

WESTMORELAND COUNTY INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Mission:

The Westmoreland County Independent Living Program (WCCB IL) engages youth and young adults in a coordinated, cross-system effort to improve their successes and permanent connections, as they become responsible and productive citizens.

Purpose:

The WCCB IL program's purpose is to assist eligible youth in developing various skills, tools, resources, and personal enrichment to help the youth obtain independent living within the community.

Eligibility:

The WCCB IL program serves youth ages 16 to their 21st birthday who meet the following criteria:

- Be in, or have been in, out-of-home placement (with WCCB) on or after age 16; AND
- Have been adjudicated dependent; or
- Have been dually adjudicated dependent AND delinquent; or
- Have been adjudicated delinquent with SHARED CASE-MANAGEMENT responsibility between the WCCB and Juvenile Probation.

The IL program is voluntary and requires youth willingness to participate and work toward goals.

Referral Procedure:

The caseworker that is assigned to a youth who meets the eligibility criteria shall refer the youth to the Independent Living Services team by completing the IL referral form, and submitting it to the IL Coordinator, along with the documents requested on the form. Once a referral form has been submitted it is the responsibility of the IL services team to offer Independent Living Services to the youth. All documentation for IL services will be input into the CAPS system once the service has been completed so it can be filed in the youth's case record. If a youth is not interested in participation, the IL Social Worker will request this in writing from the youth.

Services Available to Youth:

The IL Services team can assist eligible youth in the following areas:

(other services may be provided on a case by case basis)

- Goal Development
- Transition Planning
- Life Skills Training
- Referral for Driver's Education (actual driving lessons by certified instructors)

- Financial Aid Application Assistance
- SAT fee/College Application Fee Waivers
- Medical Assistance Paperwork
- State Identification Card
- Education Planning: College Tours, applications, etc.
- Job/Hunting/Application Assistance/Mock Interviewing
- Volunteer Opportunities/Assistance with Job Shadowing
- Assistance with gathering Transition Documents
- Driver's Permit Test
- Referrals to Community Resources
- Assistance with locating permanent housing

Life Skills Training:

Life Skills Classes (IL Group) are voluntary and offered to all IL eligible youth, including Aftercare. The classes cover the following areas: Effective communication, employment, financial management, housing, transportation, education planning including financial aid, legal issues for youth in substitute care, stress management, nutrition, sexuality & interpersonal relationships, cooking, aging out/transitioning to adulthood and related topics. Information is offered through presentations, lessons, worksheets, activities, guest speakers, and community involvement.

Youth Residing Outside Of Westmoreland County:

While a youth is in the custody of the Westmoreland County Children's Bureau it is WCCB IL's responsibility to offer IL services to the youth. If it is more convenient for the youth to attend a closer county's IL group sessions and the other county is in agreement with that, WCCB IL will still provide stipend payments in a way that makes sense according to how the other county runs their IL Groups. Once a youth is in the Aftercare program it is the responsibility of the county in which the youth resides to offer IL services to that youth. WCCB IL will make referrals to other counties as requested.

Stipends:

See Westmoreland County Independent Living Program Stipend Policy.

Transition Planning:

Westmoreland County Children's Bureau is committed to ensuring success for all youth and young adults involved with our system. One way of doing so is to ensure that all youth are aware of services available upon discharge or transitioning into adulthood in a timely manner. In an effort to begin planning for independence, a meeting is held at least 90 days prior to the youth turning 18 years old in WCCB custody. This is done through Family Group Decision Making, a Services Team for Adults in Recovery meeting, a Family Team Meeting, or other type of meeting where both family and providers can be invited to attend. At the meeting a youth-directed Transition Plan is developed, which will be presented to the court.

Remaining in Care past age 18:

Act 91 of 2012 allows youth to remain in agency custody and care past their 18th birthday until their 21st birthday if the youth meets at least one of the following criteria:

- Completing high school or an equivalent program;
- Enrolled in a post-secondary education or vocational program;

- Participating in a program to help the youth get a job;
- Employed for at least an average of 80 hours per month or;
- Cannot do any of the activities listed above because of a documented behavioral health or mental health condition

Aftercare Program:

Westmoreland County Independent Living Aftercare Program services youth age 16 through their 21st birthday, who meet the criteria for IL and who have subsequently discharged from agency care.

Aftercare services are voluntary. It is the responsibility of the youth to contact their IL worker to request Aftercare services and when assistance is needed.

Re-entry and Resumption of Jurisdiction:

According to Act 91 of 2012 youth can return to agency custody and care under certain conditions and if the youth meets certain criteria. Youth can also ask for the court to resume jurisdiction of the case, but not to be entered into the custody of the agency. This will apply if:

- The youth discharged from agency custody or care or was released from dependency, when the youth was 17 and 9 months or older,
- The youth must still be under the age of 21, and
- The youth must be engaging in one of the activities that would qualify that youth for extended foster care (listed above)-the IL program can assist youth in getting involved in at least one of these activities

Youth Advisory Board:

The Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board (YAB) is made up of current and former foster youth (youth who are or were in the care of the agency). The purpose of YAB is to educate, advocate, and bring about positive change in the substitute care system. Our goal is to represent the voice of older system youth and work with others to achieve positive change.

Westmoreland County is part of the South-West Region YAB. The group meets every few months to work on initiatives laid out by the State YAB. Youth have the opportunity to work with youth from other counties at the regional level. The state YAB meets every 3 months to work on policies, legislation, education, and reaching out to the media in an effort to make change for youth who are or have been in substitute care.

Participation in YAB is voluntary. YAB is looking for youth who can regularly attend and be involved as much as possible. There are incentives offered for regular attendance.

Independent Living Acknowledgement Page

My signature below indicates that the Westmoreland County Children’s Bureau Independent Living program has been explained to me and a copy of the packet has been provided to me. In addition, I understand that I am eligible for Independent Living services from my 16th birthday through my 21st birthday. I also understand that any financial assistance is only awarded when funds are available and I have met the requirements for that funding. I am also acknowledging that I have been made aware of my right to remain in agency custody after the age of 18 if I meet criteria and that re-entry has been explained to me.

Youth Signature

Date

Youth Name (please print)

IL Worker

Date

Ongoing Caseworker

Date

Resource Parent (if present)

Date

Other

Date

Refusal of Independent Living Services

I, _____, have been informed of my right to participate and receive Independent Living Program Services. I am not interested in participating in these services at this time. I understand that I may participate in the future, up until I turn age 21, by contacting the Westmoreland County Children’s Bureau Independent Living Program and requesting services. The program can be reached at (724) 830-3301.

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read and understand the availability of IL services.

Youth Signature

Date

Witness Signature

Date