



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 22, 2020

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Independent Living Centers Receive Increased Calls for Assistance from Young People from Foster Care During Pandemic Crisis

(Washington, DC) Independent Living Programs (ILPs) across the country are responding to increased requests for assistance from young people from foster care, according to a new poll by FosterClub.

In normal times, Independent Living Programs (ILPs) help young people from foster care navigate the challenges of transitioning from foster care to adulthood. However, many ILPs from across the country are reporting higher call volumes and requests for more urgent help from young people, as youth contend with loss of housing and employment, and fewer places to turn for help. FosterClub recently conducted a poll of these programs to gauge how the crisis was affecting young people and the demand for services. The poll revealed youth and ILPs are struggling in several significant ways:

1. Approximately 4 out of 5 ILPs reported they had experienced a significant increase in calls from young people over the past two months due to COVID-19.
2. Three-quarters of ILPS expect they will need additional IL resources as demand for assistance increases.
3. Nearly every ILP reported youth are asking for help with housing and money support, and more than 80% of ILPS noted requests for technology assistance.
4. Three-quarters of state ILPS reported youth were requesting mental health services and lacked connections to emotional support and guidance.
5. Several states noted increased calls for help in figuring out how to apply for unemployment and stimulus checks.

"Young people from foster care are being hit hard by this pandemic, and Independent Living Programs are one effective way of getting them resources that can help," said Celeste Bodner, Executive Director of FosterClub, a national network for youth in care. "This poll shows how these programs are stepping up to help young people endure this pandemic, and offer a ready-made solution for how we could get more help out to our young people if more resources were available."

ILPs rely on a blend of resources from the federal John H. Chafee Independent Living program and state and local dollars. Chafee funds have long been thought to be underfunded, however, incredibly valuable as a flexible mechanism for states to provide assistance to meet the varying needs of young people from foster care without family they can rely on. Chafee resources are especially critical now as youth are losing housing, facing unemployment or layoffs, struggling to pay for basic needs, and trying to navigate this crisis without strong connections to parents or other adults who can provide



them with guidance.

The complete poll report can be found here:

<https://www.fosterclub.com/blog/public-policy/supporting-independent-young-people-foster-care-during-covid-19ilp-poll-results>

For information about resources available to support young people through the COVID crisis, visit www.fosterclub.org/C19. For more information about the poll or to find out how you can help, contact FosterClub at help@fosterclub.com or call 503-717-1552.

Key Findings of ILP Coordinators' Response Supporting Independent Young People from Foster Care During COVID-19

Key Findings of ILP Poll:

1. The flexibility of Chafee's funding structure makes ILPs well-positioned to administer emergency relief to youth from foster care.
2. Increased flexibility of eligibility requirements would enhance ILPs' ability to meet specific needs of youth.
3. Approximately 4 out of 5 ILPs reported they had experienced a significant increase in calls from young people over the past two months due to COVID-19.
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5. Nearly every ILP reported youth are asking for help with housing and money support, and more than 80% of ILPS noted requests for technology assistance.
6. Three-quarters of state ILPS reported youth were requesting mental health services and lacked connections to emotional support and guidance.
7. Several states noted increased calls for help in figuring out how to apply for unemployment and stimulus checks.
8. Several ILPs reported that housing was a top concern with dormitories closing, roommates going back home, and employment severely constricted.
9. ILPs reported needing additional federal guidance about how rules could be adjusted to meet needs of youth from foster care during the crisis.

Regarding Flexibility

A New England state wrote,

"Due to the nature of our funding (we seem to have more flexible statewide funds than other states do for independent living), we were well-equipped to respond in creative ways. We have approved a lot of funding to help youth get through this time. Our staff are meeting with youth virtually, finding new ways to connect, and thinking about how they can meet with you while maintaining social distancing as our state starts to open back up. We have also lifted some requirements for staff to make the work easier. For instance, we are accepting 'virtual' signatures versus physical ones."



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Regarding Eligibility

A Southern state reported, they are *"focusing on meeting basic needs" and are reaching out to those who no longer have an open case, but are still eligible for services.*

Regarding Housing

A state from the upper Midwest reported they are focusing on, *"helping youth residing in dorms have safe housing" (as transitions from school occur).*

A Western state echoed this approach and said, *"Before we were hit by COVID-19 we were experiencing a housing crisis and now it has compounded."*

Another state elevated the housing concerns: *"Accessing housing has become the biggest barrier for aged out youth during this time as housing authorities are closed; the youth have been laid off; the programs are operating on a waiting list, etc."*

Cash Assistance

One state reported they had increased allotments to meet housing and food needs, and another state said they were providing cash to assist with bills.

A southern state reported, they are *"Providing gift cards for youth who have food shortages."*

As resources become more scarce, one ILP reported they are seeking gift cards from local foundations to help meet the needs.

ILPs Reported Needing Additional Federal Guidance and Flexibility

States reported that they have appreciated recent federal webinars hosted by the Children's Bureau and new guidance that has been issued. They asked for clear guidelines on whether policies related to Chafee and ETV would be relaxed due to the crisis. One state noted it would be helpful to have federal encouragement to spur extensions of foster care beyond the age of 21. One state noted that they believed the federal administration should not penalize states for NYTD standards that may not be met during this timeframe, and there be an enhanced ability to supplement ETV with general Chafee funds to meet the needs of youth.

About FosterClub

FosterClub is the national network for young people in foster care. Through work led by over 500 young leaders, FosterClub provides direct services to youth who experience the system and elevates



the young peoples' voice to drive change in the child welfare system. Learn more about FosterClub and how you can support young people in foster care at www.fosterclub