
**Department of Children and Families
Response to the Independent Living Services
Advisory Council
2017 Annual Report**

December 31, 2017

Mike Carroll
Secretary



Rick Scott
Governor



INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of the Independent Living Services Advisory Council (ILSAC or THE COUNCIL) in 2002 by the Legislature, ILSAC has provided recommendations concerning the implementation and operation of independent living services as part of a comprehensive report. As required in s. 409.1451(7), F.S., the Department of Children and Families' (Department or DCF) is submitting the ILSAC 2017 Annual Report, along with the Department's responses to each of the recommendations.

ILSAC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXTENDED FOSTER CARE

1. ENHANCED DATA: "THE COUNCIL has determined the following recommendations for Extended Foster Care (EFC). The data being collected does not provide all the detail needed to answer many of the questions. For example, THE COUNCIL was not able to determine why eligible youth would opt out of EFC given the rich provisions afforded by the program. THE COUNCIL was unable to drill down on reasons why youth were being terminated from services earlier than 21 given the limited information in FSFN about terminations. Since the community based care agencies all use the same data base system to input data about this population, it would seem natural that a data set is created by DCF to collect these specific answers as to why youth are denied services and why they leave the program prematurely. Additional recommendations related to extended foster care and data collected by the Department of Children and Families' efforts with Results Oriented Accountability (ROA). This is a fairly new effort by DCF to create specific outcomes and drivers specific to different areas of the foster care system. These areas can be better tracked and monitored over time to hold groups accountable for performance and outcomes for youth. THE COUNCIL would like to continue to have input on measures tracked and would like to receive reports about ROA their accomplishments and the roll out plan relative to how community based care agencies will be expected to report on the outcomes developed."

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE

The Department recognizes the importance of Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) data enhancements and the need for statewide guidance on data entry to assist in continuous quality improvement efforts. Currently, independent living program eligibility data is being collected and reviewed to include terminations. FSFN provides nine termination reason options in a drop-down menu for EFC. Two options reflect a youth's choice to not participate in the program. Those options don't require additional explanation or data entry detailing why the youth elected not to receive the benefit. Some of the questions simply cannot be answered by FSFN data alone. Qualitative research would be needed to gain an understanding of the underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations for youth opting out or not participating. The Department would support ILSAC's efforts to seek former foster youth and child welfare professional participants who are willing to provide insights into the lack of engagement and to develop ideas or hypotheses for improved program promotion and effectiveness.

As indicated in ILSAC's response, the Department is working toward developing measures that are driven by FSFN data input through ROA. These measures will be developed with the assistance of the ROA Technical Advisory Panel (Panel). The Panel is authorized in s. 409.997 (4), F.S., to provide advice to the Department on the implementation of its child welfare ROA program. The 2017-2018 ROA Focus Objectives

are in the process of being updated, and it is the Department's recommendation that ILSAC appoint one or more of the members to join the Panel to assist the Department in the establishment and assessment of ROA implementation cycle benchmarks and milestones specific to independent living services.

2. STATEWIDE STANDARDIZATION: "There appears to be a sizeable variation on how EFC is implemented throughout the State. DCF should clarify and create more specific guidelines for such things as: acceptable living arrangements, denials, terminations, and monthly housing costs. Here are examples of situations discussed by membership that exemplify the need for clarification in order to achieve statewide standards and fair treatment of our young adults: #1. Young adult wants to remain in current placement at group home, can CBC deny because the rate is too high? #2. Based on applicant's history, CBC will only pay for housing at a supportive living group home, youth refuses to live there. Can the CBC deny EFC? Additionally, everyone would benefit from a standard explanation and delivery of information pertaining to EFC. THE COUNCIL also recommends that DCF produce a video message that explains all of the nuances of EFC along with other IL services. A video message would equip providers to better engage aging-out youth and would allow for a standardized comprehensive statewide explanation. This would improve our young adults' understanding of EFC benefits, and likely decrease the number of youth opting out."

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE

The Department acknowledges that a level of standardization is needed with regards to the assessment and approval of EFC supervised living arrangements and believes standardization has been expressed for denials and terminations as detailed in the eligibility requirements of the law. The Department is working toward the development of operating procedures that will not only standardize transition planning for youth, but incorporate a process to ensure that independent living services are implemented as intended by Florida Statutes. Once developed and operationalized, the Department will explore methods for best promoting EFC. A video message or web-based training may be the best method for communicating to youth and child welfare professionals about the program requirements, improving the comprehension around eligibility, and specific options for services.

3. ELIGIBILITY EXPANSION: "EFC is an underutilized benefit-rich program. It has the potential to prevent homelessness, allow more time for a young adult to get his diploma, or land a job that offers security, and yet we have barriers in place that are preventing former foster youth from eligibility. One suggestion is to remove or amend the requirement that a youth must age out of a licensed placement. This is stricter than the eligibility requirements for any of the other IL (Independent Living) services. The rationale is this: Many of our youth who have been in care for a long time, have cycled through many placements and many types of placements. If a youth under DCF supervision happens to be in an unlicensed placement on his 18th birthday, non-relative or relative, he or she is shut out from the safety net of EFC."

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE

Any expansion to the eligibility population or inclusion of those aging out of relative and non-relative placements would require legislative action and approval. Currently, youth in the legal custody of the Department at age 18 are potentially eligible for EFC. The Department acknowledges that this requirement limits eligibility for youth who turn 18

while in relative and non-relative care and had not achieved permanency under the Department's supervision.

ILSAC RECOMMENDATION FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION SERVICES & SUPPORT (PESS)

"Given the confusing language in statute and administrative code related to Postsecondary Education Support Services all older teens (ages 16 and above) should have access to an attorney, through pro bono programs, legal aid organizations or otherwise."

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE

The Department acknowledges that the eligibility language for PESS in Florida Statutes and Florida Administrative Code may require, in some instances, the technical assistance of the Department for further interpretation. Currently, the Department requires or encourages child welfare professionals, specialized in independent living services, to participate in statewide monthly calls and bi-annual trainings to discuss best practices and obtain clarification around eligibility for programs. Legal counsel, while not discouraged, is not necessary for explaining and/or advising youth on independent living program requirements and benefits. There are multiple junctures by which youth may be offered information about independent living services to include PESS, such as permanency staffings, home visits, and transition planning meetings. As referenced in section 39.701 (3), F.S., providing relevant information on PESS and other independent living programs must be verified in a social study report prepared for the judicial review hearing that occurs within 90 days of the youth's 17th birthday.

ILSAC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYMENT

"Initiate efforts to educate the CBCs (Community Based Care Lead Agencies) and other stakeholders about the importance of completing the fields related to employment in FSFN when working with youth who are seeking employment or are gainfully employed.

Continue to collaborate with the local workforce development boards across the state to ensure foster youth receive every opportunity to explore critical workforce services such as career exploration, employability skills training (i.e., soft skills such as resume writing, job interview preparation, etc.), summer youth employment opportunities, and employment.

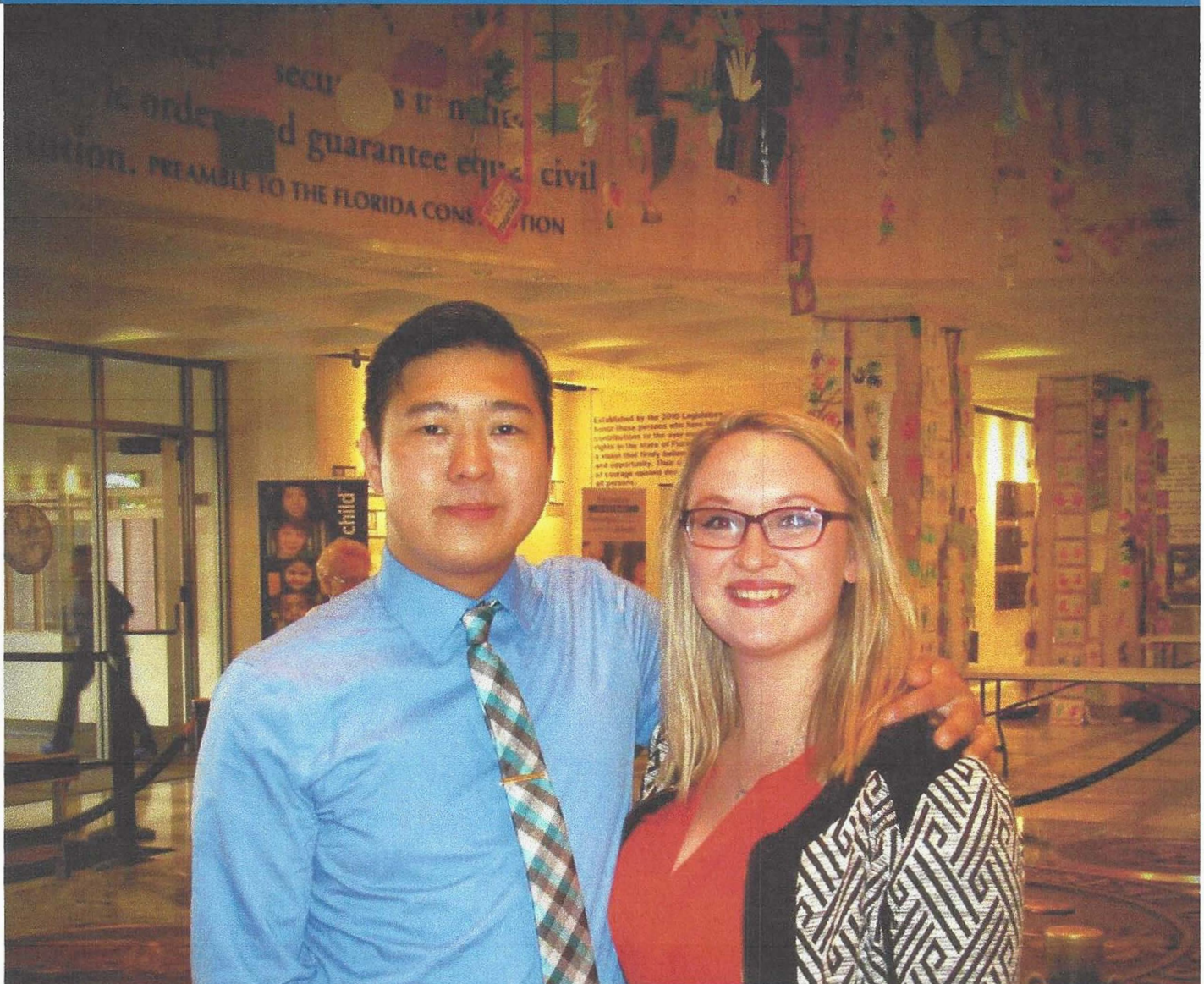
DCF in partnership with the Department of Economic Opportunity should work together to connect the CBCs and the local workforce boards to encourage collaboration and cooperation to meet the workforce needs of youth in and transitioning from the foster care system."

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE

The Department will continue efforts to educate child welfare professionals on the importance of completing the fields in FSFN that are relevant to capturing a youth's employment activities. Additionally, the Department will continue to encourage CBCs to work collaboratively with local workforce development boards across the state in order to improve employability skills and the assessment of career inventory opportunities for transitioning youth.

ANNUAL REPORT

Independent Living Services Advisory Council



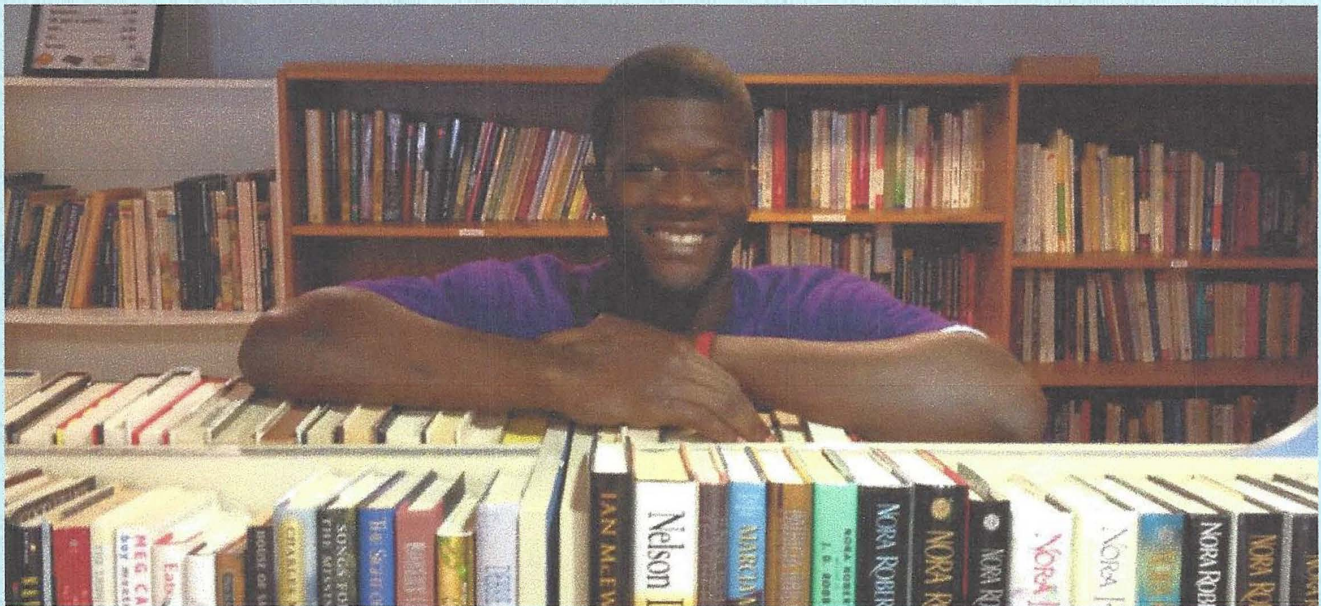
Shang and Chelsea are powerful advocates on the National, State and Local level. Helping to create change for children in the foster care system as a whole.

For more information about Shang see page 11

2017

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Meet PJ working at a local thrift store for employee skill training.

BACKGROUND OVERVIEW

Chafee Foster Care Independence Act (1999)

- Federal Law
- Increased state funding to promote the development of self-sufficiency.
- Education, Preparation for Post Secondary, Daily Life Skills, Employment, Substance Abuse Services, Pregnancy Prevention, and Preventative Health Activities.
- Connection to permanent supportive adults.

Road to Independence Act (2002)

- State Law
- A system of independent living transitional services.
- Provide direct stipend payments to young adults while they pursue full-time education opportunities 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, youth must be working a minimum of 80 hours/month, or
- Eliminate barriers to employment.

*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.

Laws exist on the state and local levels to help older foster youth. Over the years these laws have changed. Youth, and youth advocates helped educate policy makers about the increasing needs of this special population. These changes have been promulgated by the overarching question, "How well is the foster care system preparing foster youth for the age of majority?" Since 2014, the laws have changed and now, we ask a different question - "How well are we preparing youth for independence through new laws related to extended foster care, Post-Secondary Educational Supports Services (PESS), and After Care services?" It is the charge of THE COUNCIL to discover answers to this question.

Florida law also requires the Department of Children and Families (DCF) or its community based providers to prepare all adolescent foster children for independent living. Florida Statute Section 409.1451, known as the Road to Independence Act, mandates that DCF "shall administer a system of independent living transition services to enable older children in foster care and young adults who exit foster care at age 18 to make the transition to self-sufficiency as adults. The goals of independent living transition services are to assist older children in foster care and young adults who were formerly 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." FS Sec. 409.1451 (1) (a) & (b).

Nancy C. Detert Common Sense and Compassion Independent Living Act, allows young adults to remain in foster care to age 21 to finish high school, earn a GED, pursue postsecondary education, or begin a career. Also th bill provides critically needed housing security.

Young persons living in licensed care on their 18th birthdays with no secured permanent living arrangement are eligible to remain in licensed care if he or she meets specified criteria.

- Requires a young adult choosing to remain in foster care beyond 18 years old reside in a supervised living environment, approved by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) or a community-based care lead agency (CBC);
- Allows a young adult to leave and re-enter foster care an unlimited number of times before reaching 21 years old;
- Requires a CBC lead agency to provide regular case management reviews that ensure at least monthly contact with a case manager while a young adult participates in extended foster care and requires the court to review his / her status at least every six months and hold a permanency hearing at least annually;
- Requires creating a transition plan after a child in foster care turns 17 that will be reviewed and updated as necessary until he or she leaves care.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Independent Living Services Council (hereafter THE COUNCIL is) was formed in 2005 to improve interagency policy and service coordination to better support older eligible foster youth in the successful transition to adulthood. Florida has designed an array of services, as required by FS Sec. 409.1451 (7), to support older foster youth and former foster youth to help them become independent self-supporting young adults. These services are funded through a web of federal grants, general revenue dollars, and national, state and community private funds. These services are broadly defined in statute but are implemented differently throughout the state through many different Community Based Care (CBC) providers.

Florida Statute allows THE COUNCIL the "purpose of reviewing and making recommendations concerning the implementation and operation of the independent living services." THE COUNCIL brings together political, senior executive, and career staff from local, state and federal agencies across multiple systems to collaborate on recommendations related to services for older foster youth. The culmination of this annual process are the recommendations in this report to the Florida Legislature and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) on the status of the services being provided, including successes and barriers to these services.

THE COUNCIL chaired by Jeff DeMario, CEO of Vita Nova, Inc. a non-profit in Circuit 15 (Palm Beach County) and co-chaired by Penelope Deutsch, Crossroads Hope Academy Mentor, Children's Network of Southwest Florida, Circuit 20 (Lee County).

In Florida, as of January 31, 2017, there were approximately 3,000 children between the ages of 18 and 22 receiving some form of Independent Living Services. Approximately 1000 of those youth turned 18 while in foster care. The grand total for these services, including case coordination, was over \$37 million dollars during this time frame.

Services for older foster youth were re-designed in 2014 to include expansion of foster care services until 21 years old (extended foster care), broader inclusion for college completion (post-secondary education support services, or PESS), and emergency services for youth not in either program to avoid homelessness (after care services). At some point the question will be raised about whether there is significant return on the investment for these services as they relate to college enrollment & completion, employment and homelessness for older foster youth. Stated more succinctly - "Is \$37 million dollars producing the results expected to help older foster youth become successful?"

The state child welfare system (including community based care providers) are responsible for ensuring every youth who leaves the child welfare system is educated, housed, employed and connected to a permanent supportive adult by the time they reach age 25. We are the parents of these young people while they are in foster care and we need to do no less for them than we do for our own children.

As you read this years' report we call your attention to a couple of things. All of us can point to people who have facilitated our forward success in life. Whether that success came in education, career, or opportunities we all have someone who has helped us reach a point for progress in life.

1. Imagine your life without those people who made your life today possible. Where would you be?
2. How can we make sure that services designed for older foster youth provide these same connections to caring adults?

Recommendation for extended foster care

In 2012 many older foster youth and former youth ages 13-23 manned the halls of the Capitol during Children's Week to begin advocating for changes related to extending foster care to the age 21. Armed with a convincing argument that very few youth are able to successfully live independently by the age of 18, these youth were able to convince policy makers to adopt the extension of foster care and allow youth (under certain conditions) to remain in the foster placement and/or other supervised living arrangement to prevent homelessness and to allow the young adult time to achieve educational and employment goals through age 21 or 22 (if disabled). National evidence suggests that young adults in extended foster care (i.e., after age 18) are more likely to stay in school and pursue higher education, have a decreased risk of economic hardship, and are more likely to access health services, delay pregnancy, and utilize independent living services.

THE COUNCIL reviewed data related to Extended Foster Care for State fiscal years 2014-15 and 2015-16, specifically: Independent Living Services Annual Reports, Florida NYTD, and data provided by DCF at the Council's request from FSFN. A review of this data, lead to the following conclusions and questions:

Conclusions:

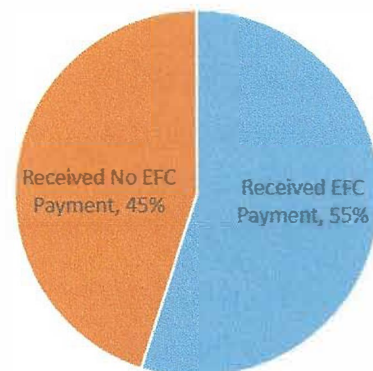
1. NYTD surveys reveal a small positive trend, episodes of homelessness decreasing and more youth reporting achieving stable housing since the implementation of EFC.
2. Still the rate of homelessness for youth who age out of foster care remains alarmingly high with over 24% of 21 year olds reporting having been homeless at least once in the past 2 years. (NYTD2016-17)
3. Less than 45% of youth eligible for EFC ever received a single payment.
4. Implementation and spending varies widely throughout the State, with the average monthly payment by CBC ranging from \$606 to \$2247. (see spreadsheet page 5)
5. The number of youth remaining with their foster care family at age 18, which was a large intent of the legislation, is low: only 3 of 81 (18-year-olds) surveyed (NYTD2016-17). Additionally, there does not appear to be a tracking measure in place for youth who remain in their former group home after 18.

Questions:

1. Why are eligible youth opting out of EFC?
2. What are the reasons youth are being denied entry into EFC?
What are the reasons youth are being terminated?
3. With a large number of youth aging out of group homes, are youth remaining in those placements after 18? Why or why not? If a youth ages out of an expensive placement and wants to remain there? Can the CBC deny eligibility based on cost? Are group homes allowing youth to remain after 18? Are the group homes accommodating young adults based on this legislation?
4. What housing options exist statewide to embrace the needs of former foster youth that are not willing or able to remain in their placement at age 18?

Florida Department of Children and Families Extended Foster Care

FY 2014-15 & 2015-16
N = 1,898



RECOMMENDATIONS:

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| Community Based Care Lead Agency | Total Average Payment Amount | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|---------------|------------|---------------|------------|---------------|
| BIG BEND CBC FA | 758.61 | 25 | 986.34 | 29 | 988.71 | 25 | 915.02 |
| CBC of Brevard | 879.37 | 26 | 1,025.12 | 27 | 991.99 | 24 | 965.58 |
| CBC of Central Florida | 1,234.57 | 38 | 1,318.07 | 41 | 1,212.89 | 41 | 1,255.69 |
| CBC of Seminole | 870.91 | 11 | 1,044.06 | 12 | 1,125.00 | 12 | 1,017.39 |
| ChildNet Inc | 754.82 | 75 | 733.51 | 71 | 710.66 | 68 | 733.72 |
| ChildNet Palm Beach | 983.20 | 79 | 961.71 | 84 | 1,116.96 | 85 | 1,021.76 |
| Childrens Network of SW Flor | 1,021.09 | 31 | 987.84 | 28 | 993.68 | 27 | 999.70 |
| COMM PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN | 801.46 | 17 | 849.91 | 16 | 837.65 | 17 | 829.27 |
| Devereux CBC | 1,073.57 | 18 | 1,285.42 | 16 | 1,317.98 | 16 | 1,219.57 |
| Eckerd Community Alternatives | 836.61 | 36 | 855.08 | 39 | 863.67 | 36 | 851.87 |
| Eckerd Community Hillsborough | 780.36 | 38 | 832.50 | 39 | 809.52 | 38 | 807.68 |
| Families First Network | 838.96 | 39 | 837.89 | 40 | 834.87 | 42 | 837.51 |
| Family Support Services | 524.43 | 27 | 611.69 | 24 | 712.31 | 20 | 606.85 |
| HEARTLAND FOR CHILDREN INC | 838.83 | 33 | 837.84 | 36 | 833.48 | 38 | 836.59 |
| Kids Central Inc | 662.16 | 15 | 990.32 | 18 | 903.40 | 15 | 860.61 |
| Kids First of Florida Inc | 866.00 | 5 | 791.96 | 6 | 872.14 | 7 | 843.71 |
| Our Kids Inc | 780.00 | 106 | 839.17 | 103 | 911.33 | 105 | 843.53 |
| PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG FAMILIE | 2,116.05 | 7 | 2,588.73 | 6 | 2,128.49 | 7 | 2,247.21 |
| Sarasota YMCA | 777.85 | 19 | 807.87 | 20 | 862.55 | 18 | 815.13 |
| St Johns County Commission | 827.92 | 4 | 875.00 | 3 | 875.00 | 3 | 856.17 |
| Grand Total | 865.19 | 648 | 918.80 | 658 | 944.73 | 644 | 909.55 |

Source:

Florida Department of Children and Families, Office of Child Welfare Extended Foster Care Monthly Average Monthly Payment paid for April, May, and June 2016

{Data Source: FSFN OCA Summary & Detail Report; Date Parameters March 1, 2016 - September 30, 2016; Run Date 5/23/2017}

Recommendation for postsecondary education services & support (PESS)

The goal of providing services under Postsecondary Education Services and Supports (PESS) is to help older foster youth reach graduation. One possible lens through which to view these services is the rate of return on investment. According to the Independent Living Services Annual Report by the Department of Children and Families Office of Child Welfare (January 31, 2017) the amount of money spent on PESS was more than \$14 million (SFY 2016). This amount is approximately 50% of the total budget for all of independent living services for the state. The same report indicates that nearly 4,800 youth were eligible for free tuition courtesy of the tuition waiver provided by DCF. Finally, of those eligible for free tuition a little more than 35% engage in postsecondary education, and of those less than 2% graduated.

RECOMMENDATION:

Given the confusing language in statute and administrative code related to Postsecondary Education Support Services all older teens (ages 16 and above) should have access to an attorney, through pro bono programs, legal aid organizations or otherwise.

Florida is a national leader in offering services and supports to young adults who are or were in our child welfare system. College tuition, financial assistance for students in college, health insurance, extended foster care, and assistance with drivers' licenses are examples of significant benefits that may be available to any given young adult. The interplay of the statutes and rules that govern eligibility for each of those benefits is very complicated. But to make an informed decision, the youth, Caseworkers, and Independent Living Workers must understand the complexities of the statutes and governing rules. Every day teens and their caregivers make decisions about placements and case closure that determine whether the youth is eligible or ineligible for specific services, without realizing the ramifications of the decision or the other options that may be available under the law. One of the best ways to ensure that a decision is made that will provide for all the rights afforded to the child under the law at the time they turn 18, is to provide advice of counsel to youth who are 16-years-old or older.

Here are some real-life examples of decisions that have been made where the youth did not have advice of counsel, and did not understand the consequences of choices made:

- A teen who has been living with a relative caregiver is given the opportunity to close her case to permanent guardianship a few months before her 18th birthday. She and her relative would be happy to skip court and visitations, but closing the case to guardianship will cut off five years of Medicaid eligibility.



Meet Chiquita ready to take on the world with her new diploma.

- A teen who is college bound and has set high academic goals for himself has the chance to move out-of-state to live with relatives. He needs to know that an out of state move will mean that his Medicaid will end at age 18, he cannot access PESS, and he cannot access free tuition. (Though he may be able to access Education Training Voucher money depending on a variety of facts.)

- A teen who has had multiple licensed and non-licensed placements over the last two years thinks that he wants to spend his last three months in care with a school friend's family. If he is living with the family on his 18th birthday, he will not be eligible for Extended Foster Care. Eligibility for Post-Secondary Education Services and Supports (PESS) will depend in part whether he had 6 months in licensed care in the 12 months preceding the placement and whether the placement is considered guardianship. If it's not considered a guardianship, the eligibility for free tuition will depend on whether family was given custody under the Relative Caregiver statute 39.5085.

- A teen who has been in licensed care for several years is placed with a relative caregiver. Adoption and permanent guardianship are both possible options. If they select adoption, the child's Medicaid will end at age 18 and she will get free college tuition but no PESS. If the case is closed to permanent guardianship, her Medicaid will end at 18. Whether or not she gets free tuition depends on whether she's under the Relative Caregiver program or whether the guardianship closed after age 16. Likewise, whether she will be eligible for PESS depends on whether the guardianship is closed before or after age 16.

As youth reach their upper teens, "routine" child welfare decisions, like placement, can have serious legal ramifications that are unknown or misunderstood by the Caseworkers or Independent Living workers. Caseworkers and Independent Living Workers, as well as caregivers, try their best to understand the law and the effects of decisions, but the law is extremely complex, and they often get it wrong. Children need the advice of their own counsel in making those decisions. It is improper, and frankly unfair, to put Caseworkers and Independent Living workers in the position of giving legal advice and opinions. Wrong decisions by those staff can deprive children in care with the benefits and services the Florida Legislature has carefully decided were in their best interests, and benefit the state as we help mold productive future citizens.

Post-secondary Education Services and Support (PESS)

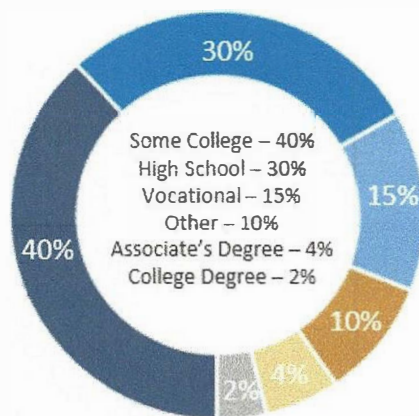
During the September ILSAC meeting, the Council received a presentation from the State's independent living specialist about DCF's Post-secondary Education Services and Support (PESS) Program. PESS is the \$14 million-a-year program that provides up to \$1,256 a month to former foster care youth (up to age 23) as long as they continue to progress in school (secondary or post-secondary).

Members were told that 1,002 (34%) of the 2,969 students eligible for PESS in 2017 have "some type of postsecondary" enrollment denoted in their record. They also were told that of 411 PESS terminations between July 2016 and June 2017, 290 (40%) were "involuntary departures." ILSAC members asked for more information about the involuntary departures and expressed concerns that the low numbers of young adults enrolled in post-secondary education program, especially because PESS payments are tied to continued enrollment in an educational institution.

Several members commented on the great need that still exists to increase the number of students in extended foster care, and former foster youth, using the tuition exemption to pursue post-secondary credentials in Florida.

Educational Attainment of Florida's

18-23 Year-old Former Foster Youth
 FY 2015-2016
 N = 2,938



Source: Florida Dept. of Children and Families
 Independent Living Service Annual Report,
 2017

Highlight: Positive Pathways



DCF Creates Positive Pathways

In May 2017, DCF signed a two-year contract with Educate Tomorrow, a 501(c)(3) organization, to run Positive Pathways for Transitioning Postsecondary Youth (Positive Pathways), a new program created by the Department and designed to increase the number of former foster youth that earn post-secondary educational credentials by recruiting, training and equipping campus-based foster care liaisons, who by law must be appointed by leaders at Florida's 28 colleges and 12 universities (see Chapter 409, Section 1452 of Florida Statutes).

The establishment of Positive Pathways demonstrates the Department's commitment to focus consistent attention on the tremendous potential of the young adults aging out of foster care, and the great need that exists for these young adults to pursue their education.

DCF's funding of Positive Pathways is a welcomed development given the Council's recommendation, in last year's report, that "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."

ILSAC member Dr. Steve J. Rios runs Positive Pathways, which is headquartered in the offices of Educate Tomorrow, in Miami. Positive Pathways operates in partnership with Florida Reach, a network of volunteer professionals, foster care alumni and community advocates from throughout Florida. For two years, Florida Reach was led by a full-time DCF employee in the office of Independent Living Services, which also provides administrative support to the ILSAC Committee. During the summer of 2017, the Florida College System (FCS) and the State University System Board of Governors (SUS BOG) released data in response to Florida law requiring annual reports to DCF on the status of students receiving tuition and fee waivers. The data revealed that as of the academic year 2015-2016, there were 3,024 students enrolled in public colleges and universities using the tuition and fee exemption. Of this number, 2,229 students are enrolled in Florida College System's (FCS) 28 institutions and 785 student enrolled in Florida public universities. (see figure A)

Since the Department began supporting Florida Reach (and now Positive Pathways), the number of students pursuing degrees at Florida's universities has increased from 543 to 785, a 31% increase. Also since 2013-2014, the number of bachelor degrees earned by former foster youth receiving the DCF waiver has increased by more than 100%, from 45 to 94 (See figure B, pg 9). Following the DCF presentation, the Council heard a presentation on Positive Pathways, the program that DCF has created to increase the number of students receiving tuition and fee waivers. Since it was created by the Department last May, Positive Pathways has reached out to the foster care liaisons appointed by leaders of the state's 28 public colleges and 12 public universities.

FIGURE A

Students receiving the Tuition and Fee Voucher Enrolled in Florida's Public Colleges and Universities



2,229



STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM of FLORIDA Board of Governors

785

Total = 3,014

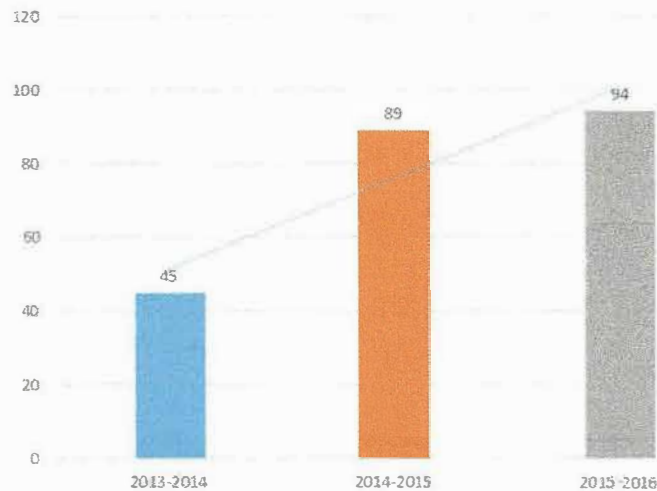
DCF also recently released information on the educational status of 2,938 young adults from foster care between the ages of 18 and 23. These students were receiving DCF support of some type in 2014-2015. The statistics indicated that 1,180 (40%) had earned some college credits, 900 (30%) of these students were still in high school, 455 (15%) had earned a vocational certificate, 4% had earned an associate's degree and 2% had earned a bachelor's degree.

Clearly, there is a lot of work to be done to dramatically increase the number and percent of college students from foster care who are succeed in post-secondary educational institutions. ILSAC commends the Department, however, for the innovative step represented by Positive Pathways.

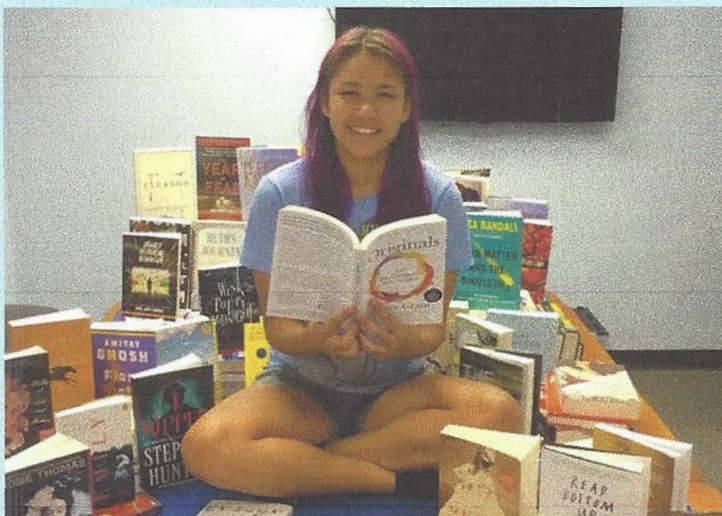
FIGURE B

Bachelors Degrees Earned by SUS Students Using DCF Tuition and Fee Exemptions

2013-14 to 2015-16



Source: Florida Board of Governors-Office of Data Analysis, 2017-07-27



Meet Jazz an avid reader, college graduate and future artist.

Follow up: Employment

In the ILSAC 2016-17 Annual Report, THE COUNCIL recognized that there are several different groups/entities that collect employment data about youth in foster care and the data is collected in different ways. The report contained recommendations aimed at strengthening THE COUNCIL'S efforts to gain more insight in to the employment rates of foster youth. The purpose of these recommendations was to allow THE COUNCIL an opportunity to:

- Learn more about Florida's various employment-related data sources used to track employment rates for foster youth across State agencies and numerous data collections systems, including DCF's data base Florida Safe Family Network (FSFN), and
- To encourage the DCF to align State-level and local resources by increasing partnerships across agencies to enhance employment data in FSFN.

Employment continues to be a viable options for youth who are transitioning from the foster care system who may or may not elect to attend college. Employment, when used as a component of a comprehensive transition plan, can offer transitioning youth an opportunity to maintain pro-social connections to systems and activities aimed at assisting them to achieve self-sufficiency. Through THE COUNCIL'S work during this past year, THE COUNCIL has learned more about the resources available through FSFN and the various employment-related reports produced through that system.

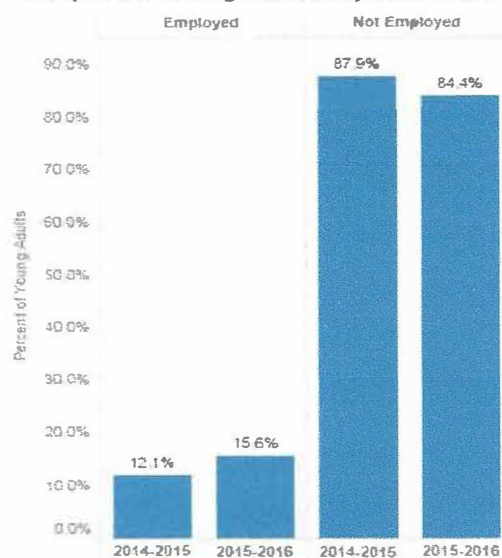
FSFN currently contains critical employment data elements that can be used to support a greater understanding of the employment rates of foster youth. The FSFN employment data can assist all stakeholders in gaining a better understanding on how often foster and transitioning youth elect to work in lieu or in combination with post-secondary education. However, these FSFN data elements are not required fields in the system and often not used as a transition planning tool by case managers serving foster youth.

RECOMMENDATION:

THE COUNCIL continues to support DCF's efforts to improve data collections methods around employment in FSFN. Therefore, THE COUNCIL recommends that DCF:

- Initiate efforts to educate the CBCs and other stakeholders about the importance of completing the fields related to employment in FSFN when working with youth who are seeking employment or are gainfully employed.
- Continue to collaborate with the Local Workforce Development Boards across the state to ensure foster youth receive every opportunity to explore critical workforce services such as career exploration, employability skills training (i.e., soft skills such as resume writing, job interview preparation, etc.), summer youth employment opportunities, and employment. DCF in partnership with the Department of Economic Opportunity should work together to connect the CBCs and the local workforce boards to encourage collaboration and cooperation to meet the workforce needs of youth in and transitioning from the foster care system.

Employment Status of Young Adults Receiving Independent Living Services by Fiscal Year



Source: FSFN OCWDRU Report #1170

Success at Work

written by Shang G.



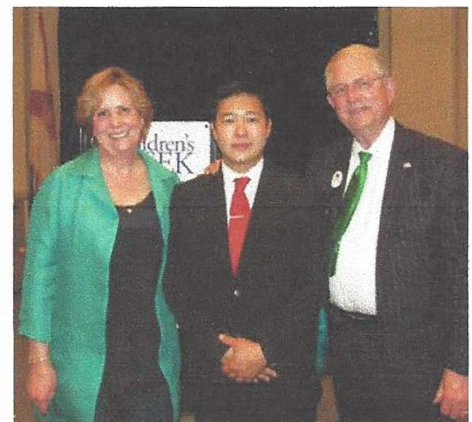
Meet Shang with Orange County Property Appraiser, Rick Singh his new boss.

When talking about Independent Living in Florida, the never ending topic has always been about education and how much money goes into the various programs like PESS, EFC or Aftercare Services.

While we as a society have always placed education as a pilgrimage to the mecca of success and self sufficiency, we cannot overlook the importance of earning a livable wage through hard work and perseverance. My personal journey through Independent Living is a perfect example of just how important work is. I believe most of our young people transitioning out of the system of care do not realize, and many of our adult allies tend to forget, that we all eventually need to work in order to become successful.

When I aged out of care at 18, there was no Extended Foster Care. I was given the opportunity to be a part of the Road to Independence program. I was still finishing high school, the idea of working, while it crossed my mind, never held importance because I had become dependent on the IL program to support me. It wasn't until almost a year later when I was removed from the IL program that I realized that without work, I would not survive. The system of care never emphasized the importance of a job. As a result I struggled to balance school and work and eventually dropped out of college. Over the next several years, I bounced around from apartment to apartment, job to job, and lived paycheck to paycheck. I had to learn from scratch without the support network of the system of care.

At some point I had enough. I reached out to Career Source and was accepted into the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). It was there I learned all the essential skills and tools that Independent Living failed to teach me. It was there where I created a professional network to begin climbing the steps (in my mid 20s) to be self-sufficient. WIOA is a federally funded program and young people who have been in foster care are already eligible because they were in the system of care. Giving the youth who are transitioning out of care a large check from Independent Living programs each month just for attending school is a recipe for disaster. It is teaching them to be dependent rather than independent. But if we were to assimilate the culture of work into our IL program, the youth would learn the true value of the dollar and would then be prepared to finally live independently when the time comes.



Shang with the Carol Jenkins Barnett, the daughter Publix founder, and her husband Barney Barnett.

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Tallahassee, Florida

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Director of Organizational
Outreach & Training
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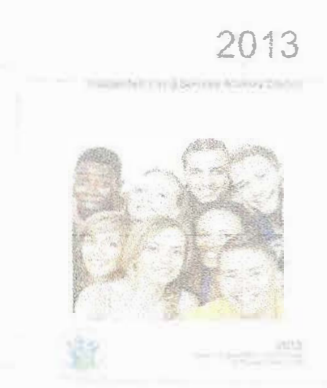
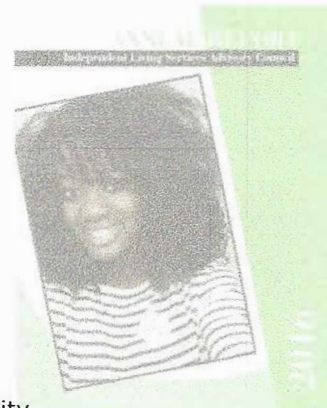
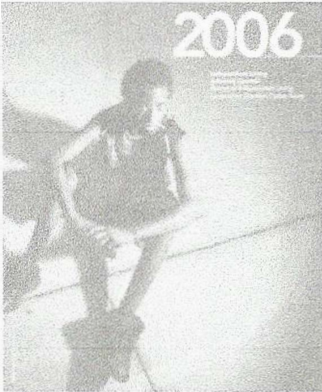
Gloria West-Lawson

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Harriet Wynn

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Jacksonville, Florida

**Special thanks to Ms. Brandie McCabe, Independent Living Specialist
Florida DCF, Office of Child Welfare for her ongoing and unwavering
support during all 2017 meetings for ILSAC.**



LEGISLATIVELY MANDATED REPORT – STATUTORY REQUIREMENT

| REPORT TITLE | STATUTORY REFERENCE | SPECIFICATIONS |
|--|------------------------------|--|
| <p>DCF response to the Independent Living Services Advisory Council Annual Report.</p> | <p>s. 409.1451(7), F.S.,</p> | <p>409.1451(7), INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES ADVISORY COUNCIL.—The secretary shall establish the Independent Living Services Advisory Council for the purpose of reviewing and making recommendations concerning the implementation and operation of the provisions of s. 39.6015 and the Road-to-Independence Program. The advisory council shall function as specified in this subsection until the Legislature determines that the advisory council can no longer provide a valuable contribution to the department’s efforts to achieve the goals of the services designed to enable a young adult to live independently.</p> <p>(a) The advisory council shall assess the implementation and operation of the Road-to-Independence Program and advise the department on actions that would improve the ability of these Road-to-Independence Program services to meet the established goals. The advisory council shall keep the department informed of problems being experienced with the services, barriers to the effective and efficient integration of services and support across systems, and successes that the system of services has achieved. The department shall consider, but is not required to implement, the recommendations of the advisory council.</p> <p>(b) The advisory council shall report to the secretary on the status of the implementation of the Road-to-Independence Program, efforts to publicize the availability of the Road-to-Independence Program, the success of the services, problems identified, recommendations for department or legislative action, and the department’s implementation of the recommendations contained in the Independent Living Services Integration Workgroup Report submitted to the appropriate substantive committees of the Legislature by December 31, 2013. The department shall submit a report by December 31 of each year to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and</p> |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| | | the Speaker of the House of Representatives which includes a summary of the factors reported on by the council and identifies the recommendations of the advisory council and either describes the department's actions to implement the recommendations or provides the department's rationale for not implementing the recommendations. |
|--|--|---|