

# **Draft for Public Comment**

**Montana's Chafee Foster Care Independence Program  
Application for FY 2010-2014**



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The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) Child and Family Services Division (CFSD) administers, supervises and oversees the programs carried out under the CFCIP (Section 477(b)(2)). The Montana program is called the Montana Foster Care Independence Program (MFCIP).

DPHHS will cooperate fully in national evaluations of the effects of independent living programs implemented to achieve the purpose of the CFCIP (Section 477(b)(2)(F)).

Montana's CFCIP program will continue to be designed and conducted to achieve the purposes in section 477(a)(1-7) of the Act. Strengthening the program through utilization of training and technical assistance will be a goal during the coming years.

### **Program Design and Delivery:**

The MFCIP will provide activities and services which:

- Help youth make the transition to self-sufficiency;
- Help youth receive the education, training and services necessary to obtain employment;
- Help youth prepare for and enter post-secondary training and educational institutions;
- Provide personal and emotional support to youth through mentors and the promotion of interactions with dedicated adults;
- Provide financial, housing, counseling, employment, education and other appropriate support and services to former foster care recipients between 18 and 21 years of age to complement their own efforts to achieve self-sufficiency and to assure that program participants recognize and accept their personal responsibility for preparing for and making the transition into adulthood;
- Make available vouchers for education and training, including post-secondary education to youth who have aged out of foster care; and
- Provide services to youth, who after attaining 16 years of age, have left foster care for kinship guardianship or adoption.

Services will primarily be provided by department or tribal staff (Transitional Living Specialists). However, these staff are expected to collaborate with and utilize services available through community providers to ensure that appropriate services are provided to assist youth in preparing for independence.

### **Help youth make the transition to self-sufficiency:**

The MFCIP utilizes the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA) to assist in the identification of service needs for youth. The ACLSA is a multi-dimensional culturally appropriate assessment tool which is readily available on the internet at no cost. Youth referred to MFCIP will complete a life skills assessment that will guide the development of an outcome based transitional plan. The transitional plan is the tool used to document the specific services needed by an individual youth.

MFCIP will begin tracking and collecting aggregate from completed ACLSA in FFY10

Other steps MFCIP will take to assist youth in making the transition to self-sufficiency are:

- Automating the referral process for youth in foster care in the State's SACWIS system to the appropriate TLS staff person;
- Automating the referral of youth age 16 or older placed in foster care whose placement is recorded in the State's SACWIS system;
- Tracking through the State's SACWIS system the number of eligible youth in foster care receiving a life skills assessment within the first 30 days of referral to MFCIP;
- Automating notification to the TLS and TLS supervisor, youth who have been referred to MFCIP and have not received an assessment within 30 days;
- Tracking through the State's SACWIS system the number of transitional living plans completed within 30 days of completion of the life skills assessment;
- Evaluating and updating the transitional living plan as needed, at least every 6 months;
- Developing opportunities for youth to participate in life skills development;
- Researching availability of an online life skills curriculum to increase the opportunities for youth to participate in specific life skills development;
- Collaborating with stakeholders to develop a Montana specific training curriculum regarding preparation of youth who will be transitioning from foster care and the services available through the MFCIP;
- Training foster parents and group home staff throughout the state utilizing this curriculum;
- Developing a MFCIP specific website.

### **Help youth receive the education, training and services necessary to obtain employment:**

Given the importance of obtaining a high school diploma or GED in obtaining

employment which will provide sufficient income for a person to support themselves financially, MFCIP will continue to provide services to youth to prepare them for employment, post-secondary vocational training and/or higher education by:

- Monitoring the youth's academic progress;
- Utilizing the life skill assessment and the corresponding transitional living plan to identify needs and appropriate services to assist the youth in preparing for and retaining employment;
- Increasing the use of programs and services available through the school system to assist in meeting youth's needs;
- Identifying barriers to youth employment and developing solutions to remove the barriers so use can obtain employment experience;
- Increasing collaboration with other agencies and organizations to identify vocational, educational and job training opportunities that are available
- Providing training regarding the educational and vocational training needs of foster youth to foster parents and group home staff;
- Providing training regarding the educational and vocational training opportunities available in local communities and within the state to foster parents and group home staff;

**Help youth prepare for and enter post-secondary training and educational institutions:**

In addition to the ETV program described on page 5, The MFCIP will help youth prepare for and enter post-secondary educational or vocational institutions by:

- Using the Montana Career Information System to assist youth in identifying careers in which they have an interest;
- Networking with local organizations to identify scholarship opportunities which youth served by MFCIP may be eligible;
- Assisting youth in exploring post-secondary educational and vocational options and financial aid opportunities which may be available;
- Assist youth in applying for financial aid, including assistance through the ETV program;
- Providing a college preparatory camp;
- Providing stipend assistance to youth for books, supplies and other expenses necessary to assist a youth in obtaining a GED or high school diploma when foster care funds are not available;
- Advocating for tuition and fee waivers within the Montana University system for former foster care youth;
- Assisting youth with dorm and apartment set-up;
- Assisting youth in developing and funding a plan for living arrangements during holidays and school breaks.

**Provide personal and emotional support to youth through mentors and the promotion of interactions with dedicated adults by:**

- Supporting permanent placement of youth in foster care through adoption, guardianship and other placements intended to provide a permanent connection;
- Assisting youth in reconnecting with important people from their past who may be able to provide support;
- Assisting youth in identifying potential mentors with whom the youth has an existing relationship;
- Identifying opportunities for youth leadership training;
- Encouraging and supporting youth participation in school and community activities.

**Provide financial, housing, counseling, employment, education and other appropriate support services to former foster care recipients between 18 and 21 years of age to complement their own efforts to achieve self-sufficiency and to assure that program participants recognize and accept their personal responsibility for preparing for and making the transition into adulthood:**

- Promoting the development of low cost housing;
- Assisting youth in applying for Section 8 or other low-income housing;
- Collaborating with other agencies which provide financial assistance, employment, housing education or other services to youth to maximize the availability of services and reduce duplication;
- Advocating for tuition waivers in the state higher education system for youth who have “aged out” foster care;
- Identifying and collaborating with existing adult service programs to provide a link between youth and adult delivery systems;
- Assisting youth to identify programs and services available in the community where the youth plans to reside
- Assisting youth to apply for services for which they are eligible;
- Assisting youth with the costs of counseling or therapy when it has been determined that such services will assist the emancipation process and other funding is not available;
- Assisting youth with medical expenses when the medical service provided was medically necessary and for which other funding is not available;
- Assisting youth with the costs of board and room.

**Make available vouchers for education and training, including postsecondary education, to youth who have aged out of foster care:**

Montana's ETV program will continue to comply with the conditions specified in subsection 477(i) of the Act. Strengthening the program through utilization of training and technical assistance will be a goal during the coming years.

The department will continue to contract with the Student Assistance Foundation (SAF), which is a private non-profit agency, to administer the ETV funds.

**ETV Eligibility:**

Eligible youth under Montana's ETV program are youth who:

- are at least 16 years old and in foster care or have "aged out" of foster care and are not yet 21;
- left foster care after age 16 for a kinship guardianship or adoption; or
- were participating in the ETV program on their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday up to their 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday as long as they are enrolled in a post-secondary education or training program and are making satisfactory progress toward completion of the program.

The SAF, in conjunction with the department has developed a written application and formal award process and plans to continue to use this process. The application will continue to require information regarding the youth's contributions, the amount of tuition and fees, and the amount of financial aid the youth is eligible to receive. Youth must maintain the equivalency of a 2.0 average to remain eligible for ETV assistance.

Applications will continue to be submitted to the SAF and will continue to be reviewed by the department to verify eligibility and to ensure that there is no duplication of benefits from MFCIP funds. Eligible youth may receive up to \$5000 a year to attend an institution of higher learning or a training program that meet the criteria established under Section 102 of the Higher Education Act of 1965. The actual amount of assistance which will be provided is dependent on other assistance available to the youth, the "cost of attendance" as defined under the Higher Education Act, the academic status of the youth and the number and needs of youth that apply for assistance.

The SAF works closely with the financial aid offices of the educational institutions to ensure that there is not a duplication of benefits.

**Provide services to youth who, after attaining 16 years of age, have left foster care for kinship guardianship or adoption.**

These youth will be eligible for the same services as other youth eligible for MFCIP or ETV services.

### **Determining Eligibility for Benefits and Services:**

Youth eligible to receive benefits and services provided under the MFCIP program are youth age 16 or older who are in foster care (as defined for CFCIP) for whom placement and care responsibility is with CFSD or a Tribal agency; and youth who were in foster care under the placement and care responsibility of the State or Tribe and “aged out” of foster care. Youth who have had a kinship guardianship or adoption established after age 16 are also eligible.

Priority for services is given to youth who are likely to “age out” of foster care and to youth ages 18 to 20 that have “aged out” of foster care.

CFSD assures fair and equitable treatment of eligible youth by clearly defining eligibility criteria and benefits available through the MFCIP. This information is formalized in the Independent Living Services section of the CFSD policy manual. Electronic copies of the policy manual are provided to state and tribal staff. Tribal social services staff is invited to CFSD staff policy training.

In addition, CFSD assures fair and equitable treatment by requiring tribal contractors to provide services using the same eligibility criteria.

Training and technical assistance opportunities will be provided to state and tribal staff providing MFCIP services with a goal of strengthening services provided to Native American youth on and off reservation. The department intends to utilize assistance from the National Resource Center for Youth Services in providing the training and technical assistance.

In addition to the above, the department plans to hold annual training for all staff providing MFCIP services.

### **Serving Youth Across the State:**

Services under MFCIP will be provided statewide to eligible youth from all political subdivisions. Youth who are under Tribal court jurisdiction who meet the definition of foster care (as defined for CFCIP) and the other eligibility criteria are eligible for the same services and benefits as youth under the care and supervision of DPHHS.

### **Serving Youth at Various Ages and Stages of Achieving Independence:**

During 2010-2014, the primary service focus of MFCIP will continue to be on youth who are 16 years old and likely to remain in foster care until they are 18 years old and on youth ages 18-21 that have “aged out” of foster care. Youth

who left foster care after age 16 because they had a kinship guardianship or adoption established will retain eligibility for services.

### **Youth under 16:**

Formal services to youth under age 16 will not be provided under the MFCIP. Foster parents and Child Protective Services (CPS) staff will be encouraged to conduct an ACSLA with these youth and to use the results of the assessment to identify the youth's strengths and needs, and to provide age appropriate services. If available, training and resource materials will be made available to the foster care provider and/or CPS worker.

### **Youth 16-18:**

Youth age 16 to 18, particularly those who are likely to "age out" of foster care, will be eligible for the services described under Program Design and Delivery on page \_\_\_\_ with the exception of Board and Room.

### **Youth age 18 through 20:**

Youth age 18 through 20 who have "aged out" of foster care will be eligible for the services described under Program Design and Delivery on page \_\_\_\_.

**Medicaid Coverage:** A youth who has "aged out" of foster care prior to age 19 is likely to be eligible for Medicaid under a Medicaid category other than "foster care related" until the youth's 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. At this time there is no Medicaid category that provides coverage to age 21 for all youth "aging out" of foster care. Depending on individual circumstances a youth may be eligible under another Medicaid category for coverage beyond age 19. Past efforts to expand Medicaid coverage to include a category of youth who have "aged out" of foster care have been unsuccessful.

**Board and Room:** Under the MFCIP, board and room is limited to food and shelter costs, and includes rent and utility deposits, rent payments, the costs of board and room while attending a college, university or other post-secondary institution, and board and room payments made while living in another person's home (e.g., a former foster parent).

### **Youth for Whom Kinship Guardianship or Adoption is Established:**

Youth who are past their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday at the time a kinship guardianship or adoption is established will continue to be eligible for services as described on pages 1-4. These youth will have been eligible for services prior to the time the guardianship or adoption is established. The eligibility criteria for services will be the same as for other youth.

There are currently no identified statutory or administrative barriers that prevent the MFCIP from serving a broader range of youth. The amount of funding CFSD receives, in combination with the size and rural nature of the state pose the greatest barriers to serving a broader range of potentially eligible youth.

### **Consultation and Collaboration:**

In order to meet the needs of youth, CPS and TLS staff must work closely with a variety of community agencies and organizations to assist youth in accessing services. These agencies and organizations include Human Resource Development Councils, Job Corps, Boys and Girls Clubs, Big Brothers and Sisters, Job Service and Tribal Employment offices, public school systems, and special schools, such as the School for the Deaf and Blind. Staff also work closely with other divisions within DPHHS including, but not limited to, Human and Community Services (which includes Offices of Public Assistance) and the Disability Services Division (which includes Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind and Low Vision Services).

TLS working with youth receiving service under MFCIP also work closely with community health (including mental health agencies) and Social Security Offices.

TLS serving youth on reservations assist youth in accessing services through the tribe as well as non-tribal services.

Representatives of each Montana tribe have been or will be contacted directly, in-person or via telephone, to obtain input into the states CFCIP plan before it is finalized. To date, no Montana tribes have indicated an intent to apply and receive CFCIP or ETV funds directly from the Secretary as allowed under section 477(j). This may be because the department currently has tribal contracts for CFCIP covering five of the reservations.

The department will be requesting further information and/or technical assistance in calculating what “an appropriate portion” of the state’s allotment would be for each tribe.

The draft CFCIP was posted on the department’s website to allow interested members of the public to comment. In addition, TLS staff were encouraged to obtain input from youth regarding the draft plan through review of the draft plan or by utilizing specific questions regarding the MFCIP. Input from all interested parties will be considered in the final plan.

### **Preparation to Implement National Youth in Transition Database:**

The department is actively preparing to incorporate the National Youth in Transition Database data collection and reporting requirements described in the final rule into the State’s current SACWIS system.

The department's SACWIS contractor has begun work on the addition of new data elements necessary to support the implementation of the NYTD survey and reporting processes. The contractor has also begun analysis of the initial specifications for a Web based solution to address NYTD survey requirements. The NYTD survey will be prototyped and will include both survey participant and administrative functions to obtain a 'best fit' for the State of Montana. Elements for consideration in the initial prototype include; confidentiality, security, TLS and youth feedback on survey, preparation for future contact (surveys), integration with MFCIP, administrative roles/needs, and data fulfillment of NYTD reporting requirements.

Three staff from Montana attended the first NYTD Technical Assistance Meeting held in Washington D.C., in July, 2008 and three will be attending the second NYTD Technical Assistance Meeting scheduled for late June, 2009. In addition, the state received two days of specific technical assistance in February, 2009 from the National Resource Center for Child Welfare and Data Technology. The department does not anticipate a need for further state specific technical assistance at this time.