

**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
311 W. SARATOGA STREET
BALTIMORE MD 21201**

DATE: March 15, 2007

CIRCULAR LETTER: SSA #07-05

TO: Directors, Local Department of Social Services
Other Recipients of Circular Letters

FROM: Carnitra White
Deputy Executive Director
Social Services Administration

RE: Aftercare Services for Out-of-Home Placement

PROGRAMS AFFECTED: Foster Care Services, Kinship Care Services,
Independent Living Services

ORIGINATING OFFICE: Office of Children and Family Services

ACTION REQUIRED: April 15, 2007

REQUIRED ACTION: Implement Aftercare Services

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Purpose

The purpose of this circular letter is to establish a procedure for post-placement activities and supervision, termed “aftercare services” to a child (and their family) by the local department of social services. These procedures include efforts that should be made prior to aftercare, during aftercare and at the completion of aftercare services.

Background

COMAR 07.02.11.23 requires that once a child leaves an approved out-of-home placement, and is placed in a non-payment placement (i.e. returned to parents, placed with relative or guardian) the local department will provide post placement supervision prior to closure of the case. Post placement supervision, trial visits as they are titled in some other states, or aftercare is a vital step toward the achievement of permanency. Sufficient and successful aftercare services can strengthen permanency and prevent re-entry.

The Chafee Independence Act includes a requirement to provide a different type of aftercare service for youth who left foster care at or after age 18. These services are to be available until the eligible youth reaches age 21.

Definition

Aftercare is a set of post-placement services for a child in or emerging from out-of-home placement foster care and kinship care. The child is no longer in a paid out-of-home placement or residing in formal kinship placement. There are two main categories of aftercare: Traditional Aftercare for reunification or relative placement and Independent Living Services Aftercare for youth 18-21 who are emancipated from out-of-home placement.

- Traditional Aftercare is NOT closure of the case. For children returning to or being placed into the home of a parent/parents or a relative/legal guardian, aftercare services are designed to transition the child from an out-of-home placement setting to the permanent home. The services are made available by the local department to ensure that the living arrangement is safe and the needs of the child and family are being met in order to help the placement be successful. The aftercare period is for three months, but can be expanded an additional 3 months.
- Independent Living Services Aftercare provides former foster care youth between the ages of 18 and 21 with an opportunity to continue learning and practicing independent living skills and activities for a specified period of time, as indicated in a service agreement, with the local department. The goal of the program is to assure that program participants recognize and accept personal responsibility and serves for making the transition into adulthood. All of Maryland’s youth must exit foster care by their 21st birthday. Any youth who left care at or after their 18th birthday is eligible for aftercare services until they reach 21, but not eligible for replacement into a paid foster care living arrangement. While the foster care record is closed, there is an open aftercare record.

Traditional Aftercare

Before The Traditional Aftercare Placement

Aftercare should not begin just because a targeted date for post-placement has arrived. Before placing a child in aftercare, the caseworker must make a full assessment of the child and family’s readiness for the placement. The Risk Assessment (DHR/SSA Form 1061) must again

be completed for comparison to the original. The Safety Assessment (SAFE-C, DHR/SSA Form 1575) must also be completed on the aftercare family 7 days prior to the aftercare placement. The assessment should examine the family's ability to provide safe care for the child. The caseworker must visit the home when all members of the household are home to observe the family unit as a whole. There must be extended overnight visits for the foster child with the family. The outcome of these visits is also a part of the caseworker's assessment.

The caseworker while visiting the child must discuss aftercare services before the change in the child's living arrangement happens. These visits should include a discussion with the child (as appropriate) about returning home or being placed with the relative family. Remember that sibling visitation must be arranged for any sibling of the aftercare child who remains in out-of-home placement.

The completed risk assessment from when the child came into care should be reviewed to be sure that all facets of the issues and circumstances that brought the child into care have been addressed. This review will also play a part in determining what, if any, services would need to be available to the family to make the aftercare placement successful.

It is very important that the caseworker meet with the aftercare caregiver to discuss the structure of the aftercare services. This meeting should include plans for the child's care including school, medical, daycare, clothing, and meals, lodging, transportation for school, transportation for medical appointments, and other issues appropriate to the care of the child. If the family will need supportive services once the child is transitioned home, the services should be part of the aftercare services structure. The aftercare services structure should be incorporated in the new service agreement. It is important that you make it clear that during the aftercare period, the child is still committed to the department. The aftercare family should be made aware that bi-weekly visits will occur during the aftercare service period.

The caseworker must meet with the foster parents/current out-of-home placement caregiver to discuss their role in transitioning the child for reunification/relative placement. The current placement caregiver plays a crucial role in helping the child move to the aftercare placement. The aftercare placement has a greater chance of success by integrating the current caregiver in the process.

While planned Aftercare is always the goal, the decision of permanency goals and case closure rests ultimately with the court. In some instances, the court will order immediate return home regardless of the permanency plan. Under such circumstances, while the department may not go against the court order, it still has the responsibility to complete actions to ensure the child's safety such as risk assessments and SAFE-C. There are also times when the court will move in the opposite direction, by extending a planned aftercare beyond the 6-month period by court order. The department cannot act against the court order. However, the department should take the initiative for planned Aftercare to ask the court to keep the Aftercare within the 6-month timeframe.

Traditional Aftercare Services and Agency Responsibility

1. *Documentation:* There are several documents that must be completed for an aftercare placement.
 - A Risk Assessment completed for the family.

- A new caseplan is to be completed with a new service agreement, unless the current caseplan is less than 60 days old. If the current caseplan is less than 60 days old an addendum to the caseplan may be substituted.
 - A service plan specific to the needs of the child and family for successful aftercare placement. It should detail any services that the child and family would need to sustain a permanent placement and details on the provision of the placement.
 - A SAFE-C, when the child is placed in the aftercare placement.
2. *Visitation:* Intense visitation is crucial to a successful aftercare placement. During the aftercare period, the caseworker must visit the child in the home at least once every 2 weeks. These visits must take place in the home with the child and at least 1 caregiver present. These visits are used to determine if the family can adequately provide care for the child without supportive help from the department or with less intensive in-home family services, and to also determine what community services the family needs to be linked to beyond local department involvement.
3. *Length of Aftercare Period:* Traditional aftercare is for a maximum of 3 months. At the 3-month period, the LDSS shall make a recommendation to the court that the child's commitment be rescinded and case closed, or return the child to an out-of-home placement, or extend the aftercare services period. Aftercare services may be continued for an additional 3 months up to 6 months. If the caseworker determines that the aftercare should be extended to 6 months a new service agreement must be completed, detailing the reasons for the extended period and what will be accomplished during the extended period. If aftercare services were extended to 6 months, at the end of that additional time period the child's commitment must be rescinded, or the child returned to an out-of-home placement.

Aftercare services should only be extended beyond 6 months under extreme circumstances. If aftercare services need to continue beyond the 6-month period, the caseworker should consult with the supervisor to assess whether Aftercare is truly appropriate. When a caseworker determines that aftercare services need to continue beyond a total of 6 consecutive months the record must detail a compelling reason why the aftercare needs to be extended. This compelling reason must clearly delineate the reason for extension in regard to the specific child and also justify that extending the aftercare services will more likely than not result in the rescinding of the commitment. Court ordered continuation aftercare is also a compelling reason. The aftercare can be extended beyond the 6 consecutive months in 1-month intervals on written approval of the local department director or for a specified period by court order. For aftercare services extended beyond the consecutive 6 months, the caseworker must visit the child in the placement every week. These visits should be detailed in the Contact Notes.

REMEMBER: *Once a child is placed for aftercare services, the services are to the entire family, as the family becomes the case. The caseworker is responsible during the aftercare visits for reviewing the care and needs situation of all children and the caregivers of the child in the home to be sure that the home is safe and appropriate.*

4. *Outcomes of Aftercare and Completion:* The intended outcome of aftercare placement and services is that the child will be transitioned back into the family or into the relative family and permanency achieved. If the local department determines that the family is providing adequate care for the child, the local department shall make a final report to the court concerning the family's progress and shall request rescission of the commitment.

Independent Living Aftercare Services

Independent Living Aftercare Eligibility

Independent Living Aftercare services are available on a voluntary basis to youth 18 to 21 years old who were in out-of-home placement on their 18th birthday. Youth are not eligible who left care prior to their 18th birthday, nor are they eligible after they reach age 21. The youth must be offered Independent Living Aftercare Services. Independent Living Aftercare services are designed to support former foster care recipients between 18-21 years old in their effort to achieve self-sufficiency. The foster care case record for the child is closed, however when a youth requests Independent Living Aftercare services, an aftercare case record is to be opened.

Youth who apply for independent living aftercare services shall:

1. Meet eligibility requirements;
2. Receive services from the local department in the jurisdiction in which they reside; and
3. Complete an intake screening process by the local department to determine appropriateness of aftercare services.
4. Complete a service agreement for the aftercare services

Preparation for Independent Living Aftercare Services

Exit interviews may be held prior to the youth leaving care. The interviews must occur, at a minimum 180, 90, and 30 days prior to the youth exiting care, and can be included with the context of one of the regular monthly visits.. The purpose of the meeting is to obtain discharge information and to discuss aftercare service availability and limitations, share the toll free 800 number with the youth (800-555-1345), ask to check in with the local department every 3 months after exiting care, and inform the youth that the caseworker will be performing outreach every 60 days during the aftercare services. The outreach is the opportunity to check on the youth's welfare and other measurable outcomes, such as how they are doing regarding employment, housing education, and relationships, and also to see if they have any further help needs. The discharge information must include at minimum:

- Living location and address
- Telephone number (residential and cell if applicable)
- Email address
- Contact person for the child

Available Independent Living Aftercare Services

Eligible former foster youth who request aftercare services must have an assessment conducted to determine the appropriateness of aftercare services and linkage to other agency or community services. Aftercare services are designed to be short-termed. Aftercare services may

be extended based on the need with appropriate agency authorization. Aftercare services include:

1. Financial assistance to purchase goods and services to support efforts of youth,
2. Counseling,
3. Employment assistance including instruction on job search, interviewing, appropriate work attire, or support to assist with transportation to maintain and seek employment, the purchase of uniforms, etc.,
4. Educational assistance and information regarding obtaining a GED, and enrolling in post-secondary educational institutions,
5. Medical assistance,
6. Security deposits,
7. Room and board, and
8. Utilities or other appropriate services for self-sufficiency.

A youth may apply and reapply for aftercare services as many times as needed up to the 21st birthday. The evaluation of a youth's need for the aftercare service involves a clinical assessment on a case-by-case basis. The goal of the aftercare services is to prevent homelessness. Therefore, extensive efforts must be made with the youth to set realistic and achievable goals in the service agreement in order to assure compliance.

The caseworker is responsible for contacting the child every 60 days when aftercare services are being rendered. The caseworker must also collect outcomes such as funds expended, achievement of goals during aftercare services, and whether there were available aftercare services to meet the youth's needs. This outreach requirement is for accountability purposes for audits and to help the youth learn about responsibility for receipts and documentation.

Independent Living Aftercare Case Record Management

- *Funding:* The source of funding for independent living aftercare services is dependent upon the services rendered, which are documented in MD CHESSIE by the service log. For room and board, payment code 5187; for goods and services, use payment code 5182; for education and training costs, youth should utilize Tuition-Fee Waiver if eligible and the Education Tuition Voucher; and for all other non-aftercare services, use the Chafee code as appropriate by issued policy.
- *When to close:* The aftercare service case record should be closed when the goal/need the youth came in for has been accomplished or met, or when the youth reaches the 21st birthday. For closures prior to the youth's 21st birthday, the local department should be prepared to reopen the case if needed. For those youth who have activated the Education Tuition Voucher (ETV) prior to their 21st birthday, they will continue eligible until their 23rd birthday. For any issues with the ETV, contact the SSA Independent Living Policy Specialist.
- *Documentation for the Youth's Case Record:*
 1. Contact sheet: Lists all telephone, office, email, mail contacts
 2. Individual Spending Plan, DHR/SSA 327 (See Attachment A)

3. Independent Living Quarterly Expenditure Report, DHR/SSA 406 (See Attachment B)
4. Aftercare Expenditure Form DHR/SSA 406A (See Attachment C)
5. Aftercare Intake Form
6. Service Agreement