



Independent Living Services

ANNUAL REPORT

Department of Children and Families

Office of Child Welfare

January 31, 2021

Chad Poppell
Secretary

Ron DeSantis
Governor

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Purpose

This report provides accountability information on Postsecondary Education Services and Support and Aftercare Services referenced in section 409.1451(6), Florida Statutes (F.S.), as follows:

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

Although Extended Foster Care is not referenced in section 409.1451(6), F.S., this report also provides outcome and oversight information for young adults continuing in foster care.

The table below depicts the number of young adults served in each program by CBC over the last two State Fiscal Years (SFY). This year's annual report numbers are calculated using different data reports. This change accounts for any variation in data previously published.

Number of Young Adults Receiving Independent Living Services by Program Type, CBC, and SFY						
CBC	2018-2019			2019-2020		
	Aftercare	EFC	PESS	Aftercare	EFC	PESS
Northwest Florida Health Network*	9	43	50	18	35	34
Brevard Family Partnership	15	42	25	17	33	25
ChildNet-Broward	46	175	161	32	138	78
ChildNet-Palm Beach	21	126	94	20	122	61
Children's Network of SW Florida	1	49	78	5	50	44
Citrus Health Network	14	252	230	18	238	205
Communities Connected for Kids	26	41	39	16	21	23
Community Partnership for Children	14	42	53	15	49	46
Eckerd Community Alternatives	50	94	86	62	113	43
Eckerd Community Hillsborough	84	81	100	53	102	83
Embrace Families	43	88	87	50	91	50
Families First Network	16	93	44	21	70	21
Family Integrity Program	2	9	6	3	9	2
Family Support Services of North Fla	36	57	38	21	65	29
Heartland for Children	19	47	43	15	57	7
Kids Central, Inc.	3	45	32	14	35	15
Kids First of Florida, Inc.	1	14	18	1	11	15
Partnership for Strong Families	12	10	17	16	12	15
Safe Children Coalition	15	36	20	14	29	13
Statewide	427	1344	1221	411	1280	809
**Source: OCWDRU #1089, FSN Data Repository						
* Northwest Florida Health Network was formerly Big Bend CBC						

Independent Living Services Outcomes

The descriptions of each independent living program available to former foster youth are not intended to detail all eligibility criteria for receiving services. Rather, the intent of each summary is to give a better understanding of each program's nuances within the scope of independent living services.

Each program is designed to assist young adults in reaching principal outcome areas as they move toward self-sufficiency. The examination of programs considers the following federal outcome areas: increasing financial self-sufficiency, improving educational attainment, increasing connections to caring adults, reducing homelessness, reducing high-risk behavior, and improving access to health insurance.

Department analysis of CBC performance in administering young adult transition services also considers Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) available data, National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) surveys, and other oversight activities.

Extended Foster Care (EFC)

Florida's vision of "continuing care" for young adults became law effective January 1, 2014. Effective January 2019, EFC policies were substantially revised to standardize the service delivery across the state and align with Title IV-E federal funding requirements. Eligible young adults have the option of remaining in foster care until the age of 21 or until the age of 22 if they have a disability. EFC is a voluntary program that requires the young adult to participate in school, work or a work training program, and reside in a supervised living arrangement in accordance with federal and state guidelines.

Services include standard case management visits, case planning, transition planning, monitoring of life skills development, and judicial oversight as required. The program utilizes Title IV-E federal funds to help pay for room and board and other allowable expenses such as child care for young adults who are parenting, clothing for work or school, school supplies, and essential services needed to support the young adult's transition to independence.

Outcome area: Increasing financial self-sufficiency

Young adults in EFC are encouraged to participate in financial literacy programs as part of the transition planning process in order to promote self-sufficiency. Section 39.6035, F.S., requires youth in transition are provided with information for the financial literacy curriculum offered by the Department of Financial Services (DFS). The Records and Resources Exchanged (CF-FSP 5426) is a form in policy that assists child welfare professionals and youth in tracking information provided, such as financial literacy and other resources required to be provided per Florida Statutes. Young adults can continue taking the DFS online courses and any other free banking classes, increasing their knowledge of money.

Allowance is the only direct payment that a young adult in EFC receives that provides them the experience of managing money except for young adults who receive direct social security benefits or those that receive a paycheck from employment. All other expenses related to maintaining a young adult in foster care are paid directly to providers or vendors.

Although providing young people financial literacy information and allowance does not necessarily yield an outcome of financial self-sufficiency, these activities are examples of skill development opportunities that increase the likelihood young adults in EFC will strengthen their knowledge of finances while continuing in foster care. The table below provides the number of young adults that participated in EFC for SFY 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 and had a recorded period of employment.

Number of Young Adults in EFC receiving Employment by CBC, and SFY		
CBC	2018-2019	2019-2020
Northwest Florida Health Network*	12	15
Brevard Family Partnership	12	9
ChildNet-Broward	21	23
ChildNet-Palm Beach	10	13
Children's Network of SW Florida	7	15
Citrus Health Network	58	71
Communities Connected for Kids	6	4
Community Partnership for Children	2	1
Eckerd Community Alternatives	18	22
Eckerd Community Hillsborough	20	38
Embrace Families	20	29
Families First Network	39	40
Family Integrity Program	5	4
Family Support Services of North Fla	22	28
Heartland for Children	6	10
Kids Central, Inc.	16	13
Kids First of Florida, Inc.	7	5
Partnership for Strong Families	1	1
Safe Children Coalition	4	7
Statewide	286	348
Source: OCWDRU #1169, FSFN Data Repository		
*Northwest Florida Health Network was formerly Big Bend Community Based Care		

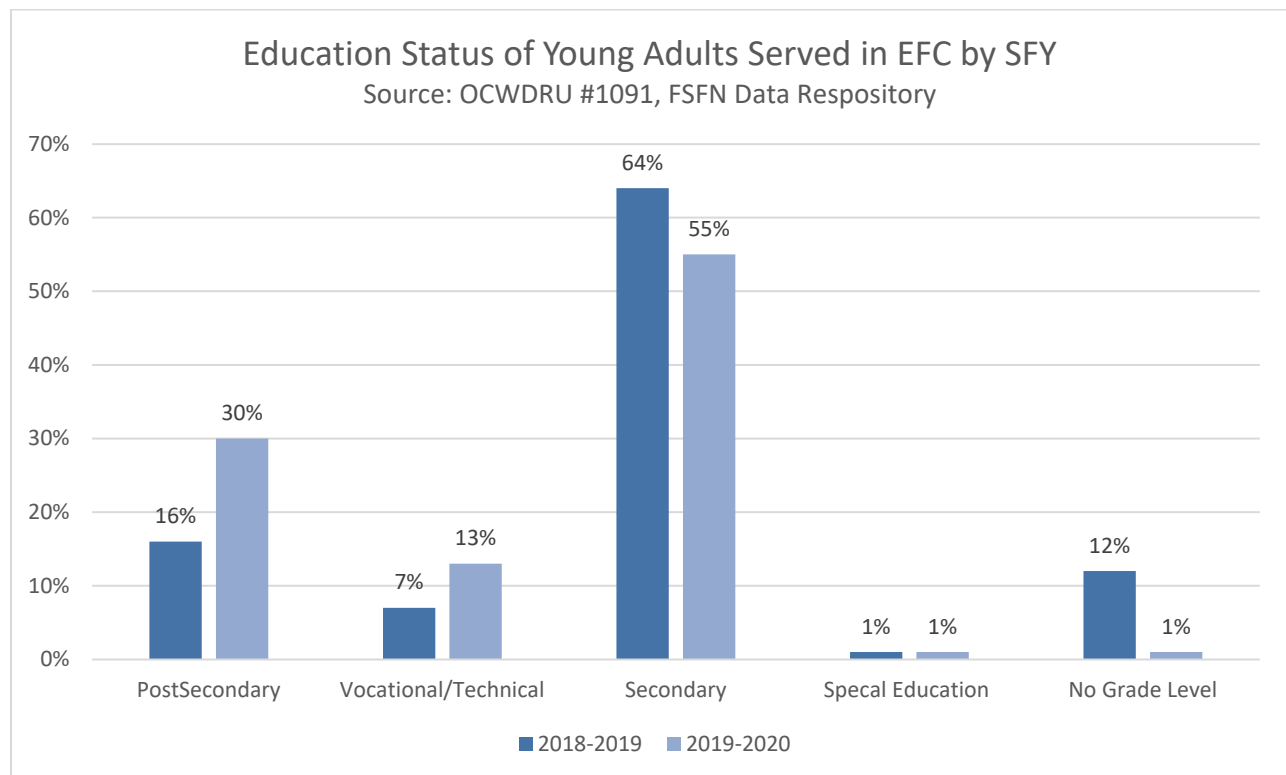
Outcome area: Improving educational attainment

Achieving a diploma can be considered a minimal requirement for self-sufficiency and can assist in establishing a solid foundation that will prepare youth for their future. Educational attainment is a key CBC Scorecard measure developed to monitor a youth's capacity for independent living.

Although a standard has been set for education at the age-out juncture, a target percentage for completion has not yet been identified for young adults participating in EFC. One reason a target has not yet been established is young adults are afforded the option of other qualifying

activities besides education. Young adults may choose employment or programs designed to promote or eliminate barriers to employment in lieu of completing secondary or postsecondary education. The flexibility may delay degree attainment for some while they are served in EFC.

The chart below reflects the percentage of young adults that received EFC services during SFY 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 and their most recent educational status in FSN. There are twenty-six grade level options to choose from in FSN ranging from Preschool to Post-Graduate Degree, including categories None, Non-graded, Not Applicable, and Unknown. Due to the variation in data, the information has been analyzed and grouped accordingly.



Outcome area: Increasing connections to caring adults

The permanency goal for young adults in EFC is to transition to independence. To achieve this goal, young adults must have a transition plan that includes the names of supportive adults committed to helping young adults on their path to success. At this time, the FSN universe does not contain specific data that captures caring adults and their contact information identified during transition planning. However, the department has identified that in FSN, the Family Functioning Assessment- Ongoing (FFA-O) and Progress Updates provide a platform through the Family Support Network Participant category that supportive adults and connections can be captured. Under this category, the participant’s name and role can be documented to reflect those connections developed and maintained by the youth in a systematic format.

In order to ensure young adults in EFC establish and maintain connections with caring adults, the department has developed standardized forms, prompting the dialogue and collection of relevant information. The My Pathway to Success Plan (CF-FSP 5425) and Shared Living Plan

(CF-FSP 5430) both provide space for the collection of the individuals helping the young adult in preparation for achieving their goals. This promotion of identifying and collecting information on specific supportive people ensures child welfare professionals are increasing young adults' connections to caring adults while participating in EFC.

Outcome area: Reducing homelessness

Effective January 1, 2019, all young adults in EFC are documented as residing in out-of-home placements called Supervised Living Arrangements (SLA) in FSFN. The new guidance requires that prior to placement, child welfare professionals must utilize a standardized form to assess the appropriateness of the living environment. The Supervised Living Arrangement Assessment for Extended Foster Care (CF-FSP 5431) ensures that young adults reside in the most suitable living arrangements. The form guides the child welfare professional in their evaluation and decision making. The young adult may have the following SLA options approved: Licensed Foster Home, Licensed Group Home, Transitional Living Program, Assisted Living Facility, Shared Housing, Shared Housing-Host Home, and/or Individual Housing.

While young adults participating in EFC are not considered homeless, young adults that choose to opt-out of the program or get terminated are at risk of homelessness. Fortunately, Aftercare Services provides young adults terminated from EFC an opportunity to bridge back into the program as a safety net. Services may include temporary financial assistance to avoid homelessness.

Outcome area: Reducing high-risk behavior

Young adults in EFC receive the same level of case management supervision as youth in foster care. Child welfare professionals make monthly home visits to check on the young adult's safety and well-being. Well-being may be monitored through ongoing assessment of life skill development. The Life Skills Progress Documentation Log (CF-FSP 5444) is a form in policy that tracks the following skills: Academic Support, Postsecondary Educational Support, Career Preparation, Employment Programs or Vocational Training, Budget and Financial Management, Housing Education and Home Management Training, Health Education and Risk Prevention, Family Support and Healthy Marriage Education, Mentoring, and Supervised Independent Living. This form was introduced in April 2019 to standardize the process of informally assessing and documenting skill competency.

While completing the form itself does not demonstrate the reduction in high-risk behavior, young adults will likely avoid risky behavior and be more successful in achieving their goals if independent living skills are regularly being assessed and addressed through plans for competency. If effectively engaged, young adults will take the lead in planning for their future, helping to identify strengths and needs to be successful.

Outcome area: Improving access to health insurance

Young adults in EFC continue to receive Child in Care (CIC) Medicaid until the age 21. The CBC continues to manage the account through FSFN; therefore, all young adults participating have the assurance of health coverage. Prior to turning 21-years-old, a young adult is

responsible for completing a Medicaid application to continue coverage through the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Although Medicaid eligibility continues until 26-years-old under the ACA, the young adult must still choose the type of Statewide Medicaid Managed Care Plan. Fortunately, there are a variety of plans to choose from, even a plan designed especially for children involved in the child welfare system. The Office of Child Welfare continues to collaborate with Economic Self Sufficiency to improve access to healthcare for our young adults who are eligible for Medicaid up to age 26. The Child Welfare Specialty Plan is an integrated, holistic healthcare program available in all regions across Florida and may serve young adults in EFC.

Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS)

Eligible young adults 18-22 (not yet 23) years of age in PESS receive \$1,256 per month and other supports necessary to become self-sufficient. Federal John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee program) funding helps pay for participant housing and other expenses necessary to cover the cost of attendance while enrolled. After the initial application process, eligibility requires that these students are enrolled in nine credit hours or the vocational equivalent; and if meeting academic progress according to the Florida Bright Futures educational institution, the student may continue to receive the assistance. Some exceptions to credit hours and progress may apply for those students with a diagnosed disability or other recognized challenging circumstance.

Of the three independent living services categories, PESS is the only program that affords youth who are adopted or placed with court-approved dependency guardians after the age of 16 with the opportunity to participate. The law requires those youth to have spent at least six months in licensed care within the 12 months immediately preceding such placement or adoption.

Outcome area: Increasing financial self-sufficiency

Financial self-sufficiency can be achieved by taking steps to create a stable income, building a savings account, and staying out of debt. Young adults participating in PESS are given the chance to demonstrate budgeting skills in several ways. A young adult may directly receive their stipend of \$1,256 if they can effectively pay their bills. Young adults also receive Federal Student Aid in the form of grants, loans, and scholarships. The Pell Grant may provide an additional financial benefit up to \$3,000 per semester for the young person to manage. Last, young adults may apply and receive loans to cover the cost of other living expenses. The income that the young adult receives through various state and federal funding sources, along with the continued access to financial education through DFS, improves young adult's capacity for financial self-sufficiency.

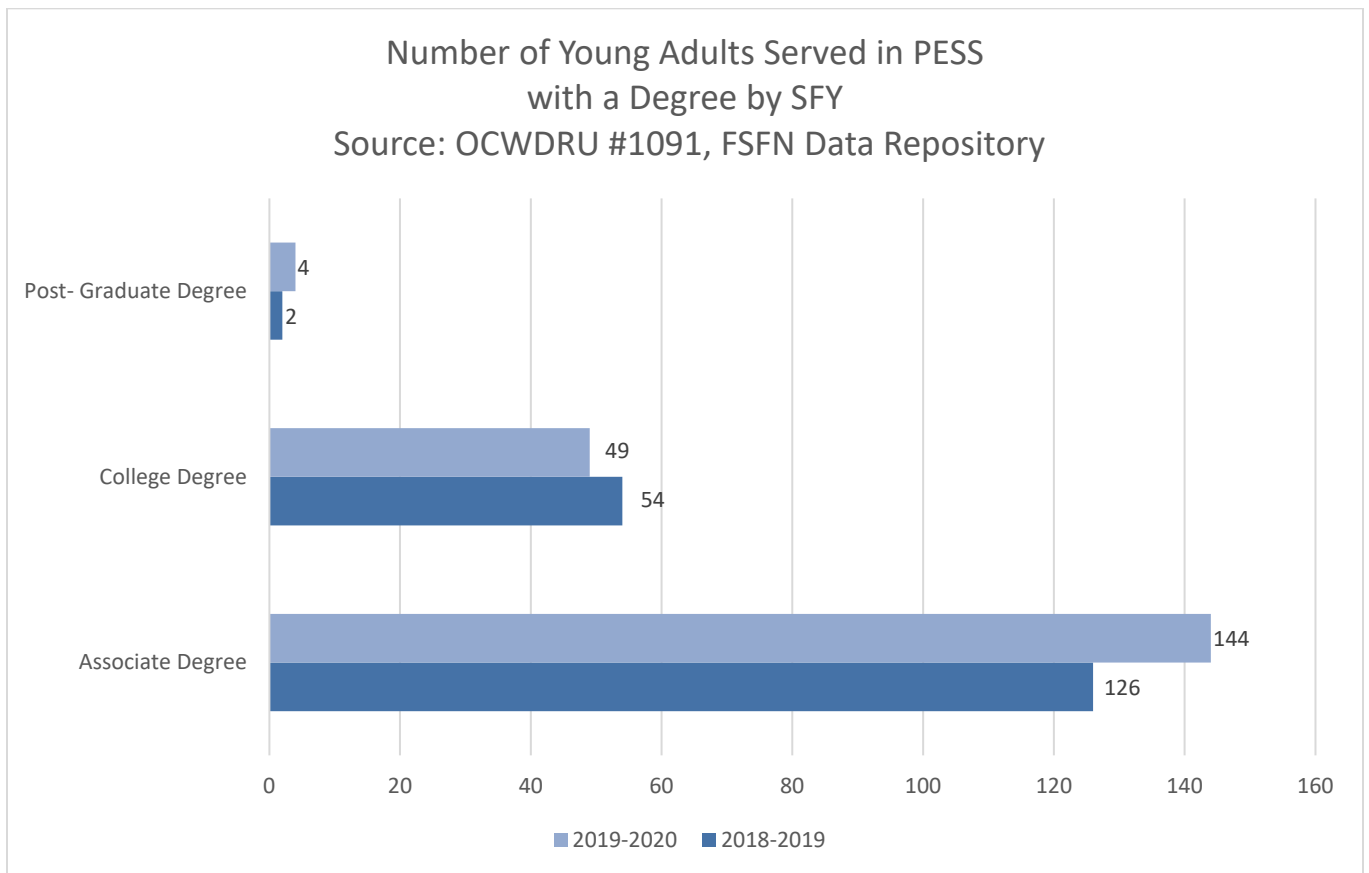
Outcome area: Improving educational attainment

During SFY 2019-2020, the department continued to contract with Educate Tomorrow Corporation, a 501(c)(3) organization, to administer the Positive Pathways Program (Positive Pathways). Positive Pathways was established to coordinate, develop, and maintain a network of postsecondary supports in efforts to improve outcomes and career transitions for former foster youth eligible for the department's Tuition and Fee Exemption (tuition exemption). This work is a continuation of support, networking, and collective impact that began in 2013 with the

establishment of Florida Reach and in response to section 409.1452, F.S., relevant to the collaboration with the State University System (SUS), Florida College System (FCS), and Department of Education.

SUS and FCS reported an improvement in degree attainment for students utilizing the tuition exemption for SFY 2019-2020. While the department did not receive identifiable student data that could be compared to FSFN PESS data, efforts to share and analyze academic progress is still underway.

The chart below portrays the number of young adults served in PESS during SFY 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 that have an educational record in FSFN reflecting degree achievement.



Outcome area: Increasing connections to caring adults

Child welfare professionals are responsible for providing oversight on PESS cases. Even though young adults in the program don't get the ongoing transition planning and supervision as those in EFC, they are still provided opportunities to engage in activities that connect them to caring adults. Ideally, young adults in PESS will have previously established supportive adults either through transition planning, EFC, guardianship, or adoption to help them succeed. Still,

supportive structures such as Positive Pathways continue to offer young adults in PESS the chance to meet new individuals with resource connections.

Outcome area: Reducing homelessness

Young adults participating in PESS receive financial assistance to help secure housing and utilities. Depending on where the young adult resides, the statutory stipend amount of \$1,256 may not adequately cover living expenses. Fortunately, CBCs can leverage community resources and partnerships to assist young adults in locating affordable housing in the cities where they are attending school.

Outcome area: Reducing high-risk behavior

While the PESS program doesn't offer the same level of supervision and oversight as EFC, young adults receiving services remain in contact with a child welfare professional. Additionally, through Positive Pathways, young adults may have access to more student services through campus-based programs designed to support former foster youth.

Outcome area: Improving access to health insurance

Like EFC, young adults participating in PESS also have access to Medicaid. Depending on whether the young adult turned 18 in the legal custody of the department, was adopted at 16 or 17, or was placed in guardianship at 16 or 17, will determine if the young adult's Medicaid is managed by the CBC.

Aftercare Services (Aftercare)

To be eligible for Aftercare, a young adult must have reached the age of 18 while in the legal custody of the department, but not yet have turned 23-years-of-age. The services provided are based on a needs assessment and intended to be temporary in nature. Services are often used as a bridge into or between EFC and PESS and may include mentoring, tutoring, mental health, substance abuse, counseling, and financial assistance. Both federal and state funds are available to pay for allowable expenses.

Due to the temporary nature of Aftercare Services and no definitive requirements for eligibility, other than aging out, analyzing outcomes is challenging. Still, the program is intended to provide support and resources; therefore, for the duration of services, the planned activities that occur will influence some or all outcome areas.

Outcome area: Increasing financial self-sufficiency

As previously noted, financial self-sufficiency can be achieved by taking steps to create a stable income. Young adults are offered financial literacy skills training through DFS and may request financial assistance through an Aftercare application. The amount of assistance must be for

specific purposes and are provided to the vendor for items like rent or utilities until a young adult can successfully manage the full amount of assistance.

Although young adults are not required to work or go to school as an ongoing condition to eligibility, young adults must make efforts to complete activities to become self-sufficient. As part of a comprehensive plan, these types of activities will help move the young adult toward financial self-sufficiency. The following table provides the number of young adults that received Aftercare Services for SFY 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 and had a recorded period of employment.

Number of Young Adults receiving Aftercare Services with Recorded Employment, CBC, and SFY		
CBC	2018-2019	2019-2020
Northwest Family Health Network*	1	7
Brevard Family Partnership	0	2
ChildNet-Broward	5	2
ChildNet-Palm Beach	2	0
Children's Network of SW Florida	0	3
Citrus Health Network	1	2
Communities Connected for Kids	3	0
Community Partnership for Children	3	8
Eckerd Community Alternatives	6	8
Eckerd Community Hillsborough	8	16
Embrace Families	4	5
Families First Network	3	10
Family Integrity Program	0	1
Family Support Services of North Fla	10	3
Heartland for Children	0	1
Kids Central, Inc.	0	4
Kids First of Florida, Inc.	0	0
Partnership for Strong Families	0	1
Safe Children Coalition	1	6
Statewide	47	79
Source: OCWDRU #1169, FSFN Data Repository		
*Northwest Florida Health Network was formerly Big Bend Community Based Care		

Outcome area: Improving educational attainment

A young adult applying for Aftercare shall also complete an Aftercare Services Plan (CF-FSP 5400). Filling out the form prompts the young adult and child welfare professional to specifically address education. The form guides in the determination of education needs, as well as postsecondary goals to include technical training. Ideally, the young adult will feel encouraged to set long-term education attainment goals, recognizing the types of financial aid and the tuition

exemption available to assist on their journey to self-sufficiency. The following table portrays the number of young adults that received Aftercare Services during SFY 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 and had a recorded achievement of H.S. Diploma or GED.

Number of Young Adults that received Aftercare Services with H.S. Diploma or GED by CBC and SFY				
CBC	2019-2020		2019-2020	
	H.S. Diploma	GED	H.S. Diploma	GED
Northwest Florida Health Network*	4	0	9	3
Brevard Family Partnership	5	4	4	2
ChildNet-Broward	13	4	8	1
ChildNet-Palm Beach	6	3	0	2
Children's Network of SW Florida	0	1	1	1
Citrus Health Network	6	0	2	0
Communities Connected for Kids	10	10	2	2
Community Partnership for Children	0	0	0	0
Eckerd Community Alternatives	10	17	19	12
Eckerd Community Hillsborough	22	35	10	26
Embrace Families	12	9	22	12
Families First Network	3	2	4	1
Family Integrity Program	0	1	1	1
Family Support Services of North Fla	11	6	6	5
Heartland for Children	4	0	0	0
Kids Central, Inc.	1	1	7	3
Kids First of Florida, Inc.	0	0	0	1
Partnership for Strong Families	3	1	1	3
Sarasota Y/Safe Children Coalition	8	0	5	3
Statewide	118	94	101	78
Source: OCWDRU #1091, FSFN Data Repository				
*North Florida Health Network was formerly Big Bend Community Based Care				

Outcome area: Increasing connections to caring adults

The Aftercare Services Plan allows the young adult and child welfare professional to list the person(s) responsible for providing services. Through the entire planning process, supportive adults, such as extended family, friends, clinical and child welfare professionals, may be identified to help with accomplishing the documented goals. If possible, these connections to caring adults will continue to be cultivated throughout the young adult case, regardless of the program the young adult is linked to.

Outcome area: Reducing homelessness

Young adults participating in Aftercare Services may receive financial assistance to help secure housing and utilities. Depending on where the young adult resides, the assistance may not adequately cover living expenses. Fortunately, CBCs can leverage community resources and partnerships to assist young adults in locating affordable housing in the cities where they are attending school.

Outcome area: Reducing high-risk behavior

Like the PESS program, Aftercare doesn't require the same structured oversight as EFC. The amount of contact with the child welfare professional assigned to the case will be limited to what has been established in the Aftercare Services Plan. Since the services are administered through the referral process, it is likely that the young adult will have contact with multiple providers. Follow up on the outcome of the service referrals would be reviewed every three months, when needs are reassessed.

Outcome area: Improving access to health insurance

Young adults in Aftercare continue to receive Medicaid through the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Although Medicaid coverage continues until 26-years-old under the ACA, the young adult is responsible for completing a Medicaid application and choosing a managed care plan.

National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD)

Since 2011, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) has required states to survey a cohort of transitioning youth and young adults at ages 17, 19, and 21 for a longitudinal study. ACF utilizes a cohort for research that not only includes youth placed in licensed foster care but also those placed with relative and non-relative caregivers, essentially those placed in out-of-home care. Therefore, based on current and historical state policies regarding independent living program eligibility, a percentage of each cohort population which were not or are not eligible for independent living services makes it difficult to determine program effectiveness from the NYTD survey results. A more complex analysis would be needed to decipher outcome information.

On October 1, 2020, the department began a new baseline year in which all youth turning 17 years of age in out-of-home care during the 2020-2021 federal fiscal year will be invited to take a voluntary survey comprised of 20-22 federally mandated questions pertaining to areas such as: employment, education, homelessness, high risk activities, adult connections, and health insurance. Those 17-year old youth surveyed will become Cohort 4 and will be surveyed again at 19 and 21 years of age.

Oversight Activities

The CBC contracts include expectations to administer all services in accordance with federal guidelines, Florida Statutes, and Florida Administrative Code. Florida has highly structured statutory requirements for EFC, PESS, and Aftercare Services around establishing client eligibility, standards of progress, payment disbursement, and payment amounts, as well as due

process and appeals. Requirements in Florida Administrative Code further detail the framework for how the array of independent living services is administered, including: application and discharge procedures, transition planning, and documentation requirements.

1. Contract Oversight

On-site contract monitoring is conducted by the department's Quality Office. The on-site monitoring process requires an in-depth assessment of the system of care in seven critical areas of operation. The seven critical areas of operation are:

- Leadership and Governance
- Workforce Management
- Quality Management and Performance Improvement
- Placement Resources and Processes
- Practice
- Partner Relationships
- Community Relationships

Each critical area has subcategories that build the framework for the system analysis process used to evaluate whether a CBC is meeting the terms of the contract and meeting safety, permanency, and well-being goals for the children and young adults they serve. Relevant independent living elements are also incorporated into the conversation to elicit information as to the effectiveness of the services and program administration. These elements include, but are not limited to:

- Housing
- Mentoring and lifelong connections
- Education
- Employment
- Financial management
- Behavioral health
- Transition

A key piece of the system evaluation is the information gathered surrounding a CBC's internal performance improvement strategy, which evaluates how they use performance and quality data internally to develop improvement strategies. This includes how they evaluate the quality and effectiveness of their family support services programs; their safety management programs; and their safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes. After an on-site monitoring, the information provided in the monitoring report drives the development of corrective action plans to address areas in which the CBC needs improvement.

In SFY 2019-2020, the CBC monitoring team conducted on-site monitoring at five CBCs:

- Community Partnership for Children
- Eckerd Connects (Hillsborough)
- Eckerd Connects (Pasco/Pinellas)
- Family First Network
- Family Integrity Program

During those on-site reviews, interviews were conducted with staff providing services to youth and young adults in transition. None of the CBCs that received an on-site monitoring had any corrective action related to this population. While there were no formal corrective action plans specific to this population, there were CBCs who had this identified as an area needing improvement. Additionally, some CBCs had this identified as an area of strength within their system of care. To access the Contract Monitoring Reports, visit:

http://centerforchildwelfare.fmhi.usf.edu/CBC_ContractMonitoringReports.shtml

2. Financial Accountability

During SFY 2019-2020, the department's Office of CBC/ME Financial Accountability provided technical assistance and oversight to DCF contract managers and CBC financial staff throughout the state to ensure payments were recorded accurately in FSFN. Independent living services payments were reviewed monthly for the following:

- Payment amounts adhere to the amounts prescribed in Florida Statutes and Florida Administrative Code;
- Young adult's eligibility within each program is appropriately documented in FSFN; and
- Federal and state funds are paid only to eligible young adults based on age qualifications for the program in which the young adults have been approved.

In addition to the technical assistance provided and monthly payment reviews, quarterly reviews were performed. Payment records were selected for each CBC where the CBC provides all supporting documentation used to populate eligibility information in FSFN and the amount of financial assistance determined by the CBC to ensure the correct application of eligibility and financial requirements were completed; thereby, ensuring the payments made were allowable.

At the beginning of the SFY, each CBC was evaluated for its agency's financial accountability of the funds provided by the department including actual expenditures recorded for the prior SFY, any carry forward funds available, and the agency's submitted Cost Allocation Plan. The Cost Allocation Plan identifies how the funds for each program will be spent during the year by the CBC and is reviewed and approved by the department. As needed, any identified fiscal issues are discussed with the CBC.

The legislature appropriates approximately \$29 million each SFY for independent living services. The total appropriation includes the cost of the case management associated with the delivery of services to young adults and the supplemental room and board payment to foster care parents for providing independent life skills and normalcy supports to youth ages 13 through 17. Total expenditures exceeded \$29 million annually.

3. Appeals

Young adults applying for or receiving independent living services through EFC, PESS, or Aftercare Services have the right to receive notice of adverse action and to resolve issues of program eligibility through the fair hearing process pursuant to sections 39.6251(9) and 409.1451(4), F.S. The Office of Appeal Hearings reported that there was one appeal granted in SFY 2019-2020, upholding the program's eligibility determinations made by CBCs.

Total Number of Independent Living Program Appeals

SFY 2018-19: 89
SFY 2019-20: 11

Number of EFC (Only) Appeals*

SFY 2018-19: 9
SFY 2019-20: 0

*The department was granted flexibility through the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act - 42 U.S.C. §5121 et seq. to allow any young adult whose employment and education eligibility for EFC was affected by the pandemic, to remain eligible for EFC. The waiver has been in effect for the State of Florida since May 22, 2020.

Rule Promulgation

The following rules were adopted during SFY 2019-2020 in Florida Administrative Code:

65C-41.003

The department amended Chapter 65C-41.003, Florida Administrative Code, to accomplish the following: remove the requirement of having to complete a new Voluntary Placement Agreement when a young adult changes qualifying activity while in EFC.

Department Plans

The department, in partnership with the Florida's Coalition for Children, CBCs, Florida Youth Shine, One Voice Impact (OVI), additional stakeholders, and – most importantly - former foster youth, developed a workgroup at the beginning of SFY 2020-2021 to create quality performance standards for the administration of EFC, PESS, and Aftercare Services. The standards developed will allow for the assessment of the quality services provided to programs that support young adults in post-18-programs. The Secretary's meeting with young adults with lived experiences during Children's Week in Tallahassee allowed for further discussion on this initiative. Upon conclusion and through the support of the Secretary, the department expanded the workgroup to incorporate the creation of a youth bill of rights and expectations brochure to educate youth on their rights while in Florida's foster care system.

The department plans to create an independent living curriculum to complement the department's vision of providing supports and resources for former foster youth as well as the independent living staff that serve this population. The plan will align with the quality standards in addressing how to better equip the independent living staff providing quality service to young adults as well as developing youth voice through engagement and empowerment.

The department has employed a young adult with lived experience as part of the policy and practice team to provide a youth voice for those youth in care and those young adults in independent living. This position has allowed for collaboration and communication between the department and some of our youth advocacy programs including OVI and Florida Youth Shine to promote youth empowerment throughout the state.

In the Fall, the department hosted a youth townhall led by the Secretary. During the meeting, the youth and young adults expressed the desire to have an application that can easily guide and provide beneficial information related to programs and services post age 18. The department is actively reviewing various applications that could best suit the needs of our young adults.

Two CBC agencies, Eckerd Connects and Citrus Health Network, are actively collaborating with OVI to pilot a life skills program called Life Skills Reimagined. The goal is to ensure that young adults have the skills necessary for self-sufficiency when they transition out of care. The pilot provides for approximately 100 licenses from the Life Learning Program, with a focus on youth ages 16-17 and includes a 1:10 facilitator to youth ratio.

Housing for young adults who utilize programs and services post age 18 has become a challenge statewide. To provide some relief, the department, in collaboration with the Florida Housing Authority, is working to provide new housing options for our young adults based on the recent passage of Chapter 2020-27, Laws of Florida (House Bill 1339).