
**Department of Children and Families
Office of Child Welfare
Response to the
Independent Living Services Advisory Council
2016 Annual Report**

December 31, 2016

Mike Carroll
Secretary



Rick Scott
Governor

ILSAC RECOMMENDATIONS ON EDUCATION

THE COUNCIL recognizes that there are existing support systems within school districts and, to a lesser degree, Florida's public colleges and universities, to assist foster youth and the adults who support them. THE COUNCIL, therefore, recommends that:

1. DCF require case managers to be knowledgeable about the Multi-Tiered System of Supports and how to work with school personnel to plan interventions to support foster youth struggling in school. DCF should require case managers, foster parents and group home managers to complete an online training on the Multi-Tiered System of Supports developed in collaboration with Department of Education's PS/Rtl Project, THE COUNCIL and DCF Staff.

2. DCF should require case managers through in-service training to be knowledgeable of online resources for education and career planning that exist to help guide older foster youth in the direction of attaining educational goals. Free resources exist in the state of Florida, such as My Career Shines Career Navigator system, that help foster youth access and apply their career plan consistently for academic success and independent living.

3. DCF should pursue its plan to provide funding to a qualified organization that will coordinate, develop, and maintain a network of postsecondary campus-based support initiatives across the Florida public college and university systems.

4. DCF should continue working closely with state level leaders at DOE, the State University System, and the Florida College System, to support the work of what will be a fledgling, mostly volunteer-driven statewide initiative related to campus-based support initiatives across Florida's public college and university systems.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE

Improving educational (academic or vocational) attainment is one of six outcome areas tracked by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) through the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD). The Department complies with all federal regulations related to assistance to former foster care youth and transmits data to NYTD from the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN), the statewide automated child welfare information system.

The Department also recognizes that there are various supportive structures, including the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), designed to assist youth with achieving their educational goals. Several areas in Florida law cite requirements related to continued education for dependent youth. Section 409.145, Florida Statutes (F.S.), includes roles and responsibilities of caregivers, the Department, Community-Based Care Lead Agencies (CBCs), and other agency staff on how to support youths' educational success. Section 39.0016, F.S., addresses interagency agreements between school districts, the Department, CBCs, and other agencies, including the coordination of relevant training. Section 409.1452, F.S., mandates collaboration with the Board of Governors, Florida College System, and Department of Education to assist children and young adults who have been or are in foster care.

The Department supports case managers, independent living specialists, foster parents, and group home managers in acquiring relevant training or skills available to further support the educational needs of the youth in the child welfare system. The Department will collaborate with Department of Education (DOE) and CBC Lead Agencies' training coordinators to ensure adequate training materials are available.

In November 2016, the Department advertised a request for proposals to procure a provider to coordinate, develop, and maintain a network of postsecondary, campus-based supports throughout Florida, called Positive Pathways for Transitioning Postsecondary Youth (Positive Pathways). Once services are procured, the Positive Pathways provider will complete the following:

- Collaborate with the Department, DOE, Board of Governors and Florida College System to establish dedicated campus coaches for those students eligible for the Tuition and Fee Exemption, as outlined in s. 1009.25, F.S.
- Develop procedures for new member orientation to support the retention of the Positive Pathways Network.
- Provide technical assistance, training and guidance to members, community stakeholders, and former foster youth.
- Organize and deliver a yearly conference for members of the Positive Pathways Network, along with their stakeholders.

ILSAC RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOUSING

After a review of the information related to how the new law has been implemented, and the housing options that exist, THE COUNCIL is making the following recommendations to DCF.

- 1. There is a lack of data indicating degree of homelessness among foster youth from within DCF. THE COUNCIL recommends that DCF should improve the tracking and monitoring of data to accurately capture how many young adults formerly from foster care are currently homeless.*
- 2. Given the presentation of practices used in Broward County, Palm Beach County and Jacksonville related to Supportive Housing Programs, Housing Coordination and Host Families, DCF should incorporate training of these models as a portion of the statewide Independent Living quarterly meetings and phone calls. Training can include exploring how these models are implemented, outcomes relative to placement longevity and permanent connections of IL youth to supportive adults.*
- 3. DCF should create a plan using the appropriate personnel within DCF to bring uniformity to implementing Aftercare Services, so that community-based care agencies are held accountable for providing services and financial assistance to young adults who are eligible in order to avoid homelessness. This plan can be presented to THE COUNCIL during the 2017 ILSAC meeting schedule.*
- 4. THE COUNCIL recommends DCF improve tracking and monitoring of data to accurately capture how many young adults formerly from foster care are accessing supportive housing options/programs post-age 18. The DCF database (called Florida Safe Families Network) could begin with providing better clarification to case*

managers for older foster youth about the types of housing older foster youth are accessing.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE

Reducing homelessness among youth is one of the six outcome areas tracked by the Administration for Children and Families through the National Youth in Transition Database. The Department and the CBCs also track and monitor the data relevant to housing for young adults receiving independent living services. The Department's Office of Child Welfare, Data Reporting Unit (OCWDRU), developed a report specific to active young adults and their living arrangement type. Young adults are captured in the report, when they are active in FSFN and are linked to an Independent Living Case Type, such as: Road to Independence, Aftercare Support Services, or Young Adults Formerly in Foster Care.

The Department acknowledges that accurate data entry is critical to accurate reporting. In efforts to improve data integrity, the Department makes readily available FSFN trainings and resources. In 2015, the Department launched a FSFN Systems Adoption Initiative to collaborate with each CBC to identify the information and technology requirements and develop an individualized System Adoption Plan. The System Adoption Action Plans were designed to assist the CBCs in achieving enhanced utilization of FSFN, while supporting the agencies' business processes. Within this initiative, guidance papers were issued to assist staff in data entry requirements. The FSFN utilization paper for Independent Living and Life Skills addresses living arrangement types specific to the over-age-18 population. Those living arrangement types include but are not limited to: Foster Family, Group Care, Renting Housing, Own Housing, and Homeless. It is important to note that when a young adult is no longer active, the Department and CBC do not continue to track the young adult's housing status. If a young adult returns requesting service, the young adult's housing needs will be assessed. When a young adult is determined to be eligible for a program and active in the system, the living arrangement will be counted.

Section 39.6251(4), F.S., addresses housing options available to young adults in Extended Foster Care, noting the preference of a licensed foster home over all other options. The Department acknowledges the lack of a sufficient number of licensed foster homes available for youth and young adults in care and supports the exploration of alternative housing programs to serve young adults in transition. While many CBCs have already established or partnered with transitional housing programs, limited supervised housing options remain available statewide. The Department agrees that additional analysis is needed and will explore all opportunities to not only reduce homelessness but to ensure young adults have access to safe and supportive housing.

Aftercare services are intended to be a bridge in or between Extended Foster Care or Postsecondary Education Services and Support. As such, services may vary based on each young adult's level of need. Florida law establishes client eligibility requirements and due process. Requirements in Chapter 65C-42.003, Florida Administrative Code, further detail the framework for how Aftercare Services shall be administered, including: application and discharge procedures, aftercare planning, and documentation requirements. CBCs that are not compliant with these requirements are cited by the Department's Contract Oversight Unit (COU) and required to complete a Corrective Action Plan. The Department will continue to work collaboratively with the CBCs to ensure all independent living program requirements are followed and that eligible young adults are fully engaging in the services available.

ILSAC RECOMMENDATIONS ON PREGNANT AND PARENTING TEENS

1. THE COUNCIL recommends that increased funding be provided to support specialized services, training, and the level of care needed so that youth in Extended Foster Care who are pregnant and parenting can remain in or relocate to quality parenting-driven programs. This funding is imperative to ensure that the youth have access to programs that can enable them to develop the skills they need to successfully parent. The additional funding can come from additional foster care dollars, prevention dollars, and/or other funding sources.

2. It is recommended that as the pregnant or parenting youth transitions to age 18, that the courts ensure “quality” of the case plan by providing follow up. Since there is currently no requirement for follow up, THE COUNCIL is recommending a legislative change that at a maximum of 30 days, DCF and the courts ensure that the expected case plan requirements related to parenting are met. This follow-up must take place to ensure that there is no disruption or discontinuation of services after the youth turns 18. THE COUNCIL is strongly recommending that this language be submitted in DCF’s proposed legislation for 2017.

3. It is recommended that DCF provide parenting youth with a Daycare Free Fast Pass. This Fast Pass would provide young parents with absolutely free, flexible, quality daycare that is easily accessible and would remove financial barriers that may prevent a child from attending daycare; therefore, reducing their risk of being abused, neglected and/or abandoned by their young parent.

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE

The Department’s policies reflect a mutual concern for pregnant and parenting teens, and recognition of the benefits of support to the teens and their infants. CBCs have the responsibility and authority to approve the living arrangements of those pregnant and parenting young adults participating in Extended Foster Care. Each agency must consider the needs of the young adult and level of supervision, allowing for the young adult to develop the skills necessary to become self-sufficient. All youth in transition should be provided essential life skills, such as parenting, to be successful. The Department will continue to conduct ongoing fiscal analysis of funding to support young adults in Extended Foster Care.

Ongoing transition planning and case planning are mandatory for young adults in Extended Foster Care. These plans should not only address the young adult’s long-term goals; they should include a description of the programs and services identified to assist the young adult in becoming successful. The Department will review all statutory and Florida Administrative Code requirements to assess whether additional language is needed in regards to case planning for pregnant or parenting youth.

The Department acknowledges the importance of child care for parenting young adults receiving independent living services. Through the ongoing partnership with the Office of Early Learning (OEL) through the Child Care Program Office and the Quality Child Care for Foster Children Workgroup, the Department will further collaborate with OEL to identify ways to better support parenting young adults seeking child care services. Additionally, the Department will gather feedback from CBC Lead Agencies to determine barriers in accessing quality child care.

ILSAC RECOMMENDATIONS ON EMPLOYMENT

To continue advancing previous COUNCIL recommendations related to employment, THE COUNCIL recommends the following:

- 1. DCF should develop and adopt operating procedures, definitions of common terms and expectations that emphasize employment as a viable option for youth in out-of-home care who are preparing to transition to adulthood.*
- 2. DCF should enter into a Data Sharing Agreement with DEO and DOR to receive employment status data for youth in care, and provide quarterly updates to THE COUNCIL.*
- 3. DCF should evaluate the current capacity of FSFN, implement necessary system enhancements and program policies to record and track the employment status of all youth who are in care at the state level. If system enhancements are required to collect the data, DCF should approve such enhancements and update the terms of the CBCs' contracts to require that data related to employment be entered in FSFN.*
- 4. Youth employment should be included on the DCF scorecard as a key component of the system of care. DCF should require the collection and use of employment-related data to promote normalcy for youth in dependency care.*
- 5. DCF should revise its Quality Assurance system to evaluate the collection and management of data related to IL youth who are employed. Additionally, IL youth employment should be included in QA reports.*

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE

Increasing financial self-sufficiency is one the six outcome areas tracked by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) through the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD). Employment is a recognized qualifying activity for participation in Extended Foster Care and is one condition that will help lead transitioning youth to becoming financially independent. The Department would appreciate the Council's leadership in examining with CBCs and external stakeholders, opportunities to increase employment rates among youth in foster care. The Department also will review the appropriateness of establishing performance goals in this focus area.

The Department acknowledges that accurate data entry is critical to accurate reporting. In efforts to improve data integrity, the Department makes readily available FSFN trainings and resources. In 2015, the Department launched a FSFN Systems Adoption Initiative to collaborate with each CBC to identify the information and technology requirements and develop an individualized System Adoption Plan. The System Adoption Action Plans were designed to assist the CBCs in achieving enhanced utilization of FSFN, while supporting the agencies' business processes. Within this initiative, guidance papers were issued to assist staff in data entry requirements. The FSFN Position Paper for Assets and Employment instructs direct service staff to enter information related to earned and unearned income. The Department also will examine a data sharing agreement with the Department of Revenue (DOR) for the purposes

of obtaining employment information for youth in transition. Currently, employment data is available in FSFN and can be accessed for tracking and monitoring. The Department will review whether the information being entered meets the reporting needs or whether FSFN enhancements would be required.

Beginning in October 2016, the Department began a redesign of CBC Performance Monitoring. Through a System of Care review, there will be an integration and synthesis of information from quality case reviews, performance and fiscal data, and special reports. Contract monitoring will include members of the contract oversight unit (COU) and child welfare system experts.

ILSAC RECOMMENDATIONS ON REDUCING THE NUMBERS OF DEPENDENT CHILDREN INVOLVED IN DELINQUENCY COURT

DCF should task a staff person with accomplishing the following recommendations. If there is a Restorative Justice staff member, THE COUNCIL suggests that is the most logical person to be tasked, as the civil citation program is an important component of restorative justice, especially in our schools, which account for a significant percentage of DJJ involvement by our youth.

- 1. It is necessary to determine why DCF youth have a lower issuance rate of civil citations by working with local law enforcement agencies (LEA) to dispel any myths they may have about children in foster care, and to resolve any real issues they may have with the child welfare system. For example, it may be that LEA do not understand who to contact, or may believe that a foster home will not support a youth in completing citation sanctions. If the latter is true, then DCF should consider mandating support for youth with DJJ involvement, including civil citation sanctions, in its licensing rules and contracts.*
- 2. For those counties which simply do not offer civil citations at all, local CBCs, partnering with DCF and identified local youth advocacy groups, should explore with LEA why this is, and attempt to convince LEA of the benefits of this program.*
- 3. It is also necessary to determine why DCF youth who are issued a civil citation have a lower successful completion rate, and then explore how to resolve this. Some conjectures: the foster parent or group home may not have the ability (or desire) to transport a youth to required sanctions; there may be a lack of communication when a youth with a sanction is transferred to another county for residence. DCF should include civil citation data elements in FSFN to ensure the necessary communication. DCF should also work with the CBCs and CMOs to ensure adequate training of the civil citation program and its requirements and benefits for our youth, and to determine how to better support our youth who are issued citations in successfully completing their sanctions and responsibilities.*
- 4. DCF should work with DJJ at the state level to ensure there is timely sharing of civil citation cross-over data at both the state and local levels.*

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE

The Department acknowledges that requirements for criminal records can create a barrier for young adults in obtaining housing, employment, and education. In September 2016, the Department created a Restorative Practices Specialist position to promote integration across the child welfare, juvenile justice, and education systems. In addition, this position serves as the Department's representative on the implementation, training, and ongoing coordination of restorative practices, such as civil citations. The Department agrees that there is a need to increase issuance rates of Civil Citations for youth in foster care and to expand the Civil Citation program for young adults receiving independent living services. The Civil Citation Coordinator for the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) currently collaborates with law enforcement agencies to implement this program and provides training and support. The Restorative Practices Specialist will work closely with DJJ's Civil Citation Coordinator to assist in these efforts.

The Department agrees that there is a need to track the number of crossover youth who are eligible for and receiving Civil Citations. Methods to track and monitor these high-risk youth are being researched through the DCF and DJJ Crossover Youth Workgroup. Data analysis is an integral component of the DCF and DJJ Crossover Youth Workgroup, and monthly data reports are shared and evaluated across both agencies.