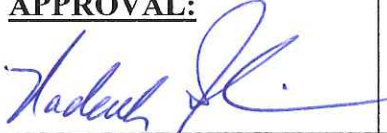




Independent Living

<u>Department Name</u> Quality Management		
<u>CHAPTER:</u>	<u>SUBJECT:</u> Independent Living	<u>POLICY NUMBER:</u> QM-007
<u>APPROVAL:</u> 	<u>EFFECTIVE DATE:</u> 6-18-2015	<u>REPLACES (policy # and date):</u> CFOP 175-80 November 15, 1999, CFOP 175-81 November 15, 1999 OM-007, March 23, 2015

- I. **PURPOSE:** This policy and procedure covers requirements relative to the independent living program for which all youth in licensed foster care who have reached 13 years of age but are not yet 23 years of age are eligible and transition planning for youth who are 17 years of age in relative or non-relative care
- II. **REVIEW HISTORY:** This policy updates CFOP-80 and CFOP 81 and all previous versions of QM-007 Independent Living Policy.
- III. **CONTACT:** Quality Management Department.
- IV. **PERSONS AFFECTED:** Children’s Network of Southwest Florida Staff, Contracted Case Management Organizations and Independent Living Provider.
- V. **POLICY:** It is the policy of Children’s Network of Southwest Florida that all youth in foster care who have reached 13 years of age but are not yet 23 years of age receive necessary life skills and preparation to transition from foster care to living independently.
- VI. **RATIONALE:** The rationale of this policy is to ensure all youth in foster care who have reached 13 years of age but are not yet 23 years of age receive the necessary services needed to transition from foster care to living independently.
- VII. **CROSS REFERENCES:** F.S. 409.145, F.S. 409.1451, F.S. 39.013, F.S. 39.6012, F.S. 39.6035, F.S. 39.6251, and F.S. 39.701.
- VIII. **PROCEDURES:**
 - A. **General Requirements.**
 - a. **Independent Living Services.** Independent living is an expansion of the permanency planning process and not a separate, discrete program. Independent living services provide a continuum of tangible and

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intangible skills and knowledge that a youth should have in order to be successful upon departure from foster care. Its emphasis is on assessing and providing job skills, self-support, daily living skills and tracking and assessing the youth's needs. All youth, regardless of their case plan goal, must be prepared to live independently.

- b. Skills and Knowledge Base. The following are examples of the types of skills and knowledge a youth will need to prepare for self-sufficiency:
- (1) Nutrition;
 - (2) Money management/budgeting;
 - (3) Apartment locating/living;
 - (4) Basic homemaking skills;
 - (5) Family planning;
 - (6) Decision making/goal planning;
 - (7) Employment/career planning;
 - (8) Interviewing skills;
 - (9) Educational development; and
 - (10) Sexually Transmitted Disease / HIV awareness
- c. Eligibility. All youth in foster care who have reached 13 years of age but are not yet 18 years of age are to be assessed for and receive independent living services. Eligibility for participation in the independent living program is only determined by age for youth in foster care and/or out of home care All 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 are also eligible for independent living services.
- (1) Youth and young adults with disabilities are eligible for this program and may not be deemed ineligible from this program on the basis of their disability, according to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Title II.
 - (2) Though a youth or young adult with a disability may need additional supports from other organizations or agencies such as Agency for Persons with Disability (APD), Mental Health or Vocational Rehabilitation, he/she is still eligible for any and all services from the independent living program. Transitional planning should begin between APD or other programs and the child welfare case manager on or before the youth's 17th birthday for all dual clients in order to establish a plan for each one of these youth's transition from foster care. The child welfare case manager will include APD in planning for dually served young adult in extended foster care beginning on or before his/her 21st birthday.

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- (3) Reasonable accommodations must be provided to insure that each youth has access to the services provided by the program.

B. Referral and Assessment.

- a. The child welfare case manager must complete and submit a referral for independent living services, regardless of the child's permanency goal, to the contracted provider, which needs to be accompanied with a copy of the youth's adjudication order, birth certificate and social security card if obtained by the agency. This referral is completed when a youth already in foster care turns 13 years of age or when a youth 13 years of age or older enters foster care.
- b. Within 30 days of the referral, the youth, with assistance from the independent living case manager, will complete an assessment to identify specific skills the youth already has, skills the youth must learn to increase his/her ability to live independently and the appropriate level of entry into the basic living skills training. Based on the results of this assessment, an individualized independent living services plan will be developed, which outlines trainings and services needed to teach the necessary skills and determines target dates for obtaining those skills. The training tasks and services and the target dates are then incorporated into the youth's case plan.
- c. Periodic re-assessments are necessary to monitor progress and take note of changes and achievements. Staff must assist the youth in re-assessing his/her skill level and update the service plan accordingly.

C. Service Provision.

- a. Independent living services must meet the youth's needs as identified in the independent living skills assessment. The services are designed to:
 - (1) Enhance self-esteem and self-confidence and encourage teamwork;
 - (2) Enable youth to obtain a high school diploma or vocational education certificate, or to prepare for the GED exam, providing remediation as needed;
 - (3) Assist youth with guidance in obtaining further education such as college, vocational training and/or career planning;
 - (4) Assist youth in obtaining job training and placement through programs such as job training, summer employment or apprenticeship programs; and

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- (5) Provide training in social skills, daily living skills, budgeting and locating and maintaining housing.

b. The services will also include:

- (1) Assisting youth to set early achievement and career goals for postsecondary educational and work experience by being active participants in choosing a post-high school goal based upon the youth's abilities and interests.
- (2) Identifying core courses necessary to qualify for that goal, any elective courses which would provide additional help in reaching the chosen goal and the grade point requirement necessary to achieve the goal.
- (3) Obtaining a copy of his/her credit report from all three major credit reporting agencies at 16 and 17 years old. Effective September 1, 2015, annual credit reports will be required beginning at age 15 years of age. The youth will be provided assistance in interpreting the credit report and, if applicable, resolving any inconsistencies outlined in the credit report.

c. The services may include:

- (1) Counseling or therapy to assist the youth in adjusting to previous separation and loss, living in out-of-home care and anticipating emancipation from foster care;
- (2) Special initiatives to assist teen parents in foster care and their children in making the transition from being in the department's care;
- (3) Establishing and maintaining ongoing support network with mentors and peer support groups;
- (4) Outreach programs to attract eligible individuals; and
- (5) Development of resources for household start-up needs.

F. Case Plan.

- a. When appropriate, if a youth is 13 years of age or older, the case plan needs to include a written description of the programs and services that will help prepare them for the transition from foster care to independent living.

G. Transition Plan.

- a. Transition planning must occur in preparation of youth who are placed in out of home care turning 18 years old to ensure they have economic stability, health and well-being and permanency connections.
- b. A transition plan is developed in collaboration with the case manager, caregiver, youth and any other individual identified by the youth. The initial transition plan shall be completed 30 days prior to the youths 17th birthday and updated when the youth is 17 ½ years old and when the youth is 17 ¾ years old.
- c. The transition plan must address specific options in the youth obtaining services including housing, health insurance, education, and workforce support and employment services. The plan must also consider establishing and maintaining naturally occurring mentoring relationships and other personal support services.
- d. When a young adult is participating in extended foster care, the transition plan must also outline rules at the approved living arrangement. The case manager shall monitor the transition plan each month during the case management meetings and update it as needed.

H. Judicial Review.

- a. Within 90 days after a youth's 17th birthday, a special Judicial Review shall occur. The Judicial Review Social Study Report additionally needs to include verification that the youth:
 - (1) Has been provided with a current Medicaid card or information concerning the Medicaid program, including information necessary to choose a managed care plan;
 - (2) Has been provided with a certified copy of his/her birth certificate;
 - (3) Has been issued a Florida identification card, if the youth does not have a valid driver's license;
 - (4) Has been provided a social security card and information relating to Social Security Insurance benefits, if eligible. If the youth has received these benefits while in foster care and they are being held in a master trust, a full accounting of those funds needs to be

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provided and the youth must be informed about how to access those funds;

- (5) Has been provided with all relevant information related to the extended foster care and postsecondary educational services and support;
- (6) Has an open bank account, or has identification necessary to open an account, and has been provided with essential banking skills;
- (7) Has been provided with information on public assistance and how to apply;
- (8) Has a clear understanding of where he/she will be living on his/her 18th birthday, how living expenses will be paid and what educational program or school he/she will be enrolled in.
- (9) Has a letter providing the dates that the youth has been under the jurisdiction of the court;
- (10) Has been provided his/her educational records;
- (11) Has been provided all health and mental health records;
- (12) Has been provided the process for accessing his/her case file;
- (13) Has been provided a statement encouraging the youth to attend all Judicial Review hearings occurring after his/her 18th birthday.

b. An updated Case Plan shall be provided to the court at the special Judicial Review hearing which includes specific information related to the independent living skills that the youth has acquired since his/her 13th birthday or since the date he/she has entered care, whichever came later.

H. Services for Young Adults Formerly in Foster Care.

1. Extended Foster Care.

- a. Youth living in licensed foster care upon their 18th birthday are eligible to remain in licensed foster care under the jurisdiction of the court and supervision of the agency.
- b. The eligibility requirements for extended foster care include the following:
 - (1) Attending high school or participating in a GED program;

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- (2) Attending college or vocational education program;
 - (3) Participating in a program designed to promote or eliminate barriers to employment;
 - (4) Employed at least 80 hours per month; or
 - (5) Unable to participate in any of the above mentioned activities due to a diagnosed and documented disability.
- c. If a young adult opts into extended foster care, they must reside in a supervised living arrangement that is approved by the agency. Supervised living arrangements may include a licensed foster home, licensed group home, college dormitory, apartment or host family, with first choice being a licensed foster home.
- d. While residing in the approved supervised living arrangement, the agency shall provide case management to include monthly contact between the young adult and case manager, supervision and supportive services to include life skills instruction, counseling, educational support, employment preparation and placement, and development of support networks. The level of supervision will be consistent with the young adult's individual education and health care needs, permanency plan and independent living goals as outlined in the transition plan.
- e. A young adult will no longer be eligible for extended foster care if he/she reaches 21 years of age or 22 years of age if he/she has a documented disability, leaves care to live in a permanent home to include residing with his or her biological parents, through marriage or adoption, fails to participate in one or more of the qualifying activities after being counseled by the child welfare case manager and provided the opportunity to engage in an alternative qualifying activity, or withdraws his/her consent to participate in extended foster care. When a young adult withdraws consent to participate, it should be verified by the court unless he/she refuses to participate in any court proceeding.
- f. If a young adult previously left care, he/she may apply for extended foster care if he/she meets the eligibility requirements.
- g. Once the young adult is approved for extended foster care, a case manager will be immediately assigned. A case plan and transition plan will be completed with the young adult and submitted to CLS to be filed with the court within 30 days of approval.
- h. Judicial Review hearings will be held at least every 6 months and a permanency review hearing will be held at least annually for all young

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adults in extended foster care. The case manager will prepare a report for the court which addresses services provided to the young adult as well as their progress with the case plan and transition plan.

2. Postsecondary Education Services and Support.

- a. Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS) assists students who are former foster care youth to receive postsecondary educational and vocational training needed to achieve independence.
- b. The eligibility requirements for this program include the following:
 - (1) Has reached 18 years of age but is not yet 23 years of age.
 - (2) Was living in licensed foster care on his/her 18th birthday and spent at least 6 months in foster care before reaching his/her 18th birthday; or
 - (3) Was adopted from foster care or placed with a court-approved dependency guardian after turning 16 years old and spent at least 6 months in licensed foster care within the 12 months immediately preceding such placement or adoption.
 - (4) Has earned a standard high school diploma or its equivalent.
 - (5) Has been admitted for enrollment as a full-time student, which is 9 credit hours or the vocational school equivalent, in a post-secondary educational institution which is a qualified participant in the Florida Bright Future Scholarship Program. If a student is enrolled part-time, he/she must have a recognized disability or approval from the academic advisor regarding the necessity to do so.
 - (6) Has submitted an application financial aid (Free Application for Federal Student Aid – FAFSA) which is complete and error free and applied for any other grants and scholarships for which he/she may qualify.
 - (7) Has signed an agreement to allow the agency access to his/her school records.
- c. Young adults approved for PESS will receive financial assistance in the amount of \$1256 per month.
- d. If a young adult has elected to remain in extended foster care, resides in licensed care, and has been approved for PESS, the amount of the financial assistance will be the established room and board rate. If the

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young adult temporarily resides away from the licensed provider, the amount will be \$1256 per month.

- e. The young adult must go through a renewal process annually during the 90-day period before the initial date of approval. In order to remain eligible, the young adult must:
 - (1) Complete the number of hours considered full-time in the last academic year (unless he/she qualifies for an exception) in which the young adult received PESS, and
 - (2) Maintains appropriate progress as required by the school, except that if his/her progress is insufficient to renew the award at any time during the eligibility period, he/she may continue to be enrolled while attempting to restore eligibility as long as progress is maintained.
- f. If the agency determines that a young adult is not enrolled in school or is no longer a resident of Florida, during the interim between an award and renewal period, funds may be terminated.
- g. If a young adult does not meet the eligibility requirements and is terminated from the program, he/she may apply for reinstatement before reaching 23 years of age.

3. Road to Independence Program.

- a. The Road to Independence (RTI) Program assists students who are former foster care youth to receive the educational and vocational training needed to achieve independence. The amount of the award shall be based on the living and educational needs of the young adult only to the extent that other grants and scholarships are not sufficient to meet those needs.
- b. Young adult who were approved for and participating in the RTI program before January 1, 2014 are eligible to remain in the program until their 23rd birthday, assuming they continue to meet the eligibility requirements and qualify for annual renewal. No new initial or reinstatement applications will be accepted for the RTI program.
- c. The eligibility requirements for this program include the following:
 - (1) Was a dependent child and living in licensed foster care or in subsidized independent living at the time of his/her 18th birthday;
 - (2) Has spent at least 6 months in foster care before reaching his/her 18th birthday, which does not have to be 6 consecutive months;

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- (3) Is a resident of the state of Florida;
 - (4) And meets one of the following qualifications:
 - i. Has earned a high school diploma or GED and has been admitted for full-time enrollment in a postsecondary education institution;
 - ii. Is enrolled full time in high school; or
 - iii. Is enrolled full time in an adult education program designed to provide the student with a high school diploma or its equivalent.
 - d. The young adult must go through a renewal process for the RTI program annually during the 90-day period before his/her birthday. In order to remain eligible for the next year, the young adults must:
 - (1) Complete the number of hours considered full-time by the educational institution in the last academic year in which the young adult earned the scholarship; and
 - (2) Maintain appropriate progress as required by the school.
 - e. If the young adult fails to submit the renewal application within the 90 day period before his/her birthday, or does not meet the renewal requirements and is terminated from the program, he/she cannot reapply but would have the option of applying for extended foster care or PESS if they meet the eligibility requirements for those programs.
4. Aftercare Services.
- a. A young adult who was in foster care at the time of his/her 18th birthday, but has not yet reached 23 years of age, and is not in foster care or receiving financial assistance under PESS is eligible for aftercare services.
 - b. Aftercare services available include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - (1) Mentoring and tutoring;
 - (2) Mental health services and substance abuse counseling;
 - (3) Life skills classes, including credit management and preventive health activities;
 - (4) Parenting classes;

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- (5) Job and career skills training;
 - (6) Counselor consultations; and
 - (7) Temporary financial assistance for necessities, including, but not limited to, education supplies, transportation expenses, security deposits for rent and utilities, furnishings, household goods, and other basic living expenses.
 - (8) Financial literacy skills training.
- c. The specific services shall be determined by an assessment of the young adult and may be provided by the Children's Network or through referrals to providers within the community.

IX. EXHIBITS:

Exhibit A: Independent Living Referral



INDEPENDENT LIVING REFERRAL

Case Manager: _____ CMO/Unit: _____
Phone: _____ Alternate Phone: _____
Courtesy Case Manager: _____ Agency: _____
Phone: _____ Alternate Phone: _____

Name: _____
Address: _____ Phone: _____
City/State _____ Zip Code _____
SS#: _____ DOB/Age: _____ Sex: _____ Race: _____

CURRENT PLACEMENT:

Type: _____ Name (Caregiver/Agency): _____
Date Placed at Current Placement? _____
Date Entered FC: _____ Date Expected to Leave FC: _____

EDUCATION INFORMATION:

Current School: _____ Grade: _____
Anticipated Graduation Date: _____

MENTAL HEALTH:

Have you ever been diagnosed or treated for a major mental illness? YES NO
If Yes, What? _____ When? _____

Are you now or have you ever attended counseling or therapy? YES NO
If Yes, for What? _____ Where? _____

ATTACHMENTS: [] Birth Certificate, [] Social Security Card, [] Adjudication Order

OTHER COMMENTS (Please identify if the youth has any special needs):

Case manager: _____ Date: _____

PLEASE FAX REFERRAL & CONSENT to Children's Home Society at
(239) 277-0662

DATE REFERRAL RECEIVED: (CHS USE ONLY): _____