

# Not So Fast: What Courts and Counties Need to Know About Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

---

## Minnesota Citizen Review Panels

Results, observations and recommendations after conducting case file reviews and focus groups addressing the Independent Living Skills services and resources in their communities.

**Cheryl Glassel, Facilitator,  
Minnesota Citizen Review  
Panels Steering Committee**

## Minnesota Department of Human Services

- A statewide look at Youth Aging Out-of-Foster Care
- Research on Foster Care Alumni
- DHS efforts underway
- Key issues needing attention

Claire Hill, Program Consultant,  
Minnesota Department of  
Human Services



## **Minnesota Citizen Review Panels**

- ❖ **Chisago County**
- ❖ **Ramsey County**
- ❖ **Washington County**
- ❖ **Winona County**

**Authority for the Citizen Review Panels can be found in the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) (Now known as the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act) and in Minnesota statute 256.01, Commissioner of human services; powers, duties. Subdivision. 15. Citizen review panels.**

---

**Minnesota Citizen Review Panels  
Minnesota Department of Human Services  
Independent Living Skills  
Case Reviews, 2005**



# Minnesota Citizen Review Panels reviewed cases to determine:

---

**How county social service agencies addressed the Independent Living Skills (ILS) needs of youth age 16 or older in long-term foster care;**

**how those services were documented;**

**and if the youth who aged out of foster care felt that services provided prepared them for independent living.**

## Case Review Selection Criteria

Both open and closed cases that met the following criteria were included in the case reviews:

---

- **Adolescents 16 or older in long-term foster care or in out-of-home-placement for more than one year as of July 1, 2003,**
- **Cases that were active during the period under review July 1, 2003 to June 30, 2004,**
- **One child per family/case for purposes of the review.**

# Number of cases reviewed: 25

---

- **Number of cases in which workers were interviewed: 24**
- **Number of cases in which foster parents were interviewed: 19**
- **Number of cases in which youth were interviewed: 12**
- **Number of youth interviewed who were living independently: 7**

**(Ages of youth ranged from 18 to 21.)**

# The two items rated:

---

## Item I: Compliance with Required Forms

- Is there an Independent Living Skills Plan in the file?
- Is there an Independent Living Skills Plan on SSIS?
- Is the plan signed by the youth?
- Is the plan signed by the worker?

## Item II: Assessment of Independent Living Skills Needs and Provision of Services

Required areas to be addressed:

Employment and career, transportation and DL, money management, social/recreational skills, housing, health care/medical coverage, educational/vocational plan and establishing and maintaining connections to family and community.

- Are/were the required areas addressed?
- If they were, were services needed?
- If services were needed, what were provided?

# Rating Items One and Two

---

## **Item I Rating Compliance With Required Forms:**

To rate this item as a Strength questions 1, 3 and 4 must be answered “Yes”.

1. Is there an Independent Living Skills Plan in the file?
2. Is there an Independent Living Skills Plan on SSIS?
3. Is the plan signed by the youth?
4. Is the plan signed by the worker?

## **Item II Rating Services Assessed and Provided by County Social Services:**

To rate this item as a strength, at a minimum, all of the Areas to be Addressed under Identified Needs must be addressed and needed services provided.



# Case Ratings

Based on the results of the case file reviews and interviews, the 25 cases were rated as follows:

---

- **Item I: Compliance with Required Forms**
  - Strength – 10 cases
  - Area Needing Improvement – 15 cases
  
- **Item II: Assessment of ILS Needs and Provision of Services**
  - Strength – 15 cases
  - Area Needing Improvement – 10 cases

## Findings and Recommendations from Minnesota Department of Human Services' Staff as a Result of the Independent Living Skills Case Reviews:

---

- **1. Finding:** Reviewers noted there were positive outcomes when workers took the time to get to know the youth and thoroughly assessed their independent living skill needs.
- **Recommendations:** Adolescent program staff should promote and support the use of the Ansel Casey Life Skills Assessment as a precursor to developing the Independent Living plan and recommend it be included in the Minnesota Child Welfare Training System (foster parent and worker training), the *ILS Best Practices Guide* and the Adolescent Transition Web site.

# Findings and Recommendations

---

- **2. Finding:** The case reviewers found that there was often confusion among the foster parent, the county worker, and other service providers regarding who was primarily responsible to develop the plan, and who was responsible to teach the youth various components of the Independent Living Plan.
- **Recommendations:**
  - The *ILS Best Practices Guide*, ILS curriculum and the foster parent curricula should be amended to clarify responsibility within the Independent Living Plan for its various components.
  - Workers need to differentiate the case plan from the Independent Living Plan by completing Independent Living Plans that focus on preparing youth for emancipation and independent living.
  - The department's Adolescent Services staff and the Quality Assurance Program staff should work more closely to ensure independent living skills are adequately assessed, documented and provided in cases involving youth in transition.

# Findings and Recommendations

---

- **3. Finding:** Compliance with case plan, SSIS ILS Plan documentation, and forms was rated as needing improvement in 64 percent of the cases reviewed.
- **Recommendations:** The Adolescent Services staff should review and clarify the requirements for counties to articulate why they are required, and what might happen if the requirements are not met. Include that information in the ILS training for county social workers.

# Findings and Recommendations

---

- **4. Finding:** Youth were often without medical coverage after exiting foster care and there appeared to be a disconnection between county social services and county financial services.
- **Recommendation:** A county social worker should accompany the youth in meeting with a county financial worker to apply for medical coverage and other benefits available to the youth when he reaches 18 and/or are no longer in foster care.

Information gathered from the case reviews has been used by the Minnesota Department of Human Services to develop policies and strategies to help youth transition from foster care to independence including:

---

- **Independent living skills curricula for workers**
- **Independent living skills curricula for foster parents**
- **Independent living skills best practice guide**
- **Policies and legislative recommendations**
- **Department of Human Services child and family services reviews**
- **Adolescent transition web site**
- **Transition planning with housing**

# Minnesota Citizen Review Panels

---



**Ongoing Quality Assurance Review  
Availability and Accessibility of  
Independent Living Skills Resources  
Focus Groups, 2006**

# Purposes of the Review

---

- **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?**



# 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

# Rating the information gathered:

---

Panel members 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.**

# Rating the information gathered:

---

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.

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, ratings and the recommendations were completed.

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

---

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

- **A Strength: 1**
- **An Area Needing Improvement: 9**

The focus group of 3 youth in Washington County rated this as a strength.  
The other nine focus groups rated this as an area needing improvement.

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

- **A Strength: 1**
- **An Area Needing Improvement: 9**

The focus group of 3 youth in Washington County rated this as a strength  
The other nine focus groups rated this as an area needing improvement.

# Recommendations from the 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 Plans (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.

# Recommendations from the Chisago County Citizen Review Panel

---

## 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.

# Recommendations from the 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.

# Recommendations from the Ramsey County Children's Services Review Panel

---

- 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.



# Recommendations from the 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.

# Recommendations from the Washington County Citizen Review Panel

---

## 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.

# Recommendations from the Washington County Citizen Review Panel

---

## 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.

# Recommendations from the Washington County Citizen Review Panel

---

## 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.

# Recommendations from the Washington County Citizen Review Panel

---

## 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.

# Observations of the Ramsey County Children's Services Review Panel Members:

---

- When the Independent Living Skills (ILS) needs of youth are not met, or even addressed by the child protection system, it is the youth themselves who ultimately suffer the consequences of homelessness, poverty, mental and physical health issues, alcohol and other drug abuse, criminal involvement and hopelessness.
- According to an article in the spring 2006 edition of the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (University of Minnesota, School of Social Work) *Minnesota-Linking Information for Kids (Minn-LInK)*, the high school graduation rates of long-term foster care adolescents are usually between 45 and 50 percent.

# Observations of the Ramsey County Children's Services Review Panel Members:

---

- Society suffers when our youth in foster care are not prepared to be productive members of society. The Wilder Research Center's study on homelessness, *Homeless in Minnesota 2003*, found that 71 percent of homeless youth had been in an out-of-home placement. Of the youth in out-of-home placement, 53 percent were in foster care.
- Concerns that the ILS needs of youth transitioning out of foster care are not being met were previously identified through numerous case reviews, focus groups, studies and meetings. Therefore, it is with an increased sense of urgency that we recommend substantive action be taken to continue movement forward on these issues.

# Observations of the Ramsey County Children's Services Review Panel Members:

---

- Meeting the needs of our youth aging out of our system would help break the cycle of poverty and all that seems to come with it.
- We should not allow the system to close a case until and unless the youth has viable, sustainable and practical plans, including housing and an income that will support them to live independent of the child protection system.
- **These kids end up on the streets.**



# A statewide view of Minnesota Youth Who will Age Out of Care

---

- In January 2005, 1,420 MN Youth, ages 16 and older, were in Long Term Foster Care (both relative and non-relative)
- 241 of these youth were state wards
- Social Services placed 91.6% of youth in long term care
- Court services placed 8.4% of youth in long term care
- 41% of MN's long term care youth are placed by Hennepin and Ramsey
- Over half of long term care youth have a diagnosed disability (most commonly mental health) that will impair their ability to live independently.

# Discharge at Age 18 – Good Policy?

---

- Common Social Work Practice to close case at age 18 or high school graduation
- How many people here have children ages 18-34?
- On average, young adults, ages 18-34 receive \$38,000 from their parents during this time frame (food, housing, education, cash)
- Parent time assisting their 18-34 year old children averages 367 hours per year. This is 9 weeks of full-time help.
- 61% of college students receive financial support from parents

# Research on Life After Foster Care

---

- University of Chicago- compared a nationally representative group of 19 year olds with former foster care youth at age 19.
- Former foster care youth had much higher rates of unemployment, poverty, pregnancy, criminal behavior and use of welfare benefits.
- Former foster care youth were much less likely to attend post secondary school, less likely to receive psychological counseling, medical and dental care.
- Former foster care youth were twice as likely to not have enough money to pay rent or utility bills, and four times as likely to report being evicted.

# Research on Life After Foster Care

---

- Harvard Medical School & Casey Family Programs studied former youth in care in Washington & Oregon- the long term effects of placement on adults who were ages 20-33.
- 80% were employed, compared to 95% of the general population of 20-33 year olds.
- 16% were on public assistance, five times higher than the general population
- 33% lived in households at or below the poverty level, three times the national poverty rate
- 33% had no health insurance, compared with 18% of the general population in the same age group

# Research on Life After Foster Care

---

- 54% currently had mental health problems
- 25% experienced post traumatic stress syndrome, a rate twice as high as that of US war veterans
- Nearly 25% had experienced homelessness after leaving foster care

# Research on Life After Foster Care

---

- University of Chicago-compared outcomes of former foster care youth to outcomes of young adults still in care (Wisconsin youth vs. Illinois youth)
- Young adults still in care progressed further in their education. They were more likely to have access to health & mental health services and other services helping them transition to adulthood.
- Remaining in care up to age 21 is an option in Illinois. 72% of youth chose this option.
- Remaining in care up to age 21 was associated with a decreased risk of economic hardship, criminal activity and pregnancy.
- Illinois offers youth transitional living programs in which caseworkers supervise & support young adults living in their own apartments.

# Did you know--

---

- Any youth who is a state ward (meaning parental rights were terminated) is eligible to receive foster care benefits up to age 21. The youth has to inform their county social worker and then either fill out an application or so an intake.

# Did you know--

---

- Youth who are non-state wards can also receive benefits up to age 21 if there were in care up until age 18, are in foster care at the time of the request and they are incapable of self-sustaining employment or in need of continuing education.
- Counties are supposed to notify youth in writing about this option 6 months before the youth turns 18. If the youth request continued foster care and the county says no, the foster parents, parents or youth can appeal to DHS.



# Did you know--

---

- Youth who age out of care are highly likely to be eligible for continued Medicaid (MA), or MinnesotaCare, based on low income. MinnesotaCare requires a monthly premium on a sliding fee scale.
- Youth will need assistance with the applications!

# Department of Human Services

## Efforts Underway

---

- ① 2001 Legislative language requiring an Independent Living Plan for youth age 16 or older in out of home care as a result of a permanency disposition.  
(MN Statute 260.C.212 subdivision 1)

The plan must address, at a minimum the following objectives:

- Educational, vocational, or employment planning
- Health care planning and medical coverage
- Transportation including, where appropriate, assisting the child in obtaining a driver's license
- Money management
- Planning for housing
- Social and recreational skills; and
- Establishing and maintaining connections with the child's family and community.

# Department of Human Services

## Efforts Underway

---

- ② Federal funds through Chafee Foster Care Independence Act to serve youth in Long Term placement and 18 to 21 year olds who have aged out of care
- About \$1,000,000.00 allocated to counties & tribes each year- they must teach youth skills, assist them with transportation, education and employment
- About \$700,000 to non-profits who provide intensive life skills training & transitional housing for youth referred by counties and youth age 18 to 21.

# Department of Human Services

## Efforts Underway

---

- ③ \$4,000,000.00 over 4 years secured from 2005 Minnesota Legislature to teach independent living skills to youth age 16 and older in out-of-home placement, as well as former youth in care, age 18 to 21. Grants have been made to – non-profit agencies statewide
- ④ Education & Training Vouchers- federal funds to help former youth in care, ages 18 to 23.
  - Up to \$5,000.00 per year for post-secondary education
  - Began in 2003- funds about 150 youth per year
  - Each youth is matched with a mentor
  - June 1<sup>st</sup> deadline each year

# Department of Human Services

## Efforts Underway

---

- ⑤ DHS Welfare Training System- Free training statewide, on request for foster parents or county social workers – How to help youth successfully transition to adulthood.
- ⑥ Best practice Guide – Helping Youth Transition from Out-of-Home care to Adulthood. Available on the DHS website.
- ⑦ Federal funds to develop a special interface for youth and youth workers on the MinnesotaHelp.info website. A tool on the website will help the users identify their areas of need, and list resources by zip code

# KEY ISSUES FOR THE NEAR FUTURE

---

1. Relationships – A sense of belonging
  - Every youth needs at least one positive adult role model in their life they can turn to in a crisis
  - Fund statewide intergenerational mentoring programs
  - Adequately fund programs for youth ages 18 to 21 who have aged out of care (they are very alone)
2. Improve the quantity and quality of Independent Living Plans for youth in long term placement.
  - Increase funding for Family Group Decision Making Providers statewide to develop Transition Plans with 16 year olds in long term care

# KEY ISSUES FOR THE NEAR FUTURE

---

## 3. Safe Affordable Housing

- Increase funding for transitional housing with supportive services
- Develop host homes or specialized foster homes

## 4. Uninsured Youth with Mental Health Needs

- Extend MA coverage for former youth in care up to age 21.

## 5. Education

- Match our federal Education and Training Vouchers with private or state funds.
- Find mentors to help youth in care prepare for post-secondary school.

# KEY ISSUES FOR THE NEAR FUTURE

---

## 6. Employment

- Fund Workforce Centers programs to specifically target youth in out-of-home placement.
- Create job-shadowing, internship or externship opportunities
- Start teaching youth at an early age about career options, and the attitudes & skills they need to find, get and keep a job.

## 7. Transportation

- Set up a fund to cover the increase in foster parents insurance rates, which will allow foster youth to get a driver's license & drive the foster parents car.
- Set up car donation & repair programs to benefit youth aging out of care



# KEY ISSUES FOR THE NEAR FUTURE

---

8. Discharge from Foster Care at age 18
  - Extend foster care benefits up to age 21 (Illinois model)
  - Amend MN Statute so that children in long term placement may not be discharged from placement at age 18 unless the court determines that the following objectives have been met:
    1. The child, the child's parents or legal guardian, and the foster parents have been notified in writing of the availability of foster care benefits up to age 21, and how to file an appeal if a request for foster care benefits up to age 21 is denied by the county.
    2. The child has obtained a high school diploma or GED
    3. The child has completed a Driver's Education course and/or has demonstrated the ability to use public transportation in his/her community.

# KEY ISSUES FOR THE NEAR FUTURE

---

- 4) The child has acquired Social Security card, birth certificate, green card or school visa, a state identification card or driver's license, school and medical records and an emergency contact list which includes medical, dental and mental health providers and supportive adults to call for help.
- 5) The child is employed and/or enrolled in post-secondary school.
- 6) The child has applied for and obtained post-secondary education financial aid he/she is eligible for.
- 7) The child has saved funds sufficient to pay for first month's rent and a damage deposit.
- 8) The child has health care coverage and health care providers to meet their physical and mental health needs.
- 9) The child has applied for and obtained any applicable disability income assistance.
- 10) The child has obtained affordable housing with needed supports, not to include homeless shelters.

# Thank you for your dedication to Minnesota's Youth!

---

If you have any questions please contact me:

[Claire.d.hill@state.mn.us](mailto:Claire.d.hill@state.mn.us)

Or

(651) 431-4686