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Executive Summary

This is the third and final phase of a three part Quality Assurance (QA) Review of Independent Living Services provided to youth currently and formally in foster care. Phase I, completed in July 2009, focused on young adults formerly in foster care who were 18 through 22 years of age. Phase II was specific to youth who had reached their 17th birthday, but were not yet 18. Phase III, which is the subject of this report, is specific to youth living in a licensed foster care home who were 13 through 16 years of age at the time of the review. The objective of the review was to assess practice and quality of service delivery in the following six areas:

1) Ongoing Needs Assessments for Case Planning;
2) Pre-Independent Living Assessments;
3) Development of Educational and Career Path;
4) Participation in Normal Life Skills Activities;
5) Agency Monitoring of Youth Progress; and
6) Transition Planning.

Chapter 409.1451, Florida Statutes (F.S.), and the Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.) require the state to have a system of services in place that are geared to assist youth in licensed care from the time they are 13 years of age throughout their length of stay in care up to age 18. These laws require the Department to provide independent living transition services that assist older children in foster care to obtain life skills and education for independent living and employment, to have a quality of life appropriate for their age, and to assume personal responsibility for becoming self-sufficient adults. For children in foster care, independent living transition services are not an alternative to adoption. Independent living transition services may occur concurrently with continued efforts to locate and achieve placement in adoptive families for older children in foster care. Therefore, Chapter 39, F.S., is also applicable to this age group.

It is important to note that since the QA reviews of Independent Living Services began, the Department, Community-Based Care (CBC) agencies, and other entities have been taking action to address gaps in services to youth in the Independent Living Program and youth who remain in foster care. Three major initiatives currently underway are the Foster Care Redesign that proposes extending foster care up to age 21, changes in Florida Administrative Code 65C-31 for youth who have aged out of the child welfare system, and activities to promote “normalcy” for youth in foster care. In addition, CBCs have implemented many promising practices for this population of youth. Many of these initiatives are outlined in Attachment 1.
At the time of the QA review there were approximately 2,300 youth ages 13-16 in licensed foster care. Although permanency goals such as reunification, adoption, permanent guardianship or placement with a relative are desired outcomes for these youth, this will not be the outcome for many youth. Therefore, it is critical that the child welfare system ensure youth are prepared to successfully live independently upon reaching the age of 18.

The Quality Assurance practice data in this report should be used as a guidepost for management when looking at strengths and weaknesses in their system of care. Information should be considered when training case workers and developing annual quality improvement plans.

The Central Region is commended for doing very well in several areas: pre-independent living assessments (94%); normalcy (96%) and ongoing assessment and involving the youth in case planning (98%). Most regions are doing fairly well in the area of ongoing assessment and involving the youth in case planning. However, a performance gap is noted in ensuring children in care are afforded adequate opportunities to live normal lives and participate in appropriate community and in-home activities. Similarly, data show improvement in practice is needed in monitoring progress towards successful transitioning from licensed foster care.

Although lead agencies should continue to look at all practice data specific to their case management agencies, the following three recommendations should be closely addressed at the local level:

1) Educational and career path plans should be based on a thorough pre-independent living assessment and modified as necessary throughout the length of stay in licensed foster care. The Florida Department of Education requires that all public middle school students create an Electronic Personal Education Planner (ePEP) as part of a Career and Education Planning course in order to be promoted to 9th grade. Case workers should use the ePEP when assessing a youth’s educational and career path plan.

2) Recent initiatives to promote and support normalcy for youth in licensed foster care should be continued at the state and local level.

3) Regular staffings and multi-disciplinary staffings should be conducted to address education, life skills training, work goals, obstacles, and case progress, as well as identifying additional service needs.

In addition, child welfare staff should review the annual report prepared by the Independent Living Services Advisory Council (ILSAC) and remain abreast of recommendations to improve practice. These recommendations should be incorporated as appropriate into annual Quality Improvement Plans.
I. **The Importance of Preparing Foster Care Youth for Adulthood**

The teenage years comprise a critical stage in child development. During these years, youth begin to discover who they are, their place in the larger society, and their own empowerment. Therefore, special efforts are needed to encourage and promote the healthy development of this age group. These youth need help in establishing healthy connections with other youth and caring adults, and in acquiring educational and life skills training that can assist them in the transition to adulthood.

Generally, most youth are not prepared for full independence at age 18 and most continue to rely on family supports well into their twenties. Youth in foster care are less likely to have such family supports. Therefore, it is important to provide them with independent living skills and life skills training to help them in their transition to adulthood. Florida's legislative intent, as outlined in chapter 409.1451, F.S. and national research cited in issue briefs from Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, reinforce the need to provide youth in foster care with opportunities to participate in life skills activities in their foster families and communities and the need to provide services to build life skills and increase their ability to live independently and become self-sufficient. It is also important that each child in foster care get assistance and guidance in setting early achievement and career goals for postsecondary education and work experience. For youth who have reached 13 years of age, case plans must include an educational and career path based upon both the abilities and interests of the youth.

According to the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, “When most young people are discharged from foster care, they are on their own; in most states, this occurs at age 18. As a result, many have difficulty with tasks such as securing housing, finding and keeping a job, taking care of their health, and undertaking educational and training opportunities, and they often end up experiencing financial and legal trouble. Data indicate that young people who are transitioning from foster care experience very poor outcomes at a much higher rate than their peers in the general population. For example, youth transitioning from foster care suffer significantly higher rates of incarceration, homelessness, school drop-out, unemployment, unwanted pregnancy, and lack of access to health care. Studies have demonstrated that among youth making the transition:

- more than one in five will become homeless after age 18;”

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merely 58 percent will graduate high school by age 19 (compared to 87 percent nationally)\(^2\);

- fewer than 3 percent will earn a college degree by age 25 (compared to 28 percent nationally\(^3\); and

- one in four will be incarcerated within two years of leaving the system.\(^4\)

II. Case Review Process

To assess practice related to the six focus areas identified on page 1, quality assurance staff reviewed the child welfare cases of 177 youth ages 13-16 who were living in a licensed foster home at the time of the review. Case reviews included the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) case file and other documents maintained in hard copy case files. The sample was selected by Regional Quality Assurance Managers using an extract from FSFN. To accomplish the review, the cases were added to the regularly scheduled quarterly QA reviews. The QA review was completed by CBC quality assurance staff. Sample sizes were as follows:

- Northwest Region: 24 cases
- Northeast Region: 33 cases
- Central Region: 48 cases
- SunCoast Region: 39 cases
- Southeast Region: 21 cases
- Southern Region: 12 cases

Case review totals will vary because some cases will not be applicable to the component being assessed by QA reviewers.

III. General Findings and Practice Trends

a) Ongoing Needs Assessments for Case Planning

The importance of conducting ongoing assessments of a youth’s needs is based on the assumption that for services to be relevant and effective, case workers must systematically gather information and continuously evaluate the needs of youth and parents/caregivers as


well as the ability of family members to use their strengths to address their problems. Conducting thorough ongoing assessments of youth is a basic child welfare function. Good assessments impact all other aspects of case management, service delivery and achieving goals. The family, to include the youth in care, should have family assessments at a minimum of every six months. The assessment should address these factors:

1) Any changes that have occurred in family conditions or circumstances;
2) All factors affecting family strengths or protective capacities;
3) Identified risks to the youth;
4) Signs of emerging danger;
5) Case plan goals that have been met and are remaining; and
6) Services that are needed to meet case plan goals.

The ongoing assessments of the family provide a basis for the permanency goal and development of the case plan and amendments. All available evaluations and information regarding family members are considered when determining the family’s strengths, safety and risk factors.

The Northwest, Central, and Southeast Regions are doing very well in assessing youth needs for case planning. The Northwest Region reports their success was due to, “Both formal and informal methods of assessment were utilized to determine needs of the youth for case planning purposes. Methods of formal assessments included Independent Living Assessments, Comprehensive Behavioral Health Assessments, adoption studies, therapeutic progress reports, and psychological assessments. Needs were also assessed informally through monthly home visits, permanency staffings, Independent Living staffings, therapeutic staffings, family assessments, and contacts with foster care providers.”

The data contained in the graph on the following page is based on the case file review of 176 of the 177 cases. One case in the Central Region was deemed not applicable to the review.
b) Pre-Independent Living Assessments

For youth ages 13-14, a pre-independent living assessment must be completed that identifies service needs and services to be provided. Pre-independent living services include, but are not limited to, life skills training, educational field trips and conferences. The specific services to be provided for the youth are determined through the pre-independent living assessment. The assessment must be conducted using an approved assessment tool, a file review and review of other assessments and evaluations, including educational, psychological and psychiatric evaluations.

Of the 177 cases, sixty-seven (67) cases were applicable to this component. Although the numbers may not represent a statistically valid sample, the range of performance is significant. The Northeast and Central Region’s CBCs did very well in this area, which impacted on the overall performance statewide. In those areas with strong performance, it was reported that agencies and providers had good tracking systems in place. One agency in the Northeast Region reported, “Being a small agency affords us the ability to keep in close contact with the kids; most of them know the case workers and they keep in close contact. The Independent Living (IL) coordinator is able to track progression from the age of 13 years and establishes a positive
relationship early on. This includes remaining as the youth’s IL coordinator until the age of 23 years.”

![Graph 2](image_url)

**c) Educational and Career Path Planning**

Youth in licensed foster care must receive guidance and assistance in developing an educational and career path that is based on the youth’s individual abilities and interests. The child welfare system must ensure that the youth’s case plan includes an educational and career path that is based upon the youth’s abilities and interests. In addition, the service providers must make the youth aware of postsecondary and vocational opportunities, assisting the youth in identifying their goals, and how the youth can actually reach a chosen goal. This requires ongoing and open communication with the youth and the youth’s family, careful development of plans and sometimes adjusting the plans to meet the youth’s changing needs or aspirations. When assessing practice, QA reviewers were guided to consider information in the case file that demonstrated that the case management organization was ensuring detailed discussions with youth regarding the following:

- Interests and any appropriate hobbies;
- Careers that interest them; and
- Awareness of need to participate in developing a more detailed educational and career path plan when they turn 16 years of age.

In addition, the youth’s case plan must outline an educational and career path that was developed with input from the youth, foster parents, and school personnel. If the youth is enrolled in the Exceptional Student Education program, goal setting must be coordinated with the school and agree with the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) transitional plan.

The Florida K-12 Public Education laws, Chapter 1003.4156, F.S., requires that beginning with students entering grade 6 in the 2006-2007 school year, promotion from a school composed of middle grades 6, 7, and 8 requires that the student must successfully complete one course in career and education planning. The course must be completed in 7th or 8th grade. The course includes career exploration; educational planning; and shall result in the completion of a personalized academic and career plan.

The required personalized academic and career plan informs students of high school graduation requirements, high school assessment and college entrance test requirements, Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program requirements, state university and Florida college admission requirements, and programs through which a high school student can earn college credit, including Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Advanced International Certificate of Education, dual enrollment, career academy opportunities, and courses that lead to national industry certification. The plan is known as the Electronic Personal Education Plan (ePEP). Child welfare staff should ensure that educational and career path planning follow this plan.

The Southeast Region CBCs, Child and Family Connections and ChildNet, Inc., were high achievers for this program component. Child and Family Connections indicate their success is due in part to a performance based contract with an external provider to deliver independent living services. There are regular meetings with the CBCs independent living specialist and the director and supervisor of the independent living provider.

The data contained in the graph below is based on the case file review of 173 of the 177 cases. Four cases were deemed not applicable to the review component.
d) Participation in Normal Life Skills Activities

The child welfare system must assure that youth living in a licensed foster care placement have opportunities to participate in activities with their foster families and within their communities that are reasonable and appropriate for their respective ages. The system must support the philosophy that youth in care deserve to be treated like other youth and that they have a right to enjoy the same freedoms and opportunities and live a “normal” life like their peers. Youth and youth in licensed foster care should have opportunities to interact with mentors, and be encouraged to engage in appropriate social and extracurricular activities that will help promote their social development and maturity. To review this component, the QA reviewer was required to determine if opportunities were made available to the teen such as:

1) Participating in age appropriate activities and managing age appropriate responsibilities;
2) Interacting with mentors;
3) Learning nutritional and financial skills;
4) Socializing and having normal life experiences; and
5) Receiving an allowance.
The Central Region is doing very well in implementing “normalcy” for youth. The QA practice data indicates they are focused on ensuring youth in care are afforded adequate opportunities to participate in normal life skills activities.

The data contained in the graph below is based on the case file review of 173 of the 177 cases. Four cases were deemed not applicable to the review component.

![Graph showing opportunity to participate in normal life skills activities](image)

**e) Agency Monitoring of Youth Progress**

The child welfare agency must monitor the youth’s progress toward successful transition from foster care to independence. Monitoring should include assurances that the youth was provided an array of services that address the life skills needed to become independent and self-sufficient. Life skills services may include training to develop banking and budgeting skills, interviewing skills, parenting skills, time management or organizational skills, educational support, employment training, and counseling. Youth should also be provided with information related to social security insurance benefits and public assistance. The case management agency must monitor the youth’s progress on a regular basis, and facilitate multi-disciplinary staffings with appropriate parties including the youth to ensure service needs are identified and being met. Staffings must occur at least every six months and should address, at a minimum, the youth’s educational and work goals, including the youth’s progress and any obstacles the
youth is facing; what life skills the youth needs and the youth’s progress toward developing already identified skills. Staffings should also address education and work goals, obstacles, and case progress, as well as identifying additional service needs.

The QA practice data indicates much improvement is needed in this area. Although the Southeast and Southern Regions are doing fairly well, the range of performance was from 43% to 71% in the other regions.

The data contained in the graph below is based on the case file review of 121 of the 177 cases. Fifty-six cases were deemed not applicable to the review component.

![Graph 5: Monitored Progress of Transition from Foster Care to Independence](image)

**f) Transition Planning for Youth with APPLA Goals**

When youth have a goal of “Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement,” the child welfare staff must make concerted efforts to ensure the youth is adequately prepared to transition into independent living and is living in a “permanent” arrangement until he/she reaches the age of majority. Permanency goals include reunification, adoption, permanent guardianship, permanent placement with a fit and willing relative, or Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA).

The APPLA permanency goal is appropriate only if there is reason to believe the placement will endure and be more stable and secure than ordinary foster care; that the health, safety and
well-being of the youth will not be jeopardized; and that there are compelling reasons APPLA is most suitable to the specific youth. There must also be a commitment on the part of the foster parent, relative or non-relative that the living arrangement is permanent until the youth reaches 18 or is emancipated. For youth with the goal of APPLA, the case workers must make concerted efforts to ensure the youth is adequately prepared to transition into independent living and is living in a “permanent” arrangement until he/she reaches the age of majority.

Ninety-four (94) of the 177 cases in the sample had APPLA as the permanency goal. This factor indicates a need for better training and oversight in using the APPLA permanency goal overall. The Southern Region reports it has the highest number of APPLA cases as compared to the other regions. The local CBC and Children’s Legal Services are concurrently reviewing these cases to determine if the APPLA goal is appropriate and if not, to take appropriate action as necessary. The Northwest Region is doing well in this area and continues to target transition planning for all youth with the APPLA goal.
Initiatives Underway to Improve Services

Another Permanent Planned Living Arrangement
The Family Safety Program Office is currently facilitating a Permanent Connections Project around the state. Eleven (11) CBCs volunteered to participate in this project which includes: a training component; focus group discussions; and specific case reviews of youth with the APPLA goal. After the on-site training with attorneys, program managers and other staff, the facilitator or team lead works with local staff to determine if the APPLA goal is appropriate. In addition, the team lead guides case management through the process of “mining” the youth’s hard files. “Mining” refers to the act of going through hard files (sometimes volumes of files) to find:

- Family pictures,
- Birth certificates,
- Report cards,
- Cards or letters from family members,
- Medical and other personal history and information, and
- Any potentially interested adult(s) that could become the youth’s permanent connection upon reaching adulthood.

The project also encourages case management staff to build a Life Book that would include any of the pertinent items found in the record to be given to the youth. The Permanent Connection Project’s overall objective is to make sure all youth who age-out of the child welfare system have someone they can turn to for help, guidance, and ongoing emotional support; someone they can share holidays and birthdays with and someone that will just be there for them when needed. To date, regions are reporting the project is very helpful.

Participation in the APPLA Permanency Roundtable Project with Casey Family Programs. The primary goal is to expedite safe permanency for the youth and to increase staff development around expediting safe permanency. This is a Casey Family Programs initiative that provides professional case consultation that takes an in depth look at a case in a structured manner to explore alternative permanency options for youth who linger in foster care. The approach is supportive of the caseworker and non-blaming with the goal to expedite legal permanency, stimulate strategies that accelerate permanency though “out of the box thinking” and to identify and address systemic barriers to expediting permanency. The Permanency Round Tables will be targeted at the youth in foster care without an identified legal permanency option.

Community Partnership for Children has hired a Family Finder to work with youth on a “cold case” approach to help youth chart their earliest memories of those important in their lives, review case files and utilize these tools to find prospective family members to create permanent unconditional lifelong attachments to another human being. The staff is participating in the formalized six-month training with nationally known trainer, Kevin Campbell, through its completion.
Employability Skills

- ChildNet has opened the FLITE Center. This is an impressive facility with programming in conjunction with United Way, Junior League. ChildNet IL specialists work closely with and coordinate services with a local agency, the FLITE Center, in providing services to Broward’s youth. The Center opened its doors on Sept. 2, 2009. As of June 22, 2010, they had recorded 4500 visits by almost 700 youth. The FLITE Center offers a single, convenient point of access to all of the broad range of services and support the youth in Broward County need to become successful adults. The Center offers a safe, nurturing environment that promotes personal growth and practical skill building. Multiple services are brought together into a single facility to streamline connections to all of the varied services available in the County. Service coordination and assistance covers the spectrum of service needs for the youth including: educational, health care including mental health needs, career training and employment, housing, essential skills training, extracurricular activities and connection to disability resources and miscellaneous supports.

- Partnership for Strong Families subcontracts with CDS Family and Behavioral Health Services (CDS) to provide case management, Independent Living skills and transitional services to youth aged 13-23. CDS employs six (6) individual case managers and a supervisor to provide youth in our mostly rural thirteen (13) county area with individualized face to face life skill instruction, supportive case management, and assistance in filling out college FAFSA forms, Pell Grant applications, locating housing, vocational training, school transfers, and counseling support for basic life skill development. CDS completes monthly face to face visits with all youth placed in the thirteen (13) county catchment areas.

- CDS in Gainesville partners with the Florida Works training program to assist youth in obtaining their GED, as well as providing employment training in jobs that have a higher employability rate. In addition, PSF and CDS have partnered with Florida Works in a grant proposal for 2011 which would focus specifically on employability and job skill acquisition. CDS participates in the Operation Full Employment Initiative in which several youth are actively employed with DCF and PSF. Other youth are employed at the Tacachale residential homes, and Job Corps in Gainesville.

- CDS in Gainesville assists youth by babysitting their children when they have a job interview etc.

- Employment Readiness Classes (funded by the Jim Moran Foundation) are held every other week to teach independent living youth about best interviewing skills, resume design and actual job searches. They have partnered with Work Source and the Duval County Library to help the youth prepare for best practices in preparing for employment.

- Due to the fact Family Integrity Program is under the umbrella of St. Johns County Health and Human Services, they are not able to solicit funds or seek outside financial support for independent living services. However, the agency’s independent living coordinators have been successful in establishing relationships with local community service providers and businesses to assist youth. Through these partnerships, community service providers such as Work Source, Job Junction, Career Navigators, Red Lobster, Atlas Design Solutions, and Miller Electric, to name a few, have been supportive in assisting the Independent Living youth with employment, career
exploration and on sight tours of the respective businesses, to expand their potential employment opportunities.

- Work Source has been instrumental in meeting with Independent Living youth to increase employment opportunities & provide individualized assistance. The Career Navigators program also provides updates on listings of businesses that are hiring. That information is periodically mailed to independent living youth encouraging those seeking employment to inquire about jobs.

- Recently Family Integrity Report created an Independent Living Resource Center at the Family Integrity Report office. The Center includes resource literature and a computer room that allows the youth to research, apply online for jobs, complete food stamp applications, complete online college admission applications, order items, research grants & scholarships, complete FAFSA, and research career and educational options. This newly developed Resource Center has also served as a “drop in” Center for youth who need assistance in emergency services. In this same Resource Center youth can enroll in the First Coast Technical Adult Education Program.

- Work Study Program in partnership with Community Partnership for Children, which allows the youth an opportunity to work and learn employment skills. Apprentice program for youth allowed a youth to work with a medical professional-dentist. Youth attended Marineland and was "trainer for the day."

- Palm Beach's Child and Family Connections switched the IL provider to Vita Nova this year and the community expects improvements in the next year. The community is also very engaged. For example, the IL stakeholder review meetings were well intended, early progress on the employment piece (with established relationships with Publix, Brandsmart, etc.) focusing more on work skills and real employment opportunities is promising, the growth of the Youth Shine chapter, an active and aggressive attorney ad litem program, via the Juvenile Advocacy Project (JAP) at Legal Aid, and active dialogue related to master trust/PASS account issues with this population.

Assessing and Tracking Systems

- To track required court hearings for IL youth turning age 17, the Office of the Attorney General in Broward County utilizes a Lotus Notes tracking system. The tracking system generates an email to the assigned attorney on each case as the youth reaches age 17. The attorney ensures that the appropriate hearing is scheduled in a timely manner.

- Partnership for Strong Families has developed a tracking system to track referrals, assessments, staffing dates. The information is then provided to CDS on a monthly basis to ensure compliance. In addition, a monthly report is run from FSFN and provided to the case management agencies and CDS to identify youth at age 16 and 10 months that will be in need of a 17 month Judicial Review, IL staffing and Case Plan.

- Children’s Legal Services in Alachua County has developed a tracking system to track all upcoming court hearings, the date the case activities report is due from CDS, and the date they are received. This report is provided to PSF and CDS every two weeks to ensure compliance.
o Family Support Services of North Florida has also identified the need to provide a more direct approach for Independent Living services and preparation for our youth through case management organizations subcontractors. As a result, FSS has created a position at each of the CMO’s to ensure the delivery of IL services and Life Skills. These positions also are responsible for targeted work with youth involved with DJJ/Corrections and participate on the Education Task Team to examine educational services and educational achievement for youth, ages 13-17. These services are part of the contract responsibilities of the case management organizations and are monitored as part of the annual monitoring completed each fiscal year.

o FSS coordinated with Florida State College at Jacksonville (FSCJ) to hire an Educational Specialist at FSCJ to assist independent living youth. This position helps remove educational hurdles and educates independent living young adults about their educational options and ensures a smooth transition into those services.

o Independent living information is tracked in the CoBRIS database and in moving forward the independent living module in FSFN. In August 2010 all IL information, including staffings, assessments and life skills trainings will be monitored by the five new case management organizations positions previously mentioned and overseen by an independent living coordinator at FSS. All positions will complete competency based training in August 2010. FSS currently sends out a monthly schedule/calendar of all 17 year old, 17 1/2 year old and SIL staffings to the case management organizations, DCF CLS, courts and GAL.

o Family Integrity Program (FIP) provides all independent living case management and services internally. The agency has two independent living coordinators that split responsibilities for this targeted population. One Coordinator provides for the 13-17 years of age group, while the other Coordinator targets the 18-23 years of age population. Both independent living coordinators have been with the agency for the past 3-5 years respectively.

**Education**

o Childnet in Broward County celebrated the graduations of foster youth with tassels, caps and gowns, and doting friends and family. ChildNet hosted the 6th Annual Independent Living Graduation for a group of deserving graduates at Broward College's South Campus in Pembroke Pines. There were 110 foster care youth who graduated from middle school, high school, GED program, technical school or college. Of that number, 50 youth participated in the special commencement that celebrated their scholastic accomplishments. The event is coordinated by ChildNet, FLITE Center, Broward Legislative Delegation, HANDY, SOS Children's Village, Broward College, Dan Marino Foundation, Junior League of Broward County, CSC of Broward County, Camelot, Keiser University, Jim Moran Foundation and Circuit 17 DCF.

o CDS in Gainesville has partnered with the Florida Works training program to assist youth in obtaining their GED, as well as providing employment training in jobs that have a higher employability rate. In addition, PSF and CDS have partnered with Florida Works in a grant proposal for 2011 which would focus specifically on employability and job skill acquisition. CDS participates in the Operation Full Employment Initiative in which several youth are actively employed with DCF and Partnership for Strong Families. Other youth are employed at the Tacachale residential homes, and Job Corps in Gainesville.
o The Columbia County school board homeless liaison provides backpacks full of school supplies for the youth each year.

o Family Support Services has an Independent Living Life Coach who is funded through the Jim Moran Foundation to support services including employment readiness, financial literacy and tutoring to our youth aging out of care. Financial Literacy Classes (funded by the Jim Moran Foundation) are held every other week to teach independent living youth about budgeting, needs vs. wants and making smart choices on saving money. They have the option of opening a bank account at Wachovia, Vystar or Community First Bank.

o Tutoring (funded by the Jim Moran Foundation) classes are held twice a week. Family Support Services has partnered with Daniel Kids Failure Free to Read Program. Failure Free Reading is designed for the lowest performing (bottom 15%) readers in grades 1-12. Students receive hands-on computer instruction and complete workbooks to review the skills they learned on the computer. The goal of the program is to improve sight vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension skills.

o Family Support Services has also partnered with the Duval County School Board. As a result there are two liaisons identified specifically for the foster care population. FSS has also developed a monthly data share with the Duval County School Board which identifies the schools the youth attend, grades (GPA), FCAT scores, and benchmarks. These positions have greatly assisted in being able to arrange transportation for foster care youth to be able to stay in the schools of origin when removals are necessary.

o Family Support Services had a kickoff event for the Passport to Independence program on August 11, 2010 between 11am-5pm at the Fraternal Order of Police Hall in Jacksonville. This event provided a preview of some of the components of the passport including a cooking demonstration, the importance of physical activity, a financial literacy game show, a graffiti wall for the youth to write about their experiences, and local businesses who highlighted services available to the youth.

o Independent living coordinators attend graduations, sporting events, and other functions that independent living youth participate in. Family Integrity Report has been able to assist with obtaining class rings upon graduation. They also have the opportunity to participate in the Myron Rolle Wellness & Leadership Academy as well as the Florida Youth Leadership Academy. Independent living coordinators hold special birthday celebrations.

o Operation Backpack annual drive supported by local retailers that help meet the basic needs of youth heading back to school.

o Local retailer Dillard’s provided a discount shopping day for youth to assist them with new clothing for the school year.

o Kids First of Florida has an onsite donation closet/pantry with donations from the community i.e.: toiletries, backpacks, handbags, school supplies, basic supplies teenagers need.
Life Skills

- In order to provide support for the independent living requirements FSS has created the Passport to Independence program where eligible youth aged 16 – 17 have the opportunity to participate in various events and classes that will provide them with life skills that address daily living, self care, responsible sexuality, money management, employment and health care. These events and classes will include food preparation and storage, maintaining a safe and clean home, financial management and responsibilities, job interviewing, resume writing and job responsibilities, and healthy emotional and physical living practices, consequences of drug and alcohol abuse, and conflict resolution. The eligible youth who complete pre-set milestones in the Passport can receive incentives including scuba diving, fishing trips or even a dolphin encounter at a local theme park. As part of the Passport to Independence program FSS is partnering with local businesses to provide job shadowing for the youth.

- Vistakon has provided funding which allows independent living youth to take the required four hour online Drug and Alcohol Course to obtain their learners permit. Once the youth obtain their learners permit, FSS coordinates with Able Driving School for six driving lessons to prepare them for their license. After completion of classes, the youth are eligible to have an extra one hour driving class where their instructor will provide a car and take them to the DMV to obtain their license. Currently there are four youth who have finished the 6 hour school and are in the process of obtaining their drivers license. There is funding for 27 total youth.

- FSS hosted a 5 hour Independent Living Life Skills Training (50 minute sessions) to address conflict resolution, self esteem, personal development and other related topics. Over 80 youth age 16-22 attended. There were several professionals from the community who work with independent living youth, including Suited for Success, The Battle Group, Knots for Kids and the YMCA to name a few. Guest speakers included, a local General Master from the 4th Circuit, Jacksonville Jaguar player and former Boston Red Sox player.

- On May 15 a group of 20 FSS youth participated with a group of Jacksonville Jaguar players in a fishing clinic aboard the Sea Love charter boat out of St. Augustine. The clinic was part of the David Garrard Foundation Charity Fishing Tournament. All of the kids caught a fish and received a fishing pole and a handshake from Jaxson de Ville, the Jaguars mascot, at the end of the event.

- On June 19th, FSS and DCF co-sponsored a surf camp in Jacksonville Beach where approximately fifteen foster youth had a day at the beach riding the waves. Each youth received instruction on how to go from kneeling to standing on the board and ride the waves. Volunteer surf instructors donated their time and resources to this camp.

- Summer Night Light's is a proactive approach to prevent gang activity in our community and is sponsored by the City of Jacksonville. Each Friday and Saturday night, over the course of eight weeks, FSS attends local community centers to provide arts and crafts and other activities to encourage positive behaviors for at risk youth. Two Independent living youth are employed by FSS to “man” the booth and oversee the projects.
Financial literacy courses with Wachovia Bank provides a “Way to Save” program that is designed to prevent independent living youth from over draft charges and allows them to save money when using their debit cards. They also conduct trainings for opening new accounts as well as online banking. Representatives from Wachovia Bank have met with independent living youth to provide personalized assistance in this regard.

A recent partnership with Flagler College interns has also offered a unique approach to expansion of life skills tasks. As a result, independent living youth had the opportunity to attend a teen girl’s support group that focused on problem solving, coping skills, appropriate socialization in self expression, communication & socialization. Another new service that is being developed with another intern at the local YMCA is assisting independent living youth with personal fitness & nutrition.

Independent living coordinators continue to assist in obtaining learner’s permits and driver’s licenses. A St. Johns Co. trainer and a representative from the St. Johns County Sheriff’s office recently offered a certified defensive driving course with independent living youths. This opportunity provided a potential insurance discount for participating in the training.

Riverside Bank provides an interactive financial literacy training for youth.

Collaboration with the University of Florida Extension Program to provide life skills training to youth.

Children's Home Society provides Wings Net which is a financial and counseling program for youth. The program supplements existing resources and community supports. Incentives are paid to youth to help them save money, maintain employment and stay in school.

Other

Independent Living Court occurs twice per month in Alachua County and IL case managers attend regularly. In addition, Partnership for Strong Families has added new resources to the IL contract with CDS to include two (2) new case manager positions, laptops, blackberries and remote connectivity to increase their ability to work in the field.

There is a very active attorney ad litem program as well as GATOR TEAM CHILD, a free legal service from the University of Florida’s Levin School of Law which assigns interns, social workers, and lawyers to youth and young adults.

The Cobblefield Women’s Group collects and provides Christmas gifts for our youth and their children.

CDS Gainesville assists youth in the selection of vehicles that are long lasting and economical.

CDS Gainesville has leased one of their buildings to a daycare that will accept the daycare and reduced fee waiver for the children from our IL participants.

CDS Gainesville has gone with youth on outings to Universal Studios, Sea World, Busch Gardens, and the MOSI museum. CDS has provided movie outings with sibling groups on a regular basis.
Additionally the young adults often get together with the IL coordinator and staff to help new youth move into their independent housing.

**Youth Voice**

- FSS has created a Youth Advisory Board (YAB) to develop a peer driven resource that provides a voice for the needs of foster youth as well as mentors for them. The YAB is a group of young adults (ages 16-23) who want to make a change in the foster care system who meet twice a month at either the Cassat Neighborhood Center or the main FSS office. YAB will also have a bi-monthly newsletter sent directly to youth ages 13-23 to inform them of events, important dates and celebrations. They are learning financial responsibility, leadership skills, fund raising techniques and community involvement.

- Additionally, youth in the 8th Judicial circuit are involved in an Independent Living Court initiative, which was established with the assistance of the General Magistrate. IL Court occurs twice monthly and the General Magistrate reviews the progress of each youth and recognizes them for their achievements with rewards. The youth can choose from various baskets provided by the court and the BAR association lawyers. Additionally the Young Lawyers Association is working on setting up IDA accounts for some of the youth in the program.

- One youth is also serving on the Circuit’s Foster Care Redesign Steering Committee.

- Youth are invited to speak at various community events. A youth is the guest speaker at the Children’s Home Society annual Ritz Fundraiser.

- Family Integrity Report offers youth the opportunity to participate in the Florida Youth Leadership Academy, Youth Advisory Board, Youth Shine and receive services from the Attorney Ad Litem.
65C-28.009, Florida Administrative Code: Adolescent Services

(1) Independent Living services and life skills services include a comprehensive array of services available to adolescents in the custody of the department and young adults who were in the custody of the department at the time of their eighteenth birthday. Independent living services consist of pre-independent living services, life skills services, and subsidized independent living (SIL) services for children in the custody of the department. Children in the custody of the department who are receiving independent living services remain subject to the requirements of case plans and judicial reviews until permanency is established. Aftercare Support Services, the Road-to-Independence Scholarship and Transitional Support Services are available for young adults who were in the custody of the department on their eighteenth birthday.

(a) Older children in foster care who have disabilities or mental health needs shall be provided with an equal opportunity to participate in the continuum of independent living services. Though a child who has a physical, emotional or learning disability may need additional support, he or she still is eligible for all independent living services from the program.

(b) To ensure the equal participation of these children, the Services Worker shall identify older foster children with disabilities or mental health needs and assist them with reasonable accommodations for their disabilities.

(2) Children age thirteen up to age eighteen are eligible for independent living services from the time of placement in shelter status with the department.

(3) Goal Setting. Beginning at age fourteen, upon entering ninth grade or upon entering licensed out-of-home care past the age of fourteen, whichever occurs first, each child in licensed out-of-home care, with the assistance of his or her foster parents and the Services Worker, shall set early achievement and career goals for the child's post secondary educational and work experience as required in Section 409.1451(3)(b)1., F.S.

(a) The process shall be child-centered, and any staffings related to the child’s post secondary or career goals, shall include the child, and shall be held in a time and place convenient to the child, taking into account the child’s school and work schedule.

(b) If the child is enrolled in the Exceptional Student Education program, such goal setting shall be coordinated with the school and agree with the Individual Educational Plan transitional plan.

(c) The case plan shall be written simply and clearly in English and, if English is not the principal language of the child, to the extent possible a copy of the case plan shall be prepared in the language of the child.

(4) Independent Living Staffings. Staffings for children age 13 and older who are in an out-of-home placement are held periodically to develop plans for meeting the identified needs of these children.

(a) Every Independent Living staffing shall, at a minimum, address the following topics:

1. The child’s educational and work goals, including the child’s progress and any obstacles the child is facing,

2. What life skills the child needs and the child’s progress toward developing already identified skills,

3. The SIL program, including program requirements and benefits,

4. The Road to Independence program, including program requirements and benefits, the tuition fee exemption, and the Bright Futures Program,

5. Permanency arrangements, including the child’s wishes regarding adoption,

6. For children age 17, the child’s plans for living arrangement after age 18 and the life skills services that may need to be continued past age 18, and

7. Any other identified obstacles and needs the child has with regard to Independent Living.

(b) Every Independent Living staffing shall meet the following requirements:
1. The Services Worker shall attend the staffing. The Services Worker’s supervisor, Child Welfare Legal Services (CWLS), the child, the child’s caregiver, the child’s guardian ad litem, and the child’s attorney, if the child is so represented, shall be invited to attend the staffing. The independent living service provider and any other individuals significant to and familiar with the child, including family members likely to be involved with the child after the child leaves foster care shall also be invited.

2. The child shall be encouraged to invite any adults who are important in the child’s life.

3. The staffing shall be conducted in and with a language the children can understand or, if needed, through a translator, and the process shall be child-centered.

4. The staffing shall be held in a time and place convenient to the child, taking into account the child’s school and work schedule.

5. The Services Worker shall be responsible for inviting the child’s guardian ad litem and attorney ad litem to the staffing.

6. Information from the pre-Independent Living life skills assessment and all Independent Living staffings shall be included in the written report submitted to the court for each judicial review.

   (5) Pre-Independent Living (Age 13 but not yet 15 years of age).
   
   (a) These services include but are not limited to life skills training, educational field trips and conferences.

   (b) Each child in the custody of the department shall be referred for independent living services thirty days prior to his or her thirteenth birthday. A child placed in the custody of the department after his or her thirteenth birthday shall be referred within thirty days after the court enters an order placing the child in the custody of the department.

   (c) Each child in the custody of the department shall receive a pre-independent living assessment within thirty days after his or her thirteenth birthday. A child placed in the custody of the department after his or her thirteenth birthday shall be assessed within sixty days after the court enters an order placing the child in the custody of the department. The results of the assessment shall be filed with the court and served on all parties.

   1. The assessment for a child thirteen to fifteen years of age shall be conducted through the use of a pre-independent living assessment tool; review of the file; review of other assessments and evaluations, including educational, psychological and psychiatric evaluations; personal observation and interviews with any person who is familiar with the child and can be helpful in the assessment process.

   2. The Services Worker shall discuss the results of the assessment with the child and caregiver and shall use the results to determine the training and services needed for the child to begin learning skills necessary for success and self-sufficiency in the future.

   3. The pre-independent living assessment shall be used to determine the child’s strengths and needs. The Services Worker shall ensure that the child’s identified needs are met. Life skills can be taught through instruction and interaction with the out-of-home caregivers or group-care staff through contracted services, referrals to community providers, one-on-one coaching and group learning sessions. The child may also be able to learn some of the needed skills in the public school curriculum.

   4. For every needed skill, the Services Worker shall document in the child’s case file who is to help the child develop that skill and the timeframe in which the child will receive the training. It is the responsibility of the Services Worker to ensure the child receives all needed life skills training.

   (d) Children in out-of-home care shall be fully informed when making decisions about educational options, including high school participation choices and college or vocational school entrance requirements. Possible rewards and consequences of the available options shall be presented to the child.

1. The Services Worker shall encourage the child to choose and achieve realistic goals.

2. The Services Worker shall discuss with the child his or her potential limitations, including physical, emotional, and behavioral limitations. The child shall not be told that a career or educational option is
unavailable unless an explanation is given and ways to overcome perceived obstacles are explored.

(e) During contacts with the child time shall be dedicated to evaluating progress in learning the skills identified through the assessment process as well as to educate the child and the caregiver about available independent living services.

(f) Staffing. In addition, the department shall conduct an annual staffing for children who are thirteen and fourteen years of age and meet the requirements for these staffings as contained in Section 409.1451(4)(a), F.S.

(6) Life Skills Services (Age 15 but not yet 18 years of age).

(a) Life skills services include but are not limited to, independent living skills training including training to develop banking and budgeting skills; parenting skills; educational support; employment training and counseling.

(b) Life skills services shall be designed to meet the child’s needs as identified in the independent living skills assessment. A child with developmental disabilities, mental health needs or other special needs shall be identified and services shall be tailored to meet the child’s needs.

(c) A referral for life skills services shall be submitted within thirty days of a child’s fifteenth birthday and an age appropriate independent living skills assessment completed within thirty days after the child’s fifteenth birthday. If the child is fifteen years of age or older when placed in the custody of the department, a referral and an independent living skills assessment shall be submitted within thirty days after the court enters an order placing the child in the custody of the department. If a child was previously referred for independent living services only an additional independent living skills assessment shall be completed and submitted.

(d) The results of the assessment shall be discussed with the child and caregiver and be used to determine the training and services needed for the child to continue learning skills necessary for successful transition to adulthood.

(e) The independent living assessment shall be used to measure life skills development progress for a child who was administered a pre-independent living assessment and also to determine each child’s strengths and needs. The Services Worker shall ensure that the child’s identified needs are met. The needed skills may be taught through instruction and interaction with the out-of-home caregivers or group-care staff, through contracted services, referrals to community providers, one-on-one coaching and group learning sessions. The child may also be able to learn some of the needed skills in the public school curriculum. For every needed skill, the Services Worker shall document in the child’s case file who is to help the child develop that skill and the timeframe in which the child will receive the training. It is the responsibility of the Services Worker to ensure the child receives all needed life skills training.

(f) Staffing. Pursuant to Section 409.1451(4)(b), F.S., the department shall conduct a staffing at least once every six months for each child in licensed out-of-home care who has reached fifteen years of age but is not yet eighteen years of age.

(g) Assessment at Seventeen Years Old. Pursuant to Section 409.1451(4)(b), F.S., during the month following his or her seventeenth birthday, each child in licensed out-of-home care shall be provided an independent living assessment, separate and distinct from the previous independent living assessment, to determine the child’s skills and ability to live independently and become self-sufficient regardless of his or her permanency goal. Based on the results of this assessment, expedited and age appropriate services and training shall be provided in order for the child to develop the necessary skills and abilities prior to his or her 18th birthday. This final assessment shall be used to measure life skill development progress.

1. The assessment for a child seventeen years of age shall be conducted through the use of an independent living assessment tool; review of the file; review of other assessments and evaluations, including educational, psychological and psychiatric evaluations; personal observation and interviews with any person who is familiar with the child and can be helpful in the assessment process.
2. Based on the results of this assessment, the Services Worker, in conjunction with the children, shall update the life skills plan to ensure that the children receive all skills training needed before the child’s 18th birthday.

3. If, based on the results, the child will most likely need additional life skills training and services after age 18, the Services Worker shall include a staff member from the unit handling post-emancipation services in order to ensure a smooth continuum of services.

(h) Information from the independent living life skills assessment and all staffings, including an enumeration of the services provided and an assessment of the youth’s progress toward developing independent living skills, shall be included in the written report submitted to the court for each judicial review.

(i) The case plan for children in out-of-home care who are age sixteen and seventeen shall include appropriate independent living and transitional services and shall be filed with the court and served on all parties.

(7) Subsidized Independent Living (SIL) (Age 16 but not yet 18 years of age).

(a) Subsidized Independent Living provides an opportunity for teenagers in foster care to receive a subsidy and other supports from the department in order to live in a setting that is not required to be licensed. Participants learn to pay their own bills and live on a budget while still under the supervision of a contracted service provider and the courts.

(b) Youth Eligibility for Subsidized Independent Living. In order to be approved to live in a subsidized living arrangement, a youth must meet the following criteria as required by Section 409.1451, F.S.:

1. Age. Must be 16 or 17 years of age and not yet reached their 18th birthday (Section 409.1451(4)(c)2., F.S.). At minimum, the child’s parents and the court must be notified that a placement in Subsidized Independent Living has been made. It must be noted that, in some cases, the department or Community-Based Care (CBC) agency may choose to gain approval from the court or the child’s parents prior to placement in Subsidized Independent Living and while this is acceptable, it is not required under law or these guidelines.

2. Legal Status. Must be adjudicated dependent, as defined in Chapter 39, F.S. and have been in custody of the department, at least 6 months prior to entering subsidized independent living, with a goal of either adoption, long-term licensed care or independent living (Section 409.1451(4)(c)2.a., F.S.). The 6 months in department custody do not have to be immediately preceding placement in SIL and can accumulate over the youth’s lifetime.

(c) According to Section 409.1451(4)(c)2.b., F.S., the youth must be able to demonstrate independent living skills. The following criteria are ways that the youth can demonstrate these skills, but exceptions to some of these criteria may be allowed by the District Administrator, Chief Executive Officer of the Community-Based Care agency (CEO of the CBC) or Independent Living Coordinator with approval of the District Administrator or CEO of the CBC with consideration of the youth’s safety and best interests:

1. Employment or Extra-curricular activities. Must be employed at least part-time earning a minimum of $100.00 per month or be involved in extra-curricular activities as deemed appropriate by the Independent Living Coordinator. These extra-curricular activities may include but not be limited to: participation on sports teams, cheerleading squads, school bands, internships, school advisory boards or any other beneficial activity that would be important to the youth’s personal development but would also limit the youth’s ability to obtain employment.

2. Savings. Must have sufficient earned savings or other means to pay move-in and first month’s living expenses, until the first subsidy check arrives. The youth may submit a statement that includes the projected move-in cost and proof of available resources to meet these costs.

3. Education. Must be enrolled in a full-time educational program. Full-time is defined as: regular attendance at high school, at least 12 credit hours per semester at an accredited college or university, or
full time as defined by the GED/Vocational Technical program which the youth is attending.

4. Grades. Must maintain adequate progress as determined by the school or educational program.

5. Assessment. Assessment of Skills by completion of curriculum determined by the independent living coordinator. Should indicate that living in an unlicensed setting with minimal supervision is potentially viable. The youth must be able to articulate and demonstrate their ability to perform certain skills as determined by the Independent Living Coordinator.

6. Behavior. Participants in the Subsidized Independent Living program are expected to exhibit responsible behavior. Prospective participants who have displayed irresponsible behavior, such as running away from home, committing violent acts toward others, delinquencies, or property crimes, within six months of requesting entrance into the Subsidized Independent Living program must be strictly evaluated to determine whether SIL placement is in their best interest and if they are at risk of exhibiting future irresponsible behaviors. Letters of reference from school, mental health personnel, foster parents, Services Workers and Department of Juvenile Justice should be requested if there is a history of irresponsible behavior.

7. Staffing/Approval. Staffing and approval by the department or CBC independent living coordinator. The coordinator must approve the youth’s living arrangement, including the cost and selection of a roommate, if applicable. The safety of the youth is a paramount consideration. Youth and Services Worker must attend the staffing which the independent living coordinator chairs. The Services Worker must invite the youth’s parent (if parental rights are still intact and at the youth’s discretion) to the staffing and any other persons involved or important to the youth, such as guardian ad litem, teachers, therapists, relatives and mentors.

(d) Dependent youth in custody of the department with disabilities are eligible for this program and may not be deemed ineligible from this program on the basis of the disability, according to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Title II. Though a youth with a disability may need additional supports from other organizations or agencies such as Developmental Services, Mental Health or Vocational Rehabilitation, the youth is still eligible for any and all services offered in the independent living program, including subsidized independent living. Reasonable accommodations must be provided to insure that each youth has access to the services provided by the program. Transitional staffings should be initiated by the Services Worker, with the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, adult and children’s mental health services or other programs, on dual youth on or before the youth’s 17th birthday. If the youth requires continued supported living, a written plan must be in place by the youth’s 18th birthday in order to transition youth from foster care and/or SIL to another supported living program.

(e) Program Instructions.

1. Parental Notification. The Services Worker, at minimum, must notify the parents of any youth placed in a subsidized independent living arrangement no longer than ten days after the placement has been made, unless parental rights have been terminated. It is preferred that this notification is in writing, but, at minimum, any attempts at notification must be entered into the HomeSafenet chronological notes. The Services Worker must NOT reveal the youth’s physical address to the parent unless written permission is provided by the youth.

2. Subsidized Independent Living Agreement. A written agreement must be developed between the youth and the department or CBC prior to the beginning of SIL. The agreement must be reviewed and updated annually, but more frequently as needed. The agreement must include, at a minimum:
   a. A description of the youth’s educational program, school or college, including start date, ending date and educational goals.
   b. The youth’s responsibilities, including and not limited to regular attendance and/or completion of life skills training, submission of payment stubs from work monthly or report from an official conducting the youth’s extracurricular activities that verifies continued involvement, and verification of school
attendance.

c. The department or contracted service provider’s responsibilities, including and not limited to regular staffings, frequent Services Worker contacts, provision of life skills training, counseling, and therapy.

d. Requirements for continued eligibility in the SIL arrangement.

e. A target date for discharge and the completion of the goals and objectives in the case plan.

f. An acknowledgement that this placement is in the youth’s best interest and that safety concerns have been addressed. In addition, to prevent the independent living program from losing community support, gaining a poor public image and possibly losing statutory authority, the youth must be informed in writing by the Independent Living Coordinator of the consequences of behavior that violates the law or community standards. Program participants have a responsibility beyond themselves, extending to the department and to fellow program participants.

g. A full explanation of the consequences of the youth’s non-compliance with the Subsidized Independent Living requirements.

3. Case Plan. Independent living arrangements established for a youth must be part of the case plan, including the goals and objectives leading to the total independence of the youth from department supervision.

a. The case plan must be reviewed and updated, at a minimum, on an annual basis.

b. The case plan must include, but is not limited to:

i. A description of the youth’s skills and a plan for learning additional skills as identified in the independent living assessment.

ii. Documentation of proposed services by the department, such as educational and employment-related assistance, counseling, therapy, skills training, and services of other agencies, including the type of service, nature, and frequency of contact.

iii. A description of behaviors the youth has exhibited that indicate an ability to be responsible and a plan for developing additional, responsible behaviors such as increasing decision-making skills.

iv. Documentation that the youth understands the specific consequences of his or her conduct in the independent living program.

v. A plan for maintaining or developing personal support relationships with family members, other adults, friends, and community support groups, among others as appropriate.

4. Frequency and Purpose of Services Worker Contact.

a. During the first three months the youth is living in an SIL arrangement, the Services Worker and the participant must have at least two contacts per week. At least one of these contacts must be in the residence of the youth. These contacts must be used to assess the participant’s strengths and needs in maintaining oneself in the living arrangement. The Services Worker must maintain weekly contact with the Independent Living Coordinator during the first three months as to the youth’s progress in adjusting to their subsidized independent living arrangement. After the first three months, the Services Worker must maintain contact with the independent living coordinator at a minimum of once a month. Note: The youth’s assigned Services Worker may be assisted in making these contacts by other Services Workers within the CBC agency, independent living staff, and/or courtesy supervision workers.

b. After the first three months the number of contacts that the Services Worker has with the youth may be reduced, but only if the youth is progressing satisfactorily. However, these contacts must not be less than once per month and must be in the residence of the youth. The number of contacts must be increased if the youth demonstrates the need for more supervision.

c. The HomeSafenet chronological notes must describe, at minimum, the issues discussed, any safety factors addressed and progress made during the contacts between the Services Worker and the youth. This record can be used to measure progress, identify resources, and establish a clear understanding of the areas where the youth and the Services Worker are concentrating their efforts.
5. Periodic Review.
   a. Since 16- and 17-year-old youths in a subsidized independent living arrangement are still in the legal custody of the department, their cases are subject to regular six-month judicial reviews.
   b. Staffings should be scheduled around the youth’s school, work and extra-curricular activity schedule. The youth may invite anyone that he/she chooses to the staffing such as, but not limited to, guardian ad litem, personal friend, potential roommate, relative, employer or teacher.

   a. Independent Living Board Rate Payment (Subsidy). Payments must be drawn from out-of-home care, room and board state funds. The subsidy check may be mailed directly to the youth, or it may be sent to staff so that the youth can report to his/her Services Worker or the coordinator at the time the check is picked up.
   b. Clothing Allowance. Youth in SIL will continue to receive the annual clothing allowance from the out-of-home care budget in addition to the monthly subsidy payment.

   a. The independent living coordinator, the Services Worker and the youth must work together to determine a fair and reasonable budget for living independently. The youth must maintain the budget on a month-to-month basis. Suitable lodging must be located and funds for rent and utility deposits, phone deposits, etc. must be put aside in preparation for the youth’s move into the living arrangement. The first month’s living expenses and move-in expenses are the responsibility of the youth. The youth may obtain move-in costs either through savings by earned income, unearned income or by any other legal methods including gifts by relatives or other concerned parties. However, the youth must also be able to demonstrate the ability to budget and meet on-going monthly financial obligations.
   b. The Services Worker must provide assistance in locating a safe and stable living arrangement that will be affordable based on the youth’s financial situation. The location of the placement must be easily accessible to school, work and other needed resources.
   c. Youth may be assisted in accessing any community resource that might help in arranging their utility deposits.
   d. A youth may choose to live alone, with a roommate (non-cohabitation) in a college dormitory, or rent a room from a family. The Services Worker must assess the living arrangement and present a report to the independent living coordinator for approval. Each individual’s situation must be considered when determining the budget with the youth and the amount of the subsidy check. The factors in subparagraph 2. above must also be considered as well as criminal, delinquency and abuse/neglect history checks.
   e. For all household members or frequent visitors ages 12 through 26, a delinquency records check through the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice. In addition, the following background checks must conducted for any household members age 12 and over:
      i. A local criminal records check through local police and sheriff’s offices.
      ii. A state criminal records check through the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.
      iii. An inquiry to the Florida Child Abuse Hotline.

8. Monthly Subsidy Rate Determination.
   a. The amount of the monthly subsidy should be determined on an individual basis, considering the cost-of-living and the youth’s monthly expenses. The maximum amount of the youth’s board rate is based on what an individual can earn working a 40-hour week at federal minimum wage. The department or CBCs have discretion in the amount of the subsidy rate based on budget considerations within the agency providing services for the youth.
   b. Program Incentives. Subject to the availability of funds, the department or CBCs have the option of providing financial incentives in addition to the monthly subsidy amount. Incentives may be based
upon attendance at skills training or other required monthly meetings, timely submission of payment stubs, participation on youth advisory boards, public speaking promoting the program, etc., with each incentive adding $10-50 to the base amount.

9. Out-of-State Supervision of a Youth in SIL.
   a. Some youth in custody of the department, under the Jurisdiction of Florida courts, reside in foster or group homes in other states. These youth must be given the same opportunities to participate in the Subsidized Independent Living program as youth that reside in state as long as they meet eligibility criteria. Although it is rare for a youth under 18 to attend college, arrangements may be made for a youth to attend college in another state and still receive a subsidy check and/or other services and supports from the department.
   b. Some states offer courtesy supervision through the independent living program. Other options might be to ask the college for staff or volunteer assistance, or to contract with a provider in that state to provide supervision.
   c. For a youth under the age of 18, attendance at a college exempts the youth from the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC). However, if a youth needs supervision, submit ICPC form 100A and check the “other” box under “type of care” and write in “College ILP.” A cover letter should explain that the judge and/or the department would appreciate arrangements for supervision.

8) Permanency Planning for Older Adolescents. The Services Worker shall, concurrent with delivery of independent living services, continue efforts to locate and achieve placement with a permanent family until the child reaches age eighteen. In cases in which the child has made the decision not to pursue adoption, the decision shall be revisited at least twice per year to determine the child’s needs and preferences. In all cases, whether the child has made the decision to be adopted or not, the Services Worker shall assist the child in making connections within the community and establishing relationships. Connections with adults may be established in foster care placements, at school, through extracurricular activities with mentors, coaches, youth leaders, instructors and others. The Services Worker shall assist each child exiting the foster care system to establish a lifelong connection with a committed adult.

(9) Children Becoming Eighteen Years of Age. The Services Worker or independent living staff shall ensure that a child in the custody of the department is counseled as to the options available to him or her upon reaching his or her eighteenth birthday. The department or contracted service provider shall ensure, as feasible, that the child and his or her attorney participates in the required staffings and special judicial review hearings.

   a) Special Judicial Review. A judicial review hearing shall be held within ninety days after a child’s seventeenth birthday and shall meet the requirements contained in Section 39.701(6)(a) and (b), F.S. In addition, pursuant to Section 39.013(8), F.S., a hearing shall be conducted within the month that begins the six-month period before the child’s eighteenth birthday to review the child’s progress while in the custody of the department. A plan for the child’s transition to adulthood shall be outlined in writing and details discussed during these reviews. The transition plan shall be filed with the court and served on all parties.

   b) Staffing at Seventeen Years Old. Within thirty days prior to the Special Judicial Review a staffing shall be conducted to notify the child of the options available upon reaching his or her eighteenth birthday and to discuss the child’s plans.

   1. Planning shall take place to ensure that the child has a place to live and a source of income, whether earned or unearned, sufficient enough to meet his or her needs upon attaining his or her eighteenth birthday. Potential problems shall be identified early in the process to avoid disruptions from occurring in the child’s education, employment and social environments.

   2. If the child desires or intends to live with a family member upon reaching his or her eighteenth birthday, the Services Worker shall assist the child in planning for a safe and smooth transition. The
Services Worker shall seek court approval through CWLS when necessary to allow contact with family members while the child remains under supervision.

(c) Assessment. During the month following his or her seventeenth birthday, each child in licensed out-of-home care shall be provided an independent living assessment.

(d) Written Notification. In conjunction with the special judicial review and staffing, each child in the custody of the department shall be notified in writing of the options available to him or her upon reaching eighteen years of age, including but not limited to the Road to Independence Program, continued court jurisdiction to age nineteen and the ability to reside in a licensed foster home. The notification shall be written in such a way that the child is able to easily understand it.

(e) The department or contracted service provider shall assist the child in making application for the Road to Independence Scholarship and/or transition support services/aftercare support services no later than ninety days prior to his or her eighteenth birthday.

Rulemaking Authority 39.012, 39.0121(7), (13), 409.1451(2)(a), (8) FS. Law Implemented 39.001(1)(i), (j), 39.621(3)(d), 39.624, 39.701(6)(a)-(c), 409.1451(1)-(5) FS. History–New 5-4-06.