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Advocates
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Leveraging Opportunities to Enhance and Expand ILP Programming

This document provides county Independent Living Programs (ILP) ideas for using their Chafee funds to innovate and enhance programming for young people in and leaving foster care. Each year the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) provides states the opportunity to request Chafee funds that remain unused by other states to help ensure that these funds are maximized. States receive these re-allocated funds in addition to their normal allocation.

The reallocation for the 2023 federal fiscal year was particularly large because it included unused funds from the \$400 million in Chafee funds that were allocated pursuant to Division X of the Consolidated Appropriation Act of 2021 during the pandemic. While California’s general Chafee allocation for federal FY 2023 was a little over \$16 million, it also received [an additional \\$15 million](#) in reallocated Chafee funds. CDSS is distributing those additional funds directly to county ILPs. *ILPs will have until September 30, 2024 to obligate those funds and until January 2025 to liquidate those funds so time is of the essence.*

ILPs always face great demand for services and these funds will be welcome to meet existing needs. We hope ILPs will also consider how some portion of these additional funds could be used to innovate and enhance programming, especially using some of the lessons learned from the pandemic and from efforts to address the housing crisis in California. This document provides information on activities to consider with details about implementation. We are happy to add to this resource so please do not hesitate to reach out to Jenny Pokempner at jpokempner@ylc.org to suggest an activity or program for which your IL Program would like more information. We would like to partner with you to make these funds go as far as possible to enhance the service array for Transition Aged Youth.

I. Chafee Fund Uses

Chafee funds are intended to provide for an array of services, supports, and resources to help young people between ages 14¹ and 21 to assist in making a successful transition to adulthood. The Chafee program was renamed in 2014– John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood– to reinforce that Chafee funds can be used for skill building, services and resources *and* building relationships and community connections. These funds can be used while young people are in foster care and after exiting care. Chafee funds remain very flexible and fund use is guided by the broad purposes laid out in federal law. Below are some of the examples provided in the law:

- transitional services such as **assistance in obtaining a high school diploma and post-secondary education, career exploration, vocational training, job placement and retention, training and opportunities to practice daily living skills (such as financial literacy training and driving instruction), substance abuse prevention, and preventive health activities (including smoking avoidance, nutrition education, and pregnancy prevention);**

¹ Federal law defines eligibility for Chafee services to include youth who had experience in foster care at age 14 and older. 42 U.S.C.A. 677 (a)(1)-(3). California regulation makes serving youth under age 16 in ILP as an option. [MPP 31-525.33](#).



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- to help children who have experienced foster care at age 14 or older achieve **meaningful, permanent connections with a caring adult**;
- to help children who have experienced foster care at age 14 or older engage in age or **developmentally appropriate activities, positive youth development, and experiential learning** that reflects what their peers in intact families experience;
- to provide **financial, housing, counseling, employment, education, and other appropriate support and services to former foster care recipients** between 18 and 21 years of age (or 23 if the states selects);
- to ensure children who are likely to remain in foster care until 18 years of age have regular, ongoing **opportunities to engage in age or developmentally-appropriate activities**;

42 U.S.C.A. 677 (a).

Because of an infusion of Chafee funds during the pandemic, the Administration for Children, Youth and Families had an opportunity to remind agencies of the flexibility of the funds and highlighted permissible activities:

- **Partner** with national and state organizations to assist young adults, including for activities relating to **locating youth, outreach and marketing**.
- **Hire youth/young adults with lived experience** in child welfare to provide navigation services to fellow youth/young adults.
- **Navigation services** to help to connect youth to services and support them as they apply for or engage in those services.
- **Employ youth/young adults, at the agency level and/or as part of contractor staff**, to provide outreach and support to fellow youth and young adults. This could include paid internships for youth/young adults to help prepare them to re-enter the job market.
- **Expand contracts with service providers who are currently working with youth and young adults** formerly in foster care to provide services through the agencies to which such youth are already connected (e.g., supportive housing providers and Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) grantees).
- **Establish websites, hotlines, and other mechanisms** to track and provide information on available services and resources.
- **Provide unrestricted one-time or monthly direct financial assistance** to youth/young adults to assist them in meeting their needs during the pandemic.

[Guidance and Instruction related to the Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act, ACYF-CB-PI-21-04 \(March 9, 2021\).](#)

The Chafee program's flexibility gives counties an enormous opportunity to be responsive to what young people need and to experiment with new ideas as well as to build on existing strengths.



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II. Lessons Learned from the Pandemic about Direct Financial Assistance and the Expanding Use of Technology for Outreach and Engagement

The experience of the pandemic showed that both older youth who are in foster care and those who have aged out face challenges meeting basic needs (food, clothing, transportation, other monthly bills). While these needs were exacerbated during the pandemic, they continue. See John Burton Advocates for Youth: [Hanging on by a Thread: The Cumulative Impact of the Pandemic on Youth Who Have Been in Foster Care or Homeless](#) (John Burton Advocates for Youth May 2021). Often when these needs go unmet, pursuing other goals like those related to employment and education get stalled. During the pandemic, California and other state child welfare agencies provided unconditional direct financial assistance to young people. Many young people reported that the payments were extremely useful and helped them address critical unmet needs. In addition, research showed that the impact of the payments was multileveled. For example, the Allegheny County Children and Youth Agency in Pennsylvania administered a large direct payments program that served 1,901 young people. The agency was able to survey a large number of those receiving funds and found that these payments allowed the majority to meet their basic needs, with the biggest impact on young women and Black youth. [Older Youth Pandemic Relief: The Impact of Cash Payments Made to Former Foster Care Youth During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) (October 3, 2022). The survey also showed that the connection made through providing the payments resulted in the re-engagement of large numbers of Chafee eligible youth with services. Anecdotal experience also showed that providing unconditional aid helped build trust between the young person and the agency and changed the dynamic of the relationship in that youth felt—in a very concrete way—that they were trusted to know what is best for them.

The pandemic pushed us all, including the child welfare system, to expand our use of technology and social media for the purposes of keeping connected and even delivering services. While the shift back to many in-person activities is welcome, the practice of using technology for outreach, communication, and follow-up provides an infrastructure to build on to increase our capacity to connect with young people in an age-appropriate way and to have more avenues to share resources and information.

III. Leveraging Chafee Funds to Address the Continuing Housing Crisis

The housing crisis in California continues to worsen and to burden young adults greatly as many enter the rental market without a rental history, financial resources, or parental support. Not having sufficient housing and funds to pay for housing are significant challenges for the required transition planning process. Work in the counties and across the country has shown the effectiveness of providing services



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that improve the chances of finding and using housing subsidies and securing a unit and staying housed. These critical services, which are Chafee eligible, include: assistance with completing housing subsidy applications and rental applications, recruiting landlords and providing them incentives to rent to young people, and provision of security deposits and first month's rent. These services have been helpful in getting youth housed using existing programs, but they also provide an opportunity to bring in more Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) housing vouchers. The number of FYI vouchers available to California and all states has greatly increased—as recently as March, Congress appropriated \$25 million for non-competitive FYI vouchers. In this federal fiscal year, which began in October, each Housing Authority has the opportunity to request up to 50 FYI vouchers. There are several [recent policies](#) that make it easier for counties to draw down these vouchers for young people. Investing in more housing related services will help counties successfully use these vouchers and support the housing stability of young people.

IV. **Insights from [Supporting Successful Transitions into Adulthood for Youth in Foster Care: Reforming California's Independent Living Program](#)**

Released in March of 2023, the Report benefited from input from about 175 transition age youth who have participated in ILP in California as well as community stakeholders. The Report developed the following recommendations regarding programming that may be of use for ILP programs to consider as they design their service array:

- Identify and address barriers to young people engaging in ILP services, including providing transportation and child care options.
- Provide greater outreach and communication, including through social media, to ensure that youth currently or formerly in foster care are aware of the full breadth of opportunities offered through ILP by telling them early and often about the array of services and supports available to them.
- Expand services that support developing and maintaining relationships with supportive adults.
- Expand capacity to connect young people with community based services, especially in the areas of housing and employment, that they can access in an ongoing way past leaving foster care.
- Enhance capacity and infrastructure to incorporate youth voice and choice into ILP program design and delivery of services, including youth boards and regular surveys.
- Hire young people as staff and/or as consultants to provide services and leadership.

V. **Examples of Chafee Fund Uses to Promote Innovation and Program Enhancement**

Below is the beginning of a list that highlights some of the innovative and exciting activities we are seeing in California and across the country. These activities are eligible uses for Chafee funds. We hope you will consider using some of your Chafee allocation to implement these or other innovative practices.



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Please let us know if you have questions or want more information about any of these programs or activities.

Activity	Key Components	Examples	Why and How This Activity Could Positively Impact Young People?
<p>Expand and Enhance Outreach Activities</p>	<p>Begin outreach efforts no later than age 16.</p> <p>Use an array of mechanisms, especially those that are youth friendly, such as social media and texting.</p> <p>Provide a clear and easily accessible description of the service array and how to access services.</p> <p>Provide transportation and child care.</p> <p>Incentivize participation and engagement in services/support such as by providing gift cards, food, access to other resources or opportunities.</p>	<p>Check for Us outreach in collaboration with Think of Us has developed databases to help with outreach in CA and lessons about marketing for young adults.</p> <p>San Joaquin County ILP collaborates closely with their county Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program (FYSCP) and the local community college’s Guardian Scholars program to provide services and supports to youth.</p> <p>Sacramento County ILP has embedded ILP staff in their local schools. The program subcontracts with four local school districts with large populations of students in foster care, and district foster youth liaisons provide ILP services to youth in their schools.</p> <p>In 2020, Los Angeles County’s ILP launched</p>	<p>The knowledge and skill base for outreach and delivery of services through technology and social media grew during the pandemic. This is a good time to make some of the gains permanent.</p>



		<p>an auto-referral database that is linked to all of America's Job Centers in the county. This has helped them identify and outreach to youth and connect them with employment opportunities.</p> <p>LA County's Volunteer Tax Assistance (VITA) site for foster youth (the Community College Foundation) as well as others across the state incentivize youth who get help preparing their taxes with a gift card. This ensures they get the new Foster Youth Tax Credit, sets them up for future healthy tax filing practices and educates them about filing.</p>	
<p>Expand and Enhance Youth Engagement and Feedback Activities</p>	<p>Create and support permanent advisory opportunities for youth to co-design Chafee programming, including compensating youth for their time.</p> <p>Create ongoing feedback loops to receive and incorporate feedback through the use of surveys, focus groups, etc.</p> <p>Reduce barriers to engagement by providing transportation and child care.</p>	<p>Los Angeles, Napa, San Francisco, Shasta and Solano Counties have youth advisory boards or youth councils made up of ILP participants that advise on programming.</p> <p>Allegheny County in PA developed a survey for ILP eligible youth with the advice of young people. Service updates around pandemic aid and the survey was</p>	<p>Engagement in program design by program users is critical to the success of Chafee services. We now have many examples of ways to build and support youth advisory boards that can be replicated.</p>



	Communicate back to participants how their feedback resulted in changes, new programming, etc.	completed through text.	
Provide Direct Financial Assistance	<p>Direct financial assistance that is unconditional.</p> <p>Providing the opportunity to connect with other ILP services and supports.</p> <p>Direct Cash Transfer Handbook</p> <p>Developing a Direct Cash Transfer Program</p>	Pandemic aid in CA and across the country.	<p>The experience of the pandemic showed how critical financial assistance can be to young people in and out of care to help meet basic needs and provide room to move away from the day-to-day and think about future goals.</p> <p>The experience also showed that providing unconditional cash assistance built trust with young people and improved engagement.</p>
Incentivize Saving by Providing Individual Development Accounts	<p>Match or provide a financial incentive for saving funds for designated uses related to asset building (car, apartment, home, postsecondary training or education).</p> <p>Develop a plan for savings and how funds can be used.</p> <p>Provide an array of skill building and community connection services.</p>	Opportunity Passport	Responsive to young adult development and learning–incentivizing behavior and providing practical experience, connecting saving and earning with skill building.
Provide Housing Security Services (housing	Helping identify housing and housing programs, including completing applications and covering application fees.	<p>United Way in Orange County</p> <p>Lease Up LA</p>	Federal law just passed that appropriated an additional \$25 million for non-competitive FYI vouchers. Using Chafee



<p>search, recruitment of landlords, program navigation and support)</p>	<p>Recruiting landlords.</p> <p>Funds for security deposits, first months rent, utility deposits, etc.</p> <p>Financial incentives for landlords and/or risk remediation funds.</p>	<p>RightWay Foundation</p> <p>Brilliant Corners</p>	<p>funds to help youth access these vouchers and get into housing will maximize funds and improve housing security.</p>
<p>Expand the Provision of Peer Delivered Services</p>	<p>Hiring or contracting peers to provide specified ILP services. Examples of these services are: advocacy, service navigation, outreach. Core elements of these programs include: ensuring equitable compensation, providing adequate training and supervisory support for young people, and providing training and support for the agency staff partners they will be working with.</p>	<p>Napa, Solano and Sonoma Counties’ programs are primarily run by staff with lived experience in the child welfare system.</p> <p>Napa, San Francisco, Solano, and Sonoma Counties run youth-led drop-in centers where youth can access a variety of resources in one place.</p> <p>Contra Costa County Children & Family Services contracts with the Child Abuse Prevention Council to employ four former foster youth as Youth Support Partners who work with youth currently in foster care, mentoring and advocating for them, ensuring they know about the opportunities available through ILP, and assisting them in achieving their goals.</p>	<p>Youth have consistently identified—and most recently in the ILP survey completed by Children Now—this as a need and commented that peer delivered services can be very engaging and more effective.</p> <p>We have a growing body of research showing the effectiveness of peer delivered services.</p> <p>Including peers in the delivery of Chafee services can also be an equity strategy.</p>



		<p>Los Angeles County hires youth formerly in foster care as ILP staff in their regional offices, working alongside their ILP coordinators.</p> <p>iFoster’s TAY Americorps Peer Navigators</p>	
Provide Financial Support for Driving	Making funds available to costs related to driving, including car insurance.	<p>Florida’s Keys to Independence Program</p> <p>Ohio used a portion of its Chafee re-allocation to create a fund so that young people could purchase cars and/or costs related to driving like insurance and repairs.</p>	Driving continues to be critical to meeting education and employment goals. Investing in getting a driver’s license can open up options for young people and make employment, education and housing programming more effective.
Expansion of Service Navigation and Community Connections	Identification of community resources, navigation and support (warm hand off and follow-up) to connect to organizations.	<p>Think of Us’s Virtual Support Services</p> <p>iFoster’s TAY Americorps Peer Navigators</p>	Investing in service connection and making sure youth are connected to existing community services is a great way to more effectively leverage non-Chafee services that youth can access now and as they age, resulting in more stable, ongoing community connections.
Expand services to youth ages 14 and 15	Provision of age-appropriate ILP services for youth ages 14 and 15. Services at this age focus on experiential learning and incentivizing activities.	<p>Monterey Pre-ILP for youth 14-15.</p> <p>Alameda ILP.</p>	Pushing the age when ILP services begin to younger ages has long been recommended as a way to better mirror



			how young people not in the system develop skills and competencies as they transition through adolescence and to adulthood.
Expand post-secondary connections and supports	<p>College tours</p> <p>Financial aid workshops and one-on-one application support</p> <p>Assistance with personal statement writing and college applications</p>	<p>Alameda County ILP provides educational coaching and collaborated with Chabot College and CSU East Bay to host a “Care 2 College” event.</p> <p>A collaboration in Fresno County between the ILP, K-12 systems and local colleges has brought youth on campus for a day of activities related to college access.</p>	<p>The delayed release of the 2024-25 FAFSA has resulted in a 45.2% decrease in financial aid application completion among California’s low-income high school seniors. The priority Cal Grant deadline has been extended to May 2nd, and youth attending community colleges can apply through September 2nd. Many graduating seniors will need additional support with completing financial aid applications over the summer.</p>

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