



Series: 300: Assessment of Child and Family Services
Policy Name: **Independent Living**
Policy Number: 302
Origination Date: 4/21/03 **Revision Date:** 6/13/2023
Regulation: FS 409.1451; CFOP 170-17; Administrative Rule 65C-41; The Nancy C. Detert Common Sense and Compassion Independent Living Act.

Policy: It is the policy of Communities Connected for Kids to administer a system of independent living services to enable older children in licensed foster care and young adults who exit foster care at age 18 to make the transition to self-sufficiency as adults. The focus is on guidance, instruction and support in managing activities of daily living and in meeting health, educational, employment, and financial needs. The goal is to assist older children in licensed 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 to their age and to assume personal responsibility for becoming self-sufficient adults. This program is not an alternative to adoption but should be concurrent to continued efforts to locate and achieve adoption or other permanency plan.

Procedure:

Independent Living services are provided by the case management agencies in conjunction with the Road to Success (RTS) Program of Communities Connected for Kids. The Road to Success Program provides oversight of independent living services for youth in foster care ages 13-15. When youth enter their 16th year, an RTS Specialist is assigned as a secondary worker. Once the youth turn 18 years old, an RTS Specialist becomes the primary worker. The RTS worker will make initial contact with the youth within 14 days of case assignment.

General Information

1. Independent Living (IL) services are an expansion of the permanency planning process. IL services provide a continuum of skills and knowledge a youth should have in order to successfully transition from foster care. All youth, regardless of their case plan goal, must be prepared to live independently.
2. Youth in licensed foster care ages 13-17 are eligible for independent living services. These services include but are not limited to:
 - a. Life Skills Assessment
 - b. Life Skills Training
3. Young adults who have reached 18 years of age but are not yet 23 years of age and who were in foster care when they turned 18 years of age or, after reaching 16 years of age, were adopted from foster care or placed with a court-approved dependency guardian (closed permanent guardianship) and have spent a minimum of 6 months in foster care within the 12 months immediately preceding such placement or adoption are eligible for services. Any youth (as of July 1, 2007) who meets these criteria may receive



the following services as long as they meet other eligibility requirements (as prescribed by 409.1451(5), F.S.) and funding allows:

- a. Extended Foster Care (EFC)
 - b. Aftercare Services
 - c. Postsecondary Educational Support Services and Support
 - d. Education and Training Vouchers
4. The Road to Success Program does not require a referral from the case management provider agencies. The data needed to determine eligibility criteria for Independent Living Services is accessible to program staff using the system of record, FSFN. In order to track eligible clients, we use an auto-email notification system. Utilizing the *Clients Eligible for Independent Living* auto-email notifications, we are able to maintain an up-to-date client-tracking list.

Life Skills Assessment & Training

1. An Informal Needs Assessment shall be completed monthly at a minimum using a Life Skills Progress Documentation Log for youth and young adults 13 years of age or older.
2. The Life Skills Progress Documentation Log shall be completed by caregivers/group homes and child welfare professionals attesting to or assisting the young person in acquiring life skills.
3. All youth and young adults 13 years of age or older shall be encouraged to participate in an Independent Living Needs Assessment.
4. Children and young adults in out-of-home care acquire independent living skills that have been paid for or provided by the Department and its contracted service providers using John H. Chaffee Foster Care Program (Chaffee program) funds. Each of the skills will fall into one or more of the following NYTD categories:
 - a. Academic support – services designed to help a youth complete high school or obtain a General Equivalency Degree (GED). Such services include the following: academic counseling; preparation for a GED, including assistance for or studying for GED exam; tutoring; help with homework; study skills training; literacy training; and help accessing educational resources. Academic support does NOT include a youth's general attendance in school.
 - b. Post-secondary educational support – services designed to help a youth enter or complete a post-secondary education and include the following: classes for test preparation, such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT); counseling about college; information about financial aid and scholarships; help completing college or loan applications; or tutoring while in college.
 - c. Career preparation - services that focus on developing a youth's ability to find, apply for, and retain appropriate employment. Career preparation includes the following types of instruction and support services; vocational and career assessment, including career exploration and planning, guidance in setting and assessing vocational and career interests and skills, and help in matching interests and abilities with vocational goals; job seeking and job placement



support, including identifying potential employers, writing resumes, completing job applications, developing interview skills, job shadowing, receiving job referrals, using career resource libraries, understanding employee benefits coverage, and securing work permits; retention support, including job coaching; learning how to work with employers and other employees; understanding workplace values such as timeliness and appearance; and understanding authority and customer relationships.

- d. Employment programs or vocational training - Services designed to build a youth's skills for a specific trade, vocation, or career through classes or on-site training. Employment programs include a youth's participation in an apprenticeship, internship, or summer employment program and do not include summer or after-school jobs secured by the youth alone. Vocational training includes a youth's participation in vocational or trade programs and the receipt of training in occupational classes for such skills as cosmetology, auto mechanics, building trades, nursing, computer science, and other current or emerging employment sectors.
- e. Budget and financial management - Training or practice with: living within a budget; opening and using a checking and savings account; balancing a checkbook; developing consumer awareness and smart shopping skills; accessing information about credit, loans and taxes; and filling out tax forms. This also includes working with the youth or young adult on accessing the Department of Financial Services' financial literacy curriculum available at financeyourfuture.myfloridacfo.com.
- f. Housing education and home management training - Assistance or training in locating and maintaining housing, including filling out a rental application and acquiring a lease, handling security deposits and utilities, understanding practices for keeping a healthy and safe home, understanding tenant's rights and responsibilities, and handling landlord complaints. Home management includes instruction in food preparation, laundry, housekeeping, living cooperatively, meal planning, grocery shopping and basic maintenance and repairs.
- g. Health education and risk prevention - Includes providing information about: hygiene, nutrition, fitness and exercise, and first aid; medical and dental care benefits, health care resources and insurance, prenatal care and maintaining personal medical records; sex education, abstinence education, and HIV prevention, including education and information about sexual development and sexuality, pregnancy prevention and family planning, and sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS; substance abuse prevention and intervention, including education and information about the effects and consequences of substance use (alcohol, drugs, tobacco) and substance avoidance and intervention. Health education and risk prevention does not include the youth's actual receipt of direct medical care or substance abuse treatment.
- h. Family support and healthy marriage education - Includes education and information about safe and stable families, healthy marriages, spousal communication, parenting, responsible fatherhood, childcare skills, teen parenting, and domestic and family violence prevention.



- i. Mentoring - Mentoring means that the youth has been matched with a screened and trained adult for a one-on-one relationship that involves the two meeting on a regular basis. Mentoring can be short-term, but it may also support the development of a long-term relationship. While youth often are connected to adult role models through school, work, or family, this service category only includes a mentor relationship that has been facilitated, paid for or provided by the state agency or its staff.
 - j. Supervised independent living - Supervised independent living means that the young adult is residing in out-of-home care, living independently under a supervised living arrangement, pursuant to subsection 39.6251(4), F.S. While this independent living skill may demonstrate a multitude of other life skills, designating this skill type means that the young adult continues to reside in an environment that allows them the appropriately assessed independence essential for transition to adulthood.
- 5. The NYTD categories detailed above are aligned with Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN), Independent Living Case Notes for required documentation and federal data reporting.
- 6. In addition, child welfare professionals must take the lead in coordinating the administration of a developmentally appropriate Independent Living Needs Assessment with youth and young adults 16 years of age and older. The assessment shall gauge a young person's knowledge and/or ability of the following skills:
 - a. Career Planning
 - b. Daily Living
 - c. Education Planning
 - d. Emergency and Safety Skills
 - e. Food Management
 - f. Health
 - g. Housekeeping
 - h. Housing
 - i. Interpersonal Skills
 - j. Job Maintenance Skills
 - k. Job Seeking Skills
 - l. Knowledge of Community Resources
 - m. Legal Skills
 - n. Leisure Activities
 - o. Money Management
 - p. Personal Appearance
 - q. Religion
 - r. Self-Care
 - s. Social Relationships
 - t. Transportation
 - u. Work Life
 - i. The assessment must be administered and discussed collaboratively with the youth, caregiver, guardian and anyone else that the youth selects to be a supportive adult on their transition to adulthood.



- ii. If the youth or young adult has an impairment due to a physical, intellectual, emotional, or psychiatric condition that substantially limits his or her ability to participate, the child welfare professional shall work with the young person's caregiver, supportive adults, service providers, and School District personnel as applicable to complete the assessment.
 - iii. The assessment must also yield information that assists in outlining specific, measurable goals that will help guide in the development of an Independent Living Skills Plan.
 - iv. The Casey Life Skills Assessment, Life Skills Reimagined and the Daniel Memorial Independent Living Skills Assessment are examples of recommended tools that may be used to measure life skill competency; however, the assessment may also be the process in which a child welfare professional utilizes the youth or young adult's case records to conduct a thorough review and determine strengths and needs.
7. The outcome of all assessments shall be documented in FSFN.

Transition Planning – Pre Planning, Assessment, and Review

- 1) A Road to Success (RTS) Specialist will be assigned to 16 year olds placed in licensed foster care. The RTS Specialists will make their initial visit with 16 year old youth within 14 days of their birthday or from when they came into licensed care, whichever occurs first, in their residence. For any youth residing outside of the circuit, this initial contact can be made telephonically.
- 2) In order to assist the youth in transition, the RTS Specialist shall establish a positive relationship with the Transitioning Youth. Building a connection is an important step in establishing trust and respect, which will in turn yield a more productive Transition Plan.
 - a) To establish or maintain a positive connection with the youth, the RTS Specialist shall participate in both formal and informal meetings with the youth by attending some home visits, court hearings, permanency staffings, appointments, and school and community events.
 - b) Conversation between the RTS Specialist and Transitioning Youth shall cover elements that will be captured in the Transition Plan and Records and Resources Exchanged form. There must also be dialogue to identify individuals whom the youth would like to attend the Transition Planning Meeting(s) and/or assist the youth in the development of the Transition Plan.
- 3) In addition to establishing or maintaining a relationship, the RTS Specialist shall conduct an informal assessment of the youth's wellbeing, utilizing all records available, and determine strengths and needs pertinent to the development of the Transition Plan. Any needs must be addressed during the Transition Planning Meeting(s) and discussed separately with relevant child welfare professionals.
- 4) A list of required documents and information to be provided to the Transitioning Youth includes, but is not be limited to:
 - a) Birth Certificate
 - b) Social Security Card



- c) Florida Identification Card
- d) Driver's License / Learner's Permit
- e) Medicaid Card
- f) Bank Account
- g) Master Trust Account (if Applicable)
- h) Medical / Dental Records
- i) Behavioral Health Records
- j) Education Records
- k) Disability Information
- l) Letter providing dates that the child is under jurisdiction of the court.
- m) Provide Financial Literacy Curriculum by Department of Financial Services
- n) Independent Living Programs
- o) Health Care Surrogate Designation of Power of Attorney
- p) ACCSS Florida Public Assistance Programs

Transition Planning: Developing and Updating the Transition Plan

- 1) Transition Plans must be constructed utilizing the My Pathway to Success Plan (form CF-FSP 5425, available in DCF Forms). The form is designed to encourage the youth to critically think about the youth's future and make realistic goals prior to writing down a plan for each specific subject area. The Transition Plan shall be as detailed as the youth chooses and be conducted in the youth's primary language.
- 2) The My Pathways to Success plan shall list the following subjects:
 - a) Long Term Goals
 - b) Short Term Goals
 - c) Housing
 - d) Education
 - e) Health Insurance
 - f) Financial Literacy
 - g) Driver's License
 - h) Workforce Support and Employment Services
- 3) The development of the Transition Plan will begin when the youth turns 16 years of age.
 - a) A draft of the initial written Transition Plan must be completed no later than 16½ years of age to allow child welfare professionals and caregiver(s) adequate time to work with the youth in meeting the goals in the youth's plan and address any skills deficiencies.
 - b) The initial Transition Plan must be filed with the court to align with the special 17-year-old judicial review hearing occurring within the 90 days of the youth's 17th birthday.
- 4) If the Department begins protective supervision any time after the youth's 16th birthday, the Transition Plan must be initiated within 30 days. The Transition Plan must be completed within 90 days after the start of the Department's protective supervision or prior to the first judicial review, whichever comes first. If protective supervision begins within the 90-day period prior to the youth's 18th birthday, transition planning must begin immediately to include the completion of the written plan.



- 5) The RTS Specialist must encourage and guide the Transitioning Youth to update sections of the My Pathway to Success Plan as often as necessary to ensure that the Transition Plan reflects the most relevant goals and circumstances to meet the needs in the youth's life.
- 6) Regardless of how often the My Pathway to Success Plan has been revised, an updated Transition Plan must be documented during the 90-day period immediately prior to the date on which the youth will attain 18 years of age.
- 7) If the Transitioning Youth is eligible and plans to remain in EFC after turning 18 years old the RTS Specialist must ensure that the Transition Plan includes an agreement detailing the chosen qualifying activity and supervised living arrangement.
- 8) The finalized My Pathway to Success Plan will serve as the last written Transition Plan unless the youth transitions to EFC.

Transition Planning: Transition Plan Meetings

- 1) The RTS Supervisor is responsible for scheduling the meeting and must consult with the youth, scheduling a date, time, and place to begin formally drafting the initial Transition Plan.
 - a) A list of Supportive Adults must be developed and those adults invited to attend the meeting as approved by the Transitioning Youth and Transition Facilitator.
 - b) In the instance that a Transitioning Youth provides the RTS Specialist a completed My Pathway to Success Plan at the time of the initial meeting, the meeting shall focus on going over the youth responses and assisting the youth in enhancing areas that may need further detail.
- 2) The RTS Specialist may schedule additional meetings as needed to ensure that the Transition Plan is updated, and reflects the most relevant goals and circumstances to meet the needs of the youth.

Youth with Special Needs

1. Youth in foster care who have disabilities or mental health needs will be provided the opportunity to participate in independent living services. Though the youth may require additional support, he or she is still eligible for independent living services.
2. To ensure equal opportunity, the DCM and RTS Specialist shall identify youth in foster care with disabilities or mental health needs and assist them with reasonable accommodations for their disabilities.

Extended Jurisdiction

1. Unless a youth signs a voluntary opt out of Extended Foster Care, the court will automatically retain jurisdiction over the young adult's dependency case. The youth does not have maintain "foster care" (Court ordered protective supervision) status as those who are under the age of 18, but instead the courts may maintain jurisdiction for the purpose of determining whether the young adult is receiving appropriate "adult" services, which may include:
 - a. Road-to-Independence Programs
 - b. Mental Health



- c. Developmental Disabilities Services
- 2. The court may retain jurisdiction over a dependency case solely for the purpose of allowing continued consideration of a petition for special immigrant juvenile status and an application for adjustment that was not granted by the time the youth reached 18 years of age. Court jurisdiction in these cases:
 - a. Terminates upon the final decision of the federal authorities or upon the young adult's 22nd birthday.
 - b. Does not affect the status of the services available to a young adult under 409.1451, F.S.
 - c. Does not require a petition from the youth. Courts themselves may retain jurisdiction. Must be court ordered prior to their 18th birthday.
- 3. Extended Jurisdiction will be discussed and explained to the youth by their RTS Specialist and during their transition plan meetings.
- 4. When a youth turns 18, the DCM will close the youth's dependency case out in FSN, and the RTS specialist will open a new FSN case. The court Order for Extended Jurisdiction must be forwarded to the RTS program upon receipt.

Foster and Group Home Placement

- 1. A young adult formerly in the legal custody of the department is eligible to remain in his or her foster or group home or another licensed placement.
- 2. The payment arrangement will be decided upon between the young adult and leaser if the young adult has opted out from EFC.
- 3. If the young adult opts in to EFC, Communities Connected for Kids will pay the licensed home directly.

Post-secondary Educational Services and Support (PESS)

- 1. A young adult is eligible for services and support under this subsection if he or she:
 - a. Was living in licensed care on his or her 18th birthday or is currently living in licensed care; or was at least 16 years of age and was adopted from foster care or placed with a court-approved dependency guardian after spending at least 6 months in licensed care within the 12 months immediately preceding such placement or adoption;
 - b. Spent at least 6 months in licensed care before reaching his or her 18th birthday;
 - c. Earned a standard high school diploma or its equivalent pursuant to s. 1003.428, s. 1003.4281, s. 1003.429, s. 1003.43, s. 1003.435, or s. 1003.438;
 - d. Has been admitted for enrollment as a full-time student or its equivalent in an eligible postsecondary educational institution as provided in s. 1009.533. For purposes of this section, the term "full-time" means 9 credit hours or the vocational school equivalent. A student may enroll part time if he or she has a recognized disability or is faced with another challenge or circumstance that would prevent full-time attendance. A student needing to enroll part-time for



any reason other than having a recognized disability must get approval from his or her academic advisor;

- e. Has reached 18 years of age but is not yet 23 years of age;
 - f. Has applied, with assistance from the young adult's caregiver and the community-based lead agency, for any other grants and scholarships for which he or she may qualify
 - g. Submitted a Free Application for Federal Student Aid which is complete and error free; and
 - h. Signed an agreement to allow the department and the community based care lead agency access to school records.
2. The amount of the financial assistance shall be as follows:
- a. For a young adult who does not remain in foster care and is attending a postsecondary school as provided in s. 1009.533, the amount is \$1,720 monthly.
 - b. For a young adult who remains in foster care, is attending a postsecondary school, as provided in s. 1009.533, and continues to reside in a licensed foster home, the amount is the established room and board rate for foster parents. This takes the place of the payment provided for in s. 409.145(4).
 - c. For a young adult who remains in foster care, but temporarily resides away from a licensed foster home for purposes of attending a postsecondary school as provided in s. 1009.533, the amount is \$1,720 monthly. This takes the place of the payment provided for in s. 409.145(4).
 - d. For a young adult who remains in foster care, is attending a postsecondary school as provided in s. 1009.533, and continues to reside in a licensed group home, the amount is negotiated between the community based care lead agency and the licensed group home provider.
 - e. For a young adult who remains in foster care, but temporarily resides away from a licensed group home for purposes of attending a postsecondary school as provided in s. 1009.533, the amount is \$1,720 monthly. This takes the place of a negotiated room and board rate.
 - f. The amount of the reward may be disregarded for purposes of determining the eligibility for, or the amount of, any other federal or federally supported assistance.
3. A young adult is eligible to receive financial assistance during the months when enrolled in a postsecondary educational institution.
4. Payment of financial assistance is for a young adult who:
- a. Has chosen not to remain in foster care and is attending a postsecondary school as provided in s. 1009.533, shall be made to the community-based care lead agency in order to secure housing and utilities, with the balance being paid directly to the young adult until such time the
 - b. The lead agency and the young adult determine that the young adult can successfully manage the full amount of the assistance.
 - c. Has remained in foster care under s. 39.6251 and who is attending postsecondary school as provided in s. 1009.533, shall be made directly to the foster parent or group home provider.
5. Community-based care lead agencies or other contracted providers are prohibited from charging a fee associated with administering the payments.



6. The department must advertise the availability of the stipend and must provide notification of the criteria and application procedures for the stipend to children and young adults leaving, or who were formerly in, foster care; caregivers; case managers; guidance and family services counselors; principals or other relevant school administrators; and guardians ad litem.
7. If the award recipient transfers from one eligible institution to another and continues to meet eligibility requirements, the award shall be transferred with the recipient.
8. The department, or an agency under contract with the department, shall evaluate each Road-to-Independence award for renewal eligibility on an annual basis. In order to be eligible for a renewal award for the subsequent year, the young adult must:
 - a. Be enrolled for or have completed the number of hours, or the equivalent, to be considered a full-time student under subparagraph (a)4., unless the young adult qualifies for an exception under subparagraph (a)4.
 - b. Maintain standards of academic progress as defined by the education institution, except that if the young adult's progress is insufficient to renew the award at any time during the eligibility period, the young adult may continue to be enrolled for additional terms while attempting to restore eligibility as long as progress towards the required level is maintained.
9. Funds may be terminated during the interim between an award and the evaluation for a renewal award if the department, or an agency under contract with the department, determines that the award recipient is no longer enrolled in an educational institution as described in subparagraph (a) 4, or is no longer a resident of this state.
10. The department, or an agency under contract with the department, shall notify a recipient who is terminated and inform the recipient of his or her right to appeal.
11. An award recipient who does not qualify for a renewal award or who chooses not to renew the award may apply for reinstatement. An application for reinstatement must be made before the young adult reaches 23 years of age. In order to be eligible for reinstatement, the young adult must meet the eligibility criteria and the criteria for award renewal for the program.

After Care Services

1. Services provided directly or through referrals include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Mentoring and tutoring;
 - b. Mental health services and substance abuse counseling;
 - c. Life skills classes;
 - d. Parenting classes
 - e. Job skills training
 - f. Temporary Financial Assistance
2. Funding through Aftercare Services are for unplanned emergencies, or can serve as a bridge into or out of the Extended Foster Care and PESS programs. Funding is intended to be short term (no more than 90 days). An Aftercare Service plan must be included with each Aftercare Application before funding can be approved, unless the request is made to prevent homelessness.



3. Young adult must:

- a. Not be in foster care
- b. Be at least 18 years of age, but no older than 23 years of age
- c. Not receiving financial assistance temporarily through Postsecondary Educational Support Services.

DocuSigned by:
Approved: Carol DeLoach
Carol DeLoach, CEO