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ACHIEVING PERMANENCY FOR OLDER YOUTH: WORKING WITH YOUTH 14-17

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ACHIEVING PERMANENCY FOR OLDER YOUTH: WORKING WITH YOUTH 14-17

13.1 Introduction

Permanency should be the goal for every child regardless of age. While there may be delays or challenges to achieving permanency, efforts to establish permanent connections for all children in foster care continue. Virginia practice and philosophy regarding older youth in care includes a strong focus on the need for permanent connections to responsible adults, as well as improved skills to manage adulthood in a successful manner at the point at which they exit foster care.

Serving youth over the age of 14 in foster care involves the same planning, procedures, and services that are provided with all youth in foster care and their families. Local departments of social services (LDSS) shall continue to focus on achieving permanency for the older youth with a sense of urgency. In addition, the LDSS shall assist the older youth in preparing for and transitioning to adulthood.

Research shows that youth who age out of the foster care system without a permanent family are more likely to experience poverty, homelessness, early parenthood, incarceration, and mental health and medical problems. They also often lack the necessary educational and life skills to be successful adults. These challenges result in significant economic, emotional, and social costs for the youth and society.

To improve outcomes for older youth, it is essential to have an integrated approach to both achieve permanent connections, ideally with a family which will be a lifelong resource for the youth, and also to offer comprehensive preparation for adulthood for all children and youth in foster care. LDSS should focus their efforts on finding families, establishing permanent lifelong connections with significant adults, and providing services and supports in areas such as education, employment, finances, health, housing, and home management.

13.2 Framework

The LDSS shall meet federal and state legal requirements and should use sound practice principles to achieve desired outcomes and to guide decision making in providing foster care services for children of all ages and their families.

13.2.1 Practice principles

Fundamental principles inherent in Virginia's Children's Services System Practice Model guide service delivery:

First, we believe in youth and family-driven practice.

- Older youth are treated with dignity and respect.
- Older youth and families have the right to say what will happen to them. Their voices are heard, valued, and considered in all decision making, including safety, permanency, and well-being as well as in service and educational planning and in placement decisions. Each youth's right to self-determination is respected within the limits of established community standards and laws.
- Older youth and family members are the experts about their own families. It is our responsibility to understand youth and families within the context of their own family rules, traditions, history, language, and culture.
- Older youth have a right to connections with their biological family and other caring adults with whom they have developed emotional ties.
- We engage older youth and families in a deliberate manner. Through collaboration with youth and families, we develop and implement creative, individualized solutions that build on their strengths to meet their needs. Engagement is the primary door through which we help older youth and families make positive changes.

Second, we believe all older youth need and deserve a permanent family and lifelong adult and family connections.

- Lifelong family connections are crucial for older youth and adults. It is our responsibility to promote and preserve kinship, sibling, and community connections for each youth. We value past, present, and future relationships that consider the youth's hopes and wishes.
- Permanency for older youth is best achieved through a legal relationship such as parental custody, adoption, or kinship care. Placement stability is not permanency.

- Planning for older youth is focused on the goal of preserving their family, reunifying their family, or achieving permanency with another family.

- Permanency planning for children and youth begins at the first contact with the children's services system. We proceed with a sense of urgency until permanency is achieved. We support families after permanency to ensure that family connections are stable.

13.2.2 Legal citations

The legal framework and specific requirements for providing services for youth in foster care are delineated in federal and state law. See the law for complete language by clicking on the citation.

- **The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 (P.L. 113-183)**

  - Requires states to develop and implement policies and procedures related to children and youth at risk of sex trafficking as well as policies and procedures encouraging normalcy for children in foster care, supporting successful transitions to adulthood for older children in foster care, and working towards achieving permanency for children entering or at risk of entering foster care. The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act requires that:

    - Children age 14 and older are included in the development of their foster care plan;

    - Children age 14 and older are given the opportunity to choose up to two (2) members to be part of their case planning team;

    - The foster care plan for a child age 14 and older include a document identifying the youth's rights pertaining to education, health, visitation, court participation, and the right to stay safe and avoid exploitation. The plan shall also include a signed acknowledgement by the youth that the document was provided to them and that those rights have been explained in an age-appropriate way;

    - Children age 14 and older receive a free annual copy of their credit report and assistance to fix any inaccuracies; and,

    - All youth aging out of foster care, unless they have been in care less than six months, be given or have certain documents including their social security card, a driver's license or state identification, certified birth certificates and a copy of their medical records. All

youth aging out of foster care shall also be provided the Proof of Foster Care form printed on agency letterhead.

- **John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999**

  - Establishes the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP). The 2018 Family First Prevention Services Act amended this legislation by renaming the program to John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee Program) and making changes to the program purposes and populations of youth eligible to receive services. The Chafee program provides federal funds to help eligible youth:

    - Transition to self-sufficiency by providing services such as assistance in obtaining a high school diploma, career exploration, vocational training, job placement and retention, training in daily living skills, training in budgeting and financial management skills, prevention of substance use disorder, and preventive health activities (including smoking avoidance, nutrition education, and pregnancy prevention).

    - Receive the education, training, and services necessary to obtain employment.

    - Prepare for and enter post-secondary training and educational institutions.

    - Provide personal and emotional support to youth through mentors and the promotion of interactions with dedicated adults.

    - Provide financial, housing, counseling, employment, education, and other appropriate support and services to former foster care recipients between 18 and 23 years of age to complement their own efforts to achieve self-sufficiency and to assure that program participants recognize and accept their personal responsibility for preparing for and then making the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

  - Establishes the Education and Training Voucher Program

    The Promoting Safe and Stable Families amendments to the Chafee Act of 2001 established the Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) Program. It provides federal and state funds to help foster youth with expenses associated with college and post-secondary vocational training programs.

- Clarifies that independent living activities should not be seen as an alternative to permanence for children/youth and can be provided concurrently regardless of permanency goal.

- Imposes penalties for misuse of funds or non-compliance with data reporting requirements.

- Increases accountability and performance standards for states in providing independent living services and improving outcomes.

The Chafee Program and ETV focus on collaborating and coordinating independent living services with other federal, state and community based agencies and providers that serve youth. There are six outcomes used for the purpose of evaluating efforts in preparing youth for adulthood, self-sufficiency, and interdependence as they transition from foster care.

The six outcomes are:

- Youth financial self-sufficiency;
- Youth educational (academic or vocational) attainment;
- Youth positive connections with adults;
- Experience with homelessness among youth;
- High-risk behavior among youth; and,
- Youth access to health insurance.

- **National Youth in Transition Database**

  Federal regulation requires states to report specific information in the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) (45 CFR 1356.80 through 1356.86). States are required to report two types of information beginning October 1, 2010. This data includes:

  - Outcomes on cohorts of youth who are aging out and have aged out of foster care.

  - Independent living services that youth receive that have been provided and/or paid for by Chafee agencies (i.e. LDSS and United Methodist Family Services (UMFS) Project LIFE.)

- **Foster care services**

  - § 63.2-905

- Independent living services
  - § 63.2-905.1
- **Foster care and transition plans for youth over age 14**
  - § 16.1-281
  - § 63.2-905.1
  - Social Security Act, Title IV, § 475 (5) (H) [42 USC 675]

13.2.3 Outcomes

The LDSS shall strive to achieve the same outcomes for older youth in foster care as any other youth, as required in the federal Child and Family Services Review. Some specific outcomes and specific measures are listed below:

Outcome 1: Children have permanency in their living situations.

- More children leave foster care and achieve permanency.
- Children achieve permanency with shorter lengths of stay.
- Increased timeliness to permanency.
- Fewer placement moves and disruptions.
- Fewer children in out-of-home care.
- More children placed in family-based care.
- More children placed in relative foster homes.
- Fewer children placed in residential care.
- Fewer children re-enter out-of-home care.

Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

- More children in foster care placed in close proximity to families and communities.
- More children in foster care placed with their siblings.

In addition, federal regulations require the tracking of outcomes for cohorts of youth in foster care who are aging out and have aged out of foster care. The six NYTD outcome areas include:

- Youth financial self-sufficiency.
- Youth education (academic or vocational) attainment.
- Youth positive connection with adults.
- Experience with homelessness among youth.
- High risk behavior among youth.
- Youth access to health insurance.

13.3 Clarification of terms

Several terms are used in serving older youth that sound similar but are distinct and should not be used interchangeably.

- "Independent living arrangement" means that a youth is living independently under a supervised arrangement. A youth in an independent living arrangement is not supervised 24 hours a day by an adult. The youth is provided with opportunities of increased responsibility; such as paying bills, assuming leases, and working with a landlord. Examples include living in one's own apartment or living in a college dorm.
- "Independent living goal" means a planned program of services designed to assist persons who are currently or formerly in foster care between the ages of 18 and 21 in preparing for adulthood.
- "Independent living services" are services and supports that are designed with and provided to the youth. They build upon the strengths and meet the unique needs of the youth in preparing for adulthood.
- "Life skills" (also known as "independent living skills") are skills the youth develops to achieve self-sufficiency and interdependence. These skills prepare and enable the youth to be successful in adulthood.
    - "Self-sufficiency" means the youth becomes skilled in accomplishing and being responsible for daily life tasks.
    - "Interdependency" means the youth becomes skilled in being resourceful and connected with others to meet his or her needs and to contribute to society.

- These terms all represent different, and sometimes complementary, strategies for helping the youth prepare throughout their journey and successfully transition to adulthood.

All older youth need to develop self-sufficiency and interdependency skills in preparation for adulthood, regardless of their permanency goal or living arrangement. Older youth in foster care may live in a variety of placements (e.g., relative homes, foster homes, group homes, residential facilities, or independent living arrangements.) They remain eligible for independent living services, regardless of placement type or permanency goal.

13.4 Achieving permanency for older youth

Permanence is both a value and a goal of practice. For youth to be successful in adulthood, they should leave the foster care system in a planned manner that connects them to a lifelong family.

Youth tend to operate in the realm of concrete thinking and permanence is an abstract idea. How a youth feels about his current situation will influence their decision, especially when they are not involved in the planning of their own permanency goals. It is imperative that the service worker uses work practices that rely on respectful family and youth engagement, strength-based approaches, team planning and decision making and the use of relevant, structured assessments.

The priority for LDSS and the youth's team shall be establishing permanency for the older youth. Permanency involves finding a permanent family and establishing enduring family relationships and lifelong connections with adults who are significant to the older youth.

The permanency goal for older youth shall be return home with custody returned to the parent or prior custodian. If reunification is not possible, then adoption by a relative or non-relative, or placement with subsequent transfer of custody to a relative shall be pursued based on the best interests of the youth. If these priority goals are not in the child's best interest, an alternative goal may be used, although these goals do not achieve permanency for the child (see Section 11).

Conducting diligent searches for relatives and establishing enduring family connections and lifelong connections with significant adults are essential from the day a youth first enters foster care and shall continue throughout the youth's time in care (see Section 2.5 and Section 2.6). Youth entering care at an older age should be involved in discussions about permanent adult connections and when ready, the youth should be engaged in ongoing discussions about adoption. If relatives or other individuals who are significant to the youth had been located in the past but ruled out as a placement resource, the service worker should continue to discuss options for these individuals to have permanent connections with the youth. This includes remaining in contact with these relatives, or other individuals who had been ruled out, to explore other roles they may take in supporting the youth. It is also important to revisit the reasons why

individuals were ruled out as a permanent placement for a youth as changes to those circumstances over time may make the individual a feasible placement in the future (See Section 9.6 for information about the Permanency Pact and its use in building kin connections). The service worker should utilize a person locator tool to locate relatives and significant adults as potential permanent connections for the youth.

Older youth should be connected with at least one adult before leaving foster care, and preferably several adults. These adults are individuals the youth can go to for advice or guidance when making decisions or resolving problems, or for companionship when celebrating holidays, special occasions, and personal achievements. The adults should be easily accessible to the youth, either by telephone or in person. They may include, but are not limited to, adult relatives, parents, foster parents, neighbors, family friends, coaches, and teachers. These adults should be in addition to the youth's spouse, partner, boyfriend, girlfriend, and current caseworker.

Services to find a permanent family and to establish lifelong connections for the older youth should be provided regardless of the youth's permanency goal, or previous unsuccessful attempts to establish enduring connections, or the youth's own perceived need for permanency. While most youth try to assert their independence before or at age 18, they will need permanent adult connections after leaving foster care, as well as the option to resume foster care services.

13.4.1 Maintaining connections with siblings and birth families

When older youth in foster care have siblings, all reasonable steps shall be taken to place the youth and siblings together in the same resource or permanent home. When placing the siblings together is not in the best interest of the youth or sibling, a plan that establishes frequent and regular visitation or communication shall be made to help the youth maintain sibling connections (see Section 6.4).

The service worker, in collaboration with the youth, should continually re-examine and maintain the "optimal level of connectedness" with the youth's birth family[1]. Family situations change over time and the youth's ability to maintain safety increases as the youth matures physically. Since most youth return home when they leave foster care, the service worker should help the youth while he or she is in foster care identify ways to connect positively with the birth family, as appropriate, and to make wise decisions while at home.

13.5 Life skills assessment

A life skills assessment shall be conducted to assess the strengths and needs of youth in preparation for adulthood. The assessment shall be driven by the youth. It should be

[1] "Optimal level of connectedness" is part of family reunification definition by Pine, Warsh, and Maluccio. Research Roundup on Family Reunification, March 2002, Child Welfare League of America.

strength-based and collaboratively involve the birth parents and caretakers of the youth. Information from the assessment should complement the information obtained during the comprehensive child and family assessment (see Section 5), of which this assessment is one component.

Federal regulation describes a life skills assessment as "a systematic procedure to identify a youth's basic skills, emotional and social capabilities, strengths and needs to match the youth with appropriate independent living services. A life skills assessment may address knowledge of basic living skills, job readiness, money management abilities, decision-making skills, goal setting, task completion, and transitional living needs" (45 CFR 1356.83(g)(20)).

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) recommends use of the Casey Life Skills Assessment (CLSA), however LDSS may choose to use another appropriate assessment tool that identifies the youth's skills, capabilities, strengths and needs as stated above. The Daniel Memorial Independent Life Skills Assessment has been verified to meet these requirements. Any other life skills assessment instrument or strategy needs to be approved by VDSS prior to use. The independent living needs assessment shall be reported to the federal government as a service provided to older youth.

13.5.1 The CLSA

The CLSA is a free tool that assesses the behaviors and competencies youth need to achieve their long term goals. It aims to set youth on the way toward developing healthy, productive lives. Examples of the life skills CLSA helps youth self-evaluate include:

- Maintaining healthy relationships;
- Work and study habits;
- Planning and goal setting;
- Using community resources;
- Daily living activities;
- Budgeting and paying bills;
- Computer literacy; and,
- The youth's permanent connections to caring adults.

To preview the CSLA, click this link: CLS Assessment.

13.5.2 Who benefits from the CLSA

CLSA is designed to be used in a collaborative conversation between an educator, mentor, service worker, or other service provider and any youth between the ages of 14 and 21. It is appropriate for all youth regardless of whether they are in foster care, live with biological parents, or reside in a group home.

13.5.3 Frequency of administering CLSA

The assessment must initially be administered:

- For youth in foster care, **within 30 days** after the youth's 14th birthday.
- For youth entering foster care after the age of 14, **within 30 days** after the youth's entry into the system.

The assessment must be re-administered at least once every 12 months for youth age 14 and older and prior to the annual update of the Transition Plan.

Completion of the assessment must be documented in OASIS on the IL checklist.

13.5.4 What happens after youth takes assessment

Youth typically will require 30-40 minutes to complete the CLSA. Their answers are available instantly for the adult to review with the youth in a strength based conversation that actively engages the youth in the process of developing goals.

The CLSA also offers a resource guide that helps when working with the youth to gain the skills that they need for successful transition to adulthood.

13.6 Independent living services for youth age 14 and older

All youth age 14 and older shall be provided independent living services for a planned period of time, based on the life skills assessment. The services shall assist the youth in developing the skills necessary for self-sufficiency and interdependence in adulthood, regardless of the youth's permanency goals (§ 63.2-905).

Independent living services include a broad range of activities, education, training, and direct services. The following types of services and skills development shall be considered to help the youth prepare for self-sufficiency: counseling, education, housing, employment, and money management. Access to essential documents, such as assistance in obtaining a birth certificate or Social Security card, and other appropriate services shall be provided consistent with the needs assessment (§§ 16.1-228 and 63.2-100). Additional services and skill development include daily living, social relationships, and communication skills.

As required by Chafee Program, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in consultation with other stakeholders developed outcome measures to assess the performance of each state and the effectiveness of its independent living services. The NYTD was established via regulation in 2008 and implemented October 2010. The Chafee Program and federal regulation requires states to report specific information to NYTD (45 CFR 1356.80 through 1356.86). In Virginia, all NYTD defined independent living services (including ETV) that are paid for and/or provided by LDSS on behalf of youth **must be documented on the OASIS independent living services screen by the LDSS**.

An independent living service is provided by LDSS if it is delivered by LDSS staff or an agent of the LDSS, including a foster parent, group home staff, or child care institution staff; or provided pursuant to a contract between a local department of social services or VDSS and a provider, agency, or any other entity regardless of whether the contract includes funding for the particular service.

The service worker and youth's team shall consider the types of services listed below for all youth over age 14 and older who are in foster care. Any of these services, as well as any other services and supports the youth requires, shall be provided, if indicated by the comprehensive assessment process and consistent with funding requirements. When a youth receives any of the services listed below, as well as the required life skills assessment, the services shall be identified in OASIS (45 CFR 1356.83(g)(20) through 1356.83(g)(30)).

The Virginia NYTD categories are:

- **Academic support.** Academic supports are services designed to help a youth complete high school or obtain a GED. Such services include the following: academic counseling; preparation for a GED, including assistance in applying for or studying for a GED exam; tutoring; help with homework; study skills training; literacy training; and help accessing educational resources. Academic support does not include a youth's general attendance in high school.

- **Post-secondary education support.** Post-secondary educational supports are services designed to help a youth enter or complete college, and include the following: classes for test preparation, such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT); counseling about college; information about financial aid and scholarships; help completing college or loan applications; or tutoring while in college. The list is not all-inclusive; other supports such as college tours paid for or provided by the agency could fall within this definition.

- **Career preparation.** Career preparation services focus on developing a youth's ability to find, apply for, and retain appropriate employment. Career preparation includes the following types of instruction and support services: vocational and career assessment, including career exploration and planning, guidance in setting and assessing vocational and career interests and skills, and help in

matching interests and abilities with vocational goals; job seeking and job placement support, including identifying potential employers, writing resumes, completing job applications, developing interview skills, job shadowing, receiving job referrals, using career resource libraries, understanding employee benefits coverage, and securing work permits; retention support, including job coaching; learning how to work with employers and other employees; understanding workplace values such as timeliness and appearance; and understanding authority and customer relationships.

- **Employment programs or vocational training**. Employment programs and vocational training designed to build a youth's skills for a specific trade, vocation, or career through classes or on-site training. Employment programs include a youth's participation in an apprenticeship, internship, or summer employment program and do not include summer or after-school jobs secured by the youth alone. Vocational training includes a youth's participation in vocational or trade programs in school or through nonprofit, commercial or private sectors and the receipt of training in occupational classes for such skills as cosmetology, auto mechanics, building trades, nursing, computer science, and other current or emerging employment sectors.

- **Budget and financial management.** Budget and financial management assistance includes the following types of training and practice: living within a budget; opening and using a checking and savings account; balancing a checkbook; developing consumer awareness and smart shopping skills; accessing information about credit, loans and taxes; and filling out tax forms.

- **Housing education and home management training.** Includes assistance or training in locating and maintaining housing, including filling out a rental application and acquiring a lease, handling security deposits and utilities, understanding practices for keeping a healthy and safe home, understanding tenant's rights and responsibilities and handling landlord complaints. Home management includes instruction in food preparation, laundry, housekeeping, living cooperatively, meal planning, grocery shopping and basic maintenance and repairs.

- **Health education and risk prevention.** Health education and risk prevention includes providing information about: hygiene, nutrition, fitness and exercise, and first aid; medical and dental care benefits, health care resources and insurance, prenatal care and maintaining personal medical records; sex education, abstinence education, and HIV prevention, including education and information about sexual development and sexuality, pregnancy prevention and family planning, and sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS; substance use prevention and intervention, including education and information about the effects and consequences of substance use (alcohol, drugs, tobacco) and substance avoidance and intervention. Health education and risk prevention does not include

the youth's actual receipt of direct medical care or treatment of a substance use disorder.

- **Family support and healthy marriage education**. Such services include education and information about safe and stable families, healthy marriages, spousal communication, parenting, responsible fatherhood, childcare skills, teen parenting, and domestic and family violence prevention.

- **Mentoring.** Mentoring means that the youth has been matched with a screened and trained adult for a one-on-one relationship that involves the two meeting on a regular basis. Mentoring can be short-term, but it may also support the development of a long-term relationship.

- **Independent living arrangement.** An independent living arrangement means that the youth is living independently under a supervised arrangement approved by the LDSS or Licensed Child Placing Agency. A youth in independent living is not supervised 24-hours a day by an adult and often is provided with increased responsibilities, such as paying bills, assuming leases, and working with a landlord, while under the supervision of an adult.

- **Room and board financial assistance**. Room and board financial assistance that is paid for or provided by the VDSS, LDSS and/or Children's Services Act (CSA) to assist with a youth's room and board, including rent deposits, utilities, and other household start-up expenses. (Includes the independent living stipend).

- **Education financial assistance.** Education financial assistance is a payment that is paid for or provided by the VDSS and/or LDSS for education or training, including allowances to purchase textbooks, uniforms, computers, and other educational supplies; tuition assistance; scholarships; payment for educational preparation and support services (i.e., tutoring), and payment for GED and other educational tests. This financial assistance also includes vouchers for tuition or vocational education or tuition waiver programs paid for or provided by the VDSS and/or LDSS (ETV program).

- **Other financial assistance.** Other financial assistance includes any other payments made or provided by the VDSS, LDSS, and/or the local Family Assessment and Planning Team (FAPT) to help the youth live independently.

- **Other financial assistance** (**incentives and stipends for youth**). Monetary incentives or stipends to acknowledge or reward eligible youth who successfully completed:

    - A life skills training;

    - Other independent living services that are designed to help the youth successfully transition to adulthood; and/ or,

- If part of the follow-up population, the NYTD Follow-up Survey.

Incentives and stipends must not exceed what is reasonable and necessary to accomplish the purpose of needing to provide such incentives and/or stipends. The local director or his/her designee must approve in writing all monetary incentives and stipend methods (i.e. gift cards, money cards, certificates, and/or stipends), purpose of incentives/stipends, and the amount paid from the VDSS Chafee Program and/or ETV funds for each youth. Also, youth receiving an incentive/stipend must have a clear understanding of purpose, cash value of incentive/stipend, and sign a document stating that he/she acknowledges receiving the monetary incentive. The document acknowledging youth receipt must be kept in the youth's case record and documented in OASIS as "Other financial assistance" within 30 days from the purchase date. Each transaction for an incentive/stipend must be recorded individually on the Chafee Program Quarterly Report for the applicable report period.

- **Other financial assistance** (**outreach services**). Efforts to attract eligible youth to participate in independent living services and formalized programs (i.e. covering transportation expenses so that eligible youth may attend Independent Living conferences and other youth conferences, meetings, retreats, and workshops designed to help the youth successfully transition to adulthood).

13.7 Preparing youth for adulthood

All youth shall have the opportunity to be engaged in directing their own life and to be engaged in the community around them. In order to provide youth in and transitioning from foster care opportunities to be listened to, to be informed, to be respected and to exert control over their lives, the service worker should:

- Prepare/train youth to lead in the development of their case planning, including permanency planning and transition planning that addresses education and employment goals.

- Provide youth opportunities for leadership and community involvement, including opportunities for advising LDSS and community partners on policy and practice.

- Maintain contact with the youth to find out how they are doing when they leave care so that policy and practice can be improved. [2]

Preparing youth in foster care for adulthood is similar to preparing all children and youth for the transition to adulthood. Successful adults are self-sufficient in accomplishing daily life skills, while also being resourceful and connected with others in meeting their own needs while contributing to society. Regardless of the permanency goal, service

[2] Adapted from Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

workers should deliberately plan and prepare youth over time to be increasingly self-sufficient, resourceful, and contributors to society.

Preparation for adulthood is a life-long process that begins at birth. It initially involves informal learning by observing and participating in day-to-day activities with birth parents and substitute caregivers. Then, as children mature, it includes formal instruction and activities. For older youth, it requires increasing opportunities for them to practice life skills and build competencies with support from caregivers, service workers, and significant others.

During adolescence, the movement to self-sufficiency and resourcefulness is not linear, but rather a dynamic process based on the youth's evolving maturity, strengths, and needs. An adolescent's search for identity and transition to adulthood can be a turbulent process, particularly for youth who have experienced abuse, neglect, separations, and/or trauma in their lives.

Developmentally, adolescents are striving to gain control over their lives. Adults need to provide opportunities for adolescents to practice resolving problems, seeking out and using resources, making decisions, and contributing to society. These are essential skills for self-sufficiency and success in adulthood.[3]

Serving older youth and preparing them for adulthood requires a planned, dynamic, strengths-based process. Service planning and decision making shall be driven by the youth, in collaboration with the youth's family and team. Services shall be based on the strengths and needs of the youth, as identified in the comprehensive assessment. The service worker and youth's team should focus on achieving permanency and ensuring the youth develops the skills necessary for self-sufficiency and interdependency. They should assist the youth in managing the transition to adulthood and then follow up to ensure success.

13.7.1 Youth-driven planning

Youth shall have a central role in all service planning and decision making. Involving the older youth increases his or her motivation to participate in and complete services. It also helps the youth increase self-awareness and learn how to develop goals, use networks, and resolve problems – essential skills for adulthood.

The service worker should encourage and support the youth in taking responsibility for becoming increasingly self-sufficient and interdependent over time. The service worker should help the youth:

- Understand his or her responsibility for developing and achieving a plan;
- Develop personal goals;

[3] Adapted from Illinois Department of Children and Family Services Best Practice Manual, Characteristics of Adolescent Development.

- Identify strengths, interests, and needs; and,
- Use these goals, strengths, and interests to design services, use networks, and access services and resources to meet his or her needs.

13.7.2 Engaging families and working with the youth's team

The service worker should diligently search, pursue, and engage the youth with extended family members and other appropriate individuals the youth defines as significant, while keeping the safety and best interests of the child at the forefront in decision making (see Section 2.5 and Section 2.6). These individuals can provide diverse roles and resources for the youth during and after his or her stay in foster care (see Section 2.4).

The service worker shall engage appropriate family members and other significant individuals to work collaboratively as a team to help prepare the youth for adulthood. Since critical decision points, including goal and placement decisions, are made through Family Partnership Meetings, the LDSS may decide that this team should continue working together as the youth's team to prepare for and transition the youth into adulthood (see Section 2.9).

The youth shall be an active and central participant on the team. The youth shall be provided with the opportunity to identify up to two (2) members of the team who are neither a foster parent of nor a case/service worker of the youth (P.L. 113-183) and who he or she wants to involve with the team to help represent the youth's needs and provide support during the process. One of the individuals selected by the youth may serve, as necessary, as an advocate with respect to normalcy for the youth. The LDSS may only reject the member(s) selected by the youth if there if good cause to believe that the individual(s) would not act in the best interest of the youth.

Team members may include birth parents, siblings, family members, prior custodians, primary caregiver(s), service worker, adult services worker for appropriate older youth, Independent Living coordinator, professionals involved with the youth (e.g., teacher, counselor, coach), service providers, community members (e.g., friend, neighbor, mentor, minister), and any other individuals identified by the youth and family as important.

The service worker and team should actively assist the youth in:

- Assessing strengths, interests, and needs, including life skills;
- Identifying significant adults who may be willing to assist the youth in carrying out identified tasks;
- Identifying services, resources, supports, and networks;
- Developing or enhancing their skills;

- Making decisions;
- Planning and supporting the youth through the transition to adult living; and,
- Maintaining contact and following up after the youth leaves foster care.

13.7.3 Chafee Program Transition Plan (Transition Plan) for youth age 14 and older

All youth age 14 and older, regardless of their permanency goal, shall have a written transition plan personalized to their individual needs based on their life skills assessment; specifying the independent living services, activities, and supports to be provided to help the youth transition to adulthood. The youth shall be involved in the development of the initial transition plan and any revisions or additions made to it. The Chafee Program Transition Plan (hereafter known as the Transition Plan) shall be:

- Youth-driven;
- Based on a formal life skills assessment;
- Developed through a team process; and,
- Coordinated with the Individual Education Program (IEP) developed by the school district for all youth in special education.

The Transition Plan for youth age 14 and older shall be personalized to the individual youth and describe in writing:

- The activities to be undertaken to establish a permanent family and lifelong connections with family members and significant adults.
- The strengths, goals, and needs of the youth, based on the assessment of life skills, and including the areas of counseling, education, housing, employment, and money management skills.
- The specific independent living services to be provided and activities undertaken to assist the youth in meeting these goals and needs, building on the youth's strengths.
- The programs and services to be provided and activities undertaken to help the youth prepare for his or her future life as an adult, including but not limited to, specific options to be pursued in education, career preparation, and work.
- The responsibilities of the child placing agency, the youth, the service provider, and any other involved individuals in achieving the planned services and activities.

- Information on the youth's right to appeal LDSS decisions on services in the Transition Plan (See Section 15.12).

The service worker may use the transition plan template developed by VDSS or the Foster Club's Transition Toolkit to document the youth's transition plan (see below.) Any other transition plan template needs to be approved by VDSS before use.

- The VDSS Chafee Program Transition Plan addresses independent living services, incorporates the domains from the Casey Life Skills Assessment, and complies with state and federal requirements for serving and transitioning older youth.

- The FosterClub's Transition Toolkit is designed for youth and their team of adult supporters to identify their assets and resources and map out a plan for the challenges after foster care.

13.7.3.1 Development and maintenance of the Transition Plan

The Transition Plan shall be printed and attached to the foster care plan which is filed with the court for distribution and placed in the paper case record. The service worker, youth, and youth's team shall implement and modify the Transition Plan over time, while continually assessing the youth's progress.

- The Transition Plan must be completed **within 30 days** of the youth turning 14 years old in foster care or entering foster care when they are 14 years of age and older.

- The Transition Plan shall be updated at least every 12 months or for each Permanency Planning and/or Review Hearing as a best practice. The updated Transition Plan will be submitted at the next scheduled hearing.

- Completion of the Transition Plan shall be documented in OASIS on the IL Checklist.

13.7.4 Youth rights

As a requirement of the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 (P.L. 113-183), youth age 14 and older shall be provided a document that describes certain rights with respect to their care. The LDSS shall be responsible for explaining to the youth his/her rights in an age-appropriate way and obtaining a signature from the youth acknowledging that the youth has received them. A description of the youth's rights follows:

- Appeals: the youth has the right to appeal LDSS decisions regarding the delay, denial or termination of services identified in the transition to independent living plan and foster care plan (See Section 15.12).

- Education: the youth has the right to go to school and get an education that is consistent with his or her age and any special needs. The youth also has the right to stay in the school he or she was enrolled in before coming into foster care if this is in the youth's best interest.

- Health: the youth has the right to be regularly taken to doctors and dentists, including eye doctors, for medical evaluation, medical care, and/or treatment as needed.

- Visitation with siblings: the youth has the right to have regular contact and visitation with siblings, if separated. Contact may include, but not be limited to, face-to-face visits, telephone calls, emails, and video conferencing.

- Court participation: the youth has the right to attend court hearings involving his or her care; be consulted in the development of and any revisions to his or her case and permanency plan. The youth also has the right to tell the judge what is happening to him or her and what the youth wants regarding the plan for permanency.

- Documentation: when exiting foster care, the youth shall be provided with an official or certified copy of the youth's (1) birth certificate; (2) social security card; (3) health insurance information; (4) medical records; (5) driver's license or state-issued identification card; and, (6) Proof of Foster Care form.

- Safety: the youth has the right to be safe and free from exploitation.

The list of youth rights is included in the Rights and Responsibility section of the VDSS Chafee Program Transition Plan template. The completed Transition Plan shall be attached to the printed foster care plan when it is submitted to court for distribution and also placed in the paper case record. The Rights and Responsibilities section and the youth's signature shall be submitted to court, even if an alternative transition plan template is used. This document shall be reviewed and signed at least annually or for each Permanency Planning and/or Review Hearing as a best practice.

13.8 Paying for independent living services

Independent living services are paid for from the LDSS' allocation of the Chafee Program funds. VDSS must approve the LDSS funding application for Chafee Program funds before funds are expended.

Independent living services may also be paid for with CSA funds. CSA establishes a collaborative system of services and funding that is child-centered, family-focused and community-based when addressing the needs of troubled and at risk youth and their families. One of the targeted populations is children and youth for whom foster care services, as defined by § 63.2-905, are being provided.

Foster care services are the provision of a full range of casework, treatment and community services including but not limited to independent living services, for a planned period of time to a child or youth who has been abused or neglected, or in need of services, or a youth or child who has been placed through an agreement between the LDSS and parent(s) where legal custody remains with the parents or guardians, or has been committed or entrusted to an LDSS or licensed child placing agency. Foster care services also include the provision and restoration of independent living services to a person who is over the age of 18 years but who has not reached the age of 23 years who is in the process of transitioning from foster care to self-sufficiency. However, independent living services are not maintenance and cannot be paid for with title IV-E funds.

Access to CSA funds is governed by state and local policies which require multi-agency planning, uniform assessment, utilization review, and authorization of funds. If it is assessed that these funds are needed to access independent living services, the service worker shall refer the youth to the FAPT, in accordance with local Community Policy and Management Team (CPMT) procedures, in order to request funding for services. The LDSS service worker should become familiar and comply with policies established by their local CPMT for access to CSA funding.

13.9 Credit checks and freezes

Identity theft is a national problem and is becoming more common among the foster care population. Children in foster care are at greater risk to become victims of identity theft due to the number of people who have access to their social security numbers and other identifying information. Many times, it is not until the young adult is applying for credit that it is discovered that credit information has been compromised.

With the passage of the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (P.L. 113-183), the age for annual credit checks now begins at 14, thereby allowing LDSS to identify credit problems earlier and provide assistance to the youth in correcting identity theft or other fraudulent use of the youth's identity by others. The Administration of Children and Families (ACF) requires that credit checks be conducted for each foster youth through the three nationwide Credit Reporting Agencies (CRAs) which are Equifax, Experian and TransUnion.

VDSS will provide the youth's credit reports to the LDSS annually following the month of the youth's birthday. The LDSS shall sign the Release of Information and Permission to Run Credit Checks for Minor Child in Foster Care allowing VDSS to conduct the credit check on the child's behalf. The LDSS shall provide the credit reports to the youth

whether or not any fraudulent activity has taken place. These reports will be provided without cost to the youth. A copy of the reports should also be kept in the youth's case record file. The LDSS shall help the youth interpret the reports and resolve any credit problems identified, including negotiating debt incurred and work with the credit bureaus to remove problematic credit information from the report(s).

Refer to the Chafee Program Credit Checks for Foster Youth Guidebook for complete information on VDSS and LDSS responsibilities; procedures to resolve discrepancies for youth under 18; assist youth 18 to 21 with obtaining their credit report, discussing the results of the credit report with youth, and contacting the CRAs to have credit information corrected.

In the event that the LDSS is unable to help the youth in foster care resolve any credit issues, the LDSS should contact the Independent Living Coordinator. The Independent Living Coordinator will provide additional technical assistance as appropriate, refer to an appropriate legal resource as necessary, and/or work with that legal resource to determine the necessity and feasibility of asking the court to appoint an advocate to assist the youth in resolving credit issues.

The provision of the credit reports to the youth should be documented in OASIS as a contact. "Annual Credit Check" will be selected as the purpose of the contact. The steps taken to correct the credit report(s) should also be documented as a contact in OASIS with "Annual Credit Check" selected as the purpose. Additionally, the credit check should be added to the annual IL checklist in OASIS. A hard copy of the credit reports and letters of dispute shall be maintained in the hard copy of in the youth's case file.

In addition to discussing credit checks with youth 14 and older, service workers should also discuss with youth age 14 and 15 whether a credit freeze has been placed on their credit in accordance with Section 4.13. By discussing this with the youth, service workers can help assess if any changes need to be made with the credit and can help prepare the youth to make decisions regarding their identity protection when they turn 16.

13.9.1 Credit freezes and youth 16 and older

Youth who are 16 years of age and older have the authority to make decisions regarding their identity protection. Just as LDSS assist youth in navigating the credit check process, so too should they assist older youth in navigating the credit freeze process.

- For any youth in foster care with an active security freeze at the time of their 16th birthday, the LDSS shall discuss security freeze removal processes and review related options with the youth no later than 90 days after the youth's 16th birthday. If requested by the youth, the LDSS shall assist with submitting a security freeze removal request in the youth's name. Security freeze removal processes and documentation requirements for youth 16 years of age or older (but less than 18 years of age) vary according to each credit

reporting agency (CRA). See Credit Freezes for Children and Youth in Foster Care for additional information.

- For all youth 16 years of age and older, the LDSS shall, during each annual Transition Plan meeting, discuss the status of the security freeze and review options for placing, continuing, or removing the security freeze. When any youth 16 years of age or older with an active security freeze leaves foster care, the LDSS shall provide to the youth and/or family a written record of the PINs assigned by each CRA.

13.10 Transitioning youth over age 16 to adulthood

The service worker and the youth's team should engage the youth over age 16 in discussions about the activities necessary to successfully prepare for and transition to adulthood. These discussions may occur earlier as well, but are of increasing importance when the youth turns 16.

Conversations should include, but are not limited to:

- Describing the purpose and importance of developing a plan for transitioning to adulthood.
- Communicating clear expectations that the youth actively participates in developing the transition to independent living plan, including any individuals they would like involved.
- Exploring any wishes, concerns, or issues the youth identifies that need to be resolved and/or he or she would like included in the plan.
- Referring and transitioning the youth who may become an "impaired adult," if the service worker and adult services worker believe the youth may be eligible for and need supportive services into adulthood (see Section 13.12).

The Transition Plan should:

- Build upon and complement earlier efforts.
- Prepare and transition the youth for adulthood, including but not limited to the following areas:
  - Finding a permanent family.
  - Establishing permanent life-long connections with significant adults.
  - Education plans.
  - Employment plans.

- Plans for obtaining financial self-sufficiency, including information regarding their credit as outlined in Section 13.9.1.

- Ensuring the youth has all necessary documents, at no charge to the youth, to support his transition to adulthood including but not limited to health and education records.

This transition planning should be based on the life skills assessment (see Section 13.5) and part of the service planning for older youth (see Section 13.7). It should be youth-driven, engage the youth's family and youth's team maintain connections with the youth's birth family as appropriate, and identify needed independent living services.

The service worker, youth, and youth's team should update the youth's foster care plan and Transition Plan, if it is a separate document, reflecting the different or additional services to be provided based on the youth's evolving goals, strengths and needs (see Section 13.7.3).

13.10.1 Services available to youth adopted or entering the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP) at age 16 or older

Youth adopted from the foster care system or entering KinGAP at age 16 years and older are eligible for independent living services. These youth are eligible to participate in any independent living programs, clinics, or classes offered by the LDSS, VDSS, or Project LIFE. If there is a fee, the youth or parent will be responsible for payment of the fees required to participate. The youth is not eligible for an independent living stipend. The youth is eligible for the ETV program if criteria are met and the youth was adopted or entered KinGAP at age 16 years or older from the foster care system.

13.11 ETV Program for youth

The purpose of the ETV Program is to fund goods and services designed to assist eligible youth in successfully completing a "post-secondary" educational or vocational training program by covering up to a maximum of $5,000 or the total cost of attendance (whichever is less) per state fiscal year of the following expenses:

- Tuition and fees;
- Room and board;
- Rental or purchase of required educational equipment, materials, or supplies (including computer, software, and computer related accessories);
- Allowance for books and transportation;
- Required residential training related to an educational or vocational program;

- Special study projects related to education;
- Child care; and/or,
- Other related expenses.

Expenses not covered by ETV include:

- Doctors' visits;
- Dentist services;
- Apartment or dorm room set-up (i.e., comforters, sheets, microwave, cleaning supplies); and,
- Food (separate from the school meal plan.)

13.11.1 ETV funding

ETV Program provides federal and state funding to help eligible youth with expenses associated with college and post-secondary vocational training programs. Funding of up to $5,000 per year OR the total cost of attendance per year (whichever is less), per eligible youth. LDSS do not receive $5,000 per youth in their initial allocation because the Virginia ETV program does not receive enough federal and state funds to allocate the full amount per student. Although the ETV program is integrated into the overall purpose and framework of the CFCIP, the program has a separate budget authorization and appropriation from the general program.

13.11.2 Eligible youth

13.11.2.1 Eligible youth ages 14-26 years

Youth ages 14-26 who are eligible to receive vouchers under this program must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Have had their most recent foster care episode provided by the Commonwealth of Virginia;
- Eligible for services under Virginia's Chafee Program, or would otherwise be eligible except that they have reached the age of 23;
- Have received their high school diploma or equivalent, or GED certificate;
- Have applied for financial aid through the post-secondary school or training program, if applicable, they wish to attend or participate in; and

- Make satisfactory academic progress by maintaining at least a cumulative grade point average of 2.0 on a 4.0 scale or have an academic standing consistent with the institution's graduation requirements for the federal student financial aid program. LDSS should monitor all ETV recipients' progress and review grades to ensure compliance prior to disbursing additional ETV funds for each semester.

13.11.2.2 Eligibility for adopted youth and youth in KinGAP

Youth adopted from Virginia's foster care system or entering KinGAP after attaining age 16 are eligible for the ETV Program as long as they meet the same eligibility requirements for foster youth and would have been otherwise eligible for services under Virginia's ILP.

13.11.3 Student application process for LDSS

LDSS should assist youth in completing both their financial aid and ETV forms in order to coordinate funding sources (e.g. federal student financial aid programs, grants, etc.), to maximize the use of ETV funding and to avoid duplication. The following steps are required in processing the application for the student:

- The student's completed application should be processed by the LDSS within two weeks of receiving the student's application.

- A copy of each and every ETV student application completed and approved by the LDSS must be kept in the youth's file along with copies of any and all supporting documents, such as; financial aid award letter, transcripts, grades, progress reports, registration form, and statement of accounts or invoices.

All youth applying for ETV services who will be attending a community college, university, or a vocational program that accepts financial aid must complete a financial aid application prior to receiving an education voucher. The youth's financial aid application shall be filed in the youth's case record. If a youth will be attending a vocational program that does not accept financial aid, the youth is not required to apply.

13.11.4 OASIS Education Screen

The Education Screen within the "IL" tab of OASIS should be reviewed and updated within 30 days of any changes. LDSS should ask the youth about ETV services at the monthly home visits and this information should coincide with the educational services that were provided and entered into OASIS. LDSS should enter the following educational data in OASIS:

- School status;

- Contact person;

- Current school;
- Current grade;
- Last grade completed;
- School address;
- Telephone number;
- STI number;
- Special Education status;
- Service provided;
- Cost of the educational service; and,
- Date last updated.

13.11.5 Higher education criteria

All schools that meet the federal eligibility criteria have been assigned a Title IV school code number. Two websites provide this school code verification and can be searched by state or specific school. If the program is listed, they meet the Higher Education Act criteria and have been assigned a federal school code. Students enrolled in these schools are eligible to receive ETV dollars. The websites are:

- FAFSA.gov
- FinAid.org.

Vocational training programs include youth's participation in vocational or trade programs in school or through nonprofit, commercial or private sectors and the receipt of training in occupational classes for such skills as cosmetology, auto mechanics, building trades, nursing, computer science, and other current or emerging employment sectors. Youth attending vocational programs should be gainfully employed after completion. All vocational programs that foster youth attend should be licensed or accredited facilities. Vocational programs serving foster youth should be in business for 2 years or more. LDSS agencies should request a copy of the business license and file it in the youth's case record.

13.11.6 Cost of attendance

The total cost of attendance is an estimate of what it costs a typical student to attend college. Cost of attendance (COA) does not only cover college tuition but it also takes into account a student's basic living expenses. The government website

www.nces.ed.gov lists the standard tuition and fees plus room and board cost for any institution that receives federal Pell Grant funding. Funding up to $5,000 per year OR the total cost of attendance per year (whichever is less), per eligible youth.

Allowable COA Includes:

- Tuition and fees;
- Equipment;
- Computers;
- Housing;
- Internships;
- Child care;
- Room and Board;
- Healthcare; and,
- Student Loans.

LDSS must use ETV funds for post-secondary educational expenses for eligible youth and document educational services in OASIS as an "Education Financial Assistance." ETV request shall be "directly" related to education. For example, a transportation request for ETV would not support car repairs for youth who lives on campus. This youth does not require transportation services for educational purposes.

No funds shall be distributed directly to the youth, except in special circumstances. The youth should not submit receipts to LDSS without prior approval for payment. Otherwise, only direct payments to vendors (institutions, book stores, computer distributors, licensed child care providers, and rental facilities etc.) shall be allowed.

13.11.7 Serving out of state youth

For a youth in foster care, the local department of social services with placement and care responsibility is responsible for providing a voucher to an eligible youth, even when the youth attends an institution of higher education out of state. In that instance, it is expected that the youth's original state of residence will continue to provide a voucher to the youth for as long as the youth remains eligible for the program. However, former foster care youth who become residents in a different state and who wish to begin attending school there may be eligible to access ETV in the new state. Prior to providing services to a former foster care youth who received

services in another state, contact the VDSS ETV Program Specialist via email for additional assistance.

13.12 Referring and transitioning youth to Adult Services

Adult Services are provided to impaired adults age 18 or older, and to their families when appropriate. "Impaired" means any person whose physical or mental capacity is diminished to the extent that he needs counseling or supervisory assistance or assistance with activities of daily living such as feeding, bathing, and walking, or instrumental activities of daily living such as shopping and money management (Adult Services Chapter 1, Definition Section 1). Adult Services are designed to help the adult remain in the least restrictive setting and function as independently as possible. Services may include case management, home-based care, transportation, adult day services, or assessment for the need for long-term care service such as nursing facilities, Medicaid-funded home and community based waivers, or assisted living facilities.

If the service worker believes an older youth in foster care may be eligible and need supportive services into adulthood, the service worker should discuss the youth's situation with an Adult Services worker. While Adult Services workers work only with adults age 18 and over, early discussions and collaboration between the foster care and Adult Services workers are essential for a successful, smooth, and timely transition for the youth. At minimum, these conversations should begin at age 16, when there is first indication that the youth may require long-term services and supports and may not have the resources or adequate assistance from other sources to meet his or her needs. At age 17, the service worker should begin the application process for adult services.

In addition to collaborating with the Adult Services worker, the foster care worker should:

- Explore the extent to which the youth needs assistance with activities of daily living (ADLs) and instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs) or requires support for mental health, intellectual disability, or cognitive issues.
- Assess the older youth's interest in receiving Adult Services.
- Consult with the youth's family members on their opinions regarding the suitability of these services for the youth.
- Collaborate with the youth's school to ensure that the IEP services are being appropriately accessed and will be available to the youth as long as necessary or to age 23.

For more complete information, see the DARS Adult Services Manual webpage on the DSS internal website. Additional Information may be found under Virginia Department of Social Services Transition for Foster Care Youth with Disabilities.

13.12.1 Assessing for benefits programs and other supports

The foster care services worker should work with an eligibility worker to evaluate the youth's potential eligibility for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Medicaid, and Auxiliary Grant (if the individual will be residing in an assisted living facility or adult foster care home).

Applying for these benefit programs can take several months, so it is critical to begin the process as early as possible. While the Adult Services worker can provide information on these programs, the foster care services worker or independent living coordinator should begin the application process. Starting early provides sufficient time for determining the youth's eligibility for services and for either smoothly transitioning the youth to Adult Services or finding alternative resources for assisting the youth who is not eligible for these services.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) allows youth with disabilities who are eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to file an SSI application up to 90 days before federal foster care payments are expected to end. This change in SSA policy helps older youth in foster care who have disabilities to transition to adult life by helping to ensure that they have income and health benefits in place. For additional information about SSI applications for foster care youth with disabilities see Section DI 25201.011 in the Social Security Administration's Program Operations Manual System (POMS).

Some youth may not have the capacity to meet their health or safety needs or to manage their financial affairs. The foster care service worker should discuss this need with the Adult Services worker early in the transition planning to explore the options available for the youth. The youth may need a guardian and/or conservator appointed or an alternative option instituted to provide substitute decision making for the youth. (See Adult Services Guardianship Chapter for additional information).

13.12.2 Adult Foster Care Services

LDSS often struggle in transitioning youth who have complex service needs, require placements, and will continue to need significant support after they age out of foster care. Placement for a young adult with special needs may be difficult, as most adult long-term care facilities focus on the elderly with significant medical and nursing needs.

An Adult Foster Care (AFC) program may be an appropriate option to meet the needs of these youth in transition. The foster care service worker should discuss with the Adult Services worker whether this program is offered locally. Many LDSS do not offer this program since it is an optional program. Additionally, while some LDSS provide an AFC program, the program may only serve individuals age 60 and older.

If an AFC setting is being explored, the foster care service worker, the eligibility worker, and Adult Services worker should collaborate in developing an appropriate post foster care plan to provide a seamless transition for the older youth from foster care services to an AFC setting. While permanency is the goal for all youth in foster care, early planning needs to occur for these youth, particularly when they do not have permanent families.

A resource parent may be approved as an Adult Foster Care Home or receive dual approval as a resource parent and an Adult Foster Care Home, depending on the needs of the young adult and other children residing in the home. This situation may allow siblings living with a resource parent to remain together if an older sibling with a disability ages out of foster care. Dual approval or conversion to an Adult Foster Care Home may be considered if it is determined to be in the best interest of the young adult, the other children residing in the home, and the resource family.

For more information on AFC, see the Adult Foster Care Manual on the DSS internal website.

13.13 Conducting NYTD outcomes survey with youth at age 17

Public Law 106-169 established the Chafee Program (formerly, CFCIP), providing states with flexible funding to carry out programs that assist youth in making the transition from foster care to self-sufficiency. The law also mandated that ACF develop a data collection system to track the independent living services states provide to youth and develop outcome measures that may be used to assess each state's performance in operating their Chafee Programs. This data collection system is known as NYTD. The law requires ACF to impose a penalty of between one and five percent of the state's annual allotment on any state that fails to comply with the reporting requirements. Pursuant to the regulation (45 CFR 1356.80 through 1356.86), states report data to ACF semiannually.

NYTD requires all states to engage in two data collection activities. First, states are to collect information on each youth who receives independent living services paid for or provided by the state agency that administers the Chafee Program. Second, states are to collect demographic and outcome information on certain youth in foster care whom the state will follow over time to collect additional outcome information. This information allows ACF to track which independent living services states provide and assess the collective outcomes of youth.

The LDSS shall conduct NYTD surveys on specific cohorts of youth in foster care beginning at age 17. A cohort is a group of people who are followed over time. A new cohort of youth begins every three (3) years. The same youth population, survey questions, and longitudinal outcomes data are used nationally.

	Baseline: all youth after 17th birthday (Survey is due within 45 days after attaining 17 years of age)	Follow-up: Same youth On or around the19th birthday	Follow-up: Same youth On or around the21st birthday
Cohort 1	FFY 2011	FFY 2013	FFY 2015
Cohort 2	FFY 2014	FFY 2016	FFY 2018
Cohort 3	FFY 2017	FFY 2019	FFY 2021
Cohort 4	FFY 2020	FFY 2022	FFY 2024

The federal fiscal year (FFY) is October 1 through September 30.

For baseline data, LDSS shall conduct the outcomes survey on all youth in foster care during the 45 days after their 17th birthday in specified years. Thus, youth in foster care who turn 17 years old are surveyed in FFY 2011 for cohort 1, in FFY 2014 for cohort 2, in FFY 2017 for cohort 3, and in FFY 2020 for cohort 4.

The youth who participated and are a part of the baseline survey will be identified by VDSS and confirmed by the ACF. Once confirmed, this information will be communicated to the LDSS Chafee Program and NYTD contacts to ensure that the youth are served in a timely manner. The LDSS shall survey the same youth around their 19th birthday in the applicable reporting period as identified by VDSS (in FFY 2013 for cohort 1; in FFY 2016 for cohort 2; in FFY 2019 for cohort 3;and in FFY 2022 for cohort 4) and when they turn age 21 (in FFY 2015 for cohort 1; in FFY 2018 for cohort 2; in FFY 2021 for cohort 3; and in FFY 2024 for cohort 4). The youth shall be surveyed regardless of whether they continue receiving independent living services or age out of foster care. In the month (usually September) prior to the beginning of a survey year, VDSS will communicate with each LDSS Chafee Program and/or NYTD contact providing a list of youth who need to be surveyed and what survey (i.e. baseline, follow-up at 19, or follow-up at 21) to administer, the time frame for administration of the survey, as well as other pertinent information.

The six outcome areas include:

- Youth financial self-sufficiency;
- Youth education (academic or vocational) attainment;
- Youth positive connection with adults;
- Experience with homelessness among youth;
- High risk behavior among youth; and,
- Youth access to health insurance.

See the NYTD Outcomes Chart that delineates for each outcome, the federal measures, definitions, and legal citations for tracking progress on the cohorts of youth who are aging out and have aged out of foster care.

13.13.1 Engaging youth to participate in the NYTD Outcomes Survey

LDSS should inform and discuss with youth, before they turn age 17, about:

- The purpose of the survey;
- The importance of their participation in the survey as a means to improve the foster care system to better address and meet the needs of youth to be successful in life;
- Who will contact the youth to complete the survey;
- How the survey will be administered;
- When the survey will be administered; and,
- The importance of keeping the agency informed of their current address and contact information for several people who will always know how to contact them after they leave foster care.

Strategies may include:

- "Engaging Youth in NYTD" through the Capacity Building Center for States provides strategies for involving youth in meaningful ways to enhance the collection and use of data, including several examples from various states on how they engage youth in NYTD.
- "Practical Strategies for Planning and Conducting the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) Youth Outcome Survey" provides practical strategies for gathering and maintaining contact information, contacting and engaging youth before after they leave foster care and additional resources for locating youth.

13.13.2 Administering the baseline NYTD Outcomes Survey

The baseline NYTD Outcomes Survey shall be administered within 45 days following the youth's 17th birthday. The survey shall not be administered prior to the youth's 17th birthday.

To administer the baseline survey, the LDSS shall:

- Review SafeMeasures monthly the list of youth that need to be surveyed.

- Contact each youth:
  - Explain the purpose, importance, and process of the survey.
  - Answer any questions or concerns the youth may have.
  - Determine an appropriate time and location to meet the youth to:
    - Obtain his or her assent to participate in the survey. The informed assent is part of the survey document for the baseline population.
    - Administer the survey.
- Provide the youth with the paper forms to fill out the survey (see Survey Form). The youth shall fill out the survey form. If the youth is physically unable to complete the form, but can provide answers to the survey, the service worker may assist the youth by completing the forms. The service worker shall not consult any source other than the youth when administering the survey.
- Enter the data from the paper survey into the NYTD Baseline Survey screen in the OASIS when documenting the monthly visit. The survey data shall be entered exactly as the youth responded to the survey. The service worker or data entry staff shall not "correct" or change the survey responses – even if he or she has knowledge about the youth's benefits, financial circumstances, or health insurance.

13.13.3 Technical assistance

- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) – Children's Bureau in the Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
  - NYTD FAQs
- Surveying youth with special needs and limited English proficiency:
  - "NYTD Technical Assistance Brief #3: Surveying Youth with Special Needs or Limited English Proficiency." June 2010. Discusses accommodations that enable these youth to fully participate in the survey.

13.14 90-day Transition Plan prior to youth turning age 18

The service worker, youth, and youth's team shall create a Transition Plan during the 90 day period immediately prior to the youth choosing to leave foster care or to terminate independent living services any time before his or her 21st birthday (§ 63.2-905.1).

For **all** youth approaching age 18, a Family Partnership Meeting (FPM) or Child and Family Team Meeting (CFTM) should be held to facilitate the development of a 90-day Transition Plan whether there is reason to believe the youth will exit care at 18 or not. The transition planning process should include discussion about the benefits to the youth of continuing to receive services beyond age 18. Information about the Fostering Futures program and the opportunity for the youth to participate upon turning 18 or at any point prior to turning 21 should be provided to the youth in writing.

The Transition Plan shall be directed by the youth, and shall be as detailed as the youth chooses. This plan shall document the specific goals and needs for the youth to successfully transition from foster care services to independence. The planning process should engage the youth's family and the youth's team. See Section 13.7 on service planning for older youth.

The service worker and the youth's team shall help the youth understand the importance of including specific areas in the 90-day Transition Plan. These areas include, but not limited to:

- Transition activities identified in Section 13.10.
- Housing.
- Options for health insurance.
    - Former foster care youth under age 26 years may be eligible to receive Medicaid if they were under the care and responsibility of any state's foster care agency and receiving Medicaid until discharged from foster care upon turning 18 years or older, meet all Medicaid requirements, and are not eligible for Medicaid in another mandatory Medicaid covered group (see Section 12.11.6.1.1). Virginia Code (§ 63.2-905.4) requires LDSS to ensure that any youth in foster care on his 18th birthday is enrolled in Medicaid, unless he objects or is otherwise ineligible.
    - Youth under age 19 who are not eligible for Medicaid may be eligible for the Family Access to Medical Insurance Security (FAMIS) program and receive health insurance until their 19th birthday. The youth must not have other health insurance, and must not have not had health insurance in the past 4 months (some exceptions apply.) There are no enrollment fees or monthly premiums. For some services, there may be a small co-payment. Covered services include: doctor visits, well-baby checkups, hospital visits, vaccinations, prescription medicine, tests, x-rays, dental care, emergency care, vision care, and mental health care.
    - Designating someone to make health care treatment decisions on the youth's behalf, if the youth becomes unable to participate in the decisions and does not have or want a relative who would otherwise be authorized by State law to make these decisions. The youth, after reaching age 18, may

designate a health care power of attorney by completing the form, entitled Virginia Advance Medical Directive, on the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) website, which complies with Virginia law (Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act P.L. 111-148; § 54.1-2995). The LDSS should encourage and assist the youth in seeking guidance from an attorney to address any questions. The youth should provide a copy of this document to his or her physician, close relatives, and/or friends.

- Educational and/or vocational training opportunities
- Local opportunities for mentors.
- Workforce supports and employment services (Social Security Act, Title IV, § 475 (5) (H) [42 USC 675]).

For youth in care at least six months, prior to the youth's leaving care, the LDSS shall also provide the youth with an official or certified copy of the youth's (1) birth certificate; (2) social security card; (3) health insurance information; (4) medical records; (5) driver's license or state-issued identification card; and (6) proof of having been in foster care. Provision of these documents should be documented in OASIS on the IL Checklist.

The 90-day transition planning process should be documented by creating a Transition Plan (see Section 13.7.3) and the FPM or CFTM with the purpose of preventing placement disruption should be entered in OASIS.

13.15 Youth Exit Survey Initiative

In 2017, the Virginia General Assembly directed the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS), in collaboration with the Virginia Commission on Youth, to develop and administer a survey to gather feedback from youth exiting Virginia's foster care system. The purpose of the Youth Exit Survey is to collect information about the relationships, resources, activities, and overall experiences of youth who have been in foster care.

13.15.1 LDSS notifications and administration protocols

Youth may take the Youth Exit Survey on or after their 18th birthday. Eligible youth are grouped according to LDSS agency and birth month. VDSS will provide survey instructions and materials for youth cohorts in regular intervals.

Approximately 60 days before the first day of the month of each youth cohort's 18th birthday, VDSS will provide eligibility lists for each agency to identify youth who will be eligible to take the survey. VDSS will also provide general information flyers and instructional documents.

Approximately 15 days before the first day of the month of each youth cohort's 18th birthday, VDSS will send a reminder email containing instructions for the upcoming cohort and personalized reminder flyers for each eligible youth.

13.15.2 Informing youth about the survey and distributing survey materials

The LDSS shall discuss the Youth Exit Survey with each identified youth and distribute a general information flyer prior to the youth's 18th birthday. The LDSS shall distribute a personalized reminder flyer to each eligible youth no later than 30 days after the youth's 18th birthday.

The Youth Exit Survey is available in electronic (online) and paper format. The LDSS shall provide paper survey materials to eligible youth upon request.

13.15.3 Engaging youth to participate in the Youth Survey Initiative

LDSS shall discuss with eligible youth, before they turn 18, the following items:

- The purpose of the survey;
- The importance of their participation in the survey as a means to share their experiences and improve the foster care system; and
- Directions for how to access the survey after they turn 18.

LDSS shall provide to eligible youth the following items:

- A general information flyer (prior to the youth's 18th birthday);
- A personalized survey reminder (no later than 30 days after the youth turns 18); and
- Paper survey materials (if requested).

13.16 OASIS documentation for independent living services

Independent living service(s) that are offered or provided to any youth shall be documented in OASIS on the "IL" services screen consistent with guidance requirements (as soon as possible but no later than **30 days** after each activity or event). This information is part of the data submitted to the NYTD twice a year. Both services participated in and declined shall be entered on the correct screen. Services a youth needs, but there is no funding for, shall also be entered on the screen. The independent living services that should be documented are listed below:

- Independent living needs assessment;
- Academic support;

- Post-secondary educational support;
- Career preparation;
- Employment programs or vocational training;
- Budget and financial management;
- Housing education and home management training;
- Health education and risk prevention;
- Family support and healthy marriage education;
- Mentoring;
- Independent living arrangement;
- Room and board financial assistance;
- Education financial assistance; and,
- Other financial assistance.

The service worker is responsible for updating IL services screens including the start date and end date of the service offered. If a service is declined, the start date and end date may be the same date. In the comments section, the service worker should define the type of service provided, consistent with definitions in guidance and OASIS, and whether or not the service met the youth's needs.

As part of the data submitted twice a year to NYTD, the service worker shall review and update the IL screens. These updates should be done consistent with guidance requirements for documentation. These screens should be reviewed at a minimum, every other month, so that data submitted to the federal government will be both accurate and timely.

- Education Screen. If a youth received special education services this shall be identified on the OASIS screen. Special education as defined by NYTD means specifically designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. The service worker should select the box that states special education at the bottom of the education screen.

- Adjudicated Delinquents. If a youth has ever been adjudicated delinquent, this status shall be documented in the IL screen of OASIS. The federal NYTD definition of an adjudicated delinquent is one where a state or Federal court of competent jurisdiction has adjudicated the youth as a delinquent.

- Post independent living. If the youth's case is closed in OASIS and the youth receives as least one independent living service after the case is closed, the type of service provided shall be documented in OASIS.

13.17 Program monitoring and case reviews

Independent living (including ETV) services that are paid for and/or provided by the LDSS are subject to monitoring and evaluation via submission of quarterly reports, OASIS data, LASER reports, and case reviews. VDSS will conduct quality assurance onsite visits and request additional information as necessary for program monitoring. VDSS staff may conduct case reviews of youth receiving independent living services. These reviews may be done by comparing data in OASIS and NYTD screens with documentation in the paper case record for the youth. These activities are consistent with VDSS' role of ensuring the proper administration of all foster care activities and services, including any action taken or not taken.

OASIS is the approved child welfare system for Virginia and all required documentation shall be input into this system. However, there are components of the case record that are required consistent with guidance in Section 4.4. The service worker should review this section to determine that hard copies of required items are in the youth's case file. In addition to those items required in Section 4.4, the service worker shall be responsible for providing for the record of the youth receiving independent living services the following:

- A copy of any documentation from a state or federal court of competent jurisdiction that the youth was adjudicated delinquent. Note: for NYTD purposes, the youth is considered an adjudicated delinquent no matter when the youth was adjudicated in his lifetime;
- Copy of IEP (if any);
- Copy of life skills assessment;
- Copy of written Transition Plan(s);
- Copy of approved student ETV Application(s) and supporting documentation;
- Documentation that verifies the youth received any or all of the independent living services that were paid for and/or provided by the LDSS on behalf of the youth;
- Documentation to define who, how, and when the youth was invited to participate in the NYTD survey (if part of the NYTD baseline population); and,
- Copies of completed NYTD surveys (i.e. baseline and follow-up), if applicable.

13.18 Resources to help serve older youth

13.18.1 Engaging youth

- **Child Welfare Information Gateway** –Promotes the safety, permanency, and well-being of children, youth, and families by connecting child welfare, adoption, and related professionals as well as the public to information, resources, and tools covering topics on child welfare, child abuse and neglect, out-of-home care, adoption, and more. The section on youth provides guidelines, protocols, and resources for service providers and other stakeholders to build partnerships with families and youth to achieve permanency and promote positive outcomes for youth.
    - Positive youth development
    - Engaging and involving youth

13.18.2 Resources for youth

- **Foster Care Alumni of America**

  The mission of Foster Care Alumni of America (FCAA) is to connect the alumni community of youth who were in foster care and to transform policy and practice, ensuring opportunity for people in and from foster care.

  The vision of Virginia's Chapter of FCAA is to be the leader in Virginia in connecting the alumni community so that youth can be heard. We envision alumni and allies working together to help truly transform Virginia's Child Welfare System to ensure a high quality of life for those in and from foster care.

- **FosterClub**

  The FosterClub is a national network for young people in foster care. The website serves as a primary communication tool for young people to connect in a safe, monitored environment. It also provides information related to foster care, including books, posters, and forms specifically designed for youth transitioning out of care. Publications are developed specifically for kids in care and are written in collaboration with foster youth. The FosterClub also is involved in teen conferences and workshops.

13.18.3 Education and training resources for youth

- **ETV Program**

  The ETV Program (See Section 13.11 for additional information) assists eligible youth (as defined in 13.11.2) with post-secondary education and

training expenses. It is designed to help youth aging out of foster care with the education, training, and services needed for employment and self-sufficiency. Funding for the program is supplied in the form of vouchers. These can be applied toward, but not limited to, colleges, universities, community colleges, and other vocational training institutions. Youth are encouraged to visit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) website and utilize the FAFSA Tips for completing the application.

- **Virginia Community College System (VCCS)**
  - **Great Expectations Program**

    The VCCS Great Expectations Program provides transitional support to youth in foster care to help them complete high school and gain access to a community college education. The goal is to provide education and employment opportunities to improve the likelihood of life success for foster youth.

    Great Expectation programs are offered in several community colleges across the state. Coaches and mentors can provide assistance, offer encouragement, and help youth reach their goals.

  - **Tuition Grant Program**

    The Tuition Grant Program provides tuition and fees at any Virginia Community College for youth who graduated from high school or completed their GED and who:

    - Were in foster care when they received their diploma or equivalency certificate;
    - Were in the custody of LDSS when they turned 18 and subsequently received their diploma or equivalency certificate; or
    - Were considered a special needs adoption at the time they received their diploma or equivalency certificate.

    Assistance is based on financial need. The Tuition Grant may be offered at 4 year institutions of higher education, depending on the institution's preferences.

- **Other Funding and Scholarship Opportunities**

  The Great Expectation programs offer additional resources to funding and scholarship opportunities on the specific community college's Great Expectation websites. Locate a Great Expectation program here.

- **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Transition Services with Virginia Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services**

  The Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) provides services to help Virginians with significant disabilities, including youth in transition, become more independent and self-sufficient. Transition Services help youth with disabilities develop skills and formulate plans to move from high school to an adult life that includes opportunities for employment, higher education, independent living, and community involvement.

  Referrals of students for DARS services often come from school personnel to the VR Counselor assigned to their school district. Referrals should be made three years prior to the youth leaving school and written into the student's IEP.

  - DARS Transition Services Guide
  - DARS office locations

- **Foster Care to Success Program (FC2S)**

  FC2S is the largest national nonprofit organization dedicated entirely to helping former foster youth obtain the academic and technical skills and competencies needed to thrive in today's economy. To that end, FC2S provides scholarship and grant money to former foster students in colleges and specialized training programs across the country. Every FC2S student receives care packages and coaching and is eligible to participate in mentoring and internship programs.

13.18.4 Other resources

- **Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative**

  Private foundation with the vision that every youth aging out of foster care should have access to the opportunities and supports needed for a successful transition to adulthood. Brings people and resources together to help youth and young adults make the connections they need for permanence, education, employment, housing, health care, and supportive personal and community relationships. Supports community-based efforts that create opportunities and build assets for youth leaving foster care through grant making, technical assistance, and advocacy.

  - Website

- **You Gotta Believe!**

Pat O'Brien's organization, Older Child Adoption and Permanency Movement, Inc., in New York State seeks to prevent homelessness by finding permanent moral and legal adoptive homes for teens and preteen children in foster care. Stresses unconditional commitment to all children who come into care as the essential ingredient in preventing both placement disruption and foster care drift. Website provides links to articles, blogs, and live stream on the Internet for radio and television broadcasts.