

**INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES ADVISORY  
COUNCIL (ILSAC)**

**2023 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE SECRETARY**

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*\*This report’s headers and sections are standardized starting with the 2023 report and moving forward to ensure that all future ILSAC reports, and Council members provide information in a manner that complies with Florida Statue, accountability, reporting requirements for consistent readability to the Department and Legislature.*

## ILSAC Purpose & Scope

The Legislature established the Independent Living Services Advisory Council (“ILSAC” or “the Council”) for the purpose of reviewing and making recommendations concerning the implementation and operation of the Extended Foster Care (EFC) program (section 39.6251, Florida Statutes (F.S.)) and the Road-to-Independence (RTI) programs (section 409.1451, F.S.) which includes Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS), and Aftercare Services. These programs provide participants with the skills, education, and support necessary to become self-sufficient and leave foster care with a lifelong connection to a supportive adult.

The Council is required to assess the implementation and operation of EFC and the RTI programs and advise the Department of Children and Families (Department) on actions that would improve the ability of these programs’ services to meet established goals. The Council’s recommendations and the Department’s response to those recommendations are included in an annual report that the Department submits to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives pursuant to section 409.1451(7), F.S.

In 2021, the Florida Legislature strengthened and expanded the Department’s reporting requirements. Specifically, the Department’s report must include the most recent data regarding the status of and outcomes for young adults who turned 18 years of age while in foster care and an analysis of such data and outcomes in each of the following domains:

- Education
- Employment
- Housing
- Financial
- Transportation
- Health
- Well-being
- Connections

The Council collects additional data to help analyze the effective implementation of EFC and RTI programs.

This report includes the Council’s recommendations to the Secretary regarding actions that would improve Independent Living programs; the status of the implementation of programs; efforts to publicize the availability of the programs; the success of the services; problems identified, and recommendations for the Department or Legislature. Moreover, it allows stakeholders to understand the efficiency and effectiveness of programs related to the Council and points ahead to opportunities for continuous improvement in the areas of coordination of efforts, progress toward incremental goals, and the measuring and reporting of overall outcomes for the population served by the Council.

## 2023 Executive Summary

This executive summary is an overview of the 2023 ILSAC research, synthesizes key points for the Department, Secretary, and Florida Legislature.

Report Section	Recommendation
RTI Successes	Since the implementation of the Council’s Lead Agency Data Collection form in 2022, lead agencies have reported that the data collected has helped to inform discussions with their leadership and justify budget increases to hire additional staff who support the young adult populations.
RTI Barriers	There are identified documentation gaps that young adults entering EFC or RTI programs are prepared to transition successfully to adulthood. These gaps impact the effectiveness of the programs reviewed by the Council.
ILSAC Infrastructure Governance Documents	The Council recommends the implementation of the ILSAC Operating Policy & Procedure Manual. The manual and all its referenced documents, processes, and procedures will provide additional structure and consistency.
ILSAC Infrastructure Governance Documents	The Council recommends a legislative revision to section 409.1451(7) F.S., to include “The Advisory Council shall conduct operations and functioning of the Council in accordance with the ILSAC Operating Policy & Procedure Manual.”
Children Transitioning to Adulthood	The Council recommends that a more streamlined adherence to current operating procedures is established for transitioning children and youth under 18 years of age, as required by the Department.
Children Transitioning to Adulthood	More consistency among all providers, lead agencies, and Case Management Organizations in formal life skills will provide youth entering EFC or RTI better outcomes.
Action Follow-up	Track action items from ILSAC annual reports and any necessary follow-up actions until conclusion or completion.

## Efforts to Publicize

Feedback from this year's Lead Agency Data Collection Form identifies opportunities for improvement to publicize programs and benefits, relying mostly on word of mouth at events, phone calls, and youth board meetings in addition to scattered use of social media. The Council would need to investigate this further for clarification on what social media platforms are being used. Research shows TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram are the most used social media for 18–24-year-olds.

The Council would like to further explore efforts to publicize programs and benefits by distributing the social media demographic research results from 2023 to all lead agencies statewide, which will be attached with the 2024 Lead Agency Data Collection Form.

## This Year's ILSAC Focus & Analysis

Research conducted by the Council in 2023 included analysis of legislative changes and process implementations between 2018 and 2022. As a result, with the many changes currently being implemented, the Chair determined it would not be prudent to make new recommendations but instead focus on items from 2018 through 2023. As a result, in the 2023 session, the Council focused on three primary areas.

The first area is a more robust follow-up on Council Annual Reports. This includes outstanding actions from previous years' recommendations, resulting in the development and implementation of the Council infrastructure. The infrastructure includes documented policies, operating procedures, and standardized documents for all future Councils. The Lead Agency Data Collection Form was implemented in 2022 to gather more research from the lead agencies regarding their programs. In 2023, it was decided that the Data Collection Form would be added to the ILSAC governance documents for all future use and used to gather more information on a specific topic each year.

The second area addresses unresolved recommendations from previous reports and conducts further inquiry with the lead agencies to provide the Department with actionable recommendations. The Council decided to focus efforts on EFC allowance, housing needs, and the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) payment guide. These research and analysis sessions included addressing the Department's responses to the Council's 2019 and 2022 reports. However, council members raised additional concerns during the 2023 session showing that more in-depth and purposeful focus was needed in these areas.

Based on information gathered in the Lead Agency Data Collection Form, the Council learned that the average caseload for an Independent Living Case Manager is a 1:25 ratio. This average does not include support staff (e.g., Employment or Housing Specialists): nine (9) of the 20 circuits identified having a Housing Specialist and six (6) of the 20 circuits identified having an Employment Specialist. There are 13 of the 20 circuits operating Independent Living programs as a hybrid, meaning the lead agency has responsibility over some of the program while sub-contracting other portions of the program. Six (6) lead agencies reported that they provide all Independent Living Services and do not contract any services.

The third area the Council focused on was EFC Allowance / FSFN Payment Guide Table Analysis & Research. Since 2018, the Council has made recommendations regarding EFC Allowance. These previous recommendations led to a discussion about what the standardized allowance amount across the state and the difference between incidental and discretionary expenses. In 2023, the Council began an investigation into the EFC allowance amounts, FSFN Payment Guide updates, and discussing Needs Assessment Forms used throughout the state. However, after months of discussion, it was decided that EFC required a more focused effort on evaluating the EFC program from start to finish.

## RTI Successes

Through the Lead Agency Data Collection Form, the Council has collected various information from lead agencies and their contracted providers in partnership with the Department. This section will summarize the data collected by ILSAC by region as self-reported by lead agencies throughout the year. A few successes reported include increased youth engagement and hiring of former youth with lived experience as staff. Most reported that their biggest success this year was being able to hire and retain employees based on budget increases.

The Department, in collaboration with community stakeholders and youth with lived experience, created and updated the Transition Plan, Aftercare Application, and PESS Application which allowed for a more streamlined process.

## RTI Barriers

While there are many factors that impact RTI effectiveness, one barrier that became evident in 2023 is that although there are procedures, forms, and judicial oversight required, there is not currently one specific measure to reflect whether a youth is prepared to transition successfully to adulthood. Pinpointing effective preparation of the young adults in RTI programs would save resources and time of the Independent Living workers who manage 18–23-year-olds, as they must spend extra time training young adults in skills they may have already acquired. This also impacts the maintenance of collaborative relationships with housing partnerships statewide.

## Recommendations

### ILSAC Infrastructure and Governance Documents

#### **Problem Statement**

In reviewing the past ILSAC reports, they may benefit from a more formal infrastructure and governance documents such as policy, operating procedures, documents, research, and analysis tools. The Council's responses led to inconsistency in deliverables, and a longer learning curve for the incoming Chair, Co-Chair, and Secretary. There is no system to review and follow up on past recommendations. The Chair has the responsibility to set the vision and lead the Council in effective research, analysis, and recommendations. However, the structure is not documented to prevent future failures in processes and procedures.

#### **Research / Analysis**

The Chair applied processes and techniques learned from the private sector to develop and implement standardized documents and process improvements. These tools have been used in the 2023 ILSAC sessions.

#### **Recommendation**

The Council recommends the implementation of the attached ILSAC Operating Policy & Procedure Manual. This governance manual is to be reviewed with all Council members at the January in-person meeting and used consistently for all future ILSAC meetings. The manual and its referenced documents, processes, and procedures are to be adhered to by all future Council members. The Council believes that the implementation of standard operating procedures and tools will ensure the uniformity of future Councils, thus providing a consistent deliverable to the Department and the Florida Legislature. The documents identified as part of the Operating Policy & Procedure Manual are listed in the Document Control Log which is a part of the Manual.

The Council further recommends a legislative revision to section 409.1451(7) F.S., to include “The advisory council shall conduct operations and functioning of the council in accordance with the ILSAC Operating Policy & Procedure Manual”, to ensure that future Council members utilize the processes put into place.

## Guardian ad Litem – Post Age 18 Young Adults

### **Problem Statement**

Many young adults in the EFC program do not have a Guardian ad Litem assigned because the office is often discharged upon a youth’s 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Moreover, for various reasons, the Independent Living Case Manager or Transitioning Youth Specialist may not be made aware of the appointment of a Guardian ad Litem to the young adult when they were a minor.

A Guardian ad Litem serves a significant and critical role in a child’s life. With high case management turn-over, changes in placement, and often even varying educational settings, a Guardian ad Litem often becomes the only constant in a child’s life.

### **Research / Analysis**

This recommendation was originally submitted to the Department in 2018. The Department responded “*The Department is willing to work with the Florida Guardian ad Litem Office to explore the additional resources needed to better bolster and advocate for transitioning youth and young adults under the juvenile court’s jurisdiction pursuant to s.39.013, F.S.*” Further, the Council had not followed back up with this task so there was no actionable task recommended back to the Department.

### **Recommendation**

In follow-up discussions with the statewide Guardian ad Litem Office, their office will review internal procedures and processes for discharge of youth transitioning to adulthood. The Guardian ad Litem Office understands the intent of the Council’s investigation and challenges that may impact young adults’ success as they enter EFC or RTI programs. The Guardian ad Litem Office will review internal processes statewide for any opportunities to improve the discharge process for youth transitioning into EFC or RTI programs. The Council addresses this line item in effort to close the item.

## Children Transitioning to Adulthood

### **Problem statement**

While there are many factors that impact RTI effectiveness, one barrier that became evident in 2023 is that although there are procedures, forms, and judicial oversight required, more concrete data is needed to show that young adults entering EFC or RTI programs are prepared to transition successfully to adulthood. More specific and real-time data could save time and resources for the Independent Living staff who manage 18–23-year-olds, as they must spend extra time training young adults in skills, they may have already acquired. This also impacts the maintenance of collaborative relationships with housing partnerships statewide.

### **Research / Analysis**

Upon reviewing the 2023 Lead Agency Data Collection Forms there are many approaches to the oversight of formal Independent Living training and/or practice for youth while they are still minors. The Council understands that the entities will implement and facilitate the formal services and supports at their discretion that best fit their demographics as no circuit operates the same, but all partners must be accountable to ensure it is done.

## **Recommendation**

The Council recommends that the Department address the inconsistencies to follow currently documented procedures. For better outcomes, more consistency in the System of Care amongst children and youth's formal independent living skills is recommended. The referenced documents include, but are not limited to, CF-FSP 5444 Life Skills Progress Doc Log and CF-FSP 5426 Records Resource Exchanged Form.

## Follow-up from Previous Reports

### **Problem Statement**

In prior years, once the Council wrote the annual report and made recommendations to the Department, the Department published the report with their written responses back to the Council. The next year the report was reviewed by the Council and new recommendations or topics for the upcoming year were discussed. The problem has been that the Council has not readdressed or reviewed responses from the Department requiring further action from the Council. The effective closure of recommendations of the past has been unclear. The Department's responses and implementation of the Council recommendations fell into two categories: the first being implemented but without a closed loop with the Council to provide feedback and updates; the second being the Department's response to the Council was requesting the Council conduct further research and/or offer clarification. In the 2022 session, the Department again reminded the Council that some responses to the Council had not been reviewed or researched.

### **Research / Analysis**

To that end, the Council launched an initiative to track all recommendations and topics to their conclusion or completion. This project provides council members with clear direction on past recommendations and their status, and tracks topics that come up during the research and analysis period of the Council sessions, and topics of interest for further review. The list of action items is color-coded for easy readability and any items that are determined as closed and completed by the Council will appear on the list. Once complete, items will be deleted from the upcoming year's list.

### **Recommendation**

It is the Council's recommendation that the list continues to be utilized to document the recommendations of the Council and any follow up actions until conclusion or completion.

## Looking Ahead

In 2024, the Council will continue to utilize the color-coded list as a central repository of issues of concern to better prioritize and address topics in the planning stages of our working calendar. This process will assist the Council in remaining on task while not losing any topic raised during our investigation and research. The Council will continue to use the Lead Agency Data Collection forms to gain more insight into programmatic services and their implementation.

The Council intends to focus primarily on evaluating the EFC program in 2024. In reviewing past recommendations as well as the research conducted in the 2023 sessions, the Council will be reviewing current data, needed measurement milestones, review best practices in-state as well as out-of-state best practices, and incorporation of youth voice in the problem-solving process.

An additional critical focus in 2024, will be the further refinement of the Council's infrastructure to include process definition and document problem-solving tools to be taught to Council members. Additionally, by implementing a methodical approach to reviewing open issues and analyzing statewide gaps, it was learned, that the Council needs to address the necessity for defined subcommittee workgroups. By



implementing subcommittees, a more in-depth exploration can be achieved in the research of the EFC and RTI programs.

Finally, Council Members discussed the need to expand term limits as they apply specifically to Chair, Co-Chair, and/or Secretary, as well as revise Council Member term limits for the effectiveness of the Council's functioning. The Council is considering a recommendation for legislative revision to section 409.1451(7.2.c), F.S., from "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." to "*..., which may not exceed 4 years, with an option to extend term beyond 4 years with the commitment of the Council Member, a unanimous vote of the Council, agreement with the Department, and approval of the Secretary.*" A specific recommendation related to special appointment of Council leadership or term limits for effective leaders was discussed but not yet been explored.

## Council Members

The Council Roster as of September 18, 2023.

### Leadership:

Ginger Rockey-Johnson, cILS, cCAM, CRPS-F: Guardian ad Litem Office – Chair  
Regina Watson: Camelot Community Care – Co-Chair  
Morgan Clement: Embrace Families Community Based Care Lead Agency – Secretary

### Council Members:

Adam Briggs: CareerSource Florida, Inc  
Alison Fulford: Department of Juvenile Justice  
Brent McNeal: Department of Education  
Christine Frederick: FLITE Center  
Demarco Mott: Citrus FCN Youth Advisory Council  
Dietra Barfield: Camelot Community Care  
Eileen Geisler: ChildNet Community Based Care Lead Agency  
Heather DeFrancisco: Department of Children and Families – Regional  
John Watson: DCF Headquarters – Office of Continuing Care  
Lynda Thompson: Foster parent (National Foster Parent Association)  
Margie Dotson: Communities Connected for Kids Community Based Care Lead Agency  
Maria Batista: Youth Advisory Board  
Melissa Vergeson: Agency of Health Care Administration (AHCA)  
Meliza Frias, Esq.: Florida Foster Care Review  
Raul Catuy: Reconnecting the Dots  
Sara Pham: Sunshine State Health Plan  
Stephanie Lucas: Children's Network of SW FL Community Based Care Lead Agency

### Vacant Council Seat(s):

Department of Economic Opportunity

The Independent Living Services Advisory Council thanks the Department, the Secretary, and the Florida Legislature for your attention.

**Department of Children and Families  
Response to the  
Independent Living Services Advisory Council  
2023 Annual Report**

December 31, 2023

Shevaun Harris  
Secretary



Ron DeSantis  
Governor

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## **Introduction**

Since its inception in 2002, the Independent Living Services Advisory Council (the Council) has been responsible for providing recommendations on the implementation and operation of Independent Living services as part of a comprehensive report to the Legislature. As mandated in s. 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 2023 Annual Report, which covers the 2022-23 state fiscal year. As required by statute, the report also includes updates on youth and young adult outcomes within the Independent Living service array.

## **Department Responses to the Council's Recommendations**

The Department extends sincere appreciation for the unwavering support and dedication of the Council and its members. With continued collaboration between the Department and the Council, Florida will continue to make substantial strides in improving the prospects and well-being of the youth and young adults in our care. The Council proposes the Department and stakeholder groups work toward the following recommendations:

### **1. INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES ADVISORY COUNCIL INFRASTRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE REVISION**

The 2022-2023 Council developed an Operating Policy and Procedure Manual to serve as a comprehensive guide for its future Council operations. The manual outlines the Council's procedures and tools and is designed to ensure that the Council's work and reporting are consistent, and that it delivers a reliable and uniform report to the Department and the Florida Legislature. The Department supports the implementation of the manual and applauds the Council's effort to increase efficiency and productivity by streamlining the onboarding process. This effort will allow the Council more time to focus on developing and implementing new initiatives.

This revision will reinforce the importance of following the established processes and procedures. However, the Department recognizes the importance of flexibility and openness to revision as new members bring new ideas and perspectives, and as the Council's work evolves. The manual should be updated periodically to reflect these changes, so that the Council can continue to function effectively. As an alternative to statutory changes, the Department will also work with the Council on approving the operating procedures and exploring policy or rule to enact this recommendation.

The Department believes the addition of the Council's Operating Policy & Procedure Manual is a valuable resource that will help the Council achieve its goals. By implementing, adhering to, and updating the Operating Policy and Procedure Manual, the Council can ensure more productive meetings and overall reporting.

### **2. GUARDIAN AD LITEM'S REVIEW OF INTERNAL POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR POST AGE 18 YOUNG ADULTS**

The Department acknowledges the significance of young adults in the Extended Foster Care program maintaining their relationship with a Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) even after age 18. The Department has shared the recommendation made by the Council for the GAL to review their ability to continue to support youth transitioning to adulthood. As highlighted by the Council, many

young adults joining the EFC program do not have a GAL, or the assigned Guardian is discharged upon a youth's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Additionally, the Independent Living Case Manager or Transitioning Youth Specialist may not be informed about the prior appointment of a GAL when a young person enters an Independent Living program. Understanding the essential role played by the GAL in advocating for youth in the dependency system, the Department recognizes this as a positive step toward improving the transition process for youth and young adults and remains interested in receiving an update on this recommendation from the Council in future ILSAC reporting.

### 3. THE COUNCIL'S RECOMMENDATION FOR THE DEPARTMENT'S REVIEW OF SYSTEM OF CARE FOR YOUTH TRANSITIONING TO ADULTHOOD.

The Department recognizes the challenges in preparing young adults for adulthood and supports the Council's recommendation that the Department continue its work towards a more consistent service delivery, and better preparation for youth transitioning to independence. To better assist this population and enhance service delivery, the Department established the Office of Continuing Care (OCC) in October 2021. The OCC is dedicated to helping youth transition to Florida's post-18 Independent Living Programs. In 2022-2023, the OCC conducted regular on-site visits and training sessions for Lead Agencies and their providers, with a specific focus on Independent Living preparation and collaboratively working with case management to serve seamlessly from teen years to adulthood. In response to feedback from stakeholders and legislative priorities, the OCC transformed the "My Pathways to Success Plan" into a comprehensive tool for gathering essential details in preparation for adulthood. Additionally, through collaboration with the Department's Office of Quality and Innovation (Quality Office), quality assurance reviews are incorporating relevant Independent Living specific questions into the "Life of Case reviews". As a result, the Quality Office can now provide real-time feedback to ensure proper assessments, planning, judicial oversight, and pertinent document availability for youth during the transition on specific cases selected for monitoring.

The implementation of site visits, training, strengthening of transition planning, and quality assurance oversight has strengthened the connection between DCF and service providers. Consequently, significant improvements have been identified in Independent Living data measures. For example, increased completion rates for transition planning (up 115% in the previous FY) and higher administration rates for life skills assessments (up 90%) to identify necessary skills for adulthood.

The OCC has made great strides in aiding young people as they transition into adulthood. The emphasis on training, improving quality, and offering technical support to lead agencies is a positive step in the right direction. Nevertheless, the Department recognizes that there are still obstacles to overcome. It will persist in its efforts to create more uniform processes for youth entering EFC or RTI programs and ensure that all service providers are consistently held responsible, in line with the Council's advice. This will include the addition of an Independent Living curriculum that is presently in development. The curriculum will provide Lead Agency staff who work with youth and young adults an opportunity to receive a specialty track training designed to enhance the knowledge of independent living requirements, policies, and best practices which will further consistent service delivery statewide.

### 4. THE COUNCIL'S RECOMMENDATION FOR COLOR\_CODED ACTION LIST

The Department supports the Council's recommendation to implement the color-coded action list and will retain for review by future Councils. The list has proven to be a valuable tool that provides the status and clear direction on past recommendations. The list also tracks topics that come up

during the research and analysis period of Council meetings. The list has been used to consolidate all recommendations from 2018 to 2023. The Department agrees the list will help to ensure that the Council's recommendations are tracked and followed up on and that the Council has a clear understanding of the outcomes of its recommendations directly from the Department.

This concludes the Department's responses, and the Department would like to extend sincere appreciation for the unwavering support and hard work of the Council and its members. With continued collaboration Florida will continue to make substantial strides in improving the prospects and well-being of the youth and young adults in our care. In line with the commitment to continuous improvement through in-depth analysis, the next section of the report provides updates on the Independent Living Programs for the Fiscal Year 2022-23.

## **Independent Living Programs Overview: Data and Outcomes**

Consistent with the Department's commitment to continuous improvement through in-depth analysis and intentional actions, this section of the report provides updates on the Independent Living Programs for fiscal year 2022-23:

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

Extended Foster Care is available to current and former foster youth who turned 18 years of age in the Department's legal custody or in licensed foster care and allows the opportunity to continue residing in or return to licensed foster care or a supervised living arrangement. Extended Foster Care provides continued case management services, court oversight, room and board, and other services needed to ensure success as an independent adult.

Eligibility Requirements for EFC include:

Completing secondary education or a program leading to an equivalent credential; or

Enrolled in post-secondary or vocational education; or

Employed for at least 80 hours/month; or

Participating in a program or activity that promotes or eliminates barriers to employment (i.e., job skills program); or

Unable to participate in one of the above full time due to a documented disability.

Young adults are eligible to remain in Extended Foster Care until their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, or until the age of 22 years old if they are actively participating in EFC and have a documented disability.

### **Road to Independence Programs**

Postsecondary Education Support Services (PESS)- s. 409.1451(2), Florida Statutes, (F.S.)

PESS is available to former foster youth who turned 18 years of age while in the legal custody of the Department and spent a total of at least six months in licensed out-of-home care before turning 18; or are 18 years of age and was adopted after the age of 16 from foster care or placed with a court-approved dependency guardian after spending at least 6 months in licensed care within the 12 months immediately preceding such placement or adoption.

PESS payment stipends are monthly in the amount of \$1,720. Prior to receiving the PESS stipend, the Department assesses for financial literacy, executive functioning, self-regulation, and similar skills. PESS provides continued transitional and financial planning that includes assistance in meeting young adults current and future needs.

Additional eligibility requirements include that a young adult:  
Have earned a standard high school diploma or equivalent.  
Has been admitted for enrollment as a full-time student (9 credit hours) at an eligible Florida Bright Futures post-secondary educational institution.

PESS support is available for eligible young adults the age of 23 years old.

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

The Aftercare program is established in section 409.1451(3), F.S. This temporary program is intended to provide a safety net for young adults who turn 18 years of age in the legal custody of the Department or in licensed foster care. Services are designed to help transition either to independence or to help become eligible for Extended Foster Care or PESS. Aftercare Services can include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Mentoring or tutoring
- Mental Health Services
- Substance abuse counseling
- Life skills classes
- Parenting classes
- Job and Career skills training
- Counselor consultations
- Temporary financial assistance
- Financial literacy skills training
- Emergency Financial Assistance

Aftercare services are available to eligible young adults until age 23. To be eligible for Aftercare, a young adult must complete the following:

1. Application for Aftercare and
2. Aftercare Services Plan, which is reassessed every 90 days.

Table 1 illustrates the number of young adults served in each Independent Living program by Lead Agency during the past two State Fiscal Years (SFYs). Florida has experienced a 22% increase in Extended Foster Care participation, and a 13% increase in the total number of young adults receiving services (Aftercare, EFC and PESS) compared to the previous SFY.

**Table 1.** Number of Young Adults Receiving Independent Living Services by Program Type, Lead Agency, and SFY

Lead Agency	2021-2022			2022-2023		
	Aftercare	EFC	PESS	Aftercare	EFC	PESS
Brevard Family Partnership	28	33	14	27	104	11
ChildNet Inc	22	166	112	24	166	112
ChildNet Palm Beach	14	126	68	11	118	62
Children's Network of SW Florida	8	41	58	8	65	34
Citrus Health Network	39	229	198	48	269	186
Communities Connected for Kids	16	28	25	11	28	26
Community Partnership for Children	8	49	37	16	76	47
Family Support Services Suncoast	42	104	62	49	105	55
Children's Network Hillsborough	57	87	40	57	146	60
Embrace Families	32	117	58	38	145	57
Families First Network	12	98	28	11	100	19
St Johns County Commission	5	12	8	0	12	8
Family Support Services	36	97	33	23	107	31
Heartland for Children	32	79	23	37	91	29
Kids Central Inc	39	28	27	54	54	39
Kids First of Florida Inc	0	16	10	0	27	13
NWF Health Network-East	16	55	35	19	67	27
Partnership for Strong Families	10	16	12	6	16	5
Safe Children Coalition	17	37	16	29	37	16
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>433</b>	<b>1,418</b>	<b>864</b>	<b>467</b>	<b>1,733</b>	<b>857</b>
**Source: OCWDRU #1089, FSN Data Repository						



## Education

For each Lead Agency, Table 2 displays the number of young adults who have achieved a High School Diploma, GED, or Special Diploma in the past two SFYs. The data indicate a significant increase (50%) in degree obtainment compared to the previous SFY.

**Table 2.** Young Adults who have a High School Diploma, GED Certificate, or Certificate of Completion/Special Diploma

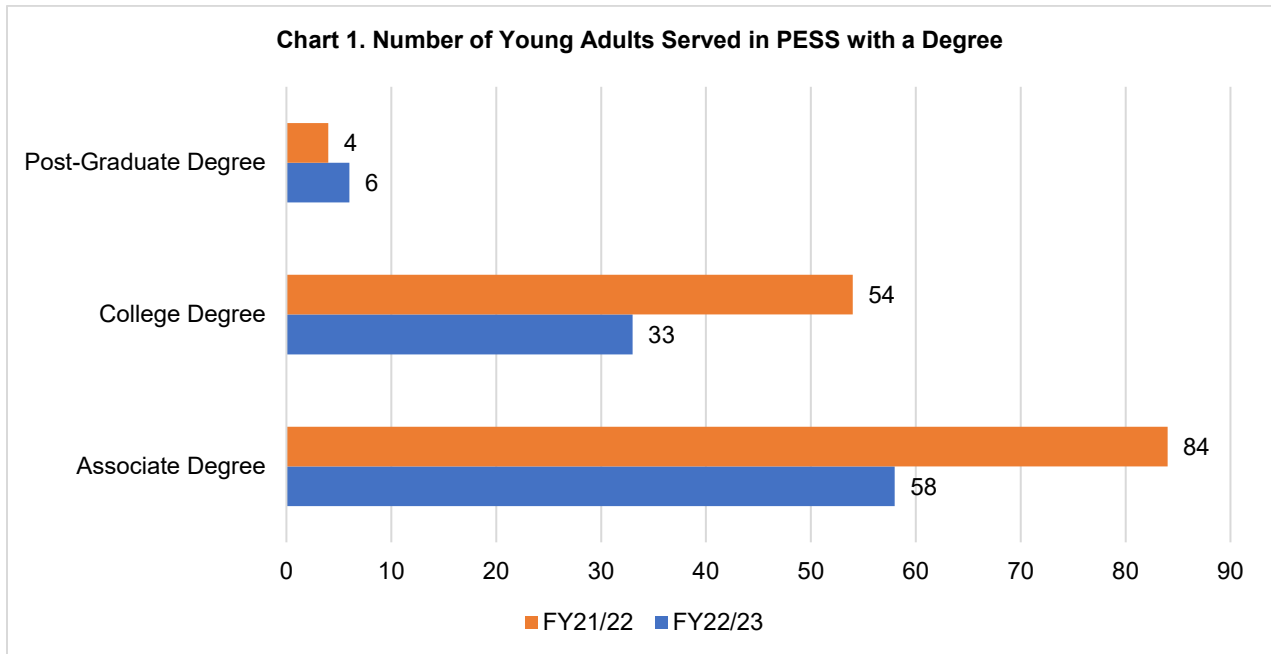
LEAD AGENCY	2021-2022	2022-2023
Brevard Family Partnership	19	30
ChildNet-Broward	60	110
ChildNet-Palm Beach	30	54
Children's Network of SW Florida	36	21
Citrus Health Network	73	207
Communities Connected for Kids	17	4
Community Partnership for Children	24	18
Family Support Services- Suncoast	81	71
Children's Network Hillsborough	39	83
Embrace Families	66	99
Families First Network	24	53
Family Integrity Program	2	8
Family Support Services of North Florida	31	31
Heartland for Children	32	20
Kids Central, Inc.	19	33
Kids First of Florida, Inc.	4	9
Northwest Florida Health Network	27	58
Partnership for Strong Families	19	8
Safe Children Coalition	27	25
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>630</b>	<b>942</b>

## Education (continued)

Chart 1 reflects the number of young adults enrolled in the PESS program who have successfully obtained a post-secondary or graduate degree in the past two SFYs. While there has been a decline in the number of young adults achieving degrees in SFY 2022-2023, it is important to acknowledge that young adults have relayed challenges due to the transition between online platforms and in-person classroom learning which could negatively impact degree obtainment.

As a result of increasing the monthly amount to \$1,720, young adults have expressed more freedom to solely focus on pursuing a post-secondary education. Furthermore, the Department has made significant improvements to their My Pathways to Success Plan. These revisions now include transitional planning for PESS participants, which aims to identify and address any obstacles that may prevent them from obtaining a post-secondary degree and provides more personalized and targeted assistance for PESS participants.

Through these concerted efforts, driven by youth engagement and an attentive eye on emerging trends, The Department anticipates significant improvements in post-secondary degree obtainment in forthcoming reports.



## Employment

Table 3 presents Lead Agency data on the count of young adults involved in the EFC Program who have been employed in the past two SFYs. It is important to note that obtaining employment is not the sole requirement for eligibility in this program.

Recent data suggests that more program participants are choosing to pursue secondary education as the activity that qualifies them for the program as represented in the increase in secondary degree obtainment. Consequently, there has been a slight decline in the number of young adults in the program who have reported employment compared to the previous SFY.

**Table 3.** Number of Young Adults in EFC with a Recorded Period of Employment

Lead Agency	2021-2022	2022-2023
Brevard Family Partnership	14	18
ChildNet-Broward	29	26
ChildNet-Palm Beach	8	6
Children's Network of SW Florida	16	14
Citrus Health Network	63	75
Communities Connected for Kids	1	3
Community Partnership for Children	2	1
Family Support Services- Suncoast	24	24
Children's Network Hillsborough	46	44
Embrace Families	66	59
Families First Network	63	51
Family Integrity Program	6	9
Family Support Services of North Florida	53	33
Heartland for Children	26	28
Kids Central, Inc.	6	3
Kids First of Florida, Inc.	6	8
Northwest Florida Health Network	18	18
Partnership for Strong Families	3	3
Safe Children Coalition	23	13
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>473</b>	<b>436</b>
Source: OCWDRU #1169, FSFN Data Repository		

## Employment (continued)

Table 4 provides the number of young adults who received Aftercare for the previous two SFY's and had a recorded period of employment. The number of young adults who have recorded employment in Aftercare has increased 62% from the previous SFY.

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 the recently updated Aftercare Services Plan, will assist with transitioning the young adult toward financial self-sufficiency.

**Table 4.** Number of Young Adults in Aftercare with a Recorded Period of Employment

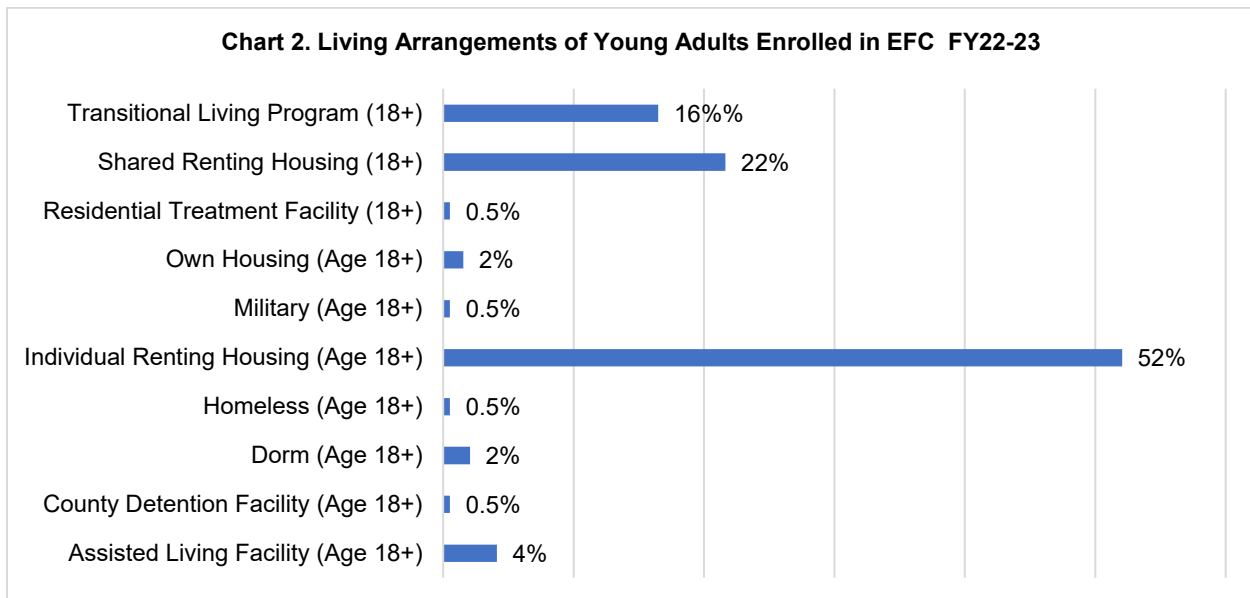
Lead Agency	2021-2022	2022-2023
Brevard Family Partnership	6	9
ChildNet-Broward	1	5
ChildNet-Palm Beach	1	0
Children's Network of SW Florida	2	5
Citrus Health Network	7	22
Communities Connected for Kids	0	0
Community Partnership for Children	1	0
Family Support Services- Suncoast	9	2
Children's Network Hillsborough	10	5
Embrace Families	10	21
Families First Network	1	31
Family Integrity Program	0	2
Family Support Services of North Florida	9	5
Heartland for Children	9	11
Kids Central, Inc.	6	1
Kids First of Florida, Inc.	0	8
Northwest Florida Health Network	1	0
Partnership for Strong Families	1	0
Safe Children Coalition	7	4
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>131</b>
Source: OCWDRU #1169, FSFN Data Repository		

## Housing

Ensuring that young adults have a safe and stable home is crucial for them to become self-sufficient. By meeting their housing needs, they can focus on achieving their short- and long-term goals. In the case of young adults in the EFC program they work with their Independent Living Team to identify a safe and appropriate place to live and enter into a Supervised Living Arrangement. Prior to placement, child welfare professionals use a standardized form to assess the suitability of the living environment. This Supervised Living Arrangement Assessment for EFC ensures that young adults are placed in the most appropriate housing option for their unique needs. These options include Transitional Living Programs, Shared Renting Housing, residential treatment facilities, their own housing, military housing, living with a single guardian, living with a married couple, individual renting housing, dormitories, and assisted living facilities.

If young adults are terminated from the EFC program, Aftercare Services can provide them with a way back into the program and prevent homelessness in the gap. Any young adult who qualifies for Aftercare who becomes homeless can request services and action is taken to solve their housing situation within 24 hours. This rapid response is imperative in ensuring the temporary crisis does not continue.

Chart 2 displays the living arrangements young adults enrolled in EFC for the SFY 2022-2023. It indicates that the largest portion of young adults in EFC (52%) utilize individual housing, 21% choose to share rental housing, and 16% are residing in a transitional living program.



## Financial

During SFY 2022-2023, the Department's Office of Lead Agency and Managing Entity Financial Accountability provided technical assistance and oversight to DCF's Lead Agency contract managers and staff throughout the state to ensure payments were recorded accurately in FSFN. Independent Living service payments were reviewed monthly to determine the following:

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

**Table 5.** FY 2022-2023 Independent Living Service Payments

	SFY22-23	GAA
Independent Living (Recurring Base)	\$	38,195,652
SB 80/96 Requirements - Rec GR	\$	1,683,938
ISSUE 4000817 IL Case Coordination / Pre-IL Life Skills & Normalcy - Rec GR	\$	5,710,752
ISSUE 4000817 Increase in PESS Monthly Payment - Rec GR	\$	8,352,000
<b>SFY 22-23 Appropriation</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>53,942,342</b>

During FY 2022-2023, the legislature appropriated nearly \$54 million for Independent Living services. The total appropriation includes the cost of 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. If a Lead Agency exceeds its Independent Living allocation, the excess comes out of its core funding.

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

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

### Transportation: Keys to Independence Program

In 2014, the Florida Keys to Independence Act was enacted into law. This program is specifically designed for youth and young adults ages 15 through 21 who are in out-of-home care, participating in Extended Foster Care, or the recent expansion to include young adults involved

in the Post-Secondary Education and Support Services Program. The program seeks to aid its target population in obtaining a driver's license and car insurance.

As of June 2023:

- 2,474 youth and young adults in the state of Florida have obtained a learner's permit.
- 1,314 have obtained a Florida driver's license.
- 9,733 youth and young adults have been enrolled in the Keys to Independence program statewide and 3,709 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 170 young adults in Florida enrolled in PESS who are currently receiving services through the Keys to Independence Program.

In addition to providing support through the Keys to Independence program, young adults can also discuss obtaining or accessing reliable transportation and other resources like bus schedules, public transportation or ride sharing through transition staffing with the Department's My Pathway to Success Plan. Through the combined efforts of the Keys to Independence program and the standardized My Pathways to Success Plan, the Department has observed a rise in young adults' ability to acquire driver's licenses without incurring any expenses, thanks to the additional support, resources, and incentives that motivate them to actively participate.

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

Young adults in the EFC program can receive Child in Care Medicaid until they turn 21. If an 18-year-old was already receiving Medicaid while under the custody of the Department, they will automatically qualify for the Sunshine Health Child Welfare Specialty Medicaid Plan until they turn 26. The Department and Sunshine Health continue their collaboration to expand programs and benefits to improve health outcomes which include CARE grants that provide up to \$150 per child per year for activities promoting healthy development. Additionally, plan members receive free transportation to medical appointments.

To make sure that youth and young adults in our post-18 programs receive necessary services, the Department has introduced a new reporting system called the "Young Adult Receiving Services Report" (YARS). This report allows caseworkers to identify any early issues or problems and plan interventions accordingly.

### **Connections**

The Department understands the value of strong bonds between caring adults and young adults in Independent Living Programs. These relationships are vital in helping young adults reach their goals and overcome obstacles. Feedback from site visits and training has emphasized the long-lasting impact of these connections. With the guidance of the OCC, the Department continues to actively promote the use of peer connections. Local Lead Agencies and their providers have increased the hiring of young adults with personal experience to form relationships with their peers, guiding them through the transition to adulthood.

Moreover, the Department offers resources to lead agencies to promote the development of supportive relationships. The enhanced My Pathway to Success Plan, along with statewide training initiatives, have placed a strong emphasis on the importance of adult support networks and mentors. To aid both staff and young adults in locating mentors and forging positive connections, facilitator guides were created and contain a specific section dedicated to the

identification and cultivation of supportive adults. In cases where no supportive adults are identified, a documented plan must be formulated to outline the steps for finding a mentor or establishing a lasting positive connection that will extend into adulthood.

Recent expansion of the Hope Florida program also serves as a resource to identify caring and committed adults for Florida's youth. Hope Florida – A Pathway to Promise that will assist youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood by providing a long-term mentor and offering a strong start to their future. Utilizing both Guardian ad Litem volunteers and Department of Elder Affairs' Hope Heroes, youth aging out of foster care are paired with a trained mentor, who will provide guidance, motivation, emotional support, and help to develop skills and resources for their future.

Through the new YARS report discussed on Pg. 13, implementation data outcomes on permanent connections will be available. This report captures information about these connections, enabling effective data collection and evaluation for future reporting. In doing so, the Department aims to better equip young adults with lifelong connections as they transition into adulthood.