

FOSTER CARE SERVICES: Emancipation/Independent Living

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Introduction

Adolescence is a time of preparation for the future. Many adolescents leaving Foster Care have significant difficulty making a successful transition to adulthood. Congressional findings indicate that “children aging out of foster care show high rates of homelessness, non-marital childbearing, poverty, and delinquent or criminal behavior; they are also frequently the target of crime and physical assaults” (42 USC 677). The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, hereafter referred to as Georgia’s Independent Living Program (ILP), was created to target youth that are vulnerable to these conditions.

Mission Statement

Georgia’s ILP provides an environment for eligible youth to maximize their potential and achieve successful transition to self-sufficiency.

Independent Living Services

In accordance with federal mandates, independent living services must be made available to all eligible youth through the ILP. Independent Living Coordinators (ILC), either through contractual arrangement or direct service, provide a continuum of training experiences that all adolescents need for enhancing their continued growth and development. Such focus areas include, but are not limited to:

- Education
- Vocational/Employment Preparation
- Life Skills
- Personal Development
- Health Education

Independent Living (IL) services focus on the long-term needs of all eligible youth. Youth are served in accordance with federal guidelines for fair and equitable treatment. Independent Living incorporates services designed to meet the needs identified in an initial assessment completed by the ILC or other providers. The results of this assessment and subsequent plan are important in designing activities/services for youth.

ELIGIBLE YOUTH

1012.1

Requirement

Eligible youth must meet one of the two following criteria:

- (a) Are ages 14 to 21 in the foster care system regardless of their permanency plan.
- (b) Are under 21 and were eligible for IL services when placement authority ended.

Eligibility begins on the 1st day of the month of eligibility and expires on the last day of the month of eligibility.

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REFERRAL

1012.2

Requirement

There must be a **Referral** to Independent Living for all “**eligible youth**”. Using the ILP referral form, which is available from the ILC, the Social Service Case Manager (SSCM) refers all eligible youth to the ILC serving their county. Referrals may be made 90 days prior to and no later than 30 days after the youth meets eligibility criteria.

1012.2 PROCEDURE

The SSCM should complete the referral form and attach required documentation as specified on that form and forward copies of this information with the completed referral form to the ILC. Referral forms are available from the ILC.

If the referral form is not received within 60 days after the youth becomes eligible, the ILC will follow-up by letter to the SSCM and a copy to the county director notifying them that the referral is past due.

1012.2 PRACTICE ISSUE

If the SSCM desires input from the ILC on the initial WTLP and Form 388, the referral should be made as soon as possible to allow ILC time to meet with youth.

Referrals made prior to the youth becoming eligible for services will expedite the initiation of services when the youth becomes eligible. Services that require the expenditure of ILP funds should not be provided until the youth meets eligibility requirements. See Eligibility Policy 1012.1.

WRITTEN TRANSITIONAL LIVING PLAN (WTLP)

1012.3

REQUIREMENT

The WTLP (Form 391) and accompanying Case Plan Goals and Steps (Form 388) must be included in the Case Review process as mandated by Federal regulations. The WTLP, based on an assessment, must be developed and signed by the youth, SSCM and IL Coordinator. See WTLP Policy 1007.10.

1012.3 PROCEDURES

1. The ILC will coordinate the assessment, which will be used in the development of the WTLP.
2. The SSCM is responsible for developing the WTLP with input from the youth, the ILC, and others identified within the youth's support system.
3. The WTLP should be included as part of the Case Review process and forwarded for the Citizen Review or to the juvenile court judge for inclusion as part of the Judicial Review and subsequent court order. The SSCM will update the WTLP with each Case Review.
4. SSCM will forward copies of the WTLP to the ILC, caregiver and the youth.

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1012.3 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. The ILC will utilize the WTLP to plan services/activities that will assist the youth in meeting the goals of the plan.
2. The WTLP requires Form 388 which reflects goals of the WTLP.
3. SSCM will forward (Form 713) all case changes (e.g., address, placement type, and goals) to ILC within 30 days of change.

WRITTEN TRANSITIONAL LIVING PLAN AMMENDMENT_

1012.4

Requirement

Form 391 (WTLP) and Form 388 may be amended, if new needs are identified or the court makes recommendations.

1012.4 PROCEDURE

The SSCM is responsible for updating the WTLP and Form 388 with the youth and with input from the ILC. All amendments to court ordered case plans must be submitted to the court for review and approval.

1012.4 PRACTICE ISSUE

One example of a situation that would require amending the WTLP would be as follows: During the duration of the current WTLP a new need is identified; a youth needs to improve their grades. It is determined that tutoring is the needed service. The SSCM will amend the WTLP (Form 391) and Form 388 with input and signatures from the youth and the ILC.

YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE WHO BECOME ELIGIBLE FOR ILP

1012.5

Requirement

For youth in foster care who become eligible for ILP, a WTLP (Form 391 and accompanying Form 388) must be completed within sixty days. If the referral form is not received within 60 days after the youth becomes eligible, the ILC will follow-up by letter to the SSCM and a copy to the county director notifying them that the referral is past due.

1012.5 PROCEDURE

1. The SSCM must submit a referral form (See policy 1012.2).
2. The SSCM must complete WTLP (See policy 1012.3 and 1007.10).

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1012.5 PRACTICE ISSUE

The SSCM must include the initial WTLP as part of the court ordered case plan and update the WTLP at each subsequent Case Review (Form 390) as long as the youth is in custody. Six month WTLP reviews are required by ILC for youth in Aftercare status.

YOUTH ENTERING FOSTER CARE AT AGE 14 and Up

1012.6

Requirement

For youth entering foster care who are eligible for ILP, a WTLP (Form 391 and accompanying Form 388) must be completed within thirty days. A copy of these forms must accompany the 30-day case plan and must be incorporated into the dispositional court order. A copy of these forms must also be sent to the ILC.

If the referral form is not received within 60 days after the youth becomes eligible, the ILC will follow-up by letter to the SSCM and a copy to the county director notifying them that the referral is past due.

1012.6 PROCEDURE

The SSCM must include the dispositional order with the WTLP and Form 388 and forward copies of this information in written form to the ILC. See WTLP Policy 1012.3.

AFTERCARE SERVICES

1012.7

Requirement

IL aftercare services will be provided to youth who are no longer in custody but were eligible for ILP services when they were discharged. They will be eligible for after care services until the age of 21. The IL Coordinator will provide services or refer youth to the appropriate services.

1012.7 PROCEDURES

1. The IL Coordinator will open an "Aftercare" case in IDS.
2. The IL Coordinator must update the WTLP and Form 388 every 6 months with youth participation.
3. The ILC will document services provided on Form 452 and place in the IL case file.

1012.7 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. The SSCM will submit an ILP Case Closure Form to the ILC.
2. The youth may request aftercare services.

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3. The ILC and the youth develop a WTLP and complete an IDS Form 590.
4. The ILC from the youth's legal or boarding county will coordinate services as specified in the WTLP.

TRANSITIONAL LIVING

1012.8

Requirement

For former foster care youth (youth in Aftercare status) who remained in care until age 18 but who have not reached the age of 21, will be eligible to receive financial assistance to aid in the transition from foster care to self-sufficiency. **The development of transitional living skills and the comprehensive assessment to determine the appropriateness of services may start before the youth leaves custody.**

1012.8 PROCEDURES

1. Youth will obtain an Application for Transitional Living Assistance from the ILC, complete the application and return to ILC.
2. ILC will coordinate a comprehensive TL assessment to determine the youth's readiness for Transitional Living. The results of the assessment will be reviewed in a Transitional Living Conference that will include the youth, SSCM, ILC, care givers, parents, family members, and other concerned persons. A new WTLP will be developed that will be reflect the results of the assessment and its recommendations.
3. The amount and duration of financial support will be specified in the WTLP.
4. The ILC will initiate a written contract with the youth, to ensure compliance with Transitional Living guidelines. Continued financial assistance is contingent upon the youth's compliance with the contract.
5. ILC is responsible for coordinating TL services with private providers and other agencies TL services. Examples of allowable services may include but not limited too the following:
 - Transitional Living Assessment
 - Transitional Living Conference related expense
 - Transportation
 - Start-up funds
 - Deposits
 - Basic Furniture
 - Cooking and cleaning supplies
 - Monthly housing and utility subsidy
 - Mentoring fees
 - Counseling
 - Support Group related expense

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1012.8 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. To be eligible, a youth must remain in agency custody until age 18.
2. Transitional Living services are appropriate for those youth who demonstrate the skills, knowledge and stability to successfully maintain a household. A comprehensive assessment will be done to determine a youth's readiness for transition to independence. The assessment will result in an updated WTLP that will identify the Transitional Living services that will be provided to assist the youth to achieve independence. If the assessment indicates that the youth is not a good candidate for Transitional Living services, the results of the assessment will identify what IL services are appropriate.

YOUTH WHO REQUEST SERVICES AFTER AGE 21

1012.9

Requirement

Youth may remain in foster care or receive aftercare services for six (6) months beyond their 21st birthday under special provisions; e.g., completion of educational goal as specified in the WTLP. Approval must be obtained from the Division Director.

1012.9 PROCEDURES

1. For those requesting continuation of foster care, the SSCM with concurrence of the ILC and legal County Director will prepare a waiver request citing the reason(s) the youth needs to remain in care.
2. For those requesting continuation of aftercare services, the ILC with concurrence of the legal County Director will prepare a waiver request citing the reason(s) the youth needs to receive continued aftercare services.
3. The waiver request must include a discharge plan based on the WTLP.
4. In cases where the boarding county is different from the legal county the waiver must indicate the legal county has been in contact with the boarding county and the boarding county agrees with the request.
5. Documented special provisions and waiver request should be referred to the ILC who will forward the request to the Division Director for final approval.

1012.9 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. The SSCM or ILC, as appropriate, will identify the special provisions to justify the waiver request.
2. The county director or designee's signature is required on all waiver request.

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3. A current copy of the WTLP must accompany the waiver request.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION RELATED EXPENSES

1012.10

Requirement

Youth receiving IL services are eligible for financial assistance.

1012.10 PROCEDURES

1. Use UAS Code 584, Program Entitlement 75 for post-secondary related expenses. For **COSTAR** Reporting, the reported client is generally the youth who has completed high school or is attending post-secondary schools.
2. The SSCM or youth should contact the ILC in writing to request financial assistance.
3. The ILC and SSCM should jointly identify educational/vocational goals and determine the financial need of the youth based on the WTLP.
4. The ILC will complete an Authorization for Billing and forward it to the County Director or designee for signature.
5. After obtaining signature, an Authorization for Billing Form will be sent to the institution or vendor. The Authorization is valid for six (6) months from the date issued. This form authorizes the institution to bill the Independent Living Program for specified allowable expenses. This form also instructs the institution/vendor to submit an original invoice to the local ILC for payment by the lead county. The invoices must contain the following information:
 - Identify expenses
 - Identify grants, scholarships that will be used to pay part of the expenses.
 - The institution/vendor's Federal Identification Tax Number (FEIN) Name and Social Security Number of the youth.
 - If the provider is an individual, his/her Social Security Number
 - Mailing Address
6. The following are examples of allowable educational expenses:
 - Application fees (waiver of fees should be requested)
 - Registration fees
 - Tuition
 - Room and board (On campus housing and meal plans must be used, if available)
 - Course books & supplies
 - Driver's Education
 - Tutoring
 - Testing (SAT, ACT, etc)
 - Educational stipends for hygiene and personal maintenance (\$50.00/month maximum)
 - Transportation assistance
7. The ILC will review and approve invoices to ensure that the expenses are

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in accordance with all Federal and State requirements.

8. A copy of the approved authorization will be maintained in the IL case record.

1012.10 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. IL funds are provided to supplement rather than replace other financial assistance for youth to complete post-secondary education programs.

EDUCATION AND ENRICHMENT RELATED EXPENSES

1012.11

Requirement

Youth eligible for IL services will receive financial assistance.

1012.11 PROCEDURE

1. ILCs will use UAS Code 585, Program Entitlement 76 for school and enrichment related expenses. For **COSTAR** Reporting, the reported client is generally the youth who is currently attending secondary schools.
2. The following are examples of allowable expenses:
 - Summer or evening school fees
 - IL life skills conferences, training, workshops, and related expenses
 - Books, supplies, tools, equipment, and uniforms
 - Tutoring
 - Graduation fees
 - Driver's Education
 - Enrichment activities
 - Extra-curricular activities (band, band uniforms, instruments, athletics, cheerleading, and school sponsored clubs)
 - Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts
 - Transportation for educational and/or cultural activities
 - Support groups such as Ala-non or Alateens

YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE DRIVING MOTORIZED VEHICLE (Obtaining a Learner's Permit)

1012.12

Requirement

Youth in the temporary or permanent custody of the County Department of Family and Children may, under certain conditions, obtain a Learner's Permit, otherwise known as "Class C Instructional Permit."

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To be considered for approval to obtain a Learner's Permit, the youth must make satisfactory progress toward the completion of his/her Written Transitional Living Plan.

If the youth is in temporary custody, the County must obtain the written permission of the birth parent(s) for the youth to operate a motorized vehicle. The birth parent(s) must also assume liability for damages and injuries that may occur as a result of the youth's operating a motorized vehicle.

For youth in either temporary or permanent custody, the caregiver must have automobile insurance that allows for coverage of the youth. The caregiver must also assume liability for damages and injuries that may occur as a result of the youth's operating a motorized vehicle.

If the youth is in temporary custody, once the above requirements are met, final authority for approval rests with the County Director.

If the youth is in permanent custody, once the above requirements are met, final authority for approval rests with the Division Director.

A caregiver may not assist the youth in obtaining his/her Learner's Permit without the written consent of the Director of the County Department of Family and Children Services.

In all cases, liability rests with birth parent(s) and/or caregiver(s), and not with the State of Georgia.

1012.12 PROCEDURES

1. The youth makes a request to the SSCM to obtain a Learner's Permit.
2. The SSCM must determine if youth is making progress on his/her Written Transitional Living Plan. The SSCM may seek input from ILC.
3. For youth in temporary custody, the SSCM, with concurrence of the Placement Supervisor, requests of the County Director to approve the youth obtaining his/her Learner's Permit.
4. For youth in permanent custody, the SSCM, with concurrence of the Placement Supervisor, will prepare and the County Director or designee will sign a request of the Division Director, with recommendation for approval and "Acknowledgement of DFCS Driving Policy for Youth in Care" (Form 11) attached.
5. For youth in temporary custody, the birth parents will sign "Consent for Youth to Drive a Motorized Vehicle (Form 9)."
6. In situations where the birth parent(s) cannot be located, reasonable efforts to contact the parents must be documented in the case record, the SSCM will prepare and the County Director or designee will sign a waiver request of the Division Director regarding number five (5), above.
7. For youth in temporary or permanent custody, the caregiver will sign "Acknowledgement of DFCS Driving Policy for Youth in Care (Form 11)"
8. The SSCM, within 30 days after youth receiving his/her Learner's Permit, will request the ILC to coordinate the enrollment (purchase if necessary) of the youth in a driver's education course, if not immediately available from the youth's school. If driver's education is available from the youth's school, then he or she will complete that course within the next school session.

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1012.12 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. The Learner's Permit, or Class C Instructional Permit, is also referred to in the Georgia Driver's Manual as "CP" and "P."
2. The Learner's Permit allows the youth, with permit in his or her immediate possession, to drive a Class C vehicle upon the public highways for a period of two years when accompanied by a person of at least 21 years of age who is a licensed driver and who is occupying a seat beside the driver.
3. Youth may obtain a copy of the Georgia Driving Manual from the Georgia Department of Public Safety at a State Patrol office; or may access the manual at: www.georgianet.org/dps
4. According to state law, a youth must provide acceptable proof that he or she has received a: high school diploma, GED, special diploma or a certificate of high school completion; or, has terminated high school and enrolled in a post-secondary school; or, has withdrawn from school with permission of parent or guardian; or, is enrolled in, not suspended from and attending public, private or home school.
5. Also according to state law, a Learner's Permit will be suspended if any of the following occur:
 - youth drops out of school without graduating and has remained out of school for 10 consecutive days
 - youth has more than 10 consecutive school days of unexcused absences in any semester or combination of two (2) consecutive quarters
 - youth has been suspended from school for:
 - threatening, striking or causing bodily harm to a teacher or other school personnel;
 - possession or sale of drugs or alcohol on school property; or
 - possession or use of a weapon on school property
6. State driving law is found in 40-5-20 O.C.G.A.

YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE DRIVING MOTORIZED VEHICLE (Obtaining a Driver's License)

1012.13

Requirement

Youth in the temporary or permanent custody of the County Department of Family and Children Services may, under certain conditions, obtain a "Class D Provisional Driver's License" at age 16-17, or "Class C Driver's License" if age 18 or older.

To be considered for approval to obtain a Driver's License, either Class C or D, the youth must make satisfactory progress toward the completion of his/her Written Transitional Living Plan.

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Youth must have been in foster care a minimum of 18 months and there must be some indication that the current placement will last at least until age 18.

If the youth is in temporary custody, the County must obtain the written permission of the birth parent(s) for the youth to obtain a driver's license/operate a motorized vehicle. The birth parent(s) must sign Form 9 (Consent for Youth to Drive a Motorized Vehicle) in which the parent(s) assume liability for damages and injuries that may occur as a result of their youth's operating a motorized vehicle.

For youth in either temporary or permanent custody, the caregiver must sign Form 11 (Acknowledgement of DFCS Driving Policy for Youth in Care). If the caregiver chooses to allow the foster care youth to drive their vehicle the caregiver must have automobile insurance that allows for coverage of the youth. The caregiver must also assume liability for damages and injuries that may occur as a result of the youth's operating a motorized vehicle.

If the youth is in temporary custody, once the above requirements are met, final authority for approval rests with the County Director.

If the youth is in permanent custody, once the above requirements are met, final authority for approval rests with the Division Director.

A caregiver may not assist the youth in obtaining a Driver's License, either Class C or Class D, without the written consent of the Director of the County Department of Family and Children Services.

In all cases, liability rests with the birth parent(s) and/or caregiver(s), and not with the State of Georgia.

1012.13 PROCEDURES

1. The youth makes a request to the SSCM to obtain a Driver's License, either Class C or Class D.
2. The SSCM obtains input from the ILC regarding youth's progress on his/her Written Transitional Living Plan.
3. For youth in temporary custody, the birth parents must sign "Consent for Youth to Drive a Motorized Vehicle" (Form 9).
4. In situations where the birth parent(s) cannot be located, reasonable efforts to contact the parents must be documented in the case record, the SSCM will prepare and the County Director or designee will sign a waiver request of the Division Director regarding number three (3), above.
5. For youth in temporary or permanent custody, the caregiver will sign "Acknowledgement of DFCS Driving Policy for Youth in Care" (Form 11).
6. For youth in permanent custody, the SSCM, with concurrence of the Placement Supervisor, will prepare and the County Director or designee will sign a request of the Division Director, with recommendation for approval. Attached to the request will be as follows:
 - a. "Acknowledgement of DFCS Driving Policy for Youth in Care" (Form 11)
 - b. If caregiver is going to allow the youth to drive their vehicle, a verification that the youth has been added to the caregiver's insurance coverage
 - c. documentation of successful completion of driver's education course
 - d. "Consent to Remain in Care" (Form 7), if applicable

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7. The SSCM, will request the ILC to coordinate the purchase of a driver's education course for the youth, within 30 days of youth receiving his/her Driver's License, if not already completed with Learner's Permit and if not immediately available from the youth's school. If driver's education is available from the youth's school, then he or she will complete that course within the next school session.

1012.13 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. Consideration by the SSCM to initiate this process and by the caregiver to allow the youth to be added to their insurance and to drive their vehicle will include:
 - the judgement and maturity of the youth
 - completion of a formal driver's education course or informal instruction
 - school performance
 - intended use of the vehicle (needed for school, work, etc.)
 - previous driving record
 - history of runaway or other status offenses
 - history of drug/alcohol use
 - completion of a "Driving Contract" between the youth and caregiver regarding the use of the vehicle (if the caregiver is going to allow youth to drive their vehicle) ILC can provide a sample contract.
2. Youth must successfully complete the Georgia Alcohol and Drug Awareness Program (ADAP) in order to receive their Provisional Driver's License.
3. Youth under the age of 18 must have a valid Learner's Permit for at least 12 consecutive months and not have been convicted of:
 - driving under the influence
 - hit and run
 - leaving the scene of an accident
 - racing on highways and streets
 - eluding a police officer
 - reckless driving
 - any offense for which four (4) or more points are assessed
4. Youth with a Provisional Driver's License may not drive a motor vehicle between the hours of 1:00 am and 5:00 am unless:
 - going to or from work
 - going to or from a school event
 - going to or from an activity sponsored by a religious organization
 - for the purpose of a medical, fire, or law enforcement related emergency
5. Youth with a Provisional Driver's License may have only three (3) other passengers under age 21 who are not members of the driver's immediate family.
6. Youth must be attending school, or be a high school graduate, have

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earned a GED, received a certificate of high school completion or enrolled in post-secondary school in order to qualify for a Provisional Driver's License.

7. Youth may obtain a copy of the Georgia Driving Manual from the Georgia Department of Public Safety at a State Patrol office; or may access the manual at: www.georgianet.org/dps
8. According to state law, a youth must provide acceptable proof that he or she has received a: high school diploma, GED, special diploma or a certificate of high school completion; or, has terminated high school and enrolled in a post-secondary school; or, has withdrawn from school with permission of parent or guardian; or, is enrolled in, not suspended from and attending public, private or home school.
9. Also according to state law, a Provisional Driver's License will be suspended if any of following occur:
 - youth drops out of school without graduating and has remained out of school for 10 consecutive days
 - youth has more than 10 consecutive school days of unexcused absences in any semester or combination of two (2) consecutive quarters
 - youth has been suspended from school for:
 - threatening, striking or causing bodily harm to a teacher or other school personnel;
 - possession or sale of drugs or alcohol on school property; or
 - possession or use of a weapon on school property
10. State driving law is found in 40-5-20 O.C.G.A.

Ownership of a Vehicle

1012.14

Requirement

Youth age 18 and over in DFCS custody may own a vehicle with written approval of the County Director. Youth under age 18 may not own a vehicle.

1012.14

PROCEDURES

1. Youth makes a request to the SSCM to purchase or otherwise acquire a vehicle.
2. SSCM obtains input from the ILC regarding youth's progress on his/her Written Transitional Living Plan.
3. SSCM determines whether or not to make a request to the County Director for permission for the youth to own a vehicle, based on the following:

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- youth's progress on his/her Written Transitional Living Plan
 - SSCM's opinion on youth's ability to meet all responsibilities of vehicle ownership, such financial, ability to maintain vehicle and maturity of youth
 - ability to obtain and maintain automobile insurance in the youth's name
 - school and/or job performance
 - recent behavior
 - any other relevant information
4. If SSCM determines that youth is able to meet the responsibilities in 3., above, then SSCM will recommend to the County Director that the youth be given approval to own a vehicle.
 5. If the County Director agrees, he/she will give written approval to the youth to own a vehicle.

1012.14 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. ILP funds may not be used for the purchase or maintenance of a vehicle.
2. ILP funds are allowable for the purchase of driver's education services.

Relative Care Subsidy (RCS) for ILP Eligible Youth

1012.15

Requirement

ILP eligible youth, who are transferred from the temporary custody of the agency into the permanent custody of a relative, continue to be eligible for ILP services.

1012.15 PROCEDURES

1. RCS youth are in the same category as "Aftercare" youth. See Aftercare Policy 1012.7.
 - ILC will complete IDS Form 590
 - ILC will complete or update WTLP.
2. ILC will forward WTLP to RCS case record to be used as part of the periodic judicial review.

Note: For Relative Care Subsidy (RCS) policy and procedures see RCS Policy 1004.

1012.15 PRACTICE ISSUES

1. RCS youth are not eligible for Transitional Living services. They are eligible for ILP services until age 21.

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2. Youth who are active in ILP will receive uninterrupted service when moving from foster care to relative care. ILC will complete IDS Form 590 once the SSCM closes the case. See above.
3. RCS youth who were eligible for ILP when they attained RCS status, but for some reason were not referred to ILP must be referred before services are initiated. See Referral Policy 1012.2; See Aftercare Policy 1012.7. Referral forms are available from ILC. A referral may be submitted by SSCM, youth, relative, or other interested party.