

TO: COUNTY DIRECTORS OF SOCIAL SERVICES

SUBJECT: Voluntary Placement Agreements for Youth
Over the Age of 18 but Less than 21

Availability of Funds for Goods and Services for
Youth Discharged from Foster Care Between the
Ages of 16 and 21

DATE: March 10, 2000

EFFECTIVE DATE: Immediate

ATTENTION: County Directors
Services Supervisors

The purpose of this letter is to inform you of changes that can positively impact your agency's ability to serve older youth who have been discharged from agency custody or who will be discharged from foster care and who remain in need of services. State funding is now available for youth who have been discharged from care, who are now between the ages of 18 and 21, and who need to re-enter care under a voluntary placement agreement. Additionally, funding is now available to assist youth between the ages of 17 through 20 who have been discharged (or are soon being discharged) from foster care.

State Funding for Voluntary Placement Agreements

DSS policy is being changed. In the past, our policy has stated that the only way a youth could remain on a Voluntary Placement Agreement past the age of 18 was by signing a VPA on his or her eighteenth birthday. This policy has resulted in a number of young people leaving agency custody at 18 with poorly established plans and being denied re-entry into foster care when they realized that they needed further assistance. For this reason, the Division has changed its policy regarding VPA's for youth who have passed their eighteenth birthday but who have not yet reached their 21st birthday.

Effective immediately, youth who have been discharged from agency custody between the ages of 16 and 21 and who, between the ages of 18 and 21 wish to re-enter DSS placement authority under a Voluntary Placement Agreement shall be allowed to do so if:

- The county approves and enters into the agreement with the young adult, based equally on the county's willingness to partially support the cost of placement and the youth's demonstrated willingness to accept responsibility for the use of the placement; and
- The young adult is enrolled in or is accepted as a full-time student for enrollment for the next school term in a program that leads to a high school diploma or equivalent; a

course of college study; or a course of vocational or technical training designed to achieve gainful employment; and

- The young adult is placed in a licensed foster care facility. If the young adult is involved in a residential educational or vocational program, the young adult shall have his or her placement resource available for weekend visits and vacations. A portion of the board payments may be used by the care provider to help the young adult with expenses associated with the educational/vocational program.

State foster home funds should be used to support 50% of the cost of placement up to the Standard Board Rate. Young adults who are participating in Voluntary Placement Agreements are included in the allocation of funds for county Independent Living programs. The agency shall provide or arrange for an assessment of young adults participating in Voluntary Placement Agreements in order to determine the young adult's needs for skill training or for purchase of goods or services that are necessary to facilitate his or her successful transition to adulthood. Independent Living funds are available to defray the costs of these goods and services.

Independent Living Trust Fund

Funding is now available to county Departments of Social Services to provide services and assistance to youth ages 17 through 20 years of age who are eligible for Independent Living Services and have been discharged from DSS custody. Funding is available by application and requires agency compliance with audit procedures to assure that the funding is used properly.

Source of Funding

This funding is re-deposited IV-E Independent Living funds that were not spent at the end of the funding cycle. These are 100% funds, and do not require a county match.

Use of Funds

Since the funding is limited, the primary focus of the Independent Living Trust Fund will be to provide funds for purchase of goods or services that are needed to help the youth to successfully transition to adulthood. The funding may not be used for room or board, nor for any other expense specifically prohibited under the Independent Living Initiative. However, it is a resource for tuition, school texts, work equipment, fees, uniforms and work clothing, household items, car insurance, bus passes, furniture, and a wide variety of other non-prohibited items. Spending is limited to \$500 per individual per state fiscal year.

The county is responsible for applying for reimbursement based on a maximum amount of \$500 per eligible youth who is in the process of being discharged, or who has been discharged and is in need of assistance. For every youth recipient, the county and youth must complete a written assessment and plan, and the plan must justify the expenditures. Agencies should maintain receipts in the case file for audit purposes.

For example, if a youth is being discharged and does not have sufficient furniture, the plan might be for the county to provide the youth with reimbursable funds that the youth can use at a local used furniture store for him to buy what he needs. The social worker could use the opportunity to help evaluate the planned purchases. Another youth may need a set of tools for a mechanics course to be self-sufficient. Reimbursable county funds could be used to purchase the tools outright, or to split the expense with the youth to help assure the youth's investment in the vocational plan. In another example, an agency can be reimbursed for providing cash incentives for youth to participate in post-discharge interviews, or to pay for expenses involved when discharged youth participate in ongoing Independent Living activities.

Procedure

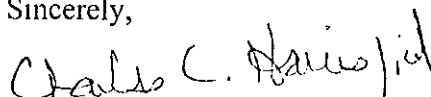
1. The county DSS staff will determine the number and identity of youths ages 17 through 20 who have been discharged or are going to be discharged from agency custody or from a voluntary placement agreement within the next 3 months. In order to be eligible, youth must meet **all** of the following criteria:
 - The youth is now 17 through 20 years of age.
 - The youth was in DSS custody between the ages of 16 and 21.
 - The youth is willing to be engaged in an assessment and planning process with the agency to determine their needs and to develop an appropriate plan.
 - The youth has applied for voluntary services to assist with the transition.
 - The youth's assessment indicates a need for goods or services for which they are not otherwise eligible through other funding sources, and which are likely to assist them in making a successful transition to adult living.
 - Needed expenditures are allowable under Independent Living guidelines.
2. Submit the completed, attached application listing all young persons who currently meet all the above criteria to:

Joan McAllister
Independent Living Services Coordinator
NC Division of Social Services
325 North Salisbury Street
MSC #2408
Raleigh N.C. 27699-2408
3. Additional applications may be submitted periodically as other youths become eligible.
4. Substitutions for approved youths are not allowed. If a young person is approved and does not use the **funding**, the money remains in the trust fund.
5. Requests for \$500 should only be made if this represents the actual expenditure. Future maximum grant amounts will depend on the amount of funds that are deposited to the Trust account, and the rate of spending. This determination will be made annually.

6. **Reporting Instructions.** You will need to use Fund ID "K" on the Part IV of the DSS 1571. Costs will be tracked in the Services Section on the XS335 and XS337 under application code 345 with the description "ILP 100% Aftercare". Reimbursement is 100% Federal funds. (Note: Application Code 345 will not appear on the XS325.)

Please assure that all members of your agency's Children's Services staff are fully informed of these changes and that adequate copies are distributed. Questions may be directed to Joan McAllister in the Policy and Planning Team of the Children's Services Section, (919) 733-4622.

Sincerely,



Charles C. Harris
Chief, Children's Services

cc: Gary Fuquay
Jim Knight
Kevin FitzGerald
Melinda Hamrick
Nancy Coston
Karen Anderson
Local Support Managers

