

# CHAPTER 9: PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD AND DISCHARGE PLANNING

**Introduction:** Growing up and becoming an adult is not easy, but it can be very exciting and you can get help and support every step of the way. Most young people transition to adulthood and are able to live on their own and do things like have a career and support themselves in their mid to late 20s. All youth need and deserve help as they build up the skills and experience to be able to make it on their own. There are many laws that help ensure that you will have support as you plan for your future and achieve your goals. This chapter gives you information on your rights and services that will help as you prepare for adulthood and when you are leaving the system at age 18 or older.

## I. Transition to Adulthood Planning Begins at 14

### **What are transition to adulthood services?**

- Transition to adulthood services are services and supports to help you achieve your dreams and learn the skills you need to handle the responsibilities of being an adult.

### **At what age should transition to adulthood planning and services start?**

- Planning and services to support your transition to adulthood should begin at least at age 14 for all youth who are in foster care.<sup>1</sup>

### **Am I eligible for transition to adulthood services no matter what my permanency plan is?**

- Yes. All young people deserve support in transitioning to adulthood no matter what their permanency plan is.

### **If I am in the juvenile justice system, am I eligible for transition to adulthood services?**

- If you are involved in the child welfare system and juvenile justice system—sometimes called shared case management—you are eligible for transition to adulthood services.
- Counties have the option to provide transition to adulthood services to youth in the juvenile justice system.<sup>2</sup> Ask your caseworker or probation if your county does and ask for transition to adulthood services!

### **Can I get transition to adulthood services no matter where I live and what type of placement I am in?**

- **All youth** in care age 14 or older are entitled to transition to adulthood services, regardless of where you are placed.
- **You are eligible** whether you live with your foster parents, family members, in a group home, a residential treatment center, or supervised independent living placement.
- You are also eligible for transition service after you leave foster care and placement. See the aftercare section for more information on this.

### **Should I be getting transition services if I have a disability or other special needs?**

- All youth age 14 and older are entitled to transition to adulthood services! Youth with disabilities deserve the same supports.<sup>3</sup>
- Both Federal and State law require that you receive services that are developmentally and age appropriate and that you are provided accommodations or assistance to make sure that even if you have a disability you can still receive the services you need.<sup>4</sup>
- JLC developed a guide for youth with disabilities to help guide their transition to adulthood.<sup>5</sup>
- You may also be able to get additional services through school or the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. Talk with your casework to see what is right for you! (See Chapter 6: Youth With Disabilities)

### **Why are you calling these services transition to adulthood services? Aren't they independent living services?**

- A federal law changed the name of independent living services to transition to a successful adulthood services.<sup>6</sup> State law has also changed.<sup>7</sup>
- This change in wording reflected the reality that young people—in and out of foster care—do not become independent as they enter adulthood. Instead, most adults develop skills so they can support themselves and thrive, but all people depend on others and are interdependent.
- As you get older you should learn more skills, have the opportunity to become more independent and make your own decisions, but you should also have a support of family, peers, and others whether you are 17, 21, or even 45! As you get older you also become part of more people's network and help them grow as well.

### **Are "Chafee" services different than transition to adulthood services?**

- The John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood, referred to as "Chafee", is the name of section of the federal law that provides funding to all states, including Pennsylvania.<sup>8</sup> These funds are used for transition to adulthood services for eligible youth but are not the only funding source for transition services.<sup>9</sup>

- You have a right to transition planning and services beginning at 14 no matter what funding is available.

### **What transition to adulthood services should I be receiving?**

- The services you receive should be based on your own goals and needs and should be listed in your case plan.
- **Here are some examples of some common transition services:**
  - Help obtaining high school diploma or GED
  - Help planning for your education
  - Help preparing for post-secondary programs, like college or trade school, including school visits, preparing for the ACT or SATs, filling out applications for schools and financial aid
  - Career planning and support
  - Job training and help with searching for and getting a job
  - Instruction on how to take care of a home or apartment
  - Budgeting and money management
  - Help finding housing and understanding the obligations of renting an apartment
  - Mentoring
  - Help building and maintaining meaningful, supportive connections with caring adults
  - Help understanding public transportation and how to access community resources
  - Understanding family planning options and how to have healthy relationships

### **How will my transition goals and needs be determined?**

- Before you begin receiving transition to adulthood services, a formal and/or an informal assessment will be done.<sup>10</sup> The results of the assessment should help you figure out what goals to set and what services you need to achieve the goals.
- You should also have the opportunity to tell your caseworker and service provider what is most important to you.
- You should be involved in identifying your goals and the services you need! We all have strengths and weaknesses, and you know yourself better than anyone else. For example, if budgeting is challenging for you (it is for many of us!) you may want to ask for more help in this area and opportunities for practicing saving and using money.

### **What is a transition to adulthood plan and what should be in it?**

- Your transition to adulthood plan should identify your transition goals and the specific services and experiences you need to achieve those goals.

- All the transition to adulthood services you are getting now or will receive should be part of your transition to adulthood plan. This should be part of your case plan,<sup>11</sup> which may be called the child permanency plan or family service plan.<sup>12</sup> Sometimes it is called an independent living plan or is a section on your case plan.
- Here are some examples of areas and goals to consider setting in your transition plan:
  - **Life Skills and Daily Living:** learning how to clean, cook, do laundry, household management, getting around the community, how to use public transportation, etc.
  - **Self-Care:** personal hygiene, addressing your health needs, instruction on family planning, sexual health, and birth control.
  - **Budgeting and Money Management:** opening and managing a bank account, understanding credit, how to create and maintain a budget, saving money, and applying for financial aid for post-secondary education and trainings.
  - **Finding, Paying for, and Maintaining Housing:** searching for housing, filling out rental applications, finding a roommate, finding and applying for housing programs that help with rent.
  - **Employment and Career:** searching and applying for jobs or vocational training, how to approach building a career, and how to find mentorship opportunities, job coaching and support.
  - **Educational Access and Success:** completing high school, going to college, or training and completing college and training.
  - **Building Relationships and Supportive Connections:** establishing relationships with mentors, locating and maintaining connections with family members other supportive adults, and finding and participating in social activities and community groups.

### Will my transition to adulthood plan change over time?

- Yes. As you grow and learn, both your strengths and challenges, as well as your goals and dreams, may change.
- Just like your case plan, your transition to adulthood plan should be updated at least every 6 months to reflect the fact that you will be adding and changing goals as you get older, learn more skills and learn more about your strengths and needs.
- Let your caseworker(s) and lawyer know if there are any additional or new goals you want to set and services that you need to achieve a goal.
- You can also let the judge know what services you are requesting when you go to court.

Make sure you have a goal for housing in your transition plan and ask about the resources and programs that exist in your community to help meet this goal.

Many young adults live with family members to help meet housing cost and needs. Don't forget to think about including your family in your transition planning because they may be able to help you figure out good housing options (as well as other things).

### **What is a stipend?**

- Money for a specific purpose—or stipends—is one way programs can support you during your transition to adulthood. Getting a stipend can be part of your transition to adulthood plan and services.
- Stipends are money earned by or awarded to you for specific purposes to meet your individualized needs and goals, for example:
  - Buying work or school uniforms
  - Paying costs associated with High school graduation
  - Covering moving expenses
- Check out your county's stipend policy and ask who is eligible. Each county has its own policies on stipends.<sup>13</sup>

### **What is a credit history?**

- A credit history is your financial “report card,” or a record of a person's debts and ability to pay their bills on-time.
- Credit histories are used to tell how well you manage your money and how financially responsible you have been. Landlords may look at this before they rent you an apartment. A bank or credit card company may look at this before they give you a loan or a credit card.
- It's important to know your credit history, since it can affect many areas of your life.

### **Do I have a credit history?**

- You shouldn't have a credit history until you turn age 18 and are able to enter into contracts, like for utilities (such as heating or electricity bills), loans, or credit cards under your name.

### **What is identify theft and are youth in foster care at risk for identity theft?**

- Identify theft is when people will use or steal someone's identity and open up accounts and buy things that they do not pay for. This results in debts being under the name of the person whose identify was taken.
- Youth in foster care are particularly at risk for identity theft because of how many people see or know their personal identity information.

### **Should I be getting my credit report each year?**

- Yes. The law requires that the child welfare agency checks your credit history every year after you turn age 14 until you leave foster care. They can help you show you how to do this yourself after age 18.<sup>14</sup>

### **What do I do if there are problems with my credit history?**

- The law requires that the child welfare agency help you resolve any problems that come up on your credit report.<sup>15</sup>
- Talk to your lawyer and caseworker if you find out that your identity has been stolen or you have accounts and debt that do not belong to you. The child welfare agency should help you resolve these issues.
- A good credit history is very important for things like getting a job, a car loan or student loan, an apartment and more.

### **Who provides transition to adulthood services?**

- Your county agency can either provide the services directly or hire another agency or program to provide the services.
- Each county has a coordinator who can give you more information about how transition to adulthood services are provided in your county.<sup>16</sup>
- You can find contact information for your IL Coordinator.<sup>17</sup>

### **How will I receive transition to adulthood services?**

- Transition to adulthood services can be provided in many ways, including one-on-one instruction and/or in group settings.
- In addition, you should also get the opportunity to learn and practice your skills at home. For example, skills like cooking, doing the laundry, and budgeting are the types of skills that you learn best by doing.

### **How should the judge in my case be involved in transition to adulthood planning?**

- The judge plays an important role in overseeing your case; their job is to make sure you get the services you need and deserve. This includes making sure you are receiving transition to adulthood services and that you are making progress in meeting your goals.
- At each permanency hearing that you have when you are age 14 or older, the judge should be asking about transition goals and services. Specifically, the judge should make

a finding, which is a statement on the record and in the court documents, about all of the following:

- the transition to adulthood services you are being provided;<sup>18</sup>
- the areas where you need help according to your assessment;
- the services you will receive before your next hearing;
- whether you are able to practice your skills at home;
- how you are developing and maintaining connections with supportive adults;
- if you are making the progress you need to graduate from high school or are otherwise enrolled in a program that will allow you to be successful, like a vocational program;
- your employment and career goals and what services are being provided to you so that you can meet them;
- whether you have physical health or behavioral health needs that require services after you leave care; and
- the plan to make sure you have stable housing or living arrangements when you leave care.

✓ **Court is a good time to let people know if there is something you need more help with or you want to add a transition service or goal.** For example, if you need more help pulling your grades up so you can get into college or you need more coaching on how to get and keep a job—ask! The judge can make sure you are provided with services you need to help you achieve your goals.

✓ **YOU** have an important role to play in making sure that everyone, including the judge, understands your needs and goals. This will help you get the help and support you need to succeed as you get ready to exit care.

✓ Your 6-month hearing is a good time to express these new interests and opportunities to the judge who can order a change in services or additional services to support your goals.

## II. Transition/Discharge Planning

### How is a transition/discharge plan different from a transition to adulthood plan?

- A “transition plan” is a discharge or exit plan from foster care and outlines a plan for life after foster care. The law requires that every youth have a transition/discharge plan before they leave care at age 18 or older.
- A transition to adulthood plan details the services and supports you need to be prepared for your eventual exit from foster care. It should begin at age 14.

- You need a good transition to adulthood plan to have a great transition/discharge plan. The transition/discharge plan builds on the transition to adulthood plan.

### **Is it a transition plan or a discharge plan? Why are there so many terms?**

- The law does refer to the plan you have before you discharge from care as a transition plan. Because transition planning begins at age 14, we use the term transition/discharge plan to let you know we mean the plan that must be developed when you leave care at age 18 or older.
- Your caseworker, lawyer or judge may refer to your discharge plan as your transition plan. Always clarify to make sure you know which plan is being discussed.

### **When should my transition/discharge plan be developed?**

- Pennsylvania requires that the transition/discharge plan be developed at least 6 months before you plan to leave care when you are age 18 or older.<sup>19</sup>

### **What should be in a transition/discharge plan?**

- The plan should be very specific and provide details on how you will meet your daily needs as well as some of your long-term goals.
- Federal and state law require that specific information on the following areas must be included in the transition/discharge plan:
  - Specific plans for housing.<sup>20</sup>
  - Your source of income.<sup>21</sup>
    - Your current job or your future employment prospects and career goals.<sup>22</sup>
    - Work force supports and employment services available.<sup>23</sup>
  - A copy of your health and education records.<sup>24</sup>
  - Details about health insurance.<sup>25</sup>
    - Any ongoing behavioral or health needs you may have as an adult and how they will be met.<sup>26</sup>
    - Information about health care decision making, including information about giving another individual the ability to make health care treatment decisions on your behalf, if it becomes necessary, and your option to sign a document that will give this person this authority.<sup>27</sup>
  - Details on programs geared towards finding you mentors or supportive connections with adults.<sup>28</sup>
  - Proof that you have all your vital documents (identification documents, necessary paperwork, and records)<sup>29</sup>:
    - birth certificate



- Social Security card
  - health insurance information
  - medical records
  - state photo ID or U.S. Passport
  - copies of your education records
  - your most recent credit report<sup>30</sup>
- A letter with the dates when you were under the jurisdiction of the dependency court and in foster care.<sup>31</sup>
- Any other support services you may need.<sup>32</sup>
- Proof that you have been notified that you can reenter care until you are 21.<sup>33</sup>
- State guidance also requires that youth be provided with:
  - Child Profile Documents
  - Life Book
  - Proof of your citizenship or legal residency status or you were not born in the United States
  - Family/tribal contact information
  - Voter registration<sup>34</sup>

**If I have a disability or special need, should anything additional be in my transition/discharge plan?**

- Yes. Youth with disabilities need to make sure their transition/discharge plan includes all services needed to meet their health and support needs. This may include things like applying for Supplemental Security Income (SSI), applying to housing programs for individuals with disabilities, and ensuring that you are connected and enrolled in adult serving systems.
- For more specific information for youth with disabilities, see Chapter 6: Youth With Disabilities.<sup>35</sup>

**How should I be involved in creating my transition/discharge plan?**

- You are the most important person involved in your transition/discharge plan. It's important to attend any meetings where your plan is being discussed.
- You should ask for additional meetings to discuss your plan if there are issues that have not been resolved or you want to talk about additional details of the plan. (See Chapter 17: Getting Your Voice Heard)
- You have a right to invite people who are involved in your life and are supports to you to your case planning and transition/discharge meetings.<sup>36</sup> This can help in making sure you feel supported and have people in the room who can help you ask question and raise your concerns.

### **What is the court's role in my transition/discharge plan?**

- The juvenile court judge is the one who approves your discharge plan.
- The judge must be satisfied that your plan meets all the requirements listed above before you can be discharged from care.<sup>37</sup>
- The court should make sure that you were involved in and understand your discharge plan and that the child welfare agency is working with you to ensure that all the details of your plan are carried out.<sup>38</sup>

### **What happens if the discharge plan presented to the court is not acceptable?**

- If your discharge plan isn't approved by the court, the court cannot close your case.<sup>39</sup>
- The judge can require additional planning meetings be held or order additional services to make sure you have a strong discharge plan.<sup>40</sup>
- For example, if there is no plan for housing or the plan is too vague, the case should not be closed. The court should order that action be taken in the form of holding meetings or providing certain assistance so that the problems with the plan can be resolved. The case should be brought back to court so that an acceptable plan can be presented to the court.

**You should never be discharged to homelessness or with a discharge plan that does not meet your needs!!**

### **Are there any tips on how I can advocate for myself when developing a discharge plan?**

- Make sure you are involved in case planning meetings and court so you can ask questions and ask for help if you need it.
- Make sure you understand what is in your plan and ask questions if you do not understand or are worried that the plan is not realistic.
- Ask that a few plans be developed for each goal so you have back up plans. This is especially important for your housing plan.
- Youth Fostering Change, a youth advocacy program with Juvenile Law Center, created a Discharge Hearing form to use prior to the discharge planning hearing. The form can be accessed online.<sup>41</sup> It is a form developed by youth in care, for youth in care to make sure you have a meaningful and realistic plan for housing, education, employment, and health care. We recommend that you fill out the Discharge Hearing form as soon as possible. (See Chapter 17: Getting Your Voice Heard for more information)
- Involve your support network and mentors in your planning. Planning for transition/discharge is really scary and can be overwhelming. People want to help and support you. Please ask them to come to meetings and court!

## I exited care but need help. Where can I go to find resources?

- Your discharge plan should include a backup plan and information about resources in the community.
- If you need more help, you can contact your caseworker, or IL worker and ask for help with finding resources. (See Chapter 17: Getting Your Voice Heard)
- If you left care when you are 17 and 9 months and are still under age 21, you can request to re-enter care if you need help. See Chapter 10: Extended Foster Care for more information on this.
- If you were in care at age 16 or older and are under age 23, you are eligible for aftercare services. See Chapter 11: Aftercare for more information.

---

<sup>1</sup> 42 PA.C.S.A § 6351(f)(8) (2016); PA.R.J.C.P 1608(d)(k).

<sup>2</sup> OFFICE OF CHILD., YOUTH, AND FAM., PA. DEP'T OF PUB. WELFARE, OCYF BULL. NO. 3130-14-01, YOUTH INDEPEND. LIVING SERVS. GUIDELINES 4 (Dec. 8, 2014), <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/docs/Publications/Documents/FORMS%20AND%20PUBS%20OCYF/OCYF%203130-14-01.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at 13-14.

<sup>4</sup> See 42 U.S.C. § 12131(2) (1990) (defining “qualified individual with a disability” to mean “an individual with a disability who, with or without reasonable modifications to rules, policies, or practices . . . meets the essential eligibility requirements for the receipt of services or the participation in programs or activities provided by a public entity.”); 42 U.S.C. § 12132 (1990) (“[N]o qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity, or be subjected to discrimination by any such entity.”); 29 U.S.C. § 794(a) (2016) (“No otherwise qualified individual with a disability . . . shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits or, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance . . .”).

<sup>4</sup> 28 C.F.R. § 35.130(d) (2016). See also *Olmstead v. L.C.*, 527 U.S. 581 (1999).

<sup>5</sup> JUVENILE LAW CENTER, TRANSITION PLANNING FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES FROM THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM TO ADULTHOOD: A GUIDE FOR YOUTH (2013), <https://jlc.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2018-03/Transition%20Planning%20for%20Youth%20with%20Disabilities%20-%20A%20Guide%20for%20Youth%20-%20October%202013.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., 42 U.S.C.A. 675(5)(c) ([T]he [permanency] hearing shall determine . . . the services needed to assist the child to make **the transition from foster care to a successful adulthood** . . .”) (emphasis added); 42 U.S.C.A. 677. This wording change was part of the Family First Prevention and Services Act, which was enacted in 2018. . 42 U.S.C.A. 677 (the “Chafee Act”) was renamed “The John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood.”

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., 42 PA.C.S.A. § 6351(f)(8) (requiring that, at a permanency hearing, the court determines “the **services** needed to assist a child . . . to make the **transition to successful adulthood**) (emphasis added).

<sup>8</sup> 42 U.S.C.A. § 677.

<sup>9</sup> See *Id.* (describing eligibility requirements for Chafee funded services); OFFICE OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES, *supra* note 2, at 4.

<sup>10</sup> OFFICE OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES, *supra* note 2, at 18-19.

<sup>11</sup> 42 U.S.C.A. § 675(1)(d)

<sup>12</sup> OFFICE OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES, *supra* note 2, at 19.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at 28-29.

- 
- <sup>14</sup> 42 U.S.C.A. § 675(5)(i).
- <sup>15</sup> *Id.* (requiring that children in foster care who are 14 years of age and older be provided with “assistance . . . in interpreting and resolving any inaccuracies in the report.”)
- <sup>16</sup> See *Staff Resources*, PA YOUTH ADVISORY BD., <http://www.payab.pitt.edu/StaffResources.htm>, to find contact information for your IL Coordinator.
- <sup>17</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>18</sup> Pa.R.J.C.P. 1608(d)(1)(k).
- <sup>19</sup> OFFICE OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES, *supra* note 2, at 19.
- <sup>20</sup> 42 U.S.C.A. § 675(5)(h); PA.R.J.C.P. 1631(e)(2)(a).
- <sup>21</sup> PA.R.J.C.P. 1631(e)(2)(b).
- <sup>22</sup> *Id.* at 1631(e)(2)(c)-(d).
- <sup>23</sup> 42 U.S.C.A. § 675(5)(h).
- <sup>24</sup> *Id.* at § 675(5)(d).
- <sup>25</sup> *Id.* at § 675 (5)(h); PA.R.J.C.P. 1631(e).
- <sup>26</sup> PA.R.C.P. 1631(e).
- <sup>27</sup> 42 U.S.C.A. § 675(5)(h).
- <sup>28</sup> See, e.g., *Id.*; PA.R.J.C.P. 1631(f).
- <sup>29</sup> 42 U.S.C.A. 675(5)(i); PA.R.C.P. 1631(e).
- <sup>30</sup> 42 U.S.C.A. 675(5)(i).
- <sup>31</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>32</sup> PA.R.C.P. 1631(e)(2)(h)
- <sup>33</sup> *Id.* at 1631(e)(2)(i).
- <sup>34</sup> OFFICE OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES, *supra* note 2, at 22-23.
- <sup>35</sup> See also JUVENILE LAW CENTER, TRANSITION PLANNING FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES FROM THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM TO ADULTHOOD: A GUIDE FOR PROFESSIONALS IN PENNSYLVANIA (2015), [https://jlc.org/sites/default/files/publication\\_pdfs/JLC-TransitionPlanningGuide-YouthDisabilities-2015FINAL.pdf](https://jlc.org/sites/default/files/publication_pdfs/JLC-TransitionPlanningGuide-YouthDisabilities-2015FINAL.pdf).
- <sup>36</sup> 42 U.S.C.A. § 675(1)(b) (stating that a youth age 14 or older must be given the opportunity to invite up to “2 members of the case planning team who are chosen by the child and who are not a foster parent of, or caseworker for, the child.”)
- <sup>37</sup> PA.R.J.C.P. 1631(f).
- <sup>38</sup> PA.R.J.C.P. 1631(e)(2).
- <sup>39</sup> PA.R.J.C.P. 1631(e)(4).
- <sup>40</sup> PA.R.J.C.P. 1631(e)(3).
- <sup>41</sup> Youth Fostering Change, *Youth-Developed Discharge Form*, JUVENILE LAW CENTER (2018), <https://jlc.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2018-02/Youth-Developed%20Discharge%20Hearing%20Form.pdf>.