

**MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

Cover Memorandum accompanying the April 1, 2006 filing of an Adoption Rule-Final Notice by the Division of Family and Children's Services issuing new Independent Living Program policy for its policy manual.

1. Proposed Rule:

Mission Statement-

To provide youth and young adults in care with an array of services and resources to assist and guide them in making a successful transition to become independent adults

Current Rule:

None

2. Proposed Rule:

- Youth in care ages 14 until their 21st birthday are eligible for all Independent Living Services except for criteria placed on the Educational and Training Voucher program;
- Youth who leave custody ages 18 to their 21st birthday are eligible for Aftercare services until their 21st birthday;
- Youth who enroll in post-secondary educational and vocational programs may be eligible based on the criteria detailed in the **Educational and Training Voucher (ETV) Program** section

All youth must have the opportunity to participate in independent living preparations, without regard to the youth's permanent plan. Refusal by the youth to participate is **not** a valid reason for non-participation. Independent Living Services are **mandatory** and not optional for all youth in care who are at least 14 years old or less than 21 years old. All youth in care are eligible and appropriate to receive Independent Living Services, based on the child's best interest.

Current Rule:

1. Each eligible youth will provide a written transitional independent living plan which will be based on an assessment of his or her needs, and which will be incorporated into his or her case plan. Attach the completed Life Skills Inventory to the child's case plan.

2. Where appropriate, the youth age 14 or over, the case plan must include a written description of the programs and services which will help the youth prepare for the transition from foster care to independent living.
3. For youth age 16 or over, the dispositional hearing must address the services needed to assist the youth in making the transition from foster care to independent living. A form listing services has been designed for use by the Foster Care Review Board. Judges have been made aware of these services.

Eligibility

Independent Living Program Services are provided to all youth age 14-20 who are presently in the custody of MDHS or whose custody was discontinued on or after the date the youth became 14. Independent Living Skills preparations begin at an earlier age using foster parents, volunteers, programs and activities in the community. All youth, no matter what their permanent plan, must have an opportunity to participate in a plan for independent living preparation.

3. Proposed Rule:

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indian Tribe youth are eligible for Independent Living Services based on the same criteria for MDHS youth in care.

*Mississippi Band of Choctaw youth are eligible for the above listed stipends. The youth reside in the following counties in Mississippi; Attala, Jones, Kemper, Leake, Neshoba, Newton, Scott, and Winston. A worker who receives a stipend request from a Mississippi Band of Choctaw youth must complete a Case Management service in MACWIS, requesting the appropriate support service for the particular stipend. This can be entered from the county location of which the youth resides in.

Current Rule:

None

4. Proposed Rule:

Life Skills Training Group Stipend: A **\$20.00** stipend can be earned for the completion of ten (10) Skills Hours.

Newsletter Stipend: A **\$15.00** stipend is available to youth who submit an article, poem or other creative writing, as well as a letter to the editor, or an editorial to the State Independent Living Coordinator for consideration for publication in any MDHS publication.

Senior Year Stipend: A **\$350.00** stipend is available to help defray senior/final year expenses for youth receiving a diploma, GED or a Certificate of Attendance at the close of the school/program year in which the stipend is requested.

High School Graduation Stipend: A **\$200.00** Graduation Stipend is available to all youth in custody who receive a high school diploma.

College Bound Stipend: A **\$600.00** College Bound Stipend is available to youth in care who plan to attend a post-secondary education program.

Current Rule:

Skills Group Stipends: A \$30.00 stipend can be earned for the completion of twenty (20) Skills Hours.

Newsletter Stipend: A youth may submit an article, poem or other creative writing, as well as a letter to the editor, or an editorial to the Independent Living Coordinator for consideration for publication in the state's independent living newsletter when in circulation. The youth may send the submission directly to the Independent Living Coordinator, MDHS, Placement Unit, or the social worker may submit the writing for the youth. An amount of \$10.00 will be paid for each item that is published in the newsletter.

Senior Year Stipend: To receive a \$200.00 stipend to help defray senior year expenses, a youth must be a regular high school senior who will be receiving a diploma or a special youth who will be receiving a *Certificate of Attendance* at the close of the school year in which the stipend is requested. This excludes GED recipients.

High School Graduation/GED Stipend: A \$100.00 Graduation Stipend is available to all foster youth who receive a high school diploma, a *Certificate of Attendance*, or pass the GED and have participated in the Independent Living Program.

College Bound Stipend: To be eligible for the \$500.00 College Bound Stipend, a youth must be staying in custody when beginning college and planning to reside in a campus dormitory.

5. Proposed Rule:

Pre-Assessment Stipend: A **\$25.00** stipend is available to all youth who complete a Life Skills Pre-Assessment form. The Independent Living Specialist will document the completion of the pre-assessment and will notify the County of Responsibility Social Worker that it has been completed by the youth.

Post-Assessment Stipend: A **\$25.00** stipend is available to all youth who participate in the Independent Living Program and complete a Post-Assessment. Independent Living Specialist will document the completion of the post-assessment and will notify the County of Responsibility Social Worker that it has been completed by the youth.

Youth Retreat Stipend: A **\$20.00** stipend can be earned for attending a retreat. These retreats are planned through the Independent Living Specialist. The Specialist will document satisfactory participation at the retreat and will notify the County of Responsibility Social Worker.

Youth Conference Stipend: A youth will receive a **\$30** cash stipend for successful completion of participation in the annual conference. The private contractor will pay this stipend to the youth at the completion of the conference. (Youth are eligible to receive a **\$30.00** Youth Conference Allowance and a **\$200.00** Youth Conference Clothing Allowance prior to attending the Youth Conference.

GED (General Education Diploma)/Certificate of Attendance Stipend: A **\$150.00** Stipend is available to all youth in custody who receive a Certificate of Attendance, or pass the GED (General Equivalency Diploma). A copy of the certificate or diploma must be filed in the paper case record in the County of Responsibility office.

College Graduation Stipend: A **\$300.00** stipend is available for youth, until their 21st birthday, who complete a two-year community college, four-year college/university or full completion of a vocational program. Upon proof of graduation, this one time stipend should be requested in MACWIS by the County of Responsibility Social Worker and issued to the youth to spend as youth wishes.

Youth Trainer Stipend: A **\$20** stipend is available to youth for assisting in various training activities. The State Independent Living Coordinator, based on recommendations from the SAILS Advisory Board, will select youth.

Aftercare Survey Stipend: A **\$15** stipend is available to youth upon completion and return of an Aftercare Survey. This stipend will be paid by the contractor.

Current Rule:

None

6. Proposed Rule:

Responsibilities of the Youth;

- Youth must be employed, with sufficient income to meet the needs of their budget;
- Youth must be an active participant and maintain involvement in the Independent Living Program;
- Youth must be capable of creating a budget based on income and living within the created budget;
- Youth must have a plan to cover the initial cost of placement;
- Youth must be willing to sign and comply with a contract from the licensed placing agency, delineating specific rules and requirements. If the contract is not satisfactorily met, the youth must leave the Independent Living Placement Program;
- Youth must be willing to allow planned and unplanned visits to the residence by the social worker, the specialist, the placement agency, and other Department staff as deemed necessary;
- If the youth wishes to live with a roommate(s), the roommate(s) must:
 - ▶ be a sibling or another youth who is also in MDHS custody;
 - ▶ be of the same sex, if not biological siblings, and have separate bedrooms;
 - ▶ be presented to the SAILS Advisory Board for approval if the roommate is not in the custody of MDHS. The SAILS Advisory Board will give consideration of the requests on a case-by-case basis;
 - ▶ be approved for Independent Living placements;

Current Rule:

Eligibility Requirements for Youth

1. Must have reached the age of 18 and be in the custody of the Department of Human Services, Division of Family and Children's Services;
2. Must be employed full time (40 hours a week) if not attending school or part time (20 or less hours a week) if enrolled in school;
3. Must have been an active participant in the *Independent Living Program* since the age of 16 or since entering custody if already 16. (*Active Participant* is one who has a minimum of 20 skills hours per year or has participated in an equivalent approved program at a residential facility. Approval is determined by the Placement Unit in the Division of Family and Children's Services.);
4. Must be capable of creating a budget based on income;
5. Must be capable of living within a created budget;
6. Must have saved enough money to cover the first month's rent and any required deposits;
7. Must be recommended for an Independent Living Placement by the youth's social worker, area social work supervisor, and the regional director;
8. Must have a completed the *Independent Living Skills Assessment* on file with the Independent Living Coordinator and an Independent Living Plan based on the *Assessment*.
9. Must have proven himself or herself to be reliable and trustworthy;
10. Must be willing to sign a contract with the licensed placing agency delineating specific rules and requirements;
11. If the contract is not satisfactorily met, the youth must leave the Independent Living Placement Program.
12. Must be willing to continue attendance at Independent Living Program activities.
13. Must be willing to allow planned and unplanned visits to the residence by the social worker, the specialist, the placement agency, and other Department staff as deemed necessary;
14. Must be sexually responsible.
15. If the youth wishes to live with a roommate, the roommate must:
 - Be a sibling or another youth who is also in MDHS, Division of Family and Children's custody;
 - Both youth who are in DFCS's custody must be approved for Independent Living Placements;

- Be of the same sex and have separate beds.

7. Proposed Rule:

Responsibilities of the Area Social Work Supervisor (ASWS);

- Shall attend SAILS Advisory Board meetings in the event the Social Worker or appointee to the SAILS Advisory Board is unavailable to attend;
- Shall review for approval appropriate placement information in MACWIS
- Shall review for approval the release of the appropriate funds for Independent Living Support Services, and Independent Living Placement Services.

Current Rule:

None

8. Proposed Rule:

DRIVERS LICENSE FOR YOUTH IN CARE

The Resource Family parents, group home administrator who has responsibility of the youth in care, a court-appointed guardian, an employer of the youth in care; or if there is no guardian or employer, then any other responsible person who is willing to assume the financial obligation (liability) imposed under Miss. Code §63-1-25, may choose to sign the application for a youth, unless restricted by a court order, who is at least age 16, to obtain a driver's license.

All drivers are required to be covered by liability insurance. However, if a car accident is caused because the youth-in-care was negligent or engaged in willful misconduct, and the damages suffered by passengers in his vehicle or in another vehicle are higher than the policy limits on the insurance coverage, the foster parent or other adult who signed the driver's license application will be liable for whatever the liability insurance does not pay. The young driver's negligence or willful misconduct is imputed to the adult who signed the young person's application for a license without any need to prove that the adult was negligent in supervising the youth in care. This is the obligation (potential liability) imposed under Miss. Code §63-1-25.

A youth who is seventeen (17) years of age or older may sign a license application without an adult's signature, but may not drive until he is covered by liability insurance.

MOTOR VEHICLES FOR YOUTH IN CARE

Resource Family parents or any other responsible adult has the freedom to purchase a motor vehicle for a youth in custody unless restricted by a court order.

The county staff shall be informed of the plan to purchase a vehicle, prior to the purchase of the vehicle. That plan must be well documented in MACWIS under the Transitional Living Plan; Transportation Radio Button. Youth in care may purchase a vehicle with their own funds if they have a valid driver's license, proof of liability insurance, and income to maintain the vehicle.

Current Rule:

None

9. Proposed Rule:

TRANSITIONAL LIVING PLAN

Youth in care, age 16 and older, shall have a Transitional Living Plan in addition to the Individual Service Plan. A Transitional Living Plan is defined as a plan documenting how a youth will move from State's custody into other programs or to self-sufficiency. The County of Responsibility Social Worker must identify on the IL Plan/TL Plan screen in MACWIS, the youth's post-custody living arrangement, means of support, educational/vocational, food & clothing, health, transportation and mentor/resource family. Six (6) months prior to the anticipated release of custody date, the Independent Living Specialist (contractor) should be notified to assist the youth in preparing for their independence. The youth can be linked with an Aftercare Specialist (contractor) who will secure from the youth information on where he or she can be reached for future reference as well as to complete an Exit Interview form. The Transitional Living Plan shall be updated and modified, as needed, each time the youth's ISP is reviewed and updated.

Current:

None

10. Proposed Rule:

AFTERCARE SERVICES

Special financial assistance will be provided for youth ages 18 until their 21st birthday, who left custody on or after attaining age 18. These services are available to youth in crisis who need additional temporary assistance to continue in the process of transitioning towards self-sufficiency. The benefits can be distributed quarterly as long as youth remains in crisis.

Aftercare Services may include rent deposits, rent, utility deposits, utility payments, food and household supplies, and child care. Payment must be made to the vendor(s) and receipts kept in the county file. These services are available to the youth in the county where the youth currently resides as long as that county MDHS worker secures documentation or a statement from the youth/chancery

court that youth has been released from agency's custody. The county of residence social worker must assess the youth's needs before creating a plan of action with the youth. The worker must complete a Case Management service in MACWIS. All requests for funds will be reviewed and considered for approval on a case-by-case basis by the Independent Living State Coordinator.

AFTERCARE MEDICAID

Youth in care who leave MDHS custody on or after their 18th birthday, but who have not reached their 21st birthday, are eligible through the month they turn 21, without regard to income or resources, for Medicaid coverage. The County of Responsibility Social Worker shall send an end date on foster care services for these youth to the Division of Medicaid (DOV), who will issue a letter to the youth specifying continued coverage.

Foster children who are receiving Medicaid or Health benefits under other categories such as SSI, TANF, Economic Assistance, CHIPS, and Regional Medicaid will not be in the category for automatic continuous Medicaid Coverage up to age 21. Those individual programs will have to determine eligibility for continued coverage.

Current Rule:

None

11. Proposed Rule:

ETV APPROVAL PROCESS:

- Independent Living (IL) Specialists (Contractor) will assist in identifying eligible youth;
- The IL Specialists (Contractor) coordinates financial aide application/packet with youth (FASFA, MTAG, Institution);
 - The youth must first apply for, and have received confirmation and/or disapproval notices from applications made for the Pell Grant, MTAG, scholarships, or other grants the youth may have applied for. The IL Specialist must also factor in the sources and amounts of any other funds that may be available to the youth.
- The IL Specialists (Contractor) coordinates ETV application with youth; and sends application to the COR Social Worker and ASWS for signature; upon obtaining signatures;
- The IL Specialists sends ETV application to State Independent Living Coordinator, for review;
- The State Independent Living Coordinator sends the ETV notification to the DFCS Administration Unit Director to ensure the county of responsibility has ample State Funds in the Mississippi Automated Child Welfare Information System; (MACWIS) for the county to select a Education and Training Voucher Support Service;

- The State Independent Living Coordinator notifies by phone or e-mail, the County of Responsibility (COR) Social Worker to expedite notice to enter the ETV support service request in MACWIS by selecting the Education and Training Voucher Support Service;
- County of Responsibility social worker enters the ETV request in MACWIS;
- A tickler (electronic notification) is received by the Area Social Work Supervisor to review/approve the ETV request in MACWIS;
- A tickler (electronic notification) is sent to the State Independent Living Coordinator;
- The State Independent Living Coordinator reviews/approves the ETV request in MACWIS;
- The ETV tickler (electronic notification) goes to the County of Responsibility Bookkeeper to be expedited;
- The County of Responsibility Bookkeeper prepares payment for the approved ETV Support Service provider (vendor or youth). A re-imbursement payment may be issued to an individual/party, including a youth, in the event a purchase was made, and proof of payment was rendered. An itemized receipt must be presented to the County of Responsibility bookkeeper before a check can be issued

An initial ETV application must be submitted in writing to enroll the youth into the ETV Program prior to their 21st birthday. Renewal applications may be submitted on or after October 1 of each subsequent year, until their 23rd birthday.

“Cost of attendance” is defined under the Higher Education Act of 1965 and includes tuition, fees, equipment, materials, computers, housing, internships, school-related travel, transportation needs, childcare, room and board, healthcare, student loans, and re-imbursement of educational needs to the applicant. For the purpose of this title, the term “cost of attendance” means:

- 1) tuition and fees normally assessed a student carrying the same academic workload as determined by the institution, and including costs for rental or purchase of any equipment, materials, or supplies required of all students in the same course of study;
- 2) an allowance for books, supplies, transportation, and miscellaneous personal expenses, including a reasonable allowance for the documented rental and purchase of a personal computer, for a student attending the institution on at least a halftime basis as determined by institution;
- 3) an allowance (as determined by the institution) for room and board costs incurred by the student;
 - a. shall be an allowance determined by the institution for a student without dependents residing at home with parents;
 - b. for students without dependents residing in institutionally owned or operated housing, shall be a standard allowance determined by the institution based on the amount normally assessed most of its residents for room and board; and
 - c. for all other students shall be an allowance based on the expenses reasonably incurred by such students for room and board;
- 4) for less than half-time students (as determined by the institution) tuition and fees and an allowance for only books, supplies and transportation (as determined by the institution) and dependent care expenses;

- 5) for students engaged in a program of study by correspondence, only tuition and fees, and if required, books and supplies, travel, and room and board costs incurred specifically in fulfilling a required period of residential training;
- 6) for incarcerated students only tuition and fees, and if required, books and supplies;
- 7) for a student enrolled in an academic program in a program of study abroad approved for credit by the student's home institution, reasonable costs associated with such study;
- 8) for a student with one or more dependents, an allowance based on the estimated actual expenses incurred for such dependent care, based on the number and age of such dependents;
- 9) for a student with a disability, an allowance (as determined by the institution) for those expenses related to the student's disability, including special services, personal assistance, transportation, equipment, and supplies that are reasonably incurred and not provided for by other assisting agencies;
- 10) for a student receiving all or part of the student's instruction by means of telecommunications technology, no distinction shall be made with respect to the mode of instruction in determining costs;
- 11) for a student engaged in a work experience under a cooperative education program, an allowance for reasonable costs associated with such employment (as determined by the institution);
- 12) for a student who receives a loan under this or any other Federal law, or, at the option of the institution, a conventional student loan incurred by the student to cover a student's cost of attendance at the institution, an allowance for the actual cost of any loan fee, originated fee, or insurance premium charged to such student or such parent on such loan, or the average cost of any such fee or premium charged by the Secretary, lender, or guaranty agency making or insuring such loan, as the case may be.

An "*institution of higher education*", as defined by the Higher Education Act of 1965:

- Awards a Bachelor's Degree or is not less than a two-year program (Associate's Degree) that provides credit towards a degree, or
- Provides not less than one year of training towards gainful employment, or
- Is a vocational program that provides training for gainful employment and has been in existence for at least two years.
- Admits as regular students only persons with a high school diploma or equivalent; or admits as regular students persons who are beyond the age of compulsory school attendance.
- Is a public, private, or non-profit institution.
- Is accredited or pre-accredited and is authorized to operate in that state.

Current Rule:

None

INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

Mission Statement-

To provide youth and young adults in care with an array of services and resources to assist and guide them in making a successful transition to become independent adults

The Independent Living Program (ILP) helps adolescents acquire basic life skills in their progress toward self-sufficiency. Youth are eligible for Independent Living Services based on the following criteria:

- Youth in care ages 14 until their 21st birthday are eligible for all Independent Living Services except for criteria placed on the Educational and Training Voucher program;
- Youth who leave custody ages 18 to their 21st birthday are eligible for Aftercare services until their 21st birthday;
- Youth who enroll in post-secondary educational and vocational programs may be eligible based on the criteria detailed in the **Educational and Training Voucher (ETV) Program** section

All youth must have the opportunity to participate in independent living preparations, without regard to the youth's permanent plan. Refusal by the youth to participate is **not** a valid reason for non-participation. Independent Living Services are **mandatory** and not optional for all youth in care who are at least 14 years old or less than 21 years old. All youth in care are eligible and appropriate to receive Independent Living Services, based on the child's best interest. Some services are provided through a contractual agreement to include Life Skills Training, Retreats, Youth Conferences, and other services deemed appropriate. The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indian Tribe youth are eligible for Independent Living Services based on the same criteria for MDHS youth in care.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SOCIAL WORKER

- The County of Responsibility Social Worker **must** complete an Individual Service Plan (ISP) on all youth in care. When the youth reaches their 14th birthday, an Independent Living Plan (ILP) **must** be completed in MACWIS. This Independent Living Plan must include a description of all programs and services

that will help the youth prepare for transition from foster care to independent living. When the youth reaches their 16th birthday, an ISP **must** include a documented Transitional Living Plan (TLP) based on an assessment of the youth's needs.. The County of Service Social Worker and the Youth shall be involved in the development of the ISP, ILP, and TLP.

- The County of Responsibility Social Worker will provide recommendations to the Youth Court Judge, during Review Hearings, information that identifies specific services being provided and services needed to help the youth transition from foster care to independent living.
- The County of Responsibility Social Worker **must** inform the youth of all Independent Living activities and arrange for participation, including transportation. The transportation plan must include who will transport the youth to all of the Independent Living activities. (The transporter may be a Social Worker, Area Social Work Supervisor, Foster Parent, Group Home Staff, Homemaker, Child Protection Service Worker, Volunteer/Mentor, Case Aide, Independent Living Specialist, or any designated staff.)
- The County of Responsibility Social Worker **must** input into MACWIS the data (life skills modules) sent from the Independent Living Specialist, which may include the Social Worker's professional knowledge of the youth's comprehension of life skills.
- The County of Service Social Worker is responsible for carrying out the plan that is established in the youth's ISP.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE AREA SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISOR (ASWS)

- The County of Responsibility ASWS is responsible for reviewing and approving youth's Individual Service Plan and Transitional Living Plan in MACWIS. This includes all submissions for approval under the Independent Living Plan icon.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Each youth in care of MDHS has an opportunity to participate in all Independent Living Services based on the Independent Living Program eligibility criteria. These services include:

- **Life Skills Training Groups:** The skills training is based on the nationally recognized, Ansell-Casey Life Skills curriculum, approved by DFCS, to participating youth. Skills training are based on assessments, personal contact, the Independent Living Plan and the Transitional Living Plan. The curriculum contains the following components: Community Resources and Transportation, Communication Skills and Social Development, Employment, Money Management, Decision Making and Study Skills, Housing, Daily Living Skills, Self-Care, and Youth Law issues. These groups are scheduled monthly, by the Independent Living Specialists (contractor), in identified locations, throughout the state.
- **Youth Retreats** are held throughout the state. Retreats are open to youth ages 14-15, while others are open to youth ages 16 to their 21st birthday. Overnight retreats are held each year covering all geographical areas of the state. The purpose of the retreats is to enhance the life skills learned in the scheduled skills groups discussed under the Life-Skills Training Groups section. Additional life skills, to include, but not limited to; team-building, leadership development, positive self expression, socialization, self-esteem, and positive values, are presented at the retreats. The County of Responsibility will submit an application for approval in MACWIS for the youth to attend the scheduled youth retreat.
- **Statewide Youth Conferences** are held annually to benefit youth from ages 16 to their 21st birthday. The purpose of the Youth Conferences is to reinforce the life skills presented through out the year at the scheduled life skills training groups and retreats. Youth conferences include various life skill building activities and motivational speakers. The County of Responsibility will submit an application for approval in MACWIS for the youth to attend the annual youth conference. The social worker shall also make a request for the Youth Conference Allowance (\$30.00), and the Youth Conference Clothing Allowance (\$200.00) in MACWIS.
- **Stipends** are paid for youth's accomplishments and assistance, which will be discussed under **Stipend Requirements and How To Apply**.
- **Transitional Independent Living Placements** are available to youth ages 18 to their 21st birthday, upon approval from the SAILS Advisory Board. Youth 17 years of age, who have obtained a high school diploma, General Education

- Diploma (GED), or Certificate of Completion will also be considered for placement.
- **Newsletter** distribution of information pertaining to the Independent Living Program is provided periodically to youth statewide. Submissions from the youth may be included in the newsletter.
 - **Handbook for Youth in Care** is available to all youth in the custody of the MDHS, Division of Family and Children's Services, who attain the age of fourteen (14) or older when entering custody. The Handbook highlights programs, services, brochures, and guideline information for the youth while in care. This Handbook is available through the county of which the youth resides in, and in conjunction with the Independent Living Specialist (contractor) upon the youth attending their first Life Skills group session.
 - **Education and Training Voucher Program** helps youth make the transition to self-sufficiency and to help youth receive the education, training and services necessary to obtain employment. Refer to the Educational and Training Voucher section for a complete discussion of this program.
 - **SAILS Advisory Board (Strategies for Accessing Independent Living Services)** is discussed under **Advisory Boards**.
 - **HOPE Forum (Help Ourselves Prosper Equally)** is discussed under **Advisory Boards**.
 - **Aftercare Services** are available to youth who leave care on or after 18th birthday. Refer to the Aftercare Services section for a complete discussion of this service.
 - **Big Brothers Big Sisters of Mississippi** mentoring program is available to youth in care ages 14-16, in selected areas.

ADVISORY BOARDS

SAILS Advisory Board (Strategies for Accessing Independent Living Services) is an advisory board composed of the State Independent Living Coordinator, MDHS Staff members from each of the regions in the State, the contractor Program Director, Mississippi Band of Choctaw representatives, stakeholders, and youth leaders. The board meets monthly to help in the decision making for recommendations of the Independent Living Program services.

HOPE Forum (Help Ourselves Prosper Equally) is a youth advisory, which consists of members who are participating in the Independent Living Program. Meetings are held at least once a quarter for the youth to discuss improvements or challenges with the Independent Living Program.

STIPEND REQUIREMENTS AND HOW TO APPLY

1. **Pre-Assessment Stipend:** A **\$25.00** stipend is available to all youth who complete a Life Skills Pre-Assessment form. The Independent Living Specialist will document the completion of the pre-assessment and will notify the County of Responsibility Social Worker that it has been completed by the youth. The Social Worker will submit the stipend request to the Independent Living Coordinator through MACWIS under State Funds.
2. **Post-Assessment Stipend:** A **\$25.00** stipend is available to all youth who participate in the Independent Living Program and complete a Post-Assessment. The Independent Living Specialist will document the completion of the post-assessment and will notify the County of Responsibility Social Worker that it has been completed by the youth. The Social Worker will submit the request to the Independent Living Coordinator through MACWIS under State Funds.
3. **Life Skills Training Group Stipend:** A **\$20.00** stipend can be earned for the completion of ten (10) Skills Hours. These skills groups are available through the Independent Living Specialist. The Specialist will document earned skills hours and will notify the County of Responsibility Social Worker that the youth has accumulated the required hours. The Social Worker will submit the request to the Independent Living Coordinator through MACWIS under State Funds. Youth will receive hour for hour credit for skills group participation. This stipend will be issued directly to the youth.
4. **Youth Retreat Stipend:** A **\$20.00** stipend can be earned for attending a retreat. These retreats are planned through the Independent Living Specialist. The Specialist will document satisfactory participation at the retreat and will notify the County of Responsibility Social Worker. The Social Worker will submit the request through MACWIS under State Funds. This stipend will be issued directly to the youth.
5. **Youth Conference Stipend:** A youth will receive a **\$30** cash stipend for successful completion of participation in the annual conference. The private contractor will pay this stipend to the youth at the completion of the conference. (Youth are eligible to receive a **\$30.00** Youth Conference Allowance and a **\$200.00** Youth Conference Clothing Allowance prior to attending the Youth Conference. The stipends shall be requested in MACWIS.)

6. **Newsletter Stipend:** A **\$15.00** stipend is available to youth who submit an article, poem or other creative writing, as well as a letter to the editor, or an editorial to the State Independent Living Coordinator for consideration for publication in any MDHS publication. The youth may send the submission directly to the State Independent Living Coordinator, MDHS, Placement Unit, or their County of Responsibility Social Worker or County of Service Social Worker may submit the writing for the youth. The County of Responsibility Social Worker will request the stipend in MACWIS and, upon approval, will issue the check directly to the youth.
7. **Senior Year Stipend:** A **\$350.00** stipend is available to help defray senior/final year expenses for youth receiving a diploma, GED or a Certificate of Attendance at the close of the school/program year in which the stipend is requested. The youth shall also be a participant in Independent Living Program activities. This stipend should be requested, during the youth's senior year, in MACWIS by the County of Responsibility Social Worker under State Funds. This stipend must be issued to the vendor(s). A re-imbusement payment may be issued to an individual/party, including a youth, in the event a purchase was made, and proof of payment was rendered. An itemized receipt must be presented to the County of Responsibility bookkeeper before a check can be issued. A statement from the youth's school verifying enrollment, as a senior/final year with anticipated graduation/completion being that same academic/program year, must be filed in the paper case record in the county. Typical senior/final year expenses include, but not limited to, pictures, invitations, cap and gown, prom attire, senior trip expenses. All purchases must be receipted and all receipts kept in the County of Responsibility office.
8. **High School Graduation Stipend:** A **\$200.00** Graduation Stipend is available to all youth in custody who receive a high school diploma. A copy of the diploma must be filed in the paper case record in the County of Responsibility office. This stipend can be accessed from the appropriate MACWIS screen. This one time stipend should be issued to the youth as a graduation gift to spend as the youth wishes. A signed receipt from the youth must be sent to the bookkeeper in the County of Responsibility.
9. **GED (General Education Diploma)/Certificate of Attendance Stipend:** A **\$150.00** Stipend is available to all youth in custody who receive a Certificate of Attendance, or pass the GED (General Equivalency Diploma). A copy of the certificate or diploma must be filed in the paper case record in the County of Responsibility office. This stipend can be accessed from the appropriate MACWIS screen. This one time stipend should be issued to the youth as a gift to spend as the youth wishes. A signed receipt from the youth must be sent to the bookkeeper in the County of Responsibility.

10. **College Bound Stipend:** A **\$600.00** College Bound Stipend is available to youth in care who plan to attend a post-secondary education program. This stipend is requested through the appropriate MACWIS screens after the County of Responsibility Social Worker receives proof youth has been accepted in a post-educational program. This stipend must be issued to the vendor(s). A reimbursement payment may be issued to an individual/party, including a youth, in the event a purchase was made, and proof of payment was rendered. An itemized receipt must be presented to the County of Responsibility bookkeeper before a check can be issued. All purchases must be receipted and all receipts kept in the County of Responsibility office. Allowable purchases are items needed to furnish a residence (on or off campus) such as, but not limited to: bedspread, curtains, rugs, refrigerator, microwave, trunk, bookcase, small appliances, computer, furniture items, and books/resource materials.
11. **College Graduation Stipend:** A **\$300.00** stipend is available for youth, until their 21st birthday, who complete a two-year community college, four-year college/university or full completion of a vocational program. Upon proof of graduation, this one time stipend should be requested in MACWIS by the County of Responsibility Social Worker and issued to the youth to spend as youth wishes. A signed receipt from the youth must be sent to the bookkeeper in the County of Responsibility.
12. **Start-Up Stipend:** A **\$1000.00** Start-Up Stipend is available to youth who leave care after turning age sixteen (16) and who have participated in the available Independent Living Program activities. The youth must have been in care for a minimum of six (6) months. This stipend may be requested during the six months prior to release from custody and up to the six months following release from custody. Documentation must be entered in MACWIS to include the release from custody date or the anticipated date. This stipend must be issued directly to the vendor(s). A reimbursement payment may be issued to an individual/party, including a youth, in the event a purchase was made, and proof of payment was rendered. An itemized receipt must be presented to the County of Responsibility bookkeeper before a check can be issued. All purchases must be receipted and all receipts kept in the County of Responsibility office. Acceptable purchases may include any items associated with the establishment of a home, such as, but not limited to: dishes, cooking utensils, appliances, linens, furniture, cleaning supplies, curtains, and rugs. The County of Responsibility Social Worker should request this one-time stipend through the appropriate MACWIS screens. A youth released from custody, who is age 17 and already has a job, may use a portion of this stipend to assist in the purchase or repair of a vehicle, if the vehicle is needed in the youth's job and as long as the youth already has the minimal essential items needed to live independently. This youth must show proof of having a driver's license and State required liability insurance.
13. **Youth Trainer Stipend:** A **\$20** stipend is available to youth for assisting in various training activities. The State Independent Living Coordinator, based on recommendations from the SAILS Advisory Board, will select youth.

14. **Aftercare Survey Stipend:** A **\$15** stipend is available to youth upon completion and return of an Aftercare Survey. This stipend will be paid by the contractor.

15. **Personal Enhancement Stipend:** A discretionary stipend may be awarded to a youth in custody, who has attained age 16, based on documented needs and contingent upon available funds. *This stipend is paid when all other sources of financial assistance have been explored and exhausted such as youth's own money, county funds, and regional funds.* The County of Responsibility must make a request for this stipend through MACWIS for approval by the State Independent Living Coordinator. A well-documented justification explaining the youth's needs must accompany the request. This stipend cannot exceed **\$500** and must be paid to the vendor(s). A re-imbusement payment may be issued to an individual/party, including a youth, in the event a purchase was made, and proof of payment was rendered. An itemized receipt must be presented to the County of Responsibility bookkeeper before a check can be issued. The youth **must** have participated in the ILP. Items that can be purchased with this fund include, but are not limited to, drivers education, summer school, correspondence courses, tutors, test fees, medical/dental procedures not covered under insurance or Medicaid, special trips/camps, or other extra-curricular school activities.

*Mississippi Band of Choctaw youth are eligible for the above listed stipends. The youth reside in the following counties in Mississippi; Attala, Jones, Kemper, Leake, Neshoba, Newton, Scott, and Winston. A worker who receives a stipend request from a Mississippi Band of Choctaw youth must complete a Case Management service in MACWIS, requesting the appropriate support service for the particular stipend. This can be entered from the county location of which the youth resides in.

DRIVERS LICENSE FOR YOUTH IN CARE

The Resource Family parents, group home administrator who has responsibility of the youth in care, a court-appointed guardian, an employer of the youth in care; or if there is no guardian or employer, then any other responsible person who is willing to assume the financial obligation (liability) imposed under Miss. Code §63-1-25, may choose to sign the application for a youth, unless restricted by a court order, who is at least age 16, to obtain a driver's license.

All drivers are required to be covered by liability insurance. However, if a car accident is caused because the youth-in-care was negligent or engaged in willful misconduct, and the damages suffered by passengers in his vehicle or in another vehicle are higher than the policy limits on the insurance coverage, the foster parent or other adult who signed the driver's license application will be liable for whatever the liability insurance does not pay. The young driver's negligence or willful misconduct is imputed to the adult who

signed the young person's application for a license without any need to prove that the adult was negligent in supervising the youth in care. This is the obligation (potential liability) imposed under Miss. Code §63-1-25.

A youth who is seventeen (17) years of age or older may sign a license application without an adult's signature, but may not drive until he is covered by liability insurance.

MOTOR VEHICLES FOR YOUTH IN CARE

Resource Family parents or any other responsible adult has the freedom to purchase a motor vehicle for a youth in custody unless restricted by a court order. The county staff shall be informed of the plan to purchase a vehicle, prior to the purchase of the vehicle. That plan must be well documented in MACWIS under the Transitional Living Plan; Transportation Radio Button. Youth in care may purchase a vehicle with their own funds if they have a valid driver's license, proof of liability insurance, and income to maintain the vehicle.

TRANSITIONAL LIVING PLAN

Youth in care, age 16 and older, shall have a Transitional Living Plan in addition to the Individual Service Plan. A Transitional Living Plan is defined as a plan documenting how a youth will move from State's custody into other programs or to self-sufficiency. The County of Responsibility Social Worker must identify on the IL Plan/TL Plan screen in MACWIS, the youth's post-custody living arrangement, means of support, educational/vocational, food & clothing, health, transportation and mentor/resource family. Six (6) months prior to the anticipated release of custody date, the Independent Living Specialist (contractor) should be notified to assist the youth in preparing for their independence. The youth can be linked with an Aftercare Specialist (contractor) who will secure from the youth information on where he or she can be reached for future reference as well as to complete an Exit Interview form. The Transitional Living Plan shall be updated and modified, as needed, each time the youth's ISP is reviewed and updated.

INDEPENDENT LIVING PLACEMENTS

An **Independent Living Placement** is defined as placement in an apartment, house, or rooming house with supervision from a licensed placement agency. A youth who has attained age 17, has obtained a high school diploma, certificate of attendance or GED and is in the custody of MDHS may be placed through an agency licensed for independent living placements. The youth's social worker, Area Social Work Supervisor, and Independent Living Specialist must recommend this placement to the SAILS Advisory Board before final approval by the Independent Living Coordinator.

Placement Requirements;

- Shall be located to provide reasonably convenient access to school, place of employment, and other essential services;
- Shall comply with all fire, sanitation, and safety regulations as determined by MDHS Licensure Standards as set for Child Placing Agencies;
- Shall be affordable based on the youth's established budget;
- All request for Independent Living placements shall be presented to the Division of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) SAILS Advisory Board for consideration;
- The State Independent Living Coordinator, with the recommendations of the SAILS Advisory Board, approves all Independent Living placements;
- Shall have provisions to allow for a roommate if the conditions under **Responsibilities of the Youth** are followed.

Role of the Child Placing Agency;

- Shall sign the lease or rental agreement;
- Shall provide a contractual agreement of responsibilities for the youth to sign. This agreement shall be updated as circumstances such as changes in the level of income or work schedule changes;
- Shall accept the Board Payment and disseminate the funds to the landlord for rent and any surplus funds to the youth;
- Shall make on-site visits as directed by the child placing agency's policy and in accordance with MDHS, Division of Family and Children's Services' licensing standards for child placing agencies;

Responsibilities of the Youth;

- Youth must be employed, with sufficient income to meet the needs of their budget;
- Youth must be an active participant and maintain involvement in the Independent Living Program;
- Youth must be capable of creating a budget based on income and living within the created budget;
- Youth must have a plan to cover the initial cost of placement;
- Youth must be willing to sign and comply with a contract from the licensed placing agency, delineating specific rules and requirements. If the contract is not satisfactorily met, the youth must leave the Independent Living Placement Program;
- Youth must be willing to allow planned and unplanned visits to the residence by the social worker, the specialist, the placement agency, and other Department staff as deemed necessary;

- If the youth wishes to live with a roommate(s), the roommate(s) must:
 - ▶ be a sibling or another youth who is also in MDHS custody;
 - ▶ be of the same sex, if not biological siblings, and have separate bedrooms;
 - ▶ be presented to the SAILS Advisory Board for approval if the roommate is not in the custody of MDHS. The SAILS Advisory Board will give consideration of the requests on a case-by-case basis;
 - ▶ be approved for Independent Living placements;

Responsibilities of the Social Worker;

- Shall assist youth, in conjunction with the Independent Living Specialist, in selecting appropriate housing, avoiding conflict of interest regarding rental property;
- Shall locate and approve a mentor for the youth;
- Shall be available to meet with the SAILS Advisory Board members and the child placing agency staff;
- Shall enter the appropriate placement information on the appropriate MACWIS screen after placement has been confirmed.

Responsibilities of the Area Social Work Supervisor (ASWS);

- Shall attend SAILS Advisory Board meetings in the event the Social Worker or appointee to the SAILS Advisory Board is unavailable to attend;
- Shall review for approval appropriate placement information in MACWIS
- Shall review for approval the release of the appropriate funds for Independent Living Support Services, and Independent Living Placement Services

Responsibilities of the Independent Living Specialists (contractor);

- Shall assist youth, in conjunction with the MDHS Social Worker, in selecting appropriate housing, avoiding conflict of interest regarding rental property;
- Shall meet with the youth every two weeks and assist in the maintenance of the youth's budget;
- Shall compile monthly reports to be presented at the monthly SAILS Advisory Board meeting, outlining the youth's previous month's activities;
- Shall report problems or potential problems to the social worker.

EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING VOUCHER (ETV) PROGRAM

The ETV Program is a federal program that provides supplemental resources to meet the *cost of attendance* in post-secondary educational and vocational programs, as defined in the Higher Education Act of 1965, for all youth aging out of custody. This program makes vouchers of up to \$5,000 per year available to eligible youth attending post-secondary education.

The following individuals will be considered for Educational and Training Vouchers:

- Youth currently in custody of MDHS;
- Youth who have left custody because they attained 18 years of age, and have not yet attained 21 years of age;
- Youth who were adopted at age 16 and have not yet attained 21 years of age;
- Youth who graduate high school, receive a GED, or a certificate of attendance;
- Youth must have participated in the ETV Program prior to their 21st birthday in order to continue receiving ETV funds until their 23rd birthday;
- Youth must first apply for, and have received confirmation from the institution through an award letter to include the Pell Grant, MTAG, scholarships, or other grants, if applicable. The Independent Living Specialist will provide assistance to the Social Worker to secure necessary documentation.

The funds may be applied for annually during each federal fiscal year (October 1-September 30). The limited amount of \$5,000, per youth, must be utilized during the fiscal year. The application should be made using the following criteria:

- Enrolled in an institution of higher education, as defined by the Higher Education Act of 1965:
 - Awards a Bachelor's Degree or is not less than a two-year program (Associate's Degree) that provides credit towards a degree, or;
 - Provides not less than one year of training towards gainful employment, or;
 - Is a vocational program that provides training for gainful employment and has been in existence for at least two years.
- In good standing with the college, university or vocational training school;
- Maintaining a grade point average of 2.0 on a 4.0 scale. If grade point average is below a 2.0, the youth has one semester to reestablish a 2.0 grade point average;
- Making progress towards completing the programs they are enrolled in;
- Priority will be given to full time students in the event of ETV funding being depleted, per federal fiscal year.

A worker who receives an ETV request from a Youth out of care and eligible for the ETV program shall complete a Case Management service in MACWIS, requesting the appropriate support service for the ETV voucher. This can be entered from any county location, regardless of the originating County of Responsibility.

ETV APPROVAL PROCESS:

- Independent Living (IL) Specialists (Contractor) will assist in identifying eligible youth;
- The IL Specialists (Contractor) coordinates financial aide application/packet with youth (FASFA, MTAG, Institution);
 - The youth must first apply for, and have received confirmation and/or disapproval notices from applications made for the Pell Grant, MTAG, scholarships, or other grants the youth may have applied for. The IL Specialist must also factor in the sources and amounts of any other funds that may be available to the youth.
- The IL Specialists (Contractor) coordinates ETV application with youth; and sends application to the COR Social Worker and ASWS for signature; upon obtaining signatures;
- The IL Specialists sends ETV application to State Independent Living Coordinator, for review;
- The State Independent Living Coordinator sends the ETV notification to the DFCS Administration Unit Director to ensure the county of responsibility has ample State Funds in the Mississippi Automated Child Welfare Information System; (MACWIS) for the county to select a Education and Training Voucher Support Service;
- The State Independent Living Coordinator notifies by phone or e-mail, the County of Responsibility (COR) Social Worker to expedite notice to enter the ETV support service request in MACWIS by selecting the Education and Training Voucher Support Service;
- County of Responsibility social worker enters the ETV request in MACWIS;
- A tickler (electronic notification) is received by the Area Social Work Supervisor to review/approve the ETV request in MACWIS;
- A tickler (electronic notification) is sent to the State Independent Living Coordinator;
- The State Independent Living Coordinator reviews/approves the ETV request in MACWIS;
- The ETV tickler (electronic notification) goes to the County of Responsibility Bookkeeper to be expedited;
- The County of Responsibility Bookkeeper prepares payment for the approved ETV Support Service provider (vendor or youth). A re-imbusement payment may be issued to an individual/party, including a youth, in the event a purchase was made, and proof of payment was rendered. An itemized receipt must be presented to the County of Responsibility bookkeeper before a check can be issued

An initial ETV application must be submitted in writing to enroll the youth into the ETV Program prior to their 21st birthday. Renewal applications may be submitted on or after October 1 of each subsequent year, until their 23rd birthday.

“Cost of attendance” is defined under the Higher Education Act of 1965 and includes tuition, fees, equipment, materials, computers, housing, internships, school-related travel, transportation needs, childcare, room and board, healthcare, student loans, and reimbursement of educational needs to the applicant. For the purpose of this title, the term “cost of attendance” means:

- 13) tuition and fees normally assessed a student carrying the same academic workload as determined by the institution, and including costs for rental or purchase of any equipment, materials, or supplies required of all students in the same course of study;
- 14) an allowance for books, supplies, transportation, and miscellaneous personal expenses, including a reasonable allowance for the documented rental and purchase of a personal computer, for a student attending the institution on at least a halftime basis as determined by institution;
- 15) an allowance (as determined by the institution) for room and board costs incurred by the student;
 - a. shall be an allowance determined by the institution for a student without dependents residing at home with parents;
 - b. for students without dependents residing in institutionally owned or operated housing, shall be a standard allowance determined by the institution based on the amount normally assessed most of its residents for room and board; and
 - c. for all other students shall be an allowance based on the expenses reasonably incurred by such students for room and board;
- 16) for less than half-time students (as determined by the institution) tuition and fees and an allowance for only books, supplies and transportation (as determined by the institution) and dependent care expenses;
- 17) for students engaged in a program of study by correspondence, only tuition and fees, and if required, books and supplies, travel, and room and board costs incurred specifically in fulfilling a required period of residential training;
- 18) for incarcerated students only tuition and fees, and if required, books and supplies;
- 19) for a student enrolled in an academic program in a program of study abroad approved for credit by the student’s home institution, reasonable costs associated with such study;
- 20) for a student with one or more dependents, an allowance based on the estimated actual expenses incurred for such dependent care, based on the number and age of such dependents;
- 21) for a student with a disability, an allowance (as determined by the institution) for those expenses related to the student’s disability, including special services, personal assistance, transportation, equipment, and supplies that are reasonably incurred and not provided for by other assisting agencies;
- 22) for a student receiving all or part of the student’s instruction by means of telecommunications technology, no distinction shall be made with respect to the mode of instruction in determining costs;
- 23) for a student engaged in a work experience under a cooperative education program, an allowance for reasonable costs associated with such employment (as determined by the institution);
- 24) for a student who receives a loan under this or any other Federal law, or, at the option of the institution, a conventional student loan incurred by the student to cover a student’s cost of attendance at the institution, an allowance for the actual cost of any loan fee, originated fee, or insurance premium charged to such student or such parent on such loan, or the average cost of any such fee or premium charged by the Secretary, lender, or guaranty agency making or insuring such loan, as the case may be.

An “*institution of higher education*”, as defined by the Higher Education Act of 1965:

- Awards a Bachelor’s Degree or is not less than a two-year program (Associate’s Degree) that provides credit towards a degree, or
- Provides not less than one year of training towards gainful employment, or
- Is a vocational program that provides training for gainful employment and has been in existence for at least two years.
- Admits as regular students only persons with a high school diploma or equivalent; or admits as regular students persons who are beyond the age of compulsory school attendance.
- Is a public, private, or non-profit institution.
- Is accredited or pre-accredited and is authorized to operate in that state.

AFTERCARE SERVICES

Special financial assistance will be provided for youth ages 18 until their 21st birthday, who left custody on or after attaining age 18. These services are available to youth in crisis who need additional temporary assistance to continue in the process of transitioning towards self-sufficiency. The benefits can be distributed quarterly as long as youth remains in crisis.

Aftercare Services may include rent deposits, rent, utility deposits, utility payments, food and household supplies, and child care. Payment must be made to the vendor(s) and receipts kept in the county file. These services are available to the youth in the county where the youth currently resides as long as that county MDHS worker secures documentation or a statement from the youth/chancery court that youth has been released from agency’s custody. The county of residence social worker must assess the youth’s needs before creating a plan of action with the youth. The worker must complete a Case Management service in MACWIS. All requests for funds will be reviewed and considered for approval on a case-by-case basis by the Independent Living State Coordinator.

AFTERCARE MEDICAID

Youth in care who leave MDHS custody on or after their 18th birthday, but who have not reached their 21st birthday, are eligible through the month they turn 21, without regard to income or resources, for Medicaid coverage. The County of Responsibility Social Worker shall send an end date on foster care services for these youth to the Division of Medicaid (DOV), who will issue a letter to the youth specifying continued coverage.

Foster children who are receiving Medicaid or Health benefits under other categories such as SSI, TANF, Economic Assistance, CHIPS, and Regional Medicaid will not be in the category for automatic continuous Medicaid Coverage up to age 21. Those individual programs will have to determine eligibility for continued coverage.

Independent Living Program Legal Base

Federal: Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, PL 106-169
Higher Education Act of 1965, Sections 102 and 472

State: Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated, Section 11-46-8
Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated, Section 43-15-13
Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated, Section 43-21-151
Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated, Section 43-23
Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated, Section 63-1-25