

**TRANSITIONAL AND INDEPENDENT LIVING
PROGRAM AND PLACEMENT REQUIREMENTS**

Effective December 1, 2006

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I. INTRODUCTION

Transitional and independent living programs provide youth who are in the Department of Human Resources (DHR) custody and residing in foster care with multiple opportunities to prepare them to live independently, self-sufficiently, and integrate into society. The goal of transitional and independent living programs is to provide older youth in foster care with the support, instruction, and opportunities to practice the necessary independent living skills and acquire the knowledge to become productive adults.

Outcomes expected from transitional and independent living programs are:

- youth shall have an affordable and potentially permanent place to live upon their discharge from the program;
- youth shall understand basic personal safety skills;
- youth shall be able to demonstrate self-sufficiency and independence from social services;
- youth shall gain significant employment experience or vocational training;
- youth shall learn to communicate effectively with individuals in the community;
- youth shall make progress toward educational goals;
- youth shall have an improved self-awareness as it relates to their family dynamics;
- youth shall increase their overall level of responsibility;
- youth shall remain free from illegal entanglements and risky behaviors;
- youth shall secure positive peer relationships; and
- youth shall understand their rights and responsibilities as a citizen.

Transitional and independent living programs must be flexible in order to meet a wide variety of needs and skill levels while providing youth the opportunity to accept more responsibility with decreasing structure and adult supervision.

A. Purpose

Many older youth in foster care need the opportunity to practice basic independent living skills in a variety of settings with decreasing degrees of care and supervision as they transition from a dependent living situation to independence or self-sufficiency. Transitional and independent living services have been offered by child-placing agencies and residential child care facilities to better serve Alabama youth as they transition to independent living. In developing these services, the various agencies' requirements have been diverse and lacking in consistency. Therefore, DHR has developed requirements for transitional placements and independent living program placements to help provide consistency in the development and delivery of transitional and independent living services. All persons, groups of persons, or corporations desiring to provide transitional and/or independent living programs and placements shall meet these requirements.

B. Legal Base

The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (H. R. 3443) amended Title IV, Part E of the Social Security Act. The Act, Public Law 106-169, replaced the former Independent Living Initiative and established the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. In addition, the *Code of Alabama* 1975, § 38-7-2, provides for the existence of transitional living facilities which are described as “a child-care facility or program that is designed to give opportunities to practice independent living skills to eligible persons at least 16 years of age and under 21 years of age in foster care in a variety of residential settings with varying degrees of care and supervision.”

C. Youth To Be Served

Transitional and independent living programs and placements shall serve Alabama youth, in DHR custody and residing in foster care, who are ready to transition from the dependence of childhood to living independently as an adult. These youth must be at least age seventeen (17) years and less than age twenty-one (21) years. Placements may also be provided to youth who were formerly in Alabama foster care; and who were discharged from DHR custody on or after their 18th birthday; and who have not yet attained age 21 years when the decision is made by an ISP team that the youth needs to reenter foster care. Refer to DHR's *Independent Living Services* and *Smooth Transitions Into Adulthood* policies for additional information regarding providing independent living services and reentering foster care, respectively.

II. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR TRANSITIONAL AND INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAMS

Older youth who are in DHR custody and residing in foster care will eventually enter a phase where they will transition from DHR custody to living independently. Many of these youth will participate in either a transitional or independent living program that will help them practice and learn how to adjust to group rules and norms; how to use community resources (e.g., transportation, medical, dental, counseling, vocational, recreational, educational); and how to interact with a variety of people, including residential staff members, other residents, and/or foster parents.

Youth in DHR custody may reside in a transitional or independent living placement only if the placement is provided through a DHR-licensed child-placing agency or residential child care facility, or a DHR-approved foster family home. Requirements for child placing agencies and residential care facilities are located in Section III. Section IV of these requirements outlines requirements for DHR approved foster family homes providing transitional or independent living placements.

A. Transitional Living

Transitional living is designed for youth who are ready to enter a phase of care that will eventually transition them to independent living. Transitional living affords youth an opportunity to practice basic independent living skills in a variety of settings with decreasing degrees of supervision.

B. Independent Living

Independent living is different from transitional living in that youth live in an alternative living arrangement (i.e., community based housing) rather than a foster family home, group home, or other residential type facility. Ideally, this placement provides the opportunity to experience decreased care and supervision so youth can become responsible for their own care when DHR no longer holds custody. The goal of an independent living placement is to prepare youth to become socially and financially independent from the program. Independent living placements shall begin no earlier than a youth's 17th birthday and no later than six (6) months prior to a youth's discharge from DHR's system of care.

C. Skill Building Components

Regardless of the administering entity (child-placing agency, residential facility or DHR approved foster home), youth must be provided opportunities to learn the skills they need to live independently. These skills, at a minimum, shall include:

- preparing meals;
- doing laundry;
- cleaning the home;
- living cooperatively with other housemates or neighbors;
- handling landlord/tenant complaints;
- controlling guests' behavior;
- handling basic maintenance, simple repairs, and how to call the landlord about problems;
- creating and maintaining order in a living space; and
- training in basic first aid.

The following additional skills, at a minimum, must be taught to youth as they prepare for living independently. They shall learn to:

- develop and follow a budget;
- identify safe and affordable housing;
- negotiate a lease;
- meet the obligations of a lease or housing contract;
- present oneself to a landlord;
- prevent actions that might lead to an eviction; and
- understand landlord/tenant rights and responsibilities.

Regardless of the skills being taught, the skills must be tailored to a youth's current level of functioning. Additional skills may be introduced as a youth progresses, achieves success in the minimum skills, and desires to learn more advanced skills.

D. Positive And Realistic Living Experiences

Youth are further prepared for adulthood by being provided a realistic living experience, through transitional or independent living placements, in which they can take full responsibility for themselves. Elements of living experiences include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Direct experience with the consequences of daily actions and decisions;
- Life skills practice while having access to staff for support and advice;
- Ability to determine needed areas of support before emancipation or transfer to a less supervised living arrangement;
- Daily social contacts;
- Emotional adjustment to the difference between present living situation and previous ones, and to the loneliness that may occur due to a change in living situations;
- Practice in living alone;
- Use of emergency medical procedures;
- Obtaining and using transportation to access needed resources;
- Safe use of household appliances;
- Practice in basic housekeeping;
- Negotiating a rental agreement;
- Use of leisure time;
- Practice in money management and budgeting; and
- Experience in shopping, food preparation, food storage, and consumer skills.

These experiences must also be tailored to a youth's current level of functioning. Additional experiences and opportunities may be introduced as a youth's skill level increases and more complex opportunities are desired.

III. TRANSITIONAL AND INDEPENDENT LIVING PLACEMENTS PROVIDED BY CHILD-PLACING AGENCIES AND RESIDENTIAL CHILD CARE FACILITIES

Child-placing agencies and residential child care facilities are responsible for assuring that their transitional and independent living placements meet these requirements as well as applicable *Minimum Standards*. The State Department of Human Resources is responsible for monitoring child-placing agencies and residential child care facilities to assure that all requirements are being followed.

A. Staffing

Transitional and independent living program staff must adhere to the *Minimum Standards* (e.g., *Child-Placing Agencies, Residential Child Care Facilities*) by which

their agency or facility is licensed, and any applicable governmental or agency rules, regulations, and standards for the purpose of governing agencies that provide care or are responsible for the placement of children. Program staff shall participate in the planning and delivery of services to youth being considered for placement in transitional and independent living programs. This includes, but is not limited to, participating in the development and revision of a youth's ISP prior to admission and during placement. Refer to DHR's *Individualized Service Plans* policy for additional information on ISPs.

Program staff must be employees of the DHR licensed child-placing agency or residential child care facility that is providing the transitional and/or independent living program and must meet the following qualifications and responsibilities. Written job descriptions shall be developed for all staff and maintained on site at the child-placing agency or residential child care facility.

1. Program Coordinator

Program staff must be employees of the DHR licensed child-placing agency or residential child care facility that is providing the transitional and/or independent living program and must meet the following qualifications and responsibilities. Written job descriptions shall be developed for all staff and maintained on site at the child-placing agency or residential child care facility.

a. Qualifications

- (1) Shall be the Executive Director of a child-placing agency or a residential child care facility or shall meet the minimum qualifications, as prescribed, for the "Executive" in the applicable *Minimum Standards*; and
- (2) Shall receive an additional sixteen (16) hours training in "Emotional and Physical Development of Teens," "Development of Youth's Strengths and Assets," and "Positive Youth Development" in addition to the training listed in the applicable *Minimum Standards*.

b. Responsibilities

- (1) Shall be responsible for working with and supervising other staff (e.g., case manager, life coach) who are working with youth in the transitional and/or independent living program;
- (2) Shall work in cooperation with the case manager, life coach and DHR social worker to identify youth who are prepared to enter a transitional and/or independent living program;
- (3) Shall assist the case manager or life coach in locating housing for youth, and work with youth and case managers or life coaches to help youth develop the necessary knowledge and skills to become independent; and

- (4) Shall provide input on all case plans that are presented to the ISP team and approve all reports or other paperwork needed by DHR.

2. Case Manager

a. Qualifications

- (1) Shall be twenty three (23) years of age or older
- (2) Shall be a licensed social worker per Code of Alabama, 1975 § 34 and practicing at one of the following levels:
 - * A licensed certified social worker (LCSW), or
 - * A licensed graduate social worker (LGSW), or
 - * A licensed bachelor social worker (LBSW) with continuing supervision from a person licensed as specified above, or
 - * A professional counselor licensed under Alabama law, or
 - * A psychologist licensed under Alabama law
- (3) Shall be supervised by the transitional and/or independent living Program Coordinator
- (4) Shall receive an additional sixteen (16) hours training in “Emotional and Physical Development of Teens” the “Development of Youth’s Strengths and Assets,” and “Positive Youth Development” in addition to the training listed in the applicable *Minimum Standards*.

b. Responsibilities

- (1) Shall be responsible for the direct supervision of youth who participate in a transitional and/or independent program
- (2) Shall actively participate in the development and implementation of all treatment plans/ISPs for youth in their caseload
- (3) Shall complete any paperwork as agreed upon through a youth’s ISP and/or DHR contract
- (4) Shall be responsible for each youth’s placement in a transitional or independent living setting, and work with the DHR social worker to monitor and supervise the youth

3. Life Coach
(Also known as a child care worker, house parent, or cottage parent)
 - a. Qualifications
 - (1) Shall have a high school degree or general equivalency diploma (GED)
 - (2) Shall meet all requirements as listed in the applicable *Minimum Standards*
 - (3) Shall be at least twenty one (21) years of age
 - (4) Shall receive an additional sixteen (16) hours training in “Emotional and Physical Development of Teens,” “Development of Youth’s Strengths and Assets,” and “Positive Youth Development” in addition to the training listed in the applicable *Minimum Standards*
 - b. Responsibilities
 - (1) Shall work shifts and be on-call 24 hours a day on a rotating basis
 - (2) Shall be responsible for the day-to-day modeling of life skills (e.g., assertiveness, communication, conflict management, problem solving and decision making)
 - (3) Shall provide activities for youth to practice life skills and provide appropriate feedback to the youth
 - (4) Shall work in partnership with the case manager

Life coach to youth ratio shall be in compliance with the worker to youth ratio as stated in the *Minimum Standards For Residential Child Care Facilities*.

B. Placements

The following information addresses transitional and independent living placement settings and requirements for the placements. Transitional and independent living programs shall prohibit roomers, boarders, and persons who are not participating in their program to share housing with youth in transitional and independent living placements. However, the following exception may apply.

- Youth are living in an apartment where the lease can remain in their name after discharge from DHR custody;
- A roommate is needed to share expenses to enable the youth to retain the apartment after discharge from DHR custody; and
- The youth’s ISP team approves the plan.

Residential child care facilities are prohibited from using mobile homes as the housing unit for transitional or independent living placements. Transitional living facilities must be in locations that are designated for the unique purpose of

transitional living (e.g., a separate wing in a building; a freestanding building) and must allow the residents free access to the exterior (e.g. no lock-down units).

1. Transitional Living

Transitional living placements may be offered through a variety of residential on-campus living arrangements where youth have the opportunity to practice independent living skills with decreasing degrees of care and supervision.

Apartment living may also be considered when the apartments are grouped together in what is known as a “pod,” and only individuals participating in the program are allowed to live within the pod. A pod must be in a specific location with a supervisor living on-site twenty four (24) hours a day, seven days a week (i.e., 24/7). Individuals functioning as a pod supervisor may serve on a rotating basis.

2. Independent Living

Independent living placements use “scattered site housing” which is a dwelling (e.g., apartment within an apartment complex, town house, duplex apartment, garage apartment) that is typically located in the same town or city where the program provider is located. Scattered site housing, a least restrictive placement type, does not have a supervisor living on-site and may or may not have other independent living placements located near it. Youth desiring to live in independent living placements will require careful selection, close supervision, and an exceptionally collaborative working effort between the provider agency’s program staff and DHR.

a. General Requirements

All youth desiring independent living placements must:

- be working full or part-time and
- be working towards a diploma or GED; or
- be attending a vocational program/college.

The youth may be involved in one or more of the above (e.g., working part time while attending a vocational program). Youth who have received a diploma or GED and are working full-time would be able to participate in independent living.

Youth are required to work with their DHR social worker and the provider agency’s social worker or case manager in developing short and long-term goals to be included in their ISP. These short and long-term goals will be based on the desired outcomes that support youth in achieving self-sufficiency.

Youth are also expected to attend the county ILP group meetings. Programs are to encourage youth to attend these meetings.

Additional requirements for youth desiring independent living placements include:

- Youth must submit a plan for rent payments and security deposit prior to the lease being signed.
- Youth must submit a weekly budget to their case manager and their DHR social worker prior to moving into the housing. The budget shall fall within a youth's monthly income.
- Youth may co-sign the housing lease with the provider agency when they are of legal age (i.e., 19 years). DHR is prohibited from signing or co-signing a lease for housing.
- Youth may share housing with one (1) other person of the same (or near the same) age and of the same sex. The program provider and the ISP team may grant an exception to this requirement to allow siblings to share housing. This exception will depend upon the ISP for each youth and the availability of housing space for the additional sibling(s).
- Each youth must have a separate bedroom regardless of the number of youth who share housing.

b. Home Furnishings

The child care facility or child-placing agency shall provide youth certain articles and supplies for furnishing their home. The articles and supplies may be new or used, and must be in good condition. The articles and supplies must include, but are not limited to:

- a bed and bed linens;
- a dining table and chairs;
- living or sitting room furniture;
- a stove and refrigerator;
- kitchen furnishings (e.g., pots, pans, cooking and eating utensils); and
- a telephone.*

* Independent living program providers shall adhere to DHR's *Telephone And Mail Contacts* policy. The telephone may be limited to local calling if a "calling plan" or "calling card" is provided for youth to contact parents, relatives, siblings, and other pertinent individuals who live outside the local calling area. Youth may purchase their own telephone and telephone services, but will be responsible for any

expenses that are beyond the scope of *Telephone And Mail Contacts* policy.

Youth may purchase their own household furnishings (e.g., table, chairs, sofa, bed linens) if desired. The household furnishings purchased by a youth should be marked as a youth's so that when youth move to another residence or leave foster care altogether, their furnishings can be easily identified from those of the independent living program provider. Items purchased by youth shall be moved with the youth.

C. Placement Supervision

All youth in transitional and independent living placements shall have twenty-four (24) hour access to program staff who are responsible for monitoring the activities of youth in their programs. Program staff shall develop a schedule for providing supervision with guidance and supervision based on a specific youth's maturity, acquired skills, and emotional status. The supervisory schedule will be developed in collaboration with a youth's ISP team.

1. Transitional Living

The ISP team is responsible for determining the frequency and type of supervision provided to youth living in transitional living placements. Supervision shall be designed so that the team may observe that the youth is practicing healthy life skills. The program where the youth is placed will schedule supervisory staff and coverage according to the *Minimum Standards* by which they are licensed.

2. Independent Living

All youth must have 24/7 telephone access to independent living program staff and an alternate placement in the event the independent living placement is unsuccessful. Program staff supervising youth in independent living placements shall evaluate, at a minimum, all youth's:

- safety, health, and overall well-being;
- ability to manage school and work responsibilities without daily supervision;
- ability to follow program and landlord rules;
- ability to use good judgment in daily activities; and
- overall progress toward established goals and desired outcomes.

Program staff must contact DHR immediately when significant issues or incidents occur and the issue/incident is severe enough to risk a youth's loss of the independent living placement (e.g., apartment) or the issue/incident creates a danger to the youth. Staff must also contact DHR within two (2)

working days when incidents occur that are concerning to the agency/facility operating the independent living program.

The frequency of supervision may vary due to many factors (e.g., readiness for independence; living arrangements chosen; presence or availability of other adults; other factors unforeseen until after placement). The following supervisory schedule, at a minimum, shall be utilized during the first eight (8) weeks in placement.

1 st Week	Daily Supervision
2 nd through 4 th Weeks	Twice A Week Supervision
5 th through 8 th Weeks	Once A Week Supervision

After the eighth (8th) week, supervision must occur no less often than once a month and the ISP team must reconvene to determine the level of on-going supervision that is needed.

IV. TRANSITIONAL AND INDEPENDENT LIVING PLACEMENTS PROVIDED BY COUNTY DHR APPROVED FOSTER FAMILY HOMES

A. Purpose

Youth who are in DHR custody and residing in a foster family home may be given the opportunity to live in a dwelling, separate from the foster family home, that is specifically designated as a transitional and/or an independent living placement when the youth's ISP team agrees that the need exists. The dwelling must be assessed and approved by the County DHR as being in compliance with the *Minimum Standards For Foster Family Homes*.

B. Physical Setting And Placement

The transitional/independent living dwelling may include, but is not limited to, a mobile home, garage apartment, or other type dwelling. (Because the *Minimum Standards For Foster Family Homes* provides for a mobile home to be the dwelling of an approved foster family home, a mobile home may be a dwelling for a transitional/independent living placement provided by a county DHR approved foster home.)

Youth may share housing with one (1) other person of the same (or near the same) age and of the same sex. The foster family home provider and the ISP team may grant an exception to this requirement to allow siblings to share housing. The exception will depend upon each youth's ISP and the availability of space for the additional sibling(s). Regardless of how many youth live in the dwelling, each must have a separate bedroom.

Youth will be under the direct supervision of the foster parent and the dwelling must be located adjacent to or close proximity to a foster parent's home for a youth's activities to be monitored. The ISP team will determine the amount of monitoring or supervision the youth receives.

1. Home Furnishings

The foster family home provider shall provide articles and supplies for youth to furnish the home. The articles and supplies may be new or used, must be in good condition, and must include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a bed and bed linens;
- a dining table and chairs;
- living or sitting room furniture;
- a stove and refrigerator;
- kitchen furnishings (e.g., pots, pans, cooking and eating utensils); and
- a telephone. *

* The foster family home provider shall adhere to DHR's *Telephone And Mail Contacts* policy. The telephone may be limited to local calling if a "calling plan" or "calling card" is provided for youth to contact parents, relatives, siblings, and other pertinent individuals who live outside the local calling area. Youth may purchase their own telephone and telephone services, but will be responsible for any expenses that are beyond the scope of *Telephone And Mail Contacts* policy.

Youth may purchase their own household furnishings (e.g., table, chairs, sofa, bed linens) if desired. The household furnishings purchased by a youth should be marked as a youth's so that when youth move to another residence or leave foster care altogether, their furnishings can be easily identified from those of the foster parent. Items purchased by youth shall be moved with the youth.

2. Submitting A Budget

Household budgeting is one of the most important aspects of a youth's learning opportunities. Youth must submit a weekly budget to the foster family home provider and their DHR social worker prior to moving into the placement, and this budget must fall within a youth's monthly income.

V. DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

Child-placing agencies, residential child care facilities and foster family homes providing transitional and independent living placements shall complete documentation as described in this section. The forms and detailed instructions are located in the *Forms And Instructions* section.

1. Independent Living Intake And Orientation Checklist

Child-placing agencies, residential child care facilities, and foster family home providers shall complete an intake and orientation checklist of some type for each youth who will reside in an independent living placement. The

“Independent Living Intake and Orientation Checklist” included with these requirements is a sample checklist. Providers may use this checklist or develop one of their own that includes items on this list.

2. Personal Safety Agreement (DHR-FCS-2139)

Youth who are planning to move into an independent living setting are required to review and sign this form. If the youth refuses to abide by the safety guidelines, the placement cannot occur. Child-placing agencies, residential child care facilities, and foster family home providers shall ensure that a new form is reviewed and signed each year that the youth remains in the independent living placement.

3. Monitoring Sheet For Youth In Independent Living Placements (DHR-FCS-2138)

Child-placing agencies, residential child care facilities, and foster family home providers are required to complete this form for each youth residing in an independent living placement.

4. Monthly Transitional And Independent Living Placement Report (DHR-FCS-2140)

Child-placing agencies and residential child care facilities must complete this monthly report for each month they have youth in a transitional or independent living placement. Foster family home providers are not required to complete this report.

5. Foster Family Home Approval To Provide A Transitional Or Independent Living Placement (DHR-FCS-2141)

This form is completed by the County DHR where the foster family home is located to indicate that the transitional or independent living placement setting meets the *Minimum Standards For Foster Family Homes*. The approval must be reviewed, signed, and dated by the foster parent(s) providing the transitional or independent living placement, and by the County DHR Director.