

Foster Care Independent Living Programs

January 1998

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The Honorable Jimmy Naifeh
Speaker of the House of Representatives
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House Committee on Children and Family Affairs
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House Committee on Government Operations
and
Members of the House of Representatives
State Capitol
Nashville, Tennessee 37243

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Transmitted herewith is the special report on Foster Care Independent Living Programs. This report is submitted pursuant to the requirements of House Resolution 81, adopted May 28, 1997.

Very truly yours,

W. R. Snodgrass
Comptroller of the Treasury

WRS/jr

State of Tennessee

Audit Highlights

Comptroller of the Treasury

Division of State Audit

Special Report

Foster Care Independent Living Programs

January 1998

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the report were to identify state programs and policies designed to assist teenage foster children in preparing for adulthood and self-sufficiency; to evaluate those programs and policies; and to recommend possible alternatives for legislative or administrative action that might increase the effectiveness of these programs.

AREAS OF CONCERN AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Need for Training for Foster Parents and Other Caregivers

According to department staff, foster parents do not receive training specifically related to teaching independent living skills. The department should develop (or contract for) specific training for those caregivers providing independent training to youth. This training should include topics such as assessment of youth's needs, independent living issues to be addressed, most effective training methods, and resources available to youth once they leave state custody (pages 8 and 12).

Need to Begin Independent Living Services at an Earlier Age

Federal guidelines regarding independent living programs focus on youth 16 years or older. However, according to child advocacy groups, teaching of independent living skills should begin much earlier because today's youth have so many needs and have been exposed to so much violence and trauma. Currently, 13- to 15-year olds in Department of Children's Services custody receive some independent living services, mostly informal instruction on preparing meals, doing laundry, etc. The department should consider offering formal independent living services before youth reach 16. At least initially, the department could focus on those youth who need the most training, have multiple problems, and lack other support systems (page 12).

Need for Evaluation of Program Effectiveness

Currently, independent living programs and services are not formally evaluated to determine their effectiveness in successfully preparing youth leaving state custody for the transition to adulthood and self-sufficiency. Without such evaluations, the Department of Children's Services cannot adequately determine whether it is spending federal (and state) dollars wisely and whether its programs (or the programs of contract providers) are meeting youth's needs. The department should develop methods for evaluating and assessing the effectiveness of the department's and contractors' independent living programs and services. Assessments should include feedback from youth who have left state custody. The department should use the results of those assessments to revise programs as needed (page 13).

OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS

The report also describes the Department of Children's Services independent living programs and policies and discusses the following issues: evaluations of independent living programs, the effect of problems in the foster care system on independent living programs, and barriers to independent living (page 5).

"Audit Highlights" is a summary of the audit report. To obtain the complete audit report which contains all findings, recommendations, and management comments, please contact

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Special Report

Foster Care Independent Living Programs

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Special Report

Foster Care Independent Living Programs

Introduction

Purpose and Authority

This special report on Foster Care Independent Living Programs was prepared pursuant to House Resolution 81, adopted May 28, 1997. The resolution requested that the Division of State Audit, within the Office of the Comptroller of the Treasury, evaluate state programs and policies designed to assist teenage foster children in successfully preparing for the transition to adulthood and self-sufficiency.

Objectives

The objectives of the report were

1. to identify state programs and policies designed to assist teenage foster children in preparing for adulthood and self-sufficiency;
2. to evaluate those programs and policies; and
3. to recommend possible alternatives for legislative or administrative action that might increase the effectiveness of these programs.

Scope and Methodology

The information presented in this report was obtained through

1. review of applicable federal and state statutes and regulations;
2. examination of Department of Children's Services files, documents, policies and procedures, and reports to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services;
3. review of prior performance audit and financial and compliance audit reports and audit reports from other states;

4. interviews with Department of Children’s Services and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services staff, attendance at a Tennessee Youth Advisory Council presentation, and review of files of youth receiving independent living services;
5. interviews with and a review of literature written by child welfare advocacy groups or other child welfare experts; and
6. interviews with foster care youth and representatives of the judicial system.

The auditors included in their review not only independent living programs available to children in foster care, but also those programs available to children in the Department of Children’s Services’ development centers and group homes and in residential programs contracting with the department.

Department of Children’s Services

The Department of Children’s Services was created in 1996 by Chapter 1079 of the Public Acts, codified as Section 37-5-101 et seq., *Tennessee Code Annotated*. Children’s services from six state departments were consolidated into one department. The Department of Children’s Services is responsible for providing “timely, appropriate and cost-effective services for children in state custody and at risk of entering state custody so that these children can reach their full potential as productive, competent and healthy adults.”

History of the Independent Living Program

Prior to 1986, most child welfare agencies did not offer specific services to adolescents to prepare them for independent living. According to federal hearings in 1984 and 1985, youth discharged from out-of-home care were experiencing difficulties such as homelessness, arrests for serious crimes, and dependence on public assistance.

In 1986, Congress passed the Independent Living Initiatives Program legislation (Public Law 99-272). The law amended Title IV-E of the Social Security Act to provide funds for programs for youths in out-of-home care who would neither return to their families nor be adopted—youth for whom out-of-home care is a permanent situation until they become too old for care. Services may be made available to youth beginning at age 16 and continue through age 18, or at state option, through age 21. Funds are awarded to states as grants based on the 1984 proportion of foster children that received payments under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act.

Independent living services that can be funded under the federal program include teaching the basics of daily living such as housekeeping, money management, and nutrition; assistance in finishing high school; preparation for college; employment preparation, job training, and placement; and individual and group counseling. States may operate their own independent living programs or contract with voluntary agencies to provide the services.

Numbers of Youth in Out-of-Home Care

An October 1995 article in the *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* estimated that 429,000 children were in out-of-home care nationwide at the end of 1991, with the largest proportion between the ages of 13 and 18. At that time, it was estimated that about 16,000 youth each year leave foster care to assume independence.

According to the Department of Children's Services, 12,061 Tennessee children (including those in the youth development centers and community residential programs) were in custody in June 1997. Of those children, 4,103 were 16 years and older.

Funding for Independent Living Programs

The original appropriation nationwide for the Independent Living Initiatives Program was \$45,000,000 in 1986. The appropriation nationwide has been \$70,000,000 annually since 1992. The federal government distributes these funds to states through a formula based on the percentage of children in the state who received federal foster care assistance in 1984, the most recent year for which data were available when the Independent Living Program was established in 1986. States are required to match, dollar-for-dollar, any amount they receive over their portion of the original \$45 million in 1986 (the base funding). If a state cannot make use of its entire federal match, the funds not used are reallocated to states that request additional federal resources.

In federal fiscal year 1997, Tennessee was eligible to receive \$500,039 in base funding and another \$277,000 in additional federal funds to be matched for independent living services to youth in care who are 16 years and older. Information provided by the department indicated that approximately \$15,000 of the total grant funds available to be matched were not used in 1997. Department staff explained that grantees sometimes have difficulty raising the matching funds.

Independent Living and Permanency Plans

Pursuant to Title 42 of the *United States Code*, Section 675, the case plan for a child 16 years or older must include a written description of the program and services which will help the child prepare for the transition from foster care to independent living. In addition, there is to be a case review system that ensures each child 16 years and older a hearing to determine the services needed to assist the child in the transition. Section 671 requires that, in order to be eligible for funds for foster care assistance, each state must prepare a plan which provides for the development of a case plan and case review system.

In accordance with federal law, Section 37-2-403, *Tennessee Code Annotated*, requires that a plan be prepared for each child in foster care, within 30 days of placement. Sections 37-2-404 and 406 require that reports be made to the courts regarding progress made towards the plan's goals and that each child's progress be reviewed by a foster care advisory review board or

a judge every six months. Section 37-2-409 requires a hearing within 18 months of the date of placement and subsequent hearings no less frequently than every 12 months for each child. In the case of a child who is at least 16 years of age, these hearings are to determine the services needed to assist the child in making the transition from foster care to independent living.

Studies Concerning Youth Who Have Left Out-of-Home Care

Only a limited number of studies nationwide have looked at the long-term functioning of children formerly in out-of-home care, and few of these studies contain recent information. (See Appendix 1 for a listing of studies reviewed.) Child welfare groups recognize three indicators that show the potential for achieving self-sufficiency—educational attainment, employment status and economic well-being, and housing. Educational attainment is a key factor in predicting adult self-sufficiency. Studies reviewed show that those who were in out-of-home care have an average level of educational attainment below that of other citizens of comparable age. A 1991 study found that 66% of 810 eighteen-year-olds discharged from out-of-home care between July 1987 and June 1988 had not completed high school. A 1990 study found that more than half (55%) of youth leaving out-of-home care (because of their age) left without a high school degree. Another study in 1991 found that only 54% of youth formerly in care had completed high school two and one-half to four years after discharge. This percentage was below the level (78%) for those 18 to 24 years old in the general population. The same study found that completion of high school prior to discharge led to better adult outcomes.

Employment status and economic well-being are seen as indicators of self-sufficiency; however, although most studies report whether the former youth in care are employed, the studies do not compare the youth's financial status with other groups. A 1983 study found that the unemployment rate was 25% among males and 19% among females formerly in care. This rate compared with 9% for males and 8% for females in the general population. A 1991 study of former youth in care found that 40% were a cost to the community (i.e., were on welfare, in jail, or on Medicaid) at the time of the study.

Studies suggest that finding stable housing is particularly difficult for youth who were once in care. Several studies of homeless persons indicated that a high or disproportionate number were in out-of-home care at some point in their lives. A 1991 study compared outcomes for children discharged from care with outcomes for children in the general population—39% of the subjects formerly in care were living with extended family (compared to 53% of youths in the general population), 12% had sought housing assistance since leaving care, 10% had used public shelters, and 25% had spent at least one night without a place to live. A 1987 study found that 23% of first-time shelter users had been in family foster care, a group home, and/or other special residential placements before the age of 17. A study of homeless persons in Lexington, Kentucky, during the winter and spring of 1988, found that 16% (four times the rate for the general population) had been a ward of the state as a child.

Observations and Comments

Independent Living Programs

In child-welfare literature, “independent living skills” are defined as those skills needed to act effectively in social roles and environments. Skills are in two major categories: tangible or “hard” skills and intangible or “soft” skills. Tangible skills are known or done—finding and maintaining employment and housing; obtaining food, clothing, health care, and other services; and managing money. Intangible skills are felt—communication, decision making, problem solving, self-esteem, anger management, and relationship development.

The Department of Children’s Services’ Independent Living Programs range from formal residential programs to informal teaching of laundry skills, meal preparation, etc., by foster parents or staff at department or contract facilities. (More detailed descriptions are provided below and in Appendix 2.) The state’s annual report to the federal government on its Title IV-E Independent Living Programs stated that in 1994-95, 2,129 of the 2,244 youth eligible (i.e., those 16 years or older) had been served. The 1995-96 report stated that 2,045 of the 2,235 youth eligible had been served. (See Table One for independent living activities reported for 1995-96.)

**Table One
Independent Living Activities
Youth Served
1995-96**

Independent Living Activities	Number Completing	Number Currently Participating	Number Withdrawing
Education			
GED/High School Diploma	104	1650	30
Vocational Training	20	50	10
College	3	32	6
Remedial/Tutoring	33	60	5
Daily Living Skills			
Budgeting	160	390	35
Housing	99	88	33
Maintaining a Home	160	390	32
Nutrition	85	92	34
Laundry	85	92	0

**Table One (cont.)
Independent Living Activities
Youth Served
1995-96**

Independent Living Activities	Number Completing	Number Currently Participating	Number Withdrawing
Employment Preparation			
Career Planning	250	95	35
Job-Retention Skills	205	75	43
Job-Seeking Skills	250	77	25
Training Collaboration (with Job Corp., JTPA, etc.)	180	61	20
Health Maintenance	96	350	9
Parenting Skills	80	120	0
Counseling			
Individual	65	70	0
Group	61	58	0
Peer Support Group	30	35	0
Family	0	0	0

Source: State of Tennessee IV-E Independent Living Program Report, federal fiscal year 1995-96, Department of Children's Services.

Other than the review of the annual report, the federal government does not perform any audits or contract compliance work for Tennessee's Independent Living Programs. A Division of State Audit review of youth's files at two facilities—a department development center and a contract facility—found that independent living skills, overall, were appropriately addressed in youth's individual program plans and that files included notations on youth's progress in developing independent living skills.

Information provided by Children's Services indicated that as of mid-September 1997, forty-seven youth were on waiting lists for independent living services. None of the department's twelve regions had more than eight youth on waiting lists, and most youth had only been on a waiting list since August 1997.

Federally Funded Programs. Using Title IV-E Independent Living funds, the department contracts with agencies who provide independent living services to youth and training to staff

who work directly with youth. Six programs received Title IV-E Independent Living funds for federal fiscal year 1996-97:

- University of Tennessee's Independent Living Assessment, Teen Leadership Initiative and Training Program
- Tennessee Association for Child Care's Independent Living Consultation and Training Program
- Oasis Center's Tutor Mentor, Home-Based and Aftercare Program
- Porter Leath Children's Center's World of Work and Aftercare Program
- John Tarleton Home for Children's Aftercare Program
- Tennessee Preparatory School's Senior Adult Training Program

See Appendix 2 for a detailed description of each program. In addition to funding these programs, the department also allocated approximately \$69,000 of the Title IV-E grant money for use by its central and regional offices. The department's guidelines for the suggested use of these funds include incentive payments for report cards or graduation, training, and aftercare payments to help youth set up a house or start college (a one-time grant). Aftercare payments can be made for up to six months after the youth leaves care.

Residential Program Contractors. In addition to programs specifically funded with Title IV-E money, all residential programs contracting with the Department of Children's Services are required, according to department staff, to offer independent living services for children 16 years or older. The department's *Provider Policy Manual*, General Requirements Section, states that all providers are to develop an Individualized Program Plan for each child within 30 days of admission and that this plan is to address the child's needs for independent living skills training. A review of the department's residential contracts for fiscal year 1997-1998 listed ten agencies (with a total of 100 contracted slots) whose main focus is independent living.

Department Facilities. Programs are also available for youth at the department's youth development centers and group homes. The independent living skills of youth in the group homes are assessed by case managers prior to placement in the group home; youth are further observed by group home staff during an orientation period at the home. Independent Living Skills needed are included in the youth's plan of care. Staff assist youth in housing searches and provide instruction and assistance in obtaining utilities, paying deposits, acquiring furnishings, etc. While in the group home, youth are taught housing chores including laundry skills, meal preparations, and maintenance of a home. If the youth need health care, the staff help them fill out forms and obtain the care needed. Money management is taught through budgeting and banking instruction—youth who work are required to maintain a bank account. Communication, social, and problem-solving skills are addressed through individual and group therapy and counseling. Education

goals are based on the youth's individual education plan. Youth in group homes attend public schools or group home in-house schools.

Staff at the youth development centers assess youth's independent living skills during classification and identify the services each child needs. Independent living skills are obtained through the educational curriculum (e.g., Health, Family and Parenting, Consumer Education, and vocational classes) and group and individual counseling (decision making, problem solving, self-esteem, and anger management). At two of the centers, students who meet certain criteria (such as completing a program or obtaining a GED) may be allowed to work on the campus. One center provides youth 16 years or older who have a diploma or GED a ten-week job-readiness skills and independent-living skills program. Another center provides youth who have completed (or are not in need of) other treatment programs, the chance to participate in a program that focuses only on independent living skills.

One of the department's twelve regions—Shelby County—has a separate unit working directly with youth in custody on independent living skills. In the other regions, case managers work with the youth assigned to them. The staff assist youth with job applications, college applications, youth conferences of the Tennessee Youth Advisory Council, the Drug-Free Youth Conference, and support group meetings concerning independent living topics.

Foster Care. The Foster Care Section in the department's *Provider Policy Manual* states that "children appropriate for independent living foster care are ages 16-21 who are in need of developmental activities and services which will enable them to live on their own." The manual further states that foster parents in the Foster Care Independent Living Program "receive specialized training in independent living skills so that they may effectively train youth in these skills." Level One Foster Care (which includes the Independent Living Program) requires a minimum of 15 to 30 hours of training for foster parents prior to placement of children and another 15 hours within 90 days of placement. Ten hours of in-service training per year is required. However, department staff stated that foster parents do not receive training specifically related to teaching independent living skills. Such specific training would help ensure that foster parents have sufficient knowledge about subjects that need to be covered, effective teaching methods, and resources available to youth who have left state custody, etc.

Department Policies for Independent Living Programs

The department has several policies that either directly or indirectly address independent living issues:

- Release from Custody of Dependent and Neglected Youth at Age 18 (describes under which circumstances these youth can continue to receive services).
- Strategies for Independent Living (describes who receives independent living services, how their needs are assessed, and what types of strategies may be used to address identified needs).

- Foster Homes as an Independent Living Resource (discusses the need to prepare youth for independence and references additional information—“Tips for Foster Parents”).
- Aftercare/Discharge Planning When the Goal Is Emancipation/Independent Living (describes the assessment of a youth’s readiness for independent living).
- Youth in a Post-secondary Education Program (contains guidelines for youth to meet in order to continue receiving services while in college).
- Driver’s Licenses and Notifying Department of Safety (describes the process for securing a driver’s license for a youth in foster care and notifying Safety if the youth changes placements).

For comparative purposes, auditors also reviewed the independent living policies of six other states—Arizona, Connecticut, Illinois, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Texas. (These states’ policies were cited as good examples by staff at the National Resource Center for Youth Services.) Overall, Tennessee’s policies are generally the same as the other states. However, some states included all policies and guidelines about their independent living programs in their formal policies. Some of the department’s policies/guidelines concerning independent living programs are in its *Provider Policy Manual* and in memoranda. For example, guidelines for aftercare payments and incentives to youth are in a separate memorandum. Compiling all related policies/guidelines in the same set of documents could (1) facilitate the department’s review to ensure that all necessary issues have been addressed and (2) help ensure that all department staff and caregivers fully understand their responsibilities.

Evaluations of Independent Living Programs

It is difficult to comment on the effectiveness of the department’s independent living programs because, according to department staff, the programs’ effectiveness has yet to be formally evaluated. The department does receive comments from foster care youth who are members of the Youth Advisory Council, a cooperative effort of youth, department staff, and other child welfare workers. (Youth’s participation in this council was mentioned by child welfare advocates as one of the strengths of Tennessee’s program.) Youth interviewed by auditors indicated that the department services that helped them the most were assistance in obtaining employment, enrolling in school, and obtaining a GED.

The lack of evaluation of program outcomes appears to be a problem nationwide. A review of literature indicated little research on the effectiveness of specific programs. One study found little reporting of program outcomes and recommended that the federal government change reporting requirements so that independent living programs’ outcome goals would have to be tracked. Child-welfare advocacy groups interviewed by auditors were unaware of any formal outcome evaluations of programs in any state. According to these groups, the absence of any standards for measuring the success of independent living programs makes it difficult to determine the success of any program.

Child-welfare advocacy groups further stated that few formal evaluations have been performed because of the lack of funds to pay for an evaluation. However, they cited conversations with federal staff that suggest the federal government is beginning to develop baseline standards and measures for evaluating independent living programs.

Children's Services staff stated that the department is developing an instrument to measure outcomes for some programs and is gathering baseline data. Beginning in July 1998, outcomes will be measured for the department and service providers. However, based on a review of information provided by the department, the outcomes to be measured do not appear to be specific to independent living programs.

Effect of Problems in the Foster Care System on Independent Living Programs

According to national child-welfare advocacy groups and studies by child-welfare experts, problems within the foster care system itself affect the success of independent living services: too many placements per child or inappropriate placements, high caseloads, poor matching of foster care families to children, high staff turnover, and emotional and other problems of the foster care youth. Local child-welfare advocacy groups and Children's Services staff cite some of the same problems within the Tennessee system: high caseloads and staff turnover, large number of placements or inappropriate placements, inability to provide the services needed, and the need for additional training/assistance for foster parents.

Placement. Children's Services is attempting to address the placement issue by introducing two new initiatives. One calls for the number of placements per child to be reduced. The more often a youth's placement is changed, the less time available for someone to adequately assess the youth's skills. In addition, changing schools along with the placement lessens the youth's chances for educational progress. The other department initiative is the development of a continuum of care program in which a provider offers several levels of service instead of only one. Youth will stay with the same provider and move through that provider's programs. The resulting continuity aids in assessing and meeting the youth's needs.

Caseloads. Available information indicates that lower caseloads can positively affect youth's success at independent living. One independent living program in Baltimore County, Maryland, compared two groups of youth—44 who participated in the program and 46 who did not. The independent living program's social workers carried a smaller caseload (15 children) than regular foster care workers and spent more one-on-one hours with the youth in the program. The unit was staffed by master's level social workers who conducted home visits with the teens enrolled. Significant others (e.g., family, peers, and foster care providers) were included in the process. The two groups compared did not differ in reasons for placement, services received, or demographic variables. The comparison found that the youth who participated in the independent living program were more likely to complete high school, to have employment history and employment at discharge, and to be self-supporting at the closing of the case.

According to Children's Services staff, caseworkers have noted a decrease in their caseloads, allowing them to see youth more often. This decrease may be attributable to the consolidation of services under one department and to the addition of available services through use of the community services agencies.

Barriers to Independent Living

Child welfare literature emphasized that youth living in out-of-home care are like their peers living with their parents—they both need assistance to establish themselves as adults, and both groups do not become magically self-supporting at age 18. However, studies agree that many adolescents leaving out-of-home care at age 18 lack ongoing support from their families and need other support systems. In addition, because of histories of abuse, neglect, etc., youth in out-of-home care may need support beyond that typically provided to youth cared for by parents.

Youth workers and former foster care youth mentioned the lack of affordable housing and a lack of credit history as major problems confronting youth leaving custody. One study found that obtaining necessary health care was a problem because of lack of money or health insurance coverage. Youth workers also indicated that youth in custody have difficulty obtaining a driver's license because of financial responsibility and insurance coverage issues. The lack of a driver's license may hinder the youth's ability to pursue educational or work opportunities. According to department policy, either the caregiver or birth parent must assume financial responsibility for the youth and sign a statement of responsibility with the Tennessee Department of Safety. The caregiver's insurance must cover the youth. This policy appears similar to other states' policies reviewed.

Areas of Concern and Recommendations

Need for Training for Foster Parents and Other Caregivers

Department staff stated that foster parents do not receive training specifically related to teaching independent living skills. (See page 8.) One study reviewed stated that a model program would train foster parents and other substitute caregivers (e.g., staff in group homes or residential care facilities) in adolescent development issues. It also noted that model programs should offer incentives for caregivers to participate in life skills activities with the youth in their care. Their participation is important because most adolescents learn independent living skills from those closest to them. Also, the substitute caregivers, who have daily contact with the youth, have the best knowledge of those youth's strengths and weaknesses.

The department should develop (or contract for) specific training for caregivers providing independent living training to youth. Caregiver training should include topics such as assessment of youth's needs, independent living issues to be addressed, most effective training methods, and resources available to youth once they leave custody.

Need to Begin Independent Living Services at an Earlier Age

Federal guidelines regarding independent living programs focus on youth 16 years or older. Child-welfare advocacy groups in Tennessee, however, indicated that youth in state custody are changing in terms of their life experiences, i.e., they are needier and more disturbed and have been exposed to violence and trauma. Therefore, the teaching of independent living skills should begin much earlier, so that youth have time to adjust emotionally. Other reasons cited for beginning at an earlier age were (1) youth 16 years or older are geared toward emancipation and not focused on learning needed skills; (2) the skills needed to be successful cannot be taught in one or two years; and (3) independence is a process that begins at an early age.

According to department staff, youth 13 to 15 years old also receive independent living services. However, instead of formal programs, these services may consist of informal instruction on preparing meals or doing laundry. A report by the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth found that in 1996, 70% of youth 13 years or older were being taught some type of independent living skills (including informal instruction in cooking, cleaning, laundry, and money management). This percentage is similar to rates in earlier years—71% in 1995 and 64% in 1994.

The department should consider offering formal independent living services before youth reach 16. At least initially, the department could focus on those youth who need the most training, have multiple problems, and lack other support systems.

Need for Evaluation of Program Effectiveness

Currently, independent living programs and services are not formally evaluated to determine their effectiveness in successfully preparing youth leaving state custody for the transition to adulthood and self-sufficiency. Without such evaluations, the department cannot adequately determine whether it is spending federal (and state) dollars wisely and whether its programs (or the programs of contract providers) are meeting youth's needs. Evaluations of short-term outcomes such as skills learned or not learned could help the department identify teaching materials or methods that need to be improved and additional training that staff (or other caregivers) need. Evaluations of long-term outcomes, which would necessitate tracking and obtaining feedback from youth after they have left state custody, would help the department (1) focus its scarce resources on those programs that are most effective and (2) identify independent living issues that need to be addressed (or addressed more effectively). For example, advocacy groups have cited the need for additional support for vocational and apprenticeship programs and for additional instruction in parenting skills (because of the increasing number of children in state custody who are parents and/or whose parents were in custody themselves). Feedback and evaluation would help the department determine what types of assistance/strategies (e.g., vocational versus academic training, varying levels of family involvement) are most critical to youth's success and how long this assistance needs to be available, enabling more effective planning, counseling, and resource allocation.

The Department of Children's Services should develop methods for evaluating and assessing the effectiveness of the department's and contractors' independent living programs and services. Assessment should include feedback from youth who have left state custody. The department should use the results of those assessments to revise programs as needed.

Appendix 1

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Appendix 2

Programs Receiving Title IV-E Independent Living Funds Federal Fiscal Year 1997

Agency

University of Tennessee College of Social Work and Office of Research and Public Service

Program

Independent Living Assessment, Teen Leadership Initiative, and Training

Description

The office sponsors the Tennessee Youth Advisory Council including meetings, youth contacts, and attendance at national youth leadership conferences. Youth participation has resulted in policy recommendations to the department. The office produces four issues of C.O.L.O.R.S., a youth newsletter. In addition, the office provides training to state and agency staff on the needs and issues of working with youth; provides individualized independent living assessments; and coordinates youth conferences. In fiscal year 1995-96, 314 youth participated in summer youth conferences, and 662 independent living skills assessments were completed.

Base Funding for 1996-97

\$130,000

Funding to Be Matched for 1996-97

\$130,201

Agency

Tennessee Association for Child Care

Program

Independent Living Consultation and Training

Description

The association provides training to agencies and state staff on adolescent issues and consultation to agencies about programming and independent living.

Base Funding for 1996-97

\$80,000

Funding to Be Matched for 1996-97

None

Appendix 2 (cont.)

Agency

Oasis Center

Program

Tutor Mentor, Home Based, and Aftercare

Description

The center provides independent living services and education, life-skills, and employment training to youth in state custody. The Tutor Mentor program serves 125 youth. Youth referred to this program have a history of repeated academic failures, truancy, chronic disruptive behaviors, multiple school suspensions, and other potential dropout behaviors. In fiscal year 1995-96, 154 youth participated in the job readiness component and 39 youth participated in the academic component. Fifty-one youth participated in the home-based independent living program.

Base Funding for 1996-97

\$60,000

Funding to Be Matched for 1996-97

\$75,000

Agency

Porter Leath Children's Center

Program

World of Work Program and Aftercare

Description

The center provides a Tutor Mentor Program emphasizing education and opportunities in the World of Work for 40 youth in custody in Shelby County. The center also provides education in independent life skills. Aftercare services (e.g., intensive counseling in job skills, budgeting, and using community resources) are provided to youth aging out of the system. In fiscal year 1995-96, 93 teens participated in the employment training program.

Base Funding for 1996-97

\$118,903

Funding to Be Matched for 1996-97

\$40,000

Appendix 2 (cont.)

Agency

John Tarleton Home for Children

Program

Aftercare

Description

The aftercare services provided assist former foster care youth in the Knox County area in the transition to adult society. Services include monthly meetings of former foster care youth; a resource referral system for youth; assistance with education and vocational needs; help with establishing bank credit and learning money management skills; and help preventing youth from becoming homeless. Youth can be served in this program for up to six months after they leave care.

Base Funding for 1996-97

\$42,129

Funding to Be Matched for 1996-97

\$10,216

Agency

Tennessee Preparatory School

Program

Senior Adult Training (SALT)

Description

High-school seniors participating in the SALT program live with a roommate in an apartment while completing a variety of skills. Students are instructed in obtaining housing, doing comparison shopping, using public transportation, and exploring post-secondary education opportunities. All seniors meet once a month and the residents in the individual cottages meet one night a week.

Base Funding for 1996-97

None

Funding to Be Matched for 1996-97

\$6,000