

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

CHILDREN'S DIVISION

P. O. BOX 88

JEFFERSON CITY, MISSOURI

November 14, 2003

MEMORANDUM

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

FROM: FREDERIC M. SIMMENS, DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: ANSELL-CASEY LIFE SKILLS ASSESSMENT (ACLSA)
NATIONAL YOUTH IN TRANSITION DATABASE (NYTD)

REFERENCE: CHILDREN'S DIVISION

DISCUSSION:

The purpose of this memorandum is to inform staff of a proposed national database and the new Life Skills Assessments to be used with all youth ages 14-21 in Legal Status 1 and former foster care youth returning to the Division for Chafee Aftercare services, reopened under Legal Status 8. Recent changes in federal policies regarding foster care heightened attention on preparing youth for living independently.

The Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 not only increased federal funding for independent living services, but also focuses on the issue of state accountability with regards to outcomes experienced by youth when they leave foster care. Section 477 (f)(l) of the legislation requires all states to develop outcome measures that can be used to assess the performance of their independent living program and to identify data elements for purposes of tracking performance. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHSS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF) is developing a comprehensive system, a National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) that integrates information pertaining to the characteristics of the youth served, services delivered, and outcomes achieved into a unique data collection and data reporting process. By specifying what is to be measured and counted by NYTD, DHSS will establish a framework for what states are expected to accomplish for the youth they serve.

NYTD will require states to report data in four distinctive stages. For the purposes of this memorandum, only the first stage will be discussed. The three other stages will be discussed in a subsequent memorandum. The first stage requires data to be collected on youth characteristics and services for all youth 14 and older who are in foster care or youth up to age 21 who were previously in foster care and are receiving post discharge

(Chafee Aftercare) services. Much of the characteristic data is already collected under the Adoption and Foster Care Automated Reporting System (AFCARS), which would link to NYTD. Each of these youth will be required to complete an independent living needs/life skills assessment.

The purpose of a life skills assessment is to provide the youth, youth's caregiver, and Case Manager comprehensive information that will assist the youth with preparing for self-sufficiency. The assessment is to be used in conjunction with other information available to focus specifically on those areas of the youth's life that are, or will, impact on their preparation for self-sufficiency. The assessment will assist in gaining understanding of the youth's strengths and challenges so practical, concrete efforts can be made to achieve the goals to which the youth seeks.

In the past, youth referred to ILP were administered a life skills inventory using the Daniel Memorial's Independent Living Assessment for Life Skills. We will be taking steps within the next year to meet the upcoming federal NYTD requirements by administering a life skills inventory for all foster youth ages 14 and older. ILP staff has taken steps and converted from using the Daniel Memorial Assessment to the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA).

The ACLSA is a youth-centered, web-based, secure tool for gauging current life skills, available in youth self-report and caregiver report formats. For each format, there are three age-related levels: Level I (8 -10 years), (Level II (11-14 years) and Level III (15-18 years). There is also a fourth level, a Young Adults (18-25) years, that does not have a caretaker format. It is possible for a youth to take more than two different level assessments.

The ACLSA assesses life skills using the youth's and the caregiver's perception about a youth's abilities in several important life skill areas or domains. It is important that a caregiver, or another adult who knows the youth well, completes the assessment to provide a more accurate picture of the youth's abilities. For the purposes of assessing youth ages 14 and older, we will not be using the Level I (8-10) years assessment. The Level II ACLSA consists of five domains and Level III and Level IV consist of six. The five domains included in both levels consist of *Daily Living Tasks, Self-care, Social Development, Work & Study Skills, Money Management*. Levels III and IV have the additional *Housing and Community Resources* domain.

The youth format contains items to measure self-reported knowledge, behaviors and a brief performance section to test actual knowledge of life skills. The caregiver form asks a parent or other adult to rate the youth in his/her care on the same set of knowledge and behavior items used in the youth self-report. The ACLSA takes about 15-25 minutes to complete, depending on which ACLSA level is used and the youth's reading level. Preferably, the ACLSA is completed electronically via the Internet, but copies can be printed from the ACLSA web site at www.caseylifeskills.org and taken by hand and the responses entered into the web site at a later time.

The purpose of using the ACLSA is to provide the youth, caregiver and staff with an indication of the youth's life skills accomplishments. It is a flexible tool that can be used for individualized case planning, but is not meant to assess all the skills the youth needs to live successfully on his/her own. Once the youth and the caregiver have completed the assessment, the Case Manager can receive an Individual Report (IR), which

summarizes the youth and caregiver's responses and the assessment scores. The IR provides both a summary of the actual responses to each question as well as the domain scores, overall scores, and a performance score. This ACLSA IR is useful for practice as it can help youth, caregivers, and staff acknowledge youth strengths, develop a realistic picture of youth readiness for emancipation, and identify areas in which youth may need to lean more or develop additional skills. This can create opportunities and facilitates increased understanding among all team members.

All youth currently referred to the current or upcoming Life Skills training sessions have been or will be administered the ACLSA by the ILP Specialist or their designee. Staff may be contacted by the ILP Specialist or their designee to assist in either the completion of the caregiver's form or asking their youth's placement provider to complete it. It is crucial at least one adult complete the caretaker form to gain a realistic picture of the youth's life skills accomplishments, within seven (7) days of when the youth completes their assessment. More than one adult can complete the caregiver format, but it is important the adult completing the assessment, is someone who knows the youth well. The ACLSA will be administered to the youth in Life Skills training at least twice, a pre-test at the beginning and a post-test at the end of the training. The youth may complete the assessment additional times throughout the Life Skills training to assess his progress.

At minimum, a field must be added to the SS-61 database to reflect the most recent life skills assessment date. Once system edits have been made, staff will receive instructions and Case Managers will be responsible for assessing all their youth ages 14 and older. Counties or circuits should presently begin contacting their assigned ILP Specialist to coordinate a time that is mutually convenient for the Specialist to attend commonly scheduled weekly or monthly staff meetings to receive the formalized training of the on-line assessment. The training will be more beneficial if Internet access is available. The assessment shall be administered at least annually once the youth has reached age 14, prior to youth being referred for ILP Life Skills training and preceding the youth's exit from the Division's care and custody

NECESSARY ACTION:

1. Review this memorandum with all staff of the Children's Division.
2. Staff should contact the youth's placement provider (i.e., birth parents, foster parents, relative/kinship providers, pre-adoptive parents, transitional living providers, residential treatment providers, or advocates) to notify them of the ACLSA and the requirement to complete the caretaker's form.
3. All comments and questions regarding this memorandum should be cleared through normal supervisory channels.
4. All questions regarding specific case situations should be made to the assigned ILP Specialist covering the county/circuit.

FS/LT:js