

# **Minnesota Citizen Review Panels - Ongoing Quality Assurance Review Availability and Accessibility of Independent Living Skills Resources - 2006**

## **I. Purposes of the Review**

The purposes of this review were to determine:

- What independent living skills (ILS) education, guidelines and resources are available in the three communities in which focus groups were held?
- How can access to ILS resources and services be improved at the local level and throughout Minnesota?

## **II. Method Used to Review ILS Resources**

### **Information gathering criteria:**

Review teams from three of Minnesota's four Citizen Review Panels, composed of two panel members each, conducted focus groups in their counties. Focus group participants were identified by the panel members and the county human services departments. Eighty one people participated in ten focus groups. The ten focus groups consisted of:

- Children's mental health workers
- Child protection workers
- Community service provider staff members
- Foster parents
- Group home staff members
- Guardians *ad litem*
- Guardianship workers
- ILS workers
- Public defenders and probation officers
- Youth

### **Period under review:**

- January 1, 2006 to September 30, 2006
- Youth must have been involved in an ILS program or have been working on an ILS plan during the period under review to participate in a focus group.

### **Rating the information gathered:**

Review teams used a tool to help them identify and rate two items:

- Item I: Independent Living Skills (ILS) Resources Available in the Community
- Item II: Access to Independent Living Skills (ILS) Resources in the Community.

Reviewers had focus group members identify the ILS resources available, what resources are needed, what resources are working well, the barriers to access ILS resources and how to improve that access. Criteria for rating the items are included on the tool. Each of the two items was rated as a strength or as an area needing improvement. Recommendations of the focus group members to improve the ILS resources and access to them were articulated. Based on the information gathered at the focus groups documentation to support the ratings and the recommendations were completed on the tool.

### **III. Data Gathered and Ratings from the Ten Focus Groups**

Focus group members were asked whether they thought education in the following areas is helpful for youth who will be leaving foster care: employment and career, transportation and driver's license, money management, social recreational skills, housing, health care and medical coverage, education and vocational information and in establishing and maintaining connections to their birth families, heritage and culture. They were then asked if they think education in those areas for youth leaving foster care is adequate in their communities. The results are in the charts that follow. There was a consensus of the group unless numbers indicate otherwise.

For the purposes of this state annual report, the data from the ten focus groups has been combined. Information specific to the counties in which the groups were conducted and detailed documentation relating to this data is included in the individual county 2006 annual reports which are in Appendix B of this report.



**Minnesota Citizen Review Panels**  
**Data from the Ten Focus Groups Regarding Independent Living Skills Resources**

Is education in this area helpful?	CMH Wkrs (17)		Child Prot. Workers (14)		Comm. Prov. (3)		Foster Parents (4)		Group Home (6)	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Employment & Career	X		X		X		X		X	
Transportation and DL	X		X		X		X		X	
Money Management	X		X		X		X		X	
Social & Recreational	X		X		X		2	NA-2	X	
Housing	X		X		X		X		X	
Health Care & Medical Cov.		X	X		X		X		X	
Educational & Vocational	X		X		X		X		X	
Establishing/ Maintaining Connections	?		X		X		X		X	
Is education in this area helpful?	Guardians <i>ad litem</i> (4)		Guardianship Workers (4)		ILS Workers (4)		Pub. Def. & Prob. (10)		Youth (15)	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Employment & Career	X		X		X		X		X	
Transportation and DL	X		X		X		X		X	
Money Management	X		X		X		X		X	
Social & Recreational	X		X		X		X		X	
Housing	X		X		X		X		X	
Health Care & Medical Cov.	X		X		X		X		14	1
Educational & Vocational	X		X		X		X		X	
Establishing/ Maintaining Connections	X		X		X		X		3	?-12

**Minnesota Citizen Review Panels**  
**Data from the Ten Focus Groups Regarding Independent Living Skills Resources**

Is education in this area adequate?	C MH Wrks (17)		CP Workers (14)		Comm. Prov. (3)		Foster Parents (4)		Group Home (6)	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Employment & Career		X		X	X		2	2		X
Transportation and DL		X		X	X		3	1		X
Money Management		X		X	X		2	2		X
Social & Recreational		?		X	X		1	NA-2 1	X	
Housing		X		X	?		3	1		X
Health Care & Medical Cov.		X		X	X		2	2		X
Educational & Vocational		X		X	X		3	1		?
Establishing/ Maintaining Connections		?		X	X		3	1		X
Is education in this area adequate?	Guardians <i>ad litem</i> (4)		Guardianship Workers (4)		ILS Workers (4)		Pub. Def. & Prob. (10)		Youth (15)	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Employment & Career		?		X		X		X	3	12
Transportation and DL	X			X	X			X	3	12
Money Management	No Response			X		X		X	3	?-12
Social & Recreational		?		X		X		X	3	12
Housing	X			X		X		X	3	?-12
Health Care & Medical Cov.	X			X		X		X	12	3
Educational & Vocational		?		?		X	X		3	12
Establishing/ Maintaining Connections		?		X		X		X	3	?-12

Overall, those in the focus groups agreed education in these areas is helpful and needed for youth in transition. For the most part, those in the focus groups said education in these areas for youth in transition is not adequate. It should be noted the three youth from the focus group in Washington County were very positive about their experiences with ILS resources.

**Minnesota Citizen Review Panels**  
**Ratings from the Ten Focus Groups Regarding Independent Living Skills Resources**

Based on the information gathered from the focus group participants, the teams rated the following two items as a strength or as an area needing improvement: Item I, independent living skills resources available and, Item II, access to independent living skills. The ratings are recorded below.

**Ratings from the Ten Focus Groups Regarding Independent Living Skills Resources**

**Item I. Independent Living Skills (ILS) resources available in the community are:**

<b>A Strength:</b>	<b>1</b>
The focus group of 3 youth in Washington County rated this as a strength.	
<b>An Area Needing Improvement:</b>	<b>9</b>
The other nine focus groups rated this as an area needing improvement.	

**Item II: Access to Independent Living Skills in the community is:**

<b>A Strength:</b>	<b>1</b>
The focus group of 3 youth in Washington County rated this as a strength	
<b>An Area Needing Improvement:</b>	<b>9</b>
The other nine focus groups rated this as an area needing improvement.	

**Minnesota Citizen Review Panels**  
**Summary of Findings**

Overall the focus groups found that youth in transition are not adequately being prepared to live on their own after they leave foster care. The information gathered from the focus groups in these three counties would likely be similar in many counties across Minnesota and the United States. As stated in the Ramsey County Children's Services 2006 Annual Report, the Wilder Research Center's study, *Homeless in Minnesota 2003*, found that 71 percent of homeless youth had been in out-of-home placement and of those 53 percent were in foster care.

Some reasons given for rating the resources available as an area needing improvement ranged from insufficient funding, lack of personnel, too much paper-work, irrelevant session content, material that is too difficult for youth with special needs, youth who do not follow through, poor communication among those involved with the youth (foster parents, school personnel, social workers and ILS providers), lack of formal ILS planning, boring sessions, not enough time to develop rapport and relationships with youth to a lack of collective will to make sure youth in transition are prepared to live on their own.

Reasons the accessibility of ILS resources was rated as needing improvement included scheduling conflicts for youth involving school, social activities and work, lack of transportation to and from sessions, poor marketing to foster parents, youth and others involved in their lives, untimely session notification, lack of coordination with ILS sessions and foster family schedules, language and cultural barriers and a lack education on the part of workers regarding ILS resources. For more details from the focus groups please see the Chisago County, Ramsey County and Washington County 2006 Citizen Review Panel annual reports.

## **IV. Recommendations**

### **Chisago County Citizen Review Panel**

#### Focus group with community service providers

- Provide youth in transition with a one-on-one mentor to help them learn to live independently after they leave foster care.
- Work with the schools on transitional programming with education in the core areas incorporated into school curricula and Individual Education Programs (IEP).
- Develop and implement a county/regional foster care provider group for all county and private foster care providers to meet about Independent Living Skills (ILS) programs and services.
- Provide intense case management services for youth moving from foster care to the community (between the ages of 18 and 21 years old).
- Arrange for and facilitate meetings among all providers of ILS services to identify gaps in services and to fill those gaps.

#### Surveys from foster care providers

- Begin ILS education, planning and funding of the ILS plan at a much earlier age.
- Create a standardized checklist to document the success in all areas of an Independent Living Skills (ILS) Plan and an Independent Education Plan (IEP).
- Provide continuity by allowing the case manager and youth to maintain contact after the youth leaves foster care.
- Provide ILS classes that include the foster parent and the teen who will age out of their care.

### **Ramsey County Children's Services Review Panel**

- Provide training for, and hold workers accountable for developing and monitoring comprehensive, regularly updated ILS plans with the youth, and enforce sanctions for workers who do not.
- Provide funds to increase the number of ILS workers and clerical staff to support them. Funds should be provided by reallocating resources and without using money for programs and services for youth in transition.
- Provide foster parents with the ILS plan, goals, components and class schedules. Clarify their roles and expectations in ILS. Continue to offer ILS training for foster parents.
- Coordinate the location and times of the ILS classes with other activities for all members of the foster family.
- Continue to provide, promote, and develop ILS curricula and resources training for child protection, ILS and guardianship workers.
- Assist all youth in transition with SSI and medical assistance benefits before they transition from foster care to independent living.
- Include youth at age 14 and 15 in ILS and pre-vocational skill building.
- Designate specific workers and foster parents who specialize in working with youth in transition and who know the resources and services available.
- Market the ILS sessions directly to the youth and the foster parents.

## **IV. Recommendations (continued)**

### **Washington County Citizen Review Panel**

#### Focus Group with Youth

- Provide more funding for Independent Living Skills (ILS) programs and staff to work with youth in transition.
- Broaden the criteria for entrance into the Solid Ground Program so more youth in transition can take advantage of it.
- Continue to provide ILS education for youth, foster parents and workers.

#### Focus Group with Foster Parents

- Ensure foster parents are equal members of the team working with the youth in transition, seek their advice and take their recommendations seriously.

#### Focus Group with Guardians *ad litem*

- Provide funding to increase staff to serve youth in transition who are on the waiting list.
- Offer after-school and summer programs for youth.
- Provide follow up ILS services for youth after age 18.
- Develop and implement ILS classes and information that are appropriate for youth with special needs (learning disabilities, mental health challenges, severely emotionally disturbed or lower IQ).
- Increase the number of waiver openings for those who qualify so more youth in transition will receive ILS services.

#### Focus Group with Public Defenders and Probation Officers

- Provide the opportunity for one-on-one mentoring relationships and assistance to youth in transition.
- Allow youth who find they need additional ILS assistance after they leave the child protection system to return to the system for services.
- Pass legislation that will restrict potential landlords' and employers' access to juvenile delinquency court records.

#### Focus Group with Children's Mental Health Workers

- Provide funding to hire adequate staff to meet the ILS needs of all youth in transition and continue SELF (Support for Emancipation and Living Functionally) funds and educational vouchers.
- Begin working with youth at younger ages to develop a relationship and before they are too cynical or burned out on the system.
- Decrease the amount of documentation the ILS workers have to do and free them up for more frequent and meaningful contact with the youth.
- Improve communication and cooperation among the workers, foster parents, teachers and therapists involved with the youth in providing ILS services.
- Provide youth in transition access to dental care, and uninterrupted MA benefits after the youth reaches 18.