

2006

**Independent Living
Advisory Council**
Report of Independent Living
Services for Florida's Foster Youth





Photo by Bill Frakes

COURTESY OF:



and



Darius lives with a foster family in Duval County, Florida and is currently available for adoption. His portrait is featured in Family Support Services' Heart Gallery of Jacksonville, and his story has been televised on CBS47 and FOX30's Jacksonville's Children show.

Despite recruitment efforts, Darius has not found a family to call his own and has become eligible for independent living services because he is 13.

It is our responsibility, as community members and state associations, to ensure that children like Darius are prepared to face the future, whatever the outcome...

Executive Summary

The transition process from childhood to adulthood is often a precarious journey and one that is filled with opportunity and risk. Most young people, with the support of their families and community network, make this transition successfully and become healthy adults who will be prepared for work and able to contribute to the well being of their families and communities. Unfortunately, there are also many young people who enter adulthood without the knowledge, skills, attitudes, habits and relationships that enable them to be productive members of society. Those youth, who through no fault of their own, live outside of their birth families in foster families, group homes and institutions are among those at greatest risk. Research and these youth's stories make it clear that they face numerous barriers to a successful transition to adulthood. Those barriers include changes in foster care placements and changes in school, an inability to participate in normal, age appropriate activities, housing, economic stability, and the lack of connections with permanent supportive adults or "family".

In Florida, as of March 2006, there were 13,429 children between the ages of 13 and 22 in various foster care arrangements. Approximately 800 of those youth "age out" each year. Florida had 3,806 former foster youth between the ages of 18 and 22 who received services in the 2005-2006 year according to ICWSIS.

This is a manageable number of young people. We can and should assure **every youth who leaves the care of the state is educated, housed, banked, employed and connected to a permanent supportive "family" by the time they reach age 25.** We are the parents of these young people while they are in foster care and we need to do no less for them than we do for our own children.

Florida has designed an array of services to support older foster youth and former foster youth in the hopes of these youth becoming independent self-supporting young adults. These services are funded through a web of federal grants, general revenue dollars, and national, state and community private funds. These services are broadly defined in statute but are implemented differently throughout the state through many different Community Based Care (CBC) providers.

The Independent Living Services Advisory Council (ILSAC) recognizes that there has been tremendous transition in the service delivery model for all of Florida's child welfare services including great change in the independent living program. The ILSAC also recognizes that there have been tremendous strides in the past year. However much more remains to be done before we can say that the young people of Florida who age out of our system of care are successful and productive adults.

The Florida Legislature has allocated significant time, effort and resources to develop a system of services for older foster youth and former foster youth. The Legislature charged the ILSAC with the task of reviewing and making recommendations concerning the implementation and operation of the independent living transition services. The volunteer members of the Council have endeavored to meet these tasks and provide the Legislature with this report. Based on a renewed sense of collaboration and cooperation with the Department of Children and Families (DCF), the National Governor's Association (NGA), Florida Team for Youth Transitioning out of Foster Care and the Florida Coalition for Children, the ILSAC makes the following priority recommendations.

The Legislature should:

Develop legislation that removes the barriers for youth aging out of foster care to obtain a permanent drivers license, limits liability and provides access to vehicle insurance.

Continue to allocate general revenue funds in addition to the minimum match to maximize federal funding and approve and appropriate the request of DCF for an additional \$18,653,869 for independent living services.

Reenact and allocate funding for Section 17 of the 2006 approved HB 7173 that adds children who are placed with a court approved non-relative or guardian after reaching 16 years of age and having spent a minimum of six months in foster care as eligible recipients for services under Subparagraph (5) Services for Young Adults Formally in Foster Care of this statute. The legislation passed in 2006 limits this expanded eligibility to take effect only if there is specific funding to accommodate the added workload. Funding was not provided in 2006 and the provisions of Section 17 did not take effect.

Develop legislation for the removal of disabilities of minors executing agreements for banking services, for the purpose of ensuring that a youth in foster care will be able to secure financial services.

The Department of Children and Families should:

Develop a program planning and delivery reporting tool for determining appropriate information regarding the independent living services, outcomes, and fiscal implications on projected and actual delivery of independent living services for all CBC lead agencies. It is recommended that DCF convene a group which includes representatives from at least DCF, the ILSAC, CBC's and Florida Coalition for Children to develop this tool.

Develop a centralized clearinghouse for approved technical assistance, training, resources and best practices for all stakeholders on all issues pertinent to independent living. The ILSAC is recommending that DCF coordinate the development and monitoring of this clearinghouse with the ILSAC.

Include ILSAC members as well as youth representatives in the quality assurance (QA) process directly relating to independent living services.

Establish a deadline for the execution of the Department of Education (DOE), Agency for Workforce Innovation (AWI) and DCF agreements in compliance with Florida Statutes §39.0016 and require an implementation plan.

Support the continuation of the Strengthening Youth Partnerships (SYP) venue to increase cross-agency collaboration among state and local organizations to enhance the knowledge of professionals working with foster youth, and expand efforts to ensure that foster youth providers and foster youth are aware of and accessing available educational and employment services through Regional Workforce Boards, their local websites and the One-Stop Career Centers.

Establish permanency planning as a priority for youth aging out of foster care that results in permanent "family" and supports. Components of this recommendation should include:

- a) Implementation of the rules and guidelines for normal age appropriate behaviors so that connections in the community can be preserved and enhanced.
- b) Address the barriers relating to foster youth obtaining a permanent drivers license and the liability and insurance premiums.
- c) Investigate the youth directed team decision making model for development of a family support network that addresses permanency. This model may involve birth families, siblings and community members in all placement decisions. Permanency decisions should continue to include reunification, adoption, guardianship, kinship care and other non traditional permanency options.

Develop and implement electronic benefits transfer options for allowances, aftercare or Road to Independence (RTI) payments as required by statute 409.451(5) (d) Section 2.

Support the proposed pilot of a Guardian Scholars Program and encourage expansion in other post secondary educational institutions.

Support the development and implementation of a transitional living or subsidized independent living housing experience, for those youth aging out of foster care at age 17 who will not have the option of remaining in a foster care family home or in a group home, to ensure a smoother transition from foster home or group home living to independent living.

Develop a data collection, analysis and reporting mechanism for the outcome measures required by federal law and funding source (Chafee) that have been issued by the Administration for Children and Families as well as the expanded outcomes recommended by the ILSAC in 2005.



We can invest more sensibly, we can work more effectively,
and we can do better by our youth aging out of foster care.

Introduction and 2006 Accomplishments

The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Act provides federal funding to assist children in foster care that are likely to remain in foster care until 18 years of age and to help young adults who are former foster children.

Florida law provides independent living services for these youth including pre-independent living services to prepare youth for transitioning out of foster care. For young adults who have left foster care, Florida law provides for aftercare services, transitional support services and the RTI Program, which assists students who are in high school and those who have enrolled in post secondary education.

While the state is the custodian of these young adults, the transition from foster care to successful adulthood requires intensive and coordinated efforts by many, to provide the support and encouragement that these young people need to become engaged, responsible and productive adults.

In the past year, the State of Florida has seen an emerging high level of interest among politicians, advocates and community leaders alike in independent living issues. This commitment has led to a number of accomplishments that have demonstrated the willingness and readiness of Florida stakeholders to embrace change and develop a collaborative and coordinated system of care for youth transitioning out of foster care.

Accomplishments

1. The transition of the child welfare system to community agencies which has provided opportunities for innovation and increased responsiveness to local needs.
 - A number of CBC's have initiated planning groups to assess their community's assets, challenges and needs.
 - Connected by 25 is exploring expansion of this private public partnership program to Brevard County as well as other interested communities.
 - Educational advocates targeted at foster care youth are now in some high schools and middle schools to address the specific needs of foster youth.
 - Creation or planning for a range of housing programs:
 - Orlando, City of Life Foundation
 - Seminole, Village Apartments under Leadership Florida
 - Miami, Santa Clara, Miami Independent Living Initiative with a private developer
 - Miami, Casa Valentina
 - Hillsborough, YMCA
 - Increased awareness, interest and commitment by the business and private funded communities in enhancing services to this group of young adults including, Washington Mutual Bank, Junior League of Florida, 100 Black Men of Tampa Bay, United Way and a number of state and national foundation initiatives.
 - Creation of a Unified Court Project that oversees the cases of cross-system youth who have both foster care and juvenile justice involvement and those youth transitioning from foster care. The project was conceived by the

Honorable Judge Baumann of the 13th Judicial District and is a unique collaboration between the foster care system, the Department of Juvenile Justice of Hillsborough County, the Guardian ad Litem office and the Hillsborough County School System.

2. The ILSAC contracted for an analysis "Meeting the Health Insurance Needs of Young Adults Formerly in Foster Care." This study along with a partnership with DCF, ACAHA, legislators, advocates and young adults, resulted in the passage of legislation in the 2006 session that expanded Medicaid eligibility to age 20 for young adults who are eligible for aftercare or transitional support services but who do not get RTI payments.
3. The ILSAC recommended, in our 2005 annual report, that an application be submitted to qualify for participation in the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices Policy Institute on Youth Transitioning out of Foster Care. That application was submitted and Florida was selected as one of six participating states. The Florida team has worked closely with ILSAC, as well as other advocates and stakeholders, to identify and recommend policy and practice that will improve the outcomes for youth transitioning out of foster care.
4. HB 7173 passed in the 2006 legislative session and statute now provides:

Accomplishments (continued)

- Expansion of Medicaid eligibility.
- A written plan to be developed with the youth and their care giver regarding the achievement and engagement of age appropriate activities.
- A full explanation to youth of all options and documents prior to any signatures to insure youth understanding.
- An educational and career plan that is developed with the youth.
- Financial literacy skills training as a requirement.
- A specific transitional services plan developed with the youth.
- Direct deposit of allowance, transitional or RTI funding.
- Expansion of tuition exemption.
- Removal of the disability of nonage for youth in foster care for the sole purpose of signing a contract for the lease of residential property at age 17.
- Additional general revenue of \$5,099,419 for the Independent Living Services Program.

5. Based on presentations and recommendations by youth, the Secretary of DCF issued a memorandum in 2005 designed to “begin a change in thinking with respect to normal adolescent behavior and activities.” Youth have presented to a number of interest groups on the

implications of failure to allow age appropriate activities. A CBC and DCF work group has developed administrative rule language addressing normalcy issues.

6. Walk a Mile, a community awareness program, funded by Annie E. Casey, teamed policy makers with foster youth in 12 CBC lead agencies in November 2006.

7. Initiation of the transformation of the statewide foster youth advocacy board to a statewide youth organization under the sponsorship of Florida’s Children First, Inc. based on the successful California Youth Connection Model.

8. Collaboration on a data sharing agreement between Florida’s education, workforce and child welfare state offices.

9. Creation of a subcommittee focused on independent living under the Florida Supreme Court Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court.

10. Increased media attention representing local regional, statewide and national news features.

These efforts have all contributed to investing our financial and human resources more sensibly and effectively. However, there remains much work to be done to significantly change the outcomes for Florida’s youth aging out of foster care.

This report identifies important challenges of this work and has been developed with the cooperation and support of the National Governors Association, Florida Team and DCF.

A. Accountability — Translating Policy to Practice

Through participation in the NGA Policy Institute on Youth Transitioning from Foster care, and the legislation passed in the 2006 session, the ILSAC and the NGA Florida Team have determined that Florida has a number of forward thinking laws and requirements in place. The challenge has been how those laws and requirements are translated into actual practice on the ground. Anecdotal stories abound from youth and other stakeholders in the system on the difficulty of access to services and funds for which they are eligible and that are mandated by statute. This challenge is not unique to Florida and this issue of accountability was a consistent theme among the six states in the NGA Policy Academy.

The ILSAC believes that there are a number of action steps that are key in creating a consistent policy and practice framework:

Outcomes

The Florida Legislature has been forward thinking in identifying the independent living skills training required for each youth in licensed foster care. OPPAGA has also been consistent in their call for a system of measuring youth outcomes.

The ILSAC seeks to partner with DCF and the legislature to ensure accountability on the part of CBC provider agencies by establishing measurable outcomes for youth aging out of foster care. The ILSAC has, over the past two years, provided recommendations for outcome measures (Appendix B). These recommendations are consistent with the Federal requirements and OPPAGA's 2004 and 2005 reports.

CBC Provider agencies should at the minimum, be able to document the youth's proficiency and/or mastery of the skills outlined in Florida statute.

Life skills class attendance can no longer be the acceptable standard of measurement for service providers. Established outcomes and data collection measurements will allow CBC provider agencies to document the progress they are making and assist in identifying where programs are working effectively and resources are being well spent. The required outcome measures released by the federal government have prompted service providers to be proactive in establishing a data collection system. Connected by 25 of

Hillsborough County has created a web-based tracking system.

Establishing the data collection and performance assessment requirements, as required by the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, should be a priority for Florida's DCF. Only through this data collection will we begin to have an understanding of how our independent living dollars are being spent throughout the state. The six outcomes recommended by the federal government focus on the youth's financial self sufficiency, experience with homelessness, educational attainment, positive connections with adults, high risk behaviors, and access to health insurance. The federal requirements have placed significant importance in tracking the outcomes at three significant intervals; age 17, age 19 and age 21. However, the importance of early intervention can not be overlooked. A significant amount of funding is available for services at age 13 to 18. Measurable outcomes related to the younger teen population are important in planning for the future needs of youth aging out of care.

We have gone on too long without accountability. Every dollar spent on independent living services should have a measurable impact on the quality of the lives for our foster care youth and young adults, especially in the areas of education, employment, housing, financial stability and permanency.



The ILSAC recommends that the Department of Children and Families:

Develop a data collection, analysis and reporting mechanism for the outcome measures required by federal law and funding source (Chafee) that have been issued by the Administration for Children and Families as well as the expanded outcomes recommended by the ILSAC in 2005.

Training

The development of a community based care system has led to the implementation of new administrative rules, guidelines and statutes. High staff turnover in the child welfare field has compounded the problem. Other key stakeholders in the lives of youth aging out of foster care have not always been informed and trained on new practice standards. The ILSAC and the NGA Florida Team have identified the following key stakeholders who need continuous, coordinated and consistent training on a variety of issues related to independent living.

Stakeholders

- Youth
- Judicial Systems (Judges, Attorneys, Guardians Ad Litem)
- Foster Parents
- Community Based Care Lead Agencies
- Direct Care providers (Independent Living Coordinators, Case Managers, Group Home and other service providers)
- Schools
- Department of Juvenile Justice
- Health Care Providers
- Regional Workforce Offices

Training Curriculum

- Florida statutes
- Normalcy—age appropriate activities
- Education planning
- Permanency
- Special needs including, disabilities, mental health, substance abuse, delinquency, legal guardianship
- Transition planning
- Life skills training
- Post 18-year-old services
- Advocacy
- Workforce
- Measuring and capturing outcomes
- Youth engagement
- Youth responsibilities

Florida has many qualified and expert resources for the development of a core curriculum on all of these independent living issues. That curriculum must be adapted for the unique needs of each audience and community and can be provided through a variety of venues. There are also a number of best practice and expert authorities outside of Florida who can be accessed for training. Current and former foster youth can and should be included in training the field. Their perspective is unique.

We should no longer tolerate the excuse “I did not know” as a reason for youth not receiving the services mandated by Florida statute.



The ILSAC recommends that the Department of Children and Families:

Develop a centralized clearinghouse for approved technical assistance, training, resources and best practice for all stakeholders on all issues pertinent to independent living. The ILSAC is recommending that DCF coordinate the development and monitoring of this clearinghouse with the ILSAC.

Reporting

Statute 409.1451, Section 5 Services for Young Adults Formerly in Foster Care requires DCF or a CBC lead agency to develop an annual plan to implement those services for their region. Those plans were submitted to DCF and were shared with the ILSAC.

At the same time OPPAGA requested that all CBC lead agencies complete a survey that reviewed the youth served, services provided and expenditures for the previous fiscal year.

Both of these documents provided valuable information. However, neither of these formats provided the data

necessary for a complete picture of the true service and expenditure needs and the effectiveness of those services and investments through tracking youth outcomes. The ILSAC is sensitive to the time and resource burdens of CBC's completing detailed projection and review paperwork.

The need for timely and accurate service and investment projections and reviews including youth outcomes is necessary information that DCF, CBC lead agencies, the ILSAC and the legislature *require* to continue to improve our system of care and insure accountability to the youth. We *can* invest more sensibly, we *can* work more effectively, and we *can* do better by our youth aging out of foster care.



The ILSAC recommends that the Department of Children and Families:

Develop a program planning and delivery reporting tool for determining appropriate information regarding the services, outcomes, and fiscal implications on projected and actual delivery of services for all CBC's. It is recommended that DCF convene a group that includes representatives from at least DCF, ILSAC, CBC's and Florida Coalition for Children.

Youth Voice

Florida has clearly recognized the value of our youth's voices by supporting the birth of the independent statewide foster youth association (Youth SHINE) based on the successful California Youth Connection model.

Youth input and leadership are a critical component of policy making efforts that are truly responsive to the unique needs and experiences of foster youth and, as such, youth have been active in each CBC, playing an active role on the NGA Florida team, the ILSAC, providing training sessions on normalcy and the judicial review process and in advocating with legislators.

We have committed to the philosophy of "nothing about us without us" and we should strengthen and continue to value their voices through intentional youth involvement in all decisions that relate to their futures including education and transition plans, judicial hearings, and permanency options as is now required by statute.

The ILSAC has recently added a youth diarist to all of the meetings who provides a summary of activities, reflections, and the nature of the interaction between youth and adult members from the youth diarist perspective. Florida's current and former foster youth's voices will be the ultimate test of our success in translating policy into consistent practice.



The ILSAC recommends that the Department of Children and Families:

Include ILSAC members as well as youth representatives in the QA process directly relating to independent living services.

B. Cost Estimates of Providing Services

Over the past few years, the legislature has mandated services to be provided to older and former foster youth subject to funding. The ILSAC believes many of these services are not provided although it is difficult to access based on present data collection systems. More importantly, as indicated in our reports, this data is not as important as the output measures. However, the Council believes it is important to report on what has been mandated and how much it would cost to provide these services.

The Council continues to recommend increases in funding while recognizing that all funds do not have to come from the state. In fact the ILSAC supports partnerships with the private sector and philanthropic community. To better understand this request, the Council has analyzed what it would cost to implement what has been mandated by the Legislature and DCF. A detailed report is available however, a shortened summary is provided below. It is our estimate that it would cost \$40,768,934 to fully implement the statutorily-mandated services throughout the state excluding Medicaid and post-secondary tuition and fee waivers.

Services for 13-17 year olds

Florida Statutes mandate assessments and services for foster children aged 13-17. There is also a mandate that the case plans and court reviews for these children be enhanced to ensure review of services to prepare these children for adulthood when they are 18 years old and out of foster care. In addition to the services provided to the children, the statutes mandate training for staff and foster parents.

According to DCF there has been an average of 5,836 youth in foster care aged 13-17 per year for the past five years. Using these numbers, based on the legislative mandates, the cost of services should be \$8,746,000 in addition to the basic services provided to all foster children.

Section 409.1451 requires the state to provide assessments for foster youth aged 13-17. Following these assessments, there should be a meeting to develop a plan of services for foster youth (the meetings should be increased to twice a year for each 15, 16 and 17-year-old and the plan of services should lead to a change in the case plan). These assessments and meetings, if done properly, should cost the state a minimum of \$25 a year (the majority of staff time in these assessments is included as part of the case management figure below). Thus, it should cost the state \$145,900 to provide these assessments and plans to foster youth.

Section 409.1451(3)(b) mandates an additional meeting with the school system to create an educational and career goal for all 13-year-old foster children. This is an existing mandate for all public school children and thus would not impose a new burden on the schools. This meeting should also be a part of the assessment and planning detailed in the previous paragraph and not be an additional cost on the foster care system.

Once an assessment has been completed and a plan implemented, these foster youth will need additional services to prepare for independence. There are particular services mandated for children aged 15-18 in Section 409.1451(4)(b). To implement these services, case managers or life skills trainers, in addition to the basic case managers who provide services to the child and his or her family to reach permanence, are needed by the case management organizations. Assuming the older foster care children are evenly distributed by age, there are 3,501 foster care children on average aged 15-17. Assuming these case managers or life skills trainers can handle a case load of 50 children, the state would need 70 such workers at an estimated cost of \$4,375,000. (According to DCF, the average cost for a caseworker is \$62,500 including benefits.)

A major component of this pre-independent living program is training of the youth, staff and foster parents. Based on two CBC reports, it averages \$364 to provide this training for 13-17 year old foster youth. Thus, it would cost the state \$2,124,304 to provide this to all the foster children.

In addition to the training for the foster youth, to be successful, the foster parents and staff have to have adequate training in the specialized needs and support of older foster youth. These costs are difficult to estimate. Although foster parents and case managers have basic training obligations, there is no curriculum in Florida or support system for foster parents and case managers. To adequately provide this support statewide, an additional \$350,000 should be allocated to a contract provider who will provide a centralized clearinghouse for approved technical assistance, training, resources and best practice for all stakeholders on issues pertinent to independent living issues.

The statute and newly proposed DCF regulations require a foster youth to have access to extra-curricular and co-curricular programs. These activities are important life skills and social skills experiences for foster youth. It is difficult to

estimate this expense. School districts have negotiated discounted rates for foster children. It is estimated that these benefits, if offered to each foster child, would average \$300 a year, totaling \$1,750,800 for all foster youth aged 13-17.

Section 409.1451(4)(c) provides for a subsidized independent living option for some 16 and 17 year old foster youth. This is a cost neutral expense. The cost of subsidized independent living is equal to or less than most foster care costs for this age population.

Although the statute mandates specialized court reviews for older foster youth, there is already a mandate for reviews of foster care cases every six months. Thus, any additional cost for these reviews is minimal.

Services for 18-23 year old former foster youth

The statutes mandate several options of care for former foster youth who turned 18 in foster care. According to DCF, there are 2,843 former foster youth who are eligible for these services. To fully fund all the programs mandated, it would cost the state \$32,022,934.

There are three basic services provided by the statute: RTI, transitional services and aftercare services. Out of this potential pool of recipients 2,127 accessed services in 2005-2006 which is a 75% usage rate. Not all the youth accessed all the programs. According to DCF figures, the largest percentage of usage was of the RTI program at 75%. Only 42% of the youth accessed transitional services and only 18% accessed the aftercare services.

To fully fund the RTI program at the present usage rate, it would cost the state \$22,767,408. This assumes a 75% usage rate and a full award of \$892 a month. According to DCF the average award around the state was \$755. We did not use the lower rate because it was often created by a lack of funds—not based on the needs of the young adults.

Transitional services are not being provided as described in the statute. The statute envisions a series of services: financial, housing, counseling, employment, education, mental health, disability, and other services. However, most CBC's are merely providing financial assistance to support housing costs. According to DCF, 1,179 former foster youth are accessing this program with an average monthly award of \$416, an annual cost of \$5,885,568 or \$4,992 per youth. However, these estimates are low. To adequately provide the transitional services these youth need to achieve self-

sufficiency, we estimate the cost to be \$6,100 per youth or \$7,191,900 for the state.

Aftercare services are also described as a list of services provided based on an assessment of the needs of the young adult. The services mandated by the statute are: Mentoring, tutoring, mental health services, substance abuse counseling, life skills classes, parenting classes, job and career skills training, counselor consultations, temporary financial assistance and financial literacy skills training. However, in practice, aftercare services tends to be an emergency fund of money for youth rather than a series of services fulfilling the temporary financial assistance mandate. According to DCF, 500 former foster youth are accessing this program with an average of \$645, a total cost of \$322,500. However, these estimates are low. To adequately provide the aftercare services these youth need for independent living, we estimate the cost to be \$3,325 per youth or \$1,662,500 for the state.

All of these services need to be supported by case managers and/or life skills coaches. These case workers will provide more intensive support to the 18 year olds and have fewer responsibilities as these young adults get older. Thus, a larger caseload is possible. Assuming a caseload of 70 young adults per worker, 41 workers are necessary. This would cost the state \$2,562,500 to provide support to these youth.

There are two ways young adults can appeal their denial of services. The first is through a judicial review in juvenile court until the age of 19. The other is through an administrative fair hearing. We could not find anyone who collected data on how many hearings are not held in juvenile court for 18-year-old former foster youth. Nor, could anyone provide reliable data on the cost of such hearings. Thus, we are unable to provide this data. However, DCF reports a total of 209 fair hearings in 2005-2006 fiscal year at a cost of \$124 for each hearing. Assuming the same rate of appeals of these services every year, it should cost the state \$25,916. (This does not include the cost of an appeal from the fair hearing.)

Florida Statute Section 409.1451(5) (b) 6.a. mandates that these services be advertised to foster youth, former foster youth, case managers, school administrators, guardians ad litem and foster parents. This type of advertising has not been done. To adequately comply with this mandate, it would cost \$45,000 to provide this in addition to the training proposed for the foster parents and case managers of the 13-17 year old youth.

There is a mandate for Medicaid coverage for these youth as of this year. This mandate is too new to have any figures to report on the costs. It is recommended however that the increase in cost for Medicaid coverage be calculated in future years to determine the actual increase.

There are two statewide expenses. The first is the support needed by the Central Office of DCF. The Council has recommended that at least four staff are needed at the Central Office to adequately manage the Independent Living system. Assuming the same rate of pay (which may be low for Central Office staff) as caseworkers, this would cost the state \$250,000. An alternate option to the support and

positions needed by Central Office office is a financial investment in the virtual Consultant/Center for Excellence being planned by the CBC leadership and the Centralized Independent Living Training Curriculum Center recommended in this report. The second statewide expense is the support for the Independent Living Advisory Council. Although the Council is a volunteer council in which members pay their own expenses (except youth members), the Council needs support to accomplish the research and reporting tasks to which the legislature has assigned it. The Council has submitted a budget request of \$80,210 to DCF to support this work.



The ILSAC recommends that the Legislature:

Continue to allocate general revenue funds in addition to the minimum match to maximize federal funding and approve and appropriate the request of DCF for an additional \$18,653,869 for Independent Living Services.

C. Education

Research has shown that children who enter foster care are on average a full grade level behind their peers. Once in foster care, frequent changes in schools and absences as a result of placement changes, place foster children and youth at further disadvantage of achieving educational success.

Education is a key to opportunity in the U.S. for a whole host of positive life outcomes. Youth who are at risk of school failure are also at high risk for drug abuse, delinquency, violence, and early pregnancy and childbearing according to research conducted by Casey Family Programs.

The case for investing in efforts to help foster youth while they are in school to complete their high school education and pursue post secondary educational and vocational opportunities is clear — education is essential to obtaining and maintaining employment.

Florida statute passed in 2004 mandates interagency agreements with local school boards to ensure educational access for foster youth. Some counties have implemented this law but they are in the minority. It is unclear as to whether those counties with interagency agreements are in compliance. It is also unclear as to the results that have been achieved in student academic standing by virtue of existing interagency agreements.

Appropriate educational support for foster youth in middle and high school, ensuring educational advocates and helping them to prepare to enroll and complete college and post secondary job training are strategies that have proven effective.

Recent legislation in HB 7173- 409.1451, Section 3 (b) (1) Preparation for Independent Living and Section 4 (a) (4) Services for Children in Foster Care and the RTI Program all support these goals. Policy however must be translated to consistent practice.



The ILSAC recommends that DCF along with the Department of Education:

- 1) Establish a deadline for the execution of the DOE, WIA and DCF agreements in compliance with Florida Statutes §39.0016 and require an implementation plan.**
- 2) Support the proposed pilot of a Guardian Scholars Program and encourage expansion in other post secondary educational institutions.**

D. Employment

Florida's Strengthening Youth Partnerships (SYP) initiative preceded the U.S. Department of Labor's 2004 new strategic vision for delivering youth services, a component of the Workforce Investment Act. The federal initiative is now a broad based interagency collaborative involving multiple agencies. Building on work started in 2003, Florida's SYP initiative focuses attention on *ensuring that every young person in Florida is ready and able to pursue a meaningful job path upon exiting secondary education*. SYP has become the vehicle for Florida's response and participation in the federal initiative.

The partnership is built on an interagency model of collaborative planning, execution, and evaluation, and currently includes representatives of the following agencies and programs:

- Workforce Florida, Inc.: First Jobs/First Wages Council
- Agency for Workforce Innovation
- Regional Workforce Offices
- Governor's Office: Office of Drug Control
- Volunteer Florida
- Associated Industries of Florida
- The Able Trust
- Department of Children and Families: Family Safety
- Department of Education: Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Education, Bureau of Adult Education, Bureau of Career, Technical and Apprenticeship Programs; Division of K-12 Public Schools, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services; Division of Vocational Rehabilitation; Office of Interagency Programs
- Department of Juvenile Justice: Educational Programs, Residential Programs
- Department of Health: Child & Adolescent Health

Students who are aging out of foster care are one of the identified groups to be served by SYP because of the following recognized characteristics of this group:

- have lower FCAT scores
- are below grade level
- are highly mobile and often lack the family supports that
- help youth transition to adulthood
- often have significant learning disabilities and behavior problems
- usually have skills that qualify them only for low wage jobs
- are more likely to enter the criminal justice system
- have few vocational skills including the "soft" skills like working under supervision and with a team and often have limited opportunities for post-secondary education

What does the SYP intend to do?

- Educate state and local agency staff about business expectations, the critical importance of youth acquiring occupational skills in the current economy, and the available programs and resources to develop Florida's future workforce;
- Support a state organizational structure that will use collaborative interagency planning, resource alignment, implementation and outcome evaluation for the purpose of more effectively preparing youth for employment and transition to adulthood;
- Support a state policy framework for ensuring that the most at-risk youth become engaged in activities that will enhance personal and community economic development;
- Untangle agency policies that work at cross-purposes;
- Identify incentives for business investment, and
- Help schools see the possible linkages between the mission of Workforce Boards and the re-tooling of secondary schooling through the A++ Plan.

Recommendations:

Continue to use the SYP venue to support increased funding of grants from participating agencies that focus on engaging local CBC's and RWBs in partnerships to address the employment and training needs of foster youth.

Continue to use the SYP venue to increase cross-agency collaboration among state and local organizations to enhance the knowledge of professionals working with foster youth.

DCF should expand its efforts with appropriate state agencies/ organizations to ensure that *foster care providers* and foster youth are aware of and encourage foster youth to access available educational and employment services through the Regional Workforce Boards, their local websites and the One-stop Career Centers.

E. Housing

In a 2003 study conducted by Peter J. Pecora of Casey Family Programs, "Assessing the Effects of Foster Care: Early Results from the Casey National Alumni Study", 42.2 percent of the youth surveyed reported being homeless at some point after leaving foster care. The main barriers to safe and affordable housing for foster youth aging out of the system are cost, lack of availability, the unwillingness of many landlords to rent to them and their own lack of knowledge about how to be good renters. Without the stability of safe housing all other services, training and opportunities will take a back seat.

Youth have been clear that moving from a foster home or a group home on their 18th birthday without the preparation and real life training is dooming them to failure.

The NGA/Florida Team has identified a number of action steps that will identify the numbers and characteristics of the youth who will need housing, specific type of housing needs on a regional basis and some steps to mobilize housing specialist and developers including collaborating with local homeless coalitions.

The ILSAC recommends that the Department of Children and Families:

- 1) Support the actions steps of the NGA /Florida Team regarding housing.
- 2) Support the development and implementation of a transitional living or subsidized independent living housing experience for those youth aging out of foster care at age 17 who will not have the option of remaining in a foster care family home or group home to insure a smoother transition to independent living.

F. Permanency

A case plan goal that does not identify permanent family connections and supports is inadequate

Foster care in Florida is a legal oversight meant to ensure that youth in our care are protected from ongoing neglect and abuse. Case plan goals are established for each child in foster care with the expectation that the child will leave foster care attached to a family. Case plan goals may seek reunification with family or perhaps guardianship or adoption, however here in Florida we are in a crisis situation with the youth who "age-out" of our foster care system at the age of 18.

If you age-out of Florida's foster care system you are in reality leaving the legal custody and care of the state and discharged to "yourself". This is a *wrong* we must correct. To leave foster care without permanent family connections and supports is a continuation of hurt and damage to our youth. Youth in Florida's foster care system should not grow up without a home and family to go to when legal services end.

As Gary Stangler¹ noted, "very few kids in this country

have finished high school by age 18. Yet our foster care system releases them even as we know it devastates their chance for a high school diploma." Mr. Stangler went on to discuss that "creating permanence for young people age 14 and older is possible and critically necessary, but it is also very difficult. For older youth who will not be adopted or reunited with their parents, we are striving to create "relational permanence," a lifelong attachment, a relationship that is an emotional connection beyond a legal relationship. It is not group care and it is not simply a mentor. It is a lifelong attachment we seek."

Independent Living Services and Permanency

Youth who age-out of foster care unprepared and without permanent family connections lose out on two fronts.

To prepare foster youth with the skills and resources necessary for their transition to adulthood is an important and required function of the child welfare system.

¹Gary Stangler is the Executive Director of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. These are excerpts from his testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance Hearing on Fostering Permanence, May 10, 2006.

What does permanency mean? There is no all-purpose definition. For me, it meant feeling comfortable at home. I found that at my second foster home...about a year ago, my mother asked how I would feel if she were to give me her last name? At first, I didn't understand. She told me she wanted to adopt me. I cried and cried...for the first time somebody wanted me and loved me, just as I am."²

However, the need of the youth for independent living services does not and should not relieve the child welfare system of their obligation to guarantee the same youth has a network of significant and permanent family relationships.

For our youth aging out of foster care, they have not stopped seeking and requiring permanent family connections and supports; if on their 18th birthday they have no one to go to, it is because as a system we have failed in working with the youth to identify and achieve permanent family relationships.

Permanency must be individualized to meet the specific needs of the foster youth. Child Welfare workers and courts must partner with the youth to identify both relatives and non-relatives the youth identifies as significant in their group of contacts.

A permanency planning process must be established that includes and integrates these significant adults. Family members, foster parents, grandparents, other relatives, teachers, coaches and mentors should be included, and emphasis should be placed on including both current and former relationships; such as former teachers or social workers.

Often the child welfare planning process will not include significant adults because they may not be viable permanency options, however all connections in the youth's life should be included, as they may be able to identify appropriate relatives, godparents and family friends.

In Florida we must no longer accept that foster care youth do not require family connections and supports as they transition to adulthood.

In Florida, we often times force our foster youth to choose between permanency and independent living services. We have established permanency policies and practice, such as requiring foster youth to remain in licensed foster care until their 18th birthday that have actually become barriers to our youth establishing permanent relationships outside the child welfare systems.

Permanent family connections and supports for foster care youth may include legal relationships and those committed relationships that extend beyond a legal relationship.

No foster youth should leave foster care without a place to call home.³

The ILSAC recommends that the Legislature:

Reenact and allocate funding for Section 17 of the 2006 approved HB 7173 that adds children who are placed with a court approved non-relative or guardian after reaching 16 years of age and having spent a minimum of six months in foster care as eligible recipients for services under Subparagraph (5) Services for Young Adults Formally in Foster Care of this statute. The legislation passed in 2006 limits this expanded eligibility to take effect only if there is specific funding to accommodate the added workload. Funding was not allocated in 2006 and services provided in the Section did not take effect.

The ILSAC recommends that the Department of Children and Families:

- 1) Establish permanency planning as a priority for youth aging out of foster care that results in permanent "family" and supports.**
- 2) Investigate the youth directed team decision making model for development of a family support network that addresses permanency. This model may involve birth families, siblings, community members in all placement decisions and is directed by the teen. Permanency decisions should continue to include reunification, adoption, guardianship, kinship care and other non traditional permanency options.**

²Nadege Breeden, chair of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative in Bridgeport, CT. Ms Breeden was adopted as an adult by her former foster mother.

³National Foster Youth Advisory Council. For information, contact Child Welfare League of America.

Normalcy/Age Appropriate Activities

Florida's current and former foster youth have continuously rated the ability to engage in age appropriate activities as crucial to the development of their independent living skills, fostering connections with others, the sense of normalcy and have ranked this issue as their number one priority. This prompted the Secretary of DCF to issue a memorandum in 2005 designed to "begin a change in thinking with respect to normal adolescent behavior and activities." A

CBC and DCF work group has developed administrative rule language addressing these normalcy issues.

The barriers for foster youth obtaining a permanent drivers license and accessing insurance, the ability to open a bank checking account before the age of 18 and the ability to receive their allowance or other stipends are all issues that the ILSAC recommends be addressed.



ILSAC recommends that the Department of Children and Families:

Develop and implement electronic benefits transfer options for allowances, aftercare or RTI payments as required by statute 409.451(5) (d) Section 2.

Drivers License

Little progress was made in 2005-2006 on the issues relating to transportation alternatives. In this report, we are focusing on three key issues that remain as barriers to progress on providing access to driving for foster youth:

- Foster parent's liability when they sign for a foster youth's application for a driver's license.
- The vicarious liability that accrues to a foster parent when a foster youth operates an owned vehicle.
- Increased insurance premiums for foster parents once foster children obtain their permanent license.

The ILSAC, in prior annual reports, has identified the myriad reasons why obtaining a license and being able to drive are critical to youth in foster care:

- All dependent children should enjoy as normal a life as their friends. There should be no penalty to being a foster kid.
- Transportation needs are central to an effective transition to adulthood. Imagine trying to go to any kind of post-secondary education or even to a job, without the ability to drive.
- Public transportation is an option for a very small number of transitioning youth.
- For many youth who have a job, their job is part time. He/she may also be going to school full or part time. How do they get from their job to school, or vice versa?
- The ability to find, purchase or finance, and then maintain a vehicle in order to maintain their employment

can be an enormous hurdle for youth, whether 16 in a foster home, or 19 and trying to make it on your own.

For the 15-year-old foster youth, most barriers relating to foster youth obtaining their learner's permit have been addressed. Even premiums were protected for foster parents signing an application for a learners permit. Section 622.796 states that "An insurer that issues an insurance policy on a private passenger motor vehicle to a named insured who is a foster parent of a minor child may not charge an additional premium for coverage of the minor child while the child is operating the insured vehicle, for the period of time that the minor has a learner's driver's license, until such time as the minor obtains a driver's license."

However, when a youth applies for their permanent license, seemingly unsolvable problems arise that penalize the foster homes and youth. Normalcy, as it relates to driving, seems out of reach and remains as a problem that needs resolution.

Actually getting the license isn't really all that difficult. Section 322.09 of Florida Statutes does permit both foster parents and an authorized representative of any residential group home to sign permission for the foster youth in their care to obtain a driver's license. But once that license is obtained problems with liability and premiums arise for foster parents.

Liability issues for foster parents and residential group homes are only partially addressed by statute. Section 322.09(04) of the Florida statutes seemingly solves the issue, but there is one, big unresolved issue. 322.09(04) reads as follows:

Notwithstanding the provisions of subsections (1) and (2), if a foster parent of a minor who is under the age of 18 years and is in foster care as defined in s. 39.01, or an authorized representative of a residential group home at which such a minor resides, signs the minor's application for a learner's driver's license, that foster parent or group home representative does not assume any obligation or become liable for any damages caused by the negligence or willful misconduct of the minor, by reason of having signed the application. Foster parents and group homes do not assume liability for damages arising out of the negligence or willful misconduct of the minor child, by reason of having signed the application."

Left unresolved, because of the inclusion of the "by reason of having signed the application" phrase would be any vicarious liability accruing to the foster parent or group home by granting permissive use of an owned automobile because of the strict liability imposed by the State of Florida on all owners of automobiles for any damages caused by the driver of that automobile (see *Hertz Corp. vs. Jackson*, 617 So. 2nd. 1051 (Fla. 1993)).

The ILSAC does understand that it is unreasonable to entirely eliminate the liability obligations of the foster parent who permits a foster youth to drive their car. We understand that a complete elimination of foster parent responsibility is unlikely and most probably in opposition to public policy. This risk is manageable with the purchase of appropriate insurance (although the cost may not be all that manageable as discussed as follows).

We support the idea that foster parents have a responsibility to know the driving habits of their youthful charges (as they would their own children) and should monitor their cars use. However, strict liability in this situation is an unfair responsibility and should be discarded as the legal basis for assigning joint and several liability.

A good first step in ridding the state of this unfair burden for all vehicle owners would be for DCF to urge legislative change that eliminates the strict liability provisions for foster parents and residential group facilities.

Any parent who has ever had a youth become a youthful driver knows that the cost of insurance can be quite heavy. There are actuarial reasons for that. Youthful drivers are far more likely to have accidents. That fact cannot be disputed. But the issue is not the cost of the insurance, but the unfair burden that accrues to the foster parent who is serving as caregiver to children who are dependent on the state for short periods of time.

Again, for 15 year olds with learners permits, the problem was solved by the statute Section 627.746 states that: "An insurer that issues an insurance policy on a private passenger motor vehicle to a named insured who is a foster parent of a minor child may not charge an additional premium for coverage of the minor child while the child is operating the insured vehicle, for the period of time that the minor has a learner's driver's license, until such time as the minor obtains a driver's license."

However, this protection does not accrue to the foster parent when the youth applies for a regular driver's license exposing the foster parent to burdensome insurance costs. It may not be reasonable to ask the insurance industry to waive premiums for a foster youth who would present the same sort of risk as a non-foster youth, although it can be argued that there is a social responsibility for them to assist these foster youth, who have been so traumatized by the system, in making a successful transition to adult jobs and education. But it also isn't reasonable to ask a foster parent or residential group home to bear this burden for these "temporary" residents of their homes.

In reality, foster parents may, or may not, be willing to help a child obtain their license, or they may be very reluctant put foster kids names on their own private insurance, even though it is legally permissible to do so because the costs may be prohibitive. Foster parents, understandably, may be reluctant to include foster children on insurance policies where the cost of inclusion would significantly add to the cost of their personal insurance. DCF, in their staff assessment of SB220, estimated that the average cost of insurance premium increase would be between \$2,000 and \$2,200 for every youth added to their policy. (If the youth were able to get their own policy, the cost would undoubtedly be even higher, with likely much lower protective limits of liability.)

Even if the costs are covered, some foster parents are still concerned that their own policies could be restricted or cancelled due to the actions of a foster child. This seems particularly unfair since many of these youth move

frequently, and a youth who may have been responsible for an accident resulting in cancellation of a policy or a large rate increase, may actually no longer live with the foster parent. Helping a transitioning youth gain transportation independence is not without risks.

The ILSAC supported SB 220/HB275, (2006 Legislative Session) filed by Senator Bennett and Representative Detert, entitled An Act Relating to Motor Vehicle Insurance for Foster Children, which established a three year pilot program to reimburse one half of the costs of insurance for foster children. This bill did not pass in the 2006 Legislative session, (a similar bill failed in 2005, as well) although it was successfully reported out of both the DCF subcommittee and the Health and Human Services Appropriations subcommittee. DCF appears to have supported the bill, although did caution that an 8% administrative cost by the CBC's was not included in the funding for the bill.

We continue to support the concept of funding to assist foster parents in the costs of insurance and we recommend that a similar bill be filed in the 2007 session.

A pilot program will enable DCF and the ILSAC to more accurately assess the outcomes and costs associated with obtaining drivers licenses for youth aged 16 and 17. We also specifically support the concept of finding alternative funding through Master Trust Accounts, Social Security Income, child support, and would add that donations from private corporations, perhaps insurance companies, might be an alternative source of funding, as well. Nevertheless, since these youth are dependent on the State of Florida, this obligates the State to fund at least a partial reimbursement of foster parent's costs. We also support the concept that the foster youth should pay for one half of the costs during the pilot phase.

A related issue relates to the standard insurance company business practice for insurers to require negligent drivers and policy owners to pay more for chargeable accidents. That, too, is a reasonable business practice, but foster

youth do not often stay with their current placement and the consequences of any accidents attributable to them should not stay with foster parents past the child's removals.

The law should be changed to prohibit auto insurers from assessing surcharges or canceling policies for any foster parent when the youth is no longer placed with them.

We also realize that the insurance industry has a major role to play in addressing the problems and issues involving foster youth. The insurance problems associated with these youth are unique and require creative solutions.

DCF should invite the insurance industry and the Department of Risk Management to participate in an issues forum addressing creative solutions to the problems of insurability, liability, and rate adequacy for this population.

Some issues that could be discussed with this kind of industry forum include:

- Prohibiting cancellation of policies for actions relating to foster children.
- Creating a risk pool to protect foster parents who may have their policies cancelled by the actions of a foster child (similar to hurricane insurance protection.)
- Creating an advisory committee of insurance professionals, foster parents, and DCF staff to research alternatives to liability issues for foster children.
- Seeking contributions from the industry's social foundations to help fund increased costs.
- The creation of a state risk pool or reinsurance facility to assist in costs of insurance for foster youth.

Transportation issues for youth in foster care and transitioning youth will remain impediments to both normalcy and achieving successful adult lives unless we can discover alternatives to the issue surrounding the purchase of reliable transportation and insurance issues.



The ILSAC recommends that the Legislature:

Address the barriers relating to foster youth obtaining a permanent drivers license and the liability and insurance premiums.

Suggested language follows:

322.09 Application of minors; responsibility for negligence or misconduct of minor.

- (1)(a) The application of any person under the age of 18 years for a driver's license must be signed and verified before a person authorized to administer oaths by the father, mother, or guardian, or, if there is no parent or guardian, by another responsible adult who is willing to assume the obligation imposed under this chapter upon a person signing the application of a minor. This section does not apply to a person under the age of 18 years who is emancipated by marriage.
- (b) There shall be submitted with each application a certified copy of a United States birth certificate, a valid United States passport, an alien registration receipt card (green card), an employment authorization card issued by the United States Department of Homeland Security, or proof of non-immigrant classification provided by the United States Department of Homeland Security, for an original license.
- (2) Any negligence or willful misconduct of a minor under the age of 18 years when driving a motor vehicle upon a highway shall be imputed to the person who has signed the application of such minor for a permit or license, which person shall be jointly and severally liable with such minor for any damages caused by such negligence or willful misconduct.
- (3) The department may not issue a driver's license or learner's driver's license to any applicant under the age of 18 years who is not in compliance with the requirements of s. 322.091.
- (4) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsections (1) and (2), if a foster parent of a minor who is under the age of 18 years and is in foster care as defined in s. 39.01, or an authorized representative of a residential group home at which such a minor resides, signs the minor's application for a learner's driver's license, that foster parent or group home representative does not assume any obligation or become liable for any damages caused by the negligence or willful misconduct of the minor, by reason of having signed the application.

The ILSAC recommends that the Legislature:

Ensure the youth in foster care are able to secure financial services.

Suggested language follows:

Section 1: Section 743.044 shall be created to read as follows:

743.044 Removal of disabilities of minors; executing agreements for banking services: For the purpose of ensuring that a youth in foster care will be able to secure financial services, including but not limited to checking and savings accounts, the disability of nonage of minors may be removed provided that the youth has reached 16 years of age, has been adjudicated dependent, is residing in any out-of-home placement as defined in 39.01 and has completed a financial literacy class. Upon issuance of an Order by a court of competent jurisdiction, these youth are authorized to make and execute all documents, contracts or agreements necessary for obtaining rights, privileges, and benefits as if the youth is otherwise competent to make and execute contracts. Execution of any such contract or agreement for financial services shall have the same effect as though they were the acts of persons who were not minors. A youth seeking to enter into such contracts or agreements or execute other necessary instruments incidental to obtaining financial services must present an order from a court of competent jurisdiction removing the disabilities of nonage of the minor under this section.

Appendix A: Statutory Obligations of the Council

Florida Statutes §409.1451. Independent Living Transition Services

(7) Independent Living Services Advisory Council—The Secretary of Children and Family Services shall establish the Independent Living Services Advisory Council for the purpose of reviewing and making recommendations concerning the implementation and operation of the independent living transition services. This advisory council shall continue to function as specified in this subsection until the Legislature determines that the advisory council can no longer provide a valuable contribution to the department's efforts to achieve the goals of the independent living transition services.

(a) Specifically, the advisory council shall assess the implementation and operation of the system of independent living transition services and advise the department on actions that would improve the ability of the independent living transition services to meet the established goals. The advisory council shall keep the department informed of problems being experienced with the services, barriers to the effective and efficient integration of services and support across systems, and successes that the system of independent living transition services has achieved. The department shall consider, but is not required to implement the recommendations of the advisory council.

(b) The advisory council shall report to the appropriate substantive committees of the Senate and House of Representatives on the status of the implementation of the system of independent living transition services; efforts to publicize the availability of aftercare support services, the Road-to-Independence Program, and transitional support services; the success of the services; problems identified; recommendations for department or legislative action; and the department's implementation of the recommendations contained in the Independent Living Services Integration Workgroup Report submitted to the Senate and the House substantive committees December 31, 2002. This advisory council report shall be submitted by December 31 of each year that the council is in existence and shall be accompanied by a report from the department which identifies the recommendations of the advisory council and either describes the department's actions to implement these recommendations or provides the department's rationale for not implementing the recommendations.

(c) Members of the advisory council shall be appointed by the secretary of the department. The membership of the advisory council must include, at a minimum, representatives from the headquarters and district offices of the Department of Children and Family Services, community-based care lead agencies, the Agency for Workforce Innovation, the Department of Education, the Agency for Health Care Administration, the State Youth Advisory Board, Workforce Florida, Inc., the Statewide Guardian Ad Litem Office, foster parents, Recipients of Road-to-Independence Program funding, and advocates for foster children. The secretary shall determine the length of the term to be served by each member appointed to the advisory council, which may not exceed 4 years.

(d) The Department of Children and Family Services shall provide administrative support to the Independent Living Services Advisory Council to accomplish its assigned tasks. The advisory council shall be afforded access to all appropriate data from the department, each community based care lead agency, and other relevant agencies in order to accomplish that tasks set forth in this section. The data collected may not include any information that would identify a specific child or young adult.

Appendix B:

Outcomes for Florida Independent Living Services

What Do You Want To Accomplish	How Will You Measure Progress
Youth Outcomes	Youth Indicators
<p>Education</p> <p>Young people acquire education that allows them to explore multiple career options and successfully secure employment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of youth performing at grade level • # of youth performing above grade level • # of youth with improved test scores • # of youth graduating from high school • # of youth completing a GED • # of youth entering a two-year post-secondary education or vocational training program • # of youth completing a two-year post-secondary education or vocational training program • # of youth entering a four-year post-secondary education or vocational training program • # of youth completing a four-year post-secondary education or vocational training program • # of youth entering an apprenticeship, internship, or technical certification program • # of youth completing an apprenticeship, internship, or technical certification program • # of youth acquiring an industry-recognized credential
<p>Employment</p> <p>Young people participate in meaningful, age appropriate work opportunities that allow them to earn a livable wage and increase their earning over time</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of youth with part-time and/or seasonal jobs • # of youth with volunteer or internship experience • # of youth with full-time jobs • # of youth with jobs with benefits • # of youth retaining jobs for six months • Increase in earnings at six months • # of youth unemployed and average length of unemployment status • # of youth unable to work who are connected to benefits • # of youth living above the federal poverty line
<p>Personal and Community Engagement</p> <p>Young people have in place supportive relationships and are able to access services in the community to achieve their personal goals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # that report success in accessing information and resources in the community; • # that report that there is at least one adult in the community that they could go to for support.
<p>Housing</p> <p>Young people have access to safe, stable, affordable housing in the community that is near public transportation, work or school.</p>	<p>For young people in school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # that have a housing plan leading to safe, stable, and affordable housing <p>For young people out of school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # that have a housing plan and accumulate savings toward that plan; • # reporting that they have housing that is safe, stable and affordable and located near public transportation, work or school • # of youth homeless for at least one night

Outcomes for Florida Independent Living Services

(continued)

What Do You Want To Accomplish	How Will You Measure Progress
Youth Outcomes	Youth Indicators
<p><u>Physical and Mental Health</u> Young people have sufficient and affordable health insurance for both physical and mental health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # that have health insurance (physical health); • # with mental health benefits; • # with both mental health and dental benefits; • # reporting access to critical health and mental health services
<p><u>Transportation</u> Young people have access to affordable transportation services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of youth who have reliable transportation to school and/or work • # of youth successfully completing drivers' education classes • # of youth who obtain drivers' license • # of youth using public transportation
<p><u>Life Skills</u> Young people have sufficient life skills to successfully transition to adulthood</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of youth receiving life skills training • # of youth completing life skills training • # of youth who can demonstrate competency in each life skill • # of youth completing a financial literacy course • # of youth opening and maintaining an active bank account, savings account, acquiring and maintaining credit. • # of youth who are unwed parents

Appendix C: Independent Living Service Advisory Council Membership 2006

Jane V. Soltis (Chair)	Eckerd Family Foundation	
Charles Nelson (Co Chair)	Guardian ad Litem Program	
Jim Adams	Florida Support Services of N. Florida	Judy Meyer	Agency for Workforce Innovation
Jack Ahearn	Department of Juvenile Justice	Linda Marie Pettus	Youth Advocate
Joel Atkinson	Department of Children and Families	Jennilee Robbins	Workforce Florida
Honorable Sarah Zabel	Judge, 11th Judicial District	Glen Casel	CBC of Seminole
Dan Brannen	Kids at Home	Carolyn Salisbury	Lawyer
Michelle Comeaux	Agency for Health Care Administration	Veronica Seleska	Eckerd Youth Alternatives
Sonya Duran	Battle Foundation	Freida Sheffield	Workforce Florida
Ashley Kyle	Youth Advocate	Jan Stratton	Universal Orlando Foundation
Gerard Glynn	Barry University School of Law	Diane Zambito	Connected by 25
Hope Kleinfeld	Safe Children Coalition	Don Winstead	Department of Children and Families
Helen Lancashire	Department of Education	Pat Badland	Department of Children and Families
Judith Levine	Department of Children and Families	Frank Platt	Department of Children and Families



Jacquielean Tew is 21 years old and works at a Publix Pharmacy saving money and preparing herself for a career in pharmacy or dentistry. She is also a student at Florida Atlantic University pursuing a Bachelors Degree in biology.

Life wasn't always full of positives for Jackie. She grew up in Miami and entered the foster care system at age 13. When confronted with bad influences and few good choices, Jackie moved to Broward County with her daughter, Jade, to make a better life for the both of them. Although she didn't know any one at first, she has a home, finished high school and is now in college. Jackie credits her mentors and Florida's Road to Independence program with the support she has needed to turn her life around.





**DCF'S RESPONSE TO
INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES
ADVISORY COUNCIL REPORT**

Department of Children and Families
Office of Family Safety

December 31, 2006

Lucy D. Hadi
Secretary

Jeb Bush
Governor

**DCF Response to 2006
Independent Living Services Advisory Council Report**

Statutory Authority: Paragraph 409.1451(7)(b), F. S.

*“This advisory council report shall be submitted by December 31st of each year that the council is in existence and **shall be accompanied by a report from the department which identifies the recommendations of the advisory council and either describes the department's actions to implement these recommendations or provides the department's rationale for not implementing the recommendations.**”*

Recommendations for the Legislature:

The following are the 4 recommendations for the Legislature contained in the 2006 Independent Living Services Advisory Council (ILSAC) Report, followed by the department's response to each recommendation:

(1) Develop legislation that removes the barriers for youth aging out of foster care to obtain a permanent drivers license, limit liability and provide access to vehicle insurance.

Response: The department concurs with this recommendation. Enactment of legislation will aid in eliminating barriers for youth in foster care and assist them to obtain employment skills; participate in an array of educational opportunities and extra-curricular activities; and engage in other normal, age-appropriate activities. For the 2007 session, the department intends to propose or support legislation regarding this issue.

(2) Continue to allocate general revenue funds in addition to the minimum match to maximize federal funding and approve and appropriate the request of the department of Children and Families for an additional \$18,653,869 for Independent Living Services.

Response: The department concurs with this recommendation. The department has submitted a legislative budget request for these funds to meet the demands of this expanding program. Department staff and ILSAC members have and will continue to work together to analyze and address funding concerns.

(3) Reenact and allocate funding for Section 17 of the 2006 approved HB 7173 that adds children who are placed with a court approved non-relative or guardian after reaching 16 years of age and having spent a minimum of 6 months in foster care as eligible recipients for services under Subparagraph (5) Services for Young Adults Formally in Foster Care of this statute. The legislation passed in 2006, limits this expanded eligibility to take effect only if there is specific funding to accommodate the added workload. Funding was not provided in 2006 and the provisions of Section 17 did not take effect.

Response: The department recognizes that expansion of this program as above will require additional funding. This issue is not part of the department's 2007 legislative budget priorities. Based on workload estimates for 06/07 for the existing eligible population, the department anticipates that community-based care agencies may be required to limit payments to young adults based on the available funding for the 06/07 fiscal year. Implementation of this legislation with accompanying funding and in concert with the emphasis on permanency planning practices in recommendation #6 below is expected to result in improved outcomes for children and young adults formerly in foster care.

(4) Develop legislation for the removal of disabilities of minors executing agreements for banking services, for the purpose of ensuring that a youth in foster care will be able to secure financial services.

Response: The department concurs with this recommendation. Many community-based care agencies have been able to develop resources that allow youth in foster care to obtain financial services, however enactment of this legislation would provide a mandate for statewide implementation. The department and the ILSAC will continue to work together to provide training about independent living mandates in law and related normalcy practices/policies.

Recommendations for the Department:

The following are the 10 recommendations for the department contained in the 2006 Independent Living Services Advisory Council Report, followed by the department's response to each recommendation:

(1) Develop a program planning and delivery reporting tool for determining appropriate information regarding the independent living services, outcomes, and fiscal implications on projected and actual delivery of independent living services for all community based care lead agencies (CBC). It is recommended that DCF convene a group that includes representatives from at least DCF, ILSAC, CBC's and Florida Coalition for Children.

Response: The department concurs with this recommendation. The department has conducted an analysis of the legislatively mandated young adult services plans submitted for the 06/07 fiscal year and shared the results with the ILSAC. The department has committed to work with an ILSAC committee to develop a tool or tools for the 07/08 fiscal year as above.

(2) Develop a centralized clearinghouse for approved technical assistance, training, resources and best practice for all stakeholders on all issues pertinent to independent living. The ILSAC is recommending that the Department coordinate the development and monitoring of this clearinghouse with the ILSAC.

Response: The department concurs with this recommendation. The department currently employs one staff member dedicated to independent living programmatic issues and one staff member dedicated to fiscal issues including independent living budget. The department is pursuing new means for offering technical assistance to community-based care lead agencies and subcontractors including virtual consultant resources and practice/policy consultation resources through a state university. The department will work with ILSAC to accomplish the above recommendation as resources permit.

(3) Include ILSAC members as well as youth representatives in the QA process directly relating to independent living services

Response: The department concurs with this recommendation. The department will work with the ILASC and the community-based care providers to determine the most effective process for accomplishing this recommendation. The department has implemented a 3 tier monitoring process involving a first level of review conducted by the community-based care provider and the second and third levels of review validated or conducted by department staff. There are multiple opportunities for ILSAC members and youth representatives to participate in the quality assurance process at the local, zone and/or state level.

(4) Establish a deadline for the execution of the Department of Education (DOE), Agency for Workforce Innovation(AWI) and Department of Children and Families agreements in compliance with Florida Statutes §39.0016 and require an implementation plan.

Response: The department concurs with this recommendation. The department is in the process of obtaining reports from the district administrators regarding the status of each 67 counties in the state about these local agreements. A statewide report will be compiled in January 2007 and the department will work with ILSAC to establish a deadline for execution.

(5) Support the continuation of the Strengthening Youth Partnerships (SYP) venue to increase cross agency collaboration among state and local organizations to enhance the knowledge of professionals working with foster youth and expand efforts to ensure that foster youth providers and foster youth are aware of and accessing available educational and employment services through Regional Workforce Boards, their local websites and the One-Stop Career Centers.

Response: The department concurs with this recommendation. Currently, the department has two representatives on the SYP group and has been involved in local meetings as well as a national meeting in Atlanta. The SYP group is currently planning to participate in the Workforce Florida conference at the end of January by facilitating a youth employment track entitled 'Strengthening Youth Partnerships in Business.' The

department's representatives will assist with facilitation and providing information to the community-based care providers to develop awareness about workforce resources.

(6) Establish permanency planning as a priority for youth aging out of foster care that results in permanent "family" and supports. Components of this recommendation should include:

(a) Implementation of the rules and guidelines for normal age appropriate behaviors so that connections in the community can be preserved and enhanced.

(b) Address the barriers relating to foster youth obtaining a permanent drivers license and the liability and insurance premiums.

(c) Investigate the youth directed team decision making model for development of a family support network that addresses permanency. This model may involve birth families, siblings, community members in all placement decisions. Permanency decisions should continue to include reunification, adoption, guardianship, kinship care and other non traditional permanency options.

Response: The department concurs with the recommendation. The department is in the process of rule promulgation for the licensing of foster families and child placing agencies. The target date for implementation of the licensing rule is spring 2007. Guidance on normalcy for children in foster care is included in the revised rules. The department commits to work with ILSAC to investigate the decision making model above and to provide and/or arrange training regarding the above recommendations.

(7) Develop and implement electronic benefits transfer options for allowances, aftercare or RTI payments as required by statute 409. 451(5)(d) Section 2.

Response: The department commits to explore this recommendation with community-based care providers. Section 409.1451(5)(d)2., F. S., provides, "After the completion of aftercare support services that satisfy the requirements of sub-subparagraph (a)1.h., payment of awards under the Road-to-Independence Program shall be made by **direct deposit** to the recipient..." While the department supports the provision of direct deposit services to young adults receiving benefits, the community-based care (CBC) agencies operate and maintain the payment systems for these benefits. A collaboration with CBCs and ILSAC is needed to implement this recommendation.

(8) Support the proposed pilot of a Guardian Scholars Program and encourage expansion in other post secondary educational institutions.

Response: The department concurs with this recommendation. The department supports the implementation of the proposed pilot of a Guardian Scholars Program and supports the expansion into other post-secondary institutions. The department will work

with the ILSAC and the National Governor's Association (NGA) Policy Academy Group on Youth Aging Out of Foster Care to determine the best way in which to support this program pilot.

(9) Support the development and implementation of a transitional living or subsidized independent living housing experience for those youth aging out of foster care at age 17 who will not have the option of remaining in a foster care family home or in a group home to insure a smoother transition from foster home or group home living to independent living.

Response: The department concurs with this recommendation. The department's homelessness prevention program will be tapped to assist ILSAC and other stakeholders accomplish this recommendation. In addition, the NGA group has identified development of housing resources as a primary objective. Collaboration with a variety of public and private resources and stakeholders is necessary to achieve the desired result.

(10) Develop a data collection, analysis and reporting mechanism for the outcome measures required by federal law and funding source(Chafee) that have been issued by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF)as well as the expanded outcomes recommended by the ILSAC in 2005.

Response: The department concurs with this recommendation. The department is obligated to comply with the ACF direction regarding data collection and outcome measure reporting. At this time, the ACF has issued a "proposed" rule regarding outcome measures and data collection. An implementation date has not been formally published. However, there is speculation that the rule will be effective in late 2007 or early 2008. As resources permit, the department will work to implement the outcome measures and the expanded outcome measures recommended by the ILSAC in 2005. Significant change to the state's SACWIS system, Florida Safe Families Network, is anticipated. This recommendation will also require considerable collaboration with the community-based care providers to implement data collection systems.