

# ANNUAL REPORT

Independent Living Services Advisory Council



*Meet Melissa, CBC of Central Florida,  
Full Time Student while working through College*

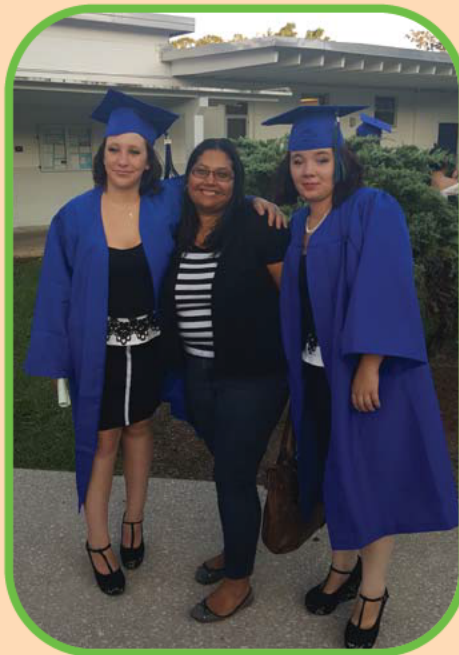
2016

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*Meet Jazzman, Palm Beach County volunteering at a beach clean up event.*



*Meet program participant from Hands of Mercy Everywhere Inc, Graduating High School.*



*Meet a future graduate from ROTC in Belleview.*

# BACKGROUND OVERVIEW

## Chafee Foster Care Independence Act (1999)

- Enacted by Federal Government
- Increased state funding to provide teens who "aged out" of foster care system with better access to programs designed to promote the development of self-sufficiency.
- Training for older foster youth for: Education, Preparation for Post Secondary, Daily Life Skills, Employment, Substance Use Services, Pregnancy Prevention, and Preventative Health Activities.
- Connect older foster teens with permanent supportive adults.

## Road to Independence Act (2002)

- State-based program establishing a system of independent living transitional services enabling older foster teens who exit foster care at 18 to make the transition to self-sufficiency as adults.
- Provide direct stipend payments to young adults while they pursue full-time education opportunity in areas of continuing education, or vocational training for post-secondary degrees.

## Sen. Nancy Detert Common Sense & Compassion Independent Living Act (2013)

- Extends care for foster teens until the age of 21. For youth attending an approved education program full time, or
- Youth must be working a minimum of 80 hours/month, or
- Youth is participating in a program designed to promote or eliminate barriers to employment.

*Note: If a youth has a documented disability that limits their ability to work or attend education full time, then the case worker and the youth will create an individualized plan to meet the needs of the youth.*

**W**hat does effective parenting look like when the State of Florida is the parent of a young adult? For young adults known to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) ages 18-22 years old, this is the question that has been examined, modified, and re-examined since 1999. As a result, the following legislation has evolved over time to give older foster youth the opportunities that most teens have growing up in healthy – supportive homes.

Oversight for the provision of these services is provided in the Florida Statute, under section 409.1451(7), which allows the Secretary of DCF to appoint an inde-

pendent council to serve the purpose of reviewing and making recommendations concerning the implementation and operation of the provisions of s. 39.6251 and the Road-to-Independence Program.

As a result, the Independent Living Services Advisory Council (THE COUNCIL) was created and has provided oversight for these Independent Living Services and has given feedback and recommendations to DCF as an independent body for the past ten years. THE COUNCIL consists of community members from varying stakeholder agencies who share the same concern and willingness to improve the implementation and operation of the Road-to-Independence Program, while advising DCF on actions that would improve the ability of the

Road-to-Independence Program services to meet the intended goals.

Through this year's report the members of the 2016 COUNCIL pay tribute to the hard work and dedication of previous COUNCIL members. Over the past ten years COUNCIL members have dedicated their time, experience, and commitment to improving child welfare for older foster youth by closely examining challenges and successes related to services provided to this population across the state. A key component of this work is making, and following up on, recommendations made to DCF in key areas related to Independent Living Services.

In addition, this report begins a new age for THE COUNCIL. In 2017, a new process will be in place tracking COUNCIL membership, meeting schedules, and content for each meeting that will refocus the efforts on implementation and operation of the service delivery of Road-to-Independence services so that young adults are better prepared for self-sufficiency.

The truth of the matter is that it is difficult for any agency to replace what healthy, supportive, and loving families provide. Over the past 10 years, THE COUNCIL has demonstrated that having an independent body examine what is in place is better than no examination at all. During this time, the youth have demonstrated their resilience to rise above difficult situations and achieve great heights when given the best opportunities to succeed. In the years ahead, THE COUNCIL is committed to ensuring these opportunities are in place for older foster youth so they can begin new chapters of their lives leading toward greater self-sufficiency.



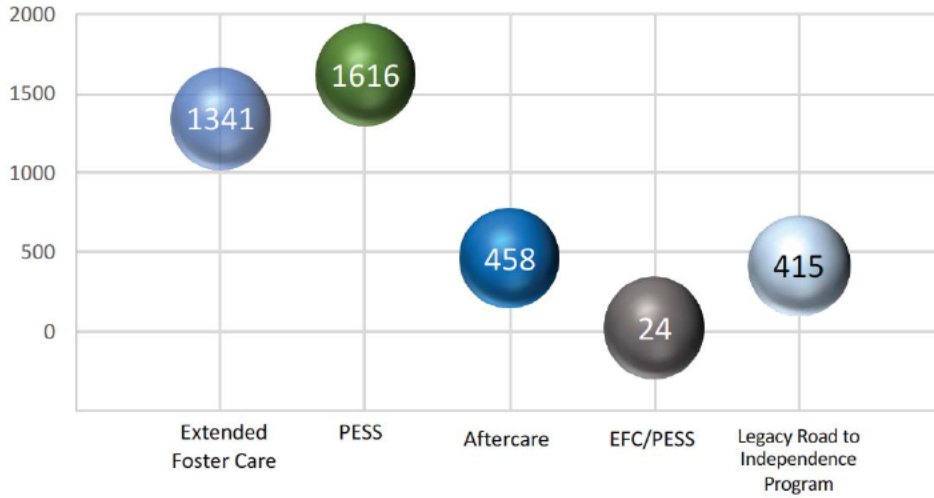
*Meet Sandy, Palm Beach County, moving away to college to become a teacher.*



*Meet Bill, very excited to meet Dwayne Johnson and helping "The Rock on set"*

# By the Numbers

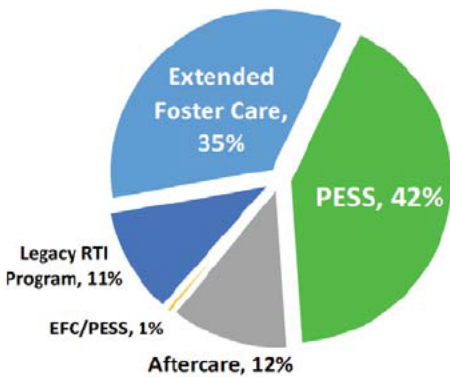
Independent Living Young Adult Participants  
By Program Type  
2016  
N = 3,854



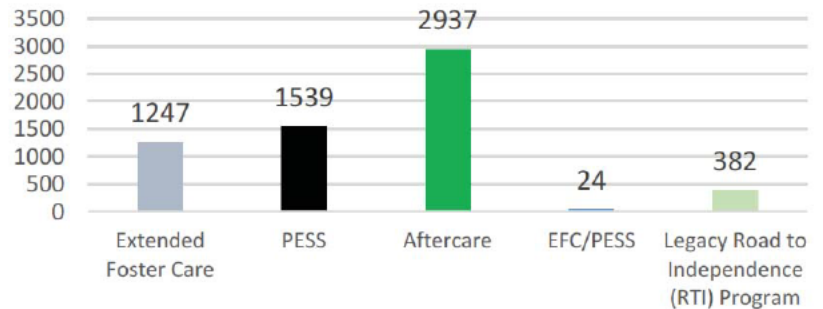
Independent Living Program Participants by Age  
18 – 24 year olds  
N = 3,854

	18	19	20	21	22	23	Totals	Percent
Extended Foster Care	705	406	180	50	0	0	1341	35%
PESS	123	245	315	370	461	102	1616	42%
Aftercare	115	103	87	79	66	8	458	12%
EFC/PESS	16	5	3	0	0	0	24	1%
Legacy RTI Program	0	30	126	120	107	32	415	11%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>959</b>	<b>789</b>	<b>711</b>	<b>619</b>	<b>634</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>3854</b>	<b>100%</b>

## INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS



Number of Young Adults Served by DCF Program  
2015-2016



Source: DCF 2015 2016 FSFN

# Executive Summary

THE COUNCIL met monthly from January 2016 through November 15, 2016 to review services, challenges, achievements and programs that are in place to assist older foster youth on their journey toward adulthood and self-sufficiency. Five central areas were identified as critical areas requiring follow-up by DCF. These areas included:

## Recommendations Summary

### 1 Education

**1** Require case managers to be knowledgeable about the Multi-Tiered System of Supports.

**4** Continue collaborating with state leadership to support the work of statewide initiative related to college campus-based supports.

**2** Urge case managers to be knowledgeable of online resources for education and career planning.

**3** DCF to pursue a plan to provide funding to maintain a network of post-secondary campus-based support initiatives.

### 2 Housing

**1** Create a tracking system for homeless youth known to DCF that is used statewide.

**4** Improve tracking and monitoring of homelessness data to accurately capture young adults are formerly from foster care.

**2** Use existing meetings to provide training statewide about Supportive Housing Programs, Housing Coordination and Host Families.

**3** Implement After Care services and funding in uniform fashion holding youth & CBCs accountable to avoid homeless situation.

### 3 Teen Parents

**1** Increase funding for specialized services, training, and level of care needed so that teen parents in Extended Foster Care can remain in or relocate to quality parenting-driven programs.

**2** DCF to propose legislation for 2017 to add judicial follow up to ensure that the expected case plan requirements related to parenting teens are met with in 30 days of hearings.

**3** Provide parenting youth in foster care with a Fast Pass allowing young parents access to free, flexible, quality daycare.

### 4 Employment

**1** Develop and adopt operating procedures, definition of common terms and expectations that emphasize employment for older foster youth.

**4** Youth employment should be included on DCF scorecard as a key component of the system of care and used to promote normalcy for youth in dependency care.

**2** Enter into a Data Sharing Agreement with DEO and DOR to receive employment status data for youth in care and provide quarterly updates to THE COUNCIL.

**5** Revise Quality Assurance system to evaluate the collection and management of data related to IL youth who are employed.

**3** Evaluate the current capacity of FSFN, implement necessary system enhancements and program policies to record and track the employment status of all youth who are in care.

**1** Determine why DCF youth have a lower issuance rate of civil citations by working with local law enforcement agencies (LEA) to dispel any myths they may have about children in foster care, and to resolve any real issues they may have with the child welfare system.

**2** Explore with local law enforcement agencies why certain counties do not offer civil citations at all.

**3** Determine why DCF youth who are issued a civil citation have a lower successful completion rate, and then explore how to resolve this.

**4** DCF should work with DJJ at the state level to ensure there is timely sharing of civil citation cross-over data at both the state and local levels.

## Executive Summary Continued

These areas were explored and presented in this report in the following manner:

- Creating a **key question** driving the concern for the service delivery or lack thereof.
- **Taking steps** as a COUNCIL during meetings to get the most accurate information available about the subject area.
- Communicating **findings** from the actions taken by THE COUNCIL.
- Examining critical **data** related to the subject area (if available).
- Creating concrete **recommendations** that can be followed up by DCF and THE COUNCIL in the following year.

One central theme that persisted throughout the year in relation to exploring these critical areas was the availability, or accuracy of data requested by THE COUNCIL from DCF. Data has been provided about enrollment/utilization of the services offered (i.e., how many participants utilize the various services, and the costs associated with providing the benefits). What is unclear is how the participation numbers compare with the overall population of eligible individuals for independent living services. For example: a review of the data showing total participants in each post-foster care program appears to show that the overall headcounts are relatively flat or declining over the reporting period or since the 2014 legislation.

A percentage (year-to-year) of the eligible population utilizing services would provide a better indicator of the penetration and effectiveness of these services (and their associated implementation plans), as opposed to a headcount. This will be an area for future exploration for THE COUNCIL accompanied by future recommendations.

THE COUNCIL would be remiss not to recognize DCF and their efforts to respond to the requests for data and presentations throughout the year. THE COUNCIL greatly appreciates the assistance of the Statewide Independent Living Services Specialist to take requests and reply to them in a timely manner so meetings can have the most accurate information and data available.

# Education

## KEY QUESTION

*How can DCF best support K-20 educational success for youth and young adults in and from foster care and enable them to access and utilize the full range of education-related transition options and resources available to them?*

## STEPS TAKEN BY COUNCIL

THE COUNCIL has worked this year to educate its members on resources available that will assist youth in foster care to successfully transition to independence by identifying key areas of need, barriers and assets related to educational success, and best practice. This information can enable the state, through its private community-based care providers, sub-contractors, and community agencies, to improve their service to youth in foster care and the many dedicated paraprofessionals, and volunteers who support them.

In the K-12 area, THE COUNCIL received a presentation about the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) used by school districts to identify, monitor and assess the needs of students struggling in school, including the many youth in care who struggle because of issues both related to foster care and related to issues they experienced before entering care. The MTSS system is an evidence-based model of academic support that uses data-based problem-solving to integrate academic and behavioral instruction and intervention.

In 2006, the Florida Department of Education and the University of South Florida created the Florida Problem Solving and Response to Intervention (PS/Rtl) Project. Through the years, the mission of the project has evolved through a partnership with the Florida Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) into the MTSS initiative. In other words, in Florida Rtl is described as a MTSS.

The integrated instruction and intervention is delivered to students in varying intensities (multiple tiers) based on student need. The goal is to prevent problems and intervene early so that students can be successful.

PS/Rtl provides professional development, technical assistance and support to increase the implementation and sustainability of a multi-tiered system of supports. This effort is supported by Regional Coordinators (RCs) located in the northern, central, and southern areas of the state. The RCs increase the ability of districts to implement MTSS through training, technical assistance, and support. Professional development modules and materials are created to support MTSS implementation across the state. In addition, project staff support the Florida Department of Education in their work with districts to improve the performance of all students.

According to the PBIS annual report, the organization worked with 54 out of 67 (81%) of Florida's school districts in 2014-2015. Forty-two percent (42%) of trained districts in Florida have trained at least 90% of the schools in their district. Only 17% of districts have trained less than



50% of the district schools. Of the 1723 trained schools, 1504 (87%) were active in the 2014-2015 school year. All elements of training have consistently been rated 5 or higher on a scale of 1 to 6.

Successful use of the MTSS must include families as full participants in the educational process for their children. Families participate as planners, contributors, leaders, teachers, learners, and colleagues. This is especially important for youth in the foster care system. Case managers, foster parents, and group home managers must be knowledgeable about the Multi-Tiered System of Supports and how to work with school personnel to plan interventions to support foster youth struggling in school. The fact that so many Districts throughout the state have received this high quality training enabled THE COUNCIL to make the recommendations that follow.

THE COUNCIL also received a presentation about My Career Shines, a comprehensive education and career planning system that can help foster youth succeed in the increasingly competitive global economy. THE COUNCIL learned, via an in-depth demonstration of the service, how foster youth and all students can learn about themselves, discover the many options and opportunities for their future, and gain access to the information and tools to achieve their goals. My Career Shines is already used by many school districts to satisfy the state's Career and Education Planning Course requirement for middle school students. Subsequent discussion suggested that foster parents, care givers, and case managers could benefit from training and access to this system to help foster youth explore and adjust their Career and Education Plan.

Regarding the post-secondary education arena, THE COUNCIL heard a presentation about Florida Reach from one of its co-founders. Florida Reach is a network of young adults, child welfare workers, youth advocates, representatives of community-based care agencies, and education student support services professionals. The presentation highlighted a number of programs at colleges throughout the state that are working to implement campus-based support initiatives, led by appointed or hired higher education professionals, several of whom also have strong social work backgrounds. The colleges and universities with paid full-time staff focused specifically on young adults from foster care include: Tallahassee Community College, Miami Dade College (2), Valencia College. The university with paid full-time staff are Florida International University (2).

Florida Reach's work has been led by a group of volunteer members of the network. DCF has provided strong moral support for this statewide group of leaders and provided the majority of funding for the 2016 Florida Reach Symposium, which was attended by more than 150 social work and higher education professionals from Florida and other parts of the country. DCF



recently released a Request for Proposal that would provide funding for an organization that is willing and able to continue Florida Reach's work and to coordinate, develop, and maintain the Positive Pathways Network, a network of postsecondary campus-based support initiatives across the Florida public college and university system.

*Meet Stanley, Adopted at 14 and now age 23. He attends college, and recently completed the EMT Program and works at a Walk-in Clinic.*

## FINDINGS

Independent living transition services are designed to help foster youth obtain life skills and education so that they can obtain post-secondary credentials that can help ensure they can earn a living and sustain themselves in adulthood. Adolescence is a time of growth, learning, and developing independence, and most youth, with the support of their family, make a successful transition to adulthood. However, youth in the foster care system often lack the guidance, support, and training to learn the skills necessary to function independently when they leave the system.

In addition to struggling in school, youth in care who experience frequent school changes may also have difficulty developing and sustaining supportive relationships with teachers or peers. Supportive relationships and a positive educational experience can be powerful contributors to the development of resilience and are vital components for healthy development and overall well-being.

Research has shown that foster youth often fall behind their peers in educational attainment due to disruptions throughout their educational careers. Youth in foster care are more likely to drop out of school, less likely to receive a high school diploma or a GED, and less likely to participate in postsecondary education. Since educational success is a key to financial self-sufficiency, coordinated educational services are critical to help foster youth succeed academically. Programs that promote educational stability and integration are most likely to promote educational success.

In spite of significant challenges, youth in the foster care system demonstrate extraordinary courage, determination and resilience. It is important to provide these youth, and the adults who support them, with the resources and assistance needed to achieve stability and independence.

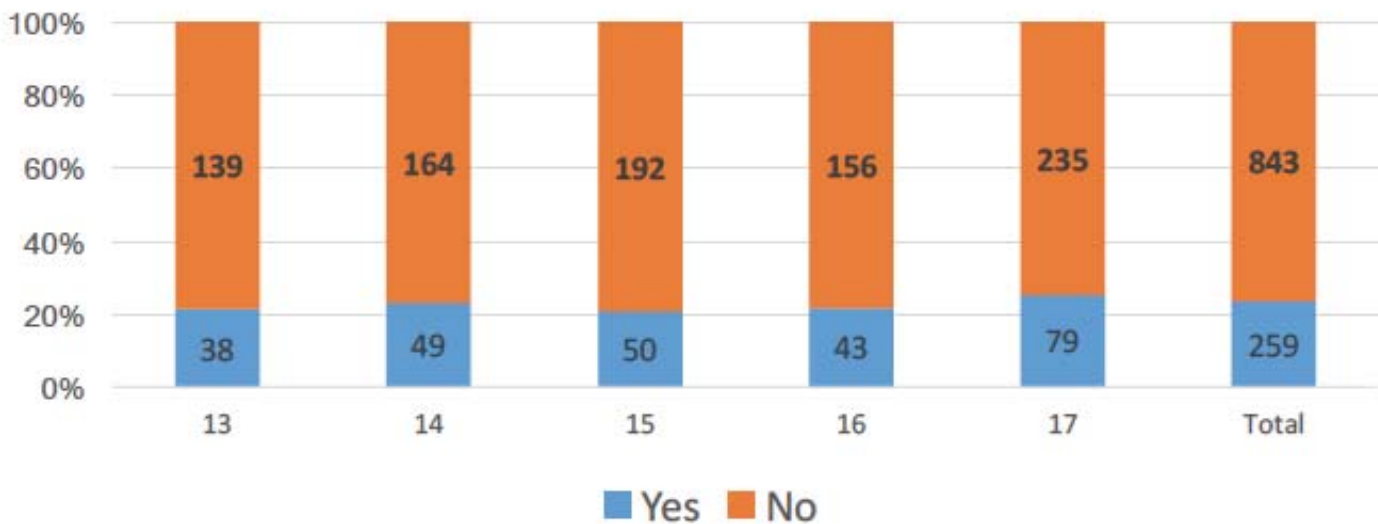
Early intervention and access to some existing educational programs can help a caregiver, case manager, mentor, or Guardian ad Litem volunteer navigate through the education system and support foster youth struggling in school. On the other end of the educational continuum, post-secondary institutions, it is vital that adults emerging from care receive ongoing support on campus and from the community, to compliment the generous financial provisions made by the state to fund educational and living expenses for this population. This support also is vital as a response to the State Legislature's innovative mandate requiring that the State University System (SUS) and the Florida College System (FCS) establish dedicated campus coaches for students eligible for the tuition and fee exemption as outlined in s.1009.25 (Florida Statutes).

The State contends, and THE COUNCIL concurs, that a system of campus-based support programs can help ensure that more young adults from foster care can avoid the "myriad negative long-term outcomes" that continue to plague the majority of these resilient yet troubled young adults.

# DATA

During the past decade, the State of Florida has consistently made efforts to improve the collection, processing, and dissemination of data on the educational progress of young people in its care. Two of the key data collection methods used to collect data on the education status of this population in Florida are the My Services Survey (administered to 13 – 17 year olds) and the NYTD Florida Survey (administered to 18-22 year olds). Two vital pieces of information from this data are related to the action steps THE COUNCIL took during the year in that they indicate ongoing educational challenges related to young people in care.

**DCF Clients with Education & Career Path Plans  
(13 - 17 year olds)**  
N = 1,102



For instance, data from the 2015 My Services Survey indicates that only 34% of the 235 seventeen year olds in state custody have an education and career path plan, which is a key component of preparing young adults for their future. Furthermore, data from the 2015 NYTD Florida indicates that of the 1,424 transitioning adults surveyed, only 60% had earned a high school diploma or GED. More troubling is the fact that only 6% had earned a vocational certificate or vocational license, and the same percent had earned an associates degree. These results are in response to the question “What is the highest educational degree or certification that you have received?”

Throughout the state, a key set of data that is missing relates to information on the educational progress of young adults attending public post-secondary institutions. Understanding this gap, the Florida Legislature has mandated that the FCS and the SUS develop reports for DCF on the status and progress of young adults from foster care who are receiving the state education fee exemption. To support this requirement and to offer the opportunity for strong collaboration, DCF has released an Request For Proposal that includes funding for research on youth from foster care attending post-secondary institutions in the State.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COUNCIL recognizes that there are existing support systems within school districts and, to a lesser degree, Florida's public colleges and universities, to assist foster youth and the adults who support them. THE COUNCIL therefore recommends that:

1. DCF requires case managers to be knowledgeable about the Multi-Tiered System of Supports and how to work with school personnel to plan interventions to support foster youth struggling in school. DCF should require case managers, foster parents and group home managers to complete an online training on the Multi-Tiered System of Supports developed in collaboration with Department of Education's PS/RtI Project, THE COUNCIL and DCF Staff.
2. DCF should require case managers through in-service training to be knowledgeable of online resources for education and career planning that exist to help guide older foster youth in the direction of attaining educational goals. Free resources exist in the state of Florida such as, My Career Shines Career Navigator system, that help foster youth access and apply their career plan consistently for academic success and independent living.
3. DCF should pursue its plan to provide funding to a qualified organization that will coordinate, develop, and maintain a network of post-secondary campus-based support initiatives across the Florida public college and university systems.
4. DCF should continue working closely with state level leaders at DOE, the State University System, and the Florida College System, to support the work of what will be a fledgling, mostly volunteer-driven statewide initiative related to campus based support initiatives across Florida's public college and university systems.

*Meet Janice, James, and Chelsea, advocating to Sen. Nancy Detert on behalf of youth in Foster Care while serving as representatives from Florida Youth SHINE.*



# Housing

## KEY QUESTION

*Now that older foster youth are able to remain in care beyond 18 years old, what types of housing options exist for young adults to best support them, and how is this tracked?*

## STEPS TAKEN BY COUNCIL

Throughout the 2016 calendar year, THE COUNCIL met to explore options that exist throughout the state since new legislation was enacted to support older foster youth post age 18. THE COUNCIL was driven by a concern that extending care without the proper supports in place was merely moving the challenges older foster youth faced at the age of 18 to the age of 21. Connection to permanent supportive adults appeared to be part of the housing formula for successfully integrating youth from child welfare to adulthood and the following methods were explored: ***Supportive Housing Programs, Housing Coordination, Low Income Options*** and ***Host Families***.

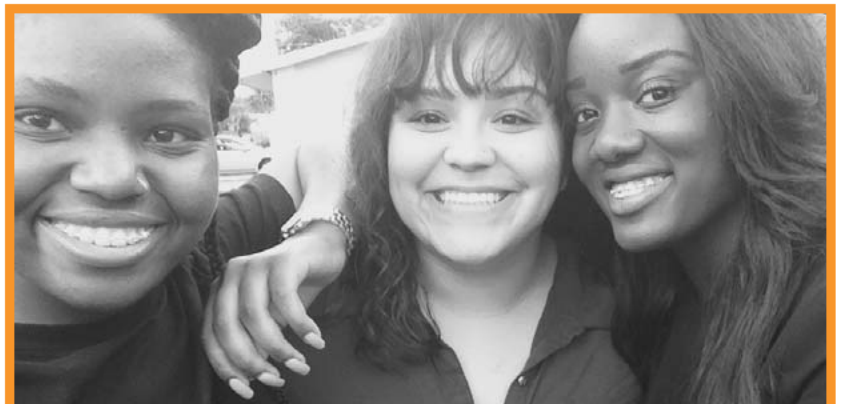
*Meet Diane Schofield and Staff, from Hands of Mercy Everywhere Maternity Group Home for young mothers.*



*Meet Francis, college graduate with support from his housing program.*



*Meet Sandina, Georgina, and Melissa, who all met while living at Vita Nova Village apartments in West Palm Beach.*



## FINDINGS

### ***SUPPORTIVE HOUSING PROGRAMS:***

Fortunately, some counties in Florida have supportive housing programs for young people from foster care. These programs are typically apartments or living arrangements that are governed by independent non-profits that allow youth 18+ from foster care to live, since many of these young people are unable to safely return home to their parents.

While living in these housing programs, youth obtain daily support, guidance, and mentorship about life skills leading to self-sufficiency. Although there is no uniformity in the delivery of life skills material from program to program, these environments are able to take advantage of real time teaching scenarios so that residents can learn cooking, cleaning, and critical thinking skills in a practice environment where it is safe to learn from their mistakes.

Models for transitional housing are typically cheaper than allowing a youth to remain in group care, or rent on their own, and come with 24-hour support. The program fees from those presented to the Council averaged \$1100/month with electric, internet and support services included. According to a 2014 OPPAGA study, in the 2013-2014 fiscal year, the per diem rate for the shift-care group home model averaged \$124 per day, or \$3720 per month. The cost of group home care in Florida for the 2013-14 fiscal year was \$81.7 million. Based on the average cost per day at a group home this assumes 1800 youth over the course of a year. Transitional housing in comparison would have cost approximately \$24.8 million per year.

Given that many of these programs offer help with mental health, trauma counseling and daily support this price was affordable against the costs some CBCs pay related to early termination of leases, resetting security deposits with community landlords, or remaining in group homes.

Finally, youth living in these programs typically appreciate living in a community of peers with shared experiences. It is not uncommon to see camaraderie within these housing programs, adding value to additional peer to peer support young people need to thrive on their own.

### ***HOUSING COORDINATION:***

Since the implementation of extended foster care, one of the major challenges around the state was finding supportive housing options when group homes, and foster homes were not an option. In addition to the expense, group care providers and foster homes had to negotiate the logistics of having youth over and under 18 living in the same communal space. This often leads to youth having to remain in extended foster care in a setting different than what was intended in the law such as having to move out of their placement on their 18th birthday to an apartment.

To help address these challenges, housing coordination has been explored in certain areas of the state to allow for certain independent living programs to refer older clients to a person who specializes in the housing options that exist in their area. For some areas in the state, housing coordinators exist to:

- Assist child welfare case managers with housing options when a youth is eligible for extended foster care.
- Serve as the entry point for all older independent living youth to enter to get help with housing.
- Partner with other housing coordinators in other systems to prevent clients from moving between homeless services to child welfare services and vice versa.

***LOW INCOME HOUSING:***

In some areas housing coordinators were also used to connect IL youth with local low income housing providers to allow IL youth formerly in care to begin the process of accessing low cost rental options. When units are made available through low income initiatives youth are connected to these units through the housing coordinator. This can result in a youth paying hundreds of dollars less for rentals each month in areas that are safe and affordable, so that other income, or scholarships can be used for daily living needs.

Housing coordinators can also serve as single points of contact for landlords who oversee the units designated for low income renters. This can help prevent evictions and problems between the tenant and landlord. Youth must be willing to meet with the housing coordinator to review lease requirements and correct behaviors that would result in an eviction.

There are steps required through the Housing Authorities in each area to become the single point of contact, but once this is established, older youth have additional options for affordable places to live in their area.

***HOST FAMILIES:***

Finally, housing coordinators and certain independent living programs in the state have taken on the role of recruitment of host families for older foster youth. Since there are no guidelines that host families have to be licensed placements prior to accepting an older foster youth (18+) this allows for quicker recruitment of new homes and placements for young adults. The challenge is to properly screen and train host families about the expectations and the challenges related to supporting older foster youth.

Many counties have successfully recruited host families to help older foster youth with short and long-term goals after turning 18 years old. Through support of host families, many youth are able to graduate high school, complete college, begin employment, and get a driver's license all while being in stable housing.



*Older foster youth learning how to cook at the Destiny House, located in Daytona.*

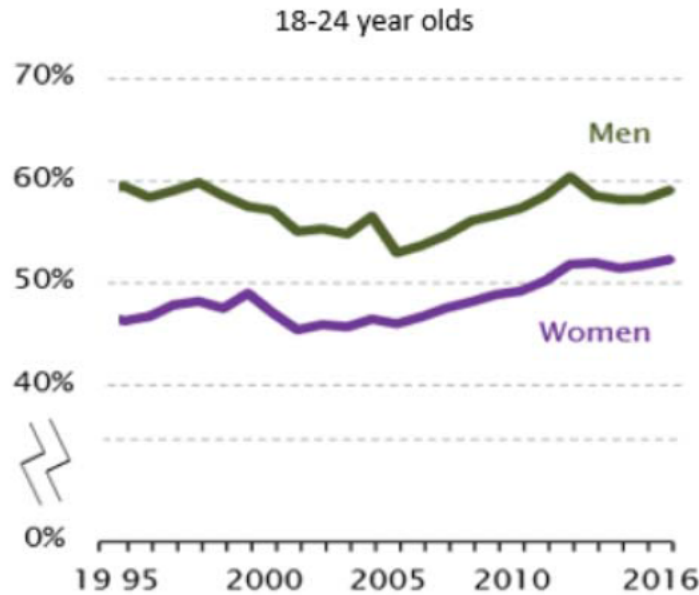


*Meet Anna, about to finish high school and travel to England along a student education program.*

# DATA

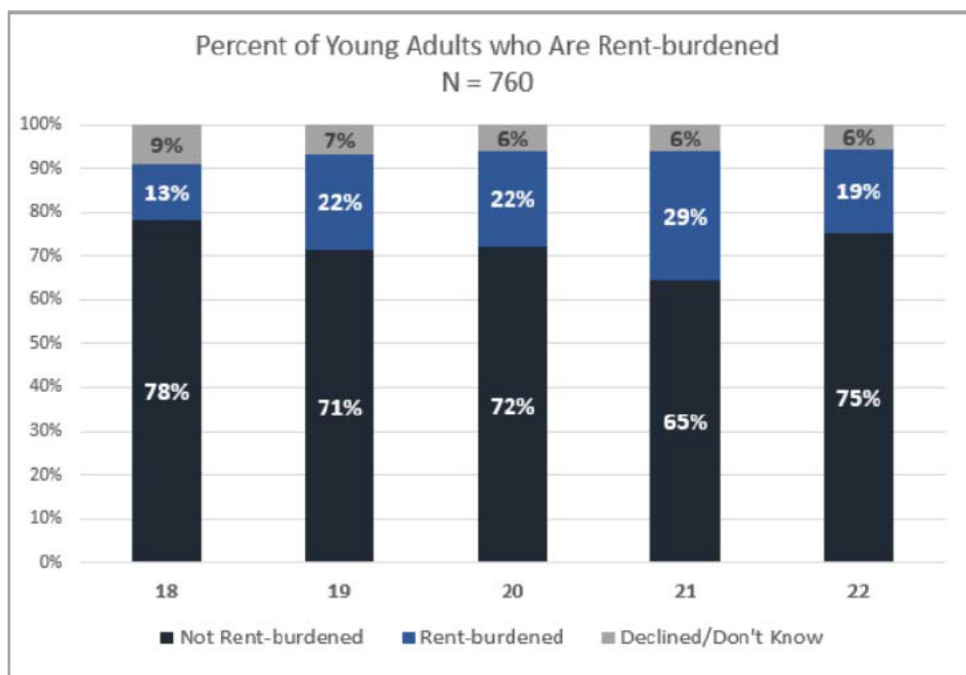
Throughout the nation, high percentages of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 live with their parents. The US Census Bureau reports that more than 50% of young women, and nearly 60% of young men in America, still live at home (see chart below). For young adults who are emancipated from foster care, there is usually still no viable “parent” home available to them. When there is, that option is usually not possible, desirable or safe.

## US Young Adults Living in Parents' Home



Source: US Census bureau

So many young Americans live at home because rent is so high in most parts of the nation. In fact, the US Census Bureau reports that of the young people who are renting are considered “rent burdened”—meaning housing eats up around a third or more of their income.





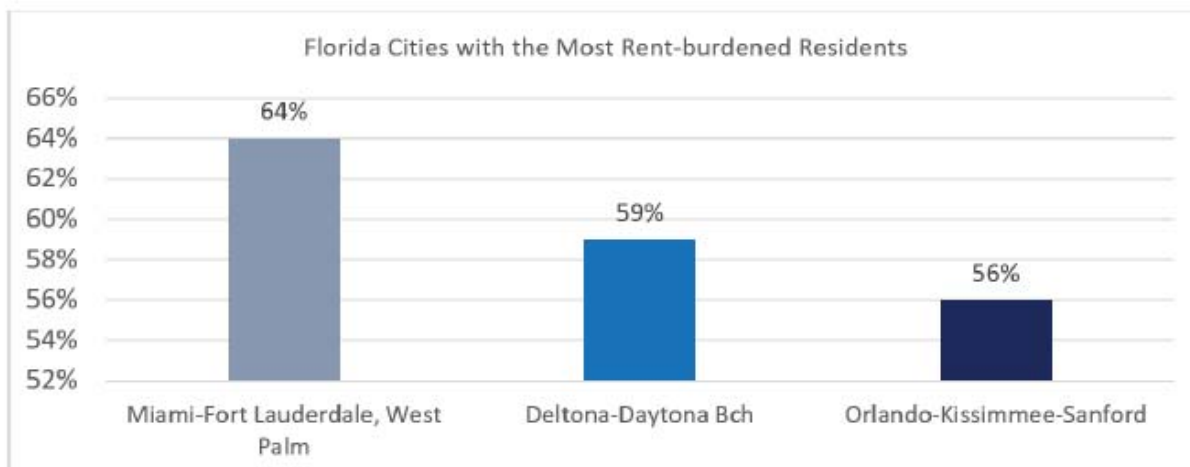
Rent burdened can also mean that after paying rent, little is left over for other living essentials, which is how the question was framed for Florida National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) respondents. Florida DCF implemented an expanded version of NYTD to be used on an annual basis to survey our young people ages 18-22 who have aged out the state foster care system. The chart below is based on the responses of 760 young adults from care who answered this survey question.

<b>After paying for your housing, do you still have enough for your other living expenses such as food, transportation, or utilities?</b>						
	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Yes</b>	43	75	121	106	202	547
<b>No</b>	7	23	37	48	51	166
<b>Declined</b>	1	4	4	4	5	18
<b>Do not know</b>	4	3	6	6	10	29
<b>Total</b>	55	105	168	164	268	760
<b>Percentage Yes</b> (Not Including "Declined/Do Not Know")	86%	77%	77%	69%	80%	77%

Source: 2016 Florida NYTD Survey

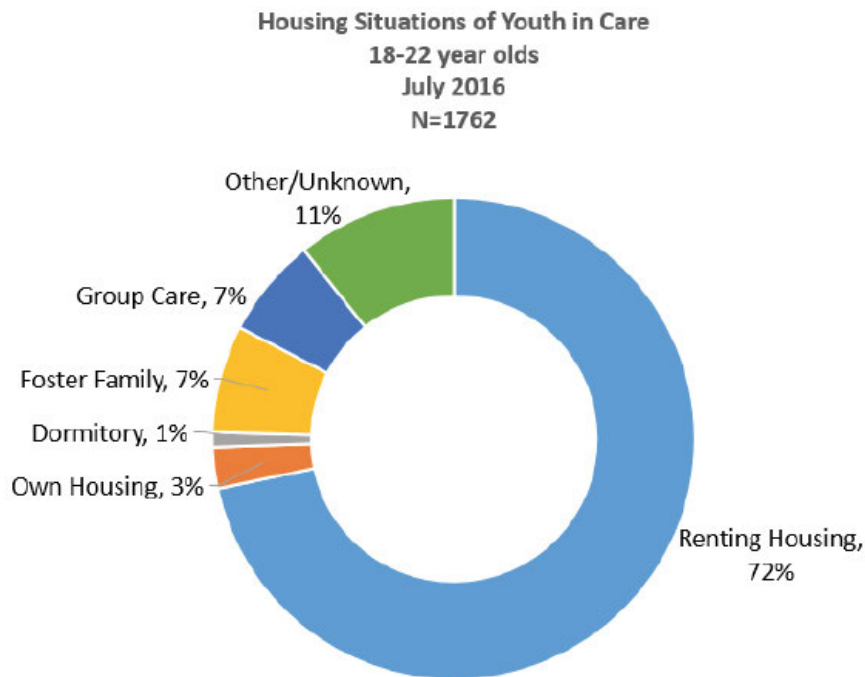
Of the 100 Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) in the United States with the most renters, Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach took the lead over the top 20 cities by a wide margin. Almost 64% of its renters — the vast majority of whom earn less than \$35,000 per year — are rent-burdened.

The chart below shows the percent of rent-burdened residents in three Florida MSAs, areas that also have large numbers of former foster youth struggling to establish themselves as independent adults. These areas are the Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach MSA, the Deltona-Daytona Beach-Ormond Beach MSA, and the Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford MSA. In almost every case, the majority of the rent-burdened renters are making less than \$20,000, which characterizes the population on which ILSAC focuses.



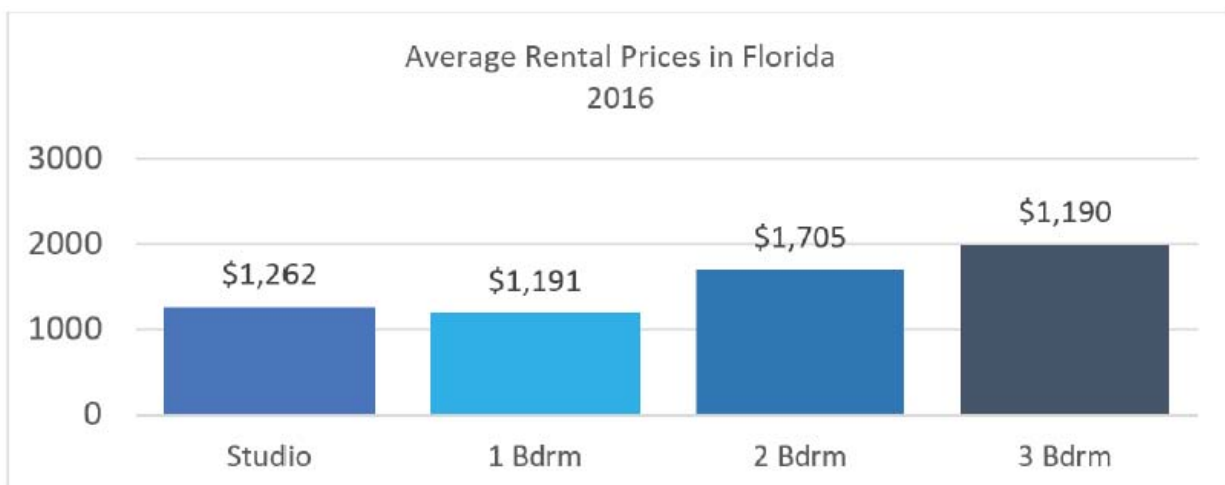
Source: US Census Bureau, 2016

Data regarding older foster youth and their living arrangements is tracked by entering the living arrangements for each youth into the DCF Database known as Florida Safe Family Network (FSFN). Information from FSFN yields statewide data that can be compiled in a number of ways. The chart below, based on FSFN data, indicates that 72% of Florida’s young adult population transitioning from foster care rent housing.



Source: Florida Department of Children and Families FSFN, 2016

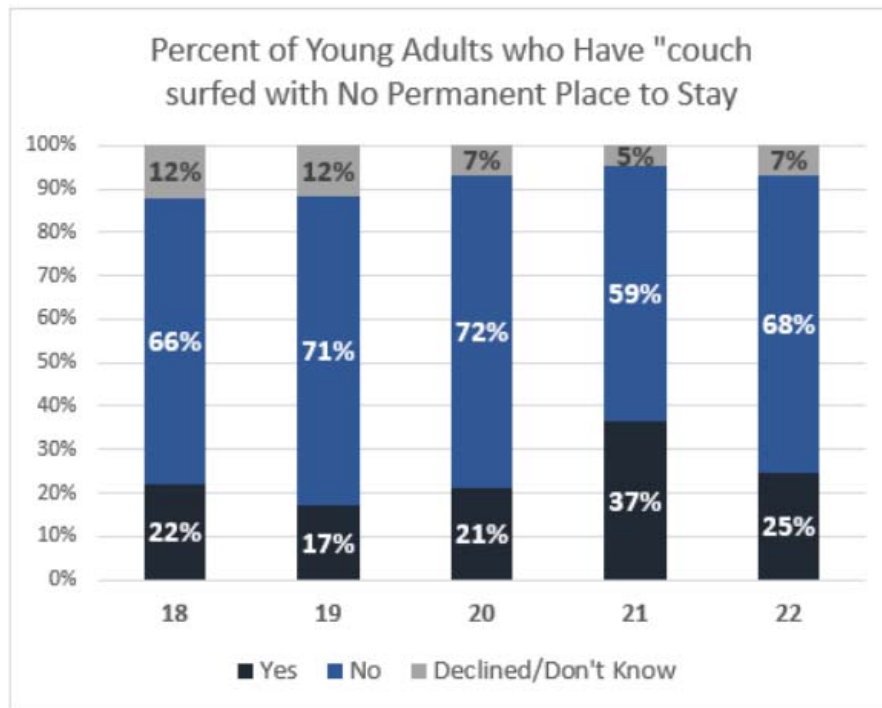
It stands to reason that these young adults are also rent burdened, especially since the majority of them live in Florida’s metropolitan areas, where rental prices average \$1,262 for studio apartments, and \$1,191 for 1 bedroom apartments (see chart below).



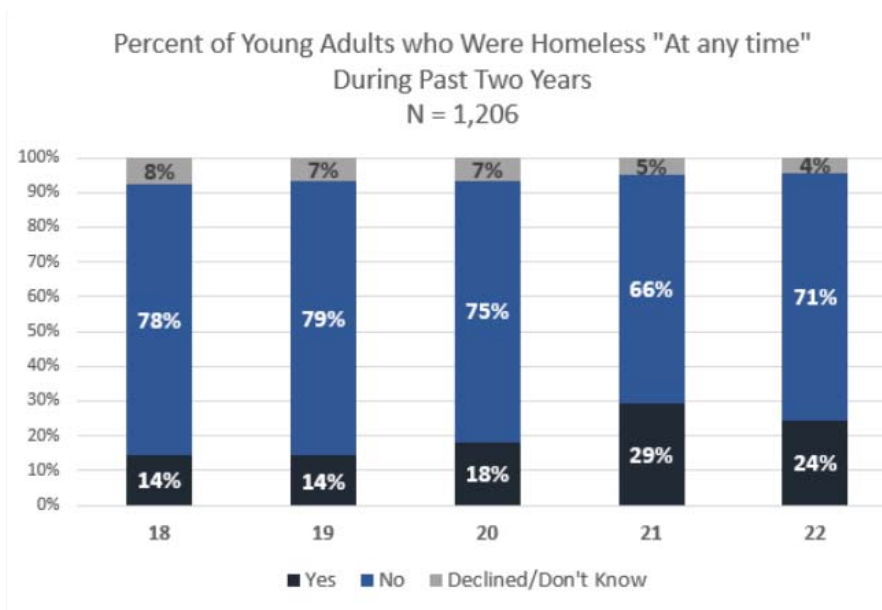
Source: US Census Bureau, 2016

The Florida NYTD survey, which gathers self-reported data directly from young adults each year, provides information on homelessness among this population. Despite this data there appears to be a lack of tracking, reporting or monitoring for older foster youth and homelessness by DCF.

The 2016 Florida NYTD indicates that homelessness is a recurring theme, and as evidenced by the two charts below where a number of respondents indicated they did not have a place of their own to stay, or experienced homelessness in the past 24 months.



Source: 2016 Florida NYTD Survey



Some members of the COUNCIL have questioned how respondents in foster care can also report that they are homeless. This leads to an overall concern that the numbers that are collected by DCF and FSFN do not indicate the total number of eligible youth able to receive IL services. FSFN only tracks youth actively receiving a service or a payment. This will leave out a portion of the total population still eligible, yet possibly disconnected from resources.

The direct answer to this question, after exploration the subject further, is that there is not enough information requested by or given to THE COUNCIL to tell how many youth are eligible in addition to the youth accessing services. In short, THE COUNCIL has not been given clear data that tracks the total population of youth known to DCF ages 18 to 22. This will be an area for future consideration as THE COUNCIL continues to examine housing options and the ramifications of lack of housing in future meetings.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

After a review of the information related to how the new law has been implemented, and the housing options that exist, THE COUNCIL is making the following recommendations to DCF:

1. There is a lack of data indicating the degree of homelessness among foster youth from within DCF. THE COUNCIL recommends that DCF should improve the tracking and monitoring of data to accurately capture how many young adults formerly from foster care are currently homeless.

2. Given the presentation of practices used in Broward County, Palm Beach County and Jacksonville related to Supportive Housing Programs, Housing Coordination and Host Families, DCF should incorporate training of these models as a portion of the statewide Independent Living quarterly meetings and phone calls. Training can include exploring how these models are implemented, outcomes relative to placement longevity and permanent connections of IL youth to supportive adults.

3. DCF should create a plan using the appropriate personnel within DCF to bring uniformity to implementing Aftercare Services, to ensure that community based care agencies are held accountable for providing services and financial assistance to young adults who are eligible in order to avoid homelessness. This plan can be presented to THE COUNCIL during the 2017 ILSAC meeting schedule.

4. THE COUNCIL recommends DCF improve tracking and monitoring of data to accurately capture how many young adults formerly from foster care are accessing supportive housing options/programs post age 18. The DCF database (called Florida Safe Family Network) could begin with providing better clarification to case managers for older foster youth about the types of housing older foster youth are accessing.

# Teen Parenting

## KEY QUESTION

*How can we better support teen parents in foster care and those aging out, in the areas specific to quality housing and daycare?*

## STEPS TAKEN BY COUNCIL

Challenges related to independent living services specific to older foster youth who are teen parents has been a concern for THE COUNCIL in previous reports. In fact, since 2013 THE COUNCIL has made nearly 20 recommendations about how to improve these services older foster youth.

In 2016 THE COUNCIL decided to begin with a review of those recommendations and revisit those currently most pressing for older foster youth. THE COUNCIL took the following steps to get updated information.

THE COUNCIL received a detailed presentation and had discussions in line with the 2015 Florida State University (FSU) Institute for Child Welfare Report which states that young parents aging out of foster care face known economic, educational, and housing obstacles that have the potential to limit their capacity to meet their children's needs. Additionally, experiences of trauma can impact the ability of parents aging out to provide a safe and nurturing home and to meet their children's needs. Increasing a parents' capacity to provide for their children's needs warrants increased attention for this unique population of Florida's young parents who turn 18 in foster care.

## FINDINGS

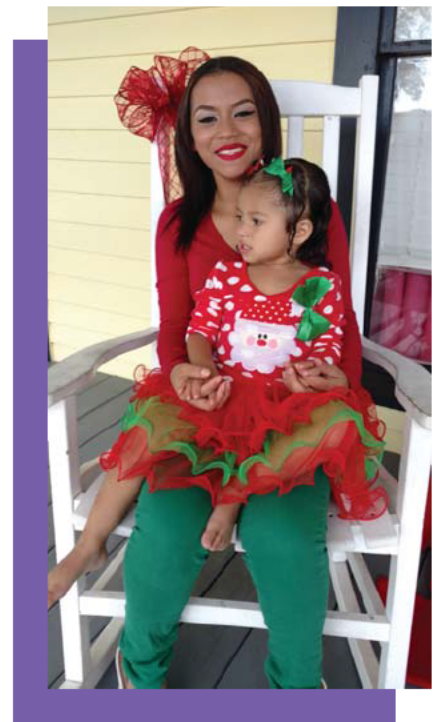
Additional funding is required through foster care dollars, prevention dollars, and/or other funding sources to specifically support Extended Foster Care populations of pregnant and parenting youth and their babies. To most effectively serve this population, funding should be provided to allow the parent and child(ren) to remain in or relocate to a quality parenting driven program at age 18 with the option to remain until they have received specialized services and attained the necessary skills a young parent and child desperately need. Findings from previous Council reports and current research indicates:

- F.S. 39.6241(4)(a) "A young adult may continue to reside with the same licensed foster family or group care provider with whom she/he was residing at the time she/he reached the age of 18 years old."
- Foster homes for teen parents should utilize a co-parenting model with evidence based parenting programs.

- There is a need for maternity homes that offer specialized transition services such as navigating ELC, child/mother Medicaid eligibility, WIC, ACCESS services, baby court, children’s mental health services, evidence-based parenting programs, and staff trained specifically to care for the parenting population and trauma-informed care.
- There is a need for human trafficking residential placements that offer parenting youth that have been sex trafficked and are at risk, the opportunity to be in a safe environment while learning how to successfully parent.
- Safety risk of transitioning an ill-equipped young parent, with minimal parenting and daily living skills into an unsupervised and unsupported living environment presents too high a risk for the mother and child(ren). This can prevent babies of young adults aging out of foster care from experiencing maltreatment. Some of the young parent risk factors can be attributed to their developmental limits, care giving inexperience, lack of parental example, as well as limited child care resources.
- Young parents need help understanding how their past trauma experiences impact their emotions and ability to successfully parent. They also need help understanding how they can prevent their child from going into foster care.

Barriers should be removed that could prevent young parents from residing in a quality parenting environment as they transition from foster care. Removing these barriers could prevent intergenerational transmission of child maltreatment through multiple generations. Several opportunities to intervene and to change a dangerous trajectory, such as:

- Relocate youth when in the best interest of the teen mother or baby. Moving and/or changing schools out of county may be the best solution to have a fresh start and get young mothers away from possible gangs, sex trafficking, or other bad influences.
- Provide opportunities for parenting in protective, supportive environments. As a teen mother feels safe and protected she will protect her child.
- Focus on the ongoing needs of both parent and baby. Their needs are constantly changing and require a much higher level of supervision and support.
- Young parents who have previously lost custody of their children need assistance navigating Baby Court to help prevent their baby from coming back into the DCF system.
- Babies of teen mothers who do not attend a quality daycare are at a great risk of abuse, neglect and abandonment.



*A young mother and her child from Hands of Mercy Everywhere Maternity Group Home.*

## DATA

To truly understand and serve the needs of this specialized population, COUNCIL members suggest in conjunction with the FSU Institute of Child Welfare that the following information be collected and analyzed:

- Data on the number of youth who are in the child welfare system who are pregnant, have given birth, or fathered a child.
- Data on the number of young women and men who have recently aged out of the child welfare system who have given birth, are about to give birth or fathered a child.
- Data on the number of children who are in the physical custody of their young parent who is in foster care or recently aged out.
- Data on the number of these children who are in DCF custody but live in the same home as their young parent who is in foster care or recently aged out.
- Data on the number of these children who live separately from their young parents who is in foster care or recently aged out.
- Data on the number of young parents in foster care or recently aged out that have an open DCF case but are working a case plan in hopes of reunification.
- Data on the number of these children whose young parents' rights have been terminated.

The most recent data collected about teen parents and foster care come from many sources. Below is the data collected from various reports from 2016.

- Connected By 25 recent report- Almost 50% of DCF youth aging out of foster care will experience homelessness after they age out.
- Nearly half the children in residential group care have behavior problems, and after their stay they tend to need more time in foster care.
- Studies of young parents who were previously in foster care found that approximately 39% had been investigated for child abuse or neglect, with 11% of the cases resulting in the child being removed from their teen parent's custody.
- The NLSAAN, a nationally representative sample of adolescents, found that 50% of female youth still in care or recently aged out become pregnant by age 19 compared to approximately 20% of same-aged females in the general population.

*Data continued...*

- 39% of young mothers are more likely to have another child before 20.
- Casey Foundation stated that teen parents who opt into Extended Foster Care are less likely to be homeless, are more likely to attend school, and have a higher overall earning potential.
- Princeton University found that public subsidies support child care for only 15% of eligible families.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE COUNCIL recommends that increased funding be provided to support specialized services, training, and the level of care needed so that youth in Extended Foster Care who are pregnant and parenting can remain in or relocate to quality parenting-driven programs. This funding is imperative to ensure that the youth have access to programs that can enable them to develop the skills they need to successfully parent. The additional funding can come from additional foster care dollars, prevention dollars, and/or other funding sources.

2. THE COUNCIL recommended that as the pregnant or parenting youth transitions to age 18, that the courts ensure “quality” of the case plan by providing follow-up. Since there is currently no requirement for follow-up, THE COUNCIL is recommending a legislative change that at a **maximum of 30 days, DCF and the courts ensure that the expected case plan requirements related to parenting are met.** This follow-up must take place to ensure that there is no disruption or discontinuation of services after the youth turns 18 years of age. THE COUNCIL is strongly recommending that this language be submitted in DCF’s proposed legislation for 2017.

3. THE COUNCIL recommends that DCF provide parenting youth with a Daycare Free Fast Pass. This Fast Pass would provide young parents with absolutely free, flexible, quality daycare that is easily accessible and would remove financial barriers that may prevent a child from attending daycare; therefore, reducing their risk of being abused, neglected and/or abandoned by their young parent.



*Meet Jesse, Kids Central Inc., she is completing her final semester of college, in her final year of the PESS Program at the end of the Fall 2016.*



# Employment

## KEY QUESTION

- 1. What type of partnerships and/or data sharing agreements are needed to ensure employment data is collected and tracked by the Florida Department of Children and Families for youth who are in dependency care?*
- 2. What type of FSFN enhancements and program policies need to be adopted by the Department of Children and Families and the contract providers to ensure employment data is consistently collected, evaluated, shared, and leveraged to improve the outcomes for youth who are in dependency care?*

## STEPS TAKEN BY COUNCIL

During the 2015 year, ILSAC formed an Employment workgroup that met to discuss the issues that impact employment for youth in care. The workgroup initiated a “data match” project in partnership with the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity. The goal of the project was to answer the following question: “Of the youth who were in care in 2015, how many were employed (as reported by the Florida Department of Revenue – Employer files)?”

Working with DCF IL staff, the DEO staff matched the youth’s records with the DOR Wage file that reflected the number of youth who were employed. This project demonstrated that DCF and DEO/DOR can share data in a format that can provide the employment status of youth who are in care. The results of the Employment workgroup’s project was shared with the full ILSAC during a meeting. Additionally, throughout the year, the ILSAC received employment-related information and updates during the meetings as well as explored strategies to improve local partnerships with the CareerSource Florida network, Vocational Rehabilitation and other employment program partners that serve youth in dependency care.



*Meet Deondre, aspiring to be a future chef by completing a culinary course at the Florida Sheriff's Youth Ranch.*

## FINDINGS

DCF is responsible for ensuring that older youth in the Independent Living program receive the services and supports needed to successfully transition to adulthood and achieve economic self-sufficiency. Youth who are gainfully employed and who earn a living wage, are on the path to becoming self-sufficient and living as a productive member of society.

Currently, employment data for youth who are in care, is not consistently entered in to DCF's database (FSFN). In Florida, there are several different groups/entities that collect employment data about youth in foster care and the data is collected in different ways. For example, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) receives employment information from lead agencies and records the information in FSFN. The Florida Department of Revenue (DOR) collects the information from employer tax records. Connected by 25 collects data via surveys of foster youth in care. Additionally, there is currently no process or official data sharing agreements in place at DCF that would:

- Create a common data source and time schedule for producing reports related to employment for youth in care
- Allow the identification and tracking of the employment status of youth in care on a consistent basis
- Allow accurate reports to be generated from FSFN that reflect the employment status of youth in care
- Allow the input/transfer of employment data in to FSFN from other program partners.



*IL youth are capable of amazing things, this young man secures employment at the University of North Florida.*

## DATA

The data sources used this year related to employment included data from the Florida Department of Children and Families, the Florida Department of Revenue, the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) and the Community-Based Care entities from across the state.

Below is information from DEO related to the numbers of older foster youth who are employed by CBC in Florida.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To continue advancing previous COUNCIL recommendations related to employment, THE COUNCIL recommends the following:

1. DCF should develop and adopt operating procedures, definition of common terms and expectations that emphasize employment as a viable option for youth in out of home care who are preparing to transition to adulthood.
2. DCF should enter into a Data Sharing Agreement with DEO and DOR to receive employment status data for youth in care and provide quarterly updates to THE COUNCIL.
3. DCF should evaluate the current capacity of FSFN, implement necessary system enhancements and program policies to record and track the employment status of all youth who are in care at the state level. If system enhancements are required to collect the data, DCF should approve such enhancements and update the terms of the CBC's contracts to require that data related to employment be entered in FSFN.
4. Youth employment should be included on DCF scorecard as a key component of the system of care. DCF should require the collection and use of employment related data to promote normalcy for youth in dependency care.
5. DCF should revise its Quality Assurance system to evaluate the collection and management of data related to IL youth who are employed. Additionally, IL youth employment should be included in QA reports.



*The Independent Living Services Advisory Council  
recognizes the scars some of our youth endure  
and endeavor to prevent future ones.*

# Reducing the Numbers of Dependent Children Involved in Delinquency Court

## KEY QUESTION

- 1. Why are DCF children significantly different in both issuance and successful completion rates?*
- 2. Once the reason is identified, how can DCF and its partners work within each county to eradicate the statistical difference?*

## STEPS TAKEN BY COUNCIL

ILSAC has reviewed information presented by members Deborah Schroth (DCF/CLS) and Jeannie Becker-Powell (DJJ) to understand the importance of civil citations and to learn and question the use and success of civil citations for DCF children.

Individual members have attended presentations on this issue at the FCC conference in July 2016 and the DCF Summit in September 2016. These presentations were by Deborah Schroth and Theda Roberts, Civil Citation Coordinator, Florida Dept. of Juvenile Justice.

## FINDINGS

Data from the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) and the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) show that there are two problems with civil citations for children in out-of-home care: DCF children who are eligible for civil citation in lieu of arrest have an issuance rate that is statistically significantly lower than the rate for their non-DCF community peers; and when DCF children are actually issued civil citations, their rate of successful completion, meaning that there are no further law enforcement/DJJ actions and there is never a recorded arrest, is significantly statistically lower than the successful completion rate of their non-DCF peers.

The Florida Juvenile Civil Citation Initiative provides law enforcement an alternative to arrest for youth under the age of 18 who commit non-serious misdemeanor offense. Civil citations provide accountability by the youth for the offense by determining interventions and consequences based on an assessment of the youth's risk to reoffend and sanctions are assigned.

Civil citation helps youth totally avoid a criminal arrest and history record that can impede future opportunities in the military, secondary and post-secondary academic or vocational education, and in housing. Youth who successfully complete civil citation requirements have proven to be less likely to have further involvement with the juvenile justice system. This can mean that a youth who is chastised for non-serious bad behavior through a civil citation does not go on to later commit any felonies.

Civil citation is uniquely different from post-arrest diversionary programs. A successfully completed post-arrest program results in the dropping of the charges, but the fact of the arrest remains on the youth's record. A successfully completed civil citation program results in no juvenile justice record, as the youth was never formally arrested. Further, because a youth in Florida may receive up to three civil citations in their minority for qualifying offenses, provided the youth has never been formally arrested, if a youth commits a non-serious offense today and is cited, if the youth makes another mistake during childhood, the youth will not necessarily be subject to arrest. For example: youth is involved in a minor "disrupting a school function" offense at the age of 12. If the youth successfully completes a civil citation, there is no arrest. If, at the age of 17, the youth makes another mistake and pickpockets a small item, the youth may again receive a civil citation. But if that youth was arrested at the age of 12, then the minor mistake at the age of 17 must result in an arrest for this very minor offense.

## DATA

Unfortunately, the DJJ-DCF dually served dashboard does not contain civil citation information. That information is available from DJJ, but has not yet been made public via its website.

DJJ has provided the following information:

For calendar year 2014, the civil citation issuance rate for all eligible youth statewide was 41%. Contrast: the issuance rate for DCF youth in out-of-home care was only 32%, a 9% difference to the detriment of our youth.

For fiscal year 2014 – 2015, the civil citation completion rate for all youth who were issued civil citations was 80%. Contrast: the successful completion rate in that same time period for DCF youth was only 66%, a 14% difference.

*General data for crossover youth:*

[Online Data for Crossover youth and Dually Served Youth  
Presentation on Civil Citation presented to ILSAC 2016](#)

*(Click to links to learn more)*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

DCF should task a staff person with accomplishing the following recommendations. If there is a Restorative Justice staff member, THE COUNCIL suggests that is the most logical person to be tasked, as the civil citation program is an important component of restorative justice, especially in our schools, which account for a significant percentage of DJJ involvement by our youth.

1. It is necessary to determine why DCF youth have a lower issuance rate of civil citations by working with local law enforcement agencies (LEA) to dispel any myths they may have about children in foster care, and to resolve any real issues they may have with the child welfare system. For example, it may be that LEA do not understand who to contact; or may believe that a foster home will not support a youth in completing citation sanctions. If the latter is true, then DCF should consider mandating support for youth with DJJ involvement, including civil citation sanctions, in its licensing rules and contracts.

2. For those counties which simply do not offer civil citations at all, local CBCs, partnering with DCF and identified local youth advocacy groups, should explore with LEA why this is, and attempt to convince LEA of the benefits of this program.

3. It is also necessary to determine why DCF youth who are issued a civil citation have a lower successful completion rate, and then explore how to resolve this. Some conjectures: the foster parent or group home may not have the ability (or desire) to transport a youth to required sanctions; there may be a lack of communication when a youth with a sanction is transferred to another county for residence. DCF should include civil citation data elements in FSN to ensure the necessary communication. DCF should also work with the CBCs and CMOs to ensure adequate training of the civil citation program and its requirements and benefits for our youth, and to determine how to better support our youth who are issued citations in successfully completing their sanctions and responsibilities.

4. DCF should work with DJJ at the state level to ensure there is timely sharing of civil citation cross-over data at both the state and local levels.

# 10 years



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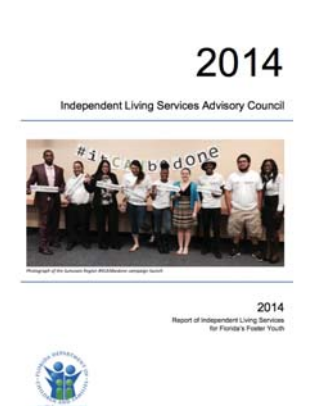
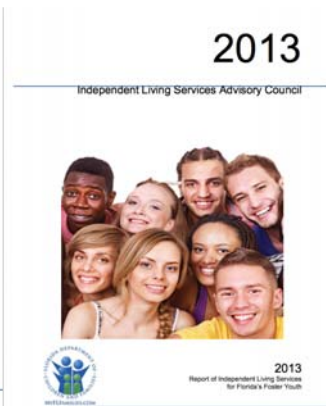
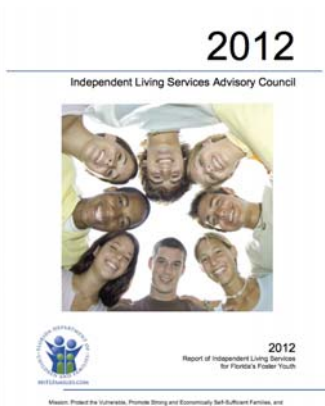
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**Department of Children and Families  
Office of Child Welfare  
Response to the  
Independent Living Services Advisory Council  
2016 Annual Report**

December 31, 2016

Mike Carroll  
Secretary



Rick Scott  
Governor

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## **ILSAC RECOMMENDATIONS ON EDUCATION**

*THE COUNCIL recognizes that there are existing support systems within school districts and, to a lesser degree, Florida's public colleges and universities, to assist foster youth and the adults who support them. THE COUNCIL, therefore, recommends that:*

- 1. DCF require case managers to be knowledgeable about the Multi-Tiered System of Supports and how to work with school personnel to plan interventions to support foster youth struggling in school. DCF should require case managers, foster parents and group home managers to complete an online training on the Multi-Tiered System of Supports developed in collaboration with Department of Education's PS/Rtl Project, THE COUNCIL and DCF Staff.*
- 2. DCF should require case managers through in-service training to be knowledgeable of online resources for education and career planning that exist to help guide older foster youth in the direction of attaining educational goals. Free resources exist in the state of Florida, such as My Career Shines Career Navigator system, that help foster youth access and apply their career plan consistently for academic success and independent living.*
- 3. DCF should pursue its plan to provide funding to a qualified organization that will coordinate, develop, and maintain a network of postsecondary campus-based support initiatives across the Florida public college and university systems.*
- 4. DCF should continue working closely with state level leaders at DOE, the State University System, and the Florida College System, to support the work of what will be a fledgling, mostly volunteer-driven statewide initiative related to campus-based support initiatives across Florida's public college and university systems.*

## **DEPARTMENT RESPONSE**

Improving educational (academic or vocational) attainment is one of six outcome areas tracked by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) through the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD). The Department complies with all federal regulations related to assistance to former foster care youth and transmits data to NYTD from the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN), the statewide automated child welfare information system.

The Department also recognizes that there are various supportive structures, including the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), designed to assist youth with achieving their educational goals. Several areas in Florida law cite requirements related to continued education for dependent youth. Section 409.145, Florida Statutes (F.S.), includes roles and responsibilities of caregivers, the Department, Community-Based Care Lead Agencies (CBCs), and other agency staff on how to support youths' educational success. Section 39.0016, F.S., addresses interagency agreements between school districts, the Department, CBCs, and other agencies, including the coordination of relevant training. Section 409.1452, F.S., mandates collaboration with the Board of Governors, Florida College System, and Department of Education to assist children and young adults who have been or are in foster care.

The Department supports case managers, independent living specialists, foster parents, and group home managers in acquiring relevant training or skills available to further support the educational needs of the youth in the child welfare system. The Department will collaborate with Department of Education (DOE) and CBC Lead Agencies' training coordinators to ensure adequate training materials are available.

In November 2016, the Department advertised a request for proposals to procure a provider to coordinate, develop, and maintain a network of postsecondary, campus-based supports throughout Florida, called Positive Pathways for Transitioning Postsecondary Youth (Positive Pathways). Once services are procured, the Positive Pathways provider will complete the following:

- Collaborate with the Department, DOE, Board of Governors and Florida College System to establish dedicated campus coaches for those students eligible for the Tuition and Fee Exemption, as outlined in s. 1009.25, F.S.
- Develop procedures for new member orientation to support the retention of the Positive Pathways Network.
- Provide technical assistance, training and guidance to members, community stakeholders, and former foster youth.
- Organize and deliver a yearly conference for members of the Positive Pathways Network, along with their stakeholders.

## **ILSAC RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOUSING**

*After a review of the information related to how the new law has been implemented, and the housing options that exist, THE COUNCIL is making the following recommendations to DCF.*

- 1. There is a lack of data indicating degree of homelessness among foster youth from within DCF. THE COUNCIL recommends that DCF should improve the tracking and monitoring of data to accurately capture how many young adults formerly from foster care are currently homeless.*
- 2. Given the presentation of practices used in Broward County, Palm Beach County and Jacksonville related to Supportive Housing Programs, Housing Coordination and Host Families, DCF should incorporate training of these models as a portion of the statewide Independent Living quarterly meetings and phone calls. Training can include exploring how these models are implemented, outcomes relative to placement longevity and permanent connections of IL youth to supportive adults.*
- 3. DCF should create a plan using the appropriate personnel within DCF to bring uniformity to implementing Aftercare Services, so that community-based care agencies are held accountable for providing services and financial assistance to young adults who are eligible in order to avoid homelessness. This plan can be presented to THE COUNCIL during the 2017 ILSAC meeting schedule.*
- 4. THE COUNCIL recommends DCF improve tracking and monitoring of data to accurately capture how many young adults formerly from foster care are accessing supportive housing options/programs post-age 18. The DCF database (called Florida Safe Families Network) could begin with providing better clarification to case*

*managers for older foster youth about the types of housing older foster youth are accessing.*

## **DEPARTMENT RESPONSE**

Reducing homelessness among youth is one of the six outcome areas tracked by the Administration for Children and Families through the National Youth in Transition Database. The Department and the CBCs also track and monitor the data relevant to housing for young adults receiving independent living services. The Department's Office of Child Welfare, Data Reporting Unit (OCWDRU), developed a report specific to active young adults and their living arrangement type. Young adults are captured in the report, when they are active in FSFN and are linked to an Independent Living Case Type, such as: Road to Independence, Aftercare Support Services, or Young Adults Formerly in Foster Care.

The Department acknowledges that accurate data entry is critical to accurate reporting. In efforts to improve data integrity, the Department makes readily available FSFN trainings and resources. In 2015, the Department launched a FSFN Systems Adoption Initiative to collaborate with each CBC to identify the information and technology requirements and develop an individualized System Adoption Plan. The System Adoption Action Plans were designed to assist the CBCs in achieving enhanced utilization of FSFN, while supporting the agencies' business processes. Within this initiative, guidance papers were issued to assist staff in data entry requirements. The FSFN utilization paper for Independent Living and Life Skills addresses living arrangement types specific to the over-age-18 population. Those living arrangement types include but are not limited to: Foster Family, Group Care, Renting Housing, Own Housing, and Homeless. It is important to note that when a young adult is no longer active, the Department and CBC do not continue to track the young adult's housing status. If a young adult returns requesting service, the young adult's housing needs will be assessed. When a young adult is determined to be eligible for a program and active in the system, the living arrangement will be counted.

Section 39.6251(4), F.S., addresses housing options available to young adults in Extended Foster Care, noting the preference of a licensed foster home over all other options. The Department acknowledges the lack of a sufficient number of licensed foster homes available for youth and young adults in care and supports the exploration of alternative housing programs to serve young adults in transition. While many CBCs have already established or partnered with transitional housing programs, limited supervised housing options remain available statewide. The Department agrees that additional analysis is needed and will explore all opportunities to not only reduce homelessness but to ensure young adults have access to safe and supportive housing.

Aftercare services are intended to be a bridge in or between Extended Foster Care or Postsecondary Education Services and Support. As such, services may vary based on each young adult's level of need. Florida law establishes client eligibility requirements and due process. Requirements in Chapter 65C-42.003, Florida Administrative Code, further detail the framework for how Aftercare Services shall be administered, including: application and discharge procedures, aftercare planning, and documentation requirements. CBCs that are not compliant with these requirements are cited by the Department's Contract Oversight Unit (COU) and required to complete a Corrective Action Plan. The Department will continue to work collaboratively with the CBCs to ensure all independent living program requirements are followed and that eligible young adults are fully engaging in the services available.

## **ILSAC RECOMMENDATIONS ON PREGNANT AND PARENTING TEENS**

*1. THE COUNCIL recommends that increased funding be provided to support specialized services, training, and the level of care needed so that youth in Extended Foster Care who are pregnant and parenting can remain in or relocate to quality parenting-driven programs. This funding is imperative to ensure that the youth have access to programs that can enable them to develop the skills they need to successfully parent. The additional funding can come from additional foster care dollars, prevention dollars, and/or other funding sources.*

*2. It is recommended that as the pregnant or parenting youth transitions to age 18, that the courts ensure “quality” of the case plan by providing follow up. Since there is currently no requirement for follow up, THE COUNCIL is recommending a legislative change that at a maximum of 30 days, DCF and the courts ensure that the expected case plan requirements related to parenting are met. This follow-up must take place to ensure that there is no disruption or discontinuation of services after the youth turns 18. THE COUNCIL is strongly recommending that this language be submitted in DCF’s proposed legislation for 2017.*

*3. It is recommended that DCF provide parenting youth with a Daycare Free Fast Pass. This Fast Pass would provide young parents with absolutely free, flexible, quality daycare that is easily accessible and would remove financial barriers that may prevent a child from attending daycare; therefore, reducing their risk of being abused, neglected and/or abandoned by their young parent.*

## **DEPARTMENT RESPONSE**

The Department’s policies reflect a mutual concern for pregnant and parenting teens, and recognition of the benefits of support to the teens and their infants. CBCs have the responsibility and authority to approve the living arrangements of those pregnant and parenting young adults participating in Extended Foster Care. Each agency must consider the needs of the young adult and level of supervision, allowing for the young adult to develop the skills necessary to become self-sufficient. All youth in transition should be provided essential life skills, such as parenting, to be successful. The Department will continue to conduct ongoing fiscal analysis of funding to support young adults in Extended Foster Care.

Ongoing transition planning and case planning are mandatory for young adults in Extended Foster Care. These plans should not only address the young adult’s long-term goals; they should include a description of the programs and services identified to assist the young adult in becoming successful. The Department will review all statutory and Florida Administrative Code requirements to assess whether additional language is needed in regards to case planning for pregnant or parenting youth.

The Department acknowledges the importance of child care for parenting young adults receiving independent living services. Through the ongoing partnership with the Office of Early Learning (OEL) through the Child Care Program Office and the Quality Child Care for Foster Children Workgroup, the Department will further collaborate with OEL to identify ways to better support parenting young adults seeking child care services. Additionally, the Department will gather feedback from CBC Lead Agencies to determine barriers in accessing quality child care.

## **ILSAC RECOMMENDATIONS ON EMPLOYMENT**

*To continue advancing previous COUNCIL recommendations related to employment, THE COUNCIL recommends the following:*

- 1. DCF should develop and adopt operating procedures, definitions of common terms and expectations that emphasize employment as a viable option for youth in out-of-home care who are preparing to transition to adulthood.*
- 2. DCF should enter into a Data Sharing Agreement with DEO and DOR to receive employment status data for youth in care, and provide quarterly updates to THE COUNCIL.*
- 3. DCF should evaluate the current capacity of FSFN, implement necessary system enhancements and program policies to record and track the employment status of all youth who are in care at the state level. If system enhancements are required to collect the data, DCF should approve such enhancements and update the terms of the CBCs' contracts to require that data related to employment be entered in FSFN.*
- 4. Youth employment should be included on the DCF scorecard as a key component of the system of care. DCF should require the collection and use of employment-related data to promote normalcy for youth in dependency care.*
- 5. DCF should revise its Quality Assurance system to evaluate the collection and management of data related to IL youth who are employed. Additionally, IL youth employment should be included in QA reports.*

## **DEPARTMENT RESPONSE**

Increasing financial self-sufficiency is one the six outcome areas tracked by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) through the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD). Employment is a recognized qualifying activity for participation in Extended Foster Care and is one condition that will help lead transitioning youth to becoming financially independent. The Department would appreciate the Council's leadership in examining with CBCs and external stakeholders, opportunities to increase employment rates among youth in foster care. The Department also will review the appropriateness of establishing performance goals in this focus area.

The Department acknowledges that accurate data entry is critical to accurate reporting. In efforts to improve data integrity, the Department makes readily available FSFN trainings and resources. In 2015, the Department launched a FSFN Systems Adoption Initiative to collaborate with each CBC to identify the information and technology requirements and develop an individualized System Adoption Plan. The System Adoption Action Plans were designed to assist the CBCs in achieving enhanced utilization of FSFN, while supporting the agencies' business processes. Within this initiative, guidance papers were issued to assist staff in data entry requirements. The FSFN Position Paper for Assets and Employment instructs direct service staff to enter information related to earned and unearned income. The Department also will examine a data sharing agreement with the Department of Revenue (DOR) for the purposes

of obtaining employment information for youth in transition. Currently, employment data is available in FSFN and can be accessed for tracking and monitoring. The Department will review whether the information being entered meets the reporting needs or whether FSFN enhancements would be required.

Beginning in October 2016, the Department began a redesign of CBC Performance Monitoring. Through a System of Care review, there will be an integration and synthesis of information from quality case reviews, performance and fiscal data, and special reports. Contract monitoring will include members of the contract oversight unit (COU) and child welfare system experts.

## **ILSAC RECOMMENDATIONS ON REDUCING THE NUMBERS OF DEPENDENT CHILDREN INVOLVED IN DELINQUENCY COURT**

*DCF should task a staff person with accomplishing the following recommendations. If there is a Restorative Justice staff member, THE COUNCIL suggests that is the most logical person to be tasked, as the civil citation program is an important component of restorative justice, especially in our schools, which account for a significant percentage of DJJ involvement by our youth.*

- 1. It is necessary to determine why DCF youth have a lower issuance rate of civil citations by working with local law enforcement agencies (LEA) to dispel any myths they may have about children in foster care, and to resolve any real issues they may have with the child welfare system. For example, it may be that LEA do not understand who to contact, or may believe that a foster home will not support a youth in completing citation sanctions. If the latter is true, then DCF should consider mandating support for youth with DJJ involvement, including civil citation sanctions, in its licensing rules and contracts.*
- 2. For those counties which simply do not offer civil citations at all, local CBCs, partnering with DCF and identified local youth advocacy groups, should explore with LEA why this is, and attempt to convince LEA of the benefits of this program.*
- 3. It is also necessary to determine why DCF youth who are issued a civil citation have a lower successful completion rate, and then explore how to resolve this. Some conjectures: the foster parent or group home may not have the ability (or desire) to transport a youth to required sanctions; there may be a lack of communication when a youth with a sanction is transferred to another county for residence. DCF should include civil citation data elements in FSFN to ensure the necessary communication. DCF should also work with the CBCs and CMOs to ensure adequate training of the civil citation program and its requirements and benefits for our youth, and to determine how to better support our youth who are issued citations in successfully completing their sanctions and responsibilities.*
- 4. DCF should work with DJJ at the state level to ensure there is timely sharing of civil citation cross-over data at both the state and local levels.*



## **DEPARTMENT RESPONSE**

The Department acknowledges that requirements for criminal records can create a barrier for young adults in obtaining housing, employment, and education. In September 2016, the Department created a Restorative Practices Specialist position to promote integration across the child welfare, juvenile justice, and education systems. In addition, this position serves as the Department's representative on the implementation, training, and ongoing coordination of restorative practices, such as civil citations. The Department agrees that there is a need to increase issuance rates of Civil Citations for youth in foster care and to expand the Civil Citation program for young adults receiving independent living services. The Civil Citation Coordinator for the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) currently collaborates with law enforcement agencies to implement this program and provides training and support. The Restorative Practices Specialist will work closely with DJJ's Civil Citation Coordinator to assist in these efforts.

The Department agrees that there is a need to track the number of crossover youth who are eligible for and receiving Civil Citations. Methods to track and monitor these high-risk youth are being researched through the DCF and DJJ Crossover Youth Workgroup. Data analysis is an integral component of the DCF and DJJ Crossover Youth Workgroup, and monthly data reports are shared and evaluated across both agencies.