

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

CHILDREN'S DIVISION

P. O. BOX 88

JEFFERSON CITY, MISSOURI

November 14, 2003

MEMORANDUM

TO: AREA EXECUTIVE STAFF, CIRCUIT MANAGERS,
CHAFFEE INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM STAFF,
AND CHILDREN'S DIVISION STAFF

FROM: FREDERIC M. SIMMENS, DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: ELIMINATION OF THE CHOICES PROGRAM FOR YOUTH AGES 13-15

REFERENCE: CHILDREN'S DIVISION

DISCUSSION:

The purpose of this memorandum is to advise staff the funding for the CHOICES Program for youth ages 13-15 was eliminated by the Legislature from the state FY 04 budget, due to severe budgetary constraints. CHOICES was a program designed for youth ages 13 through 15, in the legal custody of the Division and who are currently in out-of-home care. This program was directed toward assisting youth in becoming responsible young adults and helping them make better informed choices on their way to becoming independent. It was the expectation that every child in agency custody between the ages of 13 through 15 have the opportunity to complete the "CHOICES" curriculum.

For the past few years, state general revenue provided funding for the CHOICES Program. The Division had enhanced the capacity to better serve this younger population by setting aside a portion of the federal Chafee funding to supplement state funds to provide hands-on learning opportunities.

This provides the Children's Division with an opportunity to re-evaluate the program for youth under age 16. We recognize the need and the importance to continue serving this younger population. A workgroup consisting of Division staff and Independent Living Program contractors has been working to review the current program, which focused primarily on teaching "soft skills" to younger youth in a classroom setting. We envision the development of a practical application program, which will serve youth along a continuum of services from pre-independent living, for the youth younger than age 16, to the young adults who have exited foster care and may need aftercare services.

A memorandum and policy changes will be forthcoming. Revisions will be made in Section 4 – Out-of-Home Care of the Child Welfare Manual when the program and curriculum has been developed for youth younger than age 16.

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