

Independent Living Services

Presentation to the Senate Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs

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OPPAGA

Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability

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Presentation Overview

- Project Scope and Methodology
- Background
- Measuring Independent Living (IL) Program Effectiveness
- IL Program Service Delivery
- IL Program Participation
- Child Welfare Staff and Stakeholder Perspectives on IL Services
- Young Adult Perspectives on IL Services
- IL Program Outcomes
- Recommendations

Project Scope and Methodology

Project Scope

As directed by the Legislature, OPPAGA reviewed the effectiveness of Florida's Independent Living (IL) services. Specifically, OPPAGA

- assessed the implementation of Florida's redesign of transition services initiated by the 2013 Nancy C. Detert Common Sense and Compassion Independent Living Act;
- sought to define self-sufficiency in regard to education, employment, health, housing, and general well-being; and
- identified best practices to assess if youth are prepared or on track to achieve self-sufficiency.

Methodology

**Federal and State
Program Document
Review**

Literature Review

**Information and
Data Requests**

**Assessment of
Stakeholder & DCF
IL Child Welfare
Staff Perspectives**

**Assessment of IL
Young Adult
Perspectives**

**Program
Participation and
Outcome Analyses**

Background

Independent Living Programs

Independent Living programs are established in federal and state law to help former foster youth successfully transition to adulthood. Federal and state law establish several service requirements for youth and young adults aging out of foster care.

Services for Youth (ages 13 to 17)

Life Skills

Transition Plan

Essential Documents

Services for Young Adults (ages 18 to 26)

Educational and Training Vouchers

Financial Assistance and Support
Services

Extended Foster Care

Medicaid Coverage

Program Implementation and Funding

Florida provides three programs to meet federal and state requirements:

Extended Foster Care (EFC)

Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS)

Aftercare Services

DCF is responsible for program oversight

IL services are provided by 19 Community-Based Care Lead Agencies

DCF funds IL programs through a combination of funds appropriated by the Legislature from several sources:

Title IV-E Foster Care

Chafee Foster Care Independence Program

Chafee Education and Training Vouchers Program

State General Revenue

Program Funding & Expenditures

- Allocations for IL programs increased from Fiscal Year 2017-18 through 2018-19 and remained relatively stable for the rest of OPPAGA's review period

Funding and Expenditures	Fiscal Year				
	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Total funds appropriated to DCF for IL programs (in millions)	\$29.5	\$29.5	\$37.0	\$38.2	\$38.2
Total expenditures by lead agencies for IL programs (in millions)	36.6	34.2	34.8	35.1	35.7
Difference (in millions)	(\$7.2)	(\$4.8)	\$2.2	\$3.1	\$2.5


Source: Department of Children and Families allocation and expenditure reports.

IL Program Services

EFC (ages 18-21)

- Supervised living arrangement
- Case management
- 24-hour crisis intervention and support
- Life skills
- Counseling
- Educational support
- Employment preparation and placement
- Development of support network

PESS (ages 18-23)

- \$1,720 monthly stipend
-  CBCs directly pay housing and utilities and disburse remaining funds to young adults until young adults demonstrate ability to manage payments
- Transitional and financial planning

Aftercare (ages 18 to 23)

- Mentoring or tutoring
- Mental health and substance abuse
- Life skills and parenting classes
- Job/career training
- Counselor consultation
- Temporary financial assistance
- Financial literacy training
- Emergency financial assistance (if in PESS)

Child Welfare Professional Training and Responsibilities

Training

- Child welfare preservice training and Child Welfare Professional Certification
- Currently, no statewide standardized IL training
- Some lead agencies have additional IL-specific training

Responsibilities

- Certain tasks and activities completed at specified ages
 - ↳ Age 13 – Informal life skills assessments
 - ↳ Age 14 – Credit checks
 - ↳ Age 16 – Transition planning and formal life skills assessment
 - ↳ Age 17 – Provide youth with identifying documentation

Measuring IL Program Effectiveness

Components of Self-Sufficiency and Well-Being



Recommendations From Studies of Young Adult Perspectives on the Transition to Adulthood

- Provide greater social support for youth, offer a meaningful say about choices that impact their lives, and provide hands-on life skills training that starts earlier
- Promote active engagement and involvement of youth in case planning and planning their transition from care
- Provide specific training for child welfare professionals on topics such as
 - Impacts of trauma
 - Working with youth as equal partners
 - Understanding adolescent brain development
 - Mental illness
 - Child welfare system involvement

IL Program Performance Measurement

Recent Independent Living Services Advisory Council recommendations are related to improving IL outcome data collection

- 2020 report recommended DCF add supportive adult field to Florida Safe Families Network data
- 2021 report discussed limitations on determining effectiveness of IL programs due to lack of adequate data
- DCF coordinating with lead agencies to collect more detailed data that will be reported in 2023

DCF annual reports lack meaningful metrics for most IL program outcome areas

- Increasing financial self-sufficiency (metric for EFC and Aftercare only)
- Improving educational attainment (all 3 programs use different metrics)
- Increasing connections to caring adults (no metric)
- Reducing homelessness (no metric)
- Reducing high-risk behavior (no metric)
- Improving access to health insurance (no metric)

Lead agencies report monitoring outcomes for IL youth in a variety of ways (17 lead agencies provided information)

- 11 assess internal processes such as completing transition planning
- 7 examine outcomes, including postsecondary enrollment and employment
- 2 use a life skills assessment
- 9 determine whether benchmarks are met
- 7 track measures related to well-being such as referrals for therapeutic services, having active bank accounts
- 2 do not look at IL progress measures

IL Program Service Delivery

The Legislature Has Made Several Changes to Increase and Expand IL Services

2013 Nancy C. Detert Common Sense and Compassion Independent Living Act

Extended foster care from age 18 to age 21

Revised Road to Independence Scholarship to Postsecondary Education Services & Support (PESS)

Transferred provision of life skills training to caregivers

Required the creation of a transition plan for foster youth at age 17

The Legislature made additional changes in 2019, 2021, and 2022

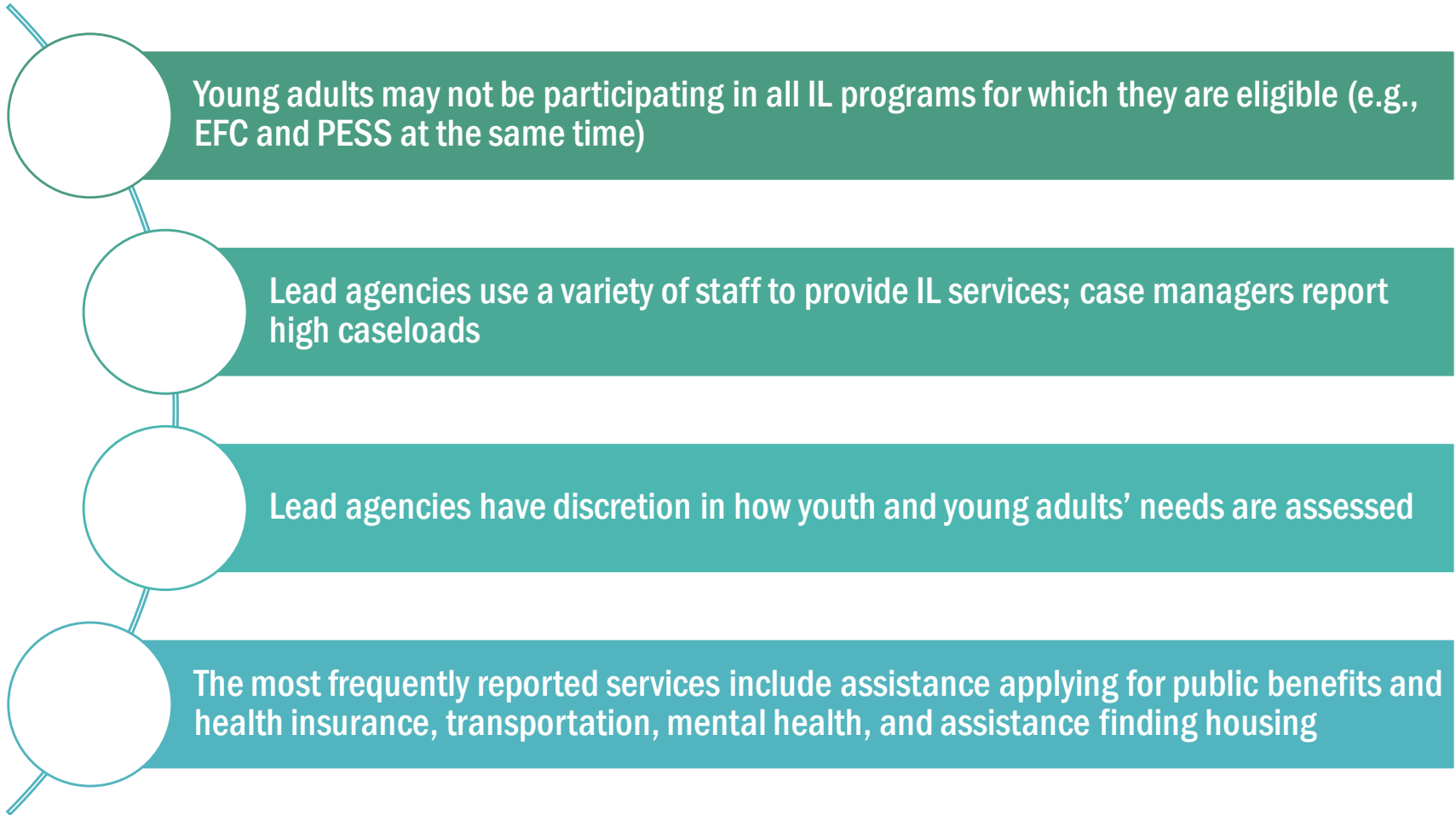
Assess youth's readiness for adulthood starting at age 13 and begin transition planning at age 16

Allow some PESS participants access to emergency financial assistance

Increase the PESS stipend from \$1,256 to \$1,720

Create the Office of Continuing Care under DCF to provide assistance to young adults who age out of foster care

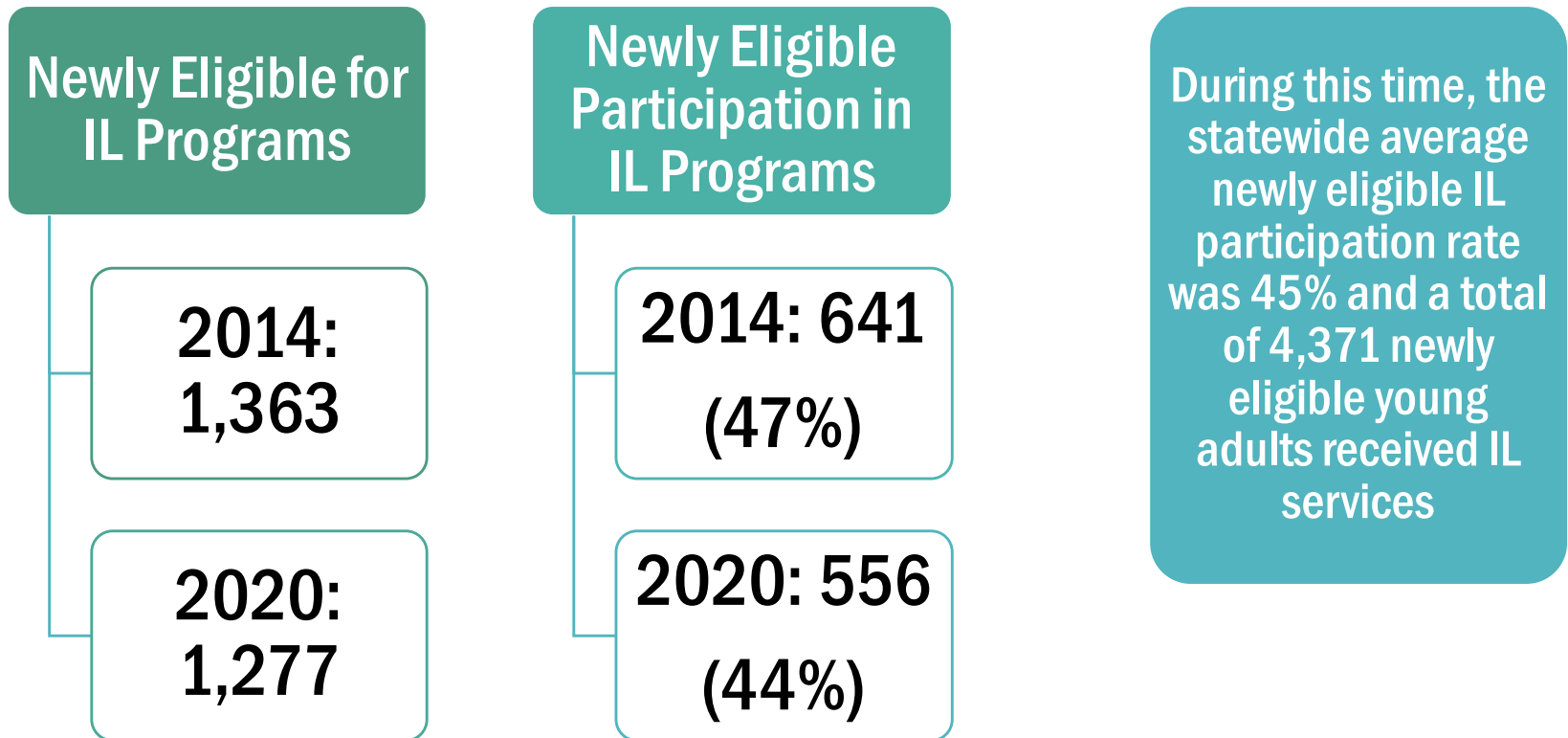
IL Service Delivery Varies Across Lead Agencies



IL Program Participation

Participation in IL Programs Has Remained Relatively Stable

While the number of newly eligible participants has decreased slightly since 2014, the percentage of newly eligible young adults participating in IL programs remained relatively stable



IL Participant Timing

Overall, 79% of young adults who participated in IL programs participated in EFC, 54% participated in PESS, and 35% participated in Aftercare

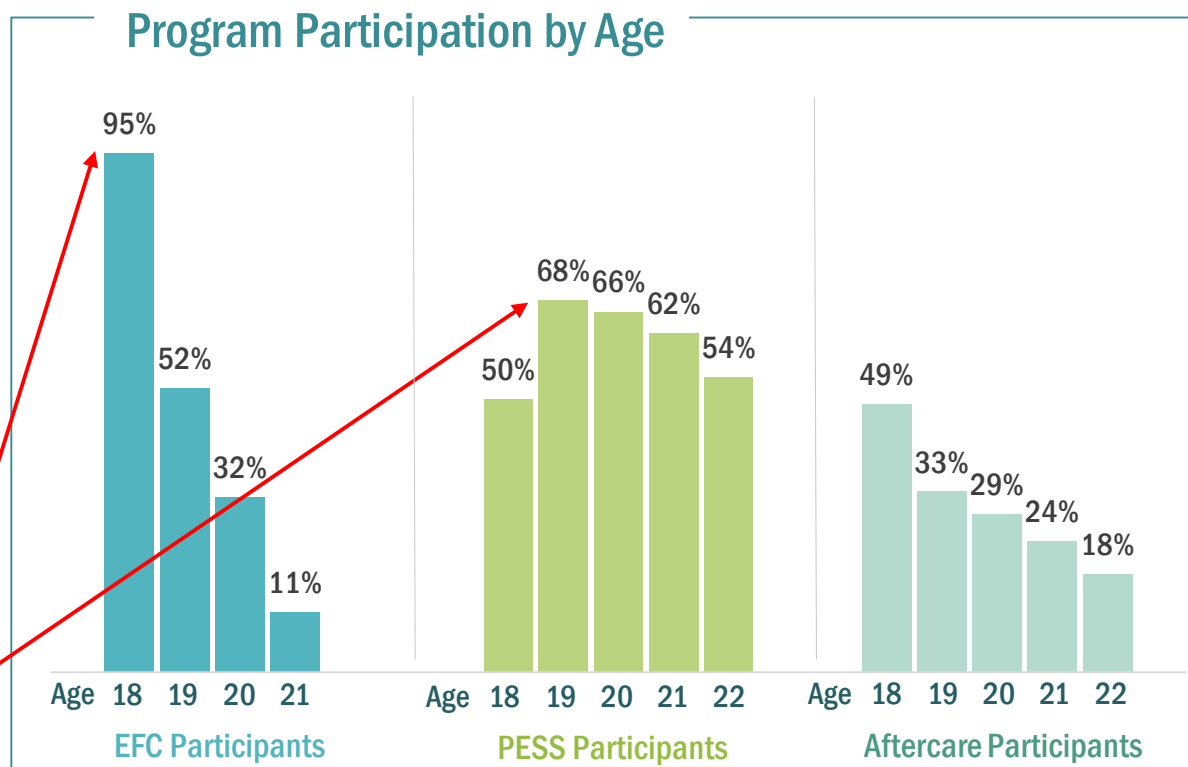
92% of all participants began receiving services at age 18

Most IL participants exit the programs by age 21

Program participation varies by age

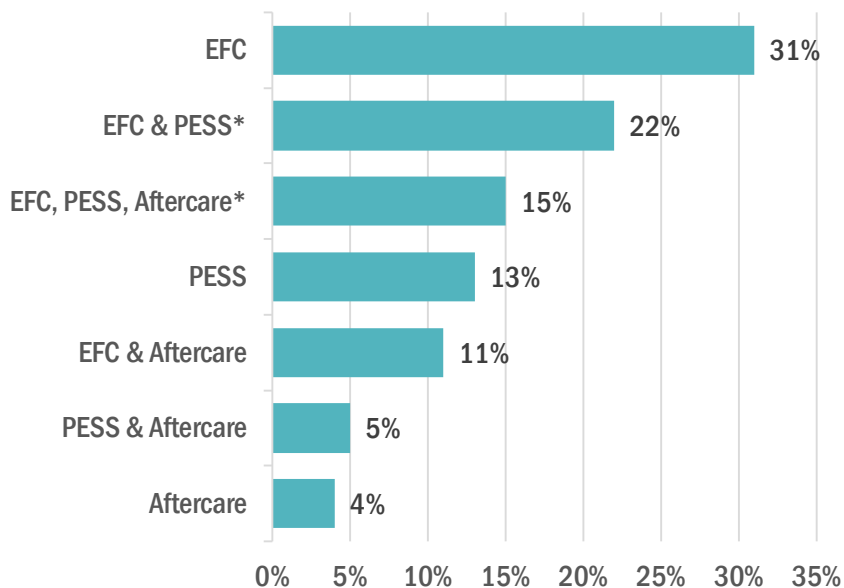
The most common EFC participation age is 18

The most common PESS participation age is 19

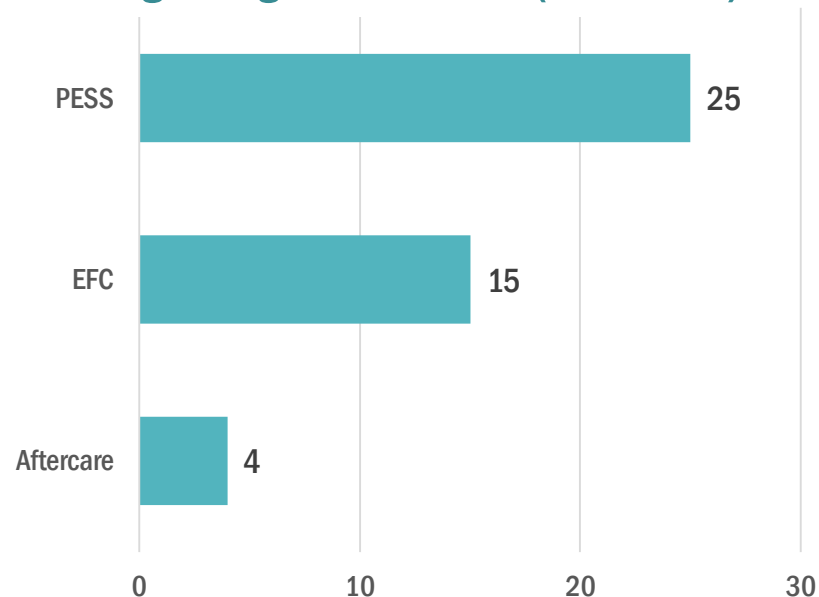


IL Program Combinations and Duration

Program Combinations



Average Program Duration (in months)



*** Of those who participated in EFC & PESS, 88% participated in EFC first, then unenrolled in EFC and participated in PESS**

Characteristics of IL Participants & Non-Participants at Their 18th Birthday

Months in Foster Care

IL Participants 45

Non-Participants 28

High School Diploma or GED

IL Participants 16%

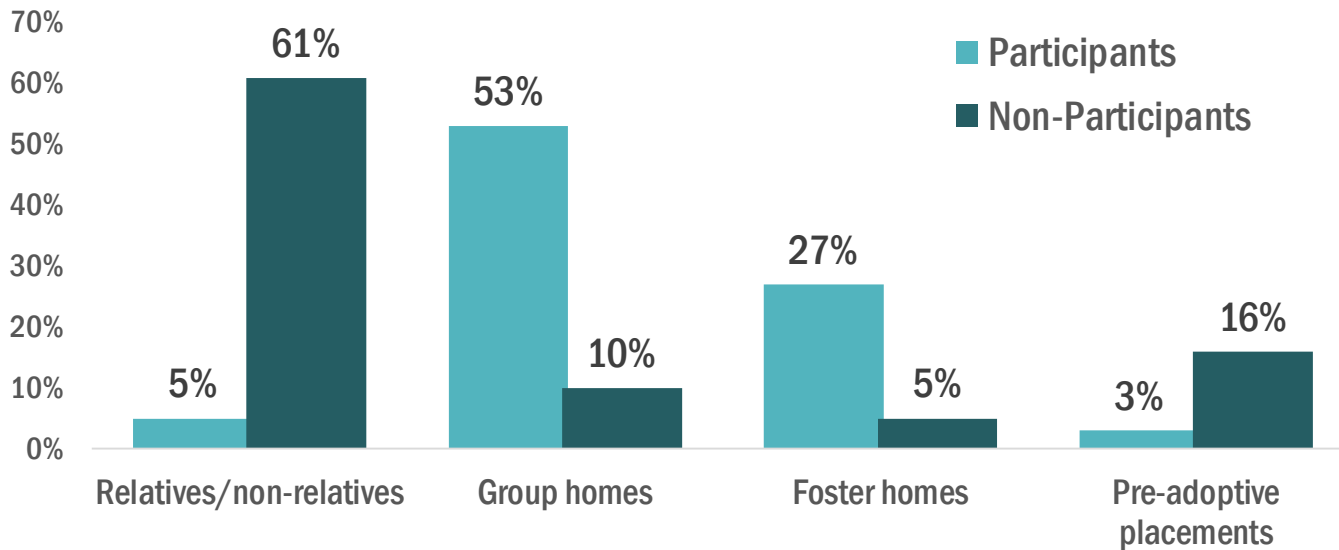
Non-Participants 10%

Prior DJJ Involvement

IL Participants 63%

Non-Participants 44%

Placement



Race & Gender

55% of IL participants were female and 49% were white

Child Welfare Staff and Stakeholder Perspectives on IL Services

Child Welfare Staff and Stakeholder Perspectives

Housing

The most frequently and consistently identified barrier young adults face, including affordability, availability, and appropriateness

Desire for Independence

Commonly cited as a reason young adults do not enroll in an IL program at age 18; among the top 3 reasons they leave programs

External Barriers

Difficulty finding supportive adults; food stamp delays; employment instability; limited public transportation

Internal Barriers

Difficulty implementing policy and program changes; insufficient knowledge about available resources, program benefits, & eligibility

Other Challenges

Lack of data; issues related to services and supports; lack of young adult engagement; life skills limitations; workforce barriers

Young Adult Perspectives on IL Services

Young Adult Perspectives

Case Manager Interactions

- Positive and negative experiences
- Turnover
- High caseloads
- Unresponsive

Life Skills Training

- Varies across the state
- In-depth and relevant for some, inadequate and not helpful for others
- Should be more hands-on
- Should continue post-18

Transition Planning

- Experiences vary widely
- Does not always occur before age 18
- Some experienced collaboration and meetings being youth-led, others reported insufficient knowledge and not being youth-led

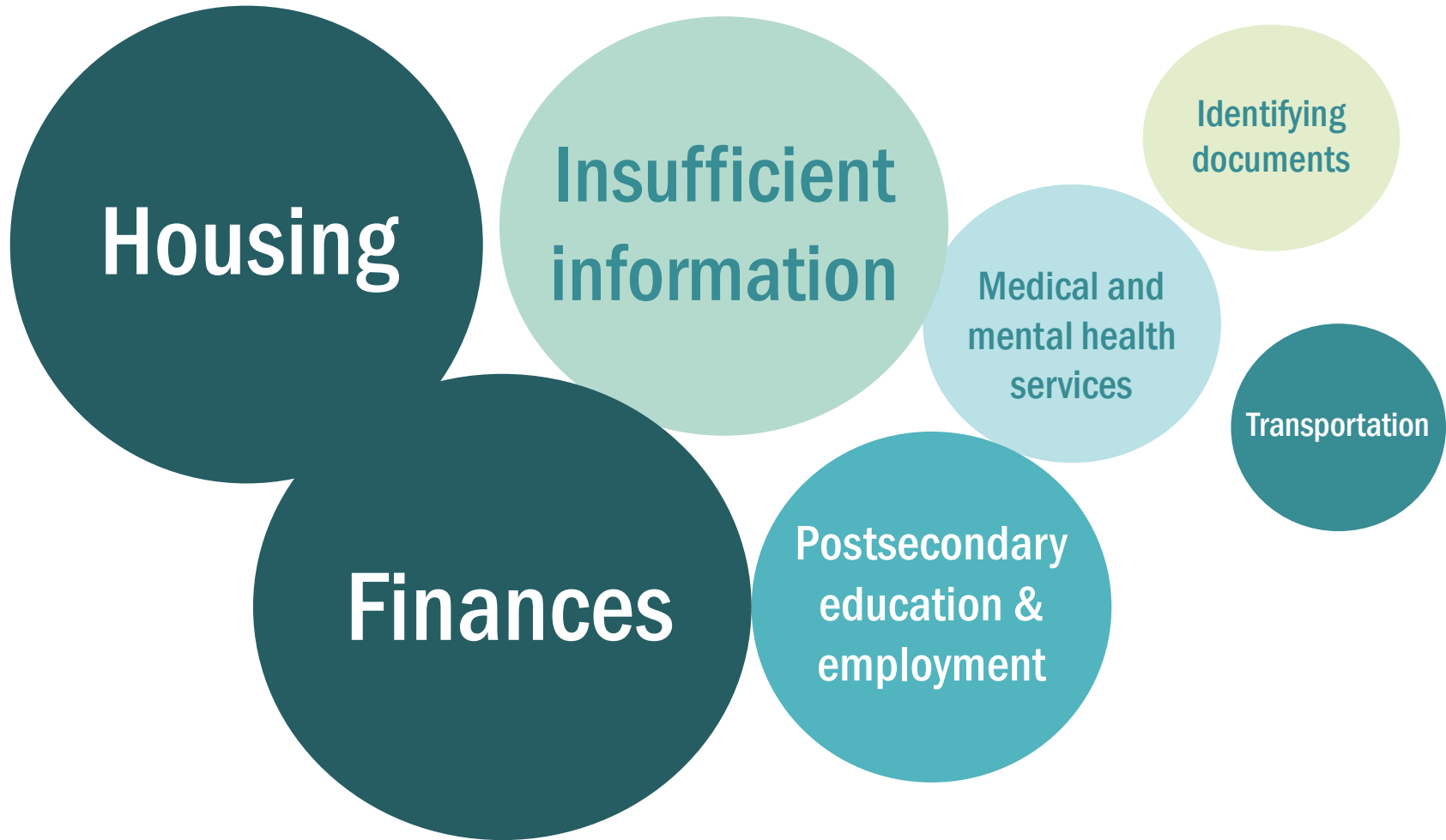
Supportive Adults

- Most young adults had at least one supportive adult, some had none or not enough support

Other

- Most valuable services: Keys to Independence, PESS, adequate knowledge of programs and resources, youth advocacy organizations, financial assistance
- Needed services: peer support or social skills training

Young Adult Perspectives – Barriers and Continued Challenges













IL Program Outcomes

Outcomes for IL Participants Compared to Non-Participants Are Mixed

	Participants	Non-Participants
Education	59% received high school diploma or GED	48% received high school diploma or GED
Employment	87% were employed	80% were employed
Public Assistance Use: SNAP	86% received SNAP	72% received SNAP
Public Assistance Use: TANF	7% received TANF	22% received TANF
Criminal Justice Involvement	45% arrested	36% arrested

Recommendations

Recommendations (19 total)

Category (number of recommendations)	Addresses young adult-identified issue	Suggested by young adults
Housing (3)		
Youth voice (2)		
Life skills (2)		
Eligibility (2)		
EFC & PESS simultaneous participation (2)		
IL services information (2)		
Child welfare professionals & lead agencies (3)		
Performance measurement (3)		

Recommendations: Housing

Recommendation	Barrier Addressed
<p>DCF should work with lead agencies to ensure that the monthly room and board rates paid to EFC housing providers are in line with the local cost of living for safe and affordable housing and should work with local providers to address stigma regarding housing this population and thus better recruit housing providers for EFC participants</p>	<p>Lack of affordable, safe housing</p>
<p>DCF should work with Positive Pathways to help develop strategies to ensure that postsecondary institutions develop better housing options for foster youth and awareness of these options among institution staff, which could include on-campus housing dedicated to foster youth and information on safe and affordable housing off campus</p>	<p>Lack of affordable, safe housing for foster youth attending postsecondary education</p>
<p>DCF should continue to work with the Florida Housing Finance Corporation and other housing stakeholders to increase availability and accessibility of safe, affordable housing for former foster youth across the state</p>	<p>Lack of affordable, safe housing</p>

Recommendations: Youth Voice

Recommendation	Barrier Addressed
<p>DCF should direct the lead agencies to ensure that youth are engaged and feel heard in the transition planning process; the department should also develop IL-specific training standards for case managers and other staff designated to work with this population that include training staff to work with youth as equal partners</p>	<p>Youth feel their voice is not heard during transition planning and stakeholders report lack of youth engagement</p>
<p>DCF should direct lead agencies who have not already done so to support youth advisory boards and integrate youth voice (e.g., by inviting them to leadership meetings, creating a position on the board of directors, hiring former foster youth). DCF should continue to employ former IL participants as peer specialists.</p>	<p>Youth feel their voice is not heard and lack of effective, basic life skills training for youth and young adults</p>

Recommendations: Life Skills

Recommendation	Barrier Addressed
DCF should work with lead agencies to review the life skills assessment tools used by each lead agency, compare tools to national best practices, and direct lead agencies to adopt a standardized life skills assessment tool to collect consistent statewide information on IL youth and young adults' life skills development	Lack of standardized assessment tools used by lead agencies
DCF should direct the lead agencies to ensure that life skills training programs are available to IL youth in each region and are provided by caregivers, an IL young adult peer partner, lead agency IL staff, and/or a peer specialist staff	Lack of effective, basic life skills training for youth and young adults

Recommendations: Eligibility

Recommendation	Barrier Addressed
<p>DCF should regularly generate a list of foster youth who are eligible for IL programs and provide this information to the lead agencies; the list could be generated through a FSFN report and would remove any ambiguity regarding who is eligible for each program</p>	<p>Difficulties in eligibility determinations and lack of engagement with services</p>
<p>The Legislature could consider increasing the maximum age at which young adults are eligible for Aftercare Services, EFC, and PESS to at least age 26; raising the eligibility to age 26 would put the program in line with young adults' Medicaid eligibility</p>	<p>Financial needs of former foster youth and the need for ongoing supportive services</p>

Recommendations: EFC & PESS Simultaneous Participation

Recommendation	Barrier Addressed
DCF should work with the lead agencies to determine how young adults can receive a PESS stipend simultaneously with non-financial EFC services, such as 24-hour crisis intervention, case management, life skills training, and other services	Inability of young adults to participate in all available IL programs
The Legislature could amend statute to clarify that a young adult may receive financial payments from both EFC and PESS at the same time	Inability of young adults to participate in all available IL programs

Recommendations: IL Service Information

Recommendation	Barrier Addressed
DCF should create a comprehensive handbook for all youth eligible for IL services; the handbook should contain easily digestible service and benefit information, information on applying for public assistance programs, housing resources, foster care-specific supports available at postsecondary institutions, and local resources specific to each lead agency	Lack of knowledge among youth and young adults of available services
DCF should also incorporate a requirement in policy that supportive adults are discussed during transition planning and outline steps lead agencies must take to connect youth and young adults to supportive adults	Lack of supportive adults

Recommendations: Child Welfare Professionals and Lead Agencies

Recommendation	Barrier Addressed
<p>DCF should ensure that the revised specialized IL training is required of and completed by IL staff at each lead agency and require lead agencies to report to DCF annually that the training has been completed by staff who work with IL youth and young adults</p>	<p>Lack of knowledge of IL programs among Child welfare professionals</p>
<p>DCF should conduct a statewide caseload analysis to identify factors that are causing caseloads above recommended standards; based on the results, the department should assist the lead agencies in addressing the identified staffing shortages so that case managers can better assist youth</p>	<p>Case management workforce issues</p>
<p>DCF should ensure that each lead agency has a single emergency contact number for IL youth and young adults who need assistance outside of regular office hours and that this number is clearly communicated to each IL young adult; DCF should also maintain a list of all lead agency emergency contact numbers</p>	<p>Difficulty/inability of young adults to reach case worker outside of normal working hours</p>

Recommendations: Performance Measurement

Recommendation	Barrier Addressed
DCF should consider making certain IL module fields in FSFN required, including discharge reason	Lack of meaningful performance metrics to measure program effectiveness
DCF should ensure that information about supportive adults is tracked for each IL participant, including efforts to connect mentors to youth who have no identified supportive adult, by requiring the field in FSFN	Lack of supportive adults; lack of meaningful performance metrics to measure program effectiveness
DCF should develop outcome measures, with performance targets, that align with current state and federal requirements, and direct the lead agencies to report such measures in the Office of Child Welfare dashboard measures	Lack of meaningful program performance metrics

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FLORIDA LEGISLATURE OFFICE OF PROGRAM POLICY ANALYSIS AND
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