
AFTER FOSTER CARE

RETURN HOME



INDEPENDENT LIVING

GUARDIANSHIP

ADOPTION

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OPTIONS FOR CHILDREN AFTER FOSTER CARE

Every foster family's situation and every child's situation is different. A foster family faces an important decision when a child in their care needs a permanent family. Is adoption the way to go? Is becoming a guardian an option? Realistically, caregivers need to understand adoption and guardianship in order to make an informed decision about offering their home as a choice for a permanent family. For some older children, adoption or guardianship may not be possible or preferable. Even caregivers who never intend to adopt or become guardians need to understand all of the options so they can participate as a well-informed member of the child welfare team.

Permanency planning during the time a child is in foster care concludes with the agency or DCFS member of the child welfare team making final recommendations to the juvenile court about the child's "permanent family" when he or she leaves foster care. The juvenile court makes the final decision about who will be the child's permanent family.

The permanent family chosen may be either:

- one or both of the child's birth parents; or
- a relative who will adopt the child or become the child's legal guardian; or
- the child's foster family who will adopt or become the legal guardian; or
- a new unrelated family who will adopt the child.

Returning Home

Being able to safely return home to the family of origin is almost always the preferred permanency option for any child in foster care. Foster families play an important role in helping this happen. Children are returned home by the juvenile court when the parents have corrected the conditions which led to the child being removed. DCFS must provide services for at least six months following the return home to help the family remain stable.

Adoption

If a child is unable to return to the parents, adoption should be considered as the next best permanency option. Adoption gives a child a lifelong family relationship. Adoptive parents are the legal parents of a child, with the same rights and responsibilities as if the child had been born to them. Financial support for eligible children and families is available through an "adoption subsidy." Families who receive adoption subsidies receive financial support

from the state until the child reaches age 18, or until age 19 if still in high school. The department may continue the agreement until the child's 21st birthday if it determines that the child has a physical, mental or emotional disability that is "chronic lifelong," thus warranting the continuation of assistance. Adoptive families may also choose not to receive financial assistance.

Guardianship

Permanent legal guardians, unlike adoptive parents, are not the child's legal parents. Guardians are appointed by the court to make important decisions in the child's life without DCFS being involved in the care, supervision, or custody of the child. Guardianship lasts until the child is 18 years old. Guardians who are eligible for financial assistance receive financial support from the state until guardianship ends at age 18, or age 19 if still in high school. The department may continue the agreement until the child's 21st birthday if it determines that the child has a physical, mental or emotional disability that is "chronic," thus warranting the continuation of assistance. Guardians who qualify for financial assistance may also choose not to receive financial assistance.

Preparation for Independent Living

For older youth, adoption or guardianship may not be the answer. Some teens feel so connected to their birth family that they do not want to be adopted or have a guardian. Pregnant and/or parenting youth may feel ready to have their own family living situation. In these cases, helping a teen prepare for independent living and supporting the transition may be in his or her best interests. Caregivers can be indispensable role models and helpers in guiding these teens through key decisions affecting their futures. Programs preparing youths to live independently are available through DCFS. (See pages 23-31.)

MAKING THE DECISION TO BECOME A CHILD'S ADOPTIVE FAMILY

Overview of Adoption

What is adoption?

Adoption means that the court makes you, or you and your spouse, the legal parents of a child. As the adoptive parents, you have the same rights and responsibilities for your adopted child as you would your birth child. Once a child is adopted from foster care, DCFS is no longer involved or responsible for the care, supervision, or custody of the child. As an adoptive parent, you assume all rights and responsibilities to make important decisions for your adopted child including the right to consent to major medical care and treatment, to marriage, to enlistment in the armed services, etc. Post adoption services are available to adoptive families and are described in detail on pages 7-9.

Who is eligible for adoption?

Children are "*eligible*" for adoption when the court rules that they cannot be returned safely to their birth parents due to parental unfitness on one or more grounds designated by law, and parental rights have been terminated.

Sometimes, the birth parents may decide to voluntarily surrender their parental rights, or consent to adoption, making their child eligible for adoption. In other cases, the parents may be deceased, or after diligent search cannot be located.

What factors are considered in selecting an adoptive family?

In selecting an adoptive family, the caseworker will consider all relevant factors, including but not limited to:

- 1) the wishes of the child;
- 2) the interaction and interrelationship of the child with the applicant to adopt the child;
- 3) the child's need for stability and continuity of relationship with parent figures;
- 4) the child's adjustment to his or her present home, school, and community;
- 5) the mental and physical health of all individuals involved;
- 6) the family ties between the child and the child's relatives, including siblings;
- 7) the background, age, and living arrangements of the applicant to adopt the child;
- 8) a criminal background report of the applicant to adopt the child.

Sibling considerations

Connections to siblings are important to a child's development and the successful transition to the adoptive home. The need for connections often intensifies as the child gets older and those connections can be especially valuable in his or her adult life. Prospective adoptive parents should keep siblings contact at the forefront and be able to provide support for the child and his or her siblings.

When a child is in need of an adoptive placement, the caseworker will attempt to determine whether a sibling has been adopted or placed in private guardianship after being in DCFS care. If so, the caseworker will make a good faith effort to locate the sibling's adoptive parents or guardians to inform them of the child now available for adoption. That family can apply to adopt the child and be considered as a possible placement.

If an adoptive placement with the sibling is not feasible, it still may be in the child's best interest to develop or maintain a relationship with his or her sibling. The caseworker will bring the families together to facilitate a discussion regarding future sibling contact. From that discussion the families will develop the Post Permanency Sibling Contact Agreement. This is a voluntary, non-binding agreement that documents a plan for contact among siblings, and could include siblings who become known after the adoption. The parties may request that the Agreement be modified or terminated at any time. Any and all terms may be modified by agreement of the parties.

Any licensed foster parent who has cared for a child for a year continuously *shall be given preference and first consideration over all other applicants* if the child becomes eligible and they apply to adopt. However, if they do not sign a Permanency Commitment by Foster Parent (CFS 1443), then they do not have standing.

The *court's* final decision about who shall adopt the child must be based on the welfare and best interests of the child, considering, but not being limited to, all of the factors listed above.

What is adoption assistance?

Adoption assistance means that after you adopt a child in your care who is eligible, the state continues to contribute financial and medical assistance for the care of that child. This financial assistance is also called an "adoption subsidy."

Who is eligible for adoption assistance?

Most children who are under the care of DCFS and available to be adopted are eligible for adoption assistance. In order for a child to be considered eligible, DCFS must first have determined that the child cannot or should not be returned to the home of his or her parents, as shown by a court finding that there is at least probable cause to believe that the child has been abused, neglected, or is dependent and that the child is likely to suffer further abuse or neglect, or will not be adequately cared for if returned to his or her parents.

To qualify for adoption assistance the child must also meet certain “special needs” criteria. Children under DCFS care prior to the adoption must:

- be one year of age or older and
- have an irreversible or non-correctable physical, mental, or emotional disability.

or:

- have physical, mental, or emotional disabilities correctable through surgery, treatment, or other specialized services;

or:

- be a member of a sibling group being placed together when at least one of the siblings meets one or more of the above criteria;

or:

- be a child being adopted by adoptive parent/s who have previously adopted, with adoption assistance, another child or children born of the same mother or father.

You may also ask for copies of documentation noting pre-existing conditions from the child’s file for future reference.

Becoming an Adoptive Parent

What do I need to do to adopt a child?

If you believe that the best permanency option for the child in your care is adoption, you should discuss adoption with your child’s caseworker. If the decision is made that it is in the child’s best interest to be adopted by you, the child’s caseworker will tell you what steps need to be taken. The child’s caseworker will give you all of the necessary paperwork to apply for adoption assistance if the child has special needs or otherwise fits the eligibility criteria. You will also have to go to court to have a hearing to legally finalize the adoption. You will need to choose your own attorney to represent you as you adopt a child who is under the guardianship of DCFS. DCFS and private agency staff are not permitted to refer adoptive parents to specific attorneys. However, caregivers may select from a list of attorneys who meet certain qualifications set out by DCFS and who are paid directly by DCFS for serving as adoption attorneys. Ask your worker if you would like a copy of this list. Caregivers who desire to adopt a child from foster care must complete the Adoption/Guardianship Certification Training. The caseworker or the adoption worker will make the referral for the training.

Can I adopt a child not placed in my home?

Caregivers, like anyone interested in adopting a waiting child, should contact the Adoption Information Center of Illinois, 800-572-2390 inside Illinois or 312-346-1516 outside Illinois. Photo listings of waiting Illinois children who are legally free for adoption are available. Like other prospective adoptive parents,

caregivers will be referred to the waiting child's caseworker for more information about the child. Caregivers who are interested in a waiting child living with another caregiver who is unable to adopt, should contact the child's caseworker to get more information and discuss the possibility of adoption.

What background information about the child will I have prior to adopting?

The adoption process attempts to match the individual needs of a waiting child with the skills and abilities of a prospective family. Prospective adoptive parents for a child will be given more and more information about the child as the adoption process progresses.

Ultimately, Illinois law requires that adoptive parents be given background information and medical and mental health histories *prior* to a child being placed with them for adoption. The following information, if known, will be given to adoptive parent/s *in writing*:

- age of birth parents;
- their race, religion and ethnic background;
- general physical appearance of the birth parents;
- their education, occupation, hobbies, interests and talents;
- existence of any other children born to the birth parents;
- information about the birth grandparents; reason for emigrating into the U.S., if applicable, and country of origin;
- relationship between the birth parents;
- detailed medical and mental health histories of the child, the birth parents and their immediate relatives; and
- the actual date and place of birth of the adopted person.

The Adoption Disclosure form (CFS 470-H) must be given to the prospective adoptive parent prior to signing off on any commitment forms. This form will confirm the information that the adoption worker has shared with the prospective adoptive parents.

None of this information will include the last known address of the birth parents, grandparents, the siblings of the birth parents or any other relative of the adopted child. Names, social security numbers and other identifying information about the birth family will remain confidential.

After Becoming an Adoptive Parent

How will my responsibilities and rights change after adoption?

As the child's adoptive parent you will make all decisions in matters having an effect on the life and development of the child, just as you would for a child who came to you by birth.

How will the birth parent/s be involved in the child's life?

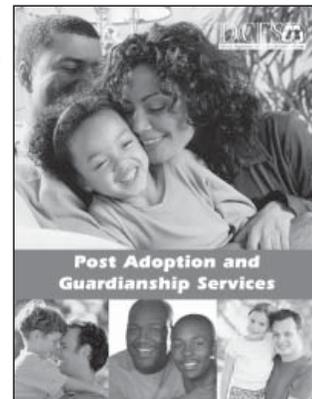
The birth parents' rights are legally terminated prior to the adoption. Therefore, the birth parents have no legal rights to the child. Any further contact between birth parents and the child is up to you, as the child's adoptive parents. You and the adoption worker should discuss how to manage the connection to the child's family in a manner that will benefit the child and your new family. You will be asked to consider keeping the child connected with any siblings after the adoption has been finalized.

How will the child's siblings be involved after the adoption?

If the adoptive family developed a Post-Permanency Sibling Contact Agreement, they will follow that plan. It may include visits with siblings placed with other adoptive parents or adult siblings. The Agreement can also be changed if all parties agree to new circumstances. Adoptive families may be contacted and considered for placement if a new sibling comes to the attention of DCFS. The goal is not to dictate, but to cooperatively and proactively protect the connections that are vital to a child's emotional development.

Will I receive services from DCFS after I adopt?

Illinois provides extensive post adoption and guardianship services to families. The department wants families to not just survive, but to thrive. The booklet on post adoption and guardianship services describes the services available. Your caseworker should provide you with a copy. You may also ask your post-adoption worker for a copy of the booklet.



You will receive the following services when you adopt a child from DCFS:

- the services and payments specified in the adoption assistance agreement; and
- available post adoption services, which include: crisis intervention, a toll-free information and referral number, individual and family therapy, family and child support groups, adoption and guardianship preservation services, non-identifying information, search and reunion services, advocacy and other specialized services needed by the family to ensure that the adoptive relationship is maintained.

These services are detailed on pages 15-16 of this section.

What kind of financial assistance will I receive as an adoptive parent?

If you enter into an adoption assistance agreement, you will receive the services and payments listed in the adoption assistance agreement.

Types of adoption assistance payments and services include:

- non-recurring expenses such as legal fees and court costs to complete the adoption may be paid directly or reimbursed;
- counseling or therapy costs not payable through private insurance, Medicaid or other publically funded resources;
- a Medicaid card for the child;
- payments for physical, emotional and mental health needs that are not paid for under Medicaid through public resources or private insurance for conditions whose onset was established prior to the adoption;
- regular day care up to age three;
- therapeutic day care;
- an ongoing monthly payment of the same amount that would have been received if the child stayed in foster care, until the child reaches age 18, or 19 if the youth is still in high school. The department may continue the agreement until the child's 21st birthday if it determines that the child has a physical, mental or emotional disability that is "chronic lifelong," thus warranting the continuation of assistance; and
- DCFS Scholarship: Your adopted child is eligible to apply. (See page 27).

What if I have a problem with the amount of adoption assistance?

When an ongoing monthly payment is part of the adoption assistance received by the adoptive family, the payment shall be the same amount that would be received if the child was in foster care. Adoption assistance payments may be adjusted based on qualifying and properly-documented changes in the child's needs, but payment will not be decreased. The payment will follow the amounts set for the type of substitute care that would be appropriate for the child if he or she were still in foster care. Adoptive parents' income and any benefits the child receives after the adoption, such as inheritance, scholarships, or income from a part-time job are not to be considered in determining the amount of the payment.

Because the adoption assistance agreement will be reviewed every year, you will have the opportunity to discuss any problems you have with the assistance being provided by DCFS. Requests for a review can be made by the adoptive parents at any time by calling the Adoption Support Line as listed on page 15.

When can the adoption assistance be reissued or transferred?

When a child for whom adoption assistance was being received is orphaned due to the death of his or her adoptive parents, or when a court terminates an adoptive parents' parental rights, an adoption agreement can be entered into with new adoptive parents. The child continues to be eligible for adoption assistance if adopted again. However, it is important to realize that the subsidy must be approved before the adoption is finalized.

What if I find that I need help with the child?

Because counseling or therapy can be part of an adoption assistance agreement, they can be used when difficulties arise. These services can be paid through Medicaid, private insurance or as negotiated by the agency business office. DCFS may pay for physical, emotional and mental health needs not wholly payable through public or private insurance or other public resources. However, these must be needs associated with or resulting from a medical condition/s whose onset has been established prior to the adoption. In addition to health benefits payable through the Medicaid card, DCFS may pay for counseling or therapeutic day care for the child, if agreed to prior to the adoption.

Your case will be assigned to an adoption unit at DCFS that will review the subsidy agreement. You will be able to contact this unit when you encounter difficulties with private health insurers, community resources and/or Medicaid.

What if there is a problem with the adoption later on?

The adoption of a child establishes lifelong rights, duties and obligations. Adoption creates a legal relationship like the parental relationship established when a child is born into a family. Adoption is not to be entered into lightly and without thought. DCFS may assist you with difficulties that arise in the future and refer you to appropriate resources. You must weigh your decision to adopt carefully before making a lifelong commitment to your child.

If there is a problem that cannot be resolved through the provision of post-adoptive services, then court action may become necessary. You need to understand that once you become the adoptive parent, it is as though your child had been born to you. Therefore, your adoptive child would have to be found by the court to be abused, neglected, or dependent in order to have DCFS again assume legal responsibility for the child.

Adoption is a permanent, lifelong commitment to a child.

MAKING THE DECISION TO BECOME A CHILD'S GUARDIANSHIP FAMILY

Overview of Guardianship

What is guardianship?

Guardianship means that the court appoints you as the child's legal guardian. It differs from adoption because the birth parents' rights do not have to be terminated in order to appoint a guardian. When you are appointed guardian of the child, DCFS will not be involved in the care, supervision or legal custody of the child. However, the court will retain jurisdiction until the child reaches the age of 18. As guardian, you assume the rights and responsibilities to make decisions in matters having an effect on the life and the development of the child. Families becoming guardians of children in the care of DCFS may receive subsidies that include financial assistance, as well as services and resources described in detail on pages 13-14.

Guardianship lasts until the child reaches the age of 18 years. The permanency options of return home and adoption must have been ruled out for a child to be considered for guardianship. The child's parent(s) may consent to the guardianship arrangement and if they do not consent, they will be given notice of their opportunity to object in court unless their parental rights have been relinquished or terminated.

Who is eligible for guardianship?

Guardianship can be considered for children who have been living in the home of a licensed relative foster family for a period of six consecutive months. The relative home must have been licensed for the entire six month period. The goals of return home and adoption must also have been ruled out prior to pursuing a goal of guardianship.

The child should have a strong attachment to the potential guardian and the guardian should have a strong commitment to the child. Children of all ages may be considered for guardianship if they have lived with a licensed relative foster family for six months. Siblings who otherwise would not be eligible for guardianship may also qualify if they have a brother or sister in the same home that does meet the criteria.

For children living with foster families that are not relatives, with documentation and approval, DCFS could determine that subsidized guardianship is in the best interest of a child who is 14 years or older. The child 14 years and older must also have been living with the licensed non-relative for a period of six consecutive months for the guardianship to be considered.

There is a sibling exception for the siblings who otherwise would not be eligible for guardianship, if they live in the same house as a brother or sister who is

eligible for guardianship. However, the exception only applies for siblings living in relative foster homes.

What is subsidized guardianship?

In 1996, the State of Illinois received special permission from the federal government (called a waiver) to institute a subsidy for guardians in certain circumstances. Subsidized guardianship means that you become the **permanent legal guardian** of the child in your care as described above and **the state contributes financial assistance** (a subsidy) for the care of the child. The subsidy continues until the child reaches 18, or 19 if still in high school. The department may continue the agreement until the child's 21st birthday if it determines that the child has a physical, mental or emotional disability that is "chronic," thus warranting the continuation of assistance.

Experiences of guardianship families in Illinois and the early pilot subsidized guardianship resulted in federal legislation called the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008. This legislation ended the waiver demonstration project and launched the program KinGAP (Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment) which Illinois implemented in November of 2009.

Important differences of KinGAP from the original waiver program:

1. KinGAP is available to any child in licensed, relative homes, while the Subsidized Guardianship waiver randomly selected children to be in a demonstration group to be eligible for subsidized guardianship, regardless of the licensing status of the proposed guardian;
2. a child must have lived in a licensed relative home for six consecutive months versus the 1 year requirement of the subsidized guardianship waiver, which had no licensing requirement; and
3. KinGAP is restricted to relative homes according to the federal government, however, Illinois is making an exception for youth 14 years of age and older to be considered for guardianship with licensed non-relatives.

Becoming the Legal Guardian

What do I need to do?

If returning home and adoption have been considered and determined not to be the best match for permanency and you would consider becoming a legal guardian, contact the child's caseworker to discuss the possibility of guardianship.

If you and the caseworker agree that it is best for you to become the child's legal guardian, the caseworker will tell you what steps must be taken. The final step is going to court with the child for a hearing to legally transfer the guardianship from DCFS to you.

How will my responsibilities and rights change as the legal guardian?

You will have more responsibility for decision-making in those matters having an effect on the life and development of the child, including the right to consent to marriage, major medical treatment and enlistment in the armed services. If the birth parent/s' rights have not been terminated, they retain the rights to visit the child and to consent to the adoption of the child. DCFS will no longer be involved. However, post guardianship services are available throughout the state for guardianship families. These services are highlighted on pages 13-14.

How will the birth parents be involved in the child's life after guardianship?

If the birth parents' rights have not been terminated, they have the right to visit their child, unless a court orders against visits. Birth parents also have the right to petition the court to have the child returned to them.

The guardian will have input into how the visits are structured, but cannot prevent visits from happening. The visitation schedule can be worked out between the birth parents and you. If the guardian and the parents cannot work out a visitation schedule, one of the parties may wish to seek court involvement. If you believe that it is in the child's best interests not to visit the birth parents, you should address this during the court proceedings naming you the legal guardian of the child.

It is your responsibility to ensure the child's safety and well-being during parental visits. It will be up to you to determine if parental visits need to be supervised or whether or not the child can be alone with the parent/s. You and the child's caseworker should alert the court prior to your appointment as the child's legal guardian if you have concerns about your ability to control or supervise parental visits. Please understand that, as guardian of the child, you are responsible for the child and if abuse or neglect occurs during a parent's visit, a child abuse/neglect report can be made and you may be held responsible. A good relationship with the birth parents can be of great benefit to you and to the child. Children who continue to have contact and a relationship with their birth parents generally have a strong loyalty to them.

In addition to the right to visit and to petition the court for a return home, birth parents have the right to consent to any subsequent adoption of their child.

How will the child's siblings be involved after taking guardianship?

If a placement with the sibling is not feasible, it still may be in the child's best interest to develop or maintain a relationship with any siblings. As the case moves toward completing the guardianship, the caseworker will bring the prospective guardian and other relevant adults together to facilitate a discussion regarding future sibling contact. From that discussion the families will develop the Post Permanency Sibling Contact Agreement. This is a voluntary, non-binding agreement that documents a plan for contact among siblings, and could include siblings who become known later. The parties may request that the Agreement be modified or terminated at any time. Any and all terms may be modified by agreement of the parties.

After Becoming a Guardianship Family

Will I receive services from DCFS after becoming a guardianship family?

Illinois provides extensive post adoption and guardianship services to families. The department wants families to not just survive, but to thrive. The booklet on Post Adoption and Guardianship Services describes the services available. Your caseworker should provide you with a copy.

After taking guardianship of a DCFS child you will receive the following services:

- the payments and services specified in the guardianship subsidy agreement; and
- available post guardianship services, including: crisis intervention, a toll-free information and referral phone number, family therapy, family and child support groups, adoption and guardianship preservation services, non identifying information and search and reunion services, advocacy and other specialized services needed by the family to ensure that the guardianship relationship is maintained.

Details of these services are described in the Post Adoption and Guardianship Services booklet, referenced above.

What kind of financial assistance will I receive as a guardian?

If you enter into a subsidized guardianship agreement, the subsidy amount can be up to the same amount that would be received if the child was in foster care. Because the subsidy amount will be reviewed every year, you will have the opportunity to discuss any problems you are having with the resources being provided by DCFS.

- payment for legal expenses to transfer the guardianship from DCFS to you;
- counseling or therapy costs not payable through private insurance, Medicaid or other publicly funded resources;
- a Medicaid card for the child;
- payments for physical, emotional and mental health needs not paid for under Medicaid, through public resources or private insurance for conditions whose onset was established prior to the guardianship;
- regular day care for children up to age three;
- therapeutic day care;
- an ongoing monthly payment of up to the same amount that would have been received if the child stayed in foster care, until the child reaches age 18, or 19 if the youth is still in high school. The department may continue the agreement until the child's 21st birthday if it determines that the child has a physical, mental or emotional disability that is "chronic," warranting the continuation of assistance; and

- when the guardianship ends at age 18, the child can still apply for the DCFS Scholarship. (See page 25). Children who are receiving subsidized guardianship assistance may apply for a four-year college scholarship awarded by the department on a competitive basis. A limited number of scholarships are awarded by the department each year to high school or high school equivalent graduates. Youth who enter into subsidized guardianship or are adopted from foster care after attaining age 16 are eligible to enter the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program.

What if I have a problem with the subsidy?

Guardianship subsidies may be increased based on changes in the child's needs, but payments will not be decreased. The subsidy amount will be up to the same amount that would be received if the child was in foster care. The guardian's income as well as any benefits the child receives after entering guardianship, such as inheritance, scholarships, or income from a part-time job are not to be considered in determining the amount of the payment.

The subsidy will be re-certified annually. On the re-certification notice, which comes by mail, there is a place where caregivers can indicate if any changes have occurred. In addition, parents are encouraged to contact the Adoption Support Line at the number listed on page 15 any time a child's service needs change. Subsidies can be amended to add additional services, such as counseling or day care. If there is a need for broader review, caregivers can request a review by the Post-Adoption and Guardianship Services Review Committee. You will have the opportunity to discuss any problems you are having with the amount being provided by DCFS. Requests for a review can be made by the guardian at any time by calling the Adoption Support Line listed on page 15.

Subsidized Guardianship: Additional Help for Your Family

What if I find I need help with the child?

Because counseling or therapy can be part of a subsidized guardianship agreement, they can be used when difficulties arise. DCFS may pay for physical, emotional and mental health needs not wholly payable through public or private insurance or other public resources. However, these must be needs associated with or resulting from a medical condition/s whose onset has been established prior to guardianship and identified in the subsidy.

In addition to health benefits payable through the Medicaid card, DCFS may pay for counseling or therapeutic day care for the child, if agreed to prior to the transfer of guardianship.

Your case will be assigned to an adoption and guardianship unit at DCFS that may review the subsidy. You can call this unit at anytime if you have questions or problems regarding the subsidy. You can also contact this unit when you

encounter difficulties with private health insurers, community resources and/or Medicaid. Additionally, adoption and guardianship preservation services may be available if you encounter problems which threaten the continuation of the guardianship arrangement.

What if there is a problem with the guardianship arrangement later on?

Depending on your family's circumstances, it is possible you may encounter a problem that cannot be resolved through post-guardianship services. You need to understand that once you become the guardian, you are solely responsible for the well-being of the child in your care. A child for whom you have been appointed guardian would have to be found by the court to be abused, neglected, or dependent in your care in order to have DCFS again assume legal responsibility for the child, or you would have to petition the court to be relieved of your responsibilities as guardian.

What if I change my mind about being the guardian of the child?

Subsidized guardianship is considered a permanent living arrangement. It should not be entered into lightly. Though the court and DCFS may assist you when and if difficulties arise after you are named the child's legal guardian, you should carefully weigh the decision to become the child's guardian before making the commitment to the child in your care.

Services Available to Adoptive and Guardianship Families

Families wanting to adopt or become guardians often wonder what services will be available to them and their children after they become legally responsible for foster children. Some families may have even heard that services are available, but may not know how to request them. This section highlights what types of services are available and how to find them. The Post Adoption and Guardianship Services booklet describes these services in detail. Your caseworker should provide you with a copy. It is also available on the DCFS website: www.DCFS.illinois.gov.

Families that adopt or move to guardianship can also call the DCFS Adoption Support Line. The Adoption Support Line allows all adoption-related calls to come to a centralized location. During the move to adoption, a caregiver may be in close contact with the adoption worker. After finalization, sometimes years down the road when there is a question about a subsidy or a new need for services, caregivers may not know who to call. Now they can call support line for answers. Trained responders with adoption experience will be able to answer questions or direct calls for follow up.

The Adoption Support Line has extended hours so caregivers can call outside of the regular business day. Operating hours are from 8:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. (Monday through Thursday) and 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Fridays.

Adoption Support Line: 888-96-ADOPT

Calls requiring a normal response will be routed to the assigned caseworker and supervisor for follow-up to occur within 24 business hours.

Subsidies

Subsidy agreements are entered into prior to the adoption or the approval of guardianship and begin after the adoption is finalized or guardianship is transferred. After the adoption or guardianship is finalized, families are eligible for other types of services provided through DCFS.

Information on an existing adoption or guardianship subsidy can be obtained from the subsidy worker at these DCFS offices.

Information on the Birth Family

Non-Identifying Information and Search and Reunion Services

Adult adoptees, adoptive parents of children under 21 and birth families can contact the Midwest Adoption Center at 847-298-9096 for non-identifying information from their adoption files and/or to seek search and reunion services.

Adoption Registry

The Illinois Department of Public Health operates an Adoption Registry for adult adoptees and birth parents to record their names with the Registry for the purpose of sharing identifying information. For information to be shared, both the adult adoptee and the birth parent must be registered. The Adoption Registry includes a Medical Exchange. If a medical information form is completed by any party to the adoption, the \$40 registration fee is waived. Call the Midwest Adoption Center at 847-298-9096 for information.

Education Resources

Youth formerly under DCFS care who are now adopted or living with guardians are eligible to apply for the DCFS Scholarship program. See page 25 for more information. More information is available in Section 6, page 4. Additional information is available on the DCFS “Get Goal’d” website, www.youthincare.illinois.gov, dedicated to older youth.

Preservation Services

Sometimes, families may feel they need support in resolving child or family-related issues that are threatening the adoption or guardianship. “Preservation services” are available statewide to assess a family’s needs. They offer crisis intervention, individual and family therapy, family and child support groups, advocacy and other specialized services aimed at preserving the adoption or guardianship. Families who privately adopted a child or adopted through another adoption agency may also be eligible for these services. The agencies that provide preservation services are listed in the Post Adoption and Guardianship Services booklet. For more information, call the Adoption Support line at 888-96-ADOPT.

ADOPTION OR GUARDIANSHIP?

Which is Better for the Child and Our Family?

Children need to feel secure to develop in a healthy way. Two important ways that children can feel more secure are through their family's ability to operate independently without feeling that someone could easily disrupt the family and by providing certainty that they will remain together as a family for life—having a *permanent* family and home. Without permanency, children often experience doubt, uncertainty and hesitancy about where they belong and who is going to care for them. A secure home and a family committed to caring gives the child a sense of attachment which is needed to promote healthy growth and development.

Even if you are willing to raise the child in your care until adulthood, unless you have *legal* responsibility for the child, your family situation cannot be considered “permanent.” For example, if the child welfare system continues to maintain *legal* responsibility for the child instead of you, then the child's caseworker must continue to monitor the care of the child. The court will continue to review your case, and there is always the possibility that the child will be removed from your family. Legal permanency allows the child welfare system and the court system to close the child's case and allows your family to raise the children and make important decisions for them without state intrusion. With *legal* permanency, children feel a sense of security.

In order for a child to be adopted, the birth parents' rights must be legally terminated or surrendered. This means that the birth parents' rights are *permanently* taken away. If you choose to become the legal guardian of the child, the birth parents' rights do *not* have to be terminated and the child could someday be returned to them.

Not every foster family adopts children or becomes a legal guardian, but many do. In fact, the majority of the children adopted in Illinois are adopted by their foster family. While adoption and guardianship provide you with many of the same rights (for example, enrolling the child in school, consent to major medical care, etc.), adoption is a lifelong legal relationship. The legal relationship with guardianship ends when the child turns 18 and is considered an adult. However, both adoption and guardianship allow for lifelong emotional ties and relationships.

Your caseworker and the rest of the child welfare team can help determine what is the best permanent home arrangement for the child in your care. The best way to help make this decision is to tell your caseworker everything you know about the child and keep in mind what you truly believe to be in the child's best interest for future care.

The following pages may help you and your family decide your role in the future of the child in your home.

The following series of questions may help you think through what might be best for the child in your care:

	Yes	No
1. If the child/ren cannot return home to their parent/s, the best long range plan is for them to stay with me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I am interested in caring for the child/ren without caseworker intervention.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I am capable of caring for the child/ren without caseworker intervention.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I have the support from family, friends, community, etc. that I need to raise the child/ren.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I am willing and able to work with the school to address the child/ren's needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I am willing and able to manage visits/relationships between the parent/s and child/ren to ensure the child/ren's safety. (Note: This is only a consideration for <i>guardianship</i> when parental rights have not been terminated. When a child is adopted, the adoptive parents may decide if a child will have contact with their biological parents.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I am willing and able to continue providing a safe and stable home environment for the child/ren.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I am confident in my ability to manage family issues such as illness and child-rearing problems.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. I do not have health conditions that would significantly limit my ability to care for the child/ren.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. I am willing to accept the subsidy payment in lieu of my current payment/s.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. I am aware of the services available in the subsidy agreement and am willing to accept those services to meet the child's needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. The child is well integrated into my family.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. I am willing to pursue adoption for the child/ren.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- If your answers to all of the previous questions were "yes," then *most likely* you should discuss adopting the child with your caseworker.
- If you answered "no" to number 13, then you should discuss being named the child's legal guardian with or without receipt of a subsidy.
- If several of your answers were "no," your caseworker will discuss other options for the child.

Please also consider the following if your answer to number 13 was “no”.

- | | Agree | Disagree |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. The child does not want to be adopted (age 14 and over). | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I do not want the birth parents’ rights to be terminated. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I am separated and do not want to obtain a divorce.* | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I am uncomfortable with changing our family relationships. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I do not want the child to be my heir. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I feel too old to adopt. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. I am hopeful that the birth parent/s will ultimately get the child back. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Your caseworker can discuss your answers to the above statements and help you determine whether adoption would be best for the child.

* If you are separated, but not divorced, you may be eligible to adopt a child if you have been separated more than one year (*DCFS Procedure 402*).

What Are the Differences Between Adoption and Guardianship?

	Adoption	Guardianship
Legal Status	<p>Birth parent/s' rights are voluntarily relinquished or involuntarily terminated.</p> <p>The adoptive parent/s is given all the rights and responsibilities that once belonged to the birth parent/s.</p> <p>When the adoptive parents are married, both spouses must adopt unless separated for more than a year.</p> <p>Adoption is a permanent, lifelong, legal relationship.</p>	<p>Birth parent/s' rights may or may not be voluntarily relinquished or involuntarily terminated.</p> <p>Guardian is given legal responsibility for the child and assumes the rights of care, custody, and supervision of the child.</p> <p>When married, either one or both spouses may be named guardian.</p> <p>The birth parent/s retain "residual rights" when parental rights have not been relinquished or terminated. These rights include: visitation, consent to adoption, choice of religion and the right to claim the body of a deceased child.</p> <p>The court makes all decisions regarding the transfer of guardianship, but the birth parent/s can request that guardianship be taken away from the caregiver and that the child be returned to their care if parental rights have not been terminated.</p> <p>If the birth parent/s' parental rights are terminated the guardian may legally adopt the child with DCFS' help.</p>
Decision Making	<p>All decisions are made by the adoptive parent/s.</p>	<p>Major decisions regarding school, medical treatment and consent for most other major life decisions are made by the guardian.</p> <p>Birth parent/s retain important rights, e.g., choice of religion, visitation and consent to adoption when parental rights have not been relinquished or terminated.</p>

	Adoption	Guardianship
Financial Assistance	<p>The adoptive parent/s, whether receiving a subsidy or not, are financially responsible for the support of the child. Financial assistance is available for the adoption of many department children. See page 8 for details.</p> <p>Note: Adoption assistance and subsidized guardianship ongoing monthly payments are the same as the foster care board payments that were received while the child was in foster care.</p>	<p>A guardian, whether receiving a subsidy or not, is financially liable for the support of the child. Financial assistance is available for eligible children. See page 13 for details. The guardian is responsible for financially supporting the child until DCFS stops the subsidy payment and the court vacates guardianship (whichever event happens last). If the birth parent/s' rights have not been terminated they can be held responsible to contribute to the financial support of the child.</p>
Relationship with the Birth Parent/s	<p>The adoptive parent/s have the right to determine if the child will have any relationship with the birth parent/s.</p>	<p>If the birth parent/s' rights have not been terminated, they have the right to visit the child unless a court orders no visits. The guardian will have input into how the visits are structured, but can not prevent visits from occurring. If the guardian and the parent/s can not work out visitation scheduling, one of the parties may wish to seek court involvement. Birth parent/s also have the right to petition the court to have the child returned to them.</p>
Child's Legal Name	<p>The adoptive parent/s determine the child's legal name.</p>	<p>Usually the child retains his/her own legal last name.</p>
Inheritance	<p>An adopted child has all of the same rights as birth children when the adoptive parent/s does not have a will. Otherwise, inheritance rights are established through a valid will as they are for birth children.</p>	<p>The child has no rights of inheritance from the guardian unless the child has been included in the guardian's will.</p>
Consent of the Child	<p>A child who is 14 years of age or older must consent to his/her own adoption.</p>	<p>A child who is 14 years of age or older must consent to the transfer of guardianship from the department to an individual. In addition, a child who is 13 years of age or older can petition for a change of guardianship.</p>

	Adoption	Guardianship
Death of Adoptive Parent/ Guardian or Termination of Adoption/ Guardian-ship	A child adopted with adoption assistance remains eligible for adoption assistance when he/she is orphaned due to the death of his/her adoptive parent/s or when a court terminates the adoptive parent/s parental rights. He or she can continue to receive adoption assistance if adopted by someone else.	A child that moves to subsidized guardianship under KinGAP does not retain eligibility for a subsidy in a subsequent guardianship.
Returning a Child to DCFS	An adopted child would have to be found by the court to be abused, neglected or dependent in order to have DCFS again assume legal responsibility for the child.	A child for whom an individual has been named guardian would have to be found by the court to be abused, neglected or dependent or other good cause must exist in order for DCFS to again assume legal responsibility for the child. Or the guardian or other interested party would have to petition the court to have the guardian relieved of the responsibility of guardianship.
<p>Both adoption and guardianship are evidence of strong commitments to children. The commitment entered into by adopting a child is one that lasts for a lifetime. Although guardianship legally ends when the child reaches adulthood, most legal guardians enter into this commitment intending it to be a lifetime relationship. Thus, adoption and guardianship are commitments to be taken seriously by caregivers.</p>		

PREPARING YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

Overview of the Independent Living Option

Why would “independence” be chosen for a foster youth, instead of adoption or guardianship?

A permanent family for older foster youth may not be possible, or in the best interests of the youth. Independence can be chosen for a youth over age 15, only after returning home, adoption and guardianship have been ruled out. Sometimes, older youth do not want to be adopted or have a guardian because they are very connected to their own family. Pregnant and/or parenting teens may feel ready to establish their own family living situation.

Specific guidelines for choosing “independence” for a youth over age 15 are:

- return home, adoption and guardianship have been ruled out; and
- the youth shows that he or she is capable and willing to care for him or herself, become economically self-sufficient and/or is establishing a family of their own; or
- a child who has a physical or mental disability demonstrates the ability, capability and willingness to care for themselves with proper support; and
- the child demonstrates the ability to achieve and maintain progress towards independence through continued cooperation with the service plan; or
- the court has ordered a permanency goal of independence, where the minor over age 16 will be in substitute care pending emancipation.

What can caregivers do to help transition youth to independent living?

Youth face many challenges in leaving foster care. Caregivers can help kids make the transition between foster care and being independent less scary and lonely by providing personal help and support to youth in making key personal and educational decisions. Experiences provided in the home can help and support youth in learning skills they will need to live independently. Caregivers can also be helpful in connecting foster youth to agency or DCFS-sponsored support programs and scholarships, as well as other educational or personal supports offered outside the child welfare system. Several PRIDE In-Service training modules are available to caregivers to help them parent teens in foster care. Contact the DCFS Office of Training at www.dcfstraining.org.

Caregivers can also encourage youth to develop and maintain family relationships. If the young person has siblings in DCFS care, he or she will be included in developing the Visitation and Contact Plan when it is clinically appropriate. The caseworker will assist the youth in connecting with siblings who are not in DCFS care and help obtain transportation for sibling visits.

What services will youth receive from DCFS or the private agency?

When a youth reaches the age of 14, the DCFS or private agency caseworker will meet with him or her to complete a life skills assessment. The life skills assessment is a tool designed to help caseworkers review a youth's knowledge and skills related to subjects such as money management, health and safety, job seeking and retention, nutrition, housing, education and similar activities.

Based on the results of the assessment, a transition plan is developed to guide the youth and the caregiver on what the youth can do to improve knowledge and skills needed to live on her own. This plan becomes part of the youth's overall client service plan and will be reviewed at future administrative case reviews.

A wide variety of supportive services are available to youth depending on his or her needs either directly through the department or through a referral to a community resource, including the following:

- **Life Skills Class:** available for youth who require more structured skills training; generally appropriate for youth aged 16 or older. Some of the areas covered include renting an apartment, seeking legal advice, shopping for the best bargain and choosing a roommate. Decision-making skills are also emphasized;
- **Educational Supports:** tutoring, GED preparation, scholarships;
- **Job-related Services:** vocational training, job placement, etc.;
- **Recreational Events and Workshops;**
- **Support Groups:** Youth in Care Network, Youth Advisory Board; and
- **Independent Living Placements:** Supervised Independent Living Program, Youth in Transition Program, Youth in College Program.

DCFS-Sponsored Youth Development Programs

Youth in Transition (YTP)

The Youth in Transition Program (YTP) provides transition services and cash maintenance stipends to youth who are in the care of the department, capable of living on their own, and age 17 or over (16 with a high school diploma or GED). They must also be approved for either the Youth in Employment (YIE) or the Youth in College Program (YIC). The purpose of these programs is to motivate and empower youth in transition into economic independence and maturity.

Eligibility for YIE

- the youth must be 17 years of age, but not yet 21;
- the department must have court-ordered legal responsibility for the youth;
- no room and board payments are being made on their behalf;

-
- the youth must have received basic independent living skills training and achieved minimal readiness for independent living as demonstrated through a Daniel Memorial Life Skill Assessment administered within six months prior to the youth applying for the YIE;
 - all other monetary benefits for which the youth is eligible must be applied for; and
 - youth must be employed and working a minimum of 20 hours per week.

Cash Benefits to the Youth

The Youth in Employment Program provides transition services and a cash maintenance stipend each month. Youth in Employment Program services and stipend will be terminated when the youth is legally emancipated, has completed 24 months in the program, reached 21 years of age, has successfully completed service agreement tasks and achieved the permanency goal, or fails to meet continued requirements of the program. See Appendix F of Procedures 302 for program financial provisions. Contact your caseworker or agency about the YIE program. Details may also be found on the DCFS-sponsored website: www.youthincare.illinois.gov.

Youth in College/Vocational Training Program

The Youth in College Program (YIC) provides supplemental services and cash maintenance payments to youth for whom the department is legally responsible and who are enrolled full-time in college or other post-high school education programs.

Benefits:

- youth may choose to attend an accredited vocational school, four-year college or community college;
- a monthly grant in the amount of \$471 is provided each month for up to four (4) years. Direct deposit is strongly recommended;
- medical cards are provided to Illinois students until participants reach 21;
- reimbursement is available for books not covered by financial aid;
- transition managers are available for assistance;
- benefits are available until the earlier of four (4) years, or the semester of the youth's 23rd birthday; and
- the youth is eligible for a one-time start up funding in the amount of \$200 to be used for initial living expenses.

Eligibility Requirements:

To be eligible, the youth must:

- be under DCFS' guardianship;
- have high school diploma or GED certificate or be enrolled as a full-time student in an accredited university or a vocational training program;
- complete the CFS 449 (Youth in College/Vocational Training Program application);
- be at least 16 years old and not yet 21;
- maintain at least "C" average each semester;
- maintain full-time status (12 hours fall & spring, 6 hours in summer, or an approved summer internship). Enrollment will be verified through the National Student Clearinghouse;
- submit class schedule at the start of each semester and grades at the end of each semester;
- report any change of address promptly to the Business Office by fax at 309-693-5433; and
- apply for financial aid every year to cover tuition or room and board costs.

Community College Payment Program

The Community College Payment Program allows youth under DCFS guardianship enrolling in an Illinois community college the opportunity to have their in-district tuition, fees, and books paid for by DCFS if they are not paid by financial aid grants. Payment requests can be submitted for vocational training programs that are part of the community college curriculum. **Requests for out-of-district and prior fiscal years' tuition will not be approved.**

Benefits:

- payment of in-district community college tuition, fees, and books not covered by financial aid grants for a maximum of 4 semesters; and
- services and assistance as required from the caseworker and/or department education advisors.

Eligibility Criteria:

To be eligible, the youth must:

- be under DCFS' guardianship;
- be accepted for enrollment by an in-district community college;
- not use his/her four semesters of payments;
- maintain a "C" average; and
- apply for financial aid through FAFSA, designating the community college to receive funds and must complete all requested documentation from the school's financial aid department. FAFSA funding is to be used before requesting payment from DCFS.

DCFS Scholarships

DCFS provides a medical card, monthly maintenance payments and tuition waivers if the recipient attends an Illinois state university.

Benefits:

- an award in the amount of \$471 is provided each month for up to four (4) years. Direct deposit is strongly recommended;
- a medical card is provided to Illinois students until the earlier of four years or age 23;
- a tuition waiver is available to any Illinois state-funded community college or university;
- reimbursement of the cost of books not covered by financial aid is available;
- education advisors and transition managers will render assistance as needed; and
- benefits are available for four (4) years, or the date on which the participant receives a bachelor's degree.

Eligibility Requirements:

- youth who are at least 16 years old, but not yet 21 on the scholarship application deadline date of March 31 of the current year are eligible to apply;
- the department must have court-ordered legal guardianship for the applicant or the department must have had legal guardianship for the applicant prior to the adoption being finalized, or the applicant must be in the Subsidized Guardianship Program;
- the youth must successfully compete for a full-term DCFS college scholarship;
- the youth must maintain at least a "C" average each semester;
- the youth must maintain full-time status (12 hours fall & spring, 6 hours or an approved internship in summer). Enrollment will be verified through the National Student Clearinghouse;
- submit the class schedule at the start of each semester and grades at the end of the semester; and
- report change of address promptly to Business Office.

The DCFS Scholarship is a competitive based process. A scholarship winner can use the scholarship for up to a four-year (bachelor's) degree. The DCFS application packet is submitted by the youth's caseworker. Caregivers can be helpful in making sure that their foster youth obtains all necessary documents and completes an application in time to make the annual DCFS deadline.

See Rule 312 (DCFS Scholarship Program) for specific program information.

Education and Training Vouchers

The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program assists youth with post-secondary education related expenses not covered by financial aid grants.

Benefits:

- payment of up to \$5000 annually of education-related expenses such as tuition, fees, books, supplies, uniforms, equipment and/or transportation not covered by other grants or scholarships;
- funding is available until age 21; and
- if the student is enrolled in a post-secondary program, has used ETV funding before age 21, and is making satisfactory progress toward completion of the program, funding is available until age 23.

Eligibility Requirements:

- youth for whom DCFS is legally responsible or who aged out of care at age 18 or older; or
- youth who have achieved permanency at age 16 or older through either subsidized guardianship or adoption.

Employment Incentive Program

The Employment Incentive Program (EIP) is designed to provide financial and supplemental services to help youth gain marketable skills through on-the-job work experience or through job training programs. Youth who complete the EIP are equipped with the employment skills and work ethics necessary for a successful transition to independence. Youth living in foster care, supervised independent living, group homes or institutional placements may apply for the EIP.

Benefits:

- monthly payment of \$150.00 with documentation for a maximum of 12 months or age 21, whichever comes first; and
- start-up funding for work-related items (e.g., tools, work clothing, etc.). Funding is need-based and limited to a one-time disbursement of up to \$200.00 with required documentation.

Eligibility Requirements:

- be 17 years of age, and not yet 21;
- have a high school diploma or a General Education Development (GED) certificate;
- be under court-ordered legal responsibility of DCFS;
- complete Ansell Casey life skills assessment; and
- be involved in job training through a certified job skills training program (e.g., Job Corps, apprenticeship, internship), or be employed for at least

one month prior to applying for the EIP and be working a minimum of 20 hours per week.

Youth Housing Assistance Program

DCFS may provide Youth Housing Assistance to help attain or maintain housing stability for youth that the department currently has or previously had legal responsibility. There are two parts to Youth Housing Assistance: Housing Advocacy and Cash Assistance, each of which is explained below. Often a client will need housing advocacy services first. Once housing is identified, that same client often needs cash assistance. Other clients will not need housing advocacy at all and will simply utilize cash assistance. Still others just need help finding housing and do not need any cash assistance. Call for details.

Housing Advocacy:

Housing advocacy services assist young adults in obtaining and/or maintaining stable housing. Services include:

- assistance in securing affordable housing;
- consumer education;
- budget counseling;
- linkages to community based resources (i.e. assistance with utilities, clothing and food); and
- follow-up services for a minimum of three months after the client secures appropriate housing.

Note: Housing Advocacy does not include any money.

Eligibility Requirements:

Youth receiving housing advocacy services must meet all three of the following criteria:

1. be at least 17 ½ and less than 21 years of age;
2. be the legal responsibility of DCFS within six months of case closure, or have aged out of DCFS care; (Note: Youth that entered adoption or subsidized guardianship after their 14th birthday are also eligible.); and
3. have an income that is sufficient to meet rent and utility costs; or be working to obtain that income. (While housing advocacy can begin before income is in place, it is extremely unlikely that youth will be able to secure housing without sufficient income. Housing advocates can often help with employment.)

Cash Assistance:

Assistance will vary depending on a client's situation. Cash assistance may be authorized for the following reasons:

- housing security deposit;
- rent (limited circumstances);
- beds for the client and the client's children;
- current utility bills or utility deposits;
- appliances;
- partial housing subsidy for a period of one year following case closure (housing costs must exceed 30% of income and assistance cannot continue past the client's 21st birthday); and
- items required by the client to avoid or manage a crisis.

Eligibility Requirements:

Youth receiving Cash Assistance must meet all four of the following criteria:

1. be at least 18 and less than 21 years of age;
2. be legally the responsibility of DCFS and ready for case closure or have aged out of DCFS care (Note: Youth that moved to adoption or subsidized guardianship are NOT eligible for cash assistance);
3. have completed a budget statement (Form CFS 370-5C) that demonstrates that with any subsidy and all other income they will be able to cover all remaining living expenses (e.g. housing, utilities, clothing, food); and
4. need cash assistance in order to attain or maintain stable housing.

Referral Process or Questions:

Please discuss this program with your caseworker. For more information, caseworkers may contact the Youth Housing Assistance Coordinator at 312-814-5571.

Supervised Independent Living Program (SILP)

This program provides supportive services and living maintenance to youth. SILP is offered through private agencies contracted by DCFS to provide services. These agencies provide services such as various types of advocacy, training, counseling and monitoring services.

Youth who participate in this program must be:

- age 16 and older, but not yet 21; and
- under DCFS' guardianship.

and they must:

- have a permanency goal of "27" in accordance with Administrative Procedures #5;
- have some money management skills;
- be able to live in the community without continuous adult supervision;
- have the desire and ability to cooperate with the supervising agency and their program rules; and
- be able to manage day to day living skills in an apartment or room and board arrangement such as meal preparation, purchasing and maintaining clothing and keeping themselves and their living environment reasonably clean.

Other requirements and policy governing the Supervised Independent Living Program are in DCFS Rule and Procedures, Subpart C – Appendix H - P302.

Medical Coverage after DCFS Care

The medical card that youth receive while in foster care makes it possible to take care of a wide range of routine and critical medical needs. When a child's case closes after they leave DCFS foster care after age 18, the medical card ends. The young person is often left in medical care limbo with few options. That changed with Illinois' implementation of the federal Affordable Care Act. As of January 2014 there is a new Medicaid eligibility group that includes young people up to the age of 26 who were formerly in foster care. Additionally, young people who left DCFS through adoption or guardianship can also apply for health care benefits through Medicaid. They may be eligible based on low-income, disability or if they have dependent children.

Eligibility information and the application process are on the website Application for Benefits Eligibility (ABE) at www.ABE.illinois.gov. Applications for Medicaid can also be submitted by calling the toll-free number 800-843-6154. The ABE website is streamlined and designed to be easy to use, and if needed the DCFS Health Services staff can help with questions. Call 217-557-2689.

PREGNANT AND/OR PARENTING YOUTH

Caregivers serve as parents to a pregnant and/or parenting youth, who parents their child. The foster youth, as a parent, has the same legal rights and responsibilities as any parent, even if the youth is a minor (under 18 years old). Caregivers, the caseworker, the agency and DCFS provide the environment and supports to allow the youth to become self-sufficient and be able to live independently. In most cases, both the youth and his or her children live together with the foster family.

Caregivers of youth who are pregnant and/or parenting:

- have primary responsibility for the youth and a secondary responsibility for his or her children;
- receive a board payment for the youth, but not for his or her child or children;
- receive a special service fee per child with the normal board rate to pass on to the parenting youth to purchase necessities for the child, such as diapers or clothing; and
- must have a foster parent license which accommodates both the youth and his or her child or children living in the foster home. Example: A teen mom and her baby living with the foster family takes up two spaces of a foster family license, although the youth's baby is not a child in foster care.

This unique dynamic of parenting a youth who is parenting a child presents implied responsibilities for the caregivers of:

- modeling how to be a responsible adult;
Examples: Budgeting money, keeping appointments, seeking medical care
- modeling parenting to teach the youth how to parent.
Example: Teaching a youth how to appropriately discipline a two-year-old
- being involved with the father or mother of the youth's child due to visits, dating, medical situations, or others situations involving the other youthful parent;
- working closely with the caseworker and medical professionals with issues related to fostering a youth who is sexually active;
- letting the youth take personal responsibility for the welfare of his or her child, while ensuring the safety and welfare of the child.
- Caregivers must be careful observers and are mandated reporters in reporting abuse or neglect of, not only the youth, but also the youth's child. But, caregivers must be able to parent the youth like any other — without using the DCFS hotline to intercede if the youth stays out late, or displays other normal teen behavior; and
- guiding the youth through educational and vocational decisions which will influence their future and the future of their child/ren, with the caseworker.

If you may be interested in fostering a pregnant and/or parenting teen, supports are available. (See pages 33-34.) If a child in your care becomes pregnant, notify the caseworker to get connected to services.

Supports for Caregivers of Pregnant or Parenting Youth

Special Programs

In Cook County, DCFS contracts with one agency to oversee the foster care programs designed to support both the foster family and the pregnant or parenting teen and his or her child/ren living with the foster family. If you would consider fostering a pregnant and/or parenting teen, ask your agency about becoming a foster family within this program.

Outside Cook County, caregivers will find general support through their agency and caseworker.

Special Service Fees

A special service fee is available to caregivers serving the parenting population. DCFS can approve this fee for the provision of items for a parenting foster youth that are over and above board payment needs of the caregiver.

Supports for Pregnant and/or Parenting Foster Youth

Youth in foster care are not eligible to receive Public Aid because they are already receiving supports through DCFS as a child under state care. There are additional supports available.

Medical Card

A pregnant and/or parenting youth, as a child in the foster care system, receives a medical card.

Independent Living Services

Pregnant and/or parenting teens will receive life skills assessment, transition planning and supportive services through their caseworker. A life skills curriculum which specifically addresses the specialized needs of pregnant and parenting teenagers has been developed and is being utilized statewide.

Education

Encouraging the youth to stay in school and guiding the youth through decisions about educational alternatives, with the caseworker, is one of the most important functions of the caregiver. Some local school districts have programs just for pregnant and/or parenting teens. The youth's caseworker and the agency should be able to help you find information about these programs.

Day Care

One of the most important supports available is day care for the youth's child or children, which enables the youth to stay in school.

Other support programs meeting the individual needs of the teen are available through DCFS, contracted community agencies, the local school district, the Illinois State Board of Education and other state governmental departments.

Supports for Children of Foster Youth

Food Stamps: Children of foster youth are usually eligible.

Medical Card: Children of foster youth each receive a medical card which covers medical care and prescriptions.

Special Service Fee: The special service fee added to the monthly payment check of the caregiver should be given to the foster youth to spend on the care of his/her child/ren, not to include day care.

WIC: Women, Infants and Children – Children of foster youth may be eligible.

Rights of Pregnant and/or Parenting Teens

Families providing or considering foster care to youth, **male or female**, who are pregnant or have a child that they take care of need to understand the youth's rights and what services are available to the teen and their child.

Youth in foster care who are pregnant, or have a child they are caring for have these rights:

- to be placed in a stable, safe place to live with their child, unless a separate placement is necessary for safety or treatment reasons;
- to continue their education and obtain a high school diploma even though they are pregnant or a parent;
- to receive necessary day care for their child/ren at no cost to them;
- to receive necessary transportation to and from the day care while they attend school;
- to receive appropriate services necessary to help them achieve in school.
Examples: Tutoring and GED preparation;
- to receive information and services to prevent pregnancy or make decisions about pregnancy and parenting;
- to receive any necessary ongoing prenatal, medical, or dental care wherever they live;
- to actively participate in the care and support of their child/ren by having appropriate regular visits when they do not have physical custody of them;
- to receive appropriate services, such as counseling, to help them with any problems they may have;
- to have necessary assistance in learning to be a better parent or how to live on their own;
- to receive help planning to use their monthly funds for the adequate care of their child/ren;

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- to be free of discrimination based on their status as being pregnant or a parent.
 - to continue to receive appropriate services as long as they are in DCFS care, which may continue until age 21 if necessary; and
 - to leave a mental health facility after staff of that facility state that they are no longer in need of mental health hospitalization.

Written Notice of Rights and How to Appeal Decisions

All pregnant and/or parenting teens receive a written notice of these rights at the first Administrative Case Review (ACR). If they believe 1) they or their child/ren require additional or different services, 2) they need a different placement or, 3) their rights as described have been ignored, this notice instructs them to request help at the ACR or to contact their case manager.

If their request for help is denied, they may appeal the decision by sending a written request to DCFS within 45 calendar days of the date of the notice of the decision. This same notice gives the teen the DCFS address to use in filing the appeal as well as the address and phone number of the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago (800-824-4050) where they may get legal information or help.



*The greatest gifts you can give your children
are the roots of responsibility and the wings of
independence.*

— Denis Waitley