



INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES ADVISORY COUNCIL



Chris | Photo by Bill Frakes

2007 Report of Independent Living Services  
for Florida's Foster Youth



"As stewards of this state, our greatest obligation is to our children. But often it is their voice that goes unheard, or overlooked. Our children need a voice. They need to be at the table because soon—it will be their table."

Governor Charlie Crist,  
2007 State of the State Speech



Cover photo by Bill Frakes

**Christopher**, 16, is the oldest of ten siblings and the only one that has not been adopted. Chris says he wants a family so that he doesn't have to "worry about always having to pack his bags and move to another home."

Courtesy of:

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## 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 will be 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 will enter adulthood without the knowledge, skills, attitudes, habits and relationships that will 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 are clear that they face numerous barriers to a successful transition to adulthood.

Barriers include changes in foster care placements and school, an inability to participate in age appropriate normal activities, unavailable housing, lack of economic stability and the lack of connections with permanent supportive adults or "family".

As Governor Crist stated (quote, left), we need to prepare them for taking their seat at the table.

In Florida as of July 1, 2007, there were 4,927 children age 13 through 17 in licensed foster care eligible for Independent Living Services and 4,451 young adults formerly in foster care age 18 through 22 potentially eligible to receive Independent Living Services.

These are manageable numbers so we should be able to assure that **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 25.**

Florida has designed an array of services to support older foster youth and former foster youth with the goal that these youth become 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. The Florida laws relating to independent living programs have been revised in the last two legislative sessions and have been called "very good" by the National Governors Association, Institute for Best Practices.

The past year has proven that the Legislature, Department of Children and Families, the Florida Coalition for Children, the providers of services, the judiciary, advocates, the private philanthropic community and the citizens of Florida have noticed the needs and challenges of youth who age out of the foster care system.

They have determined that **we** must do better. The **we** has evolved into a collective and collaborative group that has one unified purpose and includes the expert voices of current and former foster youth who have first hand knowledge of the system. They are helping us to understand how we can make services better and we are listening.

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 and recommendations.

## LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

### The legislature should:

1. 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 \$16,829,507 in General Revenue for Independent Living Services needs.
2. Revision of 409.1451 (3) (a) 3 to include all youth in out-of-home care and to insure participation in age appropriate activities.



## DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

### The Department should:

1. Every Community Based Care Lead agency should maintain a quality assurance report for **every** youth receiving Independent Living Services.
2. Insure that technical assistance resources are available to Community Based Care (CBC) agencies and contracted providers.
3. Consider establishing a technical assistance and quality assurance system that works with Community Based Care Agencies and contracted providers to implement cost effective and efficient programs specific to the needs and resources in their communities and not function in a policing role.
4. Must establish provider accountability by implementing corrective actions as part of the ongoing quality assurance process. A system of effective Independent Living Services will only be provided to our youth in foster care if quality assurance feedback and effective corrective action measures are utilized.
5. Continue to work with stakeholders to refine the 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.
6. Take the lead role and establish clear Independent Living Services policies, procedures and standards of service as a requirement of every Community Based Care Agency or other agency contracted to provide Independent Living and Transition Services.
7. Insure that life skills trainings, education planning, career path development, financial literacy training and other services mandated by Florida statute are of the **same quality** regardless of the placement of the youth in Florida's foster care system or the location of the contracted provider.
8. Insure that every Community Based Care Agency or other contracted providers meet benchmarks—not of services provided or youth served—but of outcomes achieved by youth participating in Independent Living Services.
9. Continue to use the Strengthening Youth Partnerships (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.
10. 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.
11. Expand its efforts with appropriate state agencies/organizations to insure 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.
12. Continue to support the previously recommended actions steps of the NGA /Florida Team regarding housing.
13. Continue to 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.
14. Support the development of transitional housing programs and scattered site apartments with support services for youth ages 18-23.
15. Develop and implement electronic benefit transfer options for allowances, aftercare or Road to Independence Program (RTI) payments.
16. Consider the legal and fiscal implications of aligning the RTI with the education system and require individualized and comprehensive transitional support services, including a written transitional services plan for **all** youth who have reached the age of 18, however have not obtained their high school diploma or GED over the next year.

## Introduction and Accomplishments of the Past Year

The John H. Chaffee 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 Road to Independence Program (RTI), 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.

Governor Crist, Secretary Butterworth and legislators from both sides of the aisle have been staunch supporters of the focus on Independent Living Services for youth in foster care and those young adults formerly in foster care. Through their leadership and support the following accomplishments have occurred in the past year.

1. Publication of "FAQ for Foster Youth Transitioning to Adulthood"—a youth friendly guide to questions frequently asked by youth as they transition from foster care to adulthood that is consistent with 2007 legislation.
2. Publication of "Rights and Expectations", Children and Youth in Shelter and Foster Care that has been endorsed by Secretary Butterworth.
3. Youth planned and directed a statewide meeting of District and Region administrators and CBC management and providers in Tampa Florida on June 6, 2007. The convening, Action Plan for Improving Services to Youth and Young Adults was held in collaboration with Florida Children's First, Inc., a statewide Guardian ad Litem Program representative, Cby25, community representatives, the judiciary, housing program and child welfare staff. Adult participants consistently express appreciation for the opportunity to learn from youth regardless of the training venue.
4. Youth Leadership Academy welcomed their inaugural class in December 2007 with the goal of developing and building youth leaders by providing skills training and an opportunity to partner with an adult sponsor who is a graduate of the Child Welfare Leadership Program.
5. The number and scope of trainings and publications have increased dramatically in the past year. It has become routine for local, regional and state convening's to include youth as trainers. There is an ongoing and concerted effort to reach all of the disciplines, systems and individuals who have contact with youth in the system.
6. ILSAC, partnered with DCF, joined with the CBC's and service providers, through the Florida Coalition for Children (FCC), and former foster youth to create, implement and report a baseline data collection method for Independent Living Services in Florida. This was an unparalleled partnership and work effort that has been very successful. We believe that this project is an example of how public and private stakeholders can effectively work together toward a common goal. We also believe that this effort is a first step in our system's ability to highlight the positive impact of our collective work on the lives of the young people in our care.
7. Florida has been identified as a state that is making headway on Independent Living Services legislation and practice. Testimony has been presented by Jane Soltis, Chair of the ILSAC before the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support in a Hearing on Children who Age Out of the Foster Care System in July 2007.  
  
Jane Soltis and Don Winstead Deputy Director, Department of Children and Families presented *The Florida Experience, Public Private Partnerships to Improve Services and Outcomes for Youth* at the National Governors Center for Best Practices Conference on Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care.
8. Public Private Partnerships  
Secretary Butterworth has actively engaged the private philanthropic community by adopting a set of values that invite private partners to the table and values their input. He has reached out to the community with a commitment to transparency and openness at finding new and improved ways of doing business.



continued...

9. Legislation introduced by Rep. Glorioso (R) and Senator Nan Rich (D) and passed in the 2007 session included the following changes in independent living services:
  - Expanding eligibility population for the Road to Independence
  - Program Requirement of formal evaluation for Subsidized Independent Living for eligible youth
  - Removing Casework Liability for Drivers Licenses for Youth in Foster Care
  - Expanding Medicaid Eligibility to age 21 and expanding the population
  - Removal of the disabilities of nonage of minors for depository financial services.
10. Creation of a subcommittee focused on independent living under the Florida Supreme Court Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court.

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 who are aging out of foster care.

## 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 2007 session, we are ever more cognizant of the continuous struggle in consistently translating good policy to good practice.

Acknowledging the significant challenges facing youth aging-out of the Foster Care System; Florida has been recognized as having passed some of the most comprehensive laws to address Independent Living Services.

Florida has established laws defining the requirement for DCF to provide Independent Living Services which are the needed trainings, educational services, support services and judicial oversight required to mitigate the impact of foster care and insure Florida's foster care youth are prepared to transition from state care.

Our challenge is to implement the current laws and provide appropriate, consistent, effective and measurable Independent Living Services to our youth in foster care, regardless of what part of Florida they reside in or who is the contracted Community Based Care Agency responsible for their care.

We need to sharpen our focus and commitment to turning Policy into Practice and highlight past recommendations and their current status.

### 1. Outcomes

ILSAC has been actively advocating increased accountability, including data collection methods, baseline outcome measures and better strategies to improve performance, for many years. The challenges for accountability in Independent Living Services have been well documented by many sources, in addition to ILSAC. In 2004 OPPAGA, Report Number 04-78 recommended minimum standards for independent living, life skills, housing, education, employment, health, aftercare and transition services, training, and data collection and evaluation. Yet a 2007, Report Number 07-11, follow up noted that, "while the Department has made some progress, it has not yet finished developing contractual standards and outcome measures for the independent living program as directed by the Legislature".

ILSAC sought to partner with DCF and the Legislature to insure accountability on the part of CBC and provider agencies by establishing measurable outcomes for youth aging out of foster care. The recommendations are consistent with Federal requirements and the OPPAGA reports. Established outcome measures and data collection measurements will allow CBC and provider agencies to document progress they are making and assist in identifying where programs are working effectively and resources are being well spent. Outcome measurement must address the critical areas of education, employment, housing, financial stability, and permanency.

ILSAC is pleased to report significant progress in this recommendation. ILSAC, partnered with DCF, joined with the CBC's and service providers, through the Florida Coalition for Children, and former foster youth to create, implement and report a baseline data collection method for Independent Living Services in Florida. This was an unparalleled partnership and work effort that has been very successful. We believe that this project is an example of how public and private stakeholders can effectively work together toward a common goal. We also believe that this effort is a first step in our system's ability to highlight the positive impact of our collective work on the lives of the young people in our care.

The collaboration produced a statewide standardized data collection checklist (Exhibit A). The checklist collects data consistent with ILSAC, Federal, State and OPPAGA recommendations and/or requirements. The data collection checklist was utilized to collect data on over 6,000 youth involved, or formerly involved, in the foster care system, aged 13-23. The checklists' data have been captured electronically, consistent across the State, and will serve as a critical baseline in the standards and expectations to be set for the future.

Continuing this partnership will demonstrate, to those who are holding us accountable, our commitment to effective and meaningful change.

*A sample of some of the findings of this data collection include:*

- 41% of all independent living youth are below grade level
- 53% have passed the FCAT
- 25% of all independent living youth have been arrested in the past year
- 69% of those 13-17 have had a standardized life skills assessment completed
- 67% of those 13-17 have received services for the needs identified on the life skills assessment
- 32% of those 13-17 are living in a group home
- 37% of those 13-17 are living in a foster home
- 5% of those 13-17 are in a DJJ facility
- 11% of those over 18 have spent at least one night homeless in the past year
- Of 20 year olds 36% had not yet completed high school
- For those over 19, 35% are enrolled in college

Successive update and analysis of the data must be under girded by the quality assurance process. The level of quality assurance assigned to a project often communicates the importance of the services and outcomes.

Two additional key elements of turning policy into practice are consistency of services and accountability.

As a state, we must plan for quality and make the case for implementing a business model of social services that requires us to report on the

"return of investment" for the state, county, federal and private dollars utilized to provide Independent Living Services.

DCF, the ILSAC and the FL Coalition for Children and Families must support and reinforce the implementation of Independent Living Services standards and guidelines as quality assurance is an on-going core element of integrating policy into practice. Quality assurance for Independent Living Services must be a continuous process.

ILSAC recommends that a quality assurance report is maintained for every youth receiving Independent Living Services. If we can measure the progress Florida's children in our school system with progress reports, report cards and grades then it is a realistic expectation that Community Based Care Agencies or other contracted providers can and must demonstrate the Independent Living Services provided are effective, individualized and matches the needs of the youth.

ILSAC recommends that DCF insure that technical assistance resources are available to Community Based Care agencies and contracted providers.

ILSAC also recommends that the quality assurance efforts of DCF for Independent Living Services not be established as a policing role. Rather ILSAC recommends that DCF consider establishing a technical assistance and quality assurance system that works with Community Based Care Agencies and contracted providers to implement cost effective and efficient programs specific to the needs and resources in their communities.

DCF in their role as the ultimate agent responsible for the well-being of youth in their care must establish provider accountability by implementing corrective actions as part of the ongoing quality assurance process. A system of effective Independent Living Services will only be provided to our youth in foster care if quality assurance feedback and effective corrective action measures are utilized.

## 2. Training

In coordination with the ILSAC, Department of Children and Families, Florida's Children First and Connected by 25 Policy to Practice Academy, training and technical assistance has been provided to a wide range of internal and external stakeholders. A key contribution has been the use of experts from a wide variety of sources as presenters and trainers. This included youth formerly in foster care, judges, advocates and attorneys, community service leaders, representatives of exemplar programs and state agencies comprising a broad service array.

### **Supreme Court Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court**

A subcommittee of this group focused on youth aging out of foster care has met via conference call and face to face meeting throughout 2007. The group consists of members of the judiciary and representatives from the Office of the State Court Administrator, legal aid groups, Schools of Social Work, and state social service agencies. Group members and guest speakers were provided information regarding the youth perspective regarding needs for improvement, need for services for youth in the delinquency system, extension of jurisdiction, and transitional housing resources. The group concludes its work next year and will present recommendations for improvement for services including rule amendments, proposed legislation, and a housing resource directory. The Office of the State Courts Administrator has released a Florida's Dependency Benchbook in July 2007 that includes a section on Independent Living and Road to Independence.

### **Statewide Conferences Addressing Child Welfare**

Two conferences were held during the year; both addressing Independent Living Services, youth transitioning out of foster care and teen services best practices. The 2007 Dependency Summit sponsored by the Department (and a broad range of stakeholders) was held September 5-7, 2007 and the Florida Coalition Conference (FCC) Annual Conference was held November 14-16, 2007. Attendance at both of these conferences exceeded 2,000 participants and included a wide range of internal and external stakeholders of the child welfare system. Sessions in both of these conferences were presented by young adults in or formerly in foster care and included:

- Involvement of Foster Youth as Part of the Decision Making Process
- "Like a Normal Kid" Improving the Outcomes for Youth in Foster Care
- Cby25
- Independent Living Services; The Law, The Plan, The Youth, the Urgency
- Florida's Children First and Youth SHINE

During the FCC conference, ILSAC Chair Jane Soltis and Glen Casel, CBC of Seminole Executive Director, presented a workshop entitled, "Public/Private Partnership: Data Collection and Outcomes for Youth in Foster Care."

### **Department Sponsored Training in Collaboration with Various Stakeholders**

Training has been conducted for independent living coordinators at three statewide sessions: February 26-28, June 6-7, and November 7-8, 2007. Presenters included: the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, Connected by 25, Department of Education, Department of Juvenile Justice, advocate attorneys and various others.

In addition, the Department conducted regional trainings for child welfare staff in May and November-December 2007. These training sessions provided one and one half days of training in five cities across Florida representing each of the five regions of the Department. Trainers were tapped from the law enforcement, Legal advocacy, statewide providers and federally funded national resource centers. Issues impacting youth in the foster care system and exiting the foster care system were part of the agenda.

During the year, community-based care lead agency contract managers received training and technical assistance through conference calls and video teleconferences. The primary agenda item relevant to this report was independent living funding.

Florida's Children First has provided training to over 816 individuals on legal and other key issues for older youth in care.



### 3. Reporting

Statute 409.1451, (5) Services for Young Adults Formerly in Foster Care, required the department or a community based care lead agency to develop an annual plan to implement services for their region.

Statutory requirements for annual planning required of CBC's and OPPAGA data collection have, in the past, been the major source of reporting on services provided to independent living youth. These sources have been valuable, but have not collected consistent data across the State, necessary for a complete picture of the services and expenditure needs and the effectiveness of those services.

We have documented the progress made in data reporting in this report (Recommendation – Outcomes). Florida has become a national leader in the standardized reporting of service delivery data for independent living youth. In addition, DCF now has more detailed financial data. While improvement can still be made, DCF has made significant progress in the reporting of financial expenditures of the

CBC's. In Fiscal Year 2006-07, all Federal funds received by the State were expended. These total \$12,119,871 in Federal dollars and associated State match requirements. In addition, the \$25,252,615 allocated by the Legislature was expended to within 1.2%; with only State general revenue left unexpended. While there remains concern with any funds allocated for independent living not fully expended on services, DCF has improved its tracking and assurance of financial expenditures and reporting. In addition, there remain some fluctuations amongst the CBC Lead Agencies that must be addressed.

The need for timely and accurate service and investment projections and reviews including youth outcomes is necessary information that DCF, CBC lead agencies, 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:**

**Continue to work with stakeholders to refine the 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.**



#### 4. Youth Voice

Florida continues to make substantial progress in recognizing the value of our youth's voices. 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. Secretary Butterworth has been a leader in embracing and promoting "nothing about us without us".

There has been an increased awareness of the significance of youth representation, which is evident in the actual numbers and quality of input each youth's voice has been able to provide.

##### ILSAC

There are two designated youth seats on the ILSAC. These are former foster care youth who have been able to provide substantial input. Their participation is valuable to ILSAC, since they have the capability to provide personal insight on current needs and experiences faced by foster care youth. They are seen as the voices of many other foster care youth who are unable to approach the table with their concerns. Even though there are only two youth seats allocated for the youth representation on the council, their voices are heard and considered, as they also have full voting rights as the other council members do.

##### Youth SHINE

Along with the ILSAC's youth participation, Youth SHINE, has been able to achieve many of their goals. Youth SHINE was established in the state of Florida after much recognition of the importance of youth representation. Their work in the past two years has produced much towards the improvement and importance of youth representation and resulting legislation. Florida Children First as the parent organization for Youth SHINE has served as a leader in outlining youth rights, working with the young adults and DCF in the creation of a "Rights and Expectations for Children and Youth in Shelter of Foster Care" and producing, "Frequently Asked Questions for Foster Youth Transitioning to Adulthood". These products are examples of Florida's continued commitment to improving the service delivery system for youth in and/or formerly in the foster care system.

##### Local Youth Boards

Throughout the state there are local youth advisory boards that have members from that particular area. These boards do work throughout their community on service projects and work with their service providers. These boards hold formal elections so that youth can vote for their leaders. These youth take their leadership roles and flourish with them as this gives

them the practice for becoming leaders of tomorrow. The members who volunteer their time on their youth boards also have opportunities to advocate for change in the legislation for themselves and also others in care.

##### The Connected by 25 Initiative Policy to Practice Academy

The Cby25 Academy provides technical assistance and trainings through Cby25 certified youth trainers to work with child welfare and agency staff in the development of policies, procedures and programs within their organizations that meet the requirements of Florida's Independent Living Statutes.

##### Department of Children and Families Leadership

Throughout the state of Florida, there have been increased supports for having youth representation at the table. As noted, Secretary Butterworth has been a leader and standard bearer for this philosophy and is setting the example of youth representation at the table through their inclusion in a number of task groups and teams organized by the department.

##### Training and Technical Assistance Conducted by and for Youth

One of the most exciting and beneficial training activities has been the contribution of the youth. At the statewide conferences, technical assistance meetings and regional trainings, youth have provided training through sharing of personal experience, recommendations for improvements to the system, and willingness to problem solve along side stakeholders to improve the systems of care. A full day of training was planned and provided by representatives of YouthSHINE in June 2007. This training was delivered in collaboration with Florida Children's First, Inc., a statewide Guardian Ad Litem Program representative, community representatives, the judiciary, housing program and child welfare staff. Adult participants consistently express appreciation for the opportunity to learn from youth regardless of the training venue. Youth formerly in foster care have played an ever increasing role in providing advice and counsel to policy makers.

##### Florida Youth Leadership Academy

The Florida Youth Leadership Academy is a new program designed to build youth leaders by providing skills training and an opportunity to partner with an adult sponsor who is a graduate of the Child Welfare Leadership Academy. The Inaugural class has been selected and is completing the 5 modules required for a certificate to be awarded in August 2008. This program is jointly sponsored by DCF, Connected by 25, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative and the Child Welfare Leadership Program Alumni Association.

### 5. Consistency of Services

We must plan for quality. We are more likely to meet our objectives when we do our work effectively the first time. Independent Living Services are specifically designed and funded to better insure that foster care youth are prepared to transition from state care and custody.

However, each year we have not been able to provide the foster care youth in our care the mandated services prescribed by Florida Law; even though many of the laws governing the services to teens in foster care and young adults aging-out of foster care have been part of Florida statutes for over five years.

We are the “parents” of our youth in foster care and our challenge is no different than those faced by any parent whose responsibility it is to prepare their children for adulthood beyond the daily care of their parents. We do not have “foster care youth” we have “youth in foster care.” It is time for us to remove the labels and stigmas of foster care and view our youth through the same lens that a parent looks at their children.

DCF must insure that every Community Based Care Agency or other contracted providers meet benchmarks—not of services provided or youth served—but of outcomes achieved by youth participating in Independent Living Services.

In 2007, a number of publications for youth and adults were completed and released with additional publications planned for the 2008 year. These publications reinforce the trainings conducted and provide guidelines for consistency in the delivery of services including:

- Rights and Expectations, Children and Youth in Shelter and Foster Care
- FAQ for Youth Transitioning to Adulthood
- Money: Know your Rights
- Transition for Youth with Disabilities
- Children's Mental Health Briefing Book
- Children's Mental Health Recommendations
- DCF Task Force on Child Protection
- Interagency Education Agreements Study

Serve up some wings...so children can leave the nest.

Consistency of services is dependent upon intended results and/or outcomes. To insure consistency of services throughout the state:

DCF must take the lead role and establish clear Independent Living Services policies, procedures and standards of service as a requirement of every Community Based Care Agency or other agency contracted to provide Independent Living and Transition Services.

DCF must insure that life skills trainings, education planning, career path development, financial literacy training and other services mandated by Florida statute are of the **same quality** regardless of the placement of the youth in Florida's foster care system or the location of the contracted provider.

Do not do for teens what they can do for themselves...prepare them—give them a chance to learn.



## B. Funding

In 2006, the ILSAC Report indicates 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. (For details on this figure, see the 2006 ILSAC Report.) Following this report, the Legislature and Governor approved a budget that included \$26,988,231 for Independent Living services for 2007-2008 fiscal year.

This leaves a shortfall of over \$13,780,703 for this fiscal year. The Council's analysis last year was based on what the legislature has mandated in services for foster youth 13-17 and former foster youth through age 23. The Council continues to recommend fully funding these programs to insure a successful transition for all former foster youth. However, fully funding would require going beyond the legislative mandates to insure programs meet all the needs of these youth and not just the statutory mandates.

There are additional services that can help foster youth

succeed such as the continuing recommendation of driver's insurance, implementation of educational advocates such as those in Hillsborough County for foster children or Guardian Scholar programs for post secondary students, or capital expenses for housing for former foster youth. ILSAC supports the State's efforts to expand the public – private partnerships but the philanthropic community cannot make up for the State's shortfall. It is more appropriate for the philanthropic community to support the enhancements beyond the State's statutory obligations.

The ILSAC also continues to be concerned about the inability of the Department to track how some of these funds are allocated especially for the services for the 13-17 year old foster youth. The funds are to be used as enhancements to foster care services and not to supplant funds already committed to case management. However, the Department does not monitor nor can it report how these funds are spent for these youth. It is easier to report on the funds for former foster youth over the age of 18.

### The ILSAC recommends that the Legislature:

**Support the Department of Children and Families request of \$16,829,507 in General Revenue for Independent Living Services needs.**

### Additional funds are needed:

To continue to serve young adults formerly in foster care age 18-22.

Without additional funds, the Department and its CBC partners will be forced to reduce benefits or establish waiting lists for young adults formerly in foster care.

To insure Independent Living Services are provided to youth in foster care and exiting foster care.

To cover the increase in the federal minimum wage (the basis for the Road to Independence payment in Florida law).

## 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. The Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) affirmed this in Florida when they collected statewide data on the educational performance of teenagers in out-of-home care in 2003-2004.

Education is a key to opportunity in the U.S. for a whole host of positive life outcomes. 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.

In 2004 the Legislature passed section 39.0016 to require interagency agreements addressing the educational needs of children in out-of-home care between the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Education and well as DCF regions and local school districts.

The cornerstone of this legislation is collaboration between the child welfare and school system as well as other agencies involved with the child. The ILSAC has recommended that a **deadline be established for the execution and implementation of the DOE, WIA and DCF agreements in compliance with Florida Statutes §39.0016.**

This legislation was an important step but as described in the document *Interagency Agreements Improving Educational Outcomes for Florida's Children in Foster Care*, the law has not lived up to its potential throughout the state. This publication completed by Kele Williams, Esq., University of Miami children and Law Clinic and Andrea Moore, Esq., Florida's Children First identifies the districts that have adopted interagency agreement and assess whether the agreements include key provisions necessary

to collaboratively address educational issues. One of the purposes of this report is to help spur interagency agreements, implementation and evaluation of 39.0016 at the state and local level.

Public records requests were submitted for each of Florida's 67 school districts and 11 DCF districts seeking copies of their interagency agreements. Interagency agreements were obtained for 39 counties and 22 counties did not respond to the public records request.

Key provisions in the interagency agreements that were analyzed included:

- School stability
- Attendance
- School Enrollment
- Educational Support
- Liaisons
- Services for children with Disabilities
- Educational Advocates/Decision Makers
- Transitional Planning
- Information Sharing/Training

The recommendations to the Legislature and State Agencies outlined in this excellent and detailed report are consistent with and endorsed by the ILSAC.

Those recommendations are included in Exhibit B.

### The ILSAC also recommends

**supporting a proposed pilot of a Guardian Scholars Program like program in higher educational institutions in 2006.**

There have been ongoing discussions with a number of institutions but as of yet no pilot programs have been started.



## D. Employment

Florida's available labor pool must be educated, well trained and reflective of the state's diversity. Foster youth, as well as other at-risk youth, are an important segment of that pipeline of workers but need to have access to a variety of additional resources to help them transition to independence.

Comprised of members of the Board of Directors, Workforce Florida's Youth Development Council's focus is developing policy and advancing programs that help Florida's youth enter and advance in the workforce through learning, training and earning opportunities. Most of this work is accomplished with federal funds provided to the state to assist youth with acquiring and building on skills that will lead to employment and career opportunities. The goals of the Youth Development Council include:

- Increasing the number of high school graduates.
- Increasing the number of youth who obtain a job that provides a living wage.
- Encouraging statewide employer/agency collaborations that help first-time workers enter and advance in the workplace.

Workforce Florida initiated the **Strengthening Youth Partnerships (SYP)** statewide effort in 2003 to increase coordination, planning and resource alignment among state organizations and agencies with complementary youth goals and missions. This group includes representatives from the departments of Juvenile Justice, Education, Children and Families, and Health along with Workforce Florida, the Agency for Workforce Innovation, Regional Workforce Boards, Associated Industries of Florida, Able Trust and

others. It meets regularly to identify gaps in services, potential program duplication, and strategies to improve services to Florida's most at-risk youth. The partnership's work is in line with more recent federal directives through the Employment and Training Administration (New Youth Vision) and the White House Task Force on Disadvantaged Youth (Shared Youth Vision), among others, aimed at fostering more collaboration among those supporting youth services. Key to the visions of both the state and federal partners is increasing training opportunities for young people in high-growth industries that pay higher wages. Florida's record as an early innovator in building bridges among those serving youth contributed to its selection as one of 16 states earlier this year to receive a \$116,000 federal grant to fund two programs—through Work Source in the Jacksonville area and the Southwest Florida Workforce Board in the Fort Myers area—that link at-risk youth with educational, health and social services that support successful employment outcomes.

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 youth that this initiative targets include the following:

#### Who are the students?

- Students graduating from high school who will enter the workforce
- Students who are aging out of the foster care system
- Students who are leaving or have left the juvenile justice system
- Students who leave high school before earning a diploma or GED
- Students who have been assigned to an alternative school
- Students with special needs

#### What are their characteristics?

*These students are often unprepared for work in terms of skills, behaviors, and attitudes:*

- 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.

**The Statewide Shared Case Management Pilot Project**

is a new, two-year project for juvenile offenders and youth in foster care, which was approved by the State Youth Council and Workforce Board in July 2007 and is getting underway by mid-year. It encourages collaboration at the local level and across regions in the state to develop an intensive shared case management model that will facilitate the transition to self-sufficiency. The pilot-project goal is to provide improved networks of services for juvenile offenders and youth in foster care or those recently aged out in communities where they live or may temporarily live as a result of court action. Workforce Florida has set aside \$250,000 as an incentive to Regional Workforce Boards to strengthen local and statewide networks so that services can be increased and outcomes improved to these populations of our state's most at-risk youth. The cooperation of the Departments of Justice and Children and Families at the state and local areas as well as their local providers is critical to the success of this undertaking.

The anticipated results include increased services to these populations, improved outcomes and the development of a shared case management model.

**Recommendations to the Department of Children and Families**

- 1. 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.**
- 2. 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.**
- 3. Expand its efforts with appropriate state agencies/organizations to insure 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

After leaving the care of the state, many ex-foster youth experience ongoing instability in their living situations. The lack of stable and affordable housing decreases the youths' ability to obtain an education and maintain employment. Unfortunately, young adults exiting the foster care system continue to face many challenges in accessing housing. The supply of housing is limited due to the high cost of living in many communities and, many landlords are reluctant to rent to these young adults because they have no credit history or co-signer or a criminal history that haunts them. Additionally, many youth have not developed the skills needed to enable

them to live on their own successfully.

In order to address the needs of many of the youth aging out of care, communities must begin to focus on the needs of those youth transitioning from the foster care system so that they "may be able to help bring together the available programs and funding streams to provide more comprehensive and seamless services for these youth"<sup>1</sup>. Until we can assure youth have safe and stable housing, youth aging out of the foster care system will continue to be one of our most susceptible populations.

### Recommendations:

**Continue to support the previously recommended actions steps of the NGA /Florida Team regarding housing.**

**Continue to 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.**

**Support the development of transitional housing programs and scattered site apartments with support services for youth ages 18-23.**

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

**Permanence is not a process, a plan or a placement.**

**Permanence is having an enduring family relationship that:**

Is safe and meant to last a lifetime; Offers the legal rights and social status;  
Provides for well being; Assures lifelong connections to birth/extended family siblings, culture, etc.

## F. Permanency

Foster care in Florida is legal oversight meant to insure 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 Stangler<sup>1</sup> 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."

The ILSAC recommended in the 2006 Annual Report 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 6 months in

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

foster care as eligible recipients for services under Subparagraph (5) Services for Young Adults Formally in Foster Care of this statute. This recommendation resulted in successful legislation that was signed into law by Governor Crist.

The ILSAC also recommended that the Department of Children and Families:  
 Establish permanency planning as a priority for youth aging out of foster care that results in permanent "family" and supports. 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.

*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.

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.

Promising Practices and policies to promote youth permanence include:

1. Active engagement of youth as partners in permanence
2. Active engagement of families in permanency planning
3. Organizational changes to promote youth permanency such as using data to determine priorities, new teaming practices and integration of permanency and preparation for adulthood
4. Agency-court collaborations
5. Legislative support for youth permanency
6. Experimentation with new financing strategies

In Florida, as a result of the 2007 legislation we no longer force our foster youth to choose between permanency and Independent Living Services. ***No foster youth should leave foster care without a place to call home.***

**1. Normalcy/Age Appropriate Activities**

In 2006 the ILSAC recommended that the Department of Children and Families:

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

This recommendation has not been implemented as of this date.

**ILSAC continues to recommend**

**the development and implementation of electronic benefit transfer options for allowances, aftercare or RTI payments.**

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

Legislation was enacted with provisions allowing a caseworker for a youth to sign an application for a learner's driver license or a regular driver's license without being held liable for damages caused by the minor.

ILSAC supports the concept of funding to assist foster parents in the costs of insurance.

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.

**The Department should continue to work at initiating discussions with the insurance industry and the Department of Risk Management to identify creative solutions to the problems of insurability, liability, and rate adequacy for this population.**

Transportation 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.

Section 743.004, F.S. was enacted in 2007 so that the disability for minors is removed. Youth in foster care are now able to secure financial services.

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.

Administrative Rule language was developed to address the normalcy issue. Legislation Section 409.1451, F.S. was enacted to remove responsibility under administrative rules and law and prohibit the sanctioning of a foster parent's license as a result of actions a child engaged in activities specified in his or her written plan.

It also reinforced existing law that required a written plan for each youth in foster care that provides the opportunity to participate in age appropriate activities and the authority to make decision granted to the parent or caregiver. The plans must include specific goals and objectives and be signed by all the participants.

Unfortunately this has not translated to the many young people who reside in group homes or residential settings. The ILSAC recommends revision of 409.1451 (3)(a) 3 F.S. to include all youth in out-of-home care and to insure participation in age appropriate activities.

**The ILSAC recommends revision of 409.1451 (3) (a) 3 to include all youth in out-of-home care and to insure participation in age appropriate activities.**

Suggested language follows:

**409.1451 (3) (a) 3.** Develop procedures to maximize the authority of foster parents, group home provider agency, residential agency, or other authorized caregivers to approve participation in age-appropriate activities of children in their care. The age-appropriate activities and the authority of the foster parent, group home provider agency, residential agency, or other authorized caregiver shall be developed into a written plan that the foster parent or caregiver, the child, and the case manager all develop together, sign, and follow. This plan must include specific goals and objectives and be reviewed and updated no less than quarterly. Foster parents, group home provider agency, residential agency, or other authorized caregivers who have developed a written plan as described in this subparagraph shall not be held responsible under administrative rules or laws pertaining to state licensure or have their licensure status in any manner jeopardized as a result of the actions of a child engaged in the approved age-appropriate activities specified in the written plan.

While we acknowledge Foster Care Youth attain legal status as an adult at age 18; child welfare is the only system that presumes that youth in high school are afforded the status of an adult at age 18 and in fact, foster care is the only system that has the ability to terminate their obligation to the youth on their 18th birthday.

The Road to Independence is not an entitlement program. There must be accountability on the part of the participant. While 18 year olds may have achieved the legal status of "adult", our culture and social mores recognize that 18 year olds are not adequately prepared for self-sufficiency, financial security, employment and housing stability without ongoing "parental" supports.

We can be assured that the "parental supports" that naturally

occur in families are not without requirements on the part of the 18 year old. If we acknowledge that 18 year olds require ongoing supports; we also have to ask ourselves if giving 18 year olds who are still in high or in a GED program prepared for the responsibility of managing the RTI stipends without oversight and accountability.

Florida currently provides monthly RTI payments up to \$1014 directly to youth. There are no requirements that youth provide documentation that those funds are appropriately used for education, housing or other services.

Without accountability on the part of the Independent Living Services providers *and* the youth can we realistically expect positive outcomes from the dollars invested in the Road to Independence Program?



**Increase the effectiveness of Florida's Independent Living Services by requiring accountability on the part of participants in the Road to Independence Program and comprehensive transitional support services.**

Florida has provided for stipend payments directly to the youth since 2002. Data collected this year shows the status of Florida's foster care youth—and some of the information requires us to review our current system of services for youth aging out of foster care.

- 48% of the foster care youth reviewed ages 18-23 are either in a High School or GED program,
- 7%-9% of the 18-20 year old foster care youth reviewed who are receiving RTI stipends reported they have experienced one or more nights of **homelessness** in the last 12 months,
- 14% of the 18 year old foster care youth reviewed who are receiving RTI stipends reported they have been **arrested** at least once in the last 12 months,
- 42% of the 17 year olds in foster care have **not** passed the Florida FCAT,
- 55% of the 17 year olds in foster care reviewed were **below** grade level.

Students in Florida's public schools, even though they may be 18 years of age are still required to have a parent participate in and approve enrollment in classes, participation in extracurricular activities and all authorizations for medical treatment must be signed by a "parent".

Public school districts in Florida also require that students

participating in a district sponsored field trip, athletic activities and school events must provide, in advance, written permission from their parents. Noting the term "parent" is interpreted by the school system to refer to either or both parents, to a legal guardian, or to any person in parental relationship to any student.

Parents of high school students (even though the student may have reached 18 years of age) are still required to receive all student progress reports, grades and academic status. There is no presumption of legal status as an adult for youth in high school as it relates to parental involvement, parental notification and parental approval of education services.

Additionally in Florida, a parent's obligation to pay child support normally terminates when a child reaches 18 years of age, marries, dies, or joins the military. However, in the event the child turns 18 while enrolled in high school and that child will graduate before turning 19, the obligation for support will often extend until the child graduates.

Social Security benefits also continue if the child is still a full-time student at a secondary (or elementary) school at age 18. Social Security benefits will continue until the child graduates or until two months after the child becomes age 19, whichever is first.

### The ILSAC recommends

**that over the next year the Department of Children and Families consider the legal and fiscal implications of aligning the RTI with the education system and require individualized and comprehensive transitional support services, including a written transitional services plan for all youth who have reached the age of 18, however have not obtained their high school diploma or GED.**

### Crossover Youth

Research data tells us that nationally, foster youth move through the Juvenile justice system at a higher rate than their peers and that foster youth are placed on probation and in commitment programs at a higher rate than their peers.

The Independent Living Survey Data indicates that 26% of the 13 to 17 year olds in foster care and 23% of the 18 to 23

year olds receiving services have been arrested in the past 12 months.

Unified Family court practices, the Supreme Court Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Court as well as continued dialogue between DCF and DJJ should provide some recommendations in the year ahead.

Exhibit A:  
**Independent Living Transitional Services Critical Checklist**

Youth Name: \_\_\_\_\_ D.O.B.: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_  
 C.B.C. Agency: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Caseworker: \_\_\_\_\_ Caseworker Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_  
 Caseworker Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Checklist Completed: \_\_\_\_\_

Indicators Yes, No, or N/A

**Section I — Life Skills**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1) Youth has <b>completed</b> a standardized life skills assessment.  | 1) ___ Yes ___ No ___ N/A                |
| 1a) Youth has <b>received services</b> for all areas with deficiencies.   | 1a) ___ Yes ___ No ___ N/A ___ Partially |
| 2) Youth has an <b>open and active bank account</b> (does not include master trust account).                                    | 2) ___ Yes ___ No                        |
| 3) Youth is <b>married</b> .  | 3) ___ Yes ___ No ___ N/A                |
| 4) Youth has <b>children</b> .  | 4) ___ Yes ___ No                        |
| 5) Youth is the <b>caregiver of their children</b> .  | 5) ___ Yes ___ No ___ N/A                |
| 6) Youth has a <b>written plan for participation in activities</b> that are appropriate for the youths' age and maturity level. | 6) ___ Yes ___ No ___ N/A                |

**Section II — Housing**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1) Living Arrangement:  | 1) ___ Foster Home ___ Group Home ___ Parent<br>___ Relative ___ DJJ ___ Mental Health<br>___ Non-relative Licensed ___ Dorm<br>___ Renting Housing ___ Own Housing<br>___ Friend ___ Assisted Living Facility<br>___ Corrections ___ Subsidized IL<br>___ Homeless ___ Missing ___ Other: _____ |
| 2) Number of <b>placements in past 12 months</b> .  | 2) _____   |
| 3) The youth <b>has acquired housing</b> that is safe, stable, affordable, and is located near public transportation, work and/or school.   | 3) ___ Yes ___ No  |
| 3a) If answer to 3 is no, there a plan developed to assist youth in obtaining <b>housing</b> that is safe, stable, affordable, and is located near public transportation, work and/or school. | 3a) ___ Yes ___ No ___ N/A   |
| 4) If youth is 16 or 17 a <b>formal evaluation for subsidized independent living</b> has been completed.  | 4) ___ Yes ___ No ___ N/A  |
| 5) Youth has spent at least one night <b>homeless</b> during the past 12 months.  | 5) ___ Yes ___ No  |
| 5a) If yes, approximate number of nights:   | 5a) _____  |

**Section III — Education**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1) Youth is educationally:   | 1) ___ At grade level ___ Above Grade level<br>___ Below Grade level |
| 2) Youth has <b>passed grade level FCAT</b> .  | 2) ___ Yes ___ No  |
| 2a) If no on passing full FCAT, the following tested sections were <b>passed</b> :   | 2a) ___ Reading ___ Math ___ Science ___ Writing                     |
| 3) If no to item(s) 1 or 2 above, the youth is <b>receiving remediation services identified</b> to improve his or her chances of performing at or above grade level. | 3) ___ Yes ___ No ___ N/A  |
| 4) Youth <b>has an educational and career path</b> which has been developed into a <b>written plan</b> .   | 4) ___ Yes ___ No ___ N/A  |
| 5) The educational plan has been <b>filed with the court</b> .   | 5) ___ Yes ___ No ___ N/A  |

**Education** (*continued*)

6) **Current** Educational Status.

6) \_\_\_(th)Grade \_\_\_GED Program  
 \_\_\_2 year College \_\_\_4 year College  
 \_\_\_Vocational \_\_\_Military \_\_\_Apprenticeship  
 \_\_\_Not in School

7) **Highest completed** grade/education.

7) \_\_\_(th)Grade \_\_\_GED Program  
 \_\_\_2 year College \_\_\_4 year College  
 \_\_\_Vocational \_\_\_Military \_\_\_Apprenticeship

8) Current Educational **Goal**.

8) \_\_\_High School Diploma \_\_\_GED Program  
 \_\_\_2 year College \_\_\_4 year College  
 \_\_\_Vocational \_\_\_Military \_\_\_Apprenticeship  
 \_\_\_No Further Education

**Section IV — Employment**

1) Youth's current **Employment Status**:

1) \_\_\_ Full time \_\_\_ Part Time \_\_\_ Seasonal Job  
 \_\_\_ Volunteer \_\_\_ Not employed

2) Youth has opportunity to **participate in job training** (paid or unpaid).

2) \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ N/A

3) Youth has a job with **benefits**.

3) \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ N/A

3a) If yes, please check:

3a) \_\_\_ Health Insurance \_\_\_ Dental/Vision  
 \_\_\_ Retirement \_\_\_ Vacation \_\_\_ Education Support

4) If employed, **hourly wage** is:

4) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Section V — Health**

1) Youth has insurance coverage:

1) Health insurance  
 \_\_\_ Private \_\_\_ Medicaid \_\_\_ Work Related \_\_\_ No  
 Mental health Insurance  
 \_\_\_ Private \_\_\_ Medicaid \_\_\_ Work Related \_\_\_ No  
 Dental Insurance  
 \_\_\_ Private \_\_\_ Medicaid \_\_\_ Work Related \_\_\_ No

2) Youth has received services in the last year.

2) \_\_\_ Dentist \_\_\_ Doctor \_\_\_ Emergency Room  
 \_\_\_ Mental Health Provider \_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_ None

**Section VI — Department of Correction or Juvenile Justice**

1) Youth has been **arrested in the past 12 months**.

1) \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

1a) If yes, number of times.

1a) \_\_\_\_\_

2) Youth is **currently on probation** or **under court supervision**.

2) \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

3) Youth is **currently incarcerated**, or has **been incarcerated within the past 12 months**.

3) \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

**Section VII — Transportation**

1) Youth has a **reliable means of transportation** to school and/or work.

1) \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

2) Youth has successfully **completed drivers' education**. (Age 15+)

2) \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ N/A

3) Youth's driver license status:

3) \_\_\_ Learners \_\_\_ Regular \_\_\_ Suspended/Revoked  
 \_\_\_ None \_\_\_ N/A

4) Youth's primary transportation:

4) \_\_\_ Parents \_\_\_ Public Transportation \_\_\_ Own Car  
 \_\_\_ Friends \_\_\_ Taxi \_\_\_ Bike \_\_\_ Walk

5) Youth's secondary transportation:

5) \_\_\_ Parents \_\_\_ Public Transportation \_\_\_ Own Car  
 \_\_\_ Friends \_\_\_ Taxi \_\_\_ Bike \_\_\_ Walk

Section VIII — Case plan, Aftercare and Transitional Services	
1) Case plan (13+) Check all that apply:	1) <input type="checkbox"/> Education tasks <input type="checkbox"/> Physical tasks <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health tasks <input type="checkbox"/> Life skills tasks <input type="checkbox"/> Filed with court <input type="checkbox"/> Youth involved
2) Youth has signed their <b>independent living transition plan</b> and it has been filed with the court. (17+ only)	2) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
3) Youth has been connected to <b>adult mentors</b> in the community.	3) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Declined
4) Who does the Youth <b>turn to for help</b> primarily:	4) <b>Primary</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Relative <input type="checkbox"/> Parent <input type="checkbox"/> Foster Parent <input type="checkbox"/> Mentor <input type="checkbox"/> Friend over 25 <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher/Coach <input type="checkbox"/> GAL/Attorney <input type="checkbox"/> Boss <input type="checkbox"/> Case Worker <input type="checkbox"/> None
4a) Who does the Youth <b>turn to for help</b> secondarily:	4a) <b>Secondary</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Relative <input type="checkbox"/> Parent <input type="checkbox"/> Foster Parent <input type="checkbox"/> Mentor <input type="checkbox"/> Friend over 25 <input type="checkbox"/> Friend under 25 <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher/Coach <input type="checkbox"/> GAL/Attorney <input type="checkbox"/> Boss <input type="checkbox"/> Case Worker <input type="checkbox"/> None

Exhibit B:  
**Recommendations**

**Legislature**

**The Florida Legislature should:**

- Conduct regular oversight on implementation of Florida Statute §39.0016.
- Expressly include all children in out-of-home care in the statutory definition of “homeless child” in Florida Statute §1003.30(12) of the Education Code to facilitate enrollment.
- Create a dedicated funding stream for transportation to improve school stability.
- Mandate that dependency courts hold a hearing to determine who holds educational rights for children in care and appoint a surrogate parent if necessary. Dependency courts should adopt a uniform order addressing educational issues and for the appointment of surrogate parents.
- Amend Florida law to provide that juvenile courts may appoint surrogate parents, as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- Provide standards for the appointment of surrogate parents consistent with IDEA.
- Require that publicly funded post-secondary institutions provide housing for current and former foster youth during school breaks.

**State Agencies**

**DCF, DOE and AWI should:**

- Fully implement the state level interagency agreement including designation an administrator to administer and monitor compliance with the interagency agreement, as well as provide technical assistance to districts.
- Promulgate administrative rules regarding educational case planning requirements for children in out-of-home care.
- Develop quality assurance measures to assist local implementation of interagency agreements.
- Insure maximum utilization of availability federal and state money, and explore public-private partnerships and other funding sources to promote educational stability.

**Counties**

**Local school districts, DCF districts, CBCs and other stakeholders should:**

- If they have not already done so, enter interagency agreements regarding the education of children in out-of-home care.
- Review interagency agreements to assess whether the agreement meets the goals discussed in the “Assessing Interagency Agreements” section of this report.
- Develop policies and procedures to implement interagency agreements.

Exhibit C:

**Independent Living Services Advisory Council Membership 2007**

Jane V. Soltis (Chair) .....	Eckerd Family Foundation
Charles Nelson (Co-Chair) .....	Guardian ad Litem Program
Jim Adams .....	Florida Support Services of North Florida
Jack Ahern .....	Department of Juvenile Justice
Honorable Sarah Zabel .....	Judge, 11th Judicial District
Michelle Comeaux .....	Agency for Health Care Administration
Sonya Duran .....	Battle Foundation
Ashley Kyle .....	Youth Representative
Gerard Glynn .....	Barry University School of Law
Hope Kleinfeld .....	Personal Enrichment through Mental Health Services
Helen Lancashire .....	Department of Education
Judy Meyer .....	Agency for Workforce Innovation
Linda Marie Pettus .....	Youth Representative
Jenilee Robbins .....	Workforce Florida
Glen Casel .....	CBC of Seminole
Carolyn Salisbury .....	Lawyer
Veronica Seleska .....	Advocate
Freida Sheffield .....	Workforce Florida
Jan Stratton .....	Universal Orlando Foundation
Diane Zambito .....	Connected by 25
Robert Buesing .....	Lawyer
Onchantho Am .....	Youth Representative
Gay Frizzell .....	Department of Children and Families



INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES ADVISORY COUNCIL

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**2007 INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES  
ADVISORY COUNCIL REPORT  
Department of Children and Families Response**

Department of Children and Families  
Office of Family Safety

December 31, 2007

Robert A. Butterworth  
Secretary

Charlie Crist  
Governor

## 2007 Independent Living Advisory Council Report

### Department of Children and Families Response

#### Statutory Authority:

409.1451

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 the 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 the tasks set forth in this section. The data collected may not include any information that would identify a specific child or young adult.

### **Legislative Recommendations**

**The legislature should:**

- 1. 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 \$16,829,507 in General Revenue for Independent Living Services needs.**

Department Response: The Department appreciates the support of the Independent Living Advisory Council.

- 2. Revision of 409.1451 (3) (a) 3 to include all youth in out-of-home care and to insure participation in age appropriate activities.**

Department Response: The Department's interpretation of current statute is that children living in group care settings are already entitled to participate in age appropriate or normalcy activities. The clarification of the statute specifying that all children in state custody or licensed care will help to ensure greater understanding of this requirement.

### **Department Recommendations**

**The Department should:**

- 1. ILSAC recommends that a quality assurance report is maintained for EVERY youth receiving Independent Living Services.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The Department will convene members of the ILSAC along with Department and community-based care staff and advocates to develop a recommended approach for addressing this recommendation. The Quality and Accountability Workgroup will address several of the recommendations found later in this response.

**2. ILSAC recommends that DCF ensure that technical assistance resources are available to Community Based Care agencies and contracted providers.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The Department will include the development of a plan for providing technical assistance throughout 2008 as part of the workgroup addressing quality and accountability issues.

**3. ILSAC recommends that the quality assurance efforts of DCF for Independent Living Services not be established as a policing role. Rather ILSAC recommends that DCF consider establishing a technical assistance and quality assurance system that works with Community Based Care Agencies and contracted providers to implement cost effective and efficient programs specific to the needs and resources in their communities.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. See recommendation #2.

**4. DCF in their role as the ultimate agent responsible for the wellbeing of youth in their care must establish provider accountability by implementing corrective actions as part of the ongoing quality assurance process. A system of effective Independent Living Services will only be provided to our youth in foster care if quality assurance feedback and effective corrective action measures are utilized.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The Department will provide members of ILSAC with the opportunity to meet with contract management and program leadership regarding the development, implementation and oversight of the contract template for community-based care lead agencies. During this meeting, the Department will describe existing feedback and corrective action measures and determine if improvements can be made specific to this service delivery system.

**5. ILSAC recommends that DCF should continue to work with stakeholders to refine the 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.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The Department will continue to partner with members of ILSAC, the Florida Coalition for Children, and other stakeholders to ensure implementation of performance measures based on outcomes for the 2008-09 contract year. This group may also be the appropriate group to accomplish recommendation #4 above.

- 6. DCF must take the lead role and establish clear Independent Living services policies, procedures and standards of service as a requirement of every Community Based Care Agency or other agency contracted to provide Independent Living and Transition Services.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The quality and accountability workgroup will also address the need for policy clarification. As of July 1, 2007, the contract template for community-based care lead agencies includes, "Minimum Standards for Independent Living Transition Services". The group will use this document, this 2007 report, federal and state law, and administrative code to determine priority policy needs.

- 7. DCF must ensure that life skills trainings, education planning, career path development, financial literacy training and other services mandated by Florida statute are of the same quality regardless of the placement of the youth in Florida's foster care system or the location of the contracted provider.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. These issues span the scope of both the quality and accountability group and the existing outcome measures group identified in recommendation # 5. The Department will determine the best approach for addressing this need through one or both of these groups.

- 8. DCF must ensure that every Community Based Care Agency or other contracted providers meet benchmarks-not of services provided or youth served, but of outcomes achieved by youth participating in Independent Living Services.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. See recommendations # 5 above.

- 9. Continue to use the Strengthening Youth Partnerships (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.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. Strengthening Youth Partnerships provides a cross agency collaborative approach to addressing this need. The Department will continue its support and participation.

- 10. 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.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. See recommendation # 9.

- 11. The Department 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.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The Department will collaborate with the Florida Coalition for Children and the Florida Foster Adoptive Parent Association to address this need.

- 12. Continue to support the previously recommended actions steps of the NGA /Florida Team regarding housing.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation which states that youth transitioning out of foster care should have access to safe, stable, affordable housing near public transportation, school, or work. See additional information in response to # 13.

- 13. Continue to 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.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The Department's Offices of Homelessness and Family Safety will collaborate with the Florida Coalition for Children and ILSAC to support this vital service. In addition, the Department has submitted a Legislative Budget Request of \$2,000,000 to address this critical need.

**14. Support the development of transitional housing programs and scattered site apartments with support services for youth ages 18-23.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. See recommendation #13.

**15. ILSAC continues to recommend the development and implementation of electronic benefit transfer options for allowances, aftercare or RTI payments.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The Department will collaborate with the Florida Coalition for Children to identify barriers to implementation and strategize solutions.

**16. The ILSAC recommends that over the next year DCF consider the legal and fiscal implications of aligning the RTI with the education system and require individualized and comprehensive transitional support services, including a written transitional services plan for all youth who have reached the age of 18, however have not obtained their high school diploma or GED.**

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The Department will convene a group of stakeholders to analyze and explore the unique challenges facing young adults formerly in foster care working on their high school diploma or GED.