



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

325 North Salisbury Street • Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-2409
Mail Service Center 2409

Michael F. Easley, Governor
Carmen Hooker Odom, Secretary

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

November 24, 2003

Dear County Director of Social Services

Re: Education Training Vouchers

It has been several months since we have updated your agency about the Education Training Vouchers. (See Dear Director Letter of July 3, 2003). The purpose of this letter is to inform you about the status of this resource, to review eligibility criteria, and to clarify procedures for accessing this resource. **Note: no county funds are needed to access these vouchers.**

The Education Training Vouchers are now operational, and are being administered by the Orphan Foundation of America (OFA). Several students are already enjoying the benefits of their scholarship vouchers. Many more of our students are eligible and are either unaware of the resources or are unsure how to apply for a voucher. Please share the attachment describing the program with your staff and eligible young adults.

Student Eligibility:

- The student must be eligible for the NC LINKS program
- The student must now be between the ages of 18-21. Eligibility may continue for students who were receiving vouchers on 21st birthday and are continuing to make satisfactory progress- up to age 23.
- The student either aged out of foster care or was adopted from foster care after his/her 16th birthday. (finalization)
- The student must have finished High School or have their GED and must be in a full or half-time post-secondary program or are accepted for next term. The student must be making acceptable progress toward graduation to continue getting the grant.
- The student must be a citizen or documented alien (eligible for other federal benefits)
- The student may not have more than \$10,000 in personal reserves

County DSS Responsibility

The county DSS is responsible for certifying eligibility and referring the student to OFA. This is done via the internet by going to www.statevoucher.org, clicking on the outline of North Carolina, and then clicking on the link in the left hand (blue) column marked Social Worker Youth Referral Form. Each county has a user name, which is nc-countyname, such as nc-NewHanover or nc-Durham. The password is a unique four-digit number. The county must use its password to refer its students. These passwords are available from Joan McAllister, State LINKS. To make a referral, the social worker enters the data requested onto the referral form. The referral certifies that the young adult meets all of the eligibility criteria. All of the fields that are marked with a star require an entry. The “unrequired” information is also very helpful to OFA’s ability to work individually with the student, so please fill out the form as completely as possible. Once the information is entered, the social worker should click on the “continue” button, which automatically sends the information to OFA.

The Youth’s Responsibility

The student is responsible for applying for the voucher, for providing the needed information, and for maintaining contact with OFA. This is accomplished by applying at the same web site www.statevoucher.org, but the student uses the application form that is on the main page. Do not give the student the agency password, which would provide access to information on other students from your county.

No grant is awarded until the student actually applies for the Education Training Voucher. Once the student application is received, OFA will process it quickly to determine the amount of unmet financial need up to \$5000. If the student applies for the voucher prior to the agency referral, OFA will be in contact with the agency to determine the student’s eligibility.

The student must have a computer and email address while they are in college. ETV funds can be used to pay for these costs and should be included in the student’s budget submission with the application. Part of OFA’s contract and mission is to maintain contact with the student. They will match students with appropriate “e-mentors” who have interests in common with them. These e-mentors will maintain regular contact with the students and will provide both encouragement and “care packages” several times a year, things that are in keeping with the individual student’s interests and needs.

In order to continue receiving the grant, the student must maintain ‘satisfactory progress’ in school, which means that their grades are adequate to the requirements of the certificate or degree. Normally this would mean a C average or better in courses critical to completion. If a student’s performance drops below the “satisfactory” level, he or she will be allowed to continue to receive the grant for one more grading period, in hopes that performance will improve. OFA can be very helpful in helping the struggling student get assistance so that he or she can get back on track academically.

The attached information is provided for distribution to your staff. If you have questions, please contact Joan McAllister, State LINKS Coordinator, at (919) 733-2580 or by email at Joan.McAllister@ncmail.net.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jo Ann Lamm". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Jo Ann Lamm, Program Administrator
Family Support and Child Welfare Services Section

JAL/jm

Cc: Pheon Beal
Sherry Bradsher
Family Support and Child Welfare Services Management Team
Children's Programs Representatives

FSCWS-34-03

Education Training Vouchers

Legislation authorizing Education Training Vouchers was a separate section of the Chafee Act. Funding was authorized effective October of 2003: the NC Share was \$737,000. Use of these funds has no impact on LINKS county allocations or LINKS Special Funds except that young adults receiving ETV's should use these funds first for eligible educational expenses rather than charge the Scholarship Funds. This will help the Scholarship Funds to last longer and to serve more youth. No county funds are needed to access ETV funds.

Qualifying schools

The student must be attending a post-secondary institution of higher learning or post-secondary vocational training school. The school must be accredited by a nationally accredited agency or association or has been granted pre-accreditation status. The school must have been operating at least 2 years. The school must be eligible to accept Pell Grants on behalf of their students. School must offer a 4-year bachelor's degree, a two year associates degree or a one year state or nationally recognized certificate.

Eligibility of Students

- The student must be eligible for the NC LINKS program
- The student must now be between the ages of 18-21. Eligibility may continue for students who were receiving vouchers on 21st birthday and are continuing to make satisfactory progress- up to age 23.
- The student either aged out of foster care or was adopted from foster care after his/her 16th birthday. (finalization)
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Eligible costs

The amount of the grant is based on the Cost of Attendance, which is the total amount it will cost a student to go to school, usually expressed as a yearly figure. Includes:

- Tuition and Fees
- On-campus room and board or a housing and food allowance for off campus students
- Allowances for books, supplies, transportation, loan fees for the 2003-04 school year
- If applicable, dependent care
- Costs related to a disability, e.g. eyeglasses, tutoring, adaptive software, etc.
- Miscellaneous expenses, including rental or purchase of a personal computer and internet service
- Reasonable costs for study-abroad programs

The student's cost of attendance is determined and evaluated with their existing financial award in order to determine how much money they can get. A student may receive both the Pell Grant and the ETV, which combined are equal to or less than the cost of attendance. **Note: A student is not required to be participating in a CARS/VPA to qualify for this assistance.**

Procedures:

Student Application: The student applies on line over the internet. The web address is www.statevoucher.org. Once into the web site, the student should click on the North Carolina outline to get to our home page and the application form. The student is required to fill out the application, to submit a brief essay about their future plans, and to send a copy of their financial award letter to OFA. The application includes a budget, contact information for the DSS as well as the student's interests. Note: the student will need his or her own email account while in college, since contact from OFA and volunteer mentors will be primarily over the internet.

This web site has a number of "links" to other valuable information that can be accessed by clicking on the "blackboard". Information on other scholarship information, study habits, budgeting, supports for former foster youth, etc. are available.

Referral from agency: The county should refer their eligible young adults using the same web site. Click on the Social Worker Student Referral form (left column). Your user ID is **nc-** and your county name (e.g. nc-Dare); the password is a unique 4 digit number, available from either OFA or the state LINKS coordinator. It is important that social workers in foster care and adoptions be aware of this resource and be assisted to complete these referrals.

Administration: All of the ETV scholarships are being administered by Orphan Foundation of America. The Foundation will send checks directly to third party providers or, in rare circumstances, directly to the youth for approved budgeted expenses.

For more information, contact Joan McAllister, State Coordinator of NC LINKS at (919)-733-2580 or by email at Joan.McAllister@ncmail.net.