

**INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES ADVISORY COUNCIL**

**2022 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE SECRETARY**

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## **Introduction**

Section 409.1451(7), Florida Statutes (F.S.), states, "The Secretary shall establish the Independent Living Services Advisory Council (herein referred to as "the Council") for the purpose of reviewing and making recommendations concerning the implementation and operation of section 39.6251, F.S., and the Road-to-Independence Program." Section 409.1451(7)(b)(1.), F.S., states "The advisory Council shall report to the secretary on the status of the implementation..., efforts to publicize the availability..., the success of the services..., problems identified..., and recommendations for department or legislative action."

During the 2021 Legislative Session, Chapter 2021-169, Laws of Florida (Senate Bill 80) amended section 409.1451(7)(b)(2.), F.S., impacting the Department of Children and Families' (the Department) report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, stating, "The report must also include the most recent data regarding the status of and outcomes for young adults who turned 18 years of age while in foster care, relating to education, employment, housing, financial, transportation, health and well-being, and connections, and an analysis of such data and outcomes."

To collect the "most recent data regarding the status of and outcomes for young adults who turned 18..." and effectively analyze the implementation of Extended Foster Care (EFC), Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS), and Aftercare Services, the Council requested that the Department require each Community Based Care (Lead Agency) to provide information regarding their respective staffing structure, service array, outcome data, and administration.

## **Presentations**

The purpose for requesting information regarding Lead Agency "staffing structure" was to meet section 409.1451(7)(a), F.S., which states "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 services has achieved." With Lead Agencies identifying the number of child welfare professionals dedicated to working with recipients of EFC, PESS, and Aftercare Services, the Council hoped to gain insight into the Lead Agencies' capacity to serve, support, and reach all eligible young adults.

The purpose for requesting information regarding Lead Agency "service array" was to meet section 409.1451(7)(b)(1), F.S., which states "The advisory Council shall report to the secretary on the status of the implementation of the Road-to-Independence Program, efforts to publicize the availability of the Road-to-Independence Program, the success of the services under the program..." With Lead Agencies providing this information, the Council will gain insight into agencies' and providers' ability to provide a comprehensive array of accessible, individualized services to meet the unique needs of eligible young adults.

The purpose for requesting Lead Agency "outcome data" was to meet section 409.1451(7)(b)(2), F.S., which states "The report must also include the most recent data regarding the status of and outcomes for young adults who turned 18 years of age while in foster care, relating to education, employment, housing, financial, transportation, health and well-being, and connections, and an analysis of such data and outcomes." The most recent and

relevant data will allow the Council to begin assessing program outcomes, further assisting in the status of implementation and operation.

The purpose for requesting information regarding Lead Agency “administration” was to meet section 409.1451(7)(e), F.S., which states “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 following Lead Agencies presented:

**February**

Embrace Families  
Families First Network  
Community Partnership for Children

**March**

Eckerd Connects  
Family Support Services of Suncoast  
Family Support Services of North Florida  
Children’s Network of Southwest Florida

**April**

Citrus Family Care Network  
Communities Connected for Kids  
ChildNet Palm Beach  
ChildNet Broward

**May**

Brevard Family Partnership  
Heartland for Children  
Kids Central Incorporated  
Family Integrity Program

**June**

Northwest Florida Health Network  
Partnership for Strong Families  
Safe Children Coalition

**July**

Kids First of Florida

**Key Findings**

Although the Council requested the same information from each Lead Agencies, the level of detail varied, illuminating the variance in the implementation and operation of independent living services across the state. Still, some general conclusions have been drawn based on the Lead Agency self-reported information collected.

**1. Staffing Structure**

While each Lead Agency has different organizational structures, many reported similar barriers and successes. It was very difficult for the Council to draw conclusions about what organizational structures yield the best program outcomes such as In-House, Contracted, or Hybrid models.

Below are some common discussion points related to this topic:

*Reported Successes* – Some Lead Agencies reported lower turnover rates for staff members who had clearly defined roles, specifically those staff members designated to assist in the transition of youth and young adults.

*Reported Barriers* – Conversely, most Lead Agencies reported high turnover in case management and high caseloads as challenges to maintaining a stable and capable

workforce. Overall, a lack of standardized independent living training curriculum designed to assist in developing a competent workforce, was a recurring theme.

## **2. Service Array**

While each Lead Agency may have different geographic locations that impact the availability of resources, most of the agencies reported challenges to housing, specifically for their young adults in EFC, PESS, and Aftercare Services.

*Reported Successes* – Many Lead Agencies communicated that delivering quality services were significantly impacted by existing partnerships in their communities. Many reported having youth councils or advisory boards, whether they were partially or fully supported by their agency, as a success. The Lead Agencies appearing to have the most successful engagement with their youth were those that provided continued resources, organized community events, and had a mechanism to formally connect youth to supportive adults to assist in their transition to adulthood. For example, during the presentations, engagement included activities such as:

1. Preparing food baskets with goods for young adults
2. Hosting an annual event to connect youth with resources
3. Creating a specific mobile app to communicate more effectively

*Reported Barriers* – As noted, housing was a barrier that Lead Agencies experience in the implementation of quality supports and services. Additional challenges include limited access to mental health services and lack of engagement or participation by young adults. These barriers were noticeably more prominent in rural areas.

## **3. Outcome Data**

As previously stated, the Council sought to utilize a standard Lead Agency Data Collection form to capture required information to assess program outcomes. While all Lead Agencies responded fully or in part, the information was insufficient for the Council to systematically process and describe or illustrate results relevant to services delivered. Some Lead Agencies expressed an inability to provide a comprehensive response simply because there are no known state level benchmarks specific to young adults' participation in EFC, PESS, or Aftercare Services.

Throughout each presentation it became apparent that the Lead Agency Data Collection Form will require future revision to provide clarity and consistency. Establishing a consequential data collection tool as a method to maintain focus to meaningful goals can improve any metrics used by the Lead Agencies to improve outcomes for the young adults.

## **4. Administration**

With regards to administering EFC, PESS, and Aftercare Services programs, most of the Lead Agencies reported not having management reports to track activities that would potentially be drivers or indicators for determining a young adult's success. Since there are many policies and procedures in place to ensure youth and young adults' rights and protections are honored, without a universal approach to tracking, Lead Agencies will continue to have challenges achieving independent living program outcomes. The

Department described efforts to construct management report(s) that measure young adults actively receiving services to assist Lead Agencies in their tracking. The Council looks forward to getting an update on this endeavor.

## **Recommendations**

The Council proposes that the Department and other stakeholder groups work towards the following:

### ➤ **Florida Independent Living Competency Training**

This year's Council would like to restate the importance of developing and requiring a training for individuals working with transition age foster youth. The inconsistent delivery of independent living programs statewide draws attention to the expanding workforce's critical need for greater knowledge regarding the array of independent living services, eligibility for those programs, leveraging community resources, and effectively engaging youth.

This proposed training curriculum would include a certification process, with annual refresher course(s) to stay abreast of the continually changing and progressive improvements in the field. The certification could be required or promoted for designated independent living child welfare professionals, licensing staff, Guardians ad Litem (GALs), licensed caregivers, group home staff, mentors, and other relevant service providers. Elements of the training program could include Judicial Reviews and required documentation filings for youth ages 13 to 17 , conducting teen staffings, youth case plan development, transition plan development, familiarity with the National Youth Transition Database, and training on relevant Florida Statutes, CFOP, and code requirements that impact youth, as well as training on how to access and utilize benefits such as EFC, PESS, Keys to Independence, financial literacy course, tuition waiver, Aftercare Services, Educational Training Vouchers, Chafee, and more.

The Council acknowledges that the Department is developing an independent living competency curriculum and looks forward to receiving an update on this effort.

### ➤ **Standardization of Designated Staff Roles and Responsibilities**

The information presented exhibited a need for consistency of staff and/or contractors roles and responsibilities. The Council recognizes that Lead Agencies need flexibility in staffing structure, but still recommends the development of industry standards for child welfare professionals charged with overseeing youth in transition and young adults receiving EFC, PESS, and Aftercare Services. In line with an independent living competency training, the Council proposes a standard or boiler plate job description, with more detailed applicant knowledge, skills, and abilities that ensures recruitment of a competent independent living workforce.

### ➤ **Permanent Connection Agreement**

The Council's [2020 report](#) recommended the development of a permanent connection agreement. During the 2022 presentations, it also became apparent that the young adults who are part of independent living services are often youth without identified supportive adults. It is important that the professionals serving these young adults have a mechanism, such as a formal written agreement, to engage youth and their recognized supportive adults. This will provide clarity for both parties, ensuring someone bears the responsibility of helping leverage

community resources and available services during the youth's transition to a successful adulthood.

➤ **Annual Agency Presentations**

The Council is recommending that the Department coordinate annual agency presentations on their implementation and operation of independent living services to be presented from January to June. The presentation content will be driven by the data from the presentations and lessons learned of the previous year and focus on progress made on specific topics each year.

**Membership**

In 2019, the Council, with the Department's support, sought to establish membership roles and responsibilities, outlining participation expectations; however, the Council has met significant challenges with attendance and participation. Challenges noted include, but were not limited to, competing priorities, scheduling conflicts, travel costs, and other circumstances. The Council looks forward to the Department's new policies and procedures, creating a framework for better recruitment and maintenance of members.

In January of this year, the Council roster was comprised of child welfare professionals from Lead Agencies, direct service providers, advocates for foster youth, young adults who receive or have received independent living services through the Road-to-Independence Program, representatives from the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Education, youth advisory boards, CareerSource Florida, Inc., and the Statewide Guardian Ad Litem Office. Missing from the membership roster was the Department headquarters and regional staff, Agency for Healthcare Administration staff, and foster parents.

The Council's roster as of the writing of this report includes:

Brandie McCabe: Vice President of Social Services, LYFT Learning (Chair)  
Christine Frederick: CEO, FLITE Center (Secretary)  
Demarco Mott: Chair, Citrus FCN Youth Advisory Council  
Dietra Barfield: Independent Living Director, Camelot Community Care, Pasco and Pinellas County  
Eileen Geisler: Independent Living Aftercare Specialist, ChildNet Broward  
Eva Mae Sugg, Esq., Senior Guardian ad Litem Attorney  
Ginger Rockey-Johnson: Child Advocate Manager, Guardian ad Litem (Co-Chair)  
John Watson: Youth Advisor, Office of Continuing Care, Florida Department of Children and Families  
Margie Dotson: Independent Living Specialist, Community Connected for Kids  
Meliza Frias, Esq.: Advocacy Manager, Florida Foster Care Review  
Morgan Donovan: Career Development Manager, Embrace Families  
Raul Catuy: CEO, Reconnecting the Dots LLC  
Regina Watson: Independent Living Director, Camelot Community Care, Hillsborough County  
Sabrina Scott: Director of Independent Living, Vita Nova Inc.  
Shauntraí Curry: Statewide Transition Coordinator, Florida Department of Juvenile Justice  
Stephanie Lucas: Independent Living Specialist, Children's Network of Southwest Florida  
Thomas Fair: Advocate  
Warren Davis: Policy Analyst, Career Source Florida

Special thanks to Mr. Cal Walton, III, Deputy Director of the Office of Continuing Care, and Mr. Eric Wetzel, Statewide Youth and Young Adult Transition Services Specialist, for their ongoing and unwavering support during all 2022 meetings for ILSAC.

*The Department has designated the Council as one of Florida's citizen review panels for the Federal Fiscal Year 2022, in support of the federal requirements of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act.*



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**Department of Children and Families  
Response to the  
Independent Living Services Advisory Council  
2022 Annual Report**

December 2022

Shevaun Harris  
Secretary



Ron DeSantis  
Governor

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Since the establishment of the Independent Living Services Advisory Council - ILSAC (the Council) in 2002, the Council has provided recommendations on the implementation and operation of independent living services as part of a comprehensive report to the Legislature. As required in section 409.1451(7), Florida Statutes (F.S.), the Department of Children and Families (the Department) is submitting responses to the Council's recommendations as part of the Council's 2022 Annual Report, which covers the 2021-2022 state fiscal year. In accordance with updated requirements, the report also includes updates on the youth and young adult outcomes within the independent living service array.

The Department appreciates the incredible hard work and dedication of the ILSAC towards the betterment of services for our young adults. After decades of work with these clients, we know that though they may face additional barriers, their resilience and potential for success are unparalleled. With just a few intentional and prevention-focused wrap-around supports, we have seen great achievements by these young people. We also recognize here at the Department that preventing entry into the dependency system is powerful. We are dedicated to moving upstream in our approach and providing access to community services and peer support before a child or family experiences crisis. Through the support of First Lady Casey DeSantis, HOPE Florida - A Pathway to Prosperity, has become a driving force for preventative services. The Legislature also provided the Department the opportunity to build out a specialized office dedicated to our youth and young adults in and transitioning out of foster care. This Office of Continuing Care is driven by young adults with lived experience in the system of care and supported through peer relationships so that policy, program, and direct services all come from a client-centered approach. In addition, the Office of Child and Family Well Being has redesigned the Family Well-Being Council to prioritize lived experience and youth voice and will explore platforms and meeting times preferred by these important stakeholders, aiming to make lived experience and client centered services a part of the daily culture at the Department. We appreciate the opportunity to review and respond to the Council's important and thoughtful recommendations.

**The Council proposes that the Department and other stakeholder groups work towards the following:**

### **Development of a Florida Independent Living Competency Training**

The Department recognizes the need for independent living competency training and fully supports continued opportunities to improve independent living workforce skills. The Department strives to ensure that professionals who are currently preparing youth and young adults for adulthood are equipped with the skills and tools necessary for success. Statewide training opportunities are available on evolving policies and discuss best practices. Throughout the year the Department hosts bi-monthly meetings with the young adult practitioners statewide to provide clarity on existing statutes, codes, and rules as well as opportunities for collaboration across the workforce. The Office of Continuing Care also launched onsite visit rotations to provide the community-based care staff an opportunity for one-on-one connection and assistance. These visits include a review of any barriers faced in providing high-caliber services to youth and young adults and strategies to enhance services and supports.

Through this work, the need for a statewide curriculum to support the field was identified. The Department has initiated the development of an independent living curriculum that will be

available for current and new independent living staff. The Department intends to collaborate with and include feedback from stakeholders including youth and young adults, community-based care Lead Agencies, guardian ad litem programs, and other partners as the curriculum is developed. The Department is in contact with the Florida Certification Board about the opportunity for certification to be included with the curriculum.

Through the Office of Continuing Care, the Department has also renewed its focus on centering clients at the heart of policy and resource creation. The Department's statewide Youth Advisor is integral in ensuring that not only youth advocacy groups, but also young adults with lived experience who are not involved in leadership roles, have a strong voice in shaping the curriculum.

### **Standardization of Designated Independent Living Staff Roles and Responsibilities**

The Department recognizes the need for the consistent delivery of independent living services statewide.

Maintaining the mission of the Department's Office of Continuing Care, which focuses on ensuring a high-level workforce with enhanced knowledge of independent living, continues to be its top priority. The utilization of quality assurance "Life of Case Reviews," real-time policy support, independent living-specific data collection and analysis, and the addition of an independent living curriculum training are all aimed to ensure service provision statewide is of the highest consistency and quality.

While the Council's recommendation includes the standard designation of staff roles and responsibilities within agencies, the Department's community-based care model ensures flexibility in staffing structures and increases local ownership of service delivery and design. An updated best practice model for job expectations will be developed to share with community-based care Lead Agencies.

### **Permanent Connection Agreement**

The Department recognizes the importance of supportive adult connections in the transition to adulthood. The Quality Independent Living Standards Workgroup engaged stakeholders to discuss the most critical elements to ensure a young adult's success. As a result of the workgroup's recommendations, permanent connection data is now reported to the Department. Permanent connection data reporting is being developed and will give front-line staff real-time data regarding supportive adults for youth and young adults and enable additional avenues for focus and collaboration involving a young adult's path to self-sufficiency with positive supports.

In addition to the Office of Continuing Care's continued advocacy on the importance of permanent supportive connections and data collection capabilities, mechanisms designed to promote and capture adult supportive connections for youth and young adults have also been enhanced. On-Site lead agency training, policy incorporation, family finding, and the redesign of the "My Pathways to Success Plan" are all Departmental initiatives designed to encourage independent living youth and young adults to have identified supportive adults to assist in their transition to adulthood. The "My Pathways to Success Plan" is statutorily required and subject to judicial oversight for all youth ages 16 and older. The program allows for discussion of mentor relationships and adult supportive connections.

Finally, the Office of Continuing Care's HOPE team launched a Family Finding Pilot initiative this fall. The pilot provides young adults served through independent living programs an opportunity to connect with a team member to initiate Department led family finding. The initiative is designed to assist in locating both informal adult connections and family members that are willing and able to assist with the transition to adulthood.

### **Annual Agency Presentations**

The Department's focus on independent living quality assurance and data provision will assist the Council in obtaining agency-specific data. The Young Adult Receiving Services Report will include data points on factors for success in a young adult's life, including in-depth health information and areas of strength and opportunities relating to their independent living skills. This report will provide the Council autonomy to analyze, and report based on the aggregate data provided. The Department welcomes feedback on barriers the Council encounters for lead agency presentations and will partner with the Council to ensure their data needs are met.

### **Department Report on Youth and Young Adult Services and Outcomes. section 409.1451 (2), F.S.**

The Department's focus and commitment to the success of young adults in and transitioning out of foster care has shown many improved outcomes over the last fiscal year. Several factors contributed to these outcome measures, including additional and time-limited funding, increased training, and data collection measures, as well as an overall focus on the young adult clientele. Specific funding during the pandemic from the Chafee program provided new opportunities to support young adults, including waiving program eligibility requirements for employment and education as well as offering additional avenues for resources such as employment and educational attainment monetary incentives. Florida saw increased positive outcomes in qualifying activities, such as educational attainment and employment, as well as overall participation in the independent living programs. In addition, over the last year the Department has provided numerous training opportunities that focused on appropriate data documentation. The focus was to ensure documentation is accurate to monitor services and outcomes for youth and young adults served in Extended Foster Care (EFC), Aftercare, and Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS).

## Independent Living Programs Overview

### Extended Foster Care (EFC)

In support of the development of more permanent bonds for Florida's former foster care youth, section 39.6251, F.S., established EFC for young adults who reached 18 in the legal custody of the Department, and who are between the ages of 18 and 21 (up to age 22 for youth with disabilities). The program, utilizing Title IV-E federal funds, to help pay for room and board and other allowable expenses, such as childcare for young adults who are parenting, clothing for work or school, school supplies, and essential services needed to support the young adult's transition to independence. Participation requires case manager visitation, case planning activities, life skills training, and continued judicial oversight. To maintain eligibility for participation in the program, young adults must be willing to participate and enroll in an educational setting, participate in a program or activity designed to promote or eliminate barriers to employment, or be employed for at least 80 hours per month.

### Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS)

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

### Aftercare Services (Aftercare)

To be eligible for Aftercare per section 409.1451, F.S., a young adult must have reached the age of 18 while in the Department's legal custody, but not yet have turned 23 years of age. The services provided are based on a needs assessment and are intended to be temporary. Services are often used as a bridge to EFC and PESS and may include mentoring, tutoring, mental health or substance abuse counseling, and financial assistance. Allowable expenses are covered by federal and state funding.

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

Total Number of Independent Living Services Accessed by Young Adults by Program Type, Lead Agency, and FY						
Lead Agency	2020-2021			2021-2022		
	Aftercare	EFC	PESS	Aftercare	EFC	PESS
CBC of Brevard	23	41	28	28	33	14
ChildNet Inc	38	143	71	22	166	112

ChildNet Palm Beach	15	139	53	14	126	68
Children's Network of SW Florida	2	76	57	8	41	58
Citrus Health Network	10	245	249	39	229	198
Communities Connected for Kids	11	12	15	16	28	25
Community Partnership for Children	0	47	35	8	49	37
Family Support Services Suncoast	58	134	43	42	104	62
Children's Network Hillsborough	49	116	57	57	87	40
Embrace Families CBC	44	126	54	32	117	58
Families First Network	15	80	23	12	98	28
St Johns County Commission	0	6	5	5	12	8
Family Support Services	32	100	25	36	97	33
Heartland for Children	12	75	11	32	79	23
Kids Central Inc	24	37	27	39	28	27
Kids First of Florida Inc	0	9	13		16	10
NWF Health Network-East	11	56	29	16	55	35
Partnership for Strong Families	10	17	18	10	16	12
Safe Children Coalition	12	39	19	17	37	16
Statewide	366	1498	832	433	1418	864
**Source: OCWDRU #1089, FSFN Data Repository						

## Education

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

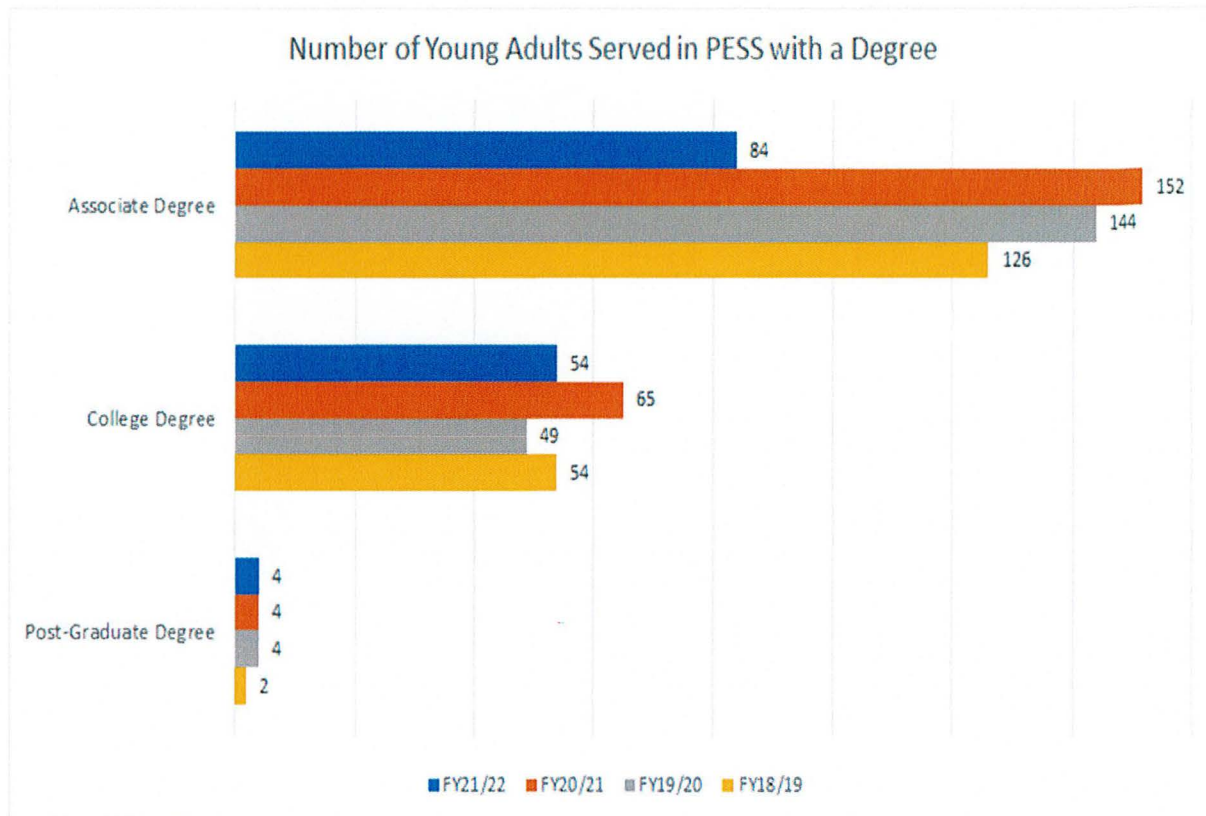
The following table shows the number of young adults during the FY 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 who have an educational record in FSFN reflective of receiving a high school, GED, or a special diploma degree. The number of young adults who earned a degree increased by 236 percent from the previous FY, with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

Young Adults who have a High School Diploma, GED Certificate, or Certificate of Completion/Special Diploma	2020-2021	2021-2022
<b>Lead Agency</b>		
Brevard Family Partnership	8	19
ChildNet-Broward	23	60
ChildNet-Palm Beach	10	30
Children's Network of SW Florida	1	36
Citrus Health Network	6	73

Communities Connected for Kids	0	17
Community Partnership for Children	0	24
Family Support Services of Suncoast <i>(contract held by Eckerd Pasco/Pinellas until 12/31/2021)</i>	36	81
Children's Network Hillsborough	28	39
Embrace Families	25	66
Families First Network	4	24
Family Integrity Program	0	2
Family Support Services of North Florida	14	31
Heartland for Children	0	32
Kids Central, Inc.	12	19
Kids First of Florida, Inc.	0	4
Northwest Florida Health Network	8	27
Partnership for Strong Families	3	19
Safe Children Coalition	9	27
Statewide	187	630

During FY 2021-2022, the Department contracted with Educate Tomorrow Corporation, a 501(c)(3) organization, to administer the Positive Pathways Program (Positive Pathways). Positive Pathways was established to coordinate, develop, and maintain a network of postsecondary supports in efforts to improve outcomes and career transitions for former foster youth eligible for the Department's Tuition and Fee Exemption (tuition exemption). This work is a continuation of support and networking, in collaboration with the State University System (SUS), Florida College System (FCS), and Department of Education.

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



## Employment

EFC policies were substantially revised to standardize the service delivery across the state and align with Title IV-E federal funding requirements. Eligible young adults have the option of remaining in foster care until the age of 21, or until the age of 22 with a documented disability. EFC is a voluntary program that requires the young adult to participate in school, work, or a work training program and reside in a supervised living arrangement by federal and state guidelines. The program utilizes Title IV-E federal funds to help pay for room and board and other allowable expenses, such as childcare for young adults who are parenting, clothing for work or school, school supplies, and essential services needed to support the young adult's transition to independence. The number of young adults who have recorded employment in EFC has increased by 20 percent from the previous state fiscal year.



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

Although young adults are not required to seek employment or attend school as an ongoing condition for eligibility in Aftercare, they must make efforts to complete activities to become self-sufficient. These types of activities, as part of a comprehensive plan, will assist with transitioning the young adult toward financial self-sufficiency. The following table provides the number of young adults who received Aftercare for FY 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 and had a recorded period of employment during FY 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. The number of young adults who have recorded employment in Aftercare has remained relatively consistent from the previous state fiscal year.

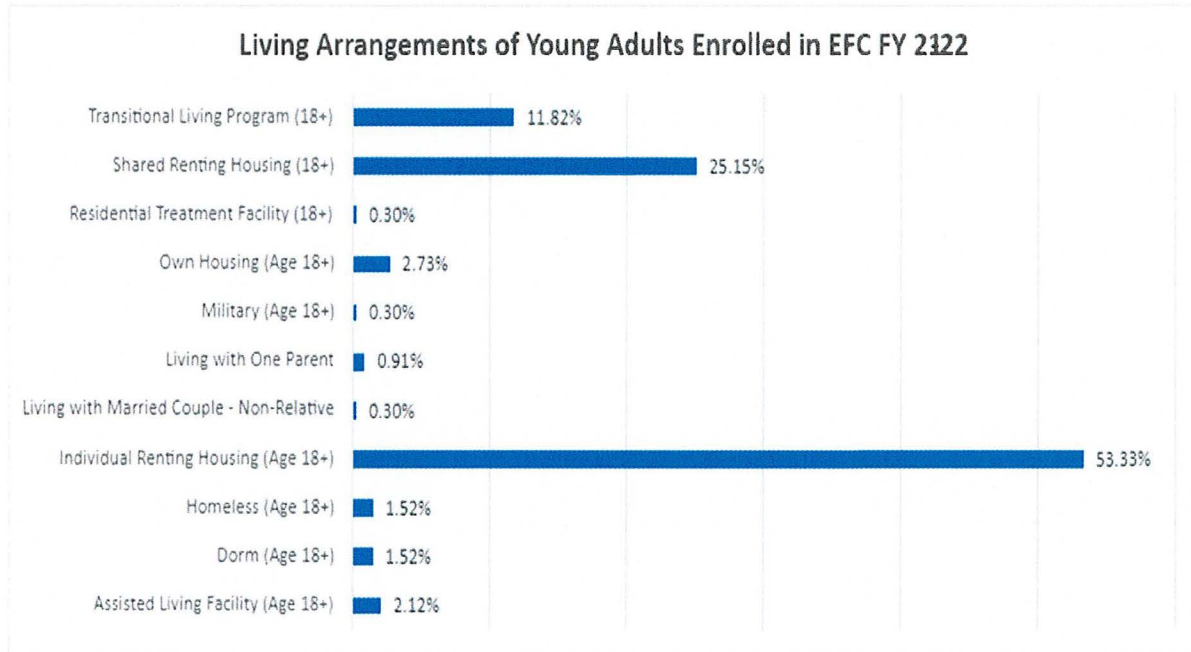
Number of Young Adults in Aftercare with a Recorded Period of Employment		
Lead Agency	2020-2021	2021-2022
Brevard Family Partnership	5	6
ChildNet-Broward	9	1
ChildNet-Palm Beach	3	1
Children's Network of SW Florida	0	2
Citrus Health Network	3	7
Communities Connected for Kids	0	0
Community Partnership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

## Housing

Safe and stable housing is a critical element in ensuring a young adult has the capacity to work towards self-sufficiency. Ensuring this basic need is met can provide a launch pad for clients to focus on achieving their short- and long-term goals. Young adults in EFC are documented as residing in out-of-home placements called Supervised Living Arrangements. Prior to placement, child welfare professionals must utilize a standardized form to assess the appropriateness of the living environment. The Supervised Living Arrangement Assessment for EFC ensures that young adults reside in the most suitable living arrangement for their needs. The young adult may reside under the following supervised living arrangements: Transitional Living Programs, Shared Renting Housing, residential treatment facility, own housing, military, living with one parent, living with a married couple, individual renting housing, dorm, or assisted living facility. While young adults participating in EFC are not considered homeless, young adults who choose to opt-out of the program or terminate from the program are at risk of homelessness.

Aftercare Independent Living Services provides young adults terminated from EFC a bridge back into the program. Services may include temporary financial assistance to avoid homelessness.

The following table indicated the living arrangements for young adults participating in EFC during FY 2021-2022. The majority of young adults in EFC (53 percent) are renting individual housing, with 25 percent sharing rental housing.



## Financial

Independent living service payments are reviewed monthly to determine the following:

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

The Legislature appropriated approximately \$40 million for FY 2021-2022 for independent living services. The total appropriation includes the cost of the case management associated with the delivery of services to young adults and the supplemental room and board payment to foster care parents for providing independent life skills and normalcy supports to youth ages 13 through 17.

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

## Transportation: Keys to Independence Program

The Florida Keys to Independence program is targeted toward youth in out-of-home care, young adults participating in EFC, or young adults between the ages of 15 and 21 participating in PESS. The Keys to Independence Program assists with services related to obtaining a driver's license and car insurance. Embrace Families, a Community-Based Care Lead Agency, is the contract holder and administers program. Requirements for a youth to participate in the program include: (1) an open dependency case that includes out-of-home care or achieved court-ordered permanency within the last six months (adoption, reunification, legal guardianship), and (2) approval of a primary caregiver who would use Prudent Parent Standards to meet the Florida Department of Highway and Motor Vehicle Safety (DHMVS) requirements for a learner's intermediate or full privilege driver's license. Access to Keys to Independence services were recently expanded to include those young adults who were in licensed care at the age of 18 years old and are currently receiving PESS.

Since the Keys Program began in December of 2014:

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

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

### **Health and Well-Being**

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

### **Connections**

As referenced earlier in the report in response to the ILSAC's permanent agreement proposal, the Office of Continuing Care works to emphasize and support the importance of long lasting, supportive connections to positive adults as a crucial component to achieving self-sufficiency. The Department has provided on-site agency training, included family-finding service capabilities, redesigned the "My Pathways to Success Plan" and is in the development of enhanced reporting capabilities to ensure that young adults in independent living have identified

supportive adults to assist in the transition to adulthood. The “My Pathways to Success Plan” includes a section that encourages discussion of mentor relationships and adult supportive connections.

The Family Finding Pilot initiative mentioned earlier in this report also provides an opportunity to locate both informal adult connections and family members that are willing and able to assist with the transition to adulthood. Data collection will allow for improved identification of the number of young adults with permanent connections to better assess the ability to engage young adults to identify and build lifelong connections.