



# **Independent Living Services**

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

Department of Children and Families Office of Child Welfare

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## Table of Contents

Purpose .....	2
Independent Living Services Outcomes .....	4
Oversight Activities .....	15
Contract Oversight .....	16
Financial Accountability .....	16
Appeals .....	17
Rule Promulgation .....	17
Department Plans .....	17
Chafee Consolidated Appropriation Act Division X-Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act.....	19

## Purpose

After decades of work with young adults in foster care, the Department of Children and Families (Department) continues to see the resilience and potential for success of these young adults. With just a few intentional supports and prevention-focused wrap-around services, these young people can accomplish great achievements. Florida is proud to have one of the most comprehensive service and resource arrays for youth and young adults transitioning to adulthood from foster care, including Extended Foster Care, Postsecondary Education Services and Supports, and Aftercare Services.

The Department recognizes that preventing entry into the dependency system is powerful. The Department is dedicated to moving upstream in our approach and providing access to community services and peer support before crisis occurs. Through First Lady Casey DeSantis' support and vision, HOPE Florida – A Pathway to Prosperity, has been a driving force in facilitating preventative services. Under the umbrella of HOPE Florida, the Legislature also provided the Department the opportunity to build out a specialized office dedicated to youth and young adults in and transitioning out of foster care. The Office of Continuing Care (OCC), driven by young adults with lived experience in the system of care, is supported through peer relationships so that policy, program, and direct services all come from a client-centered approach. In addition, the Department has redesigned the Family Well-Being Council to prioritize lived experience and youth voice. This commitment is not just through the makeup of the committee and topics of discussion, but also through exploring platforms and meeting times preferred by these important stakeholders, aiming to make lived experience and client centered services a part of the daily culture at the Department.

This report provides accountability information for SFY 2021-2022 on Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS) 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 was reported for each Community-Based Care Lead Agency (Lead Agency).
2. A description of the Department's oversight of the program, including, by the Lead Agency, any programmatic or fiscal deficiencies found, corrective actions required, and status of compliance.
3. Any rules adopted or proposed under this section since the last report.

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

The table below depicts the number of young adults served in each program, by Lead Agency, over the last two Fiscal Years (FYs). The total number of programs accessed by young adults receiving services has seen a slight increase from the previous year (2,696 in 20/21 and 2,715 in 21/22).

<b>Total Number of Young Adults Receiving Independent Living Services by Program Type, Lead Agency, and FY</b>						
<b>Lead Agency</b>	<b>2020-2021</b>			<b>2021-2022</b>		
	<b>Aftercare</b>	<b>EFC</b>	<b>PESS</b>	<b>Aftercare</b>	<b>EFC</b>	<b>PESS</b>
CBC of Brevard	23	41	28	28	33	14
ChildNet Inc.	38	143	71	22	166	112
ChildNet Palm Beach	15	139	53	14	126	68
Children's Network of SW Florida	2	76	57	8	41	58
Citrus Health Network	10	245	249	39	229	198
Communities Connected for Kids	11	12	15	16	28	25
Community Partnership for Children	0	47	35	8	49	37
Family Support Services Suncoast <i>(contract held by Eckerd Connects until 12/31/2021)</i>	58	134	43	42	104	62
Eckerd Connects - Hillsborough*	49	116	57	57	87	40
Embrace Families CBC	44	126	54	32	117	58
Families First Network	15	80	23	12	98	28
St Johns County Commission	0	6	5	5	12	8
Family Support Services	32	100	25	36	97	33
Heartland for Children	12	75	11	32	79	23
Kids Central Inc.	24	37	27	39	28	27
Kids First of Florida Inc.	0	9	13	0	16	10
NWF Health Network-East	11	56	29	16	55	35
Partnership for Strong Families	10	17	18	10	16	12
Safe Children Coalition	12	39	19	17	37	16
Statewide	366	1498	832	433	1418	864
*Eckerd Connects - Hillsborough contract ended 6/30/2022 Source: OCWDRU #1089, FSFN Data Repository						

## Independent Living Services Outcomes

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

The Department's focus and commitment to the success of young adults in and transitioning out of foster care, has shown many improved outcomes over the last fiscal year. Several factors contributed to these outcome measures, including additional and time-limited funding, increased focus on training, and the continued growth of the Office of Continuing Care and the HOPE line through HOPE Florida – A Pathway to Prosperity. The Department has provided on-site agency training, included family-finding service capabilities, redesigned the "My Pathways to Success Plan," and is in the development of enhanced data report capabilities. These data driven and outcome focused initiatives will ensure that the best service and support is provided to the youth and young adults served in EFC, Aftercare, and PESS.

Department analysis of Lead Agencies' 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.

### ***Postsecondary Education Services and Support***

Eligible young adults ages 18-21 (up to age 22 with a documented disability) in PESS receive \$1,720 per month and other support necessary to become self-sufficient, pursuant to s. 409.1451, F.S. Funding through the federal John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee program) also helps pay for participant housing and other expenses necessary to cover the cost of attendance while enrolled in school or a vocational training program. Initial eligibility requires that these students be enrolled in nine credit hours or the vocational equivalent. Students meeting academic progress according to the Florida Bright Futures educational institution, may continue to receive the assistance. Some exceptions to credit hours and progress may apply to those students with a diagnosed disability or other recognized challenging circumstances.

### **PESS Outcome Area 1: Increasing Financial Self-Sufficiency**

Youth in foster care or out-of-home care are required to participate in transition planning (My Pathways to Success Plan) under section 39.6035, F.S. This plan, which is subject to judicial oversight, contains the goals and plans for obtaining or maintaining the services necessary to successfully transition to adulthood, and financial self-sufficiency. Those services include, but are not limited to, housing, healthcare, education, transportation, employment, adult connections, and financial planning. Chapter 2022-67, Laws of Florida (SB 7065), emphasized the need for financial literacy in young adults receiving a PESS stipend; therefore, before a young adult participating in the PESS program receives funding, an assessment of the young adult's financial literacy, which includes personal financial management, budgeting, and saving, is documented and a financial plan is completed. The financial plan must be included in the transition plan and reviewed, and, if necessary, updated with the young adult every six months while enrolled in the PESS program. If deficiencies are identified, referrals or necessary information are provided to young adult to strengthening skills identified in the assessment.

## PESS Outcome Area 2: Improving Educational Attainment

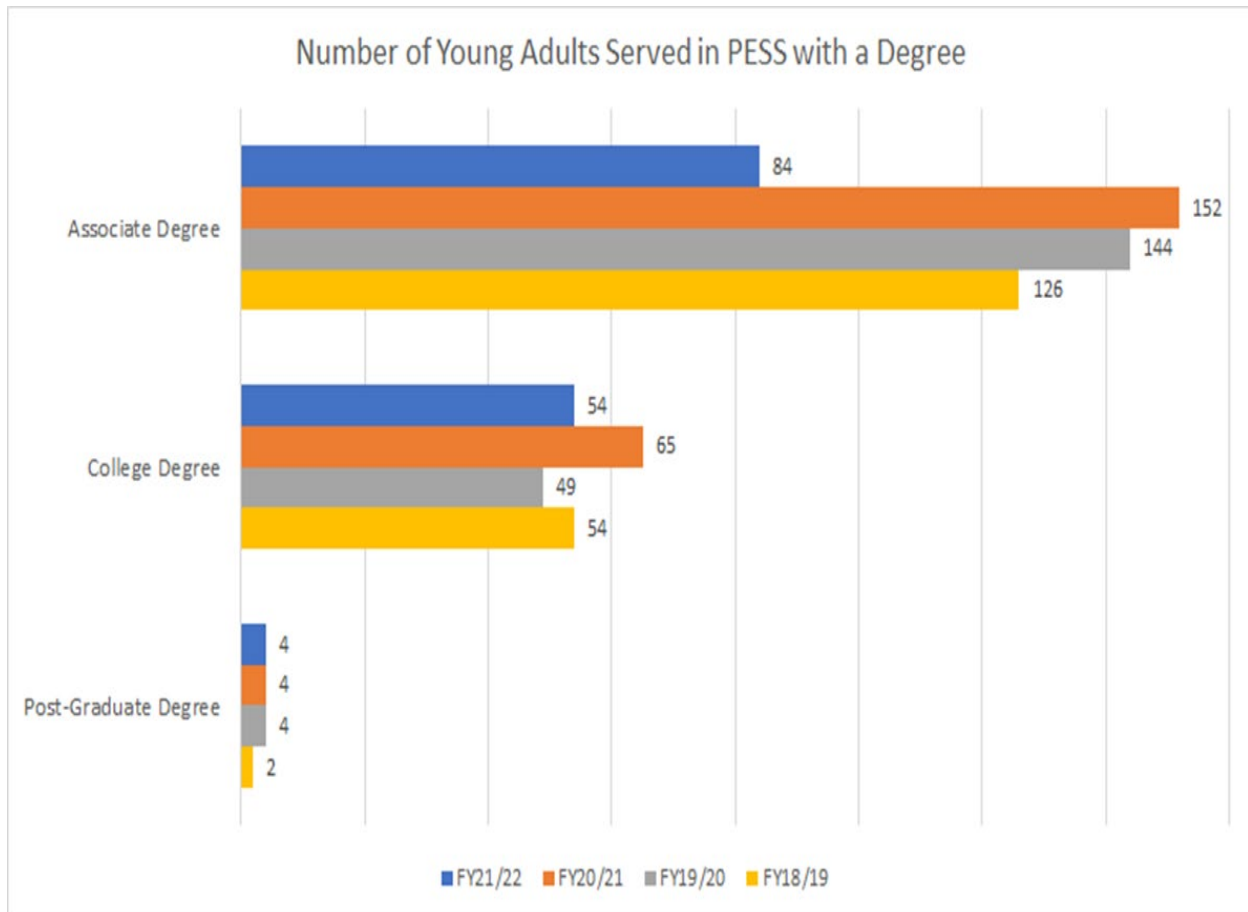
Education is a critically important outcome to establish a young adult's preparedness for the future. Many of the young adults that spoke at the Department's Child and Family Well-Being Summit this year shared the value of education. They spoke not just to the doors that a diploma can open, but also the permanence of attaining it; they felt great pride to share something that can never be taken away.

The following table shows the number of young adults during the FY 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 who have an educational record in FSFN reflective of receiving a high school, GED, or a special diploma degree. The number of young adults who earned a degree increased by 236 percent from the previous FY, with each Lead Agency reporting an increase in degree attainment. Based on work with Lead Agencies the increase is due to improved reporting of outcomes and additional cash incentives to students to make academic progress provided through Division X Chaffee funds.

Young Adults who have a High School Diploma, GED Certificate, or Certificate of Completion/Special Diploma	2020-2021	2021-2022
<b>Lead Agency</b>		
Brevard Family Partnership	8	19
ChildNet-Broward	23	60
ChildNet-Palm Beach	10	30
Children's Network of SW Florida	1	36
Citrus Health Network	6	73
Communities Connected for Kids	0	17
Community Partnership for Children	0	24
Family Support Services of Suncoast ( <i>contract held by Eckerd Connects until 12/31/2021</i> )	36	81
Eckerd Connects - Hillsborough*	28	39
Embrace Families	25	66
Families First Network	4	24
Family Integrity Program	0	2
Family Support Services of North Florida	14	31
Heartland for Children	0	32
Kids Central, Inc.	12	19
Kids First of Florida, Inc.	0	4
Northwest Florida Health Network	8	27
Partnership for Strong Families	3	19
Safe Children Coalition	9	27
Statewide	187	630
Source: OCWDRU #1122, FSFN Data Repository * Eckerd Connects - Hillsborough contract ended 6/30/2022		

During FY 2021-2022, the Department contracted 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 and networking, in collaboration with the State University System (SUS), Florida College System (FCS), and Department of Education.

The following chart shows the number of young adults participating in the PESS program who have earned a post-secondary or graduate degree between FY 2018-2019 and FY 2021-2022. While the number of young adults in the PESS program saw a decline in degree obtainment from FY 2020-2021, it should be noted that young adults moving from traditional classroom learning to an online platform during the pandemic may have negatively affected performance.



### PESS Outcome Area 3: Increasing Connections

The Department recognizes that the transition into adulthood can be challenging for young people, especially if a young person lacks positive adult connections and a support system. Through the statutory creation of the Office of Continuing Care, the Department has a renewed and innovation-focused approach on the importance of increasing supportive connections for the youth and young adults served. In collaboration with community-based care partners, agency stakeholders, and youth advocacy groups, the Office of Continuing Care redesigned the My Pathway to Success Plan, which now has a greater emphasis on supportive connections and encourages further discussion of mentor relationships. The Department is also creating and enhancing data collection, reports, and evaluations to ensure supports are meeting the needs of youth and young adults transitioning out of care statewide. A key focal point of this data collection is identifying positive connections with adults that will support these youth well into adulthood. To capture this, reporting capabilities are currently being built and are anticipated to be available in the next fiscal year. The outcomes from this reporting will help identify future training and facilitate the sharing of best practices with our partners across the state.

#### **PESS Outcome Area 4: Reducing Homelessness**

Safe and stable housing is a critical element in ensuring a young adult has the capacity to work towards self-sufficiency. Ensuring this basic need is met can provide a launch pad for clients to focus on achieving their short- and long-term goals. Young adults participating in PESS receive financial assistance to help secure housing and utilities. The statutory stipend amount of \$1,720 is available to help cover living expenses. The Lead Agencies can also leverage community resources and partnerships to assist young adults in locating affordable housing in the cities where they are attending school.

In 2021, legislation expanded the requirements under section 409.1451(3), F.S., to allow young adults who are enrolled in PESS to receive financial assistance if they are experiencing an emergency and do not have the resources to resolve the emergency. The temporary emergency assistance that is afforded to those young adults includes, but is not limited to, the ability to secure housing, cover utility expenses, and cover housing deposits. These emergency funds can provide a bridge to young adults in crisis and prevent the spiral towards homelessness.

#### **PESS Outcome Area 5: Reducing High-Risk Behavior**

Young adults in PESS receive regular contact with child welfare professionals and service providers. The young adult may request additional services anytime throughout the program to reduce any risk identified. Additionally, through the Office of Continuing Care Hope Line, young adults participating in the PESS program can speak with a peer support system and connect to existing resources in their community. This resource serves young adults that have aged out until age 26, ensuring that those with high-risk behaviors have a safety net to connect to needed services and support.

#### **PESS Outcome Area 6: Improving Access to Health Insurance**

Young adults participating in PESS have access to Medicaid. Depending on whether the young adult turned 18 while in the legal custody of the Department, was adopted at age 16 or 17, or was placed in guardianship at age 16 or 17, will determine if the young adult's Medicaid is managed by the Lead Agency. Young adults in the legal custody of the Department at the age of 18 continue to receive Medicaid until the age of 21. Young adults who turned 18 while in the legal custody of the Department and were receiving Medicaid when they turned 18 are automatically eligible for Medicaid until the age of 26 years old.

The Department is currently in the developmental stages of a report to capture information related to a young adult's medical, dental, and vision along with other essential data needed to ensure services are being provided to youth and young adults in our post-18 programs. This report will also enable caseworkers to identify issues or problems earlier in the process and plan interventions. With the creation of this report, the Department will be able to provide more updated information on the health and well-being of the young adults served in the independent living programs, it is projected to be available in the next fiscal year.



## ***Aftercare Services (Aftercare)***

To be eligible for Aftercare per section 409.1451, F.S., a young adult must have reached the age of 18 while in the Department's legal custody, but not yet have turned 23 years of age. The services provided are based on a needs assessment and are intended to be temporary in nature. Services are often used as a bridge to EFC and PESS and may include mentoring, tutoring, mental health, substance abuse, counseling, and financial assistance. Allowable expenses are covered by federal and state funding. Aftercare is an important safety net that provides access to services without full eligibility so that clients can work towards eligibility for more long-term programs with the necessary supports to succeed.

### **Aftercare Outcome Area 1: Increasing Financial Self-Sufficiency**

Young adults in Aftercare are offered financial literacy through several different paths. The Department of Financial Services (DFS) provides financial literacy training for young adults, and community-based care organizations provide as-needed financial life skills training. Additionally, young adults applying for Aftercare funding are encouraged to participate in their transition plan through the My Pathway to Success Plan form, which now includes an assessment of the young adult's financial literacy. This new financial plan is to be completed every six months, so if deficiencies are identified, referrals and additional assistance can be provided to strengthen their skills.

Young adults may also request financial assistance through an Aftercare application. The amount of financial assistance must be for specific purposes and be provided to the vendor for items like rent or utilities until a young adult can successfully manage their expenses and allocated funding.

Although young adults are not required to seek employment or attend school as an ongoing condition for eligibility in Aftercare, they must make efforts to complete activities to become self-sufficient. These types of activities, as part of a comprehensive plan, will assist with transitioning the young adult toward financial self-sufficiency.

The following table provides the number of young adults who received Aftercare for FY 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 and had a recorded period of employment during FY 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. The number of young adults who have recorded employment in Aftercare has remained relatively consistent from the previous state fiscal year.

<b>Aftercare with a Recorded Period of Employment</b>		
<b>Lead Agency</b>	<b>2020-2021</b>	<b>2021-2022</b>
Brevard Family Partnership	5	6
ChildNet-Broward	9	1
ChildNet-Palm Beach	3	1
Children's Network of SW Florida	0	2
Citrus Health Network	3	7
Communities Connected for Kids	0	0
Community Partnership for Children	2	1
Family Support Services of Suncoast <i>(contract held by Eckerd Connects until 12/31/2021)</i>	11	9
Eckerd Connects – Hillsborough*	13	10
Embrace Families	8	10
Families First Network	4	1
Family Integrity Program	0	0
Family Support Services of North Florida	9	9
Heartland for Children	6	9
Kids Central, Inc.	6	6
Kids First of Florida, Inc.	0	0
Northwest Florida Health Network	1	1
Partnership for Strong Families	0	1
Safe Children Coalition	2	7
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>81</b>
*Eckerd Connects - Hillsborough contract ended 6/30/2022 Source: OCWDRU #1169, FSFN Data Repository		

## **Aftercare Outcome Area 2: Improving Educational Attainment**

A young adult applying for Aftercare shall also complete the Aftercare Services Plan to address educational goals and needs. The form addresses educational needs including postsecondary goals or technical training. The goal is to provide a setting where the young adult will feel encouraged to set both short-term and long-term goals for educational attainment and become familiar with the types of financial aid and the tuition exemptions available to assist on their journey to self-sufficiency.

## **Aftercare Outcome Area 3: Increasing Connections**

The Aftercare Services Plan allows the young adult and child welfare professional to list the person(s) responsible for providing support to the young adult. Through the ongoing planning process, supportive adults, such as extended family, friends, child welfare professionals, faith-based community members, and other supports should be identified to help the young adult accomplish the documented goals and grow their social capital. These connections to caring adults will continue to be cultivated throughout the young adult's case, regardless of the program to which the young adult is linked.

#### **Aftercare Outcome Area 4: Reducing Homelessness**

Young adults participating in Aftercare may receive financial assistance to help secure housing and utilities. If a young adult requests assistance to prevent homelessness, a completed Aftercare application is not required, and services to assist the young adult in need of housing are provided as expeditiously as possible, but no longer than 24 hours after receiving the request. The flexibility to provide services swiftly before the crisis deepens is imperative in setting the young adult up on the path to self-sufficiency. Like PESS, Lead Agencies can leverage community resources and partnerships to assist young adults in locating affordable housing.

#### **Aftercare Outcome Area 5: Reducing High-Risk Behavior**

The Aftercare Services Plan allows the young adult and child welfare professional to list the person(s) responsible for providing services. Since the services are administered through the referral process, the young adult will likely have contact with multiple providers. Follow-up on the outcome of the service referrals is reviewed every three months when needs are reassessed. Additionally, through the Office of Continuing Care Hope Line, young adults participating in the Aftercare program can access community services and interact with a peer support system directly through one statewide point of contact.

#### **Aftercare Outcome Area 6: Improving Access to Health Insurance**

Young adults in Aftercare continue to receive Medicaid through age 26. Any immediate medical needs the young adult has or barriers accessing medical services can be addressed in their Aftercare Services Plan which is created in collaboration with their independent living services coordinator.

#### ***Extended Foster Care (EFC)***

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 21 years of age, or until 22 years of age if they have a documented disability. EFC is a voluntary program that requires the young adult who aged out of the legal custody of the Department on their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday to participate in school, work, or a work training program while residing in a supervised living arrangement, as required by federal and state guidelines.

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

#### **EFC Outcome Area 1: Increasing Financial Self-Sufficiency**

Young adults in EFC are encouraged to participate in financial education life skills programs and complete an assessment of financial literacy as part of transitioning planning through the My Pathways to Success Plan, which continues as a young adult enters the EFC program. Section 39.6035, F.S., requires that youth in transition are provided with information for the financial literacy curriculum offered by DFS. Young adults can continue taking the DFS online courses and any other free banking classes to increase their knowledge of handling money. The table below shows the number of young adults with recorded employment participating in the EFC program. The number of young adults who have recorded employment in EFC has increased by 20 percent from the previous SFY.

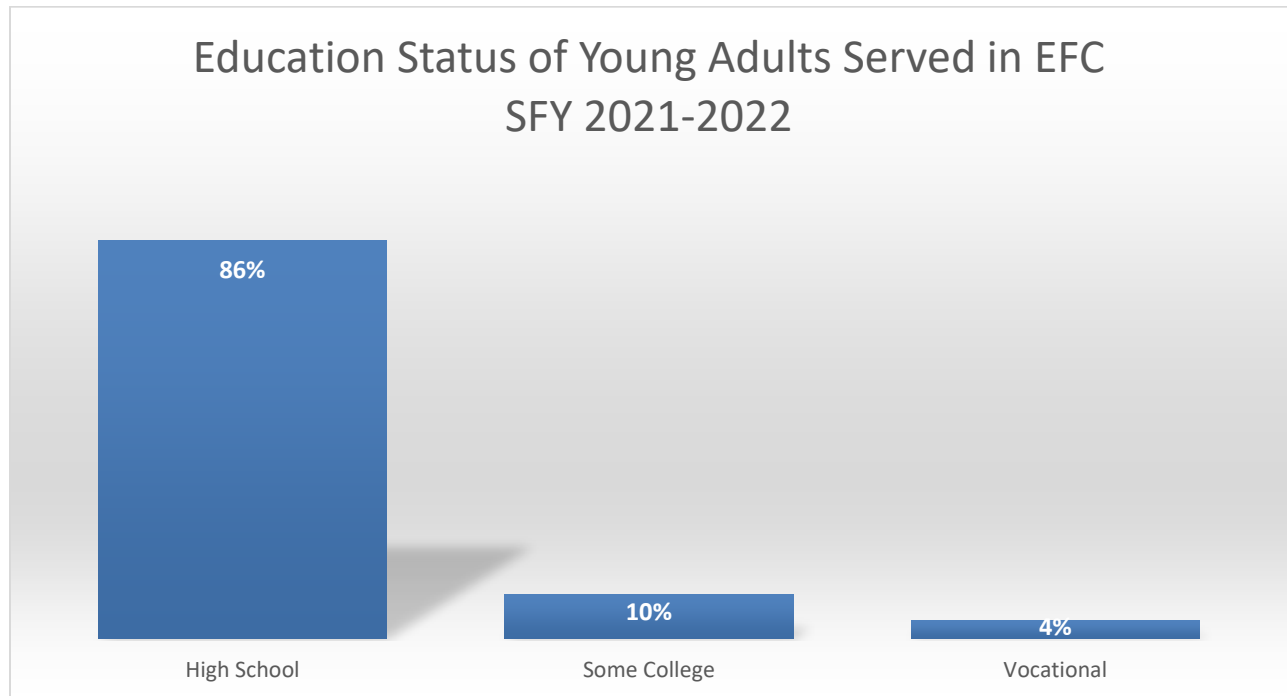
<b>EFC with a Recorded Period of Employment</b>		
<b>Lead Agency</b>	<b>2020-2021</b>	<b>2021-2022</b>
Brevard Family Partnership	13	14
ChildNet-Broward	24	29
ChildNet-Palm Beach	8	8
Children's Network of SW Florida	17	16
Citrus Health Network	60	63
Communities Connected for Kids	1	1
Community Partnership for Children	1	2
Family Support Services of Suncoast <i>(contract held by Eckerd Connects until 12/31/2021)</i>	24	24
Eckerd Connects – Hillsborough*	30	46
Embrace Families	53	66
Families First Network	46	63
Family Integrity Program	4	6
Family Support Services of North Florida	45	53
Heartland for Children	22	26
Kids Central, Inc.	12	6
Kids First of Florida, Inc.	5	6
Northwest Florida Health Network	20	18
Partnership for Strong Families	1	3
Safe Children Coalition	9	23
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>395</b>	<b>473</b>
*Eckerd Connects - Hillsborough contract ended 6/30/2022		
Source: OCWDRU #1169, FSFN Data Repository		

## **EFC Outcome Area 2: Improving Educational Attainment**

Achieving a diploma can establish a solid foundation that will prepare youth for their future. Education attainment remains an important Lead Agency scorecard measure developed to monitor a youth's capacity for independent living.

The following chart reflects the percentage of young adults that received EFC services during SFY

2021-2022 and their current educational status in FSN. Eighty-six percent of young adults participating in the EFC program are working towards a high school degree.



### **EFC Outcome Area 3: Increasing Connections**

The goal for young adults in EFC is to transition to independence. To achieve this goal, young adults participate in transitional planning with their team. The My Pathways to Success Plan has been revised with an emphasis on the importance of increasing connections and encourages formal discussion around mentor relationships. This helps facilitate thought and conversation around the role that a positive lifelong connection can play throughout the life of a young adult. With this addition, more young adults aging out of care will have the support needed to successfully transition to independence. A Shared Living Plan is required and serves as an additional method used to capture individuals assisting young adults 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.

The Department has recently identified a platform through the Family Support Network Participant category to capture supportive adults and connections. 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. Additionally, the creation of a data collection report is underway that will allow for the efficient data collection on the number of young adults with identified permanent connections to better assess the Department's success in engaging young adults to identify and build lifelong connections which are essential in the transition to adulthood.

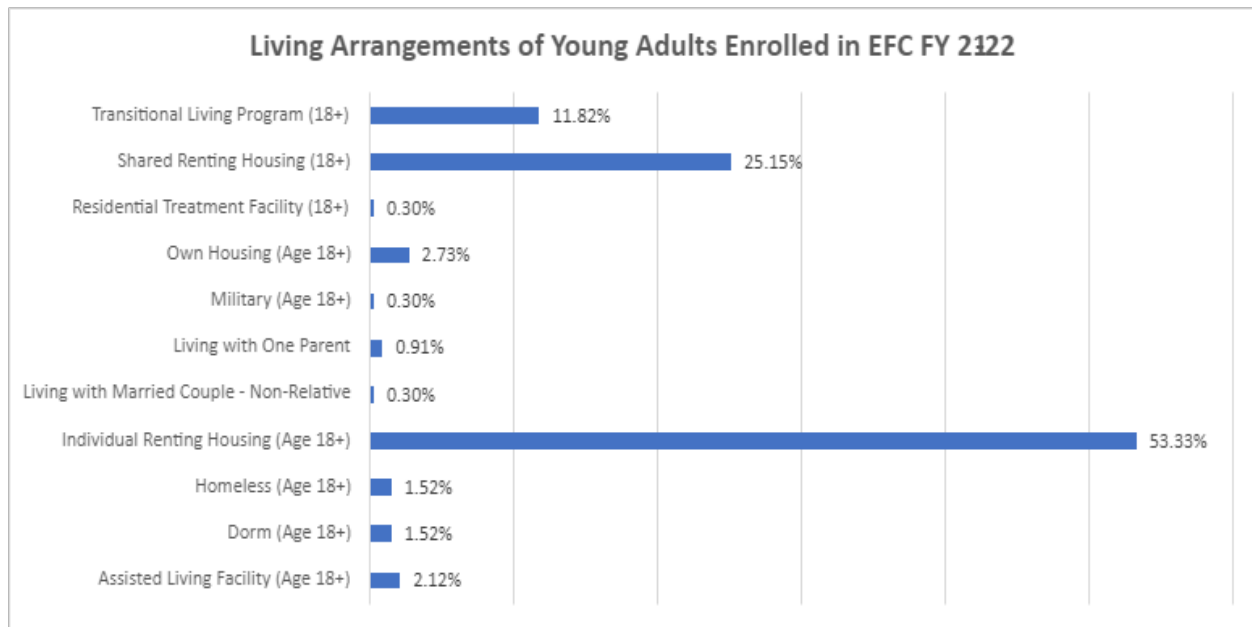
### **EFC Outcome Area 4: Reducing Homelessness**

Currently, all young adults in EFC are documented as residing in out-of-home placements called

Supervised Living Arrangements in FSFN. Before 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 ensures that young adults reside in the most suitable living arrangement. The young adult may reside under the following supervised living arrangements: Licensed Foster Home, Licensed Group Home, Transitional Living Program, Assisted Living Facility, Shared Housing, Shared Housing-Host Home, and Individual Housing.

EFC wraparound care prevents homelessness for participating clients. Aftercare services provide young adults terminated from EFC an opportunity to bridge back into the program with services that include temporary financial assistance to avoid homelessness.

The following chart reflects the living arrangements for young adults participating in EFC during SFY 2021-2022. Fifty-three percent are renting individual housing and 25 percent are sharing rental housing. The Department has seen best practice of Lead Agencies dedicating a staff member to housing. That staff member navigates identifying appropriate and diverse housing options for the young adults served in post-18 programs. That staff member can focus on building relationships within the community and partner with local housing agencies to increase resources.



### EFC Outcome Area 5: Reducing High-Risk Behavior

As indicated by the program title, EFC is an extension of foster care, providing young adults with wrap around case management and services as they transition to adulthood. Child welfare professionals conduct monthly home visits to assess the young adult’s safety and well-being. Well-being and high-risk behaviors are monitored through ongoing assessment of life skill development, required judicial oversight, and transitional planning. In addition, the Life Skills Progress Documentation Log is utilized to track a variety of areas that create the foundation to overcome barriers. This consistent support and focus on individualized service is an important tool for identifying and changing high-risk behaviors. The relationship developed and maintained through case planning can be used to support young adults facing difficult life decisions by providing guidance on the road to self-sufficiency.

## **EFC Outcome Area 6: Improving Access to Health Insurance**

Young adults in EFC continue to receive Medicaid until 21 years of age. Young adults who turned 18 in the legal custody of the Department and were receiving Medicaid when they turned 18 are automatically eligible for Medicaid until age 26.

### **Keys to Independence Program**

The Florida Keys to Independence Act was signed into law in 2014. The program is targeted toward youth in out-of-home care, young adults participating in EFC, or young adults between 15 and 21 years of age participating in PESS. The Keys to Independence Program assists with services related to obtaining a driver's license and car insurance. Embrace Families, a Lead Agency, is the contract holder for the Keys to Independence Program. Requirements for the program include a youth must have an open dependency case that includes out-of-home care or achieved court-ordered permanency within the last six months (adoption, reunification, legal guardianship), and have the approval of a primary caregiver who would use Prudent Parent Standards to meet the Florida Department of Highway and Motor Vehicle Safety (DHMVS) requirements for a learner's intermediate or full privilege driver's license. Access to Keys to Independence services was recently expanded to include those young adults who were in licensed care at the age of 18 years old and are currently receiving PESS.

Since the Keys Program began in December of 2014:

- 2,065 youth and young adults in the state of Florida that have obtained a learner's permit and 1,090 that have obtained a Florida driver's license,
- 7,660 youth have been enrolled in the Keys to Independence program statewide and 2,995 remained actively enrolled in the program as of the same date.
- Since the expansion to include eligible PESS clients in April 2022, there have been approximately 115 young adults in Florida enrolled in PESS that are currently receiving services through the Keys to Independence Program,
- In addition to the Keys to Independence program, young adults can discuss obtaining or accessing consistent transportation and other applicable resources such as bus schedules or public transportation through transition staffing with the Department's "My Pathway to Success Plan".

With the Keys to Independence program supporting young adults in PESS, along with the standardized My Pathways to Success Plan, the Department has seen an increase in young adults' ability to obtain driver's licenses at no cost with additional support, resources, and incentives to motivate active participation. Anecdotal information from the field also revealed an increased awareness of transportation options in the community.

### **Permanent Connections**

The Office of Continuing Care has continued to advocate the importance of permanent, supportive connections for the youth and young adults we serve. In response to 2021 legislative reporting requirements to include connections related to youth and young adults, the Department has provided on-site agency training, included family-finding service capabilities, redesigned the My Pathways to Success Plan, and is in the development of enhanced data report capabilities to ensure that young adults in independent living have identified supportive adults to assist in the transition to adulthood. The

My Pathways to Success Plan includes a section that encourages discussion of mentor relationships and adult supportive connections. A Family Finding Pilot initiative, which began in the fall, will also provide an opportunity to locate both informal adult connections and family members that are willing and able to assist with the transition to adulthood. The data collection report underway will allow for the efficient data collection on the number of young adults with identified permanent connections to better assess the Department's success in engaging young adults to identify and build lifelong connections. The Department's data collection is an important milestone and will enable additional avenues for focus and conversation around lining a young adult's path to self-sufficiency with positive support, which are essential in their transition to adulthood.

## **National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD)**

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

### **Served and Outcomes Population**

Data collection activity requires states to collect Outcome Information by directly surveying youth and young adults. The NYTD Outcome survey developed by the Administration for Children and Families is a longitudinal study that surveys the same group of young people over a period to establish a "cohort." Each NYTD survey cohort is comprised of youth who completed the NYTD survey at 17 years of age and are again surveyed at 19 and 21 years of age.

The Administration for Children and Families collects Outcome Information from each cohort across six domains: financial self-sufficiency, experience with homelessness, educational attainment, positive connections with adults, high-risk behavior, and access to health insurance. Since 2010, Florida has reported NYTD Survey Outcomes on three distinct cohorts (youth and young adults who completed the NYTD survey at ages 17, 19, and 21). In 2021, Florida began surveying young adults aged 19 who are part of the fourth NYTD survey cohort and will complete their final NYTD survey when they turn 21 years of age.

Beginning in October 2022 through September 2023, Florida will establish its fifth NYTD survey cohort by surveying youth who are in Florida's foster care system beginning on their 17<sup>th</sup> birthday.

## **Oversight Activities**

The contracts that the Department holds with Lead Agencies include expectations to administer all services for youth in care by federal guidelines, Florida Statutes, and Florida Administrative Code. Florida has structured statutory requirements for EFC, PESS, and Aftercare around establishing client eligibility, standards of progress, payment disbursement, and due process and appeals. Requirements in the Florida Administrative Code further detail the framework for how the array of independent living services is administered, including application and discharge procedures, transition planning, and documentation requirements.

### **1. Contract Oversight**

Contract monitoring is conducted by the Office of Contracted Client Services and the Department's



Office of Quality and Innovation. The Office of Quality and Innovation monitors through the ongoing completion of case reviews and monitoring of performance metrics. The Office of Quality and Innovation, through its partnership with the Office of Continuing Care, will soon begin the inclusion of specific independent living related life of case questions for those transitioning to adulthood. In addition, utilizing the Quality Standards Review Guide, created by the Quality Standards Workgroup, that comprised engaged stakeholders to discuss the most critical elements to ensure a young adult's success, an independent living post-18 case review has been created and will be used to collect community-based care data and outcome measures for future Department training and curriculum development.

## 2. Financial Accountability

During SFY 2021-2022, the Department's Office of Lead Agency and Managing Entity Financial Accountability provided technical assistance and oversight to the Department's Lead Agency contract managers and Lead Agency financial staff throughout the state to ensure payments were recorded accurately in FSFN. Independent living service payments were reviewed monthly to determine the following:

- Payment amounts adhere to the amounts prescribed in Florida Statutes and Florida Administrative Code.
- Young adults' eligibility within each program is appropriately documented in FSFN.
- 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.

	SFY21-22	GAA
Independent Living (Recurring Base)	\$ 38,195,652	
SB 80/96 Requirements - Rec GR	\$ 1,683,938	
<b>SFY 21-22 Appropriation</b>	<b>\$39,879,590</b>	
SFY 21-22 Division X Chafee ETV	\$ 2,876,674	
	<b>\$42,756,264</b>	

The legislature appropriated approximately \$43 million for SFY 2021-2022 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 13 through 17 years of age and included Chapter 2021-169, Laws of Florida (SB 80), Chapter 2021-170, Laws of Florida (SB 96), and Division X Chafee funding. If a Lead Agency exceeds its independent living allocation, the excess is covered from its core funding.

At the beginning of the SFY, each Lead Agency 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 Lead Agency and is reviewed and approved by the Department. As needed, any identified fiscal issues are discussed with the Lead Agency.

Quarterly reviews were conducted in addition to the technical assistance provided and monthly payment reviews. When payment records are selected, each Lead Agency is required to provide supporting documentation used to support eligibility criteria entered into FSFN. The supporting documentation is also reviewed to confirm that the amount of financial assistance determined by the Lead Agency aligns with the eligibility and financial requirements that were completed.

### 3. Appeals

Young adults applying for or receiving independent living services through EFC, PESS, or Aftercare have the right to receive notice of adverse action and to resolve issues of program eligibility through the fair hearing process under sections 39.6251(9) and 409.1451(4), F.S. The Office of Appeal Hearings reported that there were no appeals granted in SFY 2021-2022, upholding the program's eligibility determinations made by Lead Agencies.

Total Number of Independent Living Program Appeals

SFY 2020-2021: 53

SFY 2021-2022: 31

Number of EFC Only Appeals\*:

SFY 2020-2021: 16

SFY 2021-2022: 3

Of the 31 appeals in SFY 2021-2022, 18 were withdrawn, nine were abandoned, two were denied (Department's action was upheld), and two were dismissed.

\*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, and ended on December 31, 2021.

### Rule Promulgation

There were no rule promulgations in SFY 2021-2022.

### Department Plans

#### Office of Continuing Care

As part of the Legislative Session in 2021, the Office of Continuing Care was created. The Office of Continuing Care's primary charge is to ensure young adults ages 18-26 have the assistance and support needed to effectively transition to independence. The Office also handles program and policy related to the Department's transition planning and independent living programs, which start at age 13 and continue until the youth ages out at 18 and transitions into an independent living program. To ensure the youth and young adults in care are receiving the services they need, the Office of Continuing Care set out on a mission to put together a robust team of young adults with lived experience. The Office has grown from a team of two to an office with nine full-time employees, including more than half of its staff with lived foster care experience. This includes a team of Hope Navigators that connect with their peers across the state through the Hope Line. The Hope Line, a part of Hope Florida – A Pathway to Prosperity, offers free, one-on-one help for young people who are about to or have recently transitioned out of foster care, aiming to leap into adulthood with a positive

experience. Young adults between ages 18 and 26 who age out of the foster care system in Florida may receive services that include accessing special services available to former foster care youth, a support system to help with the next steps, and connections to existing resources in their community. The Hope Line has received over 500 calls since its inception and offered care navigation case management support on 125 cases.

### **Youth Advisor Position**

The Office of Continuing Care established a Youth Advisor position to incorporate youth and young adult lived experience into policy and systems change. This position will be served by a young adult with the lived experience needed to understand the system, both as a service recipient and an organizational asset. The Youth Advisor reports directly to the Deputy Director of the Office of Continuing Care and provides knowledge and expertise around the lived experience of youth and young adults. The Youth Advisor is charged with connecting with their peers on a personal and professional level to ensure the interests of the youth are effectively represented within the Department and will additionally provide feedback on policy changes and assist in the evaluation and implementation of services for youth and young adults receiving independent living services.

### **Family Finding**

The Office of Continuing Care will launch its Family Finding Pilot initiative this Fall. The pilot will provide young adults served through independent living programs an opportunity to connect with a Hope Navigator to initiate Department led family finding. The initiative is designed to assist in locating both informal adult connections and family members that are willing and able to assist with the transition to adulthood.

### **Independent Living Curriculum**

The Office of Continuing Care continues to partner with the Department's training team to create an independent living curriculum to complement the vision of providing support and resources for former foster youth. The Department will collaborate with and include forums for feedback from stakeholders, including youth and young adults, community-based care agencies, guardian ad litem programs, and other partners as the curriculum is developed. The implementation of the curriculum will align with the quality standards in addressing how to better equip the independent living staff with providing quality service to young adults, as well as developing youth voices through engagement and empowerment.

### **Independent Living App**

The Department, along with the support and expertise of young adults with lived experience, has begun the process of creating an Independent Living App to provide clients with easy access to important information related to independent living services and supports. This information will be accessible at any time on mobile devices and will allow youth and young adults to be more informed of their benefits, up-to-date independent living information, important contacts, and adulting resources to assist in making the transition to adulthood.

### **On-Site Independent Living Support**

The Office of Continuing Care launched on-site visit rotations in May 2022 to provide community-based care agency partners and their independent living departments an opportunity for one-on-one

connection and assistance. These visits include a review of any barriers faced in providing high-caliber services to youth and young adults, policy support, and strategies to enhance services and support. The site visits also provide lived experience expertise and an opportunity for state and local collaboration, making new initiatives and policy changes easier to communicate across the board. The Youth Advisor will be participating in site-visits in the future to provide lived experience expertise and to connect with peers receiving services in the area.

## **Chafee Consolidated Appropriation Act Division X - Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act**

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, P.L. 116-260, enacted into law on December 27, 2020, provided appropriations and temporary flexibilities and assistance in response to the public health emergency. Division X of P.L. 116-260, titled “Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act,” included additional, supplemental, or enhanced funding for several programs authorized under Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Act, and required Title IV-E agencies to take several actions to protect and support youth and young adults currently or formerly in foster care. The stimulus bill provided an additional \$350 million for the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee), \$50 million for Chafee Education and Training Vouchers (ETV), and increased the maximum ETV award amount from \$5,000 to \$12,000 per youth for training and postsecondary education for eligible youth in foster care. The bill also raised the maximum age of ETV eligibility from 23 to 26 for Chafee-eligible former foster youth.

Florida was awarded \$19,791,518 in additional Chafee funds, and \$2,876,674 in additional ETV. Under the Act, Florida’s young adults were permitted to remain in, and re-enter extended foster care without meeting the requirements of education and employment conditions during the period of December 27, 2020, through September 30, 2021. The Department, along with agency partners and youth advocacy groups, partnered to create an awareness campaign geared towards former foster care young adults about the funding. Additionally, each Lead Agency was required to contact the eligible young adults between the ages of 18 and 21, or age 22 with a disability, who exited extended foster care due to ineligibility and offer an opportunity to re-enter the program, which would be funded by the Division X award. Specific funding during the pandemic from the Chafee program provided new opportunities to support young adults, including the above waiving of program requirements and offering additional avenues for resources. Florida saw increased positive outcomes in qualifying activities such as secondary education and employment, as well as overall participation in the independent living programs.

Florida implemented the following provisions for Chafee funding to serve children, youth, and young adults in Road to Independence and Extended Foster Care Programs:

- Transportation assistance for young adults in EFC, PESS, and Aftercare.
- Stimulus checks to young adults that were enrolled into EFC, PESS, Aftercare and young adults entering EFC, PESS, and Aftercare.
- Chafee funding to support the needs of young adults in EFC, PESS, and Aftercare that were impacted by the pandemic.
- Employment incentives for young adults who are gainfully employed for young adults in EFC,

PESS, and Aftercare.

- Educational incentives for young adults in EFC, PESS, and Aftercare who achieved academic progress determined by their educational institutions.
- Life skills incentive for the completion of a formal life skills assessment for young adults in EFC, PESS, and Aftercare.
- Life skills incentives for enrolling in a life skills program deemed appropriate by the community-based care lead agencies for young adults in EFC, PESS, and Aftercare.
- Driver's license incentive for those young adults eligible to enroll in the state's Keys to Independence program.

The availability of additional Chafee and ETV funding provided under the new law concluded on September 30, 2022.