	71%	75%	85%
	Yes	1,719	1,559	1,483	1,071	1,016
	Total	2,015	1,821	1,852	1,424	1,288

Received dental services in the last year?	Year	Florida NYTD 2011	Florida NYTD 2012	Florida NYTD 2013	Florida NYTD 2014	Florida NYTD 2015
	Percentage Yes	40%	39%	40%	42%	49%
	Yes	800	702	741	601	567
	Total	2,004	1,821	1,852	1,424	1,288

Housing & Transportation

Responses by young adults age 18-22.

Safe Housing	Year	Florida NYTD 2011	Florida NYTD 2012	Florida NYTD 2013	Florida NYTD 2014	Florida NYTD 2015
	Percentage Yes	90%	92%	97%	91%	96%
	Yes	1,806	1,683	1,699	1,298	1,174
	Total	2,015	1,821	1,852	1,424	1,288

Spent at least one night homeless in the past 12 months <small>(Question changed in 2011 to: Have you ever been homeless?)</small>	Year	Florida NYTD 2011	Florida NYTD 2012	Florida NYTD 2013	Florida NYTD 2014	Florida NYTD 2015
	Percentage Yes	28%	28%	15%	30%	61%
	Yes	561	492	261	421	786
	Total	2,015	1,821	1,852	1,424	1,288

Have reliable means of transportation to school and/or work <small>(Question changed in 2011 to: Reliable means of transportation to school and/or work?)</small>	Year	Florida NYTD 2011	Florida NYTD 2012	Florida NYTD 2013	Florida NYTD 2014	Florida NYTD 2015
	Percentage Yes	73%	80%	79%	75%	82%
	Yes	1,473	1,379	1,371	1,063	994
	Total	2,015	1,821	1,852	1,424	1,288

Criminal Justice

Responses by young adults age 18-22.

Been arrested in the past 12 months <small>(Question changed in 2011 to have you ever been arrested)</small>	Year	Florida NYTD 2011	Florida NYTD 2012	Florida NYTD 2013	Florida NYTD 2014	Florida NYTD 2015
	Percentage					
	Yes	43%	40%	11%	33%	10%
	Yes	860	688	197	470	125
Total		2,015	1,821	1,852	1,424	1,288

Independent Living Budget

Allocated funds and Expenditures

The Legislature has appropriated \$30,170,469 annually in budget for the Independent Living Program since State Fiscal Year 2009-2010. Due to changes in federal grant funding levels year-to-year a small portion of these appropriations have been unfunded and therefore not allocated in Community-Based Care Lead Agency contracts. The actual allocation has ranged from \$30,170,469 to \$29,476,721. However, the Community-Based Care Lead Agencies have the flexibility to spend other state funds from their DCF foster care and related services contracts including state carry forward funds for independent living services. In State Fiscal Year 2012-2013, the allocated budget included \$8,161,241 of federal funding.

Total Independent Living Expenditures and Funding						
State Fiscal Year	From IL Budget	From Other CBC State Funds	From State Carry Forward Funds	Total	Funding	
					Federal	State
2009-10	\$30,170,469	\$17,528,372	\$4,181,259	\$51,880,100	\$9,042,586	\$42,837,514
2010-11	\$29,451,721	\$17,164,587	\$4,945,531	\$52,280,587	\$8,161,242	\$44,119,345
2011-12	\$29,476,721	\$13,057,985	\$6,504,452	\$49,039,158	\$8,181,242	\$40,857,916
2012-13	\$29,451,721	\$12,859,280	\$3,959,228	\$46,270,229	\$8,161,241	\$38,108,988
2013-14	\$29,451,721	\$10,397,727	\$3,005,992	\$42,855,440	\$8,161,242	\$34,694,198
2014-15	\$29,476,721	\$8,273,676	\$1,966,432	\$39,636,735		

Distribution of Expenditures

For State Fiscal Year 2012-2013, approximately 58% of all Independent Living dollars were spent on Road-to-Independence stipends. Case coordination and life skills training costs accounted for 28% of total Independent Living expenditures with Transitional Support services accounting for approximately 12% of the total amount spent. Aftercare and Subsidized Independent Living accounted for 2% of total dollars spent.

Expenditures (\$) by IL Program Area						
State Fiscal Year	Road-to-Independence (RTI)	Case Coordination and Life Skill Training	Transitional	Aftercare	Subsidized IL (SIL)	Total
2009-10	35,260,682	10,738,650	4,265,864	877,447	737,457	51,880,100
2010-11	35,204,424	11,626,648	4,591,816	448,780	408,919	52,280,587
2011-12	29,858,300	13,066,982	5,208,321	628,794	276,761	49,039,158
2012-13	26,854,501	12,929,556	5,474,269	847,282	164,621	46,270,229
2013-14	20,764,502	12,441,197	2,368,998	667,920	108,705	36,351,322
2014-2015	6,848,109	10,515,962	n/a	625,356	n/a	17,991,077

New Expenditures (\$) by IL Program Area			
State Fiscal Year	Extended Foster Care (EFC)	Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS)	Total (including other IL expenditures)
2013-14	1,431,030	5,073,086	42,855,438
2014-15	6,381,856	15,263,802	39,636,735

Accountability

Introduction – Privatization of Child Welfare Changed the Role of DCF:

Almost 15 years ago, the Florida Legislature began the process to privatize child welfare and to create the community based system of care, with the majority of the Florida Department of Children and Families' functions relating to foster care be outsourced to private agencies.

Specifically, the legislature determined that DCF would contract with private organizations to, at the minimum, provide for family preservation, independent living, emergency shelter, residential group care, foster care, postplacement supervision, permanent foster care and family reunification.²

Privatizing a child welfare service does not relieve the public child welfare agency of its responsibilities to ensure that children and families are well served and that tax dollars are effectively spent. In addition to developing and implementing policy, the public agency continues to be accountable for high-quality and effective services that comply with state and Federal rules, and achieve specified outcomes and results.³

Therefore, due to the privatization of these child welfare services, the function of DCF in those specified areas was dramatically changed from being the provider of services into contracting for and monitoring the provision of those services.

What the Law Requires:

The duties of the Department of Children and Families are laid out in law⁴, and in pertinent part require that DCF:

- Contract for the delivery, administration or management of care for children in the child protection and child welfare system (enter into contract with lead agencies for the performance of the duties),
- Adopt written policies and procedures for monitoring the contract for delivery of services by lead agencies,
- Receive federal and state funds for the operation of the child welfare system and transmit these funds to the lead agencies – and retain the responsibility for the appropriate spending of these funds as well as monitor lead agencies to assess compliance with financial guidelines.

Quality Assurance (QA) and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) are vital activities to guarantee that the services provided are fiscally sound, provide for the safety, well-being, and self-sufficiency of children and families and produce desired outcomes. Florida law⁵ specifically requires that DCF establish a quality assurance program for contracted services to dependent children. DCF must evaluate each lead agency under contract at least annually. The DCF quality assurance evaluations are to cover the programmatic, operational and fiscal operations of the lead agency, and the QA evaluations must be consistent with the child welfare results-oriented accountability system. And the purpose of the results-oriented accountability program

² Former Florida Statute 409.1671 (1)(a)

³ Child Welfare Privatization Initiatives—Assessing Their Implications for the Child Welfare Field and for Federal Child Welfare Programs U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation; Topical Paper #6, “*Ensuring Quality in Contracted Child Welfare Services*,” December 2008

⁴ Florida Statute 409.996 (1)-(3)

⁵ Florida Statute 409.996 (18)

is to monitor and measure the use of resources, the quality and amount of services provided, and child and family outcomes.⁶

Requirements for Effective Quality Assurance/Continuous Quality Improvement Program:

Legislative intent and the law are clear that DCF must monitor the use of state dollars; ensure that the quality and quantity of services are sufficient to meet the needs of the children and families, and guarantee that the services are producing the needed outcomes. The way to accomplish this is by having a robust Quality Assurance and Continuous Quality Improvement program within DCF – which necessarily requires that DCF have sufficient staff to perform these extremely important functions.

Continuous quality improvement (CQI) is the complete process of identifying, describing, and analyzing strengths and problems and then testing, implementing, learning from, and revising solutions.⁷

The Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau, considers the following five components as essential to a State having a functioning CQI system in child welfare:

1. an administrative structure to oversee effective CQI system functioning;
2. quality data collection;
3. a method for conducting ongoing case reviews;
4. a process for the analysis and dissemination of quality data on all performance measures; and,
5. a process for providing feedback to stakeholders and decision makers and as needed, adjusting State programs and process.

Title IV-B regulations require State agencies to utilize QA to regularly assess the quality of services and assure there will be measures to address identified problems. In order to ensure that the CQI system is effective and consistent, it is imperative that Florida have strong administrative oversight. A functioning CQI system will ensure that:

- The CQI process is consistent across the state and a single state agency has oversight and authority over its implementation;
- There is a systemic approach to review, modify, and implement any validated CQI process.
- The State establishes written and consistent CQI standards and requirements,
- There is an approved training process for CQI staff,
- There are written policies, procedures, and practices for the CQI process,
- There is evidence of **capacity and resources** to sustain an ongoing CQI process, including designated CQI staff or CQI contractor staff.⁸ (Emphasis added).

⁶ Florida Statute 409.997(3)

⁷ *“Using Continuous Quality Improvement to Improve Child Welfare Practice – A Framework for Implementation* Casey Family Programs and the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement - May 2005.

⁸ Children’s Bureau, US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Information Memorandum: *Establishing and Maintaining Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Systems in State Child Welfare Agencies*, August 27, 2012

Florida History of Reductions in DCF QA/CQI Funding:

Earlier, Florida was touted as having an exemplary approach to quality assurance, in part by "...developing new quality assurance implementation and oversight teams made up of lead agency and state staff that conduct quarterly reviews of the lead agencies. Using a new quality assurance instrument with a common set of quality assurance standards, Regional and lead agency staff conduct side by side reviews of a subset of cases to help interpret information in case files."⁹ However, that changed when 72% of the QA/CQI positions were removed from the budget over the past 7 years, decimating the ability of DCF to fulfil its obligations of full oversight of the provisions of child welfare services.

QA Reductions since 2008: 72% (based on original QA allocation)

Impact of all Reductions	Totals
Original Regional QA FTE Allocations	83
Reduction in FTE	60
Remaining QA FTE in Regions	27
Total Reduction	72%

The remaining 27 QA FTE must now cover adoptions, licensing and other regional duties as well as all other aspects of child welfare. The cuts in funding forced DCF to eliminate the side-by-side reviews – the process that kept the Department and the Lead Agencies together on the common cause to review case files, look at indications of problems and work on the solutions. DCF is not able to conduct special reviews because of current staff capacity. Those “special reviews” had previously included review of Independent Living Services.

When, in 2014, the legislature invested substantial funding to improve the quality of the Child Protection system in Florida, many FTEs were created and among those were 42 QA positions. However, these FTEs are dedicated solely to oversight of Child Protection and do not add oversight of child welfare services or funding.

Effect of Loss of QA/CQI on Independent Living Services:

When Florida extended foster care to age 21, many changes were made in relationship to independent living services. Previously, the lead agency was required to provide children with services designed to make our youth ready to live independently. But we knew from the data that our children who left foster care at age 18 did not have the necessary skills to be independent. With the new legislation, the job of providing the independent living skills was placed on the caregiver, which now requires that the caregiver ensure that the child who is

⁹ Child Welfare Privatization Initiatives—Assessing Their Implications for the Child Welfare Field and for Federal Child Welfare Programs, Topical Paper #6: *Ensuring Quality in Contracted Child Welfare Services*, by Nancy M. Pindus, Erica H. Zielewski, Charlotte McCullough, Elizabeth Lee, December, 2008.

between 13 and 17 years of age learns and masters independent living skills.¹⁰ The new law further requires that the caregiver be compensated for taking on this additional role – with requirement that the community based lead agency pay a supplemental room and board payment to foster care parents for providing independent life skills and normalcy supports to children who are 13 through 17 years of age placed in their care. The supplemental payments are paid monthly to the foster care parents on a per-child basis in addition to the current monthly room and board rate.¹¹

There is no doubt that our young adults who leave foster care must be provided guidance to develop the needed skills to help to become independent, productive citizens of Florida. This necessarily requires that they have the ability to learn those skills while they are in care. It therefore becomes even more important for DCF to have the manpower to conduct quality assurance and continuous quality improvement in the area of independent living skills – as well as housing, education and other services needed by our youth who are transitioning into independence.

Implementation of the Nancy C. Detert Common Sense and Compassion Independent Living Act

Administrative Code for Extended Foster Care Implementation, Postsecondary Education Supports and Services, and Licensing

Recommendations and lessons learned from the implementation of Extended Foster Care and the Independent Living Redesign have been reviewed over the past year, and have been codified into Administrative Code. Chapter 65C-41, F.A.C., governing extended foster care, has been adopted with an effective date of November 2, 2015. Chapter 65C-42, F.A.C., governing PESS, has been adopted with an effective date of October 4, 2015.

Supportive Housing

Currently, the Legislature expresses a preference for young adults in foster care to remain in their placements at age 18. This is a preference that is based on the premise that teens in foster care need a continuum of care and support as they work towards earning a high school diploma or GED. However, due to a shortage of placements for teens across the state, the majority of young adults who remain in foster care through Extended Foster Care (EFC) are moving into apartments and living on their own. To the extent that it is not possible for all young adults aging out of care to remain in their family foster homes, supportive housing can and should be an option for young adults remaining in Extended Foster Care.

¹⁰ Florida Statute 409.145(2)(a)(8).

¹¹ Florida Statute 409.145(4)(d).

Supportive housing is a model that combines affordable housing with wraparound services to help vulnerable populations in the community. These populations include young adults from foster care, homeless, or those who experience mental health challenges. This model works to provide stability, guidance and support, and access to community resources.

In a supportive housing model, young adults will reside in a safe, stable environment with their peers as they work towards achieving educational and vocational successes. These settings tend to embrace a community environment to not only provide affordable housing, but also on-site professionals to assist with making sure young adults have access to wraparound services.

Wraparound services provided in a supportive housing can produce the following outcomes:

- Teach an array of life skills related to daily living, financial literacy, health/wellness, and interpersonal communication
- Foster a community environment through programming geared towards weekly groups and community dinners
- Provide on-site clinical services
- Provide transportation to and from important appointments, interviews, and/ or school functions
- Provide critical case management to assist with accessing employment, education, health care, and other community resources
- Facilitate goal planning and setting (especially related to secondary and post-secondary, vocational, or health/wellness goals)

Employment

The concept of “Sustainability” is an important part of the new emphasis within the Department of Children and Families system of care. It is an integral part of the concept of “Normalcy” that was written into the Foster Care legislation that was enacted in 2015.

The idea that having youth in foster care fully prepared to transition to successful adult lives is embodied in all the efforts that DCF, its partner agencies and its Community Lead Agencies have made in 2015 that are directed to getting jobs and job skills training embedded in its culture.

The following initiatives are mentioned here as examples of programs and activities which the Department should support by its policies, and promote to its lead agency partners:

1. CareerSource Florida
2. The Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
3. A successful local program, “Each One Help One”, developed by Community Based Care of Central Florida with its partner organization; The City of Life Foundation.

Each of them provides an enhanced focus on the needs of foster youth in terms of helping them be prepared to have the financial means to sustain their lives as they elect to exit the system.

CareerSource Florida

The CareerSource Florida network is comprised of a state policy and investment board, state workforce administrative agency, 24 Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs) and nearly 100 one-stop career centers. The LWDAs provide access to services and on-going support for youth who are seeking employment, job training, education and other supportive services. One-Stop Career centers are strategically located in each of the LWDAs and are designed to provide a full range of assistance to job seekers and employers under one roof. Available services include training referrals, career counseling, job listings, and similar employment-related services.

Available services importantly include objective assessments of each youth's skill level and service needs, individualized service employment plans, and assistance to prepare for postsecondary educational opportunities or employment. The programs and services are designed to meet the needs of at-risk youth, including youth in and aging out of foster care, to obtain and maintain employment.

Currently, Florida's CareerSource Network is transitioning to fully implement the requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), signed into law on July 22, 2014. WIOA is the first legislative reform of the public workforce system in 15 years. The law supersedes the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and amends the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, the Wagner-Peyser Act, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Through the implementation of the WIOA, Florida will have a business-led, market-responsive, results-oriented and integrated workforce development system.

WIOA outlines a broader youth vision that supports an integrated service delivery system and gives a framework through which states and local areas can leverage other Federal, State, Local, and philanthropic resources to support in-school and out-of-school youth. WIOA provides an emphasis on expanding work experience opportunities and has incorporated new Youth Program elements. The new youth elements include financial literacy, entrepreneurial skills training, services that provide labor market and employment information in the local area, activities that help youth transition to postsecondary education and training and education offered concurrently with workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation. Florida is committed to utilizing the opportunities available through WIOA to improve career exploration, educational attainment and skills training for in-demand industries and occupations for Florida youth.

Vocational Rehabilitation

The Department of Education, Division Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is a federal-state program that works with children and adults who have physical or mental disabilities so they can prepare for, gain, or retain employment in meaningful careers. In Florida, VR is the designated state agency for vocational rehabilitation services. The program's goal is to enable individuals to increase independence through long-term employment. VR Transition Youth services assist students with disabilities to smoothly transition from high school to postsecondary training,

education, and employment. The Division has six area offices and 89 field locations statewide to provide services to VR customers. In December 2014, transitioning youth cases comprised 38% of the total VR caseload, at 14,208 cases.

According to the Office of Disability Employment Policy report on the Youth Employment Rate, in August 2014, the employment rate for youth (ages 16-19) with a disability was 16.6%. This is considerably low when compared to the employment of youth without a disability (29.9%). According to the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability, of the more than 500,000 children in foster care nationally, 30-40% are in special education. Still, this number does not capture all youth with disabilities in the foster care system.

Last year, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) increased the accessibility and breadth of VR services for youth in high school. It also created a complementary relationship between VR and other employment service agencies, including the CareerSource Network. For instance, the law stipulates that VR agencies make available Pre-Employment Transition Services to all students with disabilities in high school, directing 15% of allocated funds to those services, while mandating CareerSource to direct 75% of its youth funds for those who are not in high school.

Pre-Employment Transition Services include Career Exploration and Assessment, Work Readiness Training, Work Based Learning Experience, Postsecondary Educational Counseling, Peer Mentoring, and Self-Advocacy Training. VR provides core Pre-employment Transition Services to all students with a documented disability between the ages of 15 and 21. For students requiring intensive services, VR provides additional services and supports such as assistive technology and devices, transportation, and uniforms.

VR collaborates with various state and nationally acclaimed evidence-based programs to support students with even the most significant disabilities to achieve a life of satisfying work and independence.

- **Discovery** is a strength-based alternative assessment for youth with most significant disabilities which yields a picture of what youth can do and translates those transferrable skills to employment possibilities.
- **High School High Tech** introduces students with all types of disabilities to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math related careers. Students benefit from corporate site visits, job shadowing, internships, service learning, campus tours, and more.
- **Project SEARCH** is a nationally recognized program which provides real-life work experience combined with training in employability and independent living skills to help youth with the most significant disabilities. The model involves an extensive period of training and career exploration, innovative adaptations, long-term job coaching, and continuous feedback from teachers, job coaches, and employers.
- **Post-Secondary Education Programs** are Higher Education Programs that provide students with intellectual disabilities age-appropriate opportunities for learning, employment preparation, recreational activities, social interactions, and the development

of natural supports. Programs like the VERTICAL Training Program at the Florida State College Jacksonville even deliver career and technical training accompanied by a credential.

- **Third Party Cooperative Arrangements** are agreements between VR and School Districts to provide community-based work experiences to students with most significant disabilities.

Additional Employment Initiatives

In addition to the work currently being done by the various groups that operate statewide to equip and assist youth in foster care, PESS and EFC, there are significant activities being utilized in local communities that also help these youth be successful in becoming self-sustaining as they join their communities.

One such program is called “Each One Help One” and is operating in Central Florida (Orange, Osceola and Seminole Counties) under the aegis of Community Based Care of Central Florida and operated by the City of Life Foundation.

This program has placed over 100 foster youth into jobs, training programs and volunteer activities over the past 18 months. Their recipe for success has been based on establishing close relationships with the youth, their caregivers and local employers who are asked to get involved with one youth at a time.

The members of ILSAC believe that having a job is a key ingredient in helping youth not only be self-sustaining, but also successful in their transitions to a normal life in their communities. To that end ILSAC has set up a Work Group to explore opportunities to further improve employment outcomes for youth in care. This group will draw on available resources throughout the state to engender improved communication, resource alignment, collaboration with business leaders and information flow that can enhance system performance and outcomes. This group will report regularly to the main ILSAC group throughout the coming year as it generates results and recommendations.

ILSAC Recommendations for 2016

Based on the information ILSAC has reviewed during 2015, the Council respectfully submits the following recommendations for action by the Department of Children and Families and/or by the Florida Legislature.

Internet Access

Children in foster care should be education in internet safety and provided internet access. This issue is critical, as internet access is necessary in our daily lives, including employment purposes and on-going education. Further, the administration of the Florida My Services survey, which is web-based, requires our teens to have access over time to complete one or

two modules at a time. This is necessary to provide a thoughtful, rather than rushed, response to the survey questions.

Quality Assurance

The Legislature must ensure that DCF has adequate funds to fulfill its oversight responsibilities. DCF must restore a robust quality assurance/quality improvement process and employ enough contract management in the district and central office staff to do the job. The legislature should reinstate the QA/CQI positions at DCF to ensure that DCF can fulfill its obligations.

Employment

1. Develop a performance metrics for the IL population related to employment, to include pre-employment readiness services, employment, and employment retention services.
2. Provide or increase the professional development trainings, focused on employment, for providers who serve the IL population.
3. Increase IL population and/or service provider's engagement with the workforce development boards to heighten awareness of the unique employment needs related to the IL population.

Legislative Recommendations

The Council extensively discussed the trend data and what legislative modifications are necessary to achieve the goals of the Nancy C. Detert Act, as understood by the Council. The Council thanks the Senate Children, Families, and Elder Affairs Committee for including select ILSAC recommendations in SB 7018.

- S. 39.6035, F.S. Every required transition plan should be court-approved, rather than only those for children who opt out of EFC.

Rationale: many youth drop out/opt out of EFC fairly soon after turning 18, and refuse to or fail to return to court for approval of their transition plan before leaving the IL system of services. Requiring court approval for all such plans prior to the 18th birthday will provide better oversight by the court and help to ensure that the transition plans address the needs of each child. Further, any dialogue between the child and the court in the judicial reviews about the child's plans and the formal transition planning can strengthen the child's voice in seeking the services each child believes is necessary to assist in making the transition to adulthood.

- Add a new subsection to § 39.6035, F.S. to provide an explicit grant of rulemaking authority to enable the Department to create a standardized template for transition plans. There is currently no standardized "Transition Plan" for our children who are aging out.

Rationale: Some lead agencies are struggling to develop a comprehensive transition plan document that incorporates both state and federal requirements and remains a child-developed plan. With an explicit grant of rulemaking authority, the Department would develop a form, with public input, for use by all lead agencies, which form could also be included in the Department's FSFN program for ease of development by case management working with the child.

- S. 39.6251, F.S. should include a definition of “achieved permanency”, which is one event which renders a young adult ineligible for EFC.

Rationale: Currently there is no definition in the statute, so the interpretation of this event lacks statewide uniformity. One issue that arises is whether a youth who has married should be entitled to remain in EFC. [If a married youth is entitled to remain in EFC, an anomaly is created, since a foster child who marries is automatically removed from the child welfare system by definition of “child” in § 39.01, F.S., but this same policy would not apply to an adult in foster care.]

- S. 39.6251 should include explicit direction concerning EFC admissions, or discontinuing in care, for the child who is on runaway status and who therefore cannot “opt out” upon turning 18, but who also is not present to verify engagement in one of the qualifying activities.

Rationale: Since Florida is an automatic opt-in to EFC, a youth on runaway status poses practical problems, namely, that the youth is considered to be in the program, yet the state is unable to provide any services or to protect this youth.

- In § 39.6251, F.S., the language “Unable to participate in program or activities listed in (a)-(d) **full time** due to a physical . . . condition that limits participation” is unclear and should be clarified in the statute and should be clarified to provide that a youth who is completely unable to participate in a qualifying activity due to one of these conditions still qualifies for EFC, but must also participate to the extent possible, as determined by the youth’s medical or other service providers.

Rationale: The statutory language is problematic in that it can be interpreted in one of two ways, causing different treatment for children around the state. One interpretation is this language requires a young adult to participate in a qualifying activity at some degree less than full time, and that it disqualifies a young adult who cannot participate at all. Another interpretation is that this language is intended to allow a young adult to remain in care even if she or he is unable to participate in a qualifying activity at all, and that this applies whether the condition is temporary or permanent. There should be a single, state-wide interpretation and that interpretation should permit a young adult who cannot participate in a qualifying activity at all, whether that be temporary or permanent, to remain in, or return to, extended care should the young adult determine that EFC is in his or her best interest.

- S. 39.6251, F.S. should be amended to include some period of probationary status and/or a hiatus in benefits when a young adult is discharged from EFC for cause.

Rationale: EFC currently provides that there is no limit on the number of times a young adult may apply for and reenter EFC. The intent is clear, but this has created the opportunity for a number of our young adults to game the system. For example, a young adult stops attending

GED classes, or stops employment (or any of the other qualifying activities.) The CBC discharges the young adult from EFC; in response, the young adult immediately reapplies for the next month and reenrolls in the qualifying activity just long enough to secure readmission to the program. There needs to be some method to modify this to require accountability by the youth and to avoid numerous court actions of terminating jurisdiction and subsequently reinstating same.

- S. 409.1451, F.S. should be amended by removing the requirement that a student attend a Bright Futures-eligible institution, by deleting the reference to § 1009.533 in § 409.1451(2)(a)4 and otherwise defining an “eligible post-secondary educational institution” in this subsection.

Rationale: Requiring a former foster child to remain in Florida to attend a post-secondary educational institution penalizes those young adults who are high achievers. Although this pertains to a small percentage of young adults, we do have a few students who are accepted into, and wish to attend, out of state colleges and universities. We should be supportive of the student who is able to attend school out-of-state.

- S. 409.1451, F.S. should be amended to provide an exception to eligibility for PESS, for any youth who is incarcerated

Rationale: The funding for PESS is not unlimited. Although this situation does not arise often, it has presented as an actual problem in the past. The incarcerated youth has no expenses for day-to-day living. Any needs to assist with attending school, including costs for books and supplies, are payable from Aftercare funds. An incarcerated youth has no need for receiving \$1256.00 monthly while incarcerated.

- S. 409.4251(2)(b), F.S. This payment schedule should be amended. This section requires that payments be made to the living arrangement for any youth who is also in EFC, which creates a financial incentive for the youth to leave EFC, in order to have the use of the full amount of the PESS stipend.

Rationale: The purpose of EFC is to ensure that our new young adults continue to have the full support of case management supervision, as research shows that young adults aging out of foster care do not yet have the maturity to function independently. To encourage our young adults to remain in EFC, even if they are attending post-secondary full-time, the payment schedule should be amended to provide for the foster parent to be paid the statutory board rate from the \$1256 PESS stipend, with the remainder being paid solely for the youth’s benefit, similar to a Social Security representative payee. For a young adult in EFC who is living in an apartment, the payment provisions should be amended to direct the CBC to use the \$1256 first to pay for housing rental, with the remainder being paid to the youth.

- S. 409.1451(2)(a), F.S., should be amended to provide for summer/intercession. The statute currently does not provide for young adults who are enrolled in school during the summer, but who are enrolled in what would be considered a “part-time” status under the statute. The statute also has no provision for those students who do not attend school during a summer – but disrupting these payments for the continuously enrolled student can have harmful effects.

Rationale: For the student who remains in school over the summer, requiring that the student take no fewer than nine credit hours is extremely arduous. Typically, Florida educational institutions consider summer enrollment to be full-time at fewer than nine credit hours, due to the intensity of summer classes. The statute should include a provision that a student who meets the educational institution’s definition of full-time enrollment during any summer session or other intercession remains eligible for PESS.

Similarly, the statute should provide for continued eligibility for PESS should a student engage in some other qualifying activity during the summer or other school intercession. Many students use these shorter periods of time to pursue internships or work activities that further their chosen career goals. As “normalcy” is the Legislative intent for children in foster care, such changes would extend normalcy to those young adults who continue on with post-secondary education.

Additionally, we should not present a situation that is so disruptive to a young adult’s financial planning that the statutory scheme inadvertently causes a young adult to drop out of post-secondary education. The student has fixed financial costs, including rent and utilities that must be paid even if the student is engaging in an internship or other similar activity. The CBCs generally have been solving this issue by discharging the young adult from PESS, then providing the student with Aftercare funding during the summer or other intercession, then reenrolling the young adult in PESS upon the start of the next full school session. This creates needless and time consuming paperwork.

Independent Living Services Advisory Council

The Independent Living Services Advisory Council was created in 2002 by the Florida Legislature. The Advisory Council is codified in §409.1451(7), Florida Statute. The Department of Children and Families provides administrative support to the Advisory Council.

The charge of the Independent Living Services Advisory Council is to review and make recommendations concerning the implementation and operation of the independent living transition services. Each year the Advisory Council prepares and submits a report to the Florida Legislature and the Department of Children and Families on the status of the services being provided, including successes and barriers to these services.

As set forth in statute, the membership consists of representatives from the Department of Children and Families headquarters and region offices, Community-Based Care lead agencies, Department of Education, Agency for Health Care Administration, State Youth Advisory Board, Workforce Florida, Inc., Statewide Guardian ad Litem Office, foster parents, recipients of the Road-to-Independence Program funding, and other advocates for foster children. Other appointed members include representatives from faith-based and community-based organizations, mentoring programs, higher education and the judicial system.

Below is a table of the Independent Living Services Advisory Council membership as of December 2015.

Independent Living Services Advisory Council Membership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deborah Schroth, Advisory Council, Children’s Legal Services • Jean Becker-Powell, Florida Department of Juvenile Justice • Allan Chernoff, City of Life Foundation • Jeff DeMario, Virta Nova, Inc. • Penelope Deutsch, Children’s Service Council of Southwest Florida • Carmen Dupoint, Vocational Rehabilitation • Adam Gigliotti, Independent Living Young Adult • Curtis Jenkins, Florida Department of Education • Evelyn Lynam, System of Care Circuit 7 • Melody Kohr, Families First Network • Jovasha Lang, Office of the State Courts Administrator • Sarah Markman, Family Support Services of North Florida • Laura MacLafferty, Agency for Health Care Administration • Dehryl McCall, CareerSource Florida, Inc. • Georgina Rodriguez, Independent Living Young Adult • Shila Salem, Florida Department of Economic Opportunity • Teri Saunders, Heartland for Children, Inc., • Julia Schaffer, Independent Living Young Adult • Diane Schofield, Hands of Mercy Everywhere, Inc. • Dan Scott, Independent Living Young Adult • Christina Spudeas, Florida’s Children First • Sonia Valladares, Guardian Ad Litem • Glorida West-Lawson, Fostering Hope Florida • Harriet Wynn, Florida State Foster and Adoptive Parent Association

During 2015, the Advisory Council held ten meetings. Video teleconferencing and webcasts were also used by members to reduce travel expenses and travel time. In order to ensure the public has complete access and up-to-date information, Department staff maintained a Web page at: <http://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/independent-living/advisory-council>. The Web page contains information about the Advisory Council, its members, activities, subcommittees, as well as meeting dates and locations.