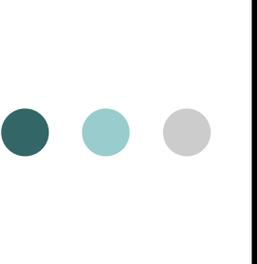


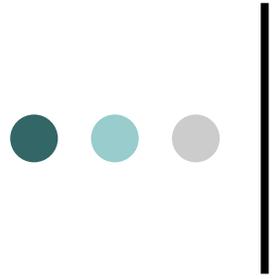
*Older Youth and Young Adults
Transitioning from Foster Care:
The NC LINKS Program*

*Training for DSS Attorneys
February 23, 2007
Institute of Government*

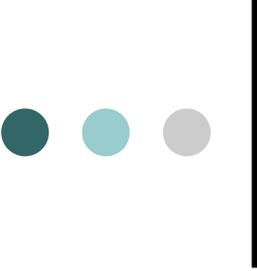


NC Outcomes of young adults 18-21 who aged out of foster care

- 13% have been homeless at some point
- 14% are not in safe/stable housing
- 70% have not experienced stable employment (6 months in same job)
- 42% do not have enough income to live on
- 38% do not have their diploma or GED
- 24% are single parents
- 33% do not have a personal support network of 5 or more caring, responsible adults.

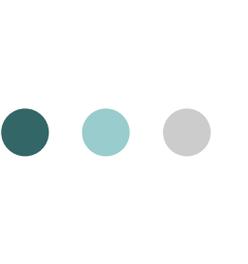


Why do teens emancipating
from foster care have such
poor outcomes?



-
Consider the impact of traditional foster care.....

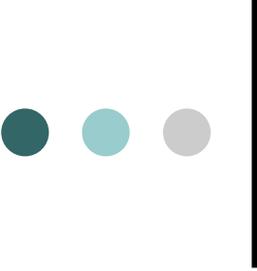
- on a youth's **academic foundation...**
- on a youth's **personal support network...**
- on the development of **good decision-making skills...**
- on the development of **work skills...**
- on the development of **money management skills...**
- on the acquisition of **basic life skills...**



How can the courts help to improve outcomes for older teens transitioning from foster care?

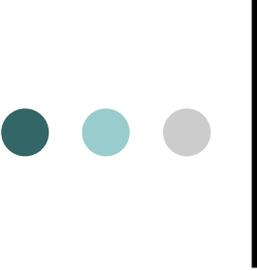
At Permanency Review Hearings:

- **What is the permanency plan?**
- What are the contents of the transitional living plan for youth 16+ (N.C.G.S.7b-906)
- **What agency efforts are being made to achieve legal permanency and lifelong connections?**
- What agency efforts are being made to assist the youth to achieve the transitional living plan?
- **How is the youth involved in developing and achieving the plan?**



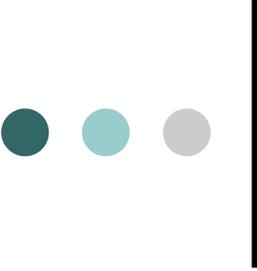
If the youth is being discharged from foster care...

- **What is the discharge plan? What is the backup discharge plan if the primary plan does not work?**
- Is the youth aware of the advantages of voluntarily remaining in care while he/she finishes school?
- **Is the youth aware of services and resources available through the LINKS program?**
- Does the youth have a plan for health care through Medicaid or other insurance?
- **Would there be an advantage to maintain court/DSS supervision for the first several months of the youth's discharge from placement?**



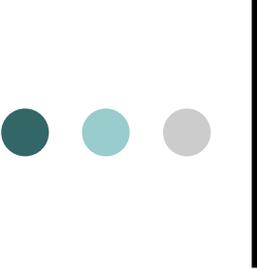
If the youth is requesting legal emancipation

- Why does the youth want to be emancipated? Often the youth's desire to be emancipated **does not** reflect readiness to function as an adult.
- Are there **other ways** to help the youth move toward independence in a planned way?



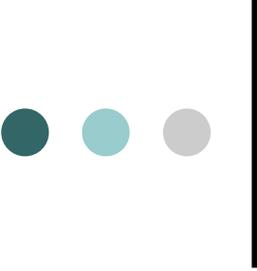
Education and Vocational Training Needs

- What is the youth's current educational status? What is the agency doing to address any academic deficiencies?
- What are the youth's secondary and post-secondary school goals? Is assistance needed to help the youth achieve those goals?
- Is the youth aware of the Education Training Voucher program which provides up to \$5000 per year to older foster youth for postsecondary educational and vocational programs?



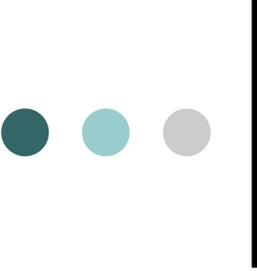
Is the youth eligible for special educational services?

- If so, what is the content of the **Individualized Education Plan?**
- What transition services are included in the IEP?



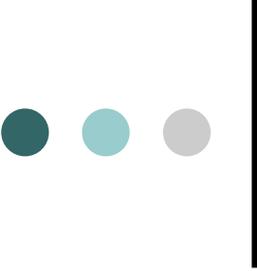
Needs of youth with disabilities

- What independent living services are being provided to youth with physical disabilities?
- If a youth is developmentally delayed, what services are being provided to help him/her prepare for adulthood?
- If the youth has a disability, has the agency applied for SSI?



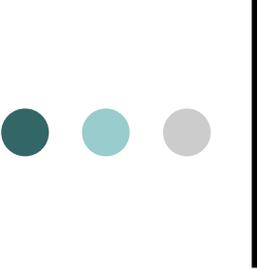
Needs of Parenting Youth

- If the youth is pregnant or parenting, have her or his rights as a parent been explained?
- Is the parenting youth placed with her child?
- What IL services are being provided to address the youth's parenting needs?



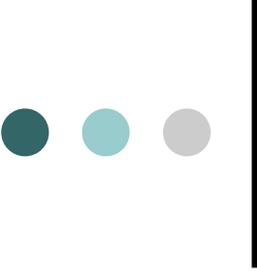
Undocumented Youth

- If an undocumented youth is in foster care as a result of abuse or neglect, and cannot be reunited with his/her family, the agency should begin procedures immediately to help the youth achieve Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. This process may only continue as long as the youth is under the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court, and can take **several years**.
- Attracta Kelly, Project Director
Immigration Law Project
919-856-2185



NC LINKS

- NC LINKS is North Carolina's independent living program for older teens and young adults who are or have been in the foster care system. All states have Independent Living programs.
- NC LINKS is funded by federal funds (Chafee Foster Care Independence Act), matched with state dollars and state in-kind match.

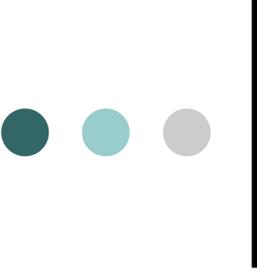


Eligibility

- Youth and young adults ages 13 to 21 who are or were in foster care as teens are eligible for LINKS services and resources. These youth/young adults may be currently in care, be discharged, be married, adopted, or emancipated and remain eligible.

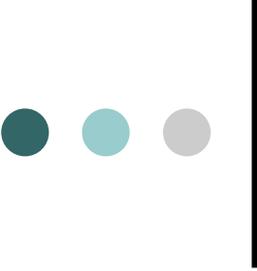
Exceptions:

- Federal funds cannot be used to provide services to illegal or undocumented aliens.
- To use IV-E funds, child cannot have resources of \$10,000 or more.



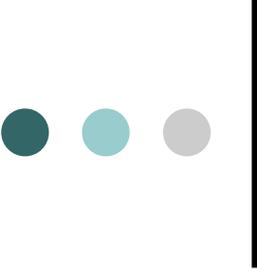
Required/Optional service populations

- Counties are **required** to provide LINKS services to teens in care 16-21 and to young adults who aged out of foster care at age 18.
- Counties are **strongly encouraged** to provide LINKS services to younger teens 13-15 and to young adults who were discharged prior to 18 and are requesting services.
- Counties **may opt** to provide services to youth discharged before age 18.



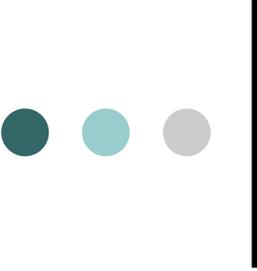
Desired Outcomes for LINKS participants

- Sufficient economic resources to meet daily needs;
- **Safe and stable place to live;**
- Academic/vocational goals are in keeping with young adult's interests and abilities;
- **Has personal support network of at least 5 caring adults;**
- Avoids illegal and high risk behaviors;
- **Postpones parenthood until financially stable and emotionally mature; and**
- Has insurance and access to needed medical/mental health/dental services.



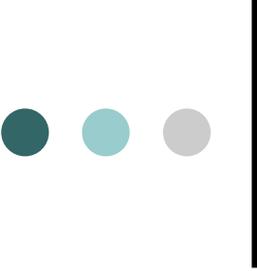
LINKS Services

- All LINKS Services are designed to help youth achieve one or more of the seven desired outcomes. Services are individualized and are based on the youth's strengths, training needs, and interests.



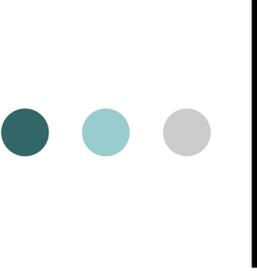
LINKS Special Funds

- LINKS Special Funds are available to reimburse counties for eligible expenditures on behalf of eligible current or former foster youth. The purpose of the funds is the same as for the rest of the program, and expenditures must be justified.
- There is approximately \$500,000 available each year for these funds; it is not an entitlement, and judicious usage has helped to maintain access to the funds for everyone who has requested them.



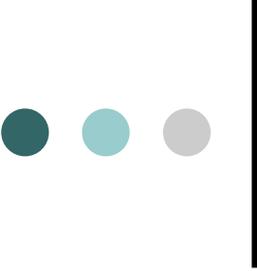
How The LINKS Special Funds Work

- Available to quickly reimburse counties for eligible expenditures on behalf of eligible youth and young adults.
- Purpose- to help youth and young adults transition successfully to adulthood by reducing barriers, providing experiences that will enhance capacity, purchasing needed items, and encouraging/rewarding desired behaviors.
- County must pay for the item or service and request reimbursement. If a third party pays, this should be arranged through DSS in advance. The Division can only reimburse county Departments of Social Services.



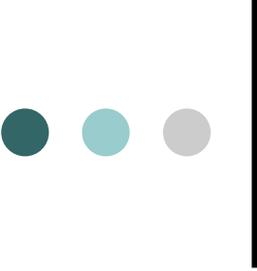
LINKS Special Funds

- Housing Funds are available ONLY to young adults who were in foster care on their eighteenth birthday. Up to \$1000 is available per young adult per year.
- These funds may ONLY be used for rent deposits, rent, or down payment on dwellings for young adults who aged out of foster care.



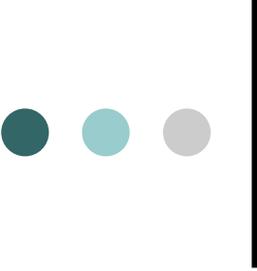
LINKS Transitional Funds

- LINKS Transitional Funds are available to reimburse counties for appropriate expenditures on behalf of eligible youth and young adults.
- In order to assess whether or not an expenditure is appropriate, counties must address three questions:



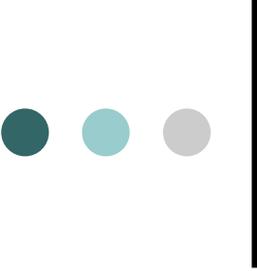
Questions:

1. Is the cost reasonable?
2. Is the youth/young adult doing their part to address the problem or expense?
3. Is there a reasonable chance that use of the funds will help the youth/young adult achieve one or more of the 7 outcomes?



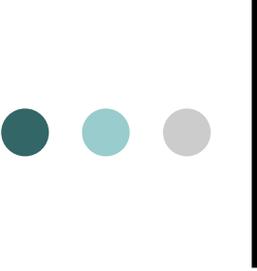
Reasonable cost

- The total funds available for LINKS Transitional Funds is \$500,000. There are over 5000 youth eligible for these funds, or on average **\$100** per youth. Therefore the cap of \$2250 should be used **very rarely if the funds are to last through the year.**
- Transitional Funds should be used to provide what is **basic and necessary** until the youth can afford more.



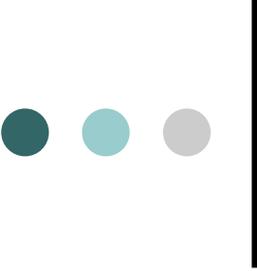
Youth doing part

- The youth is **expected to do his part** in solving the problems necessitating use of funds. This may include paying part of the cost, researching the best deal, participating in training about budgeting, time management, etc., increasing earning power, or other strategies to avoid further problems.



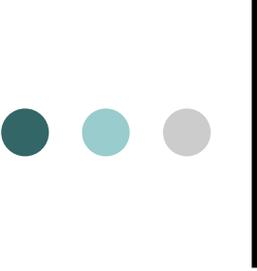
Expenditure helps youth/young adult to achieve one or more of 7 desired outcomes

- Sufficient economic resources to meet daily needs;
- **Safe and stable place to live;**
- Academic/vocational goals are in keeping with young adult's interests and abilities;
- **Has personal support network of at least 5 caring adults;**
- Avoids illegal and high risk behaviors;
- **Postpones parenthood until financially stable and emotionally mature; and**
- Has insurance and access to needed medical/mental health/dental services



Reimbursement Procedures

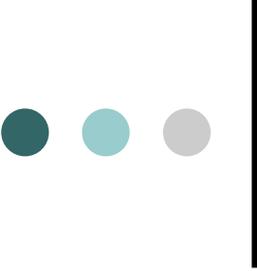
- The county must **authorize access** to the funds based on their records
- The county or third party, under agreement with DSS) **spends the money** for appropriate items or services.
- The county **requests reimbursement** from the State Coordinator



Eligibility for the ETV Program

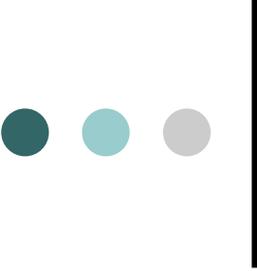
In order to qualify for an Education Training voucher, the student:

- Must meet the eligibility requirements for LINKS;
- must have been discharged from foster care after the 17th birthday **or** have been adopted from foster care after his/her 16th birthday, and have finished high school or their GED; and
- must be enrolled in or accepted for enrollment in a qualifying post-secondary educational or vocational training program and, if currently enrolled, be making satisfactory progress toward completion of the degree or certificate.



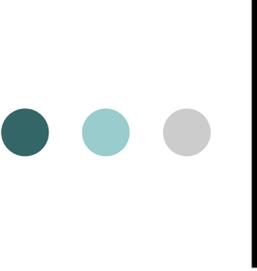
Application for ETV

- The student applies directly on-line at www.statevoucher.org This website has some very useful information for any high school student.



Benefits through the ETV Program

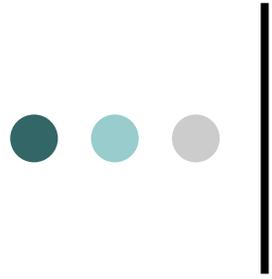
- Grants of up to \$5000 per academic year may be provided to apply to the costs of attendance at a post-secondary educational or vocational training school.
- The grant is based on the difference between allowable expenses and the amount of other federal grants the student receives (such as the Pell grant). Student Loans are not considered as resources in figuring the amount of the grant.



Allowable Costs of Attendance

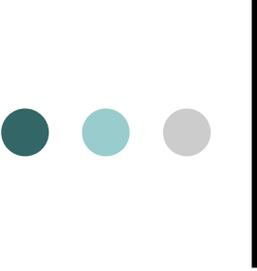
Allowable costs of attendance are

- Tuition, fees
- Room and board, either in a dorm or off campus housing
- Books
- Rental or purchase of required material, equipment or supplies
- Tutoring
- Child care for parenting students
- Transportation that is necessary for the student to attend school
- Repayment of student loans incurred for the current academic year
- Student health insurance



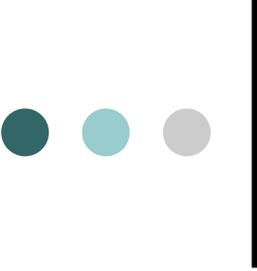
The LINKS Program is

Outcome-Based



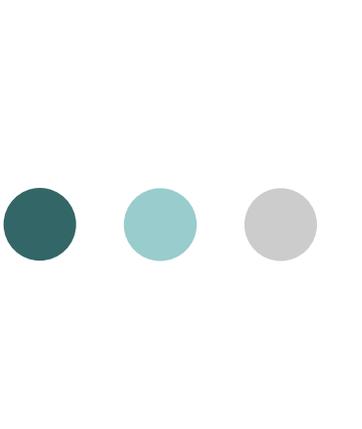
What does Outcome-Based mean?

- **All program offerings and use of LINKS funds must be directed toward achievement of one or more of these 7 outcomes.**
- **Agencies are expected to track youth's progress toward these outcomes and to adjust their approach and program offerings accordingly. Outcome information is required on the annual county report to the State Coordinator.**



Positive Youth Development

- Every LINKS Program should incorporate **Positive Youth Development** principles and practices.
- Positive Youth Development programs give youth opportunities to develop their own **skills, knowledge, and confidence** through real-life experiences and consequences..



The Focus of a Positive Youth Development Program :

Help youth prepare for their future

rather than try to

Repair the damage from their past

Hallmarks of a PYD Program

1. **The youth/young adult is an active, engaged, powerful participant in the development of his/her LINKS plan and for the entire LINKS program.**

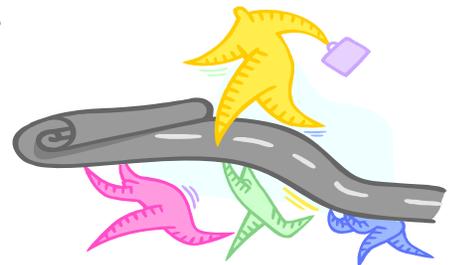


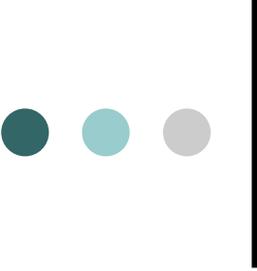
2. LINKS Activities expose youth to real-life experiences



3. The county LINKS liaison acts as a coach, advocate and mentor to help the youth travel their own journey

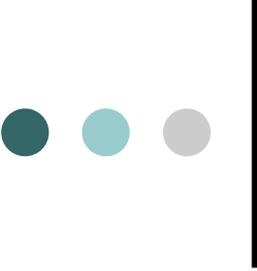
- Looks for opportunities for youth to participate in positive learning experiences.
- **Advocates for agency support of youth to explore their own plans.**
- Collaborates with other youth-serving agencies to maximize resources





To locate the LINKS Coordinator in your county:

- Contact the DSS and ask for the foster care supervisor, who can direct you to the correct person, or
- Contact the State Coordinator of the LINKS program



For further information:

Joan McAllister

State Program Coordinator, NC LINKS

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Raleigh, N.C. 27699-2409

919-733-2580

Joan.McAllister@ncmail.net