



Independent Living Services

ANNUAL REPORT

Department of Children and Families

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Table of Contents

Purpose.....	2
Independent Living Services Outcomes	3
Oversight Activities.....	12
1. Contract Oversight	12
2. Financial Accountability	13
Appeals.....	13
Rule Promulgation.....	14

Purpose

The Department of Children and Families (Department) provides intentional support and wrap-around services to young adults in foster care. Florida is proud to offer a comprehensive range of services and resources for youth and young adults transitioning to adulthood from foster care including Extended Foster Care, Postsecondary Education Services and Supports, and Aftercare Services. Through these comprehensive services and resources, the Department has witnessed the resilience and potential of Florida's youth and young adults transitioning from foster care to adulthood.

This report provides accountability information for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-23 on Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS) and Aftercare Services (Aftercare), referenced in section 409.1451(6), Florida Statutes (F.S.), as follows:

1. An analysis of performance on the outcome measures developed under this section was reported for each Community-Based Care Lead Agency (Lead Agency).
2. A description of the Department's oversight of the program, including, by the Lead Agency, any programmatic or fiscal deficiencies found, corrective actions required, and status of compliance.
3. Any rules adopted or proposed under this section since the last report.

Although Extended Foster Care (EFC) is not referenced in section 409.1451(6), F.S., this report also provides outcome and oversight information for young adults continuing in foster care. The Department recognizes the entire umbrella of Independent Living programs as integral to ensuring the success of our young adults.

Additionally, the Department understands the importance of preventing entry into the dependency system, making it critical for a proactive approach to ensuring access to community services and peer support—before a crisis occurs. First Lady Casey DeSantis' initiative, HOPE Florida – A Pathway to Prosperity, has been instrumental in facilitating preventative services. The Office of Continuing Care (OCC) is led by young adults with personal experience in the system of care. OCC operates on a client-centered approach, with policies, programs, and direct services all influenced by the input of its members.

In an effort to integrate lived experience within the Department and to prioritize the voice of young people, the Department has restructured the Family Well-Being Council. The council consists of professionals from child welfare and crossover fields like mental health and juvenile justice. The council meets monthly around a specific theme to share best practices, present new ideas and collaborate across fields to solve problems. A crucial aspect of the restructuring involved the establishment of a dedicated youth committee, overseen by the Department's first-ever Youth Advisor. The youth committee will be instrumental in ensuring that the experiences and perspectives of Florida's youth are represented and considered in the decision-making process. This approach will enable the Department to develop strategies and policies that are client-centered and responsive to the needs of our youth. The integration of lived experience and client-centered services into the Department's culture will be instrumental in creating meaningful and impactful outcomes for Florida's youth and young adults.

Table 1 illustrates the number of young adults served in each Independent Living program by Lead Agency during the past two fiscal years. There has been a 22 percent increase in Extended Foster Care participation, and a 13 percent increase in the total number of young adults receiving services (Aftercare, EFC, and PESS) compared to the previous FY.

Table 1: Young Adults Receiving Independent Living Services by Program Type, Lead Agency, and FY

Lead Agency	2021-2022			2022-2023		
	Aftercare	EFC	PESS	Aftercare	EFC	PESS
CBC of Brevard	28	33	14	27	104	11
ChildNet Inc	22	166	112	24	166	112
ChildNet Palm Beach	14	126	68	11	118	62
Children's Network of SW Florida	8	41	58	8	65	34
Citrus Health Network	39	229	198	48	269	186
Communities Connected for Kids	16	28	25	11	28	26
Community Partnership for Children	8	49	37	16	76	47
Family Support Services Suncoast	42	104	62	49	105	55
Children's Network Hillsborough	57	87	40	57	146	60
Embrace Families CBC	32	117	58	38	145	57
Families First Network	12	98	28	11	100	19
St. Johns County Commission	5	12	8	0	12	8
Family Support Services	36	97	33	23	107	31
Heartland for Children	32	79	23	37	91	29
Kids Central Inc	39	28	27	54	54	39
Kids First of Florida Inc	0	16	10	0	27	13
NWF Health Network-East	16	55	35	19	67	27
Partnership for Strong Families	10	16	12	6	16	5
Safe Children Coalition	17	37	16	29	37	16
Statewide	433	1,418	864	467	1,733	857

**Source: OCWDRU #1089, FSN Data Repository

Independent Living Services Outcomes

Independent Living programs are designed to assist young adults in achieving important milestones as they move toward self-sufficiency. This program review considers the following federal outcome areas: increasing financial self-sufficiency, improving educational attainment, increasing connections to supportive adults, reducing homelessness, reducing high-risk behavior, and improving access to health insurance.

The Department is aware of the challenges in preparing young adults for adulthood and continues its work toward improving service delivery and readiness for youth transitioning to independence. To enhance support for this population, in the previous year, the OCC conducted regular on-site visits and training sessions for Lead Agencies and their providers. The focus was on Independent Living preparation and creating a seamless transition from the teen years to adulthood, working collaboratively with case management. Additionally, the OCC transformed the "My Pathways to Success Plan" into a comprehensive tool for gathering essential details for adulthood preparation. Quality assurance reviews now include relevant Independent Living specific questions, both within the "Life of Case reviews" and as standalone post-18 Independent Living program case review that was launched in March 2023.

The implementation of site visits, training, strengthening of transition planning, and quality assurance oversight have improved the connection between the Department and service providers, resulting in significant advancements in Independent Living data measures. In Fiscal Year 2023–24, transition

planning completion rates increased by 115 percent and life skills assessment administration rates increased by 90 percent. The life skills assessment is used to identify necessary skills for adulthood.

To improve the consistency of statewide service delivery, the Department will introduce an Independent Living curriculum in 2024. The curriculum includes specialized training to CBC staff to enhance their understanding of Independent Living requirements, policies, and best practices.

Postsecondary Education Services and Support

Eligible young adults ages 18-23 in PESS receive \$1,720 per month and other support necessary to become self-sufficient, pursuant to section 409.1451, F.S. Funding through the federal John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee program) also helps pay for participant housing and other expenses necessary to cover the cost of attendance while enrolled in school or a vocational training program. Initial eligibility requires students to be enrolled in nine credit hours or the vocational equivalent. Students meeting academic progress according to the Florida Bright Futures educational institution may continue to receive the assistance. Some exceptions to credit hours and progress may apply to those students with a diagnosed disability or other recognized challenging circumstances. Services include case management visits, transition, and financial planning.

Aftercare Support Services

Eligible young adults ages 18-23 in Aftercare per section 409.1451, F.S., receive monetary and service assistance as they transition to adulthood. The services provided are based on a services plan and are intended to be temporary. Services are often used as a bridge to EFC and PESS and may include mentoring, tutoring, mental health, substance abuse, counseling, and financial assistance. Allowable expenses are covered by federal and state funding. Aftercare is an important safety net that provides access to services without full eligibility so that clients can work toward eligibility for more long-term programs with the necessary supports to succeed.

Extended Foster Care

Eligible young adults have the option of remaining in foster care until age 21. If an eligible young adult has a documented disability that prevents full-time participation in a qualifying activity, the young adult may remain in foster care until age 22. EFC is a voluntary program that requires young adults who have aged out of the Department's legal custody, or in licensed care on their 18th birthday, to participate in school, work, or a work training program while residing in a supervised living arrangement, as required by federal and state guidelines. Services include regular case management visits, case planning, transition planning, monitoring of life skills development, and judicial oversight. The program utilizes Title IV-E federal funds to help pay for room and board and other allowable expenses such as childcare for young adults who are parenting, clothing for work or school, school supplies, and essential services needed to support the young adult's transition to independence.

Outcome Area 1: Improving Educational Attainment

Education plays a vital role in fostering personal growth and self-sufficiency. Young adults who obtain an education are better prepared to face the uncertainties of the future job market. A high school and/or college diploma not only increases their chances of securing employment but may also open doors to higher-paying jobs and more opportunities for career advancement. Education equips individuals with the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies to navigate the complexities of the modern world. It instills critical thinking skills, and the ability to adapt to new challenges.

To emphasize the importance of education, the Department has enhanced its focus on both secondary and post-secondary education outcomes through the Young Adult Receiving Services Report (YARS). This report tracks the educational progress and achievements of young adults who receive services from the Department and CBC Lead Agencies. By gathering real time data on education, the Department can assess the effectiveness of programs and interventions in promoting educational success.

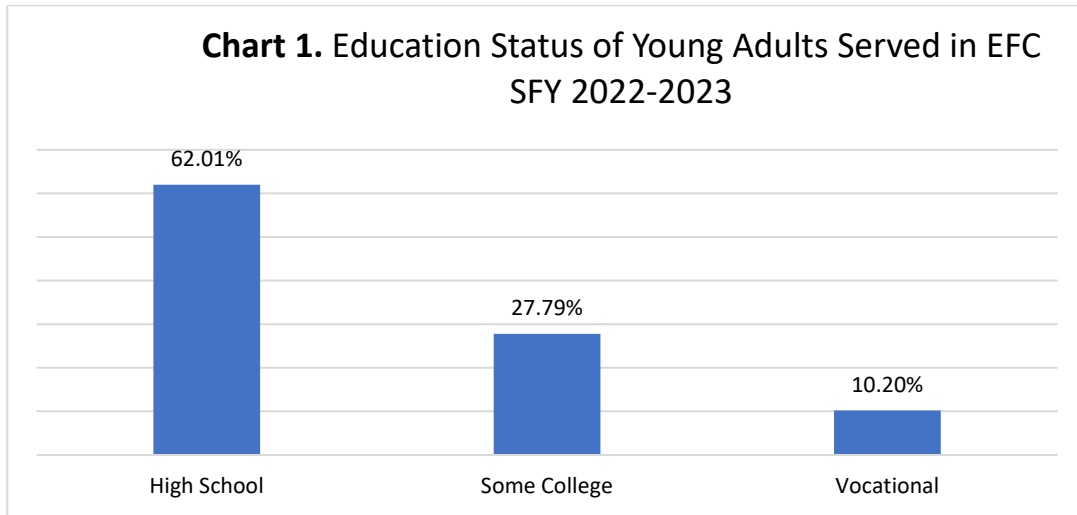
Additionally, the CBC Lead Agency site visits, which include interactions with our youth advisor, are designed to create a more educational-focused experience for youth and young adults. These site visits allow youth and young adults to see firsthand the impact of education. The interaction with our youth advisor will provide guidance and mentorship from someone who has successfully navigated the education system while exiting the foster system. This personal connection will inspire, motivate, and provide invaluable advice on how to make the most of their educational journey. Through the focus on tracking education outcomes and providing educational experiences, the Department seeks to ensure that young adults receive the support and resources they need to succeed in their educational endeavors.

Table 2 displays the number of young adults who have achieved a High School Diploma, or GED, in the past two state fiscal years by CBC Lead Agency. By enhancing its focus on education outcomes, providing educational experiences, and tracking progression, the Department has seen a 50 percent increase in high school diploma attainment compared to the previous fiscal year.

Table 2. Young Adults who have a High School Diploma, GED Certificate, or Certificate of Completion

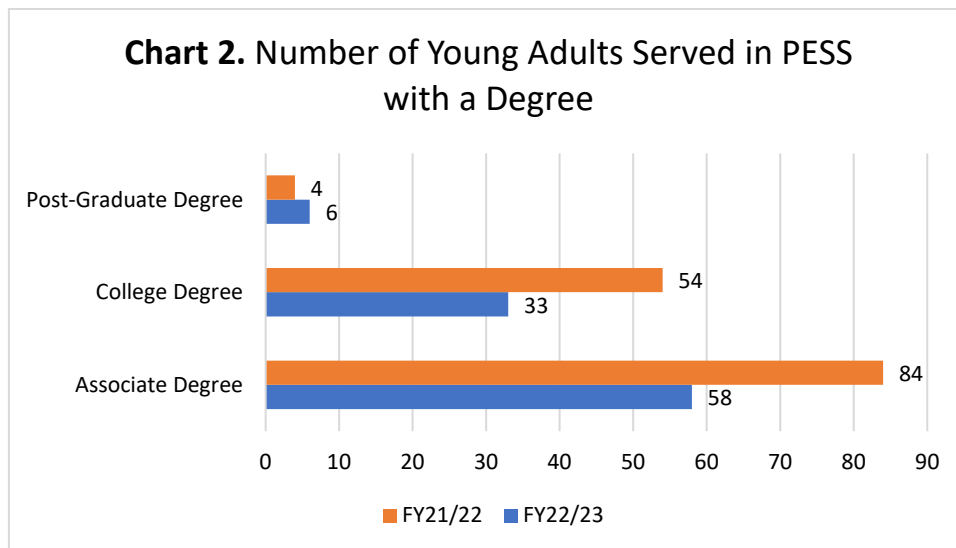
Lead Agency	2021-2022	2022-2023
Brevard Family Partnership	19	30
ChildNet-Broward	60	110
ChildNet-Palm Beach	30	54
Children’s Network of SW Florida	36	21
Citrus Health Network	73	207
Communities Connected for Kids	17	4
Community Partnership for Children	24	18
Family Support Services- Suncoast	81	71
Children’s Network Hillsborough	39	83
Embrace Families	66	99
Families First Network	24	53
Family Integrity Program	2	8
Family Support Services of North Florida	31	31
Heartland for Children	32	20
Kids Central, Inc.	19	33
Kids First of Florida, Inc.	4	9
Northwest Florida Health Network	27	58
Partnership for Strong Families	19	8
Safe Children Coalition	27	25
Statewide	630	942

Chart 1 indicates the proportion of young adults participating in EFC services and their present educational status. During FY 2022-23, 62 percent are actively pursuing a high school degree.



While overall educational attainment across programs has increased, there has been a decrease in educational attainment in the state’s PESS program. Chart 2 depicts the number of young adults in the PESS program who have successfully achieved a post-secondary or graduate degree in the past two fiscal years. Although there has been a decline in degree attainment among young adults in FY 2022-23, it is crucial to recognize the challenges these individuals have during this state fiscal year including the transition between online platforms and in-person classroom learning has presented difficulties that may hinder their ability to obtain a degree.

Recent legislation has substantially increased financial incentives for participants, with the monthly amount now raised to \$1,720. Consequently, young adults have expressed greater freedom to solely focus on pursuing post-secondary education. Furthermore, the Department has implemented significant improvements to its My Pathways to Success Plan, which now includes required transitional planning for PESS participants. This planning aims to identify and address obstacles that may impede young adults’ ability to attain a post-secondary degree, providing tailored and targeted assistance to PESS participants.



Per section 409.1452, F.S., the Department is required to collaborate with the State University System (SUS), Florida College System (FCS), and the Department of Education to improve outcomes and career transitions for former foster youth who are eligible for the Department's Tuition and Fee Exemption. In FY 2021-22, the Department continued its contract with Educate Tomorrow Corporation, a 501(c)(3) organization, which started in 2016, to administer the Positive Pathways Program. The program's staff coordinates and develops a network of postsecondary supports and hosts monthly network calls with representatives from colleges, universities, and lead agencies in Florida. Positive Pathways also conducted meetings in each region last year to raise awareness among professionals about the tuition exemptions available to young adults. This unique network currently has over 300 members.

In the fall of 2022, the SUS reported that 1,195 students utilized the Department's tuition exemption to attend a Florida public university, while the FCS had 3,577 students using the tuition exemption during the same period. Between FY 2013-14 and FY 2020-21, over 3,500 students using the tuition exemption successfully graduated with a degree from the SUS and the FCS.

Outcome Area 2: Increasing Connections

The Department recognizes the significance of building strong relationships between caring adults and young adults in Independent Living Programs. These connections play a vital role in helping young individuals achieve their goals and overcome obstacles. Feedback from OCC site visits and training has highlighted the profound and lasting impact of these relationships. With the guidance of OCC, the Department actively promotes the use of peer connections. Local lead agencies and their providers have increased the employment of young adults who, through their shared lived experience, build relationships with their peers and support them during the transition to adulthood. In addition, the Department provides resources to foster the development of supportive relationships for lead agencies. The enhanced My Pathway to Success Plan and statewide training initiatives place a strong emphasis on the significance of adult support networks and mentors. To facilitate the process of finding mentors and creating positive connections for staff and young adults, facilitator guides were created, including a specific section dedicated to identifying and fostering supportive adults. In instances where no supportive adults are available, a documented plan must be formulated outlining the steps required to find a mentor or establish a lasting positive connection as they transition into adulthood.

Another valuable resource for identifying caring and dedicated adults for Florida's youth is the recent expansion of the Hope Florida program. Hope Florida - A Pathway to Promise is designed to aid youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood by providing them with a long-term mentor and a strong foundation for their future. Through the involvement of Guardian ad Litem volunteers and the Department of Elder Affairs' Hope Heroes, young individuals aging out of foster care will be matched with trained mentors who will offer guidance, motivation, emotional support, and assistance in developing skills and resources for their future. The implementation of the new YARS report will also facilitate the collection of data on permanent connections. This report gathers valuable information about these connections, enabling effective data collection and evaluation for future reporting. The Department's goal is to equip young adults with lifelong connections as they navigate the transition into adulthood.

Outcome Area 3: Increasing Financial Self-Sufficiency

Young adults who participate in an Independent Living program must engage in transition planning, known as the My Pathways to Success Plan, as mandated by section 39.6035, F.S. This plan outlines the objectives and strategies for acquiring and maintaining the necessary services to facilitate a successful transition into adulthood, including financial independence. The services encompass various aspects such as housing, healthcare, education, transportation, employment, adult connections, and financial management. The importance of financial literacy in young adults receiving a PESS stipend was

underscored by section 409.1451, F.S.; therefore, before a participant in the PESS program can receive funding, an evaluation of their financial literacy, encompassing personal financial management, budgeting, and saving is documented. Additionally, a financial plan must be developed and incorporated into the transition plan. This financial plan is reviewed every six months and, if necessary, updated in collaboration with the young adult. If opportunities for improvement are identified, the young adult is provided referrals or necessary information to enhance the identified skills.

Young adults may also seek financial assistance through an Aftercare application. The financial assistance is designated for specific purposes and is directly provided to the appropriate vendor for services such as rent or utilities. This assistance continues until the young adult is capable of independently managing their expenses and allocated funding.

Table 3 presents lead agency data on the count of young adults involved in the EFC Program who have been employed in the past two FYs. It is important to note that obtaining employment is not the sole requirement for eligibility in this program.

Recent data suggests that more program participants are choosing to pursue secondary education as the activity that qualifies them for the program as represented in the increase in secondary degree obtainment. Consequently, there has been a slight decline in the number of young adults in the program who have reported employment compared to the previous FY.

Table 3. Number of Young Adults in EFC with a Recorded Period of Employment

Lead Agency	2021-2022	2022-2023
Brevard Family Partnership	14	18
ChildNet-Broward	29	26
ChildNet-Palm Beach	8	6
Children's Network of SW Florida	16	14
Citrus Health Network	63	75
Communities Connected for Kids	1	3
Community Partnership for Children	2	1
Family Support Services- Suncoast	24	24
Children's Network Hillsborough	46	44
Embrace Families	66	59
Families First Network	63	51
Family Integrity Program	6	9
Family Support Services of North Florida	53	33
Heartland for Children	26	28
Kids Central, Inc.	6	3
Kids First of Florida, Inc.	6	8
Northwest Florida Health Network	18	18
Partnership for Strong Families	3	3
Safe Children Coalition	23	13
Statewide	473	436

Source: OCWDRU #1169, FSFN Data Repository

While employment or attending school is not an obligation for young adults to remain eligible for Aftercare, they are required to actively engage in activities that contribute to their self-sufficiency. These activities are part of a comprehensive plan designed to facilitate the transition of young adults toward financial independence.

With its overall focus on independence and the Department’s commitment to helping young adults become self-sufficient, the number of young adults who are employed in Aftercare has increased by 62 percent from the previous FY. This is a positive trend, as it suggests that young adults are being equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the workforce.

Table 4. Number of Young Adults in Aftercare with a Recorded Period of Employment

Lead Agency	2021-2022	2022-2023
Brevard Family Partnership	6	9
ChildNet-Broward	1	5
ChildNet-Palm Beach	1	0
Children’s Network of SW Florida	2	5
Citrus Health Network	7	22
Communities Connected for Kids	0	0
Community Partnership for Children	1	0
Family Support Services- Suncoast	9	2
Children’s Network Hillsborough	10	5
Embrace Families	10	21
Families First Network	1	31
Family Integrity Program	0	2
Family Support Services of North Florida	9	5
Heartland for Children	9	11
Kids Central, Inc.	6	1
Kids First of Florida, Inc.	0	8
Northwest Florida Health Network	1	0
Partnership for Strong Families	1	0
Safe Children Coalition	7	4
Statewide	81	131

Source: OCWDRU #1169, FSFN Data Repository

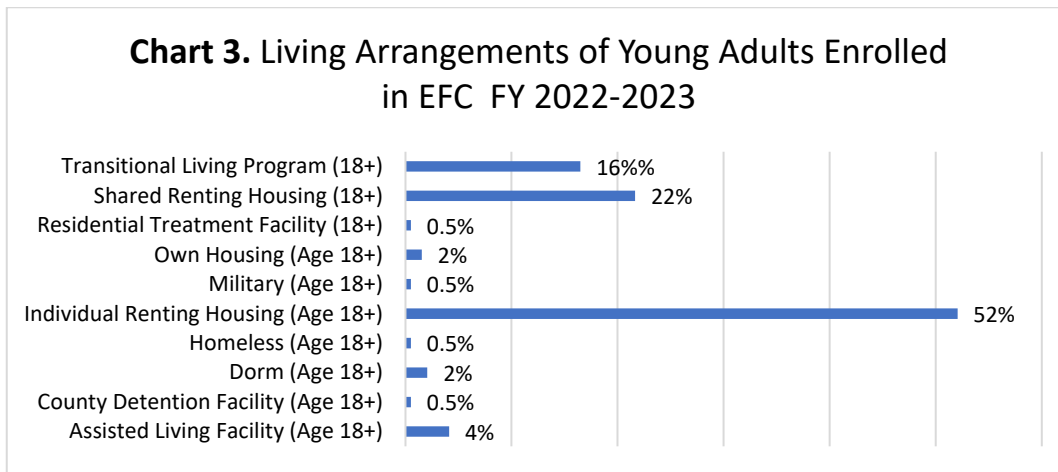
Outcome Area 4: Reducing Homelessness

Ensuring that young adults have a safe and stable home is crucial for them to become self-sufficient. When the housing needs of young adults is met, they can better focus on achieving their goals. Young adults in the EFC program collaborate with their Independent Living team to identify a safe and appropriate place to live and enter a Supervised Living Arrangement. Before the living arrangement is approved, child welfare professionals use the standardized Supervised Living Arrangement Assessment to assess the suitability of the living environment. This assessment for EFC ensures that young adults are placed in the most appropriate housing option for their unique needs. The available housing options include Transitional Living Programs, Shared Renting Housing, Residential Treatment Facilities, Own

Housing, Military Housing, Individual Renting Housing, Homeless, Dormitories, Detention, and Assisted Living Facilities.

If young adults are discharged from the EFC program, Aftercare Services can provide them a way back into the program and prevent homelessness while they are not enrolled in EFC. Young adults who are eligible for Aftercare Services and become homeless can request services. If requested, action is taken to meet their needs within 24 hours. This rapid response is imperative, as it will ensure that the temporary crisis does not result in long-term homelessness or further destabilization.

Chart 3 displays the living arrangements of young adults enrolled in EFC for FY 2022-23.



Outcome Area 5: Reducing High-Risk Behavior

The PESS program requires child welfare professionals, service providers, and young adults to regularly communicate to address and decrease any identified risks. By offering additional services when requested, these professionals can effectively reduce the chances of engaging in high-risk behaviors. Case management plays a crucial role in assessing the financial literacy, executive functioning, self-regulation, and other relevant skills of young adults to truly minimize risks and promote self-sufficiency. The assessment conducted by case management helps to identify individual needs and challenges, enabling the provision of necessary support. Additionally, lead agencies are accountable for holding meaningful discussions with young adults regarding their post-PESS needs. To ensure ongoing success and assistance, these agencies must maintain periodic meetings and update plans for individuals in the PESS program.

Under the Aftercare Services Plan, for Aftercare participants, multiple providers are involved, allowing for a comprehensive approach to addressing the needs of young adults. Additionally, follow-up on referrals and the services plan is updated every three months to ensure that appropriate supports and assistance are being provided.

The EFC program extends comprehensive support to young adults entering adulthood, aiming to minimize risky behaviors. Dedicated child welfare professionals conduct regular home visits to ensure safety, appropriate supervision, and well-being. Continuous assessments track the progress of life skill enhancement, maintaining judicial oversight, and facilitating transition planning. This approach effectively identifies and addresses any high-risk behaviors, offering guidance to these individuals to cultivate self-reliance.

Additionally, by providing access to community services, the Office of Continuing Care Hope Line serves as a statewide point of contact for young adults in the Aftercare, EFC, and PESS programs. Participants can also access a peer support system and existing community resources until the age of 26, creating a

safety net for those with high-risk behaviors. Overall, these programs offer comprehensive support and resources to young adults as they transition into adulthood. Through regular contact with professionals, utilizing peer support systems, and accessing community resources, participants have the necessary tools to overcome barriers, address risks, and work toward a successful and self-sufficient future.

Outcome Area 6: Access to Health Insurance

Young adults in the EFC program can receive Child in Care Medicaid until they reach age 21. If an 18-year-old was already receiving Medicaid while under the custody of the Department, they will automatically qualify for the Sunshine Health Child Welfare Specialty Medicaid Plan until they turn 26. The Department and Sunshine Health continue their collaboration to expand programs and benefits to improve health outcomes which include CARE grants that provide up to \$150 per child, per year for activities promoting healthy development, and monthly reimbursements for the use of over-the-counter items, such as vitamins, and hygiene products. Additionally, plan members receive free transportation to medical appointments. The OCC has initiated further collaboration with Sunshine Health to optimize the utilization of these additional services that are available to young adults by incorporating Sunshine staff into its January 2024 statewide training and streamlining the current application process. By increasing utilization of these services, OCC can effectively support young adults in navigating their healthcare needs and making informed decisions about their health.

To make sure that youth and young adults in Independent Living receive necessary services, the Department collects important health information including medical, dental, and vision records, and other crucial data from the My Pathway to Success Plan. By analyzing this information, caseworkers can now identify any early issues or problems and plan interventions accordingly. The Department's continuous real-time data on the health and well-being of young adults in the Road to Independence and EFC programs will enable better monitoring and understanding of their overall health outcomes and needs.

Keys to Independence Program

In 2014, the Florida Keys to Independence Act was enacted into law. This program is specifically designed for young individuals between the ages of 15 and 21 who are in out-of-home care, participating in EFC, or the recent expansion to include young adults involved in PESS. It aims to aid in obtaining a driver's license and car insurance.

Since the expansion to include eligible PESS clients in April 2022, there have been approximately 170 young adults in Florida enrolled in PESS who are currently receiving services through the Keys to Independence Program.

Also, as of June 2023, Florida's youth and young adults have achieved the following:

- 2,474 have obtained a learner's permit.
- 1,314 have obtained a Florida driver's license.
- 9,733 have been enrolled in the Keys to Independence program statewide and 3,709 remain actively enrolled in the program.
- Since the expansion to include eligible PESS clients in April 2022, there have been approximately 170 young adults in Florida enrolled in PESS who are currently receiving services through the Keys to Independence Program.

In addition to providing support through the Keys to Independence program, young adults can also discuss obtaining or accessing reliable transportation and other resources like bus schedules, public transportation, or ride sharing through transition staffing with the Department's My Pathway to Success Plan. Through the combined efforts of the Keys to Independence program and the standardized My Pathways to Success Plan, the Department has observed a rise in young adults' ability to acquire driver's licenses without incurring any expenses.

National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD)

In 2010, the Administration for Children and Families established the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD), which requires states to comply with two distinct data collection activities:

1. Track the independent living services and supports provided to the youth and/or young adults identified in the state's served population.
2. Collect outcomes information by directly surveying youth and young adults with the NYTD Outcome survey.

Served and Outcomes Population

Florida's served population is defined as those youth and young adults who are between the ages of 13-22, who have received at least one independent living service during the 6-month federal reporting period, regardless of their foster care status or placement type (a young adult who has reached age 23 is no longer considered part of the served population).

The Administration for Children and Families collects outcome information from each cohort across the following six domains: financial self-sufficiency, experience with homelessness, educational attainment, positive connections with adults, high-risk behavior, and access to health insurance.

The NYTD Outcome survey was developed by the Administration for Children and Families. The survey is part of a longitudinal study that established a "cohort" of young people to survey over a period-of-time. Each NYTD survey cohort is comprised of youth who completed the NYTD survey at age 17 and are again surveyed at age 19 and age 21.

Since 2010, Florida has reported NYTD Survey Outcomes on three distinct cohorts (youth/young adults who completed the NYTD survey at ages 17, 19, and 21). In 2022-2023, Florida established its fifth NYTD survey group or cohort by surveying youth who are in Florida's foster care system on their 17th birthday between October 1, 2022 – September 30, 2023. Surveying young adults age 21 in the NYTD cohort launched October 1, 2023, and will continue through September 2024

Oversight Activities

The Department's contract with Lead Agencies includes expectations to administer all services for youth in care by federal guidelines, Operating Procedures, Florida Statutes, and Florida Administrative Code. Florida has structured statutory requirements for EFC, PESS, and Aftercare around establishing client eligibility, standards of progress, payment disbursement, and due process and appeals. Requirements in the Florida Administrative Code further detail the framework for how the array of Independent Living services is administered, including application and discharge procedures, transition planning, and documentation requirements.

1. Contract Oversight

Contract monitoring is carried out by the Department's Office of Child and Family Wellbeing and the Office of Quality and Innovation. The Office of Quality and Innovation monitors performance by conducting regular case reviews and evaluating performance metrics. To better support young adults transitioning to adulthood, the Office of Quality and Innovation has collaborated with the Office of Continuing Care to include specific Independent Living questions related to the individual's life and case. To ensure the

success of young adults, a post-18 case review was created using the Quality Standards Review Guide developed by the Quality Standards Workgroup. The workgroup included input from various stakeholders. The first case review was launched in March 2023 and has served as a data collection tool for lead agencies and as a basis for future Department training and curriculum development.

2. Financial Accountability

To ensure payments are accurately recorded in FSFN, during FY 2022-23 the Department provided oversight and technical assistance to lead agency staff contract managers and lead agency financial staff throughout the state. Independent Living service payments were reviewed monthly to determine the following:

- Payment amounts adhere to the amounts prescribed in Florida Statutes and Florida Administrative Code.
- Young adults' eligibility within each program is appropriately documented in FSFN.
- Federal and state funds are paid only to eligible young adults based on age qualifications for the program in which the young adults have been approved.

	SFY22-23	GAA
Independent Living (Recurring Base)	\$	38,195,652
SB 80/96 Requirements - Rec GR	\$	1,683,938
ISSUE 4000817 IL Case Coordination / Pre-IL Life Skills & Normalcy - Rec GR	\$	5,710,752
ISSUE 4000817 Increase in PESS Monthly Payment - Rec GR	\$	8,352,000
SFY 22-23 Appropriation	\$	53,942,342

The legislature appropriated nearly \$54 million for FY 2022-23 for Independent Living services. The total appropriation includes the cost of the case management associated with the delivery of services to young adults and the supplemental room and board payment to foster care parents for providing independent life skills and normalcy supports to youth ages 13 through 17. If a lead agency exceeds its Independent Living allocation, the excess comes out of its core funding.

At the beginning of the fiscal year, each lead agency was evaluated for its agency's financial accountability of the funds provided by the Department including actual expenditures recorded for the prior fiscal year, any carry forward funds available, and the lead agency's submitted Cost Allocation Plan. The Cost Allocation Plan identifies how the funds for each program will be spent during the year by the lead agency and is reviewed and approved by the Department. As needed, any identified fiscal issues are discussed with the lead agency.

Also, quarterly reviews were conducted in addition to the technical assistance provided and monthly payment reviews. When payment records are selected, each lead agency is required to provide supporting documentation for the eligibility criteria entered in FSFN. The supporting documentation is also reviewed to confirm that the amount of financial assistance determined by the lead agency aligns with the eligibility and financial requirements that were completed.

Appeals

Young adults applying for or receiving Independent Living services through EFC, PESS, or Aftercare have the right to receive notice of adverse action and to resolve issues of program eligibility through the fair hearing process under sections 39.6251(9) and 409.1451(4), F.S. The Office of Appeal Hearings reported that there were no appeals granted in FY 2022-23, upholding the program's eligibility determinations made by Lead Agencies.

Total Number of Independent Living Program Appeals:

- FY 2021-22: 31
- FY 2022-23: 45*

Total Number of EFC Only Appeals:

- FY 2021-22: 3
- FY 2022-23: 3

* Of the 45 appeals in FY 2022-23, 21 were withdrawn, 14 were abandoned, seven were denied (Department's action was upheld), and three were dismissed.

Rule Promulgation

Rule 65C-28.009, Florida Administrative Code – Transition to Adulthood

Amendments include specifying age-appropriate activities for life skills, informing youth about Independent Living services and community resources, setting a date for filing a transition plan, assisting youth in opening bank accounts, providing annual contact to inform about the Office of Continuing Care and allowances for youth in out of home licensed care.

Rule 65C- 42.001, Florida Administrative Code – Definitions

The amendment defines an "Emergency Situation" which refers to a youth or young adult in the PESS program who is experiencing a circumstance or event that they do not have adequate resources to address, and the ability to access Aftercare financial services.

Rule 65C-42.002, Florida Administrative Code Postsecondary Education Services and Support

The "Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS) and Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Initial, Renewal and Reinstatement Application" was updated to include the increase in stipend. Additional amendments include specifying that designated staff must provide necessary services to young adults in PESS, including updating the Independent Living transition plan every six months which include life skills, counseling, financial planning, educational support, and supportive networks. The staff must maintain contact with the young adult, review progress and identify additional services needed, inform the young adult about the Office of Continuing Care, and aid with choosing and enrolling in post-secondary education.

Rule 65C-42.003, Florida Administrative Code – Aftercare Services

The "Application for Aftercare Services" and the "Aftercare Services Plan" were amended for clarity and continuity. Amendments to the Aftercare Services Plan included the amount of temporary financial assistance and the reasons for it, as well as the specific activities the young adult will do to become self-sufficient or transition into EFC or PESS and inform the young adult about the Office of Continuing Care. If a young adult in PESS experiences an emergency, the plan should also explain the reason for the emergency, show that their resources are insufficient through an assessment, and state the extra amount of financial assistance needed to resolve the situation. Additional services were added to maximize aftercare services.