



**NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER
FOR FOSTER CARE
& PERMANENCY PLANNING**

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INFORMATION PACKET: *Transition to Independent Living*

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Providing a Smooth Transition to Independent Living
The Struggles of Youth Exiting Foster Care

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Entering adulthood is an extremely daunting and stressful time for most teenagers. Fortunately the majority of teenagers have support networks to provide them with guidance to transition into this next stage of their life. In most family settings adolescents are taught essential life skills such as cooking, maintaining a home, how to search for a job, and management of finances. These adolescents can ease into adulthood, with the secure knowledge that they have someone to back them up if they do not immediately succeed. They do not have a time limit where they are automatically expected to become an adult.

Every year approximately 20,000 18-year-old youth exit the foster care system with the expectation that they will be self-sufficient (Courtney, M. E., Barth, R. P., 1999, p. 1). A large percentage of these young people have spent a great deal of their youth moving from one foster home to another. Most of these youth never reunite with their family. Having not received the support and training to prepare them for the life challenges that are in front of them, they are often unprepared for life after foster care. As a result these young people encounter struggles with homelessness, difficulty securing employment, incarceration, and pregnancy.

To assist this neglected population of youth, in 1986 the Federal Independent Living Program was enacted and added to section 477 to Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. This program provided funds for youth age 16 and older who have been or who are in foster care to make the transition to becoming self-sufficient adults (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, 1999). These funds were used for counseling, educational assistance, life-skills training, and vocational support.

In 1999 after realizations were made about the limiting power the Independent Living Program had on improving the lives of young people who have been emancipated from foster care, President Clinton signed into law The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, which increases

federal support to states for independent living programs. Under this new legislation, named in honor of the late Senator John H. Chafee, the federal allotment for Title IV-E independent living programs doubled from \$70 million per year to \$140 million (Casey Family Programs, n.d. para 1.). By increasing state's resources, and strengthening accountability, this new legislation has enabled states to work with young people aging out of foster care to achieve a fulfilling future, that is filled with support and encouragement.

Key Elements of The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999

On December 14, 1999 President Clinton signed into law The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, which increases federal support to states for independent living programs (Casey Family Programs, n.d. para 1.)

This new legislation, named in honor of the late Senator John H. Chafee, replaces the former Title IV-E Independent Living Initiative, which was established in 1986.

The following information was excerpted from the Child Welfare League of America fact sheet on The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999.

Following are the provisions of the act:

Assist youths to make the transition from foster care to independent living.

- Doubled the Independent Living Program federal funding from \$70 million to \$140 million a year.
- Funds can be used to help youths make the transition from foster care to self-sufficiency by offering them the education, vocational and employment training necessary to obtain employment and/or prepare for post secondary education, training in daily living skills, substance abuse prevention, pregnancy prevention and preventive health activities, and connections to dedicated adults.
- States must contribute a 20 percent state match for Independent Living Program funds.
- States must use federal training funds (authorized by Title IV-E of the Social Security Act) to help foster parents, adoptive parents, group home workers, and case managers to address issues confronting adolescents preparing for independent living.

Recognizes the need for special help for young people ages 18 to 21 who have left foster care.

- States must use some portion of their funds for assistance and services for older youths who have left foster care but have not reached age 21.
- States can use up to 30 percent of their Independent Living Program funds for room and board for youths ages 18 to 21 who have left foster care.
- States may extend Medicaid to 18, 19 and 20-year-olds who have been emancipated from foster care. Access to the new independent living funds is not contingent upon states exercising that option.

Offers states greater flexibility in designing their independent living programs.

- States can serve children of various ages who need help preparing for self-sufficiency (not just those ages 16 and over as in previous law), children at various stages of achieving independence, and children in different parts of the state differently; they also can use a variety of providers to deliver independent living services.
- The asset limit for the federal foster care program is changed to allow youths to have \$10,000 in savings (rather than the current \$1,000 limit) and still be eligible for foster care payments.

Establishes accountability for states in implementing the independent living programs.

- The Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) must, in consultation with federal, state, and local officials, advocates, youth service providers, and researchers, develop outcome measures to assess state performance. Outcomes include educational attainment, employment, avoidance of dependency, homelessness, non-marital childbirth, high-risk behaviors, and incarceration.

- HHS must also collect data necessary to track how many children are receiving services, services received and provided, and implement a plan for collecting needed information. HHS must also report to Congress and propose state accountability procedures and penalties for non-compliance.
- States must coordinate the independent living funds with other funding sources for similar services.
- States are subject to penalty if they misuse funds or fail to submit required data on state performance.
- \$2.1 million is set aside for a national evaluation and for technical assistance to states in assisting youths transitioning from foster care.

Outcomes for Youth Formerly Served By the Foster Care System

Statistical Fact Sheet

The following statistics were compiled by the Child Welfare League of America in 1999. Please note: Recent data on the results of the enactment of the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program has not been published yet.

Study	Homelessness	Education	Employment	Incarceration	Early Parenthood	Cost-to-Community
Barth (1990) This study documents the experiences of youth who emancipated from foster care.	30% reported having no housing or having to move every week.	At follow-up, 45% of 21 year olds had completed high school	75% were working, with an average income of \$10,000.	31% of youth had been arrested while 26% had served jail time.	40% reported a pregnancy since discharge, most were unplanned.	Almost 40% received AFDC or general assistance funds.
Cook (1991) The study examined the impact of independent living services on enhancing the ability of foster youth to be self-sufficient, 2.5 to 4 years post-discharge.	25% reported at least one night of homelessness.	54% had completed high school.	38% maintained employment for one year.	No data reported.	60% of the women had given birth.	40% were a cost to the community.
Alexander & Huberty (1993) The study was conducted with a sample of former foster youth from The Villages in Indiana, with an average age of 22 years	The average number of moves during the last five years was 7.4 .	27% had some college or vocational training.	49% were employed, compared with 67% of 18-24 year olds in the general population.	Almost 42% had been arrested	No data reported.	14% received assistance in the form of food stamps, general assistance, and/or AFDC.
Courtney & Piliavin (1998) The study looked at foster youth transitions to adulthood, 12 to 18 months post-discharge.	12% reported living on the street or in a shelter since discharge.	At 12 to 18 months post-discharge, 55% had completed high school.	50% were employed, & the average weekly wage ranged from \$31 to \$450 .	18% experienced post-discharge incarceration	No data reported.	32% received public assistance.

Standards for Independent Living Programs

Transitioning into adulthood is an extremely complex and frightening time for young people who are exiting the foster care system. They are now faced with the daunting tasks of securing housing; managing their finances; conducting day- to day life skills such as cleaning and cooking; planning for future development through the pursuit of higher education or vocational training; and socially functioning as an adult in society. Child welfare groups throughout the country have devised programs to help adolescents develop independent living skills and obtain the resources they need in order to successfully transition into adulthood.

In 1989 the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) devised the Standards for Independent Living. Considered a comprehensive model for independent living programs, these standards were included in the 1999 Foster Care Independence Act.

Following are the key elements of the CWLA Standards for Independent Living (adapted by The Institute of Applied Research in “A Review of Literature on Independent Living of Youths in Foster and Residential Care”):

Assumptions of the Standards

The CWLA standards, which are under review and revision currently, define the target group for independent living (IL) services as young people separated from their homes who are in need of obtaining the skills necessary to live healthy, productive and responsible lives as self-sufficient adults. The standards assume the primary value of the biological family and the importance of reuniting children who have been removed with their parents whenever possible. When reunification is not possible, the standards assume that:

- Planning for independent living requires a clearly stated written plan.
- Youths should be involved in the IL planning process.

- The earlier the process toward self-sufficiency can begin, the more effective will be the result.

Planning for independent living requires realistic time frames that take into account the absence of the security of a stable family in the lives of youths in out-of-home care.

- Post-emancipation services may be necessary for youths.
- Foster parents and child welfare workers must be available to provide support and to serve as role models and instructors of youths.
- Biological families should be included in the IL preparation process to the fullest extent possible.

Coordination

Coordination of the service delivery system is a primary emphasis of the standards.

Coordination implies a sense of shared purpose of the various elements of the service system necessary to promote independent living and clear definitions of roles and responsibilities of each participating agency and individual. The following should be linked together in a coordinated IL program.

- Social work services by caseworkers, social workers, counselors, and others are essential.
- The program must ensure linkage with educational services, including assessment and career guidance and help for the youth in negotiating access to schools of various kinds. This will include special education and alternative educational programs.
- Linkage to employment services should be a part of any IL program, including assessment, access to community employment and training programs, training in work habits, job leads, and job development.
- Health services must be available to the youths, including services to pregnant teens and teen parents.

- Help in finding suitable living arrangements is essential. Such housing services should include education about housing choices, procedures in finding and maintaining housing, tenants rights education, and advocacy to obtain adequate, affordable housing.
- Legal services should be available to youths in the IL program.
- Socialization, culture and recreational services such as interacting with adult role models, peer support, and community service programs are important as well.
- Aftercare services should be available, including financial assistance, employment counseling and support, crisis counseling, emergency shelters, housing assistance, information and referral services, community service opportunities, peer support programs, and advocacy.

Social Work

The CWLA standards emphasize the need for the social work process. Among other elements, the standards recommend the use of a team approach, formal and informal experiences and instruction, experiential learning, and group and individual counseling. Caseloads of workers who are providing case management and coordination services should be no larger than 20 youths. Assessment of personal and life skills is a critical component of the program. The social worker should be responsible for insuring that the child has opportunities to learn independent living skills and that a transition plan is in place for the youth.

Independent Living Skills.

Youths need assistance in a number of areas that will be important for their adult life. The CWLA standards include a focus on the following areas:

- Help to the youth in assessing his or her own strengths and needs.
- Learning how to identify and define his or her own problems.
- Learning how to perceive options and make choices.

- Understanding of the sources of stress and how to manage it.
- Planning for the future.
- How to obtain information about a family's personal, medical, and social history.
- Understanding and coping with past losses, rejection, and anger.
- How to locate, obtain and maintain a residence.
- Personal care.
- Locating and using community resources.
- Forming meaningful adult relationships.

Residential Services.

Finally, an independent living program should include a continuum of residential services. These will include the standard out-of-home arrangements as a start: emergency care, foster family care, group homes, and residential treatment centers. The program should also include, as appropriate, special IL arrangements in residential treatment centers and group homes, supervised apartments, semi-supervised apartment, and boarding homes. As will be shown below, a broader array of IL arrangements has developed since the CWLA standards were written.

Independent Living Model Programs

United Friends of the Children – Bridges to Independence, CA

The core of the Bridges to Independence program is 237 beds in apartment units throughout L.A. County, generally in safe, multiethnic neighborhoods that are reserved for 18- to 20-year-old recent graduates of the foster care system. Seventy percent of the beds are clustered inside apartment buildings leased from the county's Community Development Commission. The rest are scattered in conventional apartment buildings.

Young people come to the Bridges program through referrals from social workers or care providers, or through self-referrals. The program is geared for a middle category of emancipated youth who can function without direct supervision, but who face imminent risk of homelessness and require additional support to achieve self-sufficiency. Once accepted, each newcomer moves into a fully furnished, utilities-included apartment, and each is assigned to a DCFS caseworker. These social workers handle caseloads of 18–30 participants each, well below the standard of up to 50 youth carried by DCFS staff who work with foster children prior to emancipation.

Participants receive \$200 per month to buy groceries, and they get job search assistance, transportation support, health and dental information, and child care (if they need it). All Bridges participants must hand over 25 percent their earnings each month, like a rent payment. This money is held in trust until they graduate from the program, at which point it is returned in a lump sum and typically applied to first-month's rent and a security deposit for a permanent residence (Kellam, S., 2001, p. 20).

Additionally, the Bridges Career Center has been successful in actively advocating and developing links between youth and entry-level jobs with benefits. They provide extensive supports (e.g., coaches in the workplace) to ensure that the employment experience is positive

and that the youth remains in the job as long as possible. (Ansell, D., Correia, P. III, Copeland, R., Sheehy, A. Jr., Oldham, E., & Zanghi, M., 2001, p. 31)

Connecticut Department of Children and Families

Even prior to the enactment of the Chafee Independent Living Program, Connecticut had implemented an extensive Independent Living Program. The state provides medical coverage for current and former foster youth up to age 21, 100 percent tuition reimbursement for college and vocational training, and continued financial support up to age 23 (for those who remain full-time students).

At age 14, the state assigns most youth in care to specialized caseworkers who work only with adolescents. Young people work with their caseworkers to begin setting goals, and those living with foster families undertake life skills training using an experiential curriculum designed with input from youth themselves. Youth in residential treatment—who often have serious mental health issues—move into transitional living homes for the 18- to 24-month Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program.

After they complete the life skills training or PAL and turn 17, participants are eligible for the state's 180-bed transitional housing program. To take part, youth must be enrolled in school and working, and they must agree to place 50 percent of their income into savings. This savings requirement, reports Independent Living Coordinator Bill Pinto, enables participants to exit the program with an average nest egg of \$3,500 — a crucial cushion for a population prone to crises and unexpected setbacks (Mendel, D., 2001, p. 29).

Lighthouse Youth Services – Cincinnati, Ohio

For more than a decade, Lighthouse has been providing transitional housing for young people in and around Cincinnati, offering youth the opportunity to learn by doing. Before

entering the program, each applicant completes a 13-unit life skills training curriculum. Once youth move into apartments, Lighthouse pays the security deposit, rent, utilities, phone bills, and furnishings, along with a \$60 per month living allowance. Lighthouse also provides counseling (at least weekly) and help finding jobs, earning GEDs, applying for college, and meeting other needs. The program, which is funded with county taxes, serves 50–55 young people, who stay an average of 11 months (Mendel, D., 2001, p. 27).

Casey Family Program San Antonio Division, TX

The program emphasizes the importance of providing a real world component that prepares youth for life after care and continues to support youth after their exit from care. The program also emphasizes the importance of their community links and collaboration with health, mental health and education and vocational programs. (Ansell, D., Correia, P. III, Copeland, R., Sheehy, A. Jr., Oldham, E., & Zanghi, M, 2001, p. 24)

Youth receive support to complete high school through Project Quest, a collaborative project involving two other organizations. Youth involvement lasts one to two years and involves an educational/apprenticeship track. The program also employs a part-time vocational consultant. Youth are assessed using the “Discovery Program” assessment tool. Participating youth follow either a career plan or a post-secondary educational plan. The program also participates in a partnership with the community college district. Community College representatives come to the Casey offices 2-3 times per month to help youth with financial aid (FAF) forms, admissions and enrollment. (Ansell, D., Correia, P. III, Copeland, R., Sheehy, A. Jr., Oldham, E., & Zanghi, M., 2001, p. 30)

Informative Web Sites on Independent Living

Annie E. Casey Foundation: <http://www.aecf.org/>

This website provides data and analysis on issues affecting struggling families and at-risk kids. Links contain information on new programs, reports on legislation, descriptive articles on important child welfare issues and program grants.

caseylifeskills.org: <http://www.caseylifeskills.org/>

This site provides a variety of resources to help prepare youths for living on their own. The resources include the Life Skills Guide book and the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment.

Child Welfare League of America: <http://www.cwla.org/>

CWLA is an association of more than 1,100 public and private nonprofit agencies that provide services for over 3.5 million abused and neglected children and families each year. The site contains a wealth of information on issues related to child welfare, including descriptions of legislation, current news and links to other informative websites.

Connect for Kids: <http://www.connectforkids.org/>

Connect for Kids, is a website geared towards parents, grandparents, educators, policymakers and others interested in issues pertaining to the well being of children. The site frequently features articles pertaining to preparing young people for independent living.

The Covenant House: <http://www.covenanthouse.org/en/standard>

This is the largest privately funded childcare agency in the United States providing shelter and service to homeless and runaway youth. This site contains information on various programs including “Rights of Passage,” a transitional living program for young adults.

Family and Youth Services Bureau: <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/fysb/index.html>

A division of the administration for children services, The Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) is a federal agency dedicated to supporting young people and strengthening families. This web site provides access to information about programs and services.

Foster Club: <http://www.fosterclub.com>

This website was created specifically for foster kids. The site features helpful articles on the process of transitioning to independence.

Foster Parent Community: <http://www.fosterparents.com/>

This web site is an on-line community for foster and adoptive families, prospective foster and adoptive families and anyone involved in the field of working with at-risk children. It contains a chat room and e-mail discussion boards where individuals can assist each other to prepare children for independent living.

Independent Living Resources, Inc.: <http://www.ilrinc.com/>

This website provides resources for educators and human service professionals throughout the United States and abroad on independent living topics including: independent living, developing life skills, foster and adoptive parent training and parental and family involvement.

Institute for Research on Poverty: <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp/>

Based at University of Wisconsin-Madison, the Institute for Research on Poverty is a national center for research into the causes and consequences of poverty and social inequality in the United States. This website features: “Foster Youth Transitions to Adulthood: Outcomes 12 to

18 Months after Leaving Out-of-Home Care,” a report exploring the experiences and adjustments of youth after they have been discharged from out-of-home care in Wisconsin.

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative: <http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org/>

This site contains information about the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, a major national effort to assist young people to successfully transition from foster care to adulthood.

Lots of Learning: <http://www.lotsoflearning.com/>

LotsofLearning.com is an online educational store that features, a wide variety of quality products on social learning.

The National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information:

<http://www.calib.com/nccanch/>

The Clearinghouse provides technical assistance services to help professionals locate information related to child welfare issues. Contains online access to publications, fact sheets, and searchable databases.

National Independent Living Association: <http://www.nilausa.org/>

National Independent Living Association is a membership-based organization, representing 50 states. The membership consists of public and private organizations, individuals, youth and foster parents that are working toward the enhancement of independent living and transitional living services for older at-risk youth and their families. This site contains links to national organizations as well as access to resources containing pertinent information on issues related to independent living.

National Resource Center for Youth Services: <http://www.nrcys.ou.edu>

This site contains training, technical assistance; conferences, books, and curricula related to child welfare issues. The resource page features recent research reports. The link to the National Resource Center for Youth Development contains independent living and youth development activities.

National Resource Center for Information Technology in Child Welfare:

<http://www.nrcitcw.org/index.html>

The NRC-ITCW provides technical assistance to strengthen State, local and Tribal agencies and courts' capacity in the area of child welfare information systems. This site contains a comprehensive list of federal requirements, technical assistance materials, and reports related to federal data, systems and reporting requirements.

Phillip Roy, Inc.: <http://www.philliprooy.com>

An on-line store featuring curriculums on independent living and life skills.

Thomas website: <http://thomas.loc.gov>

Contains the most updated information on the Foster Care Independence Act including funding notices and guidelines.

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