

Introduction: Below are some of the services and benefits that youth in the child welfare system have a right to, and should be provided, as they prepare to transition to adulthood. Many of these services and benefits can support youth on their path to higher education and training. Advocates can play a vital role in helping ensure youth know about these benefits and services and maximize them to support their higher education goals. **This section covers transition to adulthood services, transition planning, and extended foster care.**

What are Transition to Adulthood Services? Transition to Adulthood Services⁸ formerly called “**Independent Living Services,**” include an array of services that help a youth prepare for the adult world. Beginning at age 14, youth in the child welfare system should be referred and assessed for transition to adulthood services.⁹ The services can include, but are not limited to, budgeting, life skills, help with finding and keeping a job, learning how to navigate public transportation, learning how to take care of one’s health, and planning for a career.¹⁰ Because getting an education is so important to success as an adult, transition services also include services and supports to help a youth complete their high school education, and access and succeed at higher education and training.

Transition to adulthood services that may support a youth’s progress towards higher education include:

- Counseling about whether a youth wants to go to college or technical school
- Tutoring to help with grades or acquisition of credits for graduation
- College visits
- SAT prep or ACT prep courses
- Assistance researching colleges
- Assistance applying for financial aid and scholarships
- Assistance accessing all stipends that can help with expenses related to applying for college or expenses while in college

Transition to adulthood services that support a youth’s success and retention in higher education and training could include:

- Tutoring
- Career and academic counseling
- Financial supports for summer classes or credit recovery courses to make up lost credits
- Assistance in securing and funding housing or placement during school breaks when on-campus housing is closed
- Assistance with applying for and managing financial aid

⁸ The Family First Prevention and Services Act, which was enacted in 2018, renamed Independent Living Services to “Transition to Adulthood Services.” This change in language was meant to reflect the growing consensus that the goal is to help youth develop the skills they need to thrive as adults. Most adults continue to be interdependent on others rather than independent. We agree with this change in the wording but understand that “Independent Living” and “IL services” are still terms that are often used.

⁹ See 42 U.S.C.A. § 675(1)(D) (West 2018).

¹⁰ Federal law provides the following examples of transition to adulthood services: assistance in obtaining a high school diploma and post-secondary education, career exploration, vocational training, job placement and retention, training and opportunities to practice daily living skills (such as financial literacy training and driving instruction), substance prevention, and preventive health activities (including smoking avoidance, nutrition education, and pregnancy prevention. See 42 U.S.C.A. § 677(a)(1) (West 2018).

You can out more about transition to adulthood services in Pennsylvania by reviewing this Bulletin:

<https://www.payab.pitt.edu/files/2014IndependentLivingServicesGuidelinesBulletinAppendix.pdf> issued by the Office of Children, Youth, and Families about Independent Living Services.

- Connection with mentoring programs and other supportive adults
- Continued assistance with mastering life skills, including budgeting, money management, household management, health, etc.

Stipends and SAT Fee Waivers

In Pennsylvania, youth who are eligible for transition to adulthood services may also be eligible for at least two important financial benefits that can help with accessing and succeeding in higher education and training.

1. IL Program Stipends.

Stipends are money that the IL program provides youth to assist them in achieving goals and to provide incentives for meeting goals, like graduating high school or getting a job. Stipends may be available for purchasing books and for other expenses in college.

2. Fee waivers for SATs.

The PA Child Welfare Resource Center distributes SAT fee waivers for youth in PA who are eligible for transition to adulthood services. Click on this link to access the forms to apply for a fee waiver.

What About Vocational Training? Transition to adulthood services may also help youth with their vocational training goals and getting a job. This Guide focuses on sharing information about training and education that is provided through institutions of higher education and training. These institutions include community colleges and technical schools that train individuals in a trade or provide credentials that will help with getting a job. While this Guide does not cover information about the many vocational training services that exist beyond institutions of higher education and training, youth can speak to their guidance counselor or their Independent Living (“IL”) worker to find out more about vocational training. Careerlink offices, which are in most counties, are also great resources. Most of these offices¹¹ should have programming for young adults. If the youth has a disability, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation: <https://www.dli.pa.gov/Individuals/Disability-Services/ovr/Pages/Transition-from-School-to-Work.aspx> (OVR) can also be a resource.

Transition to adulthood services are provided in a variety of ways and youth should receive them from multiple sources, including their resource family and placement.

Until what age can youth receive transition to adulthood services when they are in the system? Youth should receive transition services beginning at age 14. They should receive them as long as they stay in care, which is until age 21 in Pennsylvania.

¹¹ Careerlink Offices can be found here:

https://www.pacareerlink.pa.gov/jponline/Common/SearchOffice?_r9gPulPRMZU4IYBOCboEJcmSA@iLOZpuOjw9U4ewCuwGXcU4alcfAuc_U1LT@e38lmmleWQqwXKKtYrkAbVYxituillIOFmeSBK5q95ugie5RLLcmtIV.

Can youth receive transition to adulthood services after they leave the foster care system? Youth can receive transition to adulthood services until age 23 in **aftercare** as long as they left the child welfare system at age 16¹² or older.¹³ Youth can even receive these services when they are in college or other postsecondary training.

Room and Board

Youth can get most of the same transition to adulthood services in aftercare as they would when in care. Room and board is one of the transition to adulthood services that youth can only receive in aftercare. Room and board are funds or assistance to help a youth who has aged out meet housing needs. Contact the IL coordinator for the county the youth is living in to find out more about room and board.

Who is responsible for providing transition to adulthood services?

- While youth are in foster care, including extended foster care, it is the county whose care they are in that has responsibility¹⁴ for providing transition to adulthood services. This is true even if they move to another county for school or any other reason.
- After a youth leaves foster care, it is the county where a youth is living that is responsible for providing transition to adulthood services in aftercare. This applies to youth who go to school outside of PA.¹⁵
 - If a youth attends college or other postsecondary training in PA, a list of PA county IL coordinators is available at: http://www.payab.pitt.edu/IL_Contacts.htm.
 - If a youth attends college or other postsecondary training outside of PA, a list of IL coordinators by state is available at: https://www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/?CWIGFunctionsaction=rols:main.dspList&rolType=Custom&RS_ID=145.

What is a transition to adulthood plan? It is a plan—or section of a case plan—that details the youth’s transition goals and the services that are needed to achieve those goals. These goals and services should include a youth’s higher education and training goals and services that will help the youth achieve post-secondary success in whatever program they choose. Like the case plan, the transition plan should be revised and updated at least once every 6 months at the **case planning meeting**. The youth should be leading the goal setting discussions and the case planning team should help the youth fine tune those goals and help with identifying services to meet those goals. It is important to have the specific goals and services in the case plan to provide accountability.

¹² Some youth may be eligible for aftercare services if they left the child welfare system after age 14 as well.

¹³ Pennsylvania has elected to take the option offered in the federal Family First Act to extend aftercare until age 23.

¹⁴ You can find out which county has responsibility by asking in what county the youth has court and in what county is the child welfare agency that works on their case located.

¹⁵ The federal law, which funds transition to adulthood services, is called the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood, 42 U.S.C.A. §677 (West 2018). The law requires that all states serve youth in aftercare as long as they are eligible for services. A youth who was in foster care in Pennsylvania and eligible for transition services is still eligible to receive aftercare if she or he moves to another state, if the youth is still under age 21. The State Child Welfare Agency, The Office of Children, Youth and Families has issued guidance on these services in Youth Independent Living Services Guidelines: <https://www.payab.pitt.edu/files/2014IndependentLivingServicesGuidelinesBulletinAppendix.pdf>.

As long as youth are in the child welfare system, they have court review hearings, or **permanency review hearings**, at least once every 6 months. At those hearings, the judge should ask about the youth’s transition goals and services, including those related to higher education and training. This is an opportunity for the youth to raise any concerns about the transition plan and goals and ask for any services to be provided to help to meet those goals.¹⁶ In some instances, the court should order a service or support to help with meeting a goal the youth has established but needs assistance to achieve. Examples could include ordering the child welfare agency to assist the youth in completing financial aid applications or assist the youth in finding or paying for tutoring.

What is a transition/discharge plan? The transition—or discharge plan—is the plan that must be developed and approved by the court before a youth age 18 and older leaves the child welfare system.¹⁷ It is different than the transition to adulthood plan. The transition plan should be a culmination of the transition to adulthood plan and the services provided to achieve transition goals. The transition plan should be very specific and describe the plan for a youth to meet their needs and thrive as an adult when they leave the child welfare system. In addition to including details on specific options for the youth for housing, health insurance, connections with supportive adults and mentors, work force supports, and employment, the plan must include details related to the youth’s plans for education.¹⁸ This should include details on such issues as: if the youth will continue in a program of higher education, how that program will be financed, and if the youth needs any supports or services.

The transition plan needs to be approved by the court before a youth can be discharged from the child welfare system so it provides a last check on the system before the youth is out on their own.¹⁹

Vital Documents

In addition to having a transition plan before a youth leaves care at age 18 or older, the law requires that youth be given their vital documents, which includes their birth certificate, social security card, and state identification.

They also should be provided proof of their foster care status. These documents are very important for a youth to qualify for important benefits and services, including financial aid. Help make sure youth have these vital documents before they leave care and suggest safe places to store them. 42

U.S.C.A. § 675(5)(I)

What if youth are not being provided the transition to adulthood services listed on their case plans?

Including the specific services a youth needs for their higher education goals in the transition to adulthood section of their case plan is very important to ensure there is accountability from the child welfare agencies. Child welfare agencies may contract with services providers who do not provide the specific services designated in a youth’s case plan. However, the child welfare agency is still responsible for providing services that a youth needs. If the services are not being provided, the child’s attorney should ask the court to order the child welfare agency to provide them. The court can order placement services and resources to fulfill the obligation to meet the youth’s transition needs as well as what is in their best interest.

¹⁶ The court shall make findings related to “the services needed to assist the child to make the transition from foster care to a successful adulthood.” 42 U.S.C.A. §675(5)(C) (West 2018).

¹⁷ See 42 U.S.C.A. 675 U.S.C.A. §675(5)(H) (West 2018).

¹⁸ See *id.*

¹⁹ See 237 PA. CODE § 1631(E) (2013).

What is Extended Foster Care? In Pennsylvania, youth can remain in the care of the child welfare agency until age 21.²⁰ This is referred to as extended foster care. There are at least five bases for eligibility for extended care and one is being enrolled in postsecondary education or training.²¹ While in extended foster care, young people are entitled to all basic child welfare services such as placement, case management and permanency planning. Youth continue to have a caseworker and attorney as well as case plans and court reviews to ensure that they are receiving all services and care that is needed. They continue to be eligible for Medicaid. Youth continue to receive transition to adulthood services while in extended care.

Is placement or housing provided to a youth in extended foster care? When youth remain in extended foster care, the cost of their placement should be covered by the child welfare agency. This means the child welfare agency should provide youth a placement or some form of financial support that helps them pay for their living arrangements or the cost of their room and board in school. Counties may differ in how they provide this funding to youth, and youth may also receive enough federal or state grants to cover their room and board while in college. Youth can also continue living in foster home or kinship care placements as well as **supervised independent living placements** while in extended care. They can also live on-campus or find off-campus housing and the cost of these arrangements should be covered by the child welfare agency. **Youth can go away to college—even college in another state—and still remain in extended foster care in PA!** This can help youth avoid housing instability and homelessness. The provision of placement through the child welfare agency can be crucial to planning summer breaks and holidays and to help make ends meet so youth do not have to worry about their housing costs.

Receiving extended care services and supports can significantly aid a youth as they pursue higher education by providing financial as well as other social supports. Most youth gets support from their family to apply and be successful in college. While being in extended care does not replace having the support of family, it can provide a youth a safety net as they make the transition to higher education and adulthood. They also have a built-in support network, including a caseworker, lawyer and judge who can help provide advocacy and address challenges when they arise. They will have more opportunity to focus on their studies and adjusting to higher education life rather than worrying about their daily survival.

²⁰ See 42 PA. STAT. AND CONS. STAT. ANN. § 6301 (West 2012) (defining “dependent child”).

²¹ Youth are also eligible for extended care if they are: (1) completing secondary education or an equivalent credential; (2) enrolled in an institution which provides postsecondary or vocational education; (3) participating in a program actively designed to promote or remove barriers to employment; (4) employed for at least 80 hours per month; or (5) incapable of doing any of the activities described in (1)-(4). See *id.*

Living Arrangements While in Extended Foster Care

When youth stay in care until age 21, the child welfare agency is responsible for their placement or living arrangements. Examples can include:

- Family foster care
- Kinship care
- Supervised independent living apartment
- Dorm
- Host home
- Independent apartment

Youth can go away to college and still have access to these benefits.

What is Resumption of Jurisdiction or Re-Entry into Foster Care? Youth who have their child welfare case closed any time between age 17 and 9 months and 20 can re-enter the extended foster care system until age 21.²² In Pennsylvania this is called resumption of jurisdiction because the court is “re-opening” a case of a youth rather than starting a brand new dependency case.

Youth are eligible to re-enter care in PA if they were in the child welfare system in PA (not another state) and the court terminated jurisdiction of their case when they were 17 and 9 months or older. Youth can re-enter until age 21. To re-enter, youth must be doing one of the activities to qualify for extended care that were mentioned above. That includes being enrolled in a program of higher education or training. Youth should contact the county child welfare agency where they were in care to start the re-entry process. They can call their caseworker, IL worker, or lawyer and ask for help.

Youth who re-enter extended care can receive all the services and supports listed in the extended care option above.

TIPS TO HELP YOUTH USE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD SERVICES, TRANSITION AND DISCHARGE PLANNING, EXTENDED FOSTER CARE AND RE-ENTRY TO SUPPORT ACCESS AND SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Transition Planning Tips

- Help youth set goals related to higher education access and success and make sure the goals are put in their transition to adulthood plan in their case plan.
- Help youth identify the transition to adulthood services they need to achieve those goals and make sure they are put in their transition to adulthood plan in their case plan.
- Help youth with disabilities connect with the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation to help meet their workforce or career goals.
- Offer to attend the youth’s case planning and transition planning meetings to provide support and advocacy, especially in the area of higher education access and success.

²² See 42 PA. STAT. AND CONS. STAT. ANN. § 6351(j) (West 2016).

- Youth can select people to attend their case planning meeting and to provide support and advocacy.²³
- Assist youth in advocating for themselves in case planning meetings and court to make sure they are receiving the services they need to make progress on their higher education goals in their transition plan.
- Make sure that youth are receiving the transition to adulthood services highlighted in their case plan. Bring any failures to provide services to the attention of the court; the court can order the child welfare agency to provide the necessary services.
- Make sure youth know about the stipends available from their IL program and that they are requesting stipends.

Extended Foster Care and Re-entry Tips

- Make sure youth know that while they remain in the foster care system, their placement should be covered by the child welfare agency, and that they receive financial support for their living arrangements.
- Work with the youth to make sure they have a detailed higher education and transition plan as part of their discharge plan and use that plan to ask for additional services or keep the case open if the goals have not been achieved.
- Make sure youth have their vital documents and proof of foster care status before they age out and help them identify a safe place to keep them.
- Assist the youth who are no longer in care access transition to adulthood aftercare services while they are in college or a training program.
 - You can use the information above to identify the right IL coordinator and help the youth connect with them and request services.²⁴
- Make sure youth you are working with know about extended care and help them understand how it can support their higher education goals.
- If youth are out of care and eligible to re-enter, let them know that they can re-enter care and help them with the re-entry process if they choose.
- Help youth establish their eligibility for extended care and re-entry.
- Attend case planning meetings and court with youth to provide additional advocacy and help them make sure they are getting what they need. Sometimes youth face resistance in extended foster care especially when they are going away to school or when youth make special requests for supports.
- If youth are in extended foster care, they have an attorney who is appointed to represent them. Help the youth get in contact with them and work with them to provide the youth more advocacy and support.
- Help youth make plans for living arrangements so that they are covered during summer and holiday breaks. That may include advocating for a resource family placement, Supervised Independent Living (“SIL”) Placement, unlicensed SIL placement, or other arrangements during summer or breaks.
- Help youth develop a good permanency and transition plan in extended foster care that support their higher education goals.

²³ See 42 U.S.C. § 675(5)(C)(iv) (West 2018) (Beginning at age 14, the youth must be allowed to involve two individuals in case planning who are not a foster parent or part of the casework staff. One of these individuals may be an advocate on normalcy issues.).

²⁴ Here is something you can say when you call: “Hello. I am working with a young adult who is eligible for Chafee services and now lives in your county or state. Can you provide me information on how she can find out about receiving services?”