



State of Florida  
Department of Children and Families

Charlie Crist  
Governor

George H. Sheldon  
Secretary

**DATE:** December 7, 2009

**TO:** Regional Directors

**THROUGH:** David L. Fairbanks, Assistant Secretary for Programs  
Pete Digre, Assistant Secretary for Operations

*David L. Fairbanks*  
*Pete Digre*

**FROM:** Alan Abramowitz, State Director, Office of Family Safety

*Alan Abramowitz*

**SUBJECT:** Quality Assurance Review of Independent Living Program

**ACTION REQUIRED:** Please distribute this report to community partners and others that are involved or advocate for young adults served by the Independent Living Program.

**DUE DATE:** As soon as possible

**PURPOSE:** By this memorandum, please be advised that the first phase of a quality assurance review of the Independent Living Program has been completed and the report of findings is attached for your consideration.

**BACKGROUND:** In response to various concerns raised by Florida's Youth SHINE, Secretary George Sheldon requested a quality assurance review of the Independent Living Program in order to address stated concerns and to help focus improvement efforts.

The quality assurance review is being conducted in three phases:

- A process management review of services delivered to young adults who have exited foster care receiving Aftercare, Transition, or Road to Independence Services. (Completed)
- Randomly selected case file reviews and interviews of youth who have reached their 17<sup>th</sup> birthday and are preparing for independence. (Tentatively scheduled for the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of FY 2009 - 2010)
- Randomly selected case file reviews and interviews of children in care between the ages of 13 and 16 years who are involved in pre-independent planning, assessment and service provision. (Tentatively scheduled for the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of FY 2009 - 2010)

1317 Winewood Boulevard, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0700

Mission: Protect the Vulnerable, Promote Strong and Economically Self-Sufficient Families, and Advance Personal and Family Recovery and Resiliency

**OVERVIEW:** This statewide report of findings for the 1<sup>st</sup> phase is based on system of care surveys that were conducted in each Community Based Care (CBC) lead agency, interviews with young adults receiving services, and focus group discussions that were held in each region. The report provides a global view of the various and variable processes; it identifies overarching issues; and makes recommendations that additional actions be implemented to improve service delivery. The attachments provide specific details of each review process.

In general, some of the best practices noted through this review include distinct efforts to ensure open and ongoing communication among a wide variety of service providers including the Department of Juvenile Justice. When all parties communicate openly and effectively, the young adult is better served and much more likely to achieve the desired outcome. From the reviewer's perspective, those communities who use formal processes on a routine basis are much more likely to ensure appropriate and helpful information is shared and services are coordinated.

Some communities actively write grants in an effort to obtain additional funding to improve and augment their service delivery system. And, in those communities that support Children's Services Councils, the array of services is much more robust than those communities who do not have service councils.

**ACTION REQUIRED:** Please distribute this report to community partners and others that are involved or advocate for young adults served by the Independent Living Program.

1. Should you wish to view individual surveys, they will be available on the Quality Assurance web site on the Florida Center for the Advancement of Child Welfare Practices, [www.centerforchildwelfare.org](http://www.centerforchildwelfare.org).
2. If you wish to view documentation from the young adult interviews, please contact Family Safety Quality Assurance or your local Regional Quality Assurance Managers; we will be glad to assist as needed. The local managers will need to ensure all identifying information is redacted before release.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** Please contact Janis Ahearn or Gail Perry from our Quality Assurance Unit, if you have any questions or need additional information. Ms. Ahearn can be reached at (850) 921-5197 or by email: [Janis\\_Ahearn@dcf.state.fl.us](mailto:Janis_Ahearn@dcf.state.fl.us), and Ms. Perry can be reached at (850) 921-7794 or by email: [Gail\\_Perry@dcf.state.fl.us](mailto:Gail_Perry@dcf.state.fl.us).

Attachment

cc: Regional Quality Assurance Managers  
CBC Quality Assurance Managers  
Contract Managers



**Quality Assurance Special Review  
Independent Living Program**  
*Family Safety Program Office  
September 3, 2009*

## **Executive Summary**

In January 2009 Florida's Youth SHINE, an advocacy group for children, youth and young adults within the foster care system, requested Secretary George Sheldon review their concerns over inequities and inconsistencies in service delivery systems throughout the state. In response Secretary Sheldon directed the Office of Family Safety to conduct a statewide review of the Independent Living Program to assess how well the program is currently operating and how it can be improved.

Because the Independent Living Program is expansive and program components focus on services within age groups, the Office of Family Safety is leading the review which will be conducted in three separate phases.

- The first phase, which has been completed and is the subject of this report, focused on process management of Aftercare Services, Transitional Support Services and Road to Independence Services for young adults formerly in foster care, i.e., young adults 18 and over.
- The second phase will include a review of youth living in licensed out-of-home care who have reached their 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, focusing on their preparedness and planning for exiting care.
- The third phase will include children 13 through 16 years of age and will focus on the quality of pre-independent living assessments and service provision. Both will involve interviews with the youth and children.

Three data gathering activities were conducted in Phase One.

- 1) "System of Care" surveys of each Community Based Care Lead Agency (CBC) were generated to obtain information about how each agency implements Independent Living services and to gather data regarding the general structure of the agencies' Independent Living provider network.
- 2) Interviews were conducted with a sample of young adults receiving Road to Independence Scholarships, Transitional Support Services and Aftercare Services payments, and of young adults who responded to the Independent Living Checklist.
- 3) Focus group discussions were held with the CBC lead agencies in each region to gather information about the challenges lead agencies face in implementing Independent Living services, and to solicit suggestions about any needed changes to Florida Statute, Florida Administrative Code, policy or procedure.

The Department established a pre-review workgroup staffed with representatives from Florida Youth SHINE and the Independent Living Services Advisory Council (ILSAC). The workgroup reviewed and provided input into the proposed methodology and tools for the surveys and interviews. Suggested revisions were made and incorporated to all tools prior to the review.

## **Context**

Florida Statute and Florida Administrative Code require services be provided to young adults formerly in foster care who have reached 18 years of age to ensure their successful transition into adulthood.

Aftercare Services are meant to help young adults continue development of skills and abilities; Road to Independence Services are intended to help students who are former foster children to receive education and vocational training; and, Transitional Support Services are intended to provide short-term funds or other services, which may include financial, housing, counseling, employment, education, mental health, disability, and other services that may be critical to the young adult becoming self-sufficient.

In FY 2008/2009, 1,475 youth aged out of out-of-home care. In June 2009, there were 2,045 youth receiving Road to Independence services.

## **Findings**

The review concluded the following (details of which can be found in the full report and Attachments A, B, and C).

1. There are wide variations statewide in processes for providing Independent Living services to youth and young adults.
2. Although Skills Training for Youth is being reliably offered, this training does not meet all youths' needs and does not consistently promote positive outcomes for young adults.
3. While staff and provider training is available in all agencies and areas, training curriculum vary from area to area and there is a gap in training for foster parents and for staff providing services to the young adult population.
4. There are concerns about staff communication and coordination between and among case managers and Independent Living staff in "shared" cases in some areas, to include unclear roles and responsibilities, and inconsistent processes in courtesy supervision.
5. Interviews with young adults and focus groups revealed there were considerable issues with regard to the transition of youth to adulthood and independence. Focus groups indicated there was a "mad dash" for youth to obtain all their skills and training in the year prior to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday (during the critical transition year) and felt that if mandatory trainings were required at all ages, transition to adulthood would be a smoother process.

6. There were variations in young adult's understanding of, and satisfaction with, Road to Independence, Transitional Support and Aftercare services and payments.

Most young adults interviewed reported being satisfied with the assistance Case Managers or Independent Living Coordinators had provided them since aging out of the foster care system. However, many were not knowledgeable about some of the processes. Less than three-fourths of young adults reported they currently had a Transition Plan that was developed with their case manager and included specific tasks for them to complete in order to achieve independence.

## **Recommendations**

1. The Department should set core contract requirements for structure and service delivery of the Independent Living Program and ensure these requirements are being met through contract oversight and continued quality assurance reviews.
2. The Department should lead the development of standardized training for youth, staff and foster parents that allows some flexibility based on area need, but includes core lessons with activities. Training should represent a more balanced approach to include not only practical skills, such as budgeting, etc., but also "softer" skills that promote self esteem and relationship building.
3. The Department should amend Florida Administrative Code 65C-30 to address and clarify courtesy provision of Independent Living Services.
4. The Department should provide clarification of "residency" in policy memorandum, that clearly identifies the responsible entity for providing the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) funds/state match and Road to Independence dollars for young adults who were in foster care in Florida, but have moved to another state prior to "aging out of foster care," who have applied to a college in the other state.
5. The Department should evaluate the current Road to Independence requirements to allow for more flexibility for use of the funds; to include making these Road to Independence funds available for informal apprenticeships, internships, and "on-the-job training" for youth who are not ready for a structured academic or vocational program.
6. Community Based Care Lead Agencies must increase assurances that all young adults receive financial assistance based on their need. In conjunction, the Department should revise and streamline existing Independent Living forms, such as combining the Transitional Support Services Application and Transition Plan to include goal tracking activities.

# Quality Assurance Special Review Independent Living Program

## Phase I: Young Adults Over 18 Years of Age and Older - July 2009

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### I. Background and Reason for Quality Assurance Review

In January 2009 Florida's Youth SHINE, an advocacy group for children, youth and young adults within the foster care system, requested Secretary George Sheldon review their concerns over inequities and inconsistencies in service delivery systems throughout the state. Consumers and advocates are concerned that young adults are not properly prepared for adulthood and that there are wide variances in how agencies operate and interpret statutes in meeting the needs of young adults exiting the foster care system.

In response Secretary Sheldon directed the Office of Family Safety to conduct a statewide review of the Independent Living Program (ILP) to assess how well the program is currently operating and how it can be improved.

### II. Approach

Because the Independent Living Program is expansive and program components focus on services within age groups, the Office of Family Safety developed a project plan to look at three discrete populations in three separate phases.

- The first phase, which has been completed and is the subject of this report, focused on process management of Aftercare Services, Transitional Support Services and Road to Independence Services for young adults formerly in foster care, i.e., young adults 18 and older.
- The second phase, now planned to begin during the third quarter of Fiscal Year 2009 – 2010, will involve a review of randomly selected youth in foster care who have reached their 17<sup>th</sup> birthday in order to assess service delivery in preparing them for independence.
- The third phase, now planned to begin during the fourth quarter of the fiscal year, will include randomly selected case file reviews and case specific interviews of children in foster care who are 13 through 16 years of age in order to assess pre-independent living assessments and services.

To complete a process management review during the first phase, three data gathering activities were conducted.

1. "System of Care" surveys of each Community Based Care Lead Agency (CBC) were generated to obtain information about how each agency implements

Independent Living services and to gather data regarding the general structure of the agencies Independent Living provider network.

2. Interviews were conducted with a sample of young adults receiving Road to Independence Scholarships, Transitional Support Services and Aftercare Services payments and of young adults who responded to the Independent Living Checklist (automated information system) using the Services to Young Adults Formerly in Foster Care Interview Guide. The purpose of the interviews was to solicit information from young adults on general Independent Living activities and to gain a better understanding of the young adults' issues and concerns regarding the payments or services they were receiving.
3. Focus group discussions were held with the CBC lead agencies in each region to gather information about the challenges lead agencies face in implementing Independent Living services, and to solicit suggestions about any needed changes to Florida Statute, Florida Administrative Code, policy or procedure.

### **III. Methodology**

#### Statutory and Regulatory Authority

- Florida Statute Chapter 409.1451, F.S, Independent Living Transition Services.
- Florida Administrative Code 65C.31, F.A.C., Services to Young Adults Formerly in the Custody of the Department.
- Florida Administrative Code 65C-28, F.A.C., Adolescent Services.
- 1999 Foster Care Independent Act, Title 1 of the Act is the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP).

#### Tool and Process Development

The Department established a pre-review workgroup staffed with representatives from Florida Youth SHINE and the Independent Living Services Advisory Council (ILSAC). As required by ss. 409.1451(7) F.S., ILSAC was created by the Florida Legislature for the "purpose of reviewing and making recommendations concerning the implementation and operation of the independent living transition services."

The workgroup reviewed and provided input into the proposed methodology and tools for the surveys and interviews. Suggested revisions were made and incorporated to all tools prior to the review.

#### System of Care Surveys

Each of the 21 CBC lead agencies was surveyed regarding the structure of their Independent Living Program and individual protocols and processes that are in place to ensure service provision to youth and young adults.

In order to assess individual agency processes consistently statewide, the surveys were completed by the Region Quality Assurance Manager (or other designated Region Quality Assurance staff), in collaboration with the Region Contract Manager for the applicable CBC lead agency and the CBC designee. Information captured on the survey was based on self-reporting by the CBC/CBC designee.

Interviews with Young Adults Formerly in Foster Care

Interviews were conducted with young adults formerly in foster care to seek information about Independent Living services while they were still in foster care as well as their Independent Living experiences subsequent to “aging out” of the foster care system. There were 109 young adults ages 18-22 interviewed statewide, but representing each of the 21 CBC lead agencies.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were facilitated by Office of Family Safety Quality Assurance and attended by Independent Living staff from CBC lead agencies, Contracted Case Management Organizations, Community Support Organizations, Educational Liaisons, youth advocates, Department staff and Department of Juvenile Justice staff. These were held in each region during June 2009. Participants shared successful programs and practices and discussed barriers to implementation of Independent Living services for young adults formerly in foster care.

**IV. Overview**

Florida Statute and Florida Administrative Code require services be provided to young adults formerly in foster care who have reached 18 years of age to ensure successful transition into adulthood.

Aftercare Services are meant to help young adults continue development of skills and abilities; Road to Independence Services are intended to help students who are former foster children to receive education and vocational training; and, Transitional Support Services are intended to provide short-term funds or other services, which may include financial, housing, counseling, employment, education, mental health, disability, and other services that may be critical to the young adult becoming self-sufficient.

Funding for these services is provided through the federal Chafee Road to Independence Grant and Chafee Education and Training Voucher Grant. Florida matches both grants through general revenue funding. Expenditures for FY 2008/2009 were:

Program	Expenditures 2008/2009
Road to Independence	23,104,202.98
Education and Training Voucher	5,638,307.57
Aftercare Payments	890,389.06

In FY 2008/2009, 1,475 youth aged out of out-of-home care. In June 2009, there were 2,045 youth receiving Road to Independence services.



## V. Issues and Findings

The following identifies overarching issues and findings from the System of Care Surveys, interviews with young adults formerly in foster care, and regional focus groups. Details regarding each component can be found in the attached summary reports.

### 1. **There are variations statewide in providing Independent Living services to youth and young adults.**

There were differences statewide as to who is responsible for providing Independent Living services to youth and young adults, as well as the staff to client ratio. This was identified both in the surveys and focus groups.

- Agencies reported Independent Living services were provided solely by the CBC lead agency, by a Contracted Case Management Organization (CMO) or through a combination of CBC and CMO staff.
- The ratio of staff to youth and young adult population also varied considerably. For the staff to young adult population receiving Road to Independence Scholarship funds (the largest number of young adults within the young adult population) ratios ranged from a low of 1 staff to six clients to a high of one staff to 150 clients.

There were differences statewide in the reported availability of funds for Transitional Support (TSS) and Aftercare services. There were also variances in the depth of services provided to youth and young adults. This was reported in the surveys, in focus groups and in comments from young adults who cited lack of funding as the reason that was sometimes given when they received a lesser amount of TSS or Aftercare funds, than requested. Issues included:

- Inconsistencies and variations in funding Independent Living Programs statewide, by the State and by Community-Based Care Lead Agencies to sub-contracted providers.
- Inconsistency in how resources are applied statewide, to include lack of Transitional Support Services and Aftercare Services availability in some areas, while other areas provide these services consistently. (It was unclear whether this was the result of inadequate funding or was due to differences in how funding for specific programs was utilized in some areas.)

There were inconsistencies and variations statewide and by county in community supported programs and other available resources to supplement the services provided to youth and young adults by the CBC lead agency and sub-contracted providers. As one would expect, areas that actively applied for grants or boasted an active Children's Services Council had a richer array of resources.

There were inconsistencies and variations statewide and even within local areas in communication and collaboration between Case Managers, Independent Living

staff and Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) staff working with jointly served youth. There are:

- Formal processes in some areas, including monthly meetings between case management, Independent Living and DJJ staff, Cross-Over units and staffings for jointly served youth, Clinical Review Staffings for all youth placements other than traditional family foster homes and shared client lists between the CBC agency and DJJ.
- Informal processes in other areas, such as general Working Agreements between the agencies or promoting diligent involvement of staff on individual cases.
- Variations in working agreements from area to area.
- Inconsistent information-sharing practices between DJJ and Independent Living staff. Some focus group participants reported ease in obtaining reports of life skills provided by DJJ staff for youth that are in residential facilities, while others noted gathering this information is sometimes problematic.
- Inconsistent participation of DJJ staff in Independent Living staffings, although the reason for this was unclear.

There were differences by agency and sub-contracted provider in how life skills were provided to youth, evaluated for effectiveness and tracked.

- Although variations existed in the way agencies reported they provided services, most indicated life skills were provided through a combination of methods, to include specialized curriculum in a structured environment, foster parent/group home hands-on activities, training events sponsored by community resources and “other” sources (such as riding the bus with staff, going to the Social Security Administration office or visiting apartment complexes).
- Agencies also reported multiple mechanisms for evaluating the effectiveness of their life skills/services. The primary means was through youth assessment results, followed by youth outcomes.

It should be noted however, that at least one focus group raised concerns about the current assessment documents, indicating they don’t really work well with many youth, who tend to “Christmas Tree” (answering questions in a random pattern) these documents without giving much thought; while other youth have ranges of limited understanding of what the questions mean.

- Slightly over half of the agencies noted they required youth to demonstrate what they had learned in skills training. While interviews with young adults revealed the majority of individuals felt the Independent Living skills they received while in foster care were based on all or most of their special needs, almost 20% indicated none of the skills they received were based on their

needs and less than half reported they were asked to demonstrate learned skills.

There were differences in agency processes for tracking Independent Living requirements and completion of youth activities. While most agencies reported they had either a formal or informal process for tracking purposes, mechanisms ranged from standardized databases/systems in two agencies to monthly or quarterly spreadsheets in most agencies, and through contract monitoring in a small number of agencies.

- Focus group participants reported the statewide tracking system is inadequate in that it does not capture all requirements and completion of Independent Living activities for youth or current information on young adults (i.e. address, phone number, employment status, referral and financial request/approval dates, etc.)

**2. Although Skills Training for Youth is being reliably offered, this training does not meet all youths' needs and does not consistently promote positive outcomes for young adults.**

Training for youth heavily focuses on practical skills, such as money management, budgeting, cooking, etc., which are critical skills for youth to learn, but a more balanced curriculum, to include “softer” skills, such as promoting self esteem and relationship building, would likely serve to promote better outcomes for young adults.

Training for youth does not always capture their attention; it is often rote and lacks excitement. Focus group participants noted youth often tell them the trainings are “boring and uninteresting”.

There is no mandatory training requirement for youth. While skills trainings are routinely offered (and some agencies noted they provided incentives for youth to attend), youth attendance is sporadic. Some youth do not attend at all. Several focus groups expressed frustration that there was no mandatory requirement for youth to complete these, stating this may contribute to young adults being ill-prepared to face the challenges of adulthood, and may also hinder them in achieving positive outcomes.

This is further complicated by differing attitudes of staff that provide these services and oversee the programs (which were noted during focus group activities)

- On the one hand, some participants were adamant that youth needed to attend and show proficiency in all skills areas before aging out of the system and becoming eligible for adult services, particularly Road to Independence Scholarship money. They expressed that requiring this was critical for young adults in order for them to achieve positive educational outcomes, as well as overall independence.
- Other participants indicated that agencies were forcing youth to complete activities just because they were foster children, and that (as foster children) their lives had been extremely difficult through no fault of their own. They expressed that the

agency's job was to work with youth and whatever skills and abilities they had at transition, regardless of whether they had completed any training throughout their time in foster care.

**3. While staff and provider training is available in all agencies and areas, training curricula vary from area to area and there is a gap in training for foster parents and for staff providing services to the young adult population.**

Agencies reported in their surveys that training was generally available for staff working with the 13-17 year old population and for foster parents who cared for adolescents, but noted less training was available for staff working with the young adult population.

- Training for staff with adolescent caseloads included child welfare pre-service, educational and career planning, training on normalcy plans, assessments and statutory/administrative code requirements to specialized trainings, such as transitional living classes, de-escalation training and servicing youth with disabilities and substance abuse.
- Most trainings for staff working with the young adult population were cited as being the same or similar to those designed for staff providing services to the youth population. However, one agency noted there were 20 hours of additional specialized required trainings for staff working with the young adult population (to include mental health, community resources and parenting training). Other agencies indicated they provide staff with training specific to forms, needs assessment, assisting youth in completing applications for funding and training related to Medicaid and Social Security benefits.

While training was noted to be available for foster parents, it was described primarily as being provided through Model Approach to Partnership in Parenting (MAPP) classes and foster parent association activities; followed by special events, local trainings and conferences. Focus group participants noted there was a need to provide additional training to foster parents regarding their teaching responsibility for foster youth (as well as how to teach or role model for those youth) with regard to skills development.

**4. There are concerns about staff communication and coordination between and among case managers and Independent Living staff in “shared” cases in some areas, to include unclear roles and responsibilities, and inconsistent processes in courtesy supervision.**

For Youth. While 65C-30.018 reflects Out of County requirements, it does not specifically address courtesy provision of Independent Living Services. Additionally, inconsistency in provision of these services may be impacted by the staff to client ratio or geographic spread of one area versus another. NOTE: Lack of courtesy supervision requirements is particularly problematic in cases where jointly served youth are in residence in a Department of Juvenile Justice facility outside of the dependency agency jurisdiction.

For Young Adults. While young adults who move to another area are provided funding by their “agency of origin,” availability and timeliness of emergency funds may

be impacted by their remote location. General support from Independent Living staff may vary, based on staff to client ratios, geography of an area and availability of staff, particularly in rural areas of the state.

There is inconsistent application of “residency” for young adults residing out of state, i.e., areas reported struggling with determining the responsible entity for providing Educational and Training Voucher (ETV) funds/state match for young adults who were in foster care in Florida, but moved to another state prior to “aging out of foster care” and applied for college as a resident of that other state. Also of concern was whether Florida had responsibility to provide Road to Independence (RTI) money in those instances.

**5. Interviews with young adults and focus groups revealed there were considerable issues with regard to the transition of youth to adulthood and independence.**

Less than 70% of young adults interviewed indicated their case manager or Independent Living Coordinator had assisted them in developing a support system prior to their turning 18 years old. Several others indicated they had developed a network of individuals for support on their own or through their Guardian ad-Litem or another individual in the community. Five young adults interviewed noted they had no one to go to for help, if needed.

Focus groups indicated there was a “mad dash” for youth to obtain all their skills and training in the year prior to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday (during the critical transition year) and felt that if mandatory trainings were required at all ages, transition to adulthood would be a smoother process.

Focus group participants noted youth are required to make critical decisions during the year prior to turning 18, and most select the Road to Independence Scholarship route because it offers the best financial option for them as young adults. However, the youth is not always ready academically or emotionally to go to school as soon as they turn 18, or may never be ready for formal education, but they choose an educational path through RTI in order to get the “maximum” financial benefit provided by the State. This practice potentially:

- Sets young adults up for academic failure during the first year of RTI.
- Inappropriately pushes young adults to choose an educational or even a formal vocational path, when they might be more successful in an apprenticeship or “hands on” training activity, such as working on a construction site, with a maintenance crew or in the service industry. In support of this issue, while most young adults surveyed indicated they had some plan to finish school (many with a GED) or hoped to go to college or receive a technical certificate, one young adult replied “...she really wouldn’t call it a plan and stated...you have to go to school to get the Independent Living money”.

**6. There were variations in young adult's understanding of, and satisfaction with, Road to Independence, Transitional Support and Aftercare services and payments.**

Most young adults interviewed reported being satisfied with the assistance Case Managers or Independent Living Coordinators had provided them since aging out of the foster care system.

- Over 80% of young adults reported they have always been able to access someone from the agency and receive assistance in applying for a service, if needed.
- The majority of young adults interviewed also reported having been informed of their due process rights when denied a benefit. The primary method they reported for being notified of these rights was verbally through their case manager or Independent Living Coordinator, followed up with written notification along with the Notice of Adverse Action.
- Over 90% of young adults receiving the Road to Independence Scholarship reported their Case Manager or Independent Living Coordinator had assisted them with the RTI application and 80% indicated their Case Manager or Independent Living Coordinator conducted a needs assessment consultation with them that addressed all required activities.
- Most young adults, who indicated they had requested referrals for services, reported having been assisted by their Case Manager or Independent Living Coordinator in obtaining these.
- Over 90% of young adults receiving Transitional Support Services reported having worked out an agreement with their Case Manager or Independent Living Coordinator regarding contacts they felt were sufficient to meet their needs.

While most young adults were complimentary of Case Management or Independent Living Coordinator services, many were not as knowledgeable about some of the processes.

- Less than three-fourths of young adults interviewed reported they knew where Transitional Support Services (73%) and Aftercare Services (71%) applications were kept and how to access them.
- Less than three-fourths of young adults reported they currently had a Transition Plan that was developed with their case manager and included specific tasks for them to complete in order to achieve independence.

There were wide variations in survey responses provided by agencies regarding payment amounts and timelines of payments for Road to Independence Scholarship (RTI), Transitional Support Services (TSS) and Aftercare programs. Additionally, there were variations in responses young adults provided regarding these payments.

- Agencies reported multiple and differing processes to ensure timely RTI checks, ranging from monthly Excel spreadsheets and reviewing invoices to meetings between the Independent Living Specialist and other entities (Federal Funds Manager, fiscal representative, etc). In one agency there is a “Monthly Money Meeting” where the Independent Living Specialist, account manager and operations consultant review every young adult, their payment amount and who the check(s) is made out to.
- Most agencies noted checks were available and distributed by a specific date every month, generally between the first and fifth business day, although one agency reported they have worked to make improvements in this area subsequent to the Youth SHINE letter.
- Eighty-five percent (85%) of young adults indicated they had not received a late RTI payment that created a problem with their housing, school fees, utilities or other important bills. Most of the late payment situations had been resolved. However, time frames for resolution of the late payments ranged considerably; and in six instances late payments were not resolved for in excess of five days.

All agencies reported they had a process to ensure payment is received “expeditiously” in instances where young adults are in need of emergency assistance. These processes were mostly based on a determination of need through assessment and the urgency of the need as described by the young adult.

- Some agencies noted their case management organizations providing Independent Living services will accept applications and get approval through the CBC. Others stated they will pay for services out of pocket and get reimbursed later.
- While most agencies reported the time between check request and receipt varied, it was based on urgency of the need (ranging from 24 hours or less to 4-5 days). The majority of agencies indicated the average length of time for the young adult to receive the check after the request was made 24 hours or less.
- The timeframes for receiving Aftercare Cash Assistance payments for emergency needs were reported as ranging from 24 hours or less in the majority of instances to 4-5 days. One youth noted it took an excess of 30 days to resolve her rent situation. This individual was the only person who reported that a late “emergency” payment had resulted in her being without a critical basic need (stable housing).

Over 85% of the agencies stated that there was no presumptive maximum amount of TSS funds provided to young adults. While most agreed the funding was based on young adult need, two agencies noted they could not provide funds repeatedly for the same need and at least one other agency reported attempts were made to determine if the expenditure of funds was reasonable. Another agency indicated during this last fiscal year a decision was made that all funding requests over \$500 required approval of the Vice President of Client Services.

Focus groups noted there were inconsistencies in how resources were applied statewide, particularly with regard to Transitional Support Services and Aftercare Services. In one focus group, issues were also raised about lack of accountability by CBC providers to ensure they offered services and payments to young adults timely (expeditiously in emergency situations) with no arbitrary maximum amount (CAP).

- Sixty-seven percent (67%) of young adults receiving TSS funds reported they received the amount of funds requested or needed; and said they were satisfied and money had never been an issue. However, sixteen individuals reported having received fewer funds than needed to make ends meet. Three of these individuals indicated they were receiving \$416 per month (one had requested more funds; one did not know she could request a higher amount and the third said her amount was recently raised to \$520 because “she now qualifies for ETV”).
- Three young adults (about 13%) reported they had received a lesser amount of Aftercare Cash Assistance than originally requested.

Other issues related to services and payments for young adults formerly in foster care included:

- There is a lack of structure for the Transitional Support Services Program; the program is vague, unclear and widely interpreted.
- Excessive forms are required for Independent Living programs, particularly for Young Adult programs and require many staff hours that could be better spent in working with young adults. Streamlining and combining some of the forms would be beneficial to staff who complete them and for young adults who are sometimes confused by them.

## **VI. Summary**

One of reasons for privatizing the state’s child welfare services delivery system through the community based care structure was for communities to organize their child welfare agencies in a way that best supports local needs. While this has been a daunting task, most communities have risen to the challenge and have an extensive network of supports for their local areas.

Based on information obtained from the review, communities that are rich in resources such as those with Children’s Services Councils provide more robust supplemental service array, and smaller communities with fewer resources rely predominantly on state funding for CBC contracts and sub-contracts with provider agencies. Services for the youth and young adults are often contingent upon the area of the state in which they reside, as are payments for some of the programs offered to young adults, such as Transitional Support Services and Aftercare Services.

Additionally, the review identified issues with regard to inter-agency cooperation when foster children are referred to the Department of Juvenile Justice. In some jurisdictions case files, staff interviews and youth interviews document high levels of cooperation between dependency and delinquency staff, while in other areas, relationships varied and were primarily contingent upon individual staff to facilitate.



Concerns were noted with regard to staff and provider training. Although training is offered in all areas, additional training needs were identified. Revisions to existing youth skills training and training requirements were also identified as areas needing to be addressed further. Communication among and between staff and providers, to include courtesy supervision situations, needs to be improved. All participants must share pertinent information with each other in order to achieve the best possible outcome for the young adult.

Lastly, young adults and focus groups raised concerns about transition activities, noting there are serious challenges young adults face as they exit the foster care system, to include deficits in housing in many areas and resource constraints for young adults, particularly those with behavioral or developmental issues, which is the case for many of our foster youth.

## **VII. Recommendations**

1. The Department should set core contract requirements for structure and service delivery of the Independent Living Program and ensure these requirements are being met through contract oversight and continued quality assurance reviews.
2. The Department should lead the development of standardized training for youth, staff and foster parents that allows some flexibility based on area need, but includes core lessons with activities. Training should represent a more balanced approach to include not only practical skills, such as budgeting, etc., but also “softer” skills that promote self esteem and relationship building.
3. The Department should amend Florida Administrative Code 65C-30 to address and clarify courtesy provision of Independent Living Services.
4. The Department should provide clarification of “residency” in policy memorandum, that clearly identifies the responsible entity for providing the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) funds/state match and Road to Independence dollars for young adults who were in foster care in Florida, but have moved to another state prior to “aging out of foster care,” who have applied to a college in the other state.
5. The Department should evaluate the current Road to Independence requirements to allow for more flexibility for use of the funds; to include making these Road to Independence funds available for informal apprenticeships, internships, and “on-the-job training” for youth who are not ready for a structured academic or vocational program.
6. Community Based Care Lead Agencies must increase assurances that all young adults receive financial assistance based on their need. In conjunction, the Department should revise and streamline existing Independent Living forms, such as combining the Transitional Support Services Application and Transition Plan to include goal tracking activities.

## Summary of System of Care Surveys

Attachment A

Each of 21 CBC lead agencies was surveyed to describe the structure of their independent living program and individual protocols and processes that are in place to ensure service provision to youth and young adults.

In order to assess individual agency processes consistently statewide, the surveys were completed by the Region Quality Assurance Manager (or other designated Region Quality Assurance staff), in collaboration with the Region Contract Manager for the applicable Community Based Care Lead Agency (CBC) and the CBC designee. Information captured on the survey was based on self-reporting by the CBC/CBC designee. Major statewide findings include:

### Summary of Statewide Survey Results

#### CBC Structure and General Information

There were variances statewide as to who is responsible for providing Independent Living services to youth and young adults. The CBCs were asked to describe the agency and type of staff responsible for providing the following required independent living activities:

Normalcy Plans
Teen Plans
Age-Appropriate Activities
Education and Career Path
Assessments – For youth ages 13, 15, and 17
Annual Staffing – For youth ages 13 and 14
Bi-annual Staffings – For youth ages 15 and 16
Formal Subsidized Independent Living Staffing – For youth ages 16-17
Transition Plan - age 17
Special Judicial Review within 90 days of a youth's 17 <sup>th</sup> birthday (to include ensuring the youth has all required personal documentation).

Based on their feedback there is very little consistency or standardization which may be a significant contributor to inequities in payments and services.

- In seven agencies (33.3%) Independent Living services were provided solely by the CBC Lead Agency. In seven agencies (33.3%) these services were provided by a contracted case management organization (CMO). In the remaining seven agencies, services were provided by a combination of CBC and CMO staff.
- Within the responsible agencies, the type of staff providing Independent Living Services was a combination of case managers, Independent Living staff and “other” entities (such as life coaches and specialized staff to address educational needs of youth). (Chart 1)

- In instances where Independent Living services were not provided solely by case managers, cases for youth ages 13-17 were assigned by a combination of factors; age of client being the primary assignment reason, followed by geographic area and “other reasons”, such as by unit or specialized function of a sub-contracted provider.

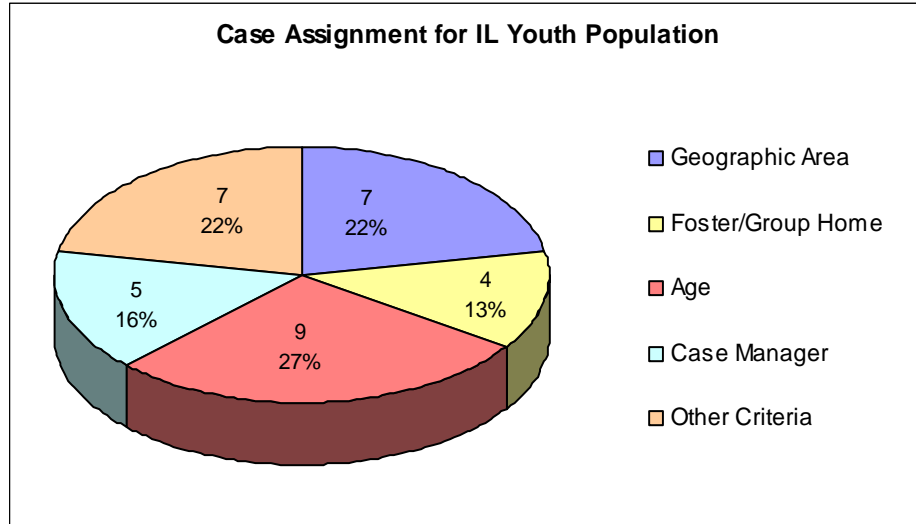


Chart 1

Source: Agency System of Care Surveys

- For the population of young adults ages 18-23, case assignment also varied. While “Other” reason was cited as the basis for primary assignment of this population (to include program type, specialized transition staff and age of young adult), in nine agencies designation of staff to young adult population remained the same as for the 13-17 year old youth. In one agency assignment occurred alphabetically, by young adult last name. (Chart 2)

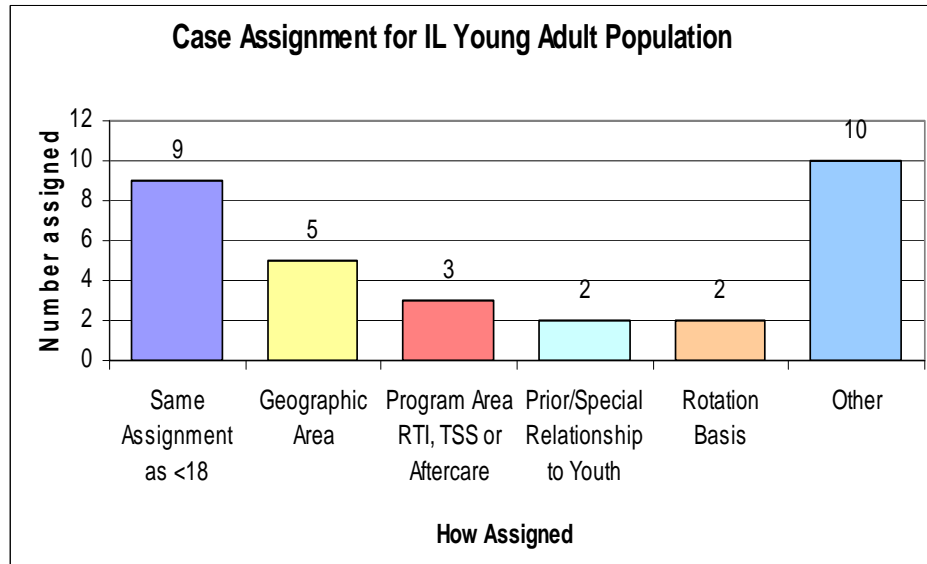


Chart 2

Source: Agency System of Care Surveys

- Twenty of twenty-one agencies noted the Independent Living Specialist/Coordinator assumed primary responsibility for providing independent Living Services to young adults when jurisdiction had been extended until the age of 19. However, in many agencies, case managers continued to support the young adult by completing court activities. (Chart 3)

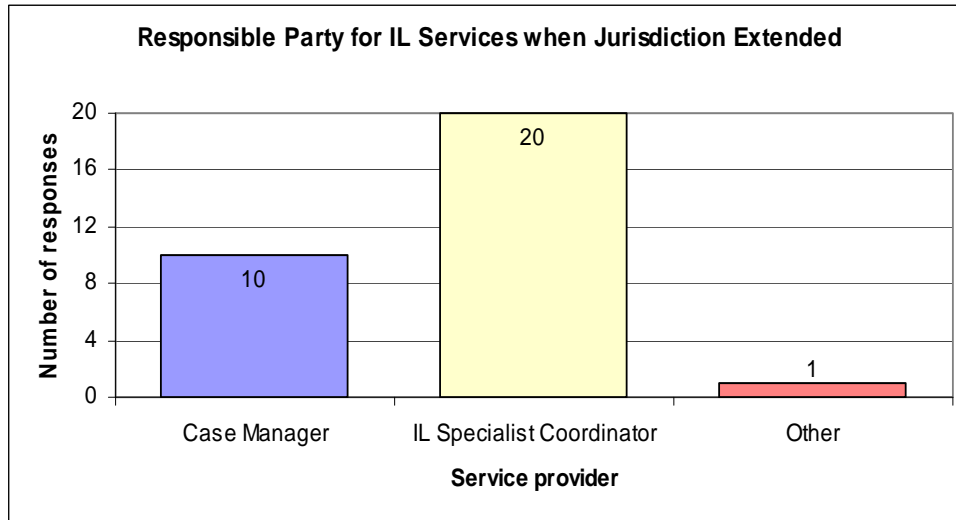


Chart 3

Source: Agency System of Care Surveys

- The ratio of staff to youth and young adult population varied considerably. For the staff to young adult population receiving Road to Independence Scholarship funds (the largest number of young adults within the young adult population and focus of this phase of the review) ratios ranged from a low of 1 staff to 6 clients (Big Bend East) to a high of 1 staff to 150 young adults (Child Net). Overall the ratios were as follows:
  - ✓ 1 staff to 10 or less young adult population (3 agencies or 14%)
  - ✓ 1 staff to 11-30 young adult population (9 agencies or 43%)
  - ✓ 1 staff to 31-50 young adult population (6 agencies or 29%)
  - ✓ 1 staff to 51-100 young adult population (2 agencies or 10%)
  - ✓ 1 staff to 100 or more young adult population (1 agency or 5%)

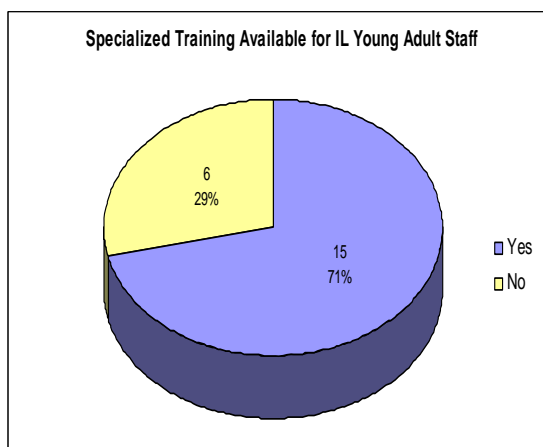
#### Staff and Provider Training

Agencies were asked whether specialized training was available for staff providing Independent Living services for both the 13-17 year old and 18-23 year-old populations and for foster parents who cared for adolescents.

- Twenty agencies (95%) indicated staff received specialized training to work with the adolescent (13-17 year-old) population. General training noted was child welfare pre-service, educational and career planning, training on normalcy plans, assessments and statutory/administrative code requirements. Other focused trainings, to include transitional living classes, de-escalation training and servicing youth with disabilities and substance abuse were also described.

One agency reported their life coaches followed the Arise Life Skills Training Model (which teaches basic life skills, money, housing and education to youth through a “train the trainer model” to their co-life coaches). Another indicated case management and Independent Living staff had been recently trained on “Youth in Court” and their Legal Aid had trained staff on identifying legal aid services needs of youth and how to access these services.

- Eighteen agencies (86%) stated foster parents received specialized training to work with the adolescent population. Training ranged from Model Approach to Partnership in Parenting (MAPP) classes, foster parent association activities, “special events”, local trainings and conferences to normalcy training, assisting older adolescents achieve independence and training on adolescent behaviors and sexually reactive teenagers.
- One agency noted they have instituted the Specialized Teen Home program established through the University of Florida Behavioral Analyst Specialists Program (BASP), which includes comprehensive tools and trainings for foster parents in the program and a condensed version for other families that foster adolescents. Another agency reported they required 18 hours of training through BASP and an additional 18 hours of in-service training, to include classroom and in-home training to foster parents. A third agency indicated their Youth Advisory Board created specialized training and actually provide the training to foster parents.
- Fifteen of twenty-one agencies (71%) noted staff received specialized training to work with the 18-23 year-old population. Most of the trainings were the same or similar to those designed for staff providing services to the youth population. However, one agency required 20 hours of additional specialized trainings for staff working with the young adult population (to include mental health, community resources and parenting training). Other agencies said they provide staff with training specific to forms, needs assessment, assisting youth in completing applications for funding and training related to Medicaid and Social Security benefits. (See Charts 4 and 5)



Charts 4 and 5

Source: Agency System of Care Surveys

### Independent Living Processes and Activities

Agencies were asked to provide information regarding the following:

#### **Process for tracking timely completion of Independent Living activities/services to youth.**

- Eighteen of twenty-one agencies indicated they had either a formal or informal process for tracking Independent Living activities and/or services for youths and young adults. These ranged from formal databases/systems in two agencies to monthly or quarterly spreadsheets in most agencies. In two of the three agencies who indicated they had no tracking system, the mechanism identified for tracking these activities was contract monitoring.
- Compliance with Florida Administrative Code and statutory requirements was noted to be measured primarily through contract oversight monitoring and quality assurance reviews completed by the CBC or contract provider.

#### **Provision of life skills to youth in foster care.**

- Most agencies indicated life skills were provided through a combination of methods, to include specialized curriculum in a structured environment, foster parent/group home hands-on activities, training events sponsored by community resources and “other” sources (such as riding the bus with staff, going to the Social Security Administration office or visiting apartment complexes).
- One agency noted they had recently held their 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Teen Institute, where there were workshops on Internet Safety, Normalcy and money management. Another agency indicated they have specialized trainings through Connected by 25. Several agencies reported they have summer programs where outside speakers are used and individualized training is conducted. (Chart 6)

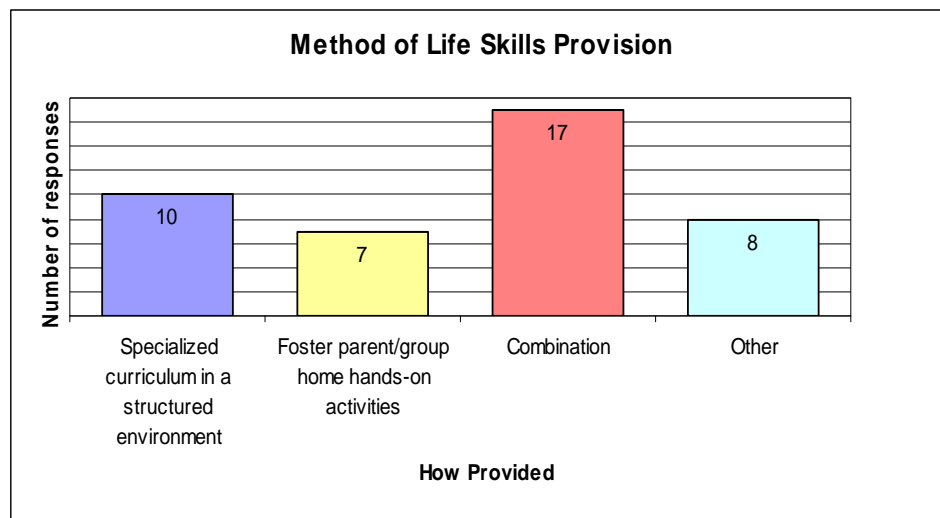


Chart 6

Source: Agency System of Care Surveys

### Evaluating the effectiveness of life skills.

- Agencies reported multiple mechanisms for tracking the effectiveness of their life skills/services. The primary means was through youth assessment results (19 agencies). Twelve agencies noted they require youth to demonstrate the learned skills. Fourteen agencies indicated they also track effectiveness through youth outcomes. (Chart 7)
- One agency stated they created a tracking sheet that requires the assigned caregiver or case manager to evaluate the youth's progress in the categories of daily living, work and study. Another agency indicated they assign youth to Group Youth Mentor Teams, and their feedback regarding youth progress is solicited regularly.

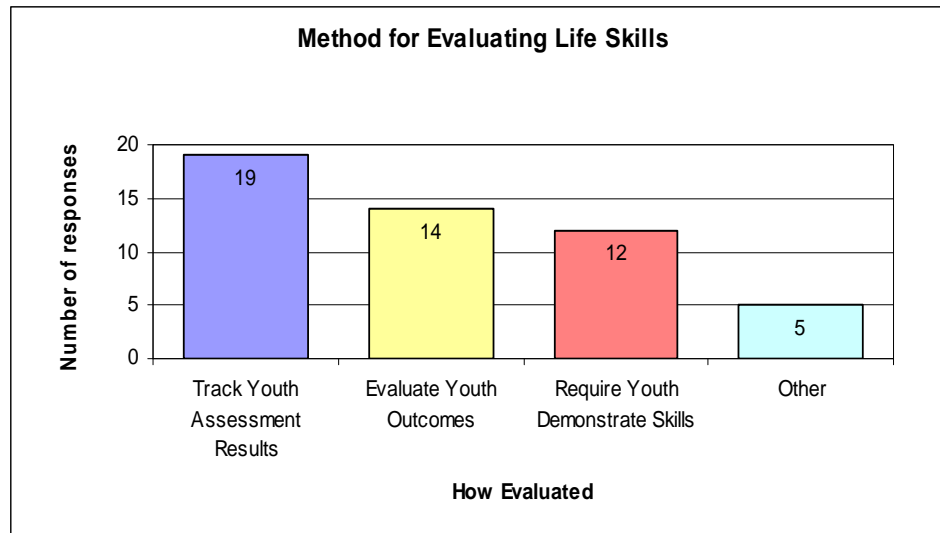


Chart 7

Source: Agency System of Care Surveys

### Activities to Promote Youth Employment.

- Twenty agencies (95%) indicated they offered or connected youth to special services/programs/trainings/mentoring opportunities to promote youth employment. Activities ranged from Faith Based Coalitions, Work Force Innovation and employing youth through Operation Full Employment to specialized job coaches assisting in readying youth for employment. Several agencies have developed partnerships with local businesses that offer job training, internships and monthly employability workshops. Several CBCs offer summer camps and summer work-study programs. (Chart 8, next page).
- One agency works with Panera Bread Company who has provided three orientations specific to Independent Living youth; to include, addressing the process of interviewing and working in restaurants. Another agency has developed an agreement with local Denny's restaurants.



Chart 8

Source: Agency System of Care Surveys

### **Other Specialized Programs for Youth and Young Adults.**

- Agencies discussed other independent living services provided by the CBC or sub-contracted provider, to include some of the following innovative practices with youth driven outcomes:
  - ✓ Co-location and collaboration of Connected by 25 with the Crosswinds Independent Living program, which has expanded their Fast Track GED course and recently had ten youth complete the program.
  - ✓ Implementation of 17-year-old monthly/bi-monthly dinners with topics related to “All about when you turn 18” that include guest speakers and discussions about living on your own.
  - ✓ Realization of Our Mother’s Home, a sub-contracted provider of congregate care that provides services to expectant or teen mothers in the areas of cooking, budgeting, parenting, cleaning, etc. The agency has also entered into a memorandum of agreement with a local provider to ensure that housing is available to young women and their children.
  - ✓ Implementation of STARS Academy (HANDY, ChildNet, BC): a mentoring/tutoring program that matches at-risk students grades 6-12 with local citizens for bi-monthly sessions, focusing on reading, math, and life skills.
  - ✓ Development of Youth Advisory Boards and summer camps in several areas and partnering with the public school system to fund three dedicated guidance counselors to be employed with the school system to work with foster youth in another area.



### Youth Involvement.

Agencies were asked to describe how they involved youth in the determination of the provision of Independent Living Services. Several agencies indicated Youth SHINE is involved in staffings, court hearings and plan development. Others noted they have Youth Advisory Councils/Boards and rely on feedback from these groups. Additionally, a number of agencies noted that they solicit input from youth directly during their staffings. One agency stated they use satisfaction surveys from classroom trainings and solicit input at the family team conference.

### Communication and Coordination with the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ).

Agencies were surveyed regarding their processes and protocols to address communication and collaboration between case managers/independent living staff and Department of Juvenile Justice staff working with jointly served youth, to ensure they receive consistent, adequate Independent Living services.

- Fifteen agencies (71%) indicated they had a formal process in place to work with jointly served youth. Some of these processes included formal monthly meetings between case management, Independent Living and DJJ staff, Cross-Over units and staffings for jointly served youth, Clinical Review Staffings for all youth placements other than traditional family foster homes and shared client lists between the CBC agency and DJJ. (Chart 9)
- In one area a judge supports a Cross-Over Independent Living Court Project to specifically address the needs of youth in both the dependency and delinquency systems. Other areas have Unified Courts to address these youth issues. One of the CBC agencies has a DJJ liaison on staff that coordinates and facilitates interagency staffings monthly.
- Six agencies (29%) stated they had informal processes in place to address this jointly served population. Informal processes ranged from Working Agreements between the agencies to diligent involvement of staff on individual cases. Two agencies reported difficulties in getting DJJ staff to return calls or participate in youth planning. (Chart 9)
- A third agency noted they had applied and were approved for a DJJ grant that would have facilitated more structure in dealing with these youth, but the project was not implemented due to lack of funding. Currently, they are only doing "crisis resolution". It should be noted that inconsistencies in working with DJJ staff, in particular working with staff in commitment facilities out of county, were noted during the focus groups.

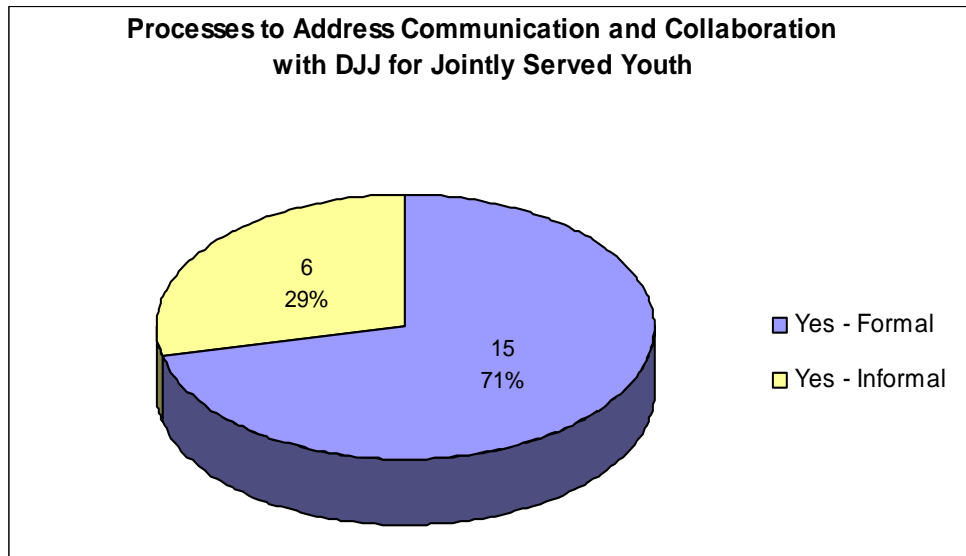


Chart 9

Source: Agency System of Care Surveys

#### Working with Youth with Disabilities

Agencies were asked to describe how they managed youth with disabilities not ready for Subsidized Independent Living (SIL).

- All agencies indicated they recognized the special challenges of working with this population and preparing them for independence. Most said they routinely referred youth with developmental disabilities to the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD).
- Additionally, specialized trainings to assist the youth in obtaining needed skills (based on the youth's specific needs identified through assessments) are provided by the majority of agencies or their sub-contracted providers. Formal and informal multidisciplinary staffings with APD, along with individuals from other relevant agencies, such as Vocational Rehabilitation and Substance Abuse and Mental Health, are reported to occur in many agencies, as well.

#### Specialized Services to Young Adults Formerly in Foster Care

Agencies were asked to provide their processes for implementing a variety of activities relevant to the 18-23 year-old population.

**Noticing Young Adults of Services.** Each agency was surveyed regarding how young adults were noticed of their eligibility for Aftercare, Transitional Support and Road to Independence (RTI) services, including who to contact for these services and how to access applications for these programs. (Chart 10)

- The majority of agencies indicated they informed youth through multiple ways, to include verbally at staffings and family team conferences, formally in writing prior to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and sometimes through judicial reviews and court documents. Several agencies reported they provide youth the Frequently Asked Questions booklet to educate them about programs for young adults formerly in foster care.

- One agency stated they created informational packets that are given to youth at all Independent Living staffings. The packets are broken out by age group and services specific to each age group are explained during youth staffings.
- Another agency noted they developed a Permanency Brochure that outlines in writing all services available to youth who are adopted, turn 18 from foster care and who become 18 while in the care of a relative or non-relative.

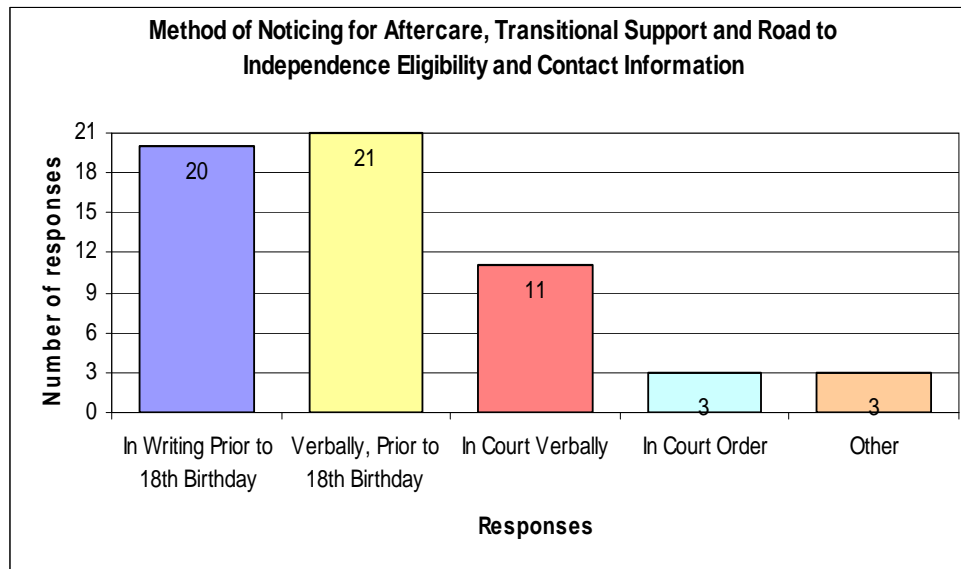


Chart 10

Source: Agency System of Care Surveys

- Agencies reported multiple ways young adults access applications for services, primarily through contact with their current or prior case manager or Independent Living Specialist, by either walking in to the service centers or through telephone calls and emails to the counselors. Three agencies indicated current online applications availability and several other agencies reported they are working to develop online applications and other information related to these services.

**Noticing Young Adults of their Due Process Rights.** Agencies were asked how they ensured young adults were kept informed of their due process rights throughout the application for services/financial assistance process and at denial/partial denial of a services or financial request. (Chart 11)

- Agencies gave multiple methods of notifying young adults of their due process rights, to include “in writing at denial/partial denial of a request” (20 or 96%), routinely, prior to and after the young adult’s 18<sup>th</sup> birthday (10 or 48%) and “Other” methods, such as informing young adults of appeal rights at the time of application to a program.

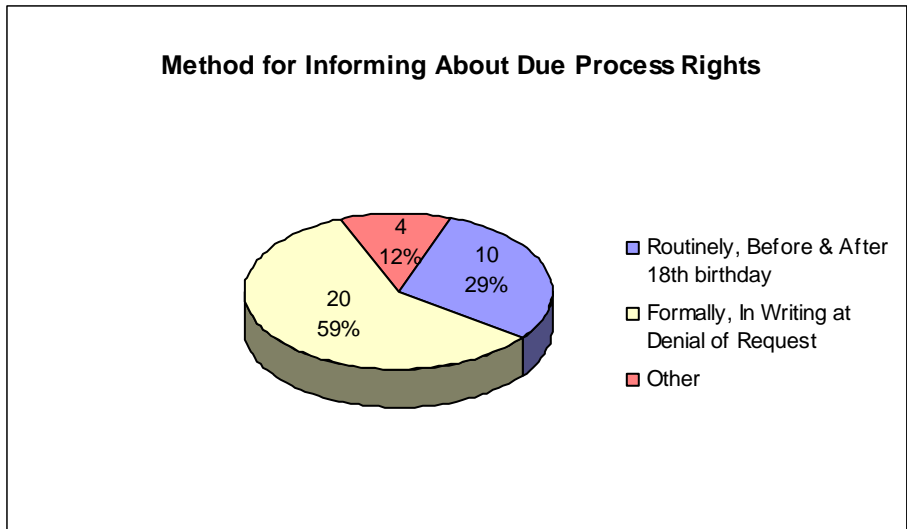


Chart 11

Source: Agency System of Care Surveys

**Provision of the Road to Independence (RTI) Scholarship.** Agencies were surveyed regarding their process for ensuring Road to Independence Scholarship payments are received timely. Additionally, they were asked how they monitor the educational progress of young adults receiving RTI stipends to ensure their continued eligibility.

- Processes to ensure timely checks ranged from monthly Excel spreadsheets and reviewing invoices to meetings between the Independent Living Specialist and other entities (Federal Funds Manager, fiscal representative, etc). In one agency there is a “Monthly Money Meeting” where the Independent Living Specialist, account manager and operations consultant reviews every young adult, their payment amount and who the check(s) are made out to.
- Most agencies noted checks were available and distributed by a specific date every month, generally between the first and fifth business day. One agency noted they have worked to make improvements in this area subsequent to the Youth SHINE letter, as at one point young adults were not being issued checks until the end of the second week of each month. They noted they were having a one time event in June to provide young adults with two checks in order to get them caught up and on track with paying their bills.
- Thirteen of twenty-one agencies (62%) indicated they monitored educational progress of young adults receiving RTI Scholarship money quarterly or at the end of a semester/grading period. Two agencies noted they review both the mid-term and end of semester grades. Four agencies (19%) reported they required monthly documentation of attendance and progress. An additional two agencies reported Independent Living staffs meet with young adults 90 days before the renewal for scholarship is due. (Chart 12)

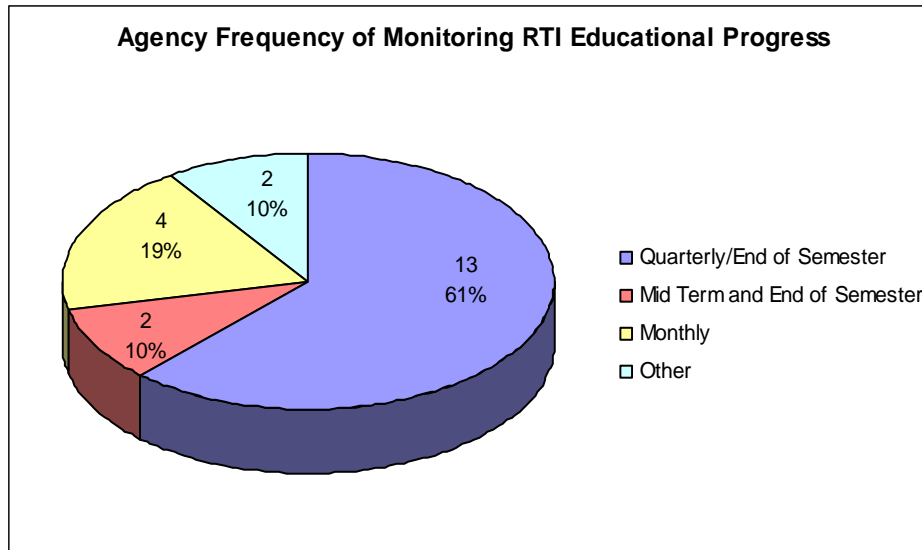


Chart 12

Source: Agency System of Care Surveys

Several agencies noted special review processes for young adults seeking a General Education Development (GED) certification, to include requiring the young adult to provide periodic Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) scores. Several agencies reported monitoring GED progress is difficult.

**Provision of Transitional Support Services and Aftercare Cash Assistance.**

Agencies were asked to describe their process for ensuring timely receipt of emergency assistance by young adults (and timeframes), their process for determining the amount of transition funds allocated per young adult and to identify whether there were “presumptive” maximum amounts of Transitional Support Services (TSS) funds provided to young adults per year.

- All agencies reported they had a process to ensure payment is received “expeditiously” when young adults are in need of emergency assistance. These processes were mostly based on a determination of need through assessment and the urgency of the need as described by the young adult.
- Some agencies noted their CMOs providing Independent Living services will accept applications and get approval through the CBC. Others stated they will pay for services out of pocket and get reimbursed later.
- One agency indicated they have ongoing charge accounts to pay for hotels and other services for the youth. Another stated they have actually delivered checks to young adults at youth residences and group care providers.
- Fourteen of twenty-one agencies (66%) reported the average length of time for young adult receipt of check after request was 24 hours or less. Four agencies (19%) indicated it took 2-3 days on average for the checks to be received; and two agencies (10%) noted it took 4-5 days for check receipt. An additional agency stated the time between check request and receipt varied, based on urgency of the need. (Chart 13)

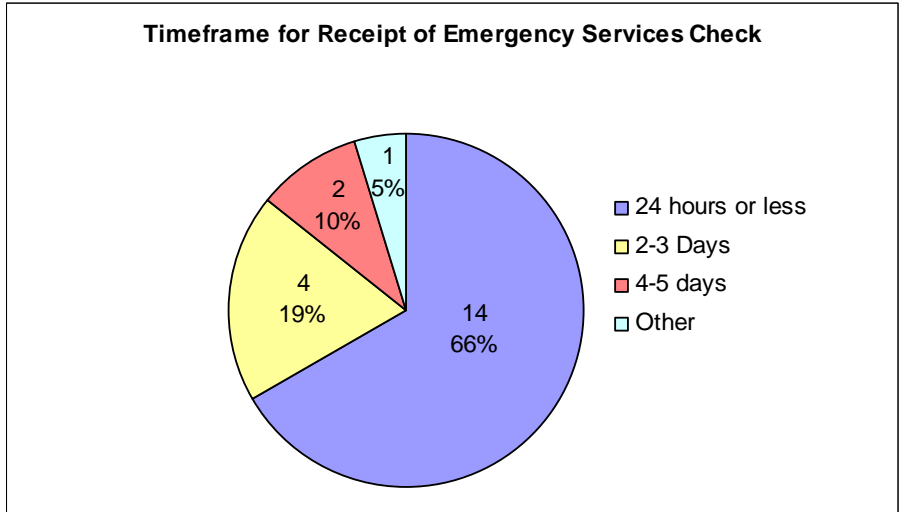


Chart 13

Source: Agency System of Care Surveys

- Eighteen agencies (86%) stated there was no presumptive maximum amount of TSS funds provided. While most agreed funding was based on young adult need, two agencies said they could not provide funds repeatedly for the same need, and at least one other agency reported attempts were made to determine the expenditure of funds was reasonable. Another agency indicated during this last year a decision was made that all funding requests over \$500 required the Vice President of Client Services approval. (Chart 14)

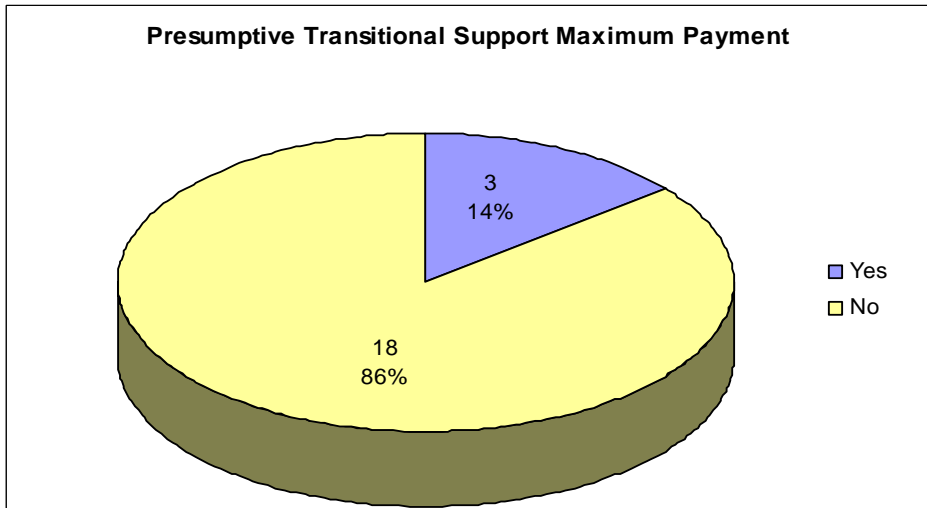


Chart 14

Source: Agency System of Care Surveys

- Of the three agencies who said there was a presumptive maximum amount for transition funds, one noted they changed their policy subsequent to the Youth SHINE letter and another reported they simply had no funding for TSS services. A third indicated ‘the agency typically provides \$416 per month, which was determined by dividing the allocation of \$5,000 by 12 months. The amount was based on the youth need to be served and the funding available, and was determined based on dividing the allocation of \$5,000 by 12 months’.

## Summary of Interviews with Young Adults Formerly in foster Care

As part of the first phase of the Independent Living review, interviews were conducted with young adults formerly in foster care to seek information about their Independent Living services while still in foster care as well as their Independent Living experiences subsequent to “aging out” of the foster care system.

All young adults formerly in the custody of the Department ages 18-22 are entitled to apply for one or more of three programs, Road to Independence Scholarship (RTI), Transitional Support Services (TSS) or Aftercare Support Services or Cash Assistance. There were 109 young adults ages 18-22 interviewed, representing each of the 21 Community Based Care Lead agencies.

The interview instrument was divided into four major sections: Section I. All Young Adults; Section II. Road to Independence Scholarship; Section III. Transitional Support Services; and Section IV. Aftercare Services. For each interview, young adults were asked to answer all questions in Section I. They were then asked to answer only questions in those sections relevant to the type of payment they were currently receiving (or had received) from the beginning of the last calendar year to current date).

Of the 109 young adults interviewed, 36 (33%) were age 18 at the time of interview; 27 (25%) were 19 years old; 24 (22%) were 20, 17 (16%) were age 21 and 5 (5%) were 22 years old at the time of interview. (Chart 1)

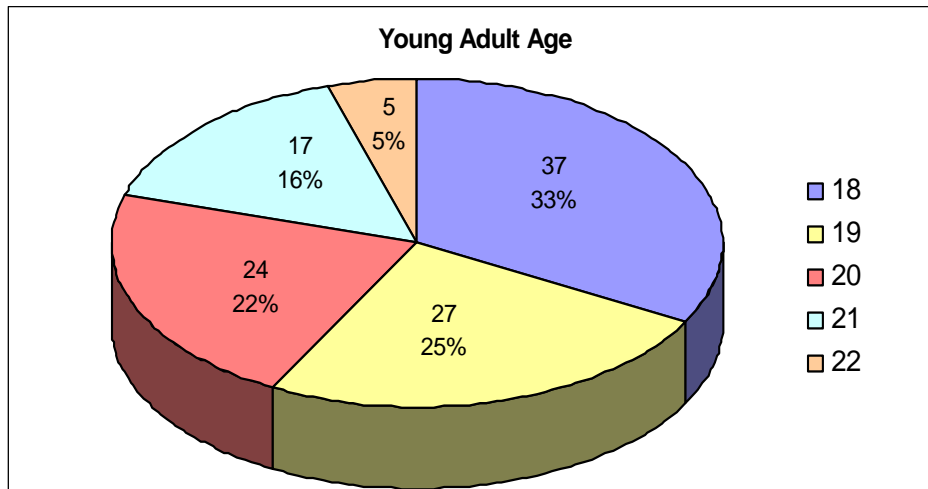


Chart 1

Source: Young Adult Interviews

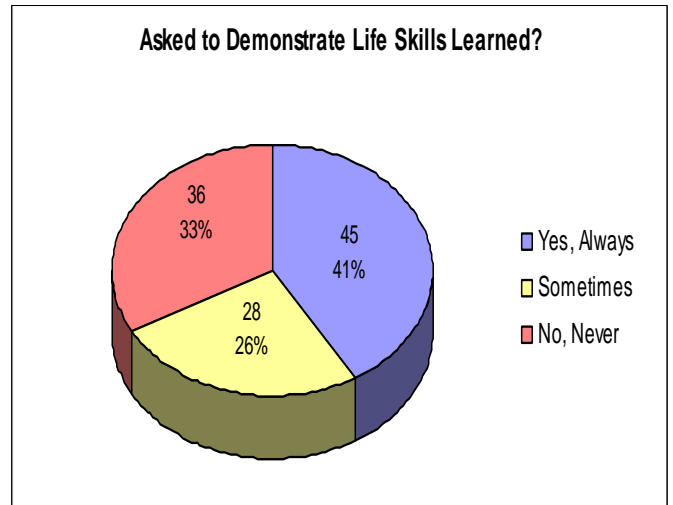
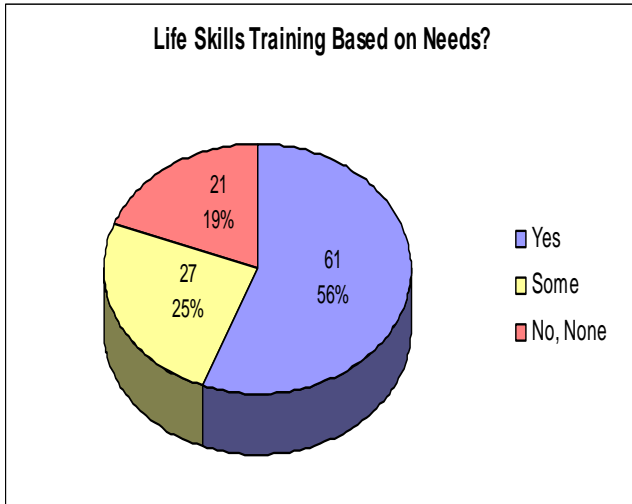
## Summary of Statewide Survey Results

### General Independent Living Services.

Young adults were asked to answer questions relevant to the services received and activities completed while they were still youth in foster care.

**Skills Training.** Young adults were surveyed regarding whether they believed the skills training they received was based on their specific needs and whether they were ever required to demonstrate the skills they had learned from trainings.

- Sixty-one young adults (56%) responded they believed all the skills training they received was based on their specific needs. Twenty-one (19%) indicated none of the training was based on their needs. The remaining 27 young adults noted some was useful and/or based on their specific needs. (Chart 2)
- Forty-five (41%) reported they were always asked to demonstrate what they had learned from training. An additional 28 (26%) indicated they were sometimes asked to demonstrate skills. However, 36 (33%) stated they were never required to demonstrate skills subsequent to training. (Chart 3)



Charts 2 and 3

Source: Young Adult Interviews

Several young adults noted they had received good training that was very useful to them and indicated they had formed a bond with their case manager. Others reported they had completed packets only. One young adult stated the classes were very basic and he may not have realized while he was taking them how much they would help him at a later date.

A few young adults indicated they received no training, primarily because they were in a residential setting (mental health treatment program or Department of Juvenile Justice program). One individual stated, “they teach you how to cook and clean, but they don’t teach you how to apply for a job or how to interview”. Another said, “When I turned 18, I was on my own and I received no preparation from the agency. I had to get my birth certificate and social security card on my own...”

Examples of demonstrating skills ranged from completing a budget and writing checks for many young adults to oral presentations. One individual provided an example about how he and his peers demonstrated skills in etiquette by coming dressed up to a formal dinner where everyone was encouraged to act politely throughout the entire time (and at the end they were rewarded).



### Employment Training.

Young adults were surveyed regarding the types training they received in preparation for employment. They were also asked whether they had in the past, or currently, worked.

- Interviewees reported they received multiple types of training in preparation for employment. Several indicated they had gone to Job Fairs or had been trained by local businesses. The most frequently cited training was *Work Dress Code*, followed by *Interviewing Skills*, *Work Ethics/Habits and Resume Development*. Some young adults noted they also received training on *Career Planning*, *Choosing References* and *Networking for Employment*; however a significant number (42) chose “Other” training. Based on reading young adult comments, many of those *Other* responses were actually from individuals who reported they had not received any specialized employment training (no training or none was not an option on the survey) for this question. (Chart 4)

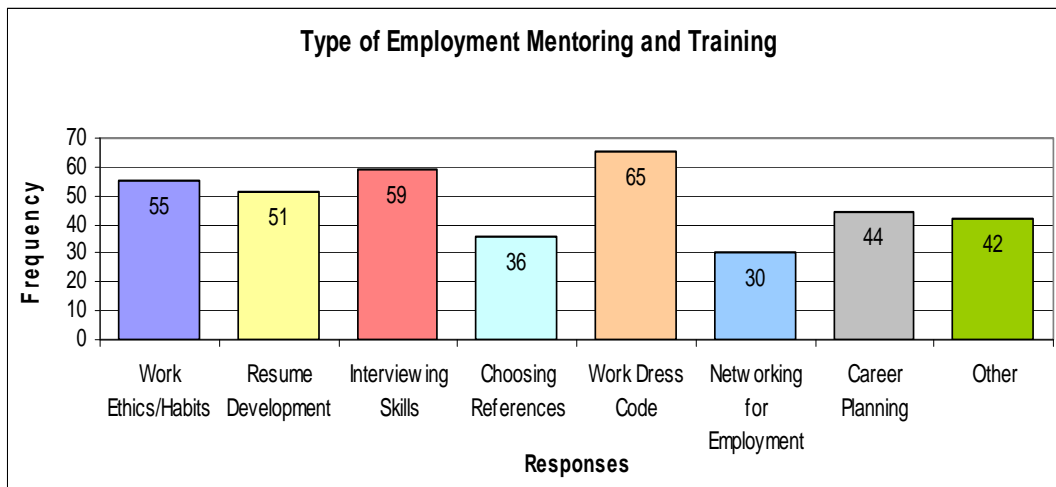


Chart 4

Source: Young Adult Interviews

- Of the 109 individuals surveyed, 54 (50%) said they always worked and 25 (23%) reported they sometimes worked. An additional 30 (27%) indicated they had never worked. Most reported they had been employed in the fast food/restaurant industry, three noted they worked at the “DCF” office and one young adult said she had a paid internship at “Volunteer Broward”. Several young women reported they had worked at one time or another, but quit due to pregnancy or having a child and class schedule. One young woman reported adequate child care as a barrier to employment.

### Staffings and Court Activities.

Individuals were asked whether they actively participated in independent living staffings or other meetings and offered the opportunity to provide their thoughts/input on skills and trainings they felt were necessary for them to achieve independence. Young adults were also asked whether their case manager/Independent Living Coordinator actively worked to ensure they were notified of, and attended, court hearings and were given the opportunity to provide input to the judge at all hearings.

- Sixty-one young adults (56%) said they had participated in all staffings and provided input regarding their skills and training. An additional 23 (21%) stated they had sometimes been involved in these staffings. There were 25 individuals who reported they had never participated in staffings and/or were solicited for their input on skills or training needs. Many indicated they were usually invited to staffings, but did not always attend, some because they “didn’t feel like it would be helpful to them”; others because they were at work or school, on runaway status, etc. (Chart 5)

Many spoke highly of their Independent Living Counselors and indicated they were always encouraged to be involved in the staffings. Several noted they became more involved in the staffing process and plans after their 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. At least two young adults reported they attended all staffings and were included in some roundtable discussion groups.

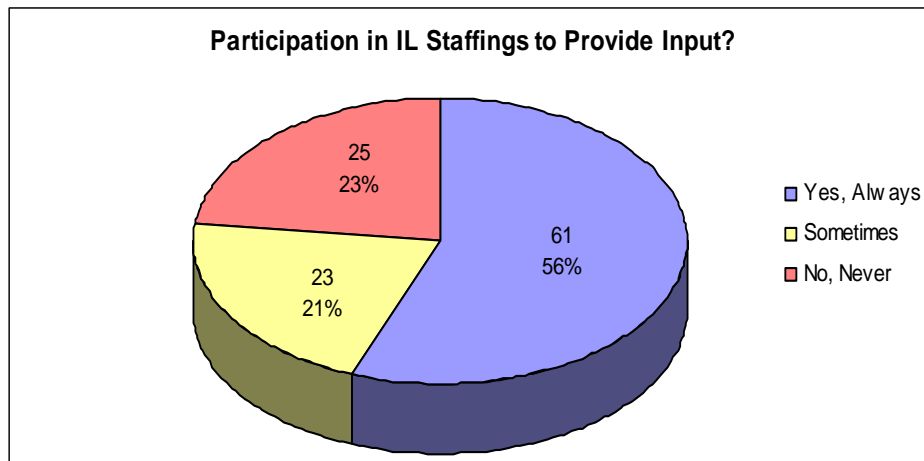


Chart 5

Source: Young Adult Interviews

- Of the 109 young adults interviewed, 70 (64%) reported they were routinely notified of and attended court and encouraged to provide input at court hearings. An additional 26 (24%) were sometimes notified and/or encouraged to participate in hearings. (Chart 6)

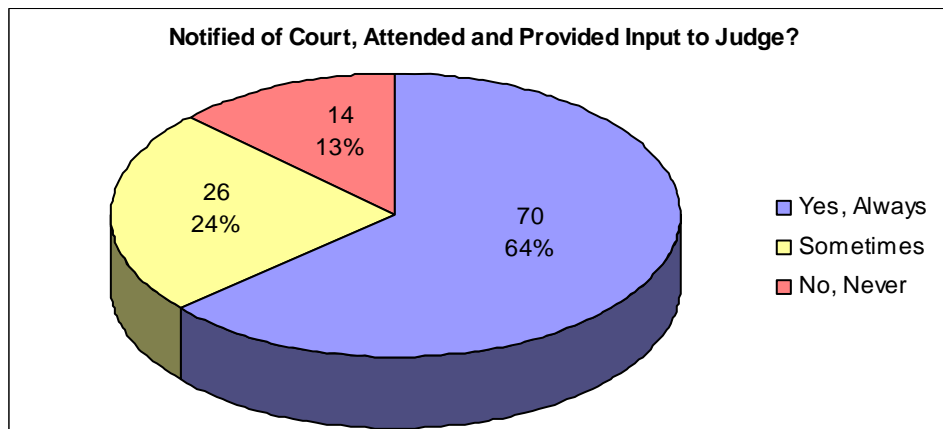


Chart 6

Source: Young Adult Interviews

Some individuals reported they were notified of all hearings, attended regularly and felt their issues were made known to the judge. Others stated they were notified of court, but either chose not to attend or the hearing conflicted with school or work. At least two young adults reported they went to court routinely while they were in a Department of Juvenile Justice program, but it was unclear whether those hearings were related to dependency or delinquency matters. One young adult commented the case manager advised her of her hearing and she wanted to attend, but “was not allowed to”.

**Development of a Support System.** Young adults were surveyed regarding whether their case manager/Independent living Coordinator actively worked with them prior to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday to identify and develop a support system prior to their “aging out of the system”. Individuals were also asked to report who they currently could turn to for help, if needed.

- Seventy-two of 109 interviewees (66%) stated their case manager or Independent Living Coordinator assisted them in developing a support system prior to their turning 18 years old. Several others indicated they had developed a network of individuals for support on their own or through their Guardian-Ad-Litem or another individual in the community. (Chart 7)

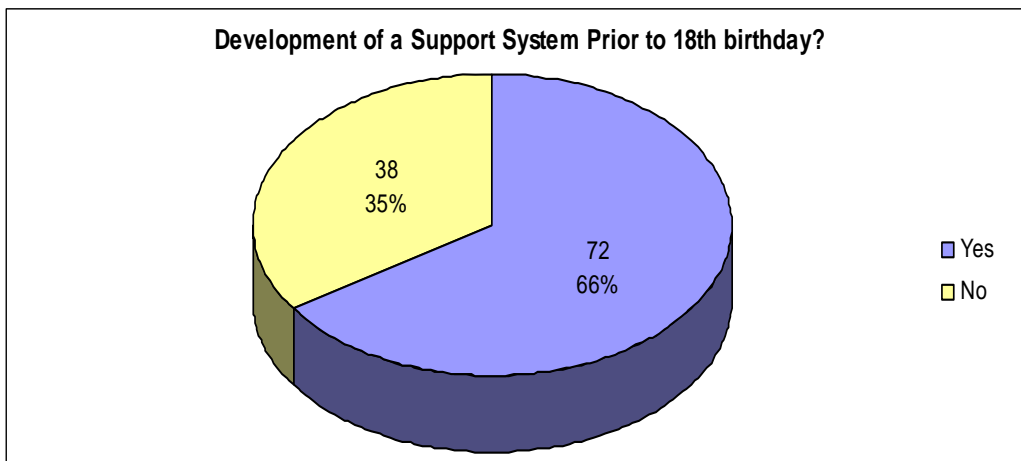


Chart 7

Source: Young Adult Interviews

- Young adults identified multiple relationships in the community to whom they could turn for support. The most common support person identified was child welfare staff, followed by a peer or other relative (including a sibling). Five young adults stated they did not have anyone to turn to for support or assistance, if needed.

**Normalcy and Educational Plans.** Individuals were asked whether they had been involved in developing a plan, and afforded the opportunity to participate in, normal activities that were reasonable and appropriate for their age. Young adults were also surveyed regarding whether they had been involved in crafting an educational plan a selecting a career path.

- Fifty-eight persons interviewed (53%) noted they had helped develop their Normalcy Plans and said they were able to participate in reasonable activities.

An additional 12 (11%) reported they had a Normalcy Plan, but did not feel like the activities they were allowed to participate in would be considered reasonable for their age. Forty of the young adults reported they had neither been involved in development of a Normalcy Plan nor allowed participation in reasonable activities. It should be noted that five of the young adults interviewed were 22 years old and three individuals indicated they had “aged out” prior to full implementation of these plans. (Chart 8)

Many young adults stated they had rules while in foster care, but felt they were able to do “normal” things, such as dating, going to movies and participating in extracurricular activities. One individual noted she was a member of the National Honor Society, participated in Mock Trial and the Key club.

Some young adults who reported they had not participated in normal activities indicated they had lived in group homes during many of their foster care years. Several also indicated they had been in DJJ facilities or moved from one placement to another and were never able to establish a plan or engage in normal activities.

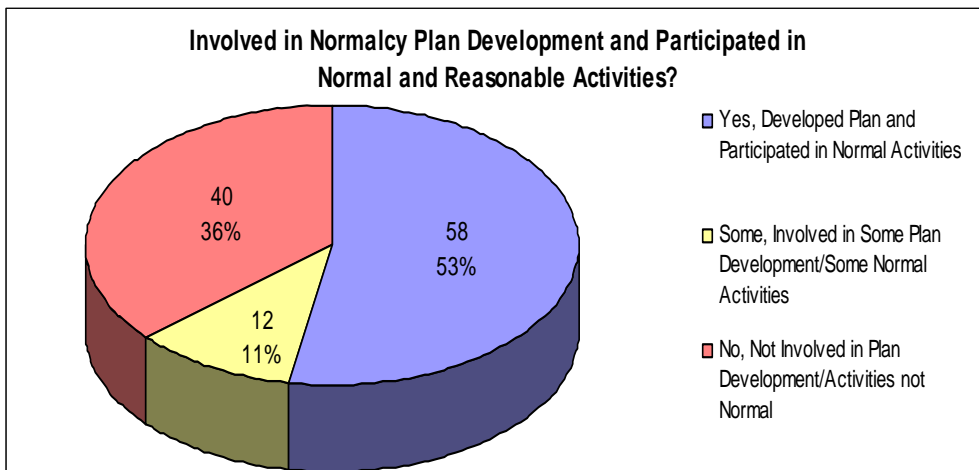


Chart 8

Source: Young Adult Interviews

- Eighty-five of 109 persons interviewed (77%) reported they had been involved in developing their education plan and in determining their career path decisions. An additional 13 (12%) indicated they had been involved in some aspect of their educational plan/career path decisions, but not fully involved in all. One young adult said he had planned his career himself as he knew what he needed to do and the counselors also knew he could handle it, but they were helpful when he needed any assistance. (Chart 9)

Most indicated they had some plan to finish school (many with a GED) or hoped to go to college or receive a technical certificate. One young adult replied “...she really wouldn’t call it a plan and stated...you have to go to school to get the Independent Living money”.

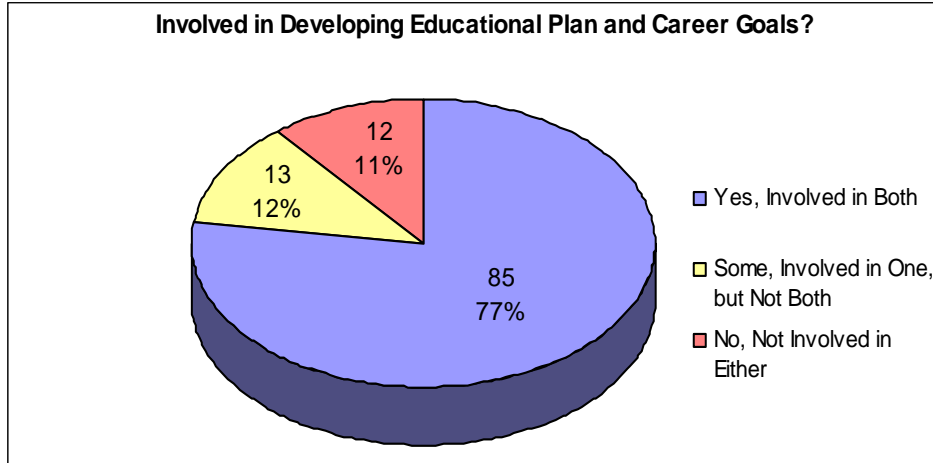


Chart 9

Source: Young Adult Interviews

**Involvement with the Department of Juvenile Justice.** To determine whether jointly served youth received adequate Independent Living services, young adults were surveyed regarding their experiences while receiving delinquency and dependency services.

- Thirty-seven of 109 young adults (34%) said they had been referred to, or involved with, the Department of Juvenile Justice while in foster care. (Chart 10) Of those, 29 (78%) were either placed in a residential facility or on court-ordered probation. The remaining eight young adults were diverted from the legal system, couldn't recall the specific DJJ programs they had been involved in or were arrested and released.

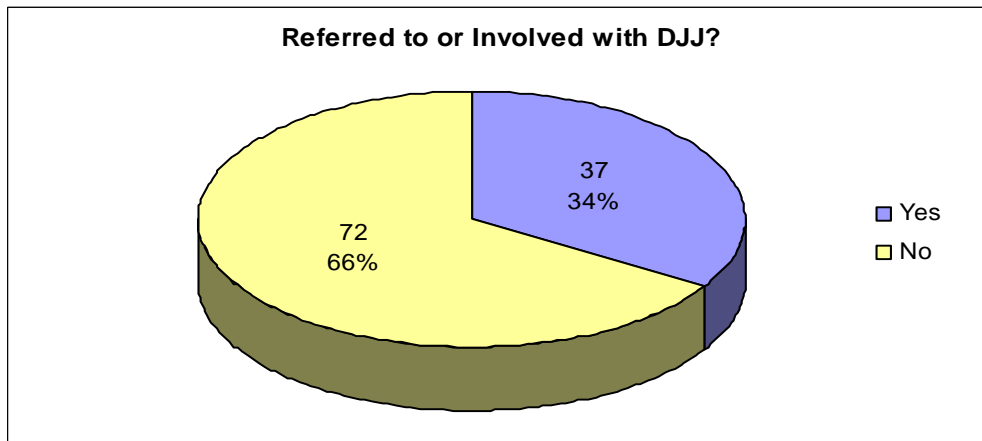


Chart 10

Source: Young Adult Interviews

- The 29 young adults who reported they had been in a residential facility or on court ordered probation (those programs which would require enhanced communication between dependency Independent Living staff and DJJ program staff), were surveyed regarding whether their CBC Case Manager or Independent Living Coordinator and staff from the DJJ program worked together and with them to develop a written plan for their Independent Living services. Five of the 29 young adults considered this question "Not Applicable" as they were very young at

the time of their dual involvement and were either not receiving any independent living services or could not recall who provided the services. Of the remaining 24 young adults, (7 or 29%) reported good communication and coordination between all parties in developing a plan. Seventeen (71%) indicated there had been no communication or plan development. (Chart 11)

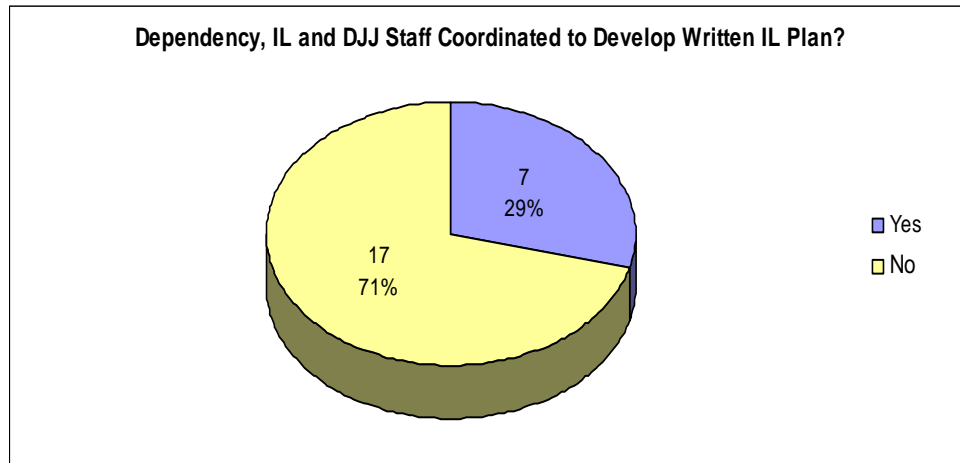


Chart 11

Source: Young Adult Interviews

- Sixteen of the 29 young adults who were dually involved (55%) reported they were able to attend their dependency court hearings while in a DJJ program. Ten indicated they were not involved in their dependency hearings (most recalled only going before the Delinquency Judge) and three answered “Not Applicable” to the question because they could not remember whether they had gone to court for dependency issues.
- Only five of the 29 young adults (17%) indicated they felt the Independent Living services they had received while in DJJ programs were helpful to them in transitioning to adulthood. One young adult reported she was assisted with computer skills and anger management and several noted the counseling/therapeutic services received were useful as they transitioned from foster care. Five of the 29 young adults indicated this question was “Not Applicable” to them because they were young and not in a transitioning phase when they were involved in DJJ programs.

**Services Accessibility and Notification of Due Process Rights.** Young adults were surveyed regarding whether (since turning 18 years old) they had been able to get in touch with someone from the agency easily and been provided timely assistance in applying for services or cash payments, if needed. They were also asked how they had been notified of their due process rights if they had been denied a benefit or had a benefit reduced or terminated for any reason other than their own request.

- 85 of 101 applicable young adults (84%) indicated they had always been able to access someone from the agency and received assistance in applying for a service, if needed (8 of the 109 young adults interviewed answered “Not Applicable to this question”). An additional 12 young adults (12%) reported this happened sometimes. In most of the “sometimes” instances the issues were

related to the counselor not being available by phone or returning the young adults call quickly.

- Thirty-two of the young adults surveyed indicated they had either been denied an initial determination of eligibility for an independent living benefit; denied a benefit based on lack of funding; or had a benefit reduced or terminated for any reason other than through their own request (77 of the interviewees answered “Not applicable to this question”). While there were multiple responses for notification of due process rights, the primary method reported was verbally through their case manager or Independent Living Coordinator, followed by notification in writing along with the Notice of Adverse Action. Two young adults stated they had not been notified of their rights at all. (Chart 12)

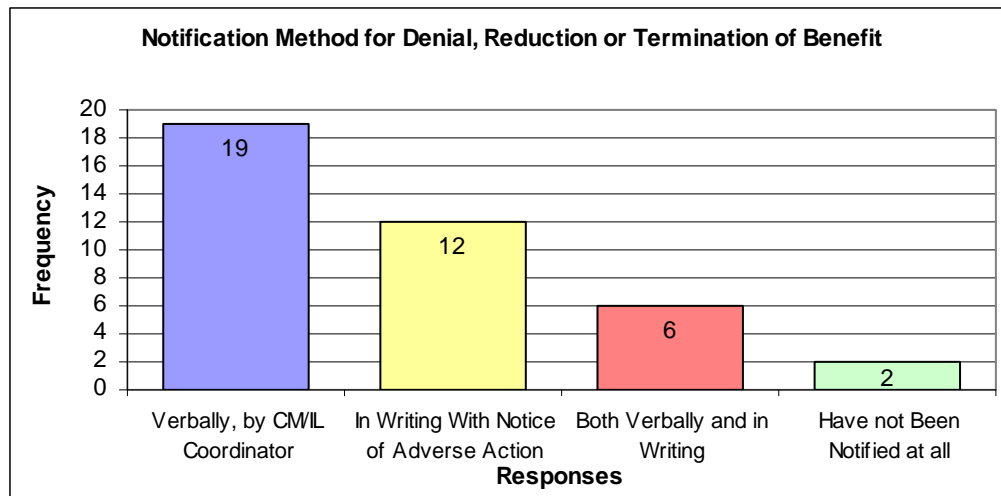


Chart 12

Source: Young Adult Interviews

**Knowledge of Support Organizations.** Young adults were asked whether they were familiar with any of the following support organizations for former foster youth:

- **Florida Youth Shine** – 25 (23%) indicated they were familiar with this organization.
- **Foster Care Alumni of America** – 16 (15%) reported knowledge of this organization.
- **Orphan Foundation of America** – 7 (6%) noted familiarity with this foundation.

Several young adults reported they had heard of one or more of these organizations, but did not have a clear understanding of what they were about. Three young adults reported they were currently or had previously been a part of Florida Youth SHINE. Another young adult noted she became familiar with the Orphan Foundation when she was “Googling” for scholarships. She applied for one through that organization and is currently waiting for a response to her application.

Road to Independence Scholarship (RTI) Program.

Interviewees were asked to answer questions in this section of the interview instrument if they were currently receiving (or had received) RTI Scholarship money during the last Calendar Year (2008-current date). Ninety-one young adults interviewed were applicable for this section.

**Educational Goal.** Individuals were surveyed regarding their current educational goal and asked to describe their plan and timeframes for achieving this goal. They were also asked how frequently their case manager/IL Coordinator followed up with the school to ensure they maintained eligibility for the program. (Chart 13)

- The largest number of young adults (42 or 46%) reported their goal was to achieve a post-secondary college degree, followed by obtaining a General Educational Development (GED) certificate (21 or 23%). Eleven young adults indicated they desired to achieve a regular high school diploma and an additional eleven adults indicated they were pursuing courses through a vocational program.
- Twenty-three of those interviewed reported they were pursuing a career in the medical or dental field (ranged from Certified Nursing Assistant to medical doctor, veterinarian and pharmacist). Several indicated they had an interest in computer technology/programming or cosmetology. One young adult noted she was currently in a culinary arts program and another reported having graduated from a culinary program in January 2009.

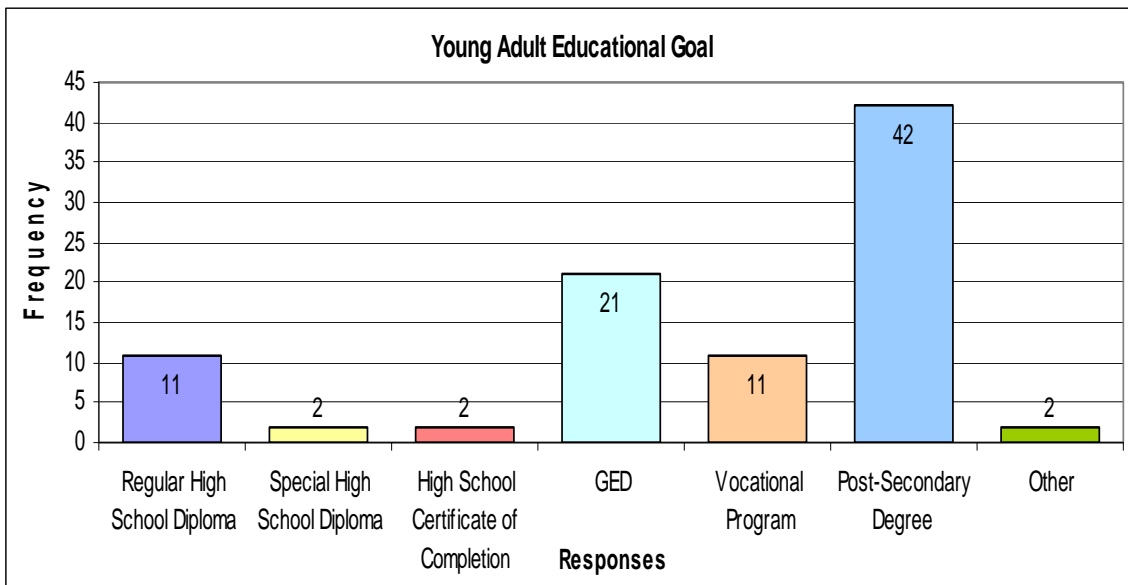


Chart 13

Source: Young Adult Interviews

- Timeframes for completion of the program ranged from within the next couple of months to six years or longer (for the young adult pursuing a medical degree). Several persons interviewed who were working on their GED reported they were having problems with one specific subject and were unsure about timeframes for completion of the program.



- The majority of young adults (51 or 56%) indicated their case manager followed-up with the school on a monthly basis to check their attendance, grades, etc. to ensure they were still eligible for the RTI program. The second largest number of adults (21 or 23%) reported timeframes for case managers/IL coordinators follow-up with the school was “Other”. Several reported the time frame as being weekly or about every two weeks. One young adult reported the case manager checked up of her “all the time”. Another reported this occurred when she picked up her check at the agency. Thirteen individuals stated they didn’t know when their case manager checked their attendance and grades. Only one young adult indicated having to report progress at the time of annual scholarship renewal. (Chart 14)

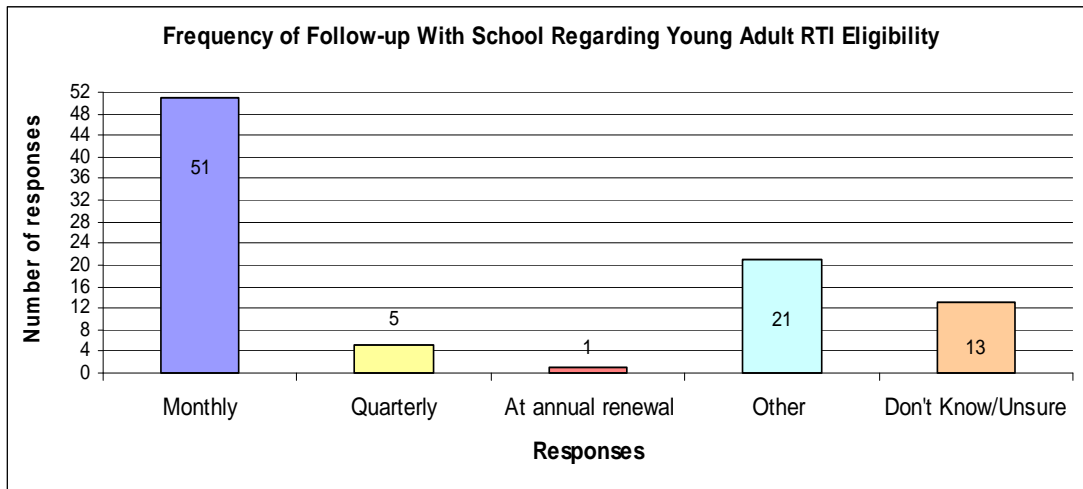


Chart 14

Source: Young Adult Interviews

**Application for RTI and other Grants or Scholarships.** Young adults were asked whether their case manager/IL Coordinator assisted them with the Road to Independence application process and completed a RTI Needs Assessment Face-to Face Consultation. They were also asked whether they were assisted in applying for other scholarships and grants (including Pell grants); and if so, who assisted them.

- Eighty-three of 91 young adults (91%) reported their case manager/ IL Coordinator assisted them with the RTI application and 73 (80%) indicated their case manager/ IL Coordinator conducted a needs assessment consultation with them that addressed the following areas:
  - ✓ Conversation about the needs assessment process;
  - ✓ Process/paperwork for filing an appeal in the event you felt the award was calculated incorrectly;
  - ✓ Opportunity to provide needed documentation regarding the application; and,
  - ✓ Your completion of the “Certification” section of the form with your signature?

Two young adults indicated they never participated in a needs assessment consultation, but signed the form, and seven individuals reported they neither participated in the consultation nor signed a form. It should be noted that comments from many of these young adults indicated they had limited recollection of the event. (Chart 15)

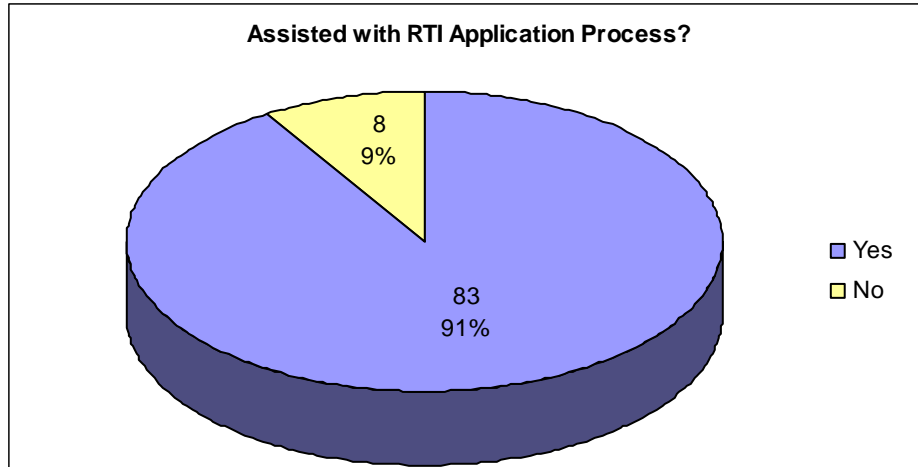


Chart 15

Source: Young Adult Interviews

- Of the 91 young adults who were receiving (or had received) RTI Scholarship money, 37 reported they were assisted in applying for other scholarships and grants (forty individuals reported they did not apply for any other grants or scholarships). Fourteen young adults stated they were currently receiving additional grants/scholarships. Primary individuals reported to have assisted the young adults in the scholarship application process were case managers and Independent Living staff.

**Road to Independence Scholarship Payments.** Young adults were asked whether they received the maximum amount of RTI Scholarship monies available; and if not, did they know the reason why not. They were also surveyed regarding timeliness of their RTI payment.

- Sixty-nine of those interviewed reported they were receiving (or had received) \$1135 monthly, the maximum amount allowed for the RTI Scholarship. (Chart 16). Of the 22 who reported they were not receiving this amount 16 (73%) indicated they knew why they were not receiving the maximum amount. Six noted they were not receiving the maximum amount and did not know why. One young adult who was receiving \$890 monthly said, "From what I hear this is the maximum amount for the county I'm in or maybe because I was working".

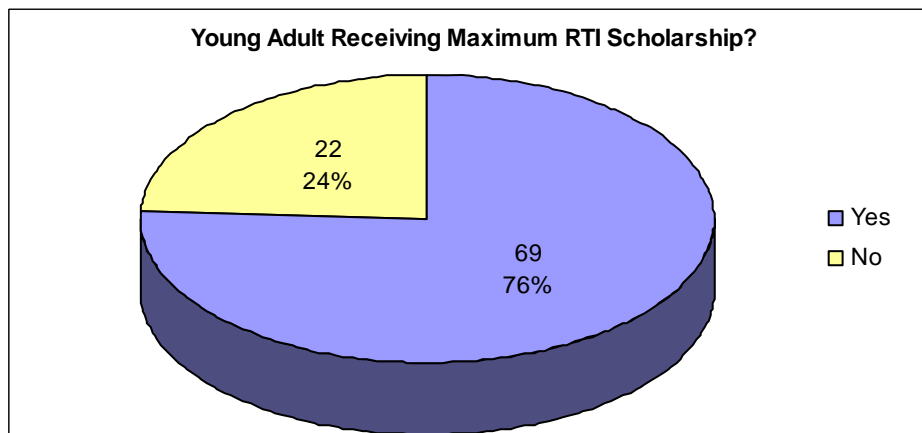


Chart 16

Source: Young Adult Interviews

- Primary reasons for not receiving the maximum amount ranged from employment earnings to having to drop out of school because of grades. One 22-year-old stated he “can not receive max as he needs to achieve his GED first”.
- Seventy-Seven young adults (85%) noted they had not received a late RTI payment that created a problem with their housing, school fees, utilities or other important bills. Of the fourteen young adults who reported they had problems associated with late RTI payments, twelve indicated the situation had been resolved. Two individuals noted there had been no resolution to their late payment (one indicated the problem was with the mail and the other said, “She did not notify anyone that her payments were late. She just dealt with the situation “). (Chart 17)

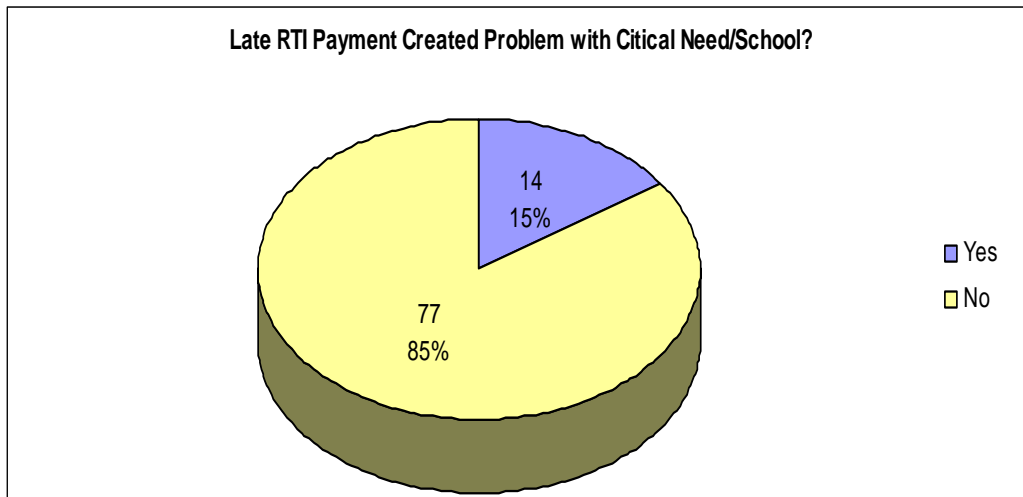


Chart 17

Source: Young Adult Interviews

- Young adults reported it took 24 hours or less to resolve their late payment in one case, two to three days for resolution in six cases and more than five days to resolve the late payment in six cases.

**Transitional Support Services (TSS) Program**

Young adults were asked to answer questions in this section if they were currently receiving (or had received) TSS money during the last Calendar Year (2008-current date). Forty-Eight young adults interviewed were applicable for this section.

**Transitional Support Services Application and Plan.** Young adults were surveyed regarding their knowledge of, and support during, the TSS application process, usefulness of their TSS plan and sufficiency of case manager/IL Coordinator contact during the period of time they were involved in the TSS program.

- Thirty-five of 48 applicable individuals (73%) indicated they knew where the TSS applications were kept and how to access them. Young adults stated that generally the applications were kept in the office and accessed through the Independent Living Coordinator, and mostly they just have to ask for it. One young adult reported she felt uncomfortable asking for a form when she needed to apply for additional assistance.

- Thirty-five young adults (73%) reported they currently had a Transition Plan that was developed with their case manager and included specific tasks for them to complete in order to achieve independence. Seven young adults indicated they had no plan and an additional six individuals reported they didn't know whether they had one. Only one young adult (who had actually initially indicated being unsure as to whether he had a current transition plan) indicated he did not feel the tasks in his plan would assist him in achieving independence. He was provided with a copy of the *IL Know Your Rights* booklet by the interviewer and indicated he would follow-up with his couch to find out what he needed to do. (Chart 18)

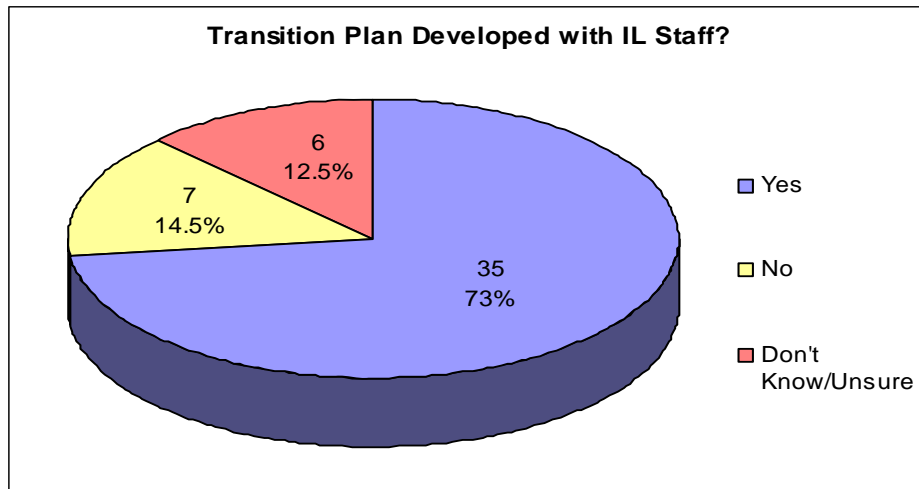


Chart 18

Source: Young Adult Interviews

- Forty-four of forty-eight young adults (92%) reported they had worked out an agreement regarding contacts with their case manager/IL Coordinator that was sufficient for their needs. Of the four who noted they had no agreement with their case manager or Independent Living Coordinator, all reported having no TSS plan. (Chart 19)

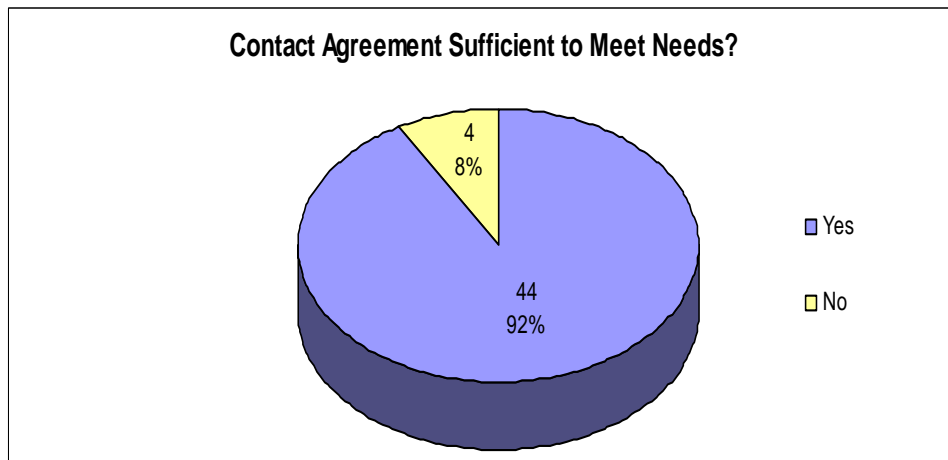


Chart 19

Source: Young Adult Interviews

**Transitional Support Services Payments.** Young adults were asked whether they had ever received a lesser amount of TSS cash assistance than they originally indicated they needed to meet their needs; and/or a gift card in lieu of cash assistance. If they answered “Yes” to this question they were also surveyed as to whether they were told why the amount was less than requested. Lastly, they were asked if they had been informed about/and or used the hearing process to address this issue.

- Thirty-two young adults (67%) reported they had always received the amount of TSS funds requested or needed; indicating they were satisfied and money had never been an issue. Sixteen young adults (33%) noted they had not received the amount requested. An additional young adult reported she had never received less than requested, but didn’t know she could ask for more. Three of these individuals indicated they were receiving \$416 per month (one had requested more funds; one did not know she could request a higher amount [noted above] and the third said her amount was recently raised to \$520 because “she now qualifies for ETV”). (Chart 20)

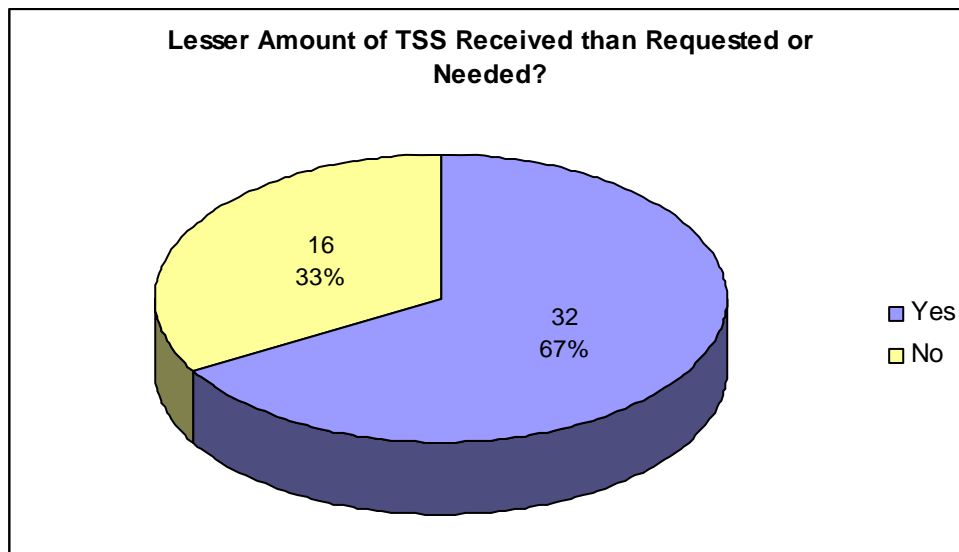


Chart 20

Source: Young Adult Interviews

One individual indicated she paid for car repairs using her rent money and was having financial difficulty as a result; stating, the “Program is here to help but not helping me none”. Another reported she needed cash assistance for books. To compromise for the lesser amount given her, she had to drop some classes.

- Primary reason’s given for not receiving the amount requested were as follows:
  - ✓ Insufficient funds
  - ✓ Maximum amount allowed
  - ✓ Educational and/or work issues
  - ✓ Incomplete paperwork

One young adult was told she was “taking too many classes”, another reported she was informed she could “obviously afford it since she paid for it upfront”.

- Nine of 17 individuals who received less than requested (or were unaware they could request more than \$416 a month) reported being informed of the hearing process. Only one young adult indicated he had attempted to address his issue informally (by completing a form) but the matter was never resolved.

Aftercare Cash Assistance Program

Young adults were asked to answer questions in this section of the interview instrument if they were currently receiving (or had received) Aftercare Cash Assistance during the last Calendar Year (2008-current date). Twenty-four young adults interviewed were applicable for this section.

**Aftercare Cash Assistance Applications and Referrals for Services.** Young adults were surveyed regarding their knowledge of the Aftercare Cash Assistance process and whether their case manager assisted them in making any needed services referrals.

- Seventeen of 24 applicable adults (71%) indicated they knew where the Aftercare Cash assistance applications were kept and how to access them. Most reported they were available through their Independent Living Coordinators. (Chart 21)

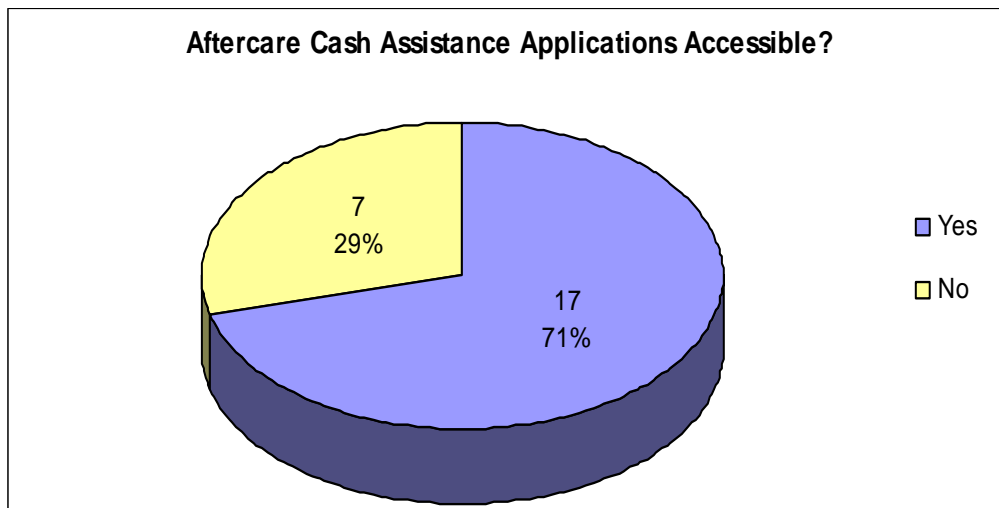


Chart 21

Source: Young Adult Interviews

- Fifteen individuals (62%) reported they had been assisted with referrals for services, if needed. An additional eight (33%) indicated in comments they had not had occasion to request referrals for services; however they responded No to this question because there was no "Not Applicable " response available.

**Aftercare Cash Assistance Payments.** Young adults were asked about the process and timeliness for accessing emergency assistance and whether a late payment had resulted in them being without a critical need (such as food, electricity or housing). They were also surveyed regarding whether they had ever received a lesser amount of cash assistance than they needed or requested. If they answered "Yes" to this question they were also surveyed as to whether they were told why the amount was less than requested. Lastly, they were asked if they had been informed about/and or used the hearing process to address this issue.

The timeframes for receiving Aftercare Cash Assistance payments for emergency needs were reported as 24 hours or less (six respondents), 2-3 days (four respondents), 4-5 days (three respondents) and, "Other" amount of time by two respondents. In the two "Other" instances, one interviewer reported she could not recall the timeframe for receipt of an emergency payment and the other noted it took an excess of 30 days to resolve her rent situation. This individual was the only person who reported that a late payment had resulted in her being without a critical basic need. (Chart 22)

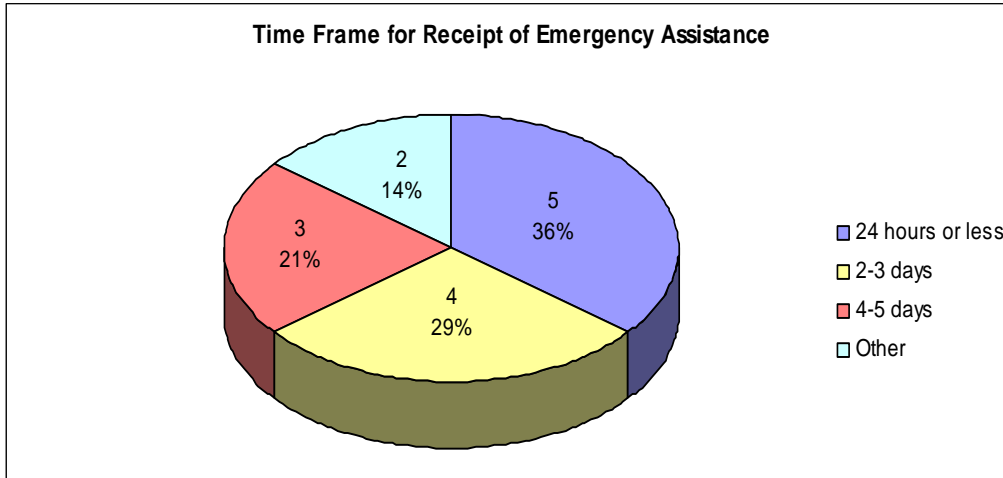


Chart 22

Source: Young Adult Interviews

- Two young adults reported they had received a lesser amount of Aftercare Cash Assistance than originally requested. An additional individual answered "No" to this question, but comments supported she had received less than initially requested and needed. It should be noted, bringing the total number to three. One of these individuals reported the lesser amount of money as due to funding issues, one noted only part of her balance had been paid, but wasn't sure why and they other stated she was confused.
- Only one of the three young adults reported to have attempted to resolve the lesser payment (through informally meeting with her Independent Living Coordinator). The other two reported they were unaware of their due process rights to address this issue.

## Summary of Focus Groups Discussions

Focus groups with Independent Living staff from Community-Based Care Lead Agencies, Contracted Case Management Organizations, Community Support Organizations, Educational Liaisons, and Advocates for young adults, Department of Children and Families and Juvenile Justice Staff occurred in each region during June 2009. The purpose of the focus groups was to gather information about area structure and innovative practices and to discuss barriers to full implementation of independent living services for young adults formerly in foster care.

It should be noted that focus group participants indicated they would like to meet regularly with other Independent Living staff to discuss issues and concerns and to share innovative practices. It should also be noted that Independent Living staff expressed a desire to participate in any planned revisions to Florida Statute or Administrative Code related to Independent Living programs.

### Summary of Statewide Focus Groups

#### Innovative Practices

Community-based care agencies and case management organizations providing Independent Living services described some of the following innovative practices:

**Transitional Living Programs.** Several areas noted they had these programs for young adults needing housing. The programs were funded through a variety of means, including the case management organization, sub-contacted providers, community supports and Children's Services Councils.

- Housing ranged from apartment complexes, carriage house to a more "group home" type of setting.
- Maximum stay ranged from one year until age 23.
- Some housing had limited staff on-site; others had staff availability, as needed.
- Some transitional living programs included an educational component/development of Independent Living skills.
- Other programs provided employment opportunities, with a thrift shop on-site in one area to using young adults in residence for office filing and property maintenance in another area.
- Several agencies had transitional housing and special services for pregnant women and mothers with young children.
- One agency reported recruiting individuals currently in Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP) training to provide housing for young adults ages 18-23, and coordinated some "matching" of the young adults to these families, with somewhat successful results.
- Several agencies noted their foster parents rent "transitional rooms" to young adults who were formerly in their home as a foster child.
- Other areas noted limited or no housing availability, stating young adults were sent to hotels on a short term basis to prevent homelessness.



**Employment and Mentoring Activities.** Most agencies reported they had either well-established or emerging programs in the areas of mentoring and/or providing employment opportunities for older youth and young adults.

- Summer employment opportunities are being utilized, but are somewhat limited due to national and statewide economic issues and increased unemployment.
- Most agencies reported they hired young adults through Operation Full Employment.
- Several agencies had partnerships with local businesses to train and hire youth or young adults to work in area restaurants.
- One agency reported having a contract to train youth and young adults on how to sell and make jewelry.
- Several Agencies have formal mentoring programs linking youth or young adults with employers, board members, local agencies (such as Big Brothers Big Sisters) and local banks for mentoring activities. Others mentor on an informal youth by youth basis, linking individuals in the community who request being a mentor to a youth or young adults, based on their special needs.
- One agency reported they promote “natural mentors”, (i.e., various people in the lives of the youth that provide support and guidance, such as teachers, coaches, pastors, etc...).
- Another agency has a grant that hires young adults 18-22 years old to serve as peer mentors to the population of youth in foster care.

**Life Skills and Educational Programs.** Agencies reported numerous specialized programs to promote enhanced skills and educational opportunities for older youth and young adults.

- Most agencies reported Financial Literacy programs to assist young adults and youth in becoming financially responsible. Some of these programs are through local banks, others through contract providers or community volunteers.
- All agencies noted they have specialized trainings on fundamental skills, such as parenting, community resources, understanding how to access benefits through Medicaid and the Social Security Administration to more specialized skills, such as cooking healthy nutritious meals on a budget, learning about real life experiences in creating a business with a social conscience and in legal education.
- Several agencies reported they had specialized workshops on self esteem and emotional literacy; although most reported this was a skill that needed more attention with the both the youth and young adult population.
- Several areas stated they have formal educational advocates, who act as liaisons for youth and young adults in the school system. In these areas the educational liaison works with the school system to ensure youth are on-target with their educational plans and young adults are maintaining their eligibility for the Road to Independence Scholarship. (NOTE: These liaisons, however, have large caseloads and are not found in all areas).

- Several agencies reported partnerships with the local colleges for scholarships and tutoring young adults.
- One agency noted a program that promotes a fast track to the GED, which includes twelve days of extensive teaching for the 18-21 year-old population. This program boasted that nine of twelve registrants passed their GED during the last round.
- Another agency reported having a program whose primary mission was to provide one-on-one educational mentors to foster care children that are turning 18 and “aging out” of the system. These mentors become the educational planners and life coaches for young adults who want to obtain higher education, but are intimidated or unfamiliar with the system.

**Other Innovative Programs.** Agencies reported they had other programs/activities that supported the transition to adulthood and promoted young adult independence.

- Some areas embrace a Family Team Conferencing Model approach to staffing youth as they transition to adulthood, to include staff from the schools, DJJ programs, formal and informal supports, representatives from Substance Abuse and Mental Health programs, therapists and the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, as applicable.
- Several agencies noted they have active Youth Boards and solicit input from individuals on the Board in developing life skills activities and trainings.
- Additionally, some agencies reported they have specialized units or staff that work with the population of youth in Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) programs to ensure they stay on track with their life skills and receive housing or other necessary referrals, at discharge from the DJJ program.
- Several areas indicated they participate in “Teen Court”, which provides a non-judicial alternative to regular juvenile court and is operated on a volunteer basis. Youth as well as adult volunteers are used, to include Juvenile Assistant State Attorney Staff as well as attorneys from private firms.

Barriers to Implementation of Independent Living Programs. Agencies, advocates and community representatives were asked to identify barriers to full and adequate implementation of Independent Living Services. A summary of these included:

#### **Finding/Money Issues**

- Inconsistency in funding Independent Living Programs statewide, by the State and by Community-Based Care Lead Agencies to sub-contracted providers.
- Inconsistency in how resources are applied statewide, to include lack of Transitional Support Services and Aftercare Services in some areas, while other areas provide these services consistently.
- Lack of funding for Transitional Support Services and Aftercare Services, based on some areas reporting they had no money for these services in their budget.
- Lack of funding for staff to adequately provide critical supports to the 18-23 year-old population.

### Other Resource Issues

- Lack of services for young adults who have significant emotional or behavioral issues or are significantly developmentally delayed (but do not qualify for services through the Agency for Person's with Disabilities or Vocational Rehabilitation). Housing is especially problematic for this population, who often end up homeless and on the streets.
- Lack of child care for young mothers (which impedes education and employment)
- Lack of transportation for all young adults, to include inadequate or no available public transportation in some areas. Additionally, many young adults have funding constraints that prohibit their purchasing a car or maintaining automobile insurance. (Focus groups also noted that many youth in foster care are unable to get a driver's license; and if they do, few have access to an automobile.) Foster parent liability issues were cited as a major reason for this.
- Inconsistencies statewide and by county in community supported programs and other available resources to supplement the services provided to youth and young adults by the community-Based Care Lead agency and sub-contracted providers. Richer resources were reported in those areas that boasted an active Children's Services Council.
- Inconsistent knowledge about the availability of, and how to access, grants that would provide additional support for these programs.

### Educational Issues

- Inconsistent communication and coordination between agency staff and local schools, particularly in gathering substantive information or documents regarding appropriate progress for young adults in the General Educational Development (GED) program.
- Inconsistent application of the Administrative Code requirement for continued RTI eligibility that reads, to "...Maintain appropriate progress as required by the educational institution..." 65C-31.004(5)(d)3., F.A.C. This is particularly problematic with students who are in GED programs.
- Absence of specialized education advocates, which most areas agreed was critical to ensure positive educational outcomes for older youth and young adults.
- Lack of flexibility for using Road to Independence Scholarship (RTI) money. Several areas noted young adults are not always ready academically or emotionally to go to school as soon as they turn 18-years-old. Others indicated some young adults may never be ready for formal education, but they choose an educational path through RTI in order to get the "maximum" benefit provided by the State.
  - ✓ Sets young adults up for academic failure during the first year of RTI.
  - ✓ Inappropriately pushes young adults to choose an educational or even a formal vocational path, when they might be more successful in an apprenticeship or "hands on" training activity, such as working on a construction site, with a maintenance crew or in the service industry.

### Programmatic Issues

- Inconsistencies in the structure of Independent Living services in many agencies. In some areas, services are provided directly by the Community-Based Care Lead agencies and in others Independent Living services are provided by a sub-contracted

case management organization, other community resource (or a combination of staff). Additionally, in some areas case managers provide the majority of services, while in others, Independent Living Coordinators/Specialists provide most of these services.

- Difficulties in communication and coordination between case managers and Independent Living staff in “shared” cases in some areas, to include unclear roles and responsibilities of each staff.
- Current assessment documents don’t really work well with many youth, who tend to “Christmas Tree” these documents without much thought. Others have limited understanding of what the questions ask. Participants suggested that an additional hands-on component to the assessment that requires youth to “show me what you can do”, might realize a more accurate measure of their abilities.
- Lack of structure for the Transitional Support Services Program, the program is vague and unclear.
- Excessive forms are required for Independent Living programs and require many staff hours that could be better spent in working with youth and young adults. Streamlining and combining some of the forms would be beneficial to staff who complete them and for youth and young adults who are sometimes confused by them.
- Inconsistent application of courtesy supervision.
  - ✓ For youth. While 65C-30.018 reflects Out of County requirements, it does not specifically address courtesy provision of Independent Living Services. Additionally, inconsistency in provision of these services may be impacted by the staff to client ratio or geographic spread of one area versus another. NOTE: Lack of courtesy supervision requirements is problematic in cases where jointly served youth are in residence in a Department of Juvenile Justice facility outside of the dependency agency jurisdiction.
  - ✓ For Young Adults. While young adults who move to another area are provided funding by their “agency of origin”, availability and timeliness of emergency funds may be impacted by their remote location. General support from Independent living staff may vary, based on staff to client ratios, geography of an area and availability of staff, particularly in rural areas of the state.
- Inconsistent application of “residency” for young adults residing out of state. Clarification was requested regarding who has the responsibility to provide the Educational and Training Voucher (ETV) funds/state match for young adults who were in foster care in Florida, but moved to another state prior to “aging out of foster care”, and applied for college as a resident of that state. Also concerns were raised regarding whether the Florida agency still had responsibility to provide RTI money in those instances.
- Lack of an adequate tracking system that captures all requirements and completion of Independent Living activities for youth; and current information on young adults (ie. address, phone number, employment status, referral and financial request/approval dates, etc.)

### **Training Issues**

- Lack of a “core” curriculum for training youth, staff and foster parents. While training should be somewhat flexible and meet the needs of a specific area, basic requirements (“Big Ticket Items”) should be standardized and used statewide by all Community Based Care Lead Agencies and sub-contracted agencies that provide training.

- There is a need for additional training:
  - ✓ For Foster Parents. Additional foster parent training regarding their teaching responsibility for youth in their home (as well as how to teach or role model for those youth) with regard to skills development should be offered.
  - ✓ For Youth. A more balanced curriculum, to include both “hard” skills, such as money management, budgeting, cooking, etc., with “softer” skills, such as promoting self esteem and relationship building should be developed.
- Training for youth does not always capture their attention; it is often rote and lacks excitement. Focus group participants noted youth often tell them the trainings are “boring and uninteresting”.

### **Communication Issues with Department of Juvenile Justice**

- There were inconsistencies statewide in communication and collaboration between case managers/Independent Living staff and Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) staff working with jointly served youth.
  - ✓ Local working agreements vary from area to area.
  - ✓ Communication is generally from staff to staff for jointly served youth. In some areas DJJ staff participate in Independent Living staffings routinely, in others that happens infrequently.
  - ✓ Sharing of information between dependency and delinquency staff also varies from area to area. Some focus group participants reported ease in obtaining reports of life skills provided by DJJ staff for youth that are in residential facilities, while others noted gathering this information is sometimes problematic.
  - ✓ Communication and information-sharing is an issue in instances where youth are in DJJ residential facilities outside of their dependency agency jurisdiction.

### **Accountability Issues**

Focus group participants raised issues in the various forums that were less tangible, such as youth/young adult accountability for participating in Independent Living activities and fulfilling their academic requirements; and Community-Based Care and provider accountability to ensure they offered services and payments to youth timely and based on need. The following were issues from these discussions:

- Community Based Care providers should ensure they offer services and payments to young adults timely (expeditiously in emergency situations) with no arbitrary maximum amount (CAP) attached. In instances where funding was not available to meet the specific young adult need, agencies are not always providing an explanation of why the funding is unavailable or less than requested/needed or a notice of due process to the young adult.
- Consider a mandatory requirement for youth to complete skills training and demonstrate proficiency prior to aging out of foster care. While all areas provide life skills activities (and some agencies noted they offered incentives for youth to attend) many focus group participants expressed frustration that there was no mandatory requirement for youth to complete these; stating this may contribute to young adults being ill-prepared to face the challenges of adulthood, and may also hinder them in achieving positive outcomes.
- Participants indicated there was a “mad dash” for youth to obtain all their skills and training in the year prior to their 18th birthday (during the critical transition year) and

felt that if mandatory trainings were required at all ages, transition to adulthood would be a smoother process.

- There were varying attitudes regarding requiring youth to participate in life skills.
  - ✓ On the one hand, some participants were adamant that youth needed to attend and show proficiency in all skills areas before aging out of the system and becoming eligible for adult services, particularly Road to Independence Scholarship money. They expressed that requiring this was critical for young adults in order for them to achieve positive educational outcomes, as well as overall independence.
  - ✓ Other participants indicated that agencies were forcing youth to complete activities just because they were foster children, and that (as foster children) their lives had been extremely difficult through no fault of their own. They expressed that the agency's job was to work with youth and whatever skills and abilities they had at transition, regardless of whether they had completed any training throughout their time in foster care.
  
- Finally, focus groups noted there are serious challenges young adults' face, to include deficits in housing in many areas and resource constraints for young adults, particularly those with behavioral or developmental issues, which is the case for many of our foster youth. While transitional activities can prepare youth to some degree for these challenges, enhanced coordination with community supports and commitment by foster parents working with youth is critical to ensuring positive outcomes for young adults.