BACKGROUND

Youth with disabilities that exit foster care without achieving permanency and/or permanent connections are especially vulnerable in their transition to adulthood. A November 2009 study by the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) Office of Research found that almost 17 percent of foster care youth aged 16 and older have been diagnosed with at least one disability, the most common being emotional disturbance, followed by other medical conditions such as (a) intellectual disability, (b) physical disability, and (c) visual/hearing impairment. Older foster care youth with a disability exiting out of care face significant challenges during this time of transition due to their medical, mental health, educational, vocational, and other needs.

The purpose of this document is to provide additional guidance to staff in local departments of social services to coordinate the transition of youths with a disability out of foster care and into adulthood. Please note that this document is not all-inclusive as there may well be other specialized services that will be needed to assist the child with special needs. This document is intended to be a resource to be used with existing guidance. Please refer to VDSS Foster Care guidance, Section 14, for additional information.

WHEN SHOULD TRANSITION PLANNING OCCUR?

Exit planning for foster care youth with a disability must begin well in advance of the youth’s 18th birthday. The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities recommend that transition planning for youths with a disability begin when the youth reaches age 16, though it may begin earlier because of the increased needs that a disability can present to securing a safe and sufficient discharge. Transition services must be a coordinated set of activities oriented toward producing results.

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN TRANSITION PLANNING?

Preparing youths with a disability for adult living involves a wide range of skills areas and activities and may involve considerable planning with focused, coordinated services. Some of the individuals who may need to be involved in transition planning include:

- The youth with a disability in foster care
- Foster care workers/supervisors in local departments of social services (LDSS)
- LDSS adult services workers/supervisors
- LDSS eligibility workers/supervisors
- Family members and/or caregivers
- Family partnership teams
- Health care professionals
- Teachers and other educational professionals
- Housing coordinators
- Job specialists
- Community services boards/mental health professionals
- Other adults with a legitimate interest in the child’s welfare
RESOURCES FOR TRANSITIONING YOUTH WITH A DISABILITY

FINANCIAL PROGRAMS

Perhaps one of the most important services that need to be addressed is the need for income and health care. Medicaid eligibility and Supplemental Security Income should be considered early on in the transition process.

Medicaid Eligibility: Eligibility for Medicaid is based on a combination of financial and non-financial requirements. To apply for Virginia Medicaid, please contact the LDSS in the city or county where the applicant lives. Contact information for LDSS’s can be found at http://www.dss.virginia.gov/localagency/. A face-to-face interview is not required. A Medicaid application must be filed, and it must be signed by the applicant unless it is completed and signed by the applicant’s legal guardian, attorney-in-fact, or authorized representative.

Applicants for Medicaid are asked to:

- Provide Social Security numbers;
- Confirm they are Virginia residents;
- Confirm U.S. citizenship or provide documentation of alien status;
- Verify income and resources; and
- Submit bills for medical services received in the past three months.

Once a completed application is received, the LDSS will determine whether the applicant meets a group covered by Virginia’s Medicaid Program and if the applicant’s resources and income are within the required limits. The amount of income and resources the applicant can have and be eligible for Medicaid depends on how many people the applicant has in their family and the covered group. An eligibility decision will be made on the applicant’s Medicaid application within 45 days or 90 days if a disability determination is needed. The LDSS will send the applicant a written notice that their application has either been approved or denied. If the applicant disagrees with the decision made by the LDSS, he or she may file an appeal. A guide to Medicaid eligibility can be found at http://dmasva.dmas.virginia.gov/Content_atchs/atchs/medbook-eng.pdf.

According to Medicaid policy, LDSS’s are required to determine for any Medicaid recipient, before he or she is terminated from Medicaid, if the recipient possibly qualifies for another covered group. If so, they must place that person in that covered group, continue their coverage, if they are eligible, without a new application having to be filed. Should individuals incur circumstances that might be unknown to the worker during their original coverage, they need to notify the worker since those circumstances could impact their continued eligibility (e.g., if someone is determined to be disabled, receiving SSI, or is pregnant, it could impact their continued eligibility). All current recipients (male and female) between the ages of 19-64, unless they opt out, are evaluated for limited coverage, the Plan First family planning service, before they are terminated from full coverage. In the near future, under the federal Affordable Care Act, foster care Medicaid coverage will be extended beyond the current age to age 26.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI): SSI is a Federal income supplement program funded by general tax revenues (not Social Security taxes) designed to help aged, blind, and disabled people who have little or no income. It provides cash to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. This link will take you to the Benefit Eligibility Screening Tool. See also more detailed information at SSI Eligibility Requirements. By taking a few minutes to answer some questions, a person can determine if he or she is eligible for SSI or other benefits. For more information, go to http://www.ssa.gov/ssi/. Please note that Permanency Workers can/should start the SSI application process as soon as possible when a child’s disability is confirmed. This
section of guidance is specific to applying for SSI, this is based on when a child needs to be referred as a teen to adult services. See VDSS Foster Care guidance, Section 4, regarding SSI.

**Auxiliary Grant (AG):** The Auxiliary Grant (AG) Program is a state and locally funded assistance program to supplement the income of a recipient of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and certain other aged, blind, or disabled individuals residing in a licensed assisted living facility (ALF) or adult foster care (AFC) to ensure that recipients are able to maintain a standard of living that meets a basic level of need. Additional information can be found at [http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/as/auxgrant.cgi](http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/as/auxgrant.cgi).

The General Assembly sets the AG rate and the individual also receives a monthly personal care allowance (currently $82 per month). The individual must reside in an ALF or AFC that accepts AG and must be the criteria for placement. LDSS eligibility staff determines whether an individual meets the financial requirements.

To be eligible for an AG in Virginia, an individual must meet all of the following:

- Be 65 or over or be blind or be disabled;
- Reside in a licensed ALF or approved AFC;
- Be a citizen of the United States or an alien who meets specified criteria;
- Have a non-exempted (countable) income less than the total of the AG rate approved for the ALF plus the personal needs allowance;
- Have non-exempted resources at the current established levels; and
- Have been assessed and determined to be in need of care in an ALF or AFC.

**SERVICES**

**Adult Day Care:** Adult day care centers are regulated, non-residential facilities that provide a variety of health, social and related support services in a protective setting during part of the day to four or more adults who are elderly or who have a disability and who reside elsewhere. Non-residential adult facilities can be found at [http://www.dss.virginia.gov/facility/adcc.cgi](http://www.dss.virginia.gov/facility/adcc.cgi).

**Adult Foster Care (AFC):** AFC is an optional program for LDSS’s for three or fewer adults. It should be noted that fewer than 20 LDSS’s currently have an active AFC program. AFC providers are approved, trained, and monitored by the LDSS. Adults in an AFC may be eligible for an Auxiliary Grant. A resource parent may be approved as an AFC home or receive dual approval as a resource parent and an AFC home, depending on the needs of the young adult and other children residing in the home. This situation may allow siblings living with a resource parent to remain together if an older sibling with a disability ages out of foster care. Contact your LDSS Adult Services Program to see if it offers this program. Contact information for LDSS’s can be found at [http://www.dss.virginia.gov/localagency/](http://www.dss.virginia.gov/localagency/).

**Adult Services:** Each local department of social services has an Adult Services Program. These services are provided to impaired adults age 18 or older and their families when appropriate. “Impaired” means any person whose physical or mental capacity is diminished to the extent that he or she needs counseling or supervisory assistance or assistance with activities of daily living (ADLs) such as feeding, dressing, bathing, walking, or with instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs) such as shopping, housekeeping, and money management. Adult services are designed to help the adult remain in the least restrictive setting and function as independently as possible. Services may include case management, home-based care, transportation, adult day services, or
assessment for the need for long-term care services such as nursing facilities, assisted living facilities, and Medicaid-funded home- and community-based care waiver programs. Contact information for LDSS’s can be found at [http://www.dss.virginia.gov/localagency/](http://www.dss.virginia.gov/localagency/).

**Assisted Living Facility (ALF):** ALFs are non-medical residential settings that provide or coordinate personal and health care services, 24-hour supervision, and assistance for the care of four or more adults who are elderly or have a disability. ALFs licensed by DSS are found at [www.dss.virginia.gov/facility/alf.cgi](http://www.dss.virginia.gov/facility/alf.cgi). In order to be admitted to an ALF, an individual must be assessed prior to admission. If the individual is public pay (i.e., he or she is eligible to receive an Auxiliary Grant), an authorized public human services agency staff member can complete the assessment. Authorized public human services agencies include LDSS’s, area agencies on aging, community services boards, local departments of health, and centers for independent living.

**Assistive Technology (AT):** AT is an umbrella term that includes assistive, adaptive, and rehabilitative devices for people with disabilities and also includes the process used in selecting, locating, and using them. AT promotes greater independence by enabling people to perform tasks that they were formerly unable to accomplish, or had great difficulty accomplishing, by providing enhancements to, or changing methods of interacting with, the technology needed to accomplish such tasks. Examples of AT include wheelchairs, walkers, large print, prosthetics, speech-generating devices, hearing aids, and voice-recognition software.

In Virginia, the Virginia Assistive Technology System (VATS) ensures that Virginians of all ages and abilities can acquire the appropriate, affordable assistive and information technologies and services they need to participate in society as active citizens. Explore the VATS site at [http://www.vats.org/](http://www.vats.org/) to learn more about programs and services and AT. VATS also manages an AT recycling program to make AT more available, especially for those who have no public or private health insurance and who don’t have the resources necessary to purchase the equipment they need. Members of the community donate equipment, no longer in use, to a reuse program where items are sanitized, repaired, refurbished, matched and redistributed, at no cost, to eligible individuals who can use it.

**Centers for Independent Living (CILs):** Centers for independent living (CILs) are private, nonprofit corporations that provide services to maximize the independence of individuals with disabilities and the accessibility of the communities they live in. Centers are funded in part by the Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Independent Living Branch, to provide, among other things, several core services:

- Systems advocacy
- Independent living skills training
- Information and referral
- Peer counseling

Most centers are also actively involved in one or more of the following activities: community planning and decision-making; school-based peer counseling, role modeling, and skills training; working with local governments and employers to open and facilitate employment opportunities; interacting with local, state, and federal legislators; and staging recreational events that integrate individuals with disabilities with their nondisabled peers. The purpose of the independent living programs is to maximize the leadership, empowerment, independence, and productivity of individuals with disabilities and to integrate these individuals into the mainstream of society. Information on Centers for Independent Living from the Department of Education web pages: [http://www.ed.gov/programs/cil/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/programs/cil/index.html). For a list of CILs in Virginia, please go to [http://www.ilru.org/html/publications/directory/virginia.html](http://www.ilru.org/html/publications/directory/virginia.html).
Community Services Boards (CSBs): CSBs deliver mental health, intellectual disability, and substance abuse services. CSBs provide some services in all 136 cities and counties in Virginia. CSBs function not only as service providers, but also as client advocates, community educators and organizers, program developers and planners, and advisors to their local governments, serving as the locus of fiscal and programmatic accountability.

Educational Activities: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities. The federal IDEA program defines transition services (found at §300.43) as a coordinated facilitation of the child’s movement to post-school activities, including:

- Post-secondary education
- Vocational education
- Integrated employment
- Continuing and adult education
- Adult services
- Independent living
- Community participation

The activities must focus on the child’s strengths, preferences, and interests. IDEA requires the development of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that states the child’s post-secondary goals. Source: [http://nnichcy.org/schoolage/transitionadult](http://nnichcy.org/schoolage/transitionadult).

Job Assistance through the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS): The Consumer Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program helps people with disabilities get ready for, find, and keep a job. It helps to increase their ability to live independently in their communities. The Consumer VR program works with individuals with every type of disability. VR services include but are not limited to, vocational counseling, training, and job placement. Anyone may refer a person with a disability who wants to work. Referrals come from social workers, doctors, mental health professionals, high school teachers, family, employers, hospitals and many others. Give referral information to a local DARS office found at [http://www.vadrs.org/](http://www.vadrs.org/). If a person receives Social Security Disability (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and wants to work, the individual already meet the first three criteria. However, a person does not have to be receiving SSDI or SSI to apply.

An individual may apply for the DARS vocational rehabilitation program if:
- He or she has a physical, mental, or emotional disability;
- The disability keeps the individual from finding or keeping a job;
- The individual is willing and able to work and believes these services can help; and
- The individual is in the state (living in, working in, or moving to Virginia).

Job Corp: Job Corps is a free education and training program that helps young people learn a career, earn a high school diploma or GED, and find and keep a good job. For eligible young people at least 16 years of age that qualify as low income, Job Corps provides the all-around skills needed to succeed in a career and in life. If you or someone you know is interested in joining Job Corps, call (800) 733-JOBS or (800) 733-5627 where an operator will provide general information about Job Corps, referral to an admissions counselor closest to where the young person lives, and send an information packet. See website at [http://www.jobcorps.gov/home.aspx](http://www.jobcorps.gov/home.aspx).

Medicaid-Funded Long-Term Care: A user-friendly guide to understanding long-term care services called *The Guide for Long-Term Care Services in Virginia*, which is located at...
This booklet explains Medicaid-funded long-term care services and the requirements for each, including nursing facility, Money Follows the Person, and home-based care waiver services.

**Medicaid Waivers:** For an informative guide about Medicaid waivers for persons with a disability, go to [http://dmasva.dmas.virginia.gov/Content_atchs/ltc/ltc_md_waiver.pdf](http://dmasva.dmas.virginia.gov/Content_atchs/ltc/ltc_md_waiver.pdf).

**Nursing Facility (NF):** A NF is a facility in which the primary function is the provision, on a continuing basis, of nursing services and health-related services for the treatment and inpatient care of two or more non-related individuals. An individual seeking NF placement must be prescreened by a team including a nurse from a local department of health and a Family Services Specialist from a LDSS. The individual must meet established NF criteria. NFs are regulated by the Virginia Department of Health (VDH). To find a NF, visit the [VDH website](http://dmasva.dmas.virginia.gov/Content_atchs/ltc/ltc_guide_srvcs.pdf). It should be noted that most long-term care facilities focus on the elderly with significant medical and nursing needs.

**Section 8 Housing:** The Section 8 housing choice voucher program is the federal government's major program for assisting very low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market. Since housing assistance is provided on behalf of the family or individual, participants are able to find their own housing, including single-family homes, townhouses, and apartments. The participant is free to choose any housing that meets the requirements of the program and is not limited to units located in subsidized housing projects.

Housing choice vouchers are administered locally by public housing agencies (PHAs). The PHAs receive federal funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to administer the voucher program. A family that is issued a housing voucher is responsible for finding a suitable housing unit of the family's choice where the owner agrees to rent under the program. This unit may include the family's present residence. Rental units must meet minimum standards of health and safety, as determined by the PHA. A housing subsidy is paid to the landlord directly by the PHA on behalf of the participating family. The family then pays the difference between the actual rent charged by the landlord and the amount subsidized by the program.

Eligibility for a housing voucher is determined by the PHA based on the total annual gross income and family size and is limited to U.S. citizens and specified categories of non-citizens who have eligible immigration status. The PHA serving your community can provide you with the income limits for your area and family size. During the application process, the PHA will collect information on family income, assets, and family composition. The PHA will verify this information with other local agencies, your employer and bank, and will use the information to determine program eligibility and the amount of the housing assistance payment. If the PHA determines that your family is eligible, the PHA will put your name on a waiting list, unless it is able to assist you immediately. Once your name is reached on the waiting list, the PHA will contact you and issue to you a housing voucher.

If you are interested in applying for a voucher, contact the [local PHA](http://dmasva.dmas.virginia.gov/Content_atchs/ltc/ltc_guide_srvcs.pdf). For further assistance, please contact the [HUD Office](http://dmasva.dmas.virginia.gov/Content_atchs/ltc/ltc_guide_srvcs.pdf) nearest to you or go to [http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD](http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD). Since the demand for housing assistance often exceeds the limited resources available to HUD and the local housing agencies, long waiting periods are common. In fact, a PHA may close its waiting list when it has more families on the list than can be assisted in the near future. Each PHA has the discretion to establish local preferences to reflect the housing needs and priorities of its particular community.
**Woodrow Wilson Rehab Center (WWRC):** The Center provides vocational training and medical rehabilitative services for people with disabilities to assist them in obtaining employment and to live more independently. WWRC exists to provide the skills and supports necessary to enable these people to accomplish greater independence and achieve competitive employment. WWRC accepts applications of any individual with a disability whose needs are compatible with the structure, staff, and other WWRC resources. Primary consideration is given to DARS clients pursuing vocational goals. For more information about WWRC, visit [http://www.wwrc.net/](http://www.wwrc.net/). Admissions criteria are found at [http://www.wwrc.net/Admissions.htm](http://www.wwrc.net/Admissions.htm).