

PART II: Final Report for Fiscal Years 2000-2004

(9) Chafee Foster Care Independence Program

**Children's Administration
Department of Social and Health Services**

Final Report for FY 00-04: Chafee Foster Care Independence Program

<p>Section 477 (b)(2) Lead Agency</p>	<p>In Washington State, the Department of Social and Health Services, Children's Administration (CA) administers, supervises and oversees the Title IV-E program and the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP). CA has continued efforts to implement and improve the Chafee Independent Living Program. Community collaboration is a guiding force in our work with adolescents and their caregivers. Contact information for the CA program manager is as follows:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Marlon Buchanan, Independent Living Program Manager Department of Social and Health Services Children's Administration Post Office Box 45710 Olympia, WA 98504-5710 (360) 902-7976 Phone (360) 902-7903 Fax buml300@dshs.wa.gov</p>
<p>Report Overview</p>	<p>The first years of Chafee implementation have been primarily concerned with developing the infrastructure for services and making sure social service workers, youth, and other stakeholders are aware of resources available, and in evaluating the status of youth transitioning from state care. We have grown from having programs scattered across the state to having only a few coverage gaps. We've expanded from serving only young people between 16 and 18 to serving young people between 13 and 23. We've made promising inroads with systems integration to improve educational, housing, and employment outcomes.</p>

<p>Section 477 (a)(1-6)</p>	<p>(1) Help youth make the transition to self sufficiency</p> <p>The Washington State legislature established statutory authority to serve former foster youth ages 18 to 21 in June 2001. The Children's Administration immediately began implementing services to address the needs of this population. Services to former foster care youth are delivered via a contract amendment to the Independent Living contract. These contracted programs are known as <i>Transitional Living Programs (TLPs)</i>. We started with three TLPs in 2001, seven in 2002, and we have grown to having 10 currently. We have TLP programs in</p>
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every region. Service delivery to former foster care youth between the ages of 18 and 21 has increased by more than 120% since the establishment of the programs in 2001. These programs assist eligible youth in securing housing, employment, and employment-related training and education.

In addition, Independent Living programs have grown. The number of youth receiving Independent Living services between the ages of 16-18 has increased over 170%. We have also lowered the eligibility age for Independent Living services to 13.

Washington State passed the Homeless Prevention, Protection and Engagement Act (HOPE) in 1999 that established the Responsible Living Skills Program (RLSP). RLS programs are designed for youth, ages 16 to 18 in the custody of the State or Tribe. The programs provide long-term housing, assessment, and life skills training to youth who are state-dependent, who are not returning to their families, and who have been unsuccessful in traditional foster care.

(2) Help youth receive the education, training and services to obtain employment

Educational stability and achievement for children in foster care is an important aspect of insuring a successful transition to self-sufficiency. In 2002, the Children's Administration (CA) and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) convened a workgroup to examine methods to improve school stability and achievement for children in foster care. Specific recommendations to improve practices in information sharing, educational advocacy and education planning resulted. Implementation is underway. For example:

- DCFS/school protocols (communicating about foster youth) – the protocols developed by the workgroup are going forward across the state as a directive.
- School-based foster parent recruitment – a tool-kit has been created and contracts for the actual recruitment work in the schools are in development.
- Court protocols – CA and OSPI issued a request to all Washington State judicial officers asking that they incorporate the following questions into the shelter care hearing:
 - What is the child's current education status?
 - Where is the child enrolled?
 - Does the child have special education needs?

- How is the child being transported to and from school?
- Data-sharing – The workgroup has identified the foster child information needed for a meaningful exchange of information between schools and local CA/DCFS offices. There is a letter of agreement being developed regarding data collection between schools, CA and the courts.

Casey and the YMCA ILP are partners in the Renton WorkSource YouthSource one-stop to link current and former foster youth entering WIA programs with Chafee and other resources targeted for foster youth and to facilitate entrance of foster youth into WIA programs. A Casey-sponsored Americorps City Year team has been deployed at the YouthSource Learning Center for the 2003-04 school year to provide tutoring and other support for foster youth.

Education Consortium (members include Casey Family Programs; DCFS Region 4; Seattle Public Schools, Team Child; Treehouse; UW NW Institute for Children and Families)– April 2004 are finalizing a MOU between Seattle Public Schools and DCFS, Region 4, to proactively raise awareness of the needs of foster care students in the schools and to collaboratively promote their academic success through collaborative training, inter-systems communication and individually tailored social/academic planning and support for foster care children in Seattle Public Elementary Schools.

Education improvement, pilot projects were first initiated in 2002 using the extension of available Chafee funds from year 2000. The projects included tutoring services, educational advocacy, vocational training, youth development activities, and community volunteer projects. Approximately 160 youth benefited from these services. Graduation ceremonies for 2002 and 2003 high school graduates and GED recipients were also held in all six of the Division of Children and Family Service regions in Washington State.

Judicial Checklist and Information for Judges

“Critical Questions and Strategies for Meeting the Education Needs of Children and Youth in Juvenile and Family Court, Judicial Checklist and Information for Judges,” a collaboration of Team Child and Casey, provides judges with information and questions to ask about the educational needs and progress of the children for whom they have judicial responsibility. Based on the premise that just by asking a few simple questions a judge can highlight significant educational problems a

child might have. The checklist provides four basic questions, each with a set of sub-questions. For each question, there is a supplement which gives pertinent information and specific strategies for dealing with a problem. For example, one question is: "Is the child enrolled in school and doing well?" The supplemental information covers legal information related to enrollment and two strategies the judge can use to ensure that the child will be enrolled in a timely manner. Casey is working with Team Child and others to promote institutionalizing the use of the Judicial Checklist in Washington State.

(3) Help youth prepare for and enter post-secondary training and educational institutions

In 2001, Governor Gary Locke instituted a golf tournament to raise funds for scholarships for foster youth to attend higher education institutions. Governor's Scholarships are currently awarded to 25-30 foster youth each year. This program currently works in concert with Washington state's Education and Training Voucher program to identify post-secondary bound youth and help to provide them with mentoring and financial assistance.

Building on these initiatives and opportunities, the CA and other community stakeholders are proposing a comprehensive effort to meet the post secondary education needs of youth from foster care - the *Foster Care to College Program*. The intent of this program is to reach out to those who will be emancipated from foster care by helping them graduate from high school and attend college utilizing the scholarship aid that is currently available to them.

Contracted IL providers prepare and mentor foster youth ages 16 to 18 to complete high school or a GED program, and enter post-secondary education programs. Many regions have instituted formal tutoring, educational advocacy, and homework assistance programs.

(4) Provide personal and emotional support to youth through mentors and the promotion of interaction with dedicated adults

Mentoring of youth is a paid activity through contracted IL services. The assessment of IL needs and completion of the IL plan for all foster youth ages 16 through 17 is a requirement. The IL checklist is also required to be in every service record prior to the date the youth is expected to exit from care. Youth centered personal and emotional support will be facilitated through the use of the Ansell-Casey Life Skills

Assessment (ACLSA) starting in 2004.

Contracted IL providers, foster parents and community service providers are successfully connecting youth with adults. The Foster Youth Transition to Independence Study, Final Report (Office of Children's Administration Research, 2004) interviewed 71% of pre-emancipation youth who had been in public child welfare foster care for at least 12 months. "Almost all of the youth (97%) report having a close positive relationship with at least one adult."

The recipients of the Education and Training Vouchers receive mentoring and support through their post-secondary programs. This is a formalized and contracted service.

(5) Provide financial, housing, counseling, employment and other appropriate support and services to former foster care recipients between 18 and 20 years of age

Whenever possible, services to former foster care youth are delivered by contracted service providers. If contracted service agencies are not available, youth may still apply for transition funds through a regional Division of Children and Family Services office. Contracted private agencies will continue to develop partnerships with housing and employment agencies and help young people stay connected to supportive adults and peers. Contracted Transitional Living Programs will continue to provide the following services:

- I. Educational services, including basic literacy and computational skills training, either in local alternative public high schools or in a high school equivalency program that leads to obtaining a high school equivalency degree;
- II. Assistance in securing and maintaining safe and stable housing;
- III. Assistance and counseling related to obtaining vocational training or higher education, job readiness, job search assistance, and placement programs;
- IV. Counseling and instruction in life skills such as money management, home management, consumer skills, parenting, healthy marriages, health care, access to community resources, and transportation and housing options;

V. Individual and group counseling; and

VI. Networking with federal agencies and state and local organizations such as the United States Department of Labor, employment and training administration programs including the Workforce Investment Act which administers Workforce Development Councils, the Job Corps, vocational rehabilitation, volunteer programs, and housing authorities.

Transitional living programs are currently offered in every region. The state coverage will continue to increase over the next five years.

(6) Make available vouchers for education and training, including postsecondary education, to youth who have aged out of foster care

Services to former foster care youth in Washington State are delivered via a contract for Education and Training Voucher services. Only IL providers who also provide Transitional Living Services are allowed to have an Education and Training Voucher contract. This is to help create a "continuum of care" for youth who enter a provider's IL program and subsequently transition to the TL program. TLPs are already experts with youth ages 18-21 and have already established relationships with the youth who will take advantage of ETV. ETV services include:

- Outreach, identification, eligibility determination of ETV recipients
- Helping youth fill out ETV application, FAFSA application, and other financial aid applications
- Mentoring recipients of ETV. This service includes:
 - Working with other agencies such as the Washington Education Foundation, the Orphan Foundation of America, the Washington State Higher Education Coordinating Board, and post-secondary institutions to identify additional resources for youth
 - Helping youth to develop education and career plans
 - Providing support for youth through their post-secondary education
- Tracking youth progress in their post-secondary program
- Submitting quarterly reports detailing demographic information, information about the use of ETV funds, and other tracking information to help better the ETV program

We currently have 10 ETV programs; at least one in each region of the state. We also have a separate ETV program for all 29 federally

recognized tribes. We expect to serve over 130 youth with vouchers in the first year of the program.

A Chafee Independent Living data base was created in 2003 to allow child welfare supervisors and social workers to track Chafee eligible youth. The data base will allow CA to begin transition planning for every 17 year old in care. Transition planning provides young people access to their local TLP prior to exit from foster care. A formal transition plan for every young person in foster care provides a safety net and ongoing connection to a support system upon exit from foster care. Additionally TLPs already serve many of the eligible and soon to be eligible youth and will work with each youth to create education plans that will include ETV.

Coordination between ETV contractors and the Washington Education Foundation, the Washington State Higher Education Coordinating Board, and other agencies enable former foster care youth to have access to the maximum amount of financial assistance (e.g., federal student financial aid programs, grants, scholarships, etc.). Moreover, DSHS will approve costs for higher education that shall not exceed the lesser of \$5000 or the total cost of attendance as defined in section 472 of the Higher Education Act, thereby allowing ETV funds to leverage other sources of funds and give us the opportunity to provide special assistance to youth with learning disabilities and other barriers to education and employment success. A guidebook and application have been developed to instruct providers how to:

- Determine eligibility for ETV
- Determine financial need based on the Higher Education Act
- Work with other agencies to identify additional resources for youth
- Provide mentoring services
- Provide quarterly reports

The guidebook and application are kept up to date by the IL Program Manager with consultation from ETV providers and DSHS staff. Tracking and monitoring procedures will be put in place in order to prevent duplication of benefits. The initial procedures will consist of:

- Regional databases listing the service providers in each region detailing how the funds are being allocated;
- Headquarter based database detailing the spending statewide;
- Quarterly cross referencing of these databases to ensure accuracy and maintain performance goals; and
- Development of action steps designed to rectify any discrepancies within the databases.

Additional
Progress

Tribal Participation

Agreements with the Tribes regarding allocation of the Chafee Independent Living funds were reached in year 2000. Each year, a solicitation process occurs where all 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington State are given an opportunity to apply for Chafee funding. Tribal youth also have access to statewide IL providers. Applications are reviewed by tribal representatives and representatives from CA. To date, every tribe that has requested Chafee funds for their own IL program has been approved for funding. This year, 23 tribes requested funds.

Community Collaboration

In Region 4, the community collaboration initiated in 2000 by the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (DCFS, Treehouse, Seattle-King County WorkForce Development Council, YMCA Transitions and ILP, Mockingbird Society, King County Mental Health Division, Chemical Abuse & Dependency, Juvenile Justice and others) has continued to grow. In November 2003, tangible evidence was the opening of the 2100 Building, a new facility in central Seattle that houses several of the transition collaborators – Treehouse, the YMCA Chafee-funded ILP and privately-funded Transitions Programs, and the Mockingbird Society – as well as other agencies who provide programs and services for youth.

The Youth In Transition Planning Committee in Region 2 is made up of contracted providers for Independent Living Services, community partners representing the Casey Family Program and other social service agencies, local government, C.A. staff, and youth. This region wide committee, which meets quarterly, has been instrumental in developing education enhancement projects, working with local landlords in establishing housing options for youth, implementing the Transitional Living Grants, and creating the process for distributing the ETV vouchers. An upcoming project will involve securing grant dollars to be put toward various education enhancement projects. Youth advisors to the committee include some who are still placed in state care, and some who have reached adult status. These youth provide the Committee with critical information about their needs for assistance as they move toward independence, and about the best ways for Chafee funds to be put to use. Other regions have similar collaborations.

Treehouse is a private non-profit agency serving foster youth that

provides clothing and school supplies for foster youth, funding for enrichment activities and summer camp, and in-school tutoring. With support from Casey Family Programs and private funds, TreeHouse provides Educational Advocacy services for middle-school age foster care students and the Coaching-to-College program to assist high school foster youth to apply for and succeed in post-secondary education, including accessing Chafee funds.

The YMCA Transitions program is designed to help moderate-to-high functioning young adults, age 18-23, in King County who are or have been in foster care who need assistance in obtaining and maintaining stable housing and developing independent living skills. The program assists young people to access Chafee funds and augments those funds to assist with the costs of housing and supports young adults in acquiring furniture, household supplies and computer technology. Through life skills classes and coaching, program staff support young adults in building independent living skills, focusing on education, career exploration, job acquisition, leadership development, relationships, health and wellness. A range of housing options to meet the developmental needs of youth in transition include: "host homes" for youth too old for public foster care but who still need help developing independent living skills from a "foster parent"; shared homes for 4 – 6 youth with a resident manager; room rentals where the host parent is primarily a landlord; and shared apartments in the community.

The Young Adult Housing Task Force is a work group of the Transition Collaborators established to create housing linked with services for young adults (18 through 23 years old) in King County exiting state care (foster care, juvenile justice system) with a felony or sexually deviant background. In addition to foster care service providers, participants include representatives from the Seattle, Renton and King County Housing Authorities, area youth housing and service providers, Juvenile Rehabilitation Services, and the Department of Corrections.

Ready to Rent is a program of United Way's Out of the Rain Homeless Initiative in partnership with Mutual Interest and the Rental Association of Puget Sound. The YMCA and Casey were selected as programs to deliver their housing preparedness curriculum and whose clients can access their free credit reports and move in assistance funds.

ILP Seattle is a website that was created in 2003 to provide guidance to King County young adults ages 13-25 years on how to transition out of foster care successfully. This website provides guidance in education,

employment, housing, and life skills, and information about programs and resources in King County that can assist with transition. Another helpful web-based site that covers all Washington State is Child Advocacy Central, an internet project developed through the merging of goals of two distinct Washington advocacy groups, the University of Washington Child Advocacy Clinic and the Washington State Children's Justice Interdisciplinary Task Force (CJITF). This site is designed for three target audiences: professionals, foster parents/caregivers and teens and provides relevant, timely information in an easily understood format. Website topics include "Learn about the child welfare system"; 'Understand child welfare terms'; 'Respond to child abuse and neglect'. The site also has an interactive component that encourages caregivers to voice their opinions about such things as the rewards and challenges of caring for children, and a list of services in our community.

The Washington State Independent Living Coordinator and other CA staff are closely aligned with Casey Family Programs, the private foundation whose headquarters is in Seattle, Washington. Collaborative efforts between CA and Casey occur at both the direct service level and the systems improvement level to help adolescents in foster care achieve self-sufficiency. At the level of direct services, CA staff will continue to work with Casey workers in Seattle, Yakima and Tacoma to jointly provide services to adolescents in and from foster care. At the systems level, the IL Coordinator will continue to work closely with the Casey Washington State Strategy Director to review and adopt Casey best practices, tools and products chosen by the IL Coordinator and to coordinate technical assistance from Casey in implementation of services.