



North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Division of Social Services

325 North Salisbury Street • Raleigh, North Carolina 27603
Courier # 56-20-25

Michael F. Easley, Governor
Carmen Hooker Buell, Secretary

Pheon E. Beal, Director
(919) 733-3055

August 6, 2001

Dear County Director of Social Services

**RE: LINKS Special Funds
Procedures for Access**

**Attention: LINKS Liaisons
County Finance**

The purpose of this letter is to clarify the procedures for accessing LINKS Special Funds on behalf of eligible foster teens and young adults up to age 21 who are or were in foster care as teens. Four types of LINKS Special Funds are available to promptly reimburse counties for additional expenditures on behalf of eligible youth and young adults. These funds are in addition to the county LINKS allocation and salary supplements, if any. Eligibility can be cumulative: one youth may be eligible for one, two, three, or four categories of funding, for a total of as much as \$4000 per year. Eligibility, once established, remains in effect until the youth achieves his or her 21st birthday, unless the county discontinues the eligibility status. The available balance renews annually on October 1 to the maximum available amount. Unspent funds from the prior fiscal year do not carry over to the ensuing Federal fiscal year.

Purpose

The purpose of LINKS Special Funds, as with all LINKS funds, is to help youth successfully transition to self-sufficiency by reducing barriers to achieving that goal. LINKS Special Funds help to assure that every eligible youth or young adult will have timely, equal access to financial resources regardless of county of residence. There are four categories of Special Funds:

- The Trust Fund is made up of funds from the former Independent Living Initiative which were designated for aftercare services. These funds, currently capped at \$500 per individual per year, can be used for any youth at least 17 years of age who has been discharged or is to be discharged imminently. These funds can be applied to a variety of non-housing costs that are barriers to a youth's transition. Funds have been used for auto repair, insurance, computers, educational/vocational assistance, uniforms, furniture, utility costs, and a variety of other needs. These funds may also be used to provide financial incentives to discharged youth to encourage contact with the agency at regular intervals after discharge, so that problem areas may be addressed before they are crises.
- Scholarship Funds may be used either for vocational/educational expenses or for conferences involving foster or adopted youth. These funds are capped at \$500 per year but may be used by youth as young as 13 for attendance at youth conferences. Access to scholarship funds has been simplified so that reimbursement can be provided to counties at any time during the year. A separate scholarship application is no longer required.



- Transitional Housing Funds are available **only** to young adults who aged out of foster care at 18 but are not yet 21 years of age. Up to \$1500 per year is available to help with room and board, which is defined as rent, rent deposits, or boarding arrangements that include meals as a part of the rent. Utility costs are not included in this fund, but may be paid from other funds for which the youth is eligible. Funding is intended to help youth get moved into their own home, not to prolong unnecessary dependency. Any young adult who receives Transitional Housing Funds must also be provided with Transitional Services (SIS Code #133) to assure that non-financial transitional needs are addressed.
- Extremely High Risk Funds are available to any youth or young adult ages 13 through 20 who, because of life circumstances, behaviors, or lack of needed resources is evaluated by the county DSS to be at high risk of negative outcomes unless appropriate intervention is initiated. The High Risk Funds must be spent on activities or purchases that reduce the defined risk. Up to \$1500 is available annually.

Procedures

In order to qualify for LINKS Special funds, a youth or young adult must be at least 13 years of age and must be or have been in foster care as a teenager. Eligibility ends on the young adult's 21st birthday. Youth and young adults who have been discharged as teens, adopted, emancipated, or have married remain eligible for these resources if it is needed to address barriers to self-sufficiency. The county Department of Social Services determines eligibility for the various funding sources and documents the basis for that eligibility in the case record. The county then forwards information on the attached form "Authorization for Access to LINKS Special Funds" establishing eligibility to the NC LINKS Coordinator, Joan McAllister, either by FAX to (919) 715-6714 or by mail to 325 North Salisbury Street, MSC 2408, Raleigh, N.C. 27699-2408. One or more youth may be registered on a single form. The county should check the boxes indicating eligibility for one or more of the funds. The information is then loaded into a data base at the State Office.

When the county establishes the need for access to one or more of the Special Funds sources, county funds are used to advance the expenditure. The county then requests reimbursement through the LINKS Coordinator, using the attached "Request for Reimbursement" form. The request specifies the types and amount of funds that should be charged for each youth/young adult, up to the maximum amount available. The NC LINKS Coordinator checks the data base to assure that eligibility has been established and forwards all requests to the Controller's office on a monthly basis by the 25th of the month. Counties are reimbursed by EFT approximately a week to ten days later. In order to assure timely reimbursement, counties are asked to submit their requests to the LINKS Coordinator by the 24th of the month. Requests for reimbursement may be Faxed.

Documentation regarding justification for the expenditure, receipts, etc. are maintained in the youth's/young adult's case record and are not forwarded to the State office. Questions about eligibility or allowability of specific expenditures may be directed to the state LINKS Coordinator at 919-733-4622. Both authorizations and requests for reimbursement should be signed by the worker's supervisor. Copies of these forms should be maintained in the county LINKS program file in case of .

Care should be taken to assure a clean audit trail for use of all LINKS funds. LINKS funds, including the program allocation and LINKS Special Funds, may only be used for purposes designated in federal statute and the North Carolina State Plan.



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Counties are encouraged to set up a specific budget line item using county funds that are used solely for advancing these funds and recapturing reimbursement. The amount of funds needed for reimbursement purposes would depend on the number of youth likely to need the assistance during a single month. For small counties, a line item of \$1500-\$2000 should be adequate for the purpose. For large counties, the account may need to be significantly larger than that, perhaps \$5000-\$8000, to assure that the agency can respond promptly to the youth's needs.

Youth Responsibility

LINKS Special Funds are a resource, not a right. The youth or young adult must help to identify the goals and the barriers to be addressed, must use some of his/her own resources to apply toward resolution of the problems, must participate in the development of a reasonable plan for achieving identified goals, and must demonstrate willingness to assume his or her share of responsibility to work toward resolution of the issues. It is neither helpful nor practical to provide these resources if the youth refuses to be involved in problem identification, planning or goal achievement in a meaningful way. However the agency should remain ready to assist as soon as the youth or young adult expresses and demonstrates willingness to handle some or all of this responsibility.

Identification of Eligible Pool of Youth

All youth in foster care ages 13-18 and youth on Voluntary Placement Agreements may be eligible for these funds unless they have reserves of more than \$10,000. In addition, discharged youth who were in foster care as teenagers and who are not yet 21 may be eligible. Once eligibility is determined, the county may preregister all or some of the youth as they prefer.

In accordance with the federal statutory requirements, North Carolina has made a commitment to locate young adults who aged out of foster care after December 11, 1999 at age 18 and who have not yet turned 21 years of age. These youth must be informed of the availability of LINKS Special Funds and other agency services for which they may be eligible. Agencies must use and document reasonable efforts to locate and contact these young adults, such as by contacting known friends, siblings and other family members, former foster parents or social workers, or other adults who may have contact with the young adult. If the young adult applies for LINKS services, the agency is required to offer those services. LINKS Special Funds can be used to offset the costs of those services as well as to purchase or contract for other needed goods or services.

If you have questions about this letter or about the procedures for reimbursement for LINKS Special Funds, please contact Joan McAllister, NC LINKS Coordinator at 919-733-4622.

Sincerely,



Charles C. Harris, Chief
Children's Services

CCH/jsm

Cc: Pheon Beal
Gary Fuquay
Paul LeSieur



CS-25-2001

