

NC LINKS

Overview

Positive Youth Development

Eligibility

Outcome-Based Programming

LINKS Funding

The North Carolina LINKS Program

Effective October, 2000, the North Carolina LINKS Program replaced the former Independent Living Program for older teens in foster care. The program is mandated through the John Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, and is funded through Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. The program is designed to help adolescents aged 13 through 20 who are or were in foster care to become connected with the resources they need to help assure that they will have a well-connected, self-sufficient life. LINKS doesn't "stand" for anything. The word LINKS signifies the connections that every adult needs in life: connections to family and friends, to businesses, to employment, education and training; and to resources and opportunities. The LINKS program is supervised by the state LINKS coordinator and is administered by designated staff in each county Department of Social Services.

As of December, 2003 over 3400 youth and young adults ages 13 through 20 were in DSS custody or placement responsibility, most of whom were eligible for services under this program. Additionally 820 young adults had aged out of the North Carolina foster care system and were not yet 21 years of age. There are also many youth and young adults who have left the foster care system who are having a difficult transition to adulthood and who could benefit from short-term re-involvement with LINKS services.

LINKS services include an objective, written assessment of the young person's life skills, goals, and motivation to work toward those goals. The assessments are completed every six months by the youth and by someone who has directly observed the youth's skills, such as the caregiver. Once the training needs and strengths are identified, the youth and agency develop a plan to work toward goals defined jointly by the youth, his/her supporters and agency. These plans are as individual as the assessment findings. Services are designed with the youth, and may include such areas as life skill training, the development and nurturing of a personal support network, exploration of educational and career opportunities, remedial educational assistance, and/or counseling. For young adults, additional services may include financial assistance to attend school, purchase of needed items or services, and/or assistance to locate and move into appropriate housing. For youth who left custody and are struggling with achieving self-sufficiency, outreach services and resources are available.

Youth Development Approach

Youth development is the process through which adolescents become adults. This process is the result of the interaction between the adolescent- and all that he or she is- and the environment. All adults have been through this process. For many adults, the process included some negative experiences. However, the vast majority of adolescents do become self-sufficient adults.

Adolescents in foster care are engaged in this normal but sometimes chaotic process of youth development. Because of their personal history, most of these youth are facing additional barriers to achieve positive outcomes, such as a history of abuse or neglect. Research has shown that caring adults can influence positive outcomes for all adolescents.

While there is no guarantee, positive outcomes are much more likely to occur **if**:

- Youth are engaged in making the decisions that affect their lives;
- Youth are recognized and valued for their strengths and the resources they are to themselves;
- Youth have a variety of opportunities to learn and to try out their new skills in a supportive environment; and
- Youth have increasing responsibility for themselves for handling issues that confront them.

The parallels between the Positive Youth Development Approach and family-centered practice are not accidental. The youth is affirmed as the expert on his or her needs. The agency encourages the youth's active participation in services and decision making. The approach to the youth is strengths-based, acknowledging that all youths have strengths. The agency treats the youth with respect and supports his or her right to self-determination and to make decisions about his or her life. It supports the youth's right to be heard and to be understood. It avoids premature judgments about the youth, and remains open to new information. It promotes the sharing of power. It engenders partnership between the youth and the agency.

The traditional foster care system is formed around the protection of children. Children are removed from their families only when supportive services are not adequate to ensure safety. Children remain in foster care only when, despite the efforts of families and agencies, permanent placement is not possible. Teens in foster care may be denied these critical aspects:

- decisions about their lives are frequently made for them without their involvement;
- the focus of the agency's work is often on fixing the youth's problems, rather than on building on their strengths;
- liability concerns take precedence over allowing youth to learn through experience or to take over responsibility for aspects of their lives.

These programmatic barriers sometimes result in delaying the maturation process and make positive outcomes far less likely.

The LINKS program is based on positive youth development principles. Rather than treating the youth as an **object** who has no say in decisions, or as a **recipient** who needs to be "repaired," the agency interacts with the youth as a **resource**, a person with unique experiences and abilities who can become self-sufficient if given needed information and a supportive environment. The following example illustrates these three approaches to Jeff, a 17 youth who wants to go back to live with his mother, an alcoholic who has often broken promises to seek treatment, to visit, to bring him home from the group home for holidays, etc. The agency is seeking TPR because Jeff has been in care for almost two years. Jeff is furious about this, and says that no matter what DSS does, he will go back to his mom when he is 18.

Jeff treated as an Object	Jeff treated as a Recipient	Jeff treated as a Resource
<p>The DSS continues with its petition to terminate parental rights. It cannot find justification for exempting the agency from this ASFA requirement. The agency will not even consider allowing Jeff to visit his mother given her lack of progress and the liability issues they could face were something to happen.</p>	<p>The DSS refers Jeff to a therapist to help him with his anger and frustration with his mother. The social worker meets with Jeff regularly to develop an alternative plan which includes his signing a CARS agreement and continuing in school so he can get his diploma, even though he will be 19 when he finishes. Jeff expresses no interest in this option. The DSS explains the benefits of the LINKS Special Funds program, and how the agency will be able to help him set up his own place, to rent an apartment, and to get further training. When Jeff does not participate in some of his planning meetings, the plan is discussed without him.</p>	<p>The DSS accepts Jeff's plan to return to his mother's home and stops the TPR proceedings. The services agreement includes increasing visitation with the mother, including school holidays. Jeff will be responsible for arranging his own transportation. The focus of social work time will be on helping Jeff to develop strategies to cope with issues that confront him. The DSS makes available services and resources that Jeff needs to explore his plans, always open to the option of changing the plan if this does not work out as he hopes.</p>

When the agency treats Jeff as a *resource* it acknowledges that this is Jeff's life and that these are Jeff's decisions to make. Jeff needs to explore his choices when he has the support he needs to make his plans work or to make different choices if they don't.

Eligibility Requirements for LINKS Program and Access to LINKS Services and Funds

Eligibility for LINKS services is intentionally broad, in order to permit agencies to serve youth and young adults who need the services and who are willing to do their part in resolving problems. Access to LINKS services and funds requires that the youth be an active participant in his or her planning, including sharing in the responsibility for designing and implementing their transitional plan. Youth involvement in case planning must be documented in the case record and reflected on the case plan. Youth and young adults who refuse services, who refuse to be an active participant in designing the case plan, and/or who refuse to do their part in resolving problems will not be provided LINKS services or resources. Note: Youth who are court ordered to participate in the LINKS program cannot participate unless they are willing to do so.

In North Carolina, all youth who are now 13 or older and are not yet 21 and who are or were in DSS foster care after the age of 13 are eligible for LINKS services. For the purposes of this policy, being in "foster care" means that the child was removed from the home, was placed in DSS custody, and lives or lived as a teenager in either a licensed

foster care facility or with a relative (not the removal home). Youth who, as teenagers, have been discharged from foster care and were reunified, placed with relatives, adopted, married, or emancipated remain eligible for services until their 21st birthday.

Licensed foster care facilities include:

- Foster family care homes and specialized foster family homes
- Small group homes (residential)
- Large group facilities (residential)
- Adoptive foster homes
- Licensed emergency shelters
- Relative foster homes and relative specialized foster family homes, either licensed or court-approved.

Foster care facilities do not include correctional facilities, residential schools, or independent living arrangements.

Otherwise eligible youth are not eligible for LINKS funds if

- they have personal reserves of more than \$10,000, or
- they are undocumented or illegal aliens.

Priorities for Services Delivery

The following priorities are guidelines for prioritizing LINKS services.

Services must be offered and provided as appropriate to youth and young adults ages 16-21 who are in DSS custody and to young adults who aged out of agency custody at age 18 and who are not yet 21. Outreach efforts for young adults who aged out of care are required to determine their current situations, their interest in continued services, and their need for resources through the LINKS Special Funds program. Outreach efforts are only required for those young adults who aged out of foster care at age 18.

- Eligible teens and young adults in foster care or on CARS agreements ages 16-21 must be offered skills training, counseling, education and other appropriate support and services to assist their transition to self-sufficiency. .
- Young adults who “age out” of foster care (were in foster care on their eighteenth birthday) must be offered any needed assistance for which they are eligible. LINKS Transitional Housing Funds are available to reimburse counties for the cost of rent, rent deposits, or room and board arrangements when it is part of a broader service plan. In addition, other LINKS Special Funds are available to help with related expenses, such as utilities, furniture, etc.

Each county agency must decide which optional services will be offered in addition to those mandated by Federal statute.

- Services are strongly recommended for youth in agency custody ages 13-15 and for young adults who did not age out of custody, but were in custody as teens and are now between the ages of 18 and 21 and who are requesting services.

- Services are recommended for youth who were in custody as teens, have been discharged, and who are now between the ages of 13 and 18.

LINKS is An Outcome Based Service

Our goal is for every youth and young adult who lives or has lived in foster care as a teenager to achieve the following outcomes by age 21. Young adults who exit the foster care system prior to their 21st birthday should be making steady progress toward these outcomes. LINKS program staff should be constantly alert to ways in which they can offer training, opportunities, and personal support that will help youth and young adult participants.

1. All youth leaving the foster care system shall have sufficient economic resources to meet their daily needs.
2. All youth leaving the foster care system shall have a safe and stable place to live.
3. All youth leaving the foster care system shall attain academic or vocational/educational goals that are in keeping with the youth's abilities and interests.
4. All youth leaving the foster care system shall have a sense of connectedness to persons and community. Every youth in the foster care system needs a personal support system of at least 5 persons *in addition to* child welfare employees, foster families, and other professional helping persons.
5. All youth leaving the foster care system shall avoid illegal/high risk behaviors.
6. All youth leaving the foster care system shall postpone parenthood until financially established and emotionally mature.
7. All youth leaving the foster care system shall have access to physical and mental health services.

LINKS liaisons are encouraged to track and review progress toward these outcomes to provide guidance for all program activities. Some indicators of goal achievement are included as boxed text, while related program activities are bulleted below each box:

Outcome #1: Youth has sufficient economic resources to meet daily living needs

1. If youth is a dependent child, the family provides sufficient resources for basic daily living needs.
2. Job stability for youth or young adults, as indicated by at least three months in the same job during the first year post discharge.
3. The youth or young adult pays own portion of daily living expenses or contributes to an agreed-upon amount.
4. If unable to pay own portion of expenses, has stable income/resources, such as SSI or stable family support.

Examples of program elements for youth capable of eventually earning sufficient resources to meet their daily needs include:

- Job readiness skills;
- Vocational interest testing;
- Volunteer work for younger and older youth in their fields of interest
- Competency-based training for the work environment, e.g. money and time management, credit management, conflict management, personal conduct in a work environment, tax preparation, etc.;

- Experiences preparing for employment while in custody, such as part-time employment, participation in school-to-work programs, job sharing or apprenticeships, and job coaching;
- Part-time or full-time employment for youth 16 and older;
- Youth responsibility for saving own money and paying part of their personal expenses;
- Driver's education and driver's license before discharge
- Vocational Rehabilitation testing and training, when appropriate;
- Transitional education and training resources such as Job Corps, Americorps, college or vocational training, military options, etc.

Additional or alternative program elements for young adults with unrealized potential to support selves completely (continuing their education/training, currently unemployed, temporarily disabled) and who need temporary financial support.

- Family/extended family/community support
- Public assistance, e.g. TANF, Food Stamps, Work First, Section 8 or public housing, etc.
- Vocational Rehabilitation;
- Educational/Vocational scholarships and other assistance
- CARS/Voluntary Placement Agreement with DSS while in school.

Program elements for disabled or developmentally delayed young adults who will continue to need financial support may include:

- SSI
- Extended family/community support
- Public assistance
- Sheltered workshops/supported employment programs
- Supported housing programs
- MH/MR/DD adult programs
- Assisted living programs for adults

Outcome #2 Youth has a safe and stable place to live

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The youth is living in a stable housing situation and can afford the cost 2. The housing situation is not hazardous and is not in high-crime area 3. Youth has not been victimized since discharge |
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Examples of program elements

- Full development of two or more discharge plans;
- Learning about housing/utility costs for various types of housing in the intended home community;
- Learning to evaluate safety; using police and crime statistics, news reports, etc. as resources to learn about the location of safe neighborhoods;
- Learning to enhance personal safety in the home including basic knowledge about home repair and avoiding common hazards;
- Learning to avoid danger and to defuse volatile interpersonal situations;
- Learning basic non-lethal self-protection techniques;
- Having a stable place to live upon discharge;
- Having trusted friends who can offer temporary sanctuary, if needed;

- Making concerted efforts toward permanence for every youth prior to discharge, including learning about adult adoption procedures.

Outcome #3 Youth is attaining or has attained academic or vocational/educational goals

1. Youth is on or above grade level or, if not, is receiving assistance to attain grade level;
2. Youth's stated educational and vocational goals are openly explored;
3. Education/vocational training is reasonable given level of academic/vocational ability and interests

Examples of program elements

- Aggressive remedial academic assistance for youth who are not at grade level: educational testing, tutoring, computer-based learning, vocational interest/ability testing, etc.
- Early exposure to a variety of academic/vocational schools and possible means to attend those schools
- Positive reinforcement for achievement of steps toward personal academic and/or vocational goals- recognition, financial incentives, privileges, etc.
- Developing strong working relationships between the DSS and the public school to establish in-school mentors and advocates for participating youth.

Outcome #4 Youth has connections to a positive personal support system

1. Youth has a broad-based personal support system of at least 5 adults supporters who are personally interested and invested in the youth's future, in addition to those who are professionally involved with the youth (foster parents, social workers, therapists, etc.)
2. Youth has a responsible caring adult outside the child welfare system to call on for support or advice
3. Youth has consistent, welcoming place to visit, if desired

Examples of program elements

- Help all children and youth to seek out lifetime connections and permanence while in care and beyond; providing information on adult adoptions to youth and adults that are in family-like relationships.
- Build on the youth's existing support system;
- Build tribal connections for American Indian youth;
- Assure cultural connections as appropriate to individual self-identity;
- Provide opportunities to meet responsible caring adults, e.g. through volunteerism, faith communities, athletics, clubs, etc.
- Re-explore birth family, former foster families, etc. as potential support resources;
- Involve youth in activities that build healthy life-long interests;
- Build relationships between teens and the business community- e.g. mechanics, plumbers, electricians, potential employers, etc.

Outcome #5 Youth is avoiding illegal/high risk behaviors

1. No convictions, detentions, or incarcerations since discharge
2. Leisure activities and source of income are legal activities
3. Youth has a support system that includes positive role models
4. Youth is drug and alcohol-free, does not have needle/sexually transmitted diseases

Examples of program elements

- Build peer community within the LINKS program that expects, rewards and supports pro-social, positive behaviors
- Help youth to become connected with family members, mentors and other caring adults who care about what goes on with the individual youth from day to day and who are regularly engaged with the youth. Visits with family members are protected and are never denied as a form of “punishment.”
- Create open discussions about handling pressures regarding drug and alcohol use;
- Provide education and exposure to realities of drug/alcohol abuse- involve volunteers from former LINKS participants or other young adults who were involved in illegal/high risk activities and have learned the negative effects of that experience;
- Encourage watchfulness on part of staff, family, caregivers, etc.- provide education regarding signs of gang involvement, drug and/or alcohol abuse, etc.
- Early intervention/timely treatment for substance or alcohol abuse problems
- Specific preventive health education re: AIDS, hepatitis, the impact of STDs and other health risks.

Outcome # 6 Youth is postponing parenthood until financially and emotionally capable of parenting.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Is not a parenting or pregnant teen2. If youth has given birth or fathered a child, is purposefully and effectively avoiding another pregnancy3. Has responsible adult assistance or guidance in parenting any offspring |
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Examples of program elements

- Open, gender-specific group, mixed group and/or individual discussions about intimate and friendship relationships and respect for personal boundaries;
- Sex and abstinence education;
- “Baby Think-it-Over” activities or other simulations for boys and girls;
- Education about impact of parenthood on income, education, vocational plans;
- Adoption presented as a caring option, perhaps involving persons who have adopted infants or who have relinquished their child to talk to the group or individuals;
- Responsible parenthood instruction for boys and girls- babysitting instruction, supervised and unsupervised opportunities to be around small children in a caregiving role;
- Pregnancy prevention posters, videos, etc.
- Coordination of LINKS program with Adolescent Parenting Program/Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Programs

Outcome #7 Youth has access to physical and mental health services

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Routine physical, dental and mental health preventive care are provided while in care;2. Identified physical, dental and mental health needs are being treated quickly and appropriately3. Youth has insurance that will cost of mental health/dental/physical health care after discharge;4. Self care/self monitoring is sufficient to avoid serious medical/dental/psychiatric crises |
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Examples of program elements

- Explore availability of health insurance through the family, employment or school
- Establish Medicaid/Health Choice eligibility if possible

- Teach about free/low cost services through Mental Health Clinic, Public Health, free clinics, etc.
- Provide written and verbal information and instruction on self-care- medication information, health maintenance, when to worry; what to do if seriously ill; avoiding contagion, etc.
- Provide opportunities for youth to grieve the losses in their life that connect to their experience with foster care: death; loss of relationships; loss of time with family; loss of trust; etc.
- Provide resource materials and referrals, including internet web sites specific to youth's identified needs and concerns.

While a sense of well being and self respect are difficult to measure, the LINKS program also encourages movement toward this outcome.

Youth has a sense of well-being and a positive sense of self-identity

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Youth demonstrates a positive outlook on life 2. Youth demonstrates resilience in overcoming past problems as well as in facing new problems 3. Youth has a positive self identity as a person of worth 4. Youth has a positive sense of the history of his/her culture 5. Youth is able to handle prejudice/discrimination without violence 6. Youth is culturally competent and is at least tolerant of other cultures 7. Youth is able to assert self appropriately in the face of discrimination |
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Examples of program elements

- Youth are given opportunities to develop a strong reality-based sense of self worth within a program that consistently advocates youth development.
- Youth resilience is recognized, acknowledged, and nurtured even when it is contrary to systemic expectations
- Youth are taught skills for nurturing their own resilience, such as decision making, self-care, recreational activities, and confidence-building experiences;
- Youth are supported in their participation in activities that develop skills, talents, spiritual development, positive relationships, recreational interests, physical and intellectual conditioning. Involvement in these activities is considered a part of the overall transitional plan and is not denied as a form of "punishment". The agency will access reasonable appropriate funds to help the youth to participate in positive experiences.
- Youth are given opportunities to develop leadership and self-advocacy skills through organizations such as Say-So and through participation in statewide and national conferences that promote youth development.
- All youth in foster care are given opportunities to construct and maintain life books
- Youth are given opportunities to learn to openly discuss their experiences of being in foster care and any resulting negative feelings about themselves
- Youth experience positive exposure to a variety of cultural groups, learning value of diversity;
- American Indian youth are given opportunities to build their tribal connections;
- Youth in foster care are given opportunities to maintain cultural connections as appropriate to individual self-identity;
- Youth are given opportunities to provide group leadership in learning about different cultures

- Youth participate in sensitivity exercises regarding all types of discrimination, including that based on race, gender, and sexual orientation.
 - Youth receive assertiveness training
- Youth learn about civil rights, including their own.

Financial Aspects of the LINKS Program

Funding formula

Each county with eligible youth receives a LINKS program allocation based on a per capita formula that considers both mandated and non-mandated service populations. Counties then determine how their total program allocation best meets the purposes of the youth in their county within federal and state guidelines. Program allocations and supplemental salary funds are accessed through the DSS-1571 budget process.

LINKS funds may be used in addition to other Federal, state, and other funds to provide services but may not be used to supplant (replace) other available Federal funds that are designated for those purposes.

Use of County Program Allocation Funds

LINKS funds are provided in order to help eligible youth and young adults to successfully transition from foster care to self-sufficiency.

- **Resource Development**
Counties may use LINKS program allocations to purchase or rent program materials, supplies and equipment for the establishment, continuation, implementation or revision of the county LINKS program, and/or for evaluation of the effectiveness of the program. Counties must follow cost allocation or direct charge procedures to purchase equipment for the LINKS program such as computers, printers, scanners, cameras, copiers, televisions, DVDs or VCRs. Direct charges to the LINKS program allocation are only allowed if the equipment purchase is designated for the sole use of the LINKS program.
- **Youth Incentives**

Funds may be used to provide reasonable incentives (cash, gift certificates, food, etc.) to youth to encourage program participation or goal achievement. Incentives are offered to encourage a youth to reach toward a goal, as a part of the formal or informal service agreement with the youth.
- **Goods or Services for Individual Youths/Young Adults**

A county may use some or all of their program allocation to pay for goods or services on behalf of one or more individual youths or young adults, so long as doing so does not undercut funding needed by other youth/young adults in the mandatory services groups.

- Program Operations

A county may use a portion of its program allocations for staff positions, for contracted services, or for time spent on the planning and delivery of services. Note: A county that receives one or more salary supplements must spend that portion of the allocation on staff salary/time or on contracted LINKS services.

LINKS Special Funds

- The Trust Fund is capped at \$500 per individual per year. The Trust Fund is made up of funds from the former Independent Living Initiative which are designated for aftercare services. Eligibility for these funds must, therefore, match eligibility under the old Independent Living Program that preceded the Chafee program. These funds can be used for any youth at least 16 through 20 years of age who either has been discharged from custody or is going to be discharged within a few months. These funds can be applied to a variety of non-housing expenses that are barriers to a youth's transition. Funds have been used for auto repair, insurance, computers, educational/vocational assistance, uniforms, furniture, utility costs, and a variety of other needs. These funds may also be used to provide financial incentives to discharged youth to encourage contact with the agency at regular intervals after discharge, so that problem areas may be addressed before they become crises. Trust funds cannot be used for rent, rent deposits, room and board arrangements or down payments on dwellings.
- Scholarship Funds are capped at \$750 per individual per year. Effective October 2003, young adults who qualify for the Education/Training Voucher program will not be allowed access to Scholarship funds, since post-secondary educational expenses allowable under the Scholarship Fund are also allowable under the ETV program. Scholarship funds may be accessed on behalf of young adults who do not meet the eligibility requirements for ETV funds.

Scholarship funds may be used on behalf of eligible youth and young adults ages 13 to 21 who need assistance to improve school performance, to achieve their high school diploma or GED, to pay fees for college applications, to take training courses that assist independence (such as drivers education), to provide tutoring, to provide financial incentives for school performance, or in other ways to encourage or facilitate a young person's progress in school. Due to the limitation on the amount of funds available, payment of "senior expenses" are not considered to be an appropriate use of Scholarship funds.

Scholarship funds may also be used by eligible youth and young adults to pay costs for attendance at state or national youth conferences or similar events that are likely to help the youth attain maturity, skills, and experiences that will improve his or her likelihood of achieving self-sufficiency.

- Transitional Housing Funds are available **only** to young adults who aged out of foster care at 18* but are not yet 21 years of age. Up to \$1000 per individual per year is available to help with transitional housing costs, which is defined as rent, rent deposits, or room and board arrangements that include meals as a part of a rental agreement. Utility costs are not included in this fund, but those costs may be paid

from Trust Funds or, in some cases, High Risk funds if the youth is eligible. Funding is intended to help youth get moved into a permanent home, not to prolong unnecessary dependency. An eligible young adult who is participating in a CARS Arrangement may use these funds to help set up their independent living arrangement.

- Extremely High Risk Funds are available to help any youth or young adult ages 13 through 20 who, because of life circumstances, behaviors, or lack of needed resources is evaluated by the county DSS to be at high risk of negative outcomes unless appropriate intervention is initiated. The specific reason for the High Risk designation must be thoroughly documented in the individual's record. The High Risk Funds may only be spent on activities or purchases that have a reasonable likelihood of reducing that defined risk. High Risk Funds may not be used for rent or rent deposits or any charge directly related to acquiring housing. Up to \$1000 is available per individual per year.

Exceptions:

Cars

It is only rarely appropriate to use High Risk funds to help young adults to purchase automobiles. To qualify as an exception, the following questions must be answered and documented in the case record:

1. Is this young adult at high risk of not making a successful transition to adulthood?
2. Will assistance with purchasing a car reduce that risk? How? Note: the youth must NEED the car, not just want a car.
3. Does the young adult have sufficient income to maintain a car, including gas, routine maintenance and repairs?

If the answer to these questions supports use of the funds, then the funds may be used to MATCH money earned by the young adult up to \$1000. Trust funds may be used for a downpayment if necessary.

Treatment

Title IV-E Funds cannot be used to supplant other existing federal funds; therefore anything that is reimbursable through Medicaid cannot be paid for with LINKS funds. In addition, given the limitation of funds, it is not appropriate to use High Risk Funds for treatment for youth and young adults who are not eligible for Medicaid if doing so will exhaust the funds with no reasonable impact on the level of risk. Therefore the only time this would be appropriate to use High Risk Funds for "treatment" costs would be when the general criteria for the use of high risk funds and

1. Either the youth/young adult is not eligible for Medicaid, or the expense is not Medicaid reimbursable, and
2. The treatment expense is neither ongoing nor so expensive that the funds will be exhausted without significant impact on the risk, i.e. paying for therapy vs. paying for glasses.

Eligibility Criteria- Special Funds

Scholarship Funds	Trust Funds	Transitional Housing Funds	High Risk Funds	Educational/Training Vouchers
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Age: Is now between the ages of 13 and 21 (has not had 21st birthday). 2. Is or was in foster care as a teenager. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Age: Is now between the ages of 16 and 21 (has not had 21st birthday).and was in foster care on or after 16th birthday 2. Has been discharged from DSS Custody or will be discharged within the next 3 months. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Now between 18 and 21 (has not had 21st birthday). 2. Was in DSS custody on 18th birthday and at that time was living in a licensed foster care living arrangement <u>or</u> was placed with a relative (not the removal home) <u>or</u> in other court-approved foster placement. 3. Was not in a correctional facility (jail, detention, forestry camp or other secure facility) on 18th birthday. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Age 13 to 21 (has not had 21st birthday). 2. Is facing extreme barriers to a successful transition to self-sufficiency 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Now between 18 and 21 (has not had 21st birthday). 2. Was in DSS custody on 18th birthday and at that time was living in a licensed foster care living arrangement <u>or</u> was placed with a relative (not the removal home) <u>or</u> in other court-approved foster placement <u>or</u> was adopted after 16th birthday. 3. Has achieved high school diploma or a GED. 4. Is attending or enrolled for the next semester in an accredited post-secondary educational or vocational training program full time. 5. Is making satisfactory progress toward completion of the course of study.

**REQUEST FOR REIMBURSEMENT
LINKS SPECIAL FUNDS**

Please reimburse (Total amount due) _____ to the _____ County Department of Social Services for funds spent on behalf of the following individuals. I certify that the individuals listed below are 1) eligible under the guidelines specified by the LINKS program; 2) were pre-authorized for access and 3) that expenditures for which reimbursement is claimed were allowable and appropriate according to LINKS policy.

Certified by _____, Position _____
Date _____

PLEASE PRINT INFORMATION CLEARLY

NAME	DOB	SIS ID	Trust Fund/ Aftercare (maximum \$500/yr)	Scholarship Funds (maximum \$750/yr)	Transitional Housing (maximum \$1000/yr)	Funds for Extremely High Risk Youth (maximum \$1000/yr)	Purpose of expenditure
TOTALS per fund							

Education Training Vouchers

Legislation authorizing Education Training Vouchers was a separate section of the Chafee Act. Funding was authorized effective October of 2003: the NC Share was \$737,000. Use of these funds has no impact on LINKS county allocations or LINKS Special Funds except that young adults receiving ETV's should use these funds first for eligible educational expenses rather than charge the Scholarship Funds. This will help the Scholarship Funds to last longer and to serve more youth. No county funds are needed to access ETV funds.

Qualifying schools

The student must be attending a post-secondary institution of higher learning or post-secondary vocational training school. The school must be accredited by a nationally accredited agency or association or has been granted pre-accreditation status. The school must have been operating at least 2 years. The school must be eligible to accept Pell Grants on behalf of their students. School must offer a 4-year bachelor's degree, a two year associates degree or a one year state or nationally recognized certificate.

Eligibility of Students

- The student must be eligible for the NC LINKS program
- The student must now be between the ages of 18-21. Eligibility may continue for students who were receiving vouchers on 21st birthday and are continuing to make satisfactory progress- up to age 23.
- The student either aged out of foster care or was adopted from foster care after his/her 16th birthday. (finalization)
- The student must have finished High School or have their GED and must be in a full or half-time post-secondary program or are accepted for next term. The student must be making acceptable progress toward graduation to continue getting the grant.
- The student must be a citizen or documented alien (eligible for other federal benefits)
- The student may not have more than \$10,000 in personal reserves

Eligible costs

The amount of the grant is based on the Cost of Attendance, which is the total amount it will cost a student to go to school, usually expressed as a yearly figure. Includes:

- Tuition and Fees
- On-campus room and board or a housing and food allowance for off campus students
- Allowances for books, supplies, transportation, loan fees for the 2003-04 school year
- If applicable, dependent care
- Costs related to a disability, e.g. eyeglasses, tutoring, adaptive software, etc.
- Miscellaneous expenses, including rental or purchase of a personal computer
- Reasonable costs for study-abroad programs

The student's cost of attendance is determined and evaluated with their existing financial award in order to determine how much money they can get. A student may receive both

the Pell Grant and the ETV, which combined are equal to or less than the cost of attendance. Note: A student is not required to be participating in a CARS/VPA to qualify for this assistance.

Procedures:

Student Application: The student applies on line over the internet. The web address is www.statevoucher.org. Once into the web site, the student should click on the North Carolina outline to get to our home page and the application form. The student is required to fill out the application, to submit a brief essay about their future plans, and to send a copy of their financial award letter to OFA. The application includes a budget, contact information for the DSS as well as the student's interests. Note: the student will need his or her own email account while in college, since contact from OFA and volunteer mentors will be primarily over the internet. LINKS Scholarship funds can be used for the cost of low-cost internet access and email

ETV Administration: All of the ETV scholarships are being administered by Orphan Foundation of America. The Foundation will send checks directly to third party providers or, in rare circumstances, directly to the youth for approved budgeted expenses.

For further information on the NC LINKS program contact the state coordinator by email Joan.McAllister@ncmail.net or by telephone at 919-733-2580.