

You Are Not Alone!

A HANDBOOK PUBLISHED BY LAWYERS FOR CHILDREN
FOR YOUTH AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE IN NEW YORK CITY

The "You Are Not Alone" series is dedicated to the inspiring young people that we at Lawyers For Children have the privilege to work with every day. The information in these pages is for them and other young people like them who work hard to create healthy, happy, successful lives for themselves after foster care. We are deeply grateful for their contributions to this book, for their trust, their courage and their determination.

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Lawyers For Children is a non profit organization providing critically needed, top-quality legal representation and social work services to over 4,000 children and young people in foster care in New York City every year. We advocate on behalf of our clients in foster care, abuse, neglect, termination of parental rights and custody proceedings. In addition, Lawyers For Children engages in policy and reform efforts to benefit all children in foster care throughout New York State. To learn more about LFC, visit our website at www.lawyersforchildren.org, call us at 212-966-6420, or write to Lawyers For Children at 110 Lafayette Street, NY, NY 10013.

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INTRODUCTION

WHY SHOULD I READ THIS HANDBOOK?

If you have picked up this handbook, or were given a copy by a social worker, caseworker, or your law guardian, you are probably one of the many young adults who is planning for the time when you will age out of the foster care system in New York City. *You Are Not Alone* is intended to help you in your journey to independence and to help inform you about the issues that you may want to address while you are still in foster care. This handbook will also provide information about resources available to you after you age out of foster care. It is important to know that your lawyer and your foster care agency should help you with everything you need to do as you prepare to leave foster care.

If you come across words or phrases in the handbook that are not familiar to you, check the Quick Reference Guide in the back for short definitions of foster care and family court terms.

Remember, you are not alone!



Remember, you

KNOW THE BASICS BEFORE LEAVING FOSTER CARE

Your foster care agency should help you prepare to leave foster care by helping you to find housing, apply for benefits, identify an adult in the community whom you can rely on for assistance, and find employment or an appropriate educational program.

Specifically, your agency should assist you to do the following before you leave foster care:

- ✦ complete housing applications before you turn 21 or leave foster care, so you can access a housing priority for young people leaving foster care through the NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA) and Section 8 (See p. 16 for more details);
- ✦ apply for Medicaid benefits, and ensure that you are moved to transitional Medicaid while you wait for your own Medicaid coverage to begin (See p. 34);
- ✦ apply for public assistance and/or SSI benefits, if you are eligible (See p. 32);
- ✦ make referrals for employment services and/or educational programs (See p. 27);
- ✦ make sure you have proper documentation and immigration status before you turn 21 (See SIJS, p. 42).

In addition to helping you with these applications and referrals, your agency should:

- ✦ notify you in writing 90 days before your last day in foster care;
 - ✦ identify people and services that can help you when you leave foster care;
 - ✦ put in a request for a discharge grant or take you shopping for furniture and clothing;
 - ✦ keep you on a “trial discharge” for six months, or until you are 21, so that you can get help from the agency if you need it or return to foster care if necessary;
 - ✦ find a safe place for you to live for at least a year after leaving foster care
- THAT IS NOT A SHELTER.**

A SHELTER IS NOT AN APPROPRIATE DISCHARGE PLAN



are not alone!

YOUR LAWYER

Your lawyer will probably work for Lawyers For Children or the Legal Aid Society. Both of these offices represent young people in foster care, but each office works differently.

The most important thing to remember about your lawyer is that she or he works for YOU. Your lawyer can help ensure that you get all the services and benefits that you have a legal right to receive.

The judge will assign the lawyer who will represent you in court. At Lawyers For Children, you will have both a lawyer and a social worker to advocate for you. Your lawyer's job is to represent your wishes and protect your legal interests.

FINDING YOUR LAWYER

If you do not know who your lawyer is, ask your caseworker for your lawyer's name and number. You can find out on your own by making a few phone calls.



First, call Lawyers For Children at 800-244-2540 or 212-966-6420. Tell the person who answers that you want to know the name of your lawyer and social worker.

You'll be asked for your name and maybe for your birth date. If you are represented by Lawyers For Children, you can also search for your attorney or social worker on LFC's web site:

web

www.lawyersforchildren.org

If Lawyers For Children can't find your name in their records, you should then call Legal Aid. Legal Aid has offices in each borough. Call the number listed on next page in the borough where you lived before you came into foster care.



Lawyers For Children

800-244-2540 or 212-966-6420

web

www.lawyersforchildren.org

Legal Aid

Manhattan: 212-312-2260

Bronx: 718-579-7900

Brooklyn: 718-237-3100

Queens: 718-298-8900

Staten Island: 718-981-0219

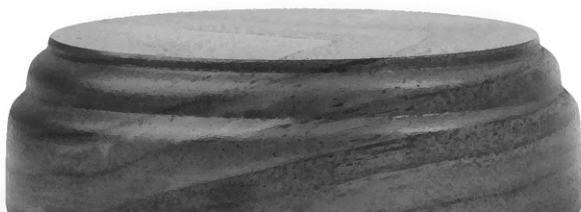
web

www.legal-aid.org



REMEMBER

Your agency is obligated by law to help you get the benefits that you want and need. Your lawyer is there to ensure that your rights are protected, that the agency fulfills its obligations to you, and that you have a voice in your foster care experience.



PERMANENCY PLANNING

Every young person in foster care has a permanency plan. As you approach your eighteenth birthday and prepare to leave foster care, your role in the planning process becomes more important than ever. You will be asked to participate in permanency planning conferences and permanency planning hearings to help determine the details of your own permanency planning goal.

Your attorney is available to help you throughout this process and you should not hesitate to ask for assistance. Some of the important concepts and terms that you will confront when planning for your future are outlined below.

PERMANENCY PLANNING GOAL

Your agency is responsible for developing a plan for what happens when you leave foster care. When creating your plan, the agency must choose between the five different permanency planning goals (also known as PPGs) that are laid out in the Adoption and Safe Families Act. The goals are:

- ✦ return to parent;
- ✦ adoption;
- ✦ custody or guardianship;
- ✦ placement with a fit and willing relative; and
- ✦ another planned permanent living arrangement with connection to a significant adult in the community, also known as APPLA. (You may have heard of the goal of “independent living” or “discharge to adult residential care.” These goals are now both included under the new goal of APPLA.)

Your permanency plan should be made with your input and you should consult with your lawyer about any aspects of the plan that you are unsure of, or any aspects of the plan that you think might present a problem for you. The agency must present your plan to the Family Court judge who will review your case approximately every six months. When the plan is presented in court, you and your lawyer can agree with the plan or present a different plan to the judge.





ANOTHER PLANNED PERMANENT LIVING ARRANGEMENT

PERMANENCY HEARING OR PERMANENCY PLAN REVIEW

This is a hearing held about every six months, where the Family Court reviews the agency's progress in planning for you. You should talk with your lawyer in advance about coming to court for these hearings, so that you can have the most input into the plans that will be presented to the judge regarding your future. Remember that when your plan is presented in court, you and your lawyer can agree with the plan or present a different plan to the judge.

SERVICE PLAN REVIEW (SPR) OR PLANNING CONFERENCE

A service plan review (SPR) or planning conference is a meeting scheduled at least every six months, where your foster care agency identifies your permanency plan and discusses what services are available to you. Your caseworker should invite you and any "significant adult" (parent, relative, foster parent, teacher) in your life to attend this conference. You also have a right to know about and attend the SPR or planning conference. And you have a right to have your attorney attend the conference as your advocate, if you wish.

Any concerns or issues you may have, such as questions about your immigration status, education, employment, housing, medical needs, independent living services, and discharge resources or supports should be addressed in the SPR or planning conference. If your goal is APPLA, the agency should help you to identify your "significant adult." Tell them about anyone whom you would feel comfortable calling on for help after you're out of foster care. If you can't think of anyone, your agency should help you find someone who you can turn to when you leave care.

DISCHARGE FROM FOSTER CARE

Once you reach age 18, the foster care agency must obtain your written consent to remain in care. You can not be forced to remain in foster care after you turn 18. However, you can choose to stay in care until your 21st birthday, as long as you work with your agency towards your goal.

**18
21**

When you leave care, you are “discharged.”

TRIAL DISCHARGE

A trial discharge is a six-month period when you are technically in the custody of ACS, but are able to live on your own in the community. A trial discharge is required for all young adults being discharged to independent living or APPLA. Your lawyer is entitled to 10 days advance notice of the trial discharge. While you are on trial discharge, the agency must continue to help you find services, and provide you with clothing allowances and independent living stipends. Your agency must help you find housing or take you back into a group or foster home if you become homeless during this time. After six months, a trial discharge will become a final discharge unless you and your lawyer or caseworker request an extension of the trial discharge period.

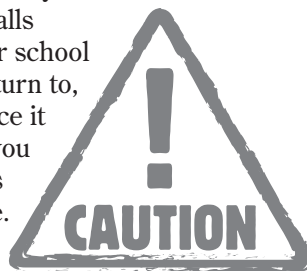
FINAL DISCHARGE

If you are final discharged, the agency no longer has legal custody or authority over you. If you reach age 21 and do not wish any further contact with the agency, or when your trial discharge period ends, you are considered to be final discharged. Before your 21st birthday, the agency must seek permission from the court to approve your final discharge, and must notify your lawyer 10 days before your discharge becomes final. If you become homeless after a final discharge, the agency does not have to place you back into care or to offer you services or referrals. However, in rare cases an exception may be made so that you can continue to receive some services or support. You should contact your law guardian immediately if you find yourself in this situation.

A trial discharge
is a backup plan
& safety net
for your future.



A final discharge may seem like the quickest and best way to leave foster care and move on with your life. However, there are important benefits to remaining on trial discharge status after you leave your foster care placement. If something falls through, such as your housing, your job, or your school financing, you still have your agency or ACS to turn to, and they have a legal obligation to help you. Since it is hard to know before you leave care whether you will need their help after you are discharged, it's worth considering the option of a trial discharge. Think of it as your backup plan and safety net for your future.



AWOL OR ABSENT WITHOUT LEAVE FROM FOSTER CARE

If you leave your placement without receiving permission from the staff, you are considered to be “AWOL.” If you stay away from your placement for more than 60 days, you may be discharged from foster care and you may lose certain entitlements. If you wish to return to foster care after 60 days have passed, you may have to ask your attorney to help you return to your old placement or to get a new placement. If you are experiencing problems in your placement, call your lawyer! Your lawyer should be able to help you change your placement or improve your living situation.

EMANCIPATION

There is no way to become an “emancipated minor” through the New York court system, but young people often hear about being emancipated. If you are at least 16 years old, it may be possible for you to live on your own and receive public assistance (home relief). You must be able to prove to a public assistance worker that you live apart from your family, that you have your own place to live, and that you are not receiving and do not need any foster care services.

If you have left foster care and you need to know more about how to live on your own and receive public assistance, call The Door or your lawyer. The Door is a center for young people ages 12-21. The Door is open Monday-Friday from 2–8PM. You can contact The Door at 212-941-9090. All information and services at The Door are confidential between you and The Door staff.



The Door

555 Broome Street
Between 6th Avenue and Varick Street
212-941-9090

web

www.door.org

YOUR DISCHARGE PLAN

Before you are discharged from foster care, your agency must be certain that you will be healthy, safe and housed when you leave care. A young adult can not be discharged to “a shelter for adults, shelter for families, single-room occupancy hotel or any other congregate living arrangement which houses more than 10 unrelated persons.” This rule comes from the New York Code of Rules and Regulations. This means you **MUST HAVE HOUSING OTHER THAN A SHELTER** before the agency can discharge you, **EVEN IF YOU ARE TURNING 21**. Your agency is obligated by law to find you suitable housing that will last for at least one year.



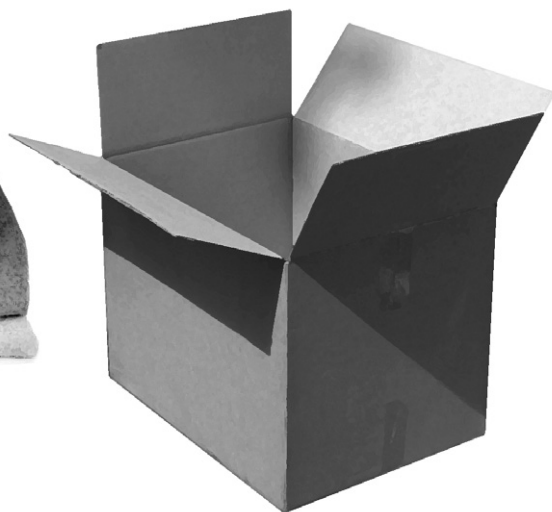
Your agency must seek permission from the Court before final discharging you. The agency normally asks the Court for that permission at a permanency hearing where they have to inform the Court of your discharge plan and explain the supports that are in place for you after you are discharged. The court hearing includes an opportunity for the court to review the plan for where you will live after you leave foster care. This is an opportunity for you and your law guardian to have the court direct the agency to find you housing, employment, education, a stable source of income, an adult you can rely on for help after your discharge, medical coverage or anything else that you might need from the agency.

Make a
solid plan
for your
future!

Your law guardian will fight in Court to make sure that your agency helps you make a solid plan for your future. However, the Court may not order the agency to help you if the agency can convince the judge that they have tried their best to help you, but you have not cooperated. This is one reason why it is important that you come to court for your permanency hearings. If you are in court, you can help your lawyer respond to any complaints the agency may have about your behavior or lack of cooperation. Remember that your lawyer should never simply accept an agency's claim that you are uncooperative, and can fight for your right to appropriate planning services from the agency.

Sometimes it can be hard to work with your agency and it is almost always frustrating. If you don't like your caseworker, see if you can work with the agency's Independent Living Coordinator or the caseworker's supervisor. Tell the agency about your plans for yourself and what you are doing to make a successful future after foster care. If you feel that the agency is unfairly blaming you for work that they have not done or if you cannot find anyone at your agency that is willing to really work with you,

CALL YOUR LAWYER FOR HELP!



HOUSING

Your agency is responsible for helping you find safe, permanent and affordable housing before you leave foster care. Finding safe and affordable housing is a challenge for everyone living in New York City. For young people leaving foster care it is one of the most difficult tasks that you will face. Although there are no guarantees or easy solutions, there are many programs specifically designed to help young people aging out of foster care to find permanent housing.

Many housing programs for youth aging out of foster care require that you apply before you leave foster care. At the end of this section you will also find information about housing programs for youth who are still in foster care and are participating in independent living programs. Talk to your caseworker, their supervisor, the housing coordinator at your foster care agency, or the Administration for Children's Services Housing Support and Services Unit (212-341-8979) for help locating and applying for housing. If you cannot get the help that you need, **CONTACT YOUR LAWYER!**





There are three main housing programs for youth aging out of foster care:

- ◆ the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA);
- ◆ Section 8; and
- ◆ the ACS Housing Subsidy.

It is extremely important to understand that you can only receive benefits from one of these programs. However, you should apply for all of them, see which one is approved, and then decide which program best meets your needs. For further information about housing resources, contact your caseworker, your lawyer, or Administration for Children's Services Housing Support and Services Unit at 212-341-8979.



To apply for any of these programs, you should speak to your caseworker, or go to the ACS Housing Support and Services Unit in Manhattan at 150 William Street (between Fulton and Ann Streets), 8th floor.



Because locating housing can be a long and complicated process, you should begin this process as soon as possible after you turn 18 years old. It's important to know that most, but not all, of these programs require that you have some form of income, and they look for four to eight pay stubs as part of the application process. More detailed information is provided in the insert in the back cover of this handbook, but the following pages provide brief descriptions of the programs.

HOUSING PROGRAMS

YOUR CASEWORKER SHOULD BE WILLING AND ABLE TO HELP YOU APPLY FOR ALL OF THE FOLLOWING HOUSING PROGRAMS:

NEW YORK CITY HOUSING AUTHORITY (NYCHA)

The New York City Housing Authority gives priority to applications from young people aging out of foster care, and locates apartments for them in a public housing complex. To qualify, you must meet certain income requirements and pass a criminal background check.



SECTION 8 HOUSING

The federal Section 8 program provides vouchers to help pay for housing for those who qualify. The Section 8 program had been frozen, but has re-opened on a limited basis for a small group of applicants. If you are in foster care and were previously certified as eligible for Section 8, or are already on the Section 8 waiting list but haven't yet been interviewed, you may now be eligible for the Section 8 program. The Section 8 program is run by NYCHA and, like NYCHA housing, there are income requirements and a criminal background check for Section 8. One important distinction between NYCHA and Section 8 is that Section 8 is more flexible about the criminal background check requirements. Unfortunately, there is no indication of how much funding is available or if another freeze is possible. As a result, even if you have already applied or are already on the waiting list, you should continue to explore other housing resources in addition to Section 8.



ACS HOUSING SUBSIDY

The ACS Housing Subsidy program pays up to \$300 per month towards your rent, directly to your landlord, for up to three years or until your twenty-first birthday.



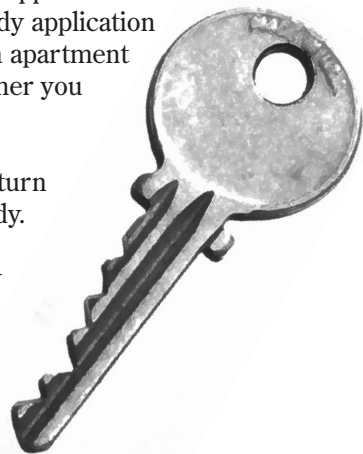
In order to qualify for the ACS Housing Subsidy, you must be on trial discharge to independent living (APPLA), with a documented source of income, and you must be able to pay 30 percent of your income towards your housing costs. The subsidy is paid directly to the landlord, and the landlord must agree to accept payment from ACS. ACS must also inspect the apartment and determine if it qualifies for the housing subsidy. Generally, the caseworker looks at the size and the condition of the apartment to decide whether it is eligible for the subsidy. You can only receive the subsidy if your name is the only name on the lease, even if you have roommates who are also former foster youth.

In addition, the ACS Housing Subsidy program will also pay part of your real estate broker's fee, security deposit, moving expenses, or other one-time expenses, up to a total of \$1,800. These funds are available to you even if you have not located an apartment that has been approved for an ACS subsidy. This \$1,800 in funding is often referred to as a "one shot" grant. If you leave foster care without a rent subsidy and get behind in your rent payments, the ACS subsidy program may also provide cash assistance to prevent you from being evicted. You can access the one shot grant up to six months past your 21st birthday.



Your agency caseworker should help you fill out the housing subsidy application. You can also call ACS's Housing Support and Services Unit for help at 212-341-8979. The ACS subsidy application can take months to approve, and you have to locate an apartment where the landlord will accept the subsidy, so the sooner you apply, the better your chances.

Note: Under the current ACS guidelines, after you turn 21, you can no longer receive the ACS Housing Subsidy. This means that you will get the most out of the ACS Housing Subsidy the younger you are when you apply for and begin to use the subsidy, but CAN receive the "ONE-SHOT" GRANT until you are 21 and a half.



HOUSING LOTTERIES

New York City receives money from city, state and other sources to develop apartments and homes for lower-income individuals and families. Tenants are chosen by a lottery system once the developments are completed. These houses and apartments are listed in the classified section of newspapers and online at:

web www.nyc.gov/html/hpd/html/apartment/lotteries.shtml.

Each residence has different qualifications and deadlines to enter the lottery. You should know that these apartments and houses are not public housing. Your landlord will be the real estate developer, and you will be a regular tenant.

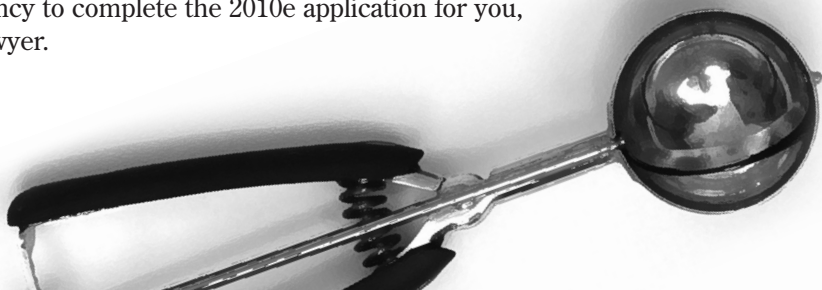
SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Supportive housing could be available to you if you have mental or physical disabilities, HIV/AIDS and/or addiction issues. Supportive housing offers services on site, and you must qualify for supportive housing through the Human Resources Administration (HRA). There are different levels of supportive housing, ranging from apartments scattered around the five boroughs to apartments in special adult residential facilities. The application, called HRA 2010e, is now exclusively online, and must be submitted by someone at your agency or at ACS who was specifically trained by HRA in how to complete it. If no one at your agency has been trained to do so, your caseworker should contact the ACS Housing Support and Services Unit at 212-341-8979/8973 for assistance. The application must include an updated psychosocial summary, a psychiatric evaluation, a release of HIV-related information, and a PPD test (a skin test for tuberculosis). After all of these are submitted, HRA and the Office of Mental Health (OMH) determine what level of supportive housing you qualify for. There are often waiting lists for openings. As with the ACS Housing Subsidy and NYCHA, you should also expect to pay 30 percent of your income towards your rent.



NY/NY III

Along with traditional supportive housing options, HRA and OMH have established housing just for youth aging out of foster care. Unlike other supportive housing placements, these do not require an official medical diagnosis and do not have on-site services. However, they still require a supportive housing application to be completed in order to apply for them. If you need help getting someone from ACS or your agency to complete the 2010e application for you, call your lawyer.



OTHER EMERGENCY HOUSING PROGRAMS

If you need emergency cash assistance for housing after leaving foster care, you may be eligible for assistance from programs such as Jiggetts for Families or rental arrears grants.

JIGGETTS FOR FAMILIES

Jiggetts assistance may be available if you:

- ◆ Are eligible for public assistance,
- ◆ Have a child living with you that is under 18, or under 19 if that child is still in high school,
- ◆ Are being sued in court because you owe back rent,
- ◆ Are charged rent that is higher than your public assistance rent grant; and
- ◆ Have no other way to pay the rent.

The Jiggetts application takes at least two months to process. You cannot complete it on your own. You must apply with the help of a qualified organization. You can search for organizations to help with the Jiggetts application at LawHelp.org or you can call the Legal Aid Society (212-312-2260). Jiggetts only provides temporary rental assistance. While applying for Jiggetts, you should also be exploring other low-cost housing.



RENTAL ARREARS GRANTS

Rental arrears grants may be available through the New York City Human Resources Administration if you live in an apartment but are about to be evicted for not paying the rent, or you have been evicted but your landlord is willing to re-rent the apartment to you. Grants are available for both families and single adults, whether or not you receive public assistance. You can apply at the local public assistance office.

You can call your caseworker (if you are still on trial discharge), your attorney, or 311, for more information on where to apply for either program.



**CALL
311**

TRANSITIONAL LIVING PROGRAMS (TLPs)

These are twelve-to-eighteen-month residential programs for homeless youth. You can only be referred to these programs if you are homeless after discharge. There are educational services, vocational training, job placement assistance, counseling and training in basic life skills such as cooking, home maintenance and money management available on site. There are a total of five of these programs in the five boroughs, and some are single sex only. To enter a TLP, you must enter a crisis shelter and request a referral to a transitional living program. You can find a crisis shelter by contacting Covenant House at 212-613-0300, or Safe Horizon at 212-695-2220 or contact your lawyer.



HOUSING PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH STILL IN FOSTER CARE

GOOD SHEPHERD SERVICES

CHELSEA FOYER AT THE CHRISTOPHER

The Chelsea Foyer at The Christopher (Foyer) provides 40 young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 who are aging out of foster care, homeless, or at risk of homelessness, with supported transitional housing in a co-ed setting. Residents live in suites or studio style apartments and participate in an individualized program of services for up to 24 months. Young people receive on-site case management and life-skills development services and linkages to job training and placement, educational, and vocational resources. You must apply to be part of the program, and once accepted, you are required to hold, at minimum, a part-time job to support your daily needs and help save for the future. Residents contribute a "program fee," determined by income, instead of rent, which is deposited in an account and acts as a security deposit and savings account. Young people who take good care of their apartments get their full program fee savings returned to them upon discharge. For more information, you can go to www.chelseafoyer.org or ask your caseworker or lawyer for more information.

web

RENTAL AGREEMENT

This Rental Agreement and/or Lease shall evidence the complete terms and conditions under which the parties whose signatures appear below have agreed. Landlord/Lessor/Agent, _____, shall be referred to as "OWNER" and Tenant(s)/Lessee, _____, shall be referred to as "RESIDENT." As consideration for this agreement, OWNER agrees to rent/lease to RESIDENT and RESIDENT agrees to rent/lease from OWNER for use solely as a private residence, the premises located at _____ in the city of _____.

1. TERMS: RESIDENT agrees to pay in advance \$ _____ per month on the _____ day of each month. This agreement shall commence on _____ and continue (check one)
A. _____ as a leasehold. Thereafter it shall become a month-to-month tenancy. If RESIDENT should move from the premises prior to the expiration of this time period, he shall be liable for all rent due until such time that the Residence is occupied by an OWNER approved paying RESIDENT and/or expiration of said time period, whichever is shorter.
B. _____ on a month-to-month tenancy until either party shall terminate this agreement by giving a written notice of intention to terminate at least 30 days prior to the date of termination.

2. PAYMENTS: Rent and/or other charges are to be paid at such place or method designated by the owner as follows
_____ All payments are to be made by check or money order and cash shall be acceptable.
_____ and a Security Deposit of \$ _____ and additional _____ for a total payment of \$ _____. All payments are to be made payable to _____.

OWNER acknowledges receipt of the First Month's rent of \$ _____.

The above deposits shall secure compliance with the terms and conditions of this agreement and shall be held in escrow for the purpose of payment of rent, damages, and/or cost for repair of damages to premises and/or other costs not fully allowable under the terms of this agreement. A written receipt of rent shall be provided to the tenant upon payment of rent.

SCHAFER YOUNG ADULT INITIATIVE

This program is similar to the Chelsea Foyer program in that it provides housing and services on site for young people on trial or final discharges from foster care. To apply, you must be 18-23 years old, on trial or final discharge, and have a goal of APPLA. In terms of income, you must either qualify for the ACS Housing Subsidy or have enough income without it to pay the rent. They accept Section 8 vouchers as well. For more information, call 212-828-3007.



FURNITURE AND OTHER HOUSING RELATED ASSISTANCE

FURNITURE

In addition to your discharge grant, you can get money for furniture through ACS' Day Program Services or through the "one-shot" grant from the ACS Housing Subsidy program described above. Make sure you speak to your caseworker to clarify whether you qualify and how the funds will be given to you. Some agencies will have a caseworker shop for furniture with you and others will reimburse you after you provide receipts for furniture you have purchased on your own. Public assistance may also help with furniture costs.

SECURITY DEPOSIT, FIRST MONTH'S RENT, BROKER'S FEES

The \$1,800 "one shot" grant available through the ACS Housing Subsidy program can be used to help pay your security deposit, your first month's rent or any broker's fees. Public assistance may also help with these initial rental costs. There is more detailed information about public assistance beginning on page 30. Be sure to ask your public assistance case manager about these programs.



EDUCATION

HIGH SCHOOL

While in foster care, you have the right to an education and the right to an education that meets your needs. While you are in school, the agency is obligated by law to pay for things like senior year dues, prom dresses, clothes for graduation, school uniforms, other school expenses (including class rings, school books and yearbooks), and certain extracurricular activities. If you need any of these things, you should speak to your caseworker or your lawyer.

If you are having trouble enrolling in high school or getting the services you need in your current high school, such as English as a Second Language (ESL) services, childcare, or special education or advanced study programs, you should call your lawyer or Advocates for Children's Education Helpline at 866-427-6033. Advocates for Children helps young people under the age of 21 get the services they need and are entitled to in New York City public schools.



GED PROGRAMS

If you have decided that a regular high school isn't for you, a GED program may be a good way for you to get your high school degree. There are a variety of GED programs available in all five boroughs, with different hours and different costs. There are even some GED programs that are attached to colleges or vocational programs. Your agency should assist you in finding a program that's right for you, and in paying for it or finding financial aid for you if there's a tuition fee. If you feel that your caseworker is not responding to your request for help, contact your lawyer.





COLLEGE

There are thousands of colleges and universities, both public and private, throughout the country and abroad. You can get help searching for and applying to colleges and universities through your agency, your high school or your GED program. Many community centers, after-school programs, and even public libraries can also help you find the college that is right for you. In addition, you can find many resources to help you research schools on the internet.

New York has a large network of public State Universities (SUNY) and City Universities (CUNY). There are also many private colleges and universities, as well as technical and community colleges in both New York City and New York State. SUNY and CUNY schools cost less than most private colleges, but this does not mean that you should not explore all of the available options.

Concerns about the cost of tuition should not prevent you from applying to and attending college. Almost anyone in foster care can get financial aid from the state of New York through TAP (Tuition Assistance Program) or from the Federal government through PELL Grants and ETVs (Educational Training Vouchers). The Financial Aid chapter of this handbook (p. 25) has the details about how these programs work. In addition to these government grants and loans, there are many foster care agencies that have their own scholarship programs to help you with the cost of college.

If you need more information about college, college testing, or financial aid for college, contact your lawyer, your caseworker, or one of these organizations:

MANHATTAN, BROOKLYN, STATEN ISLAND

The Door 212-941-9090

THE BRONX

Kips Bay Boys & Girls Club 718-893-8600

QUEENS

Center for Children + Families 718-847-1500

Sunnyside Community Services 718-784-6173

VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Your agency must help you find a job. This includes helping you find the right vocational or trade school. Vocational or trade schools teach job-specific skills. If this is the type of education that you want, the agency should also help you find financial aid if you need it. Make sure that your caseworker knows that you want to find a vocational school, and helps you fill out the applications for admission and for financial aid. (See ETVs on the next page).

Automotive
Culinary
Paralegal
Aviation
Welding
HVAC
Medical
Film
Broadcast
Software
Hotel Management
Construction
Interior Design
Data
Electrical
Web Design
Culinary
Massage Therapy
Mechanics
Trainer/Fitness
Plumbing
Fashion Design
Medical
Graphic Design
Nursing
Recording Arts
Court Reporting
Hair Design
Makeup Artist
fashion
fine Arts
Music
Counseling
Cable Network
Dental Hygienist
Cosmetology

FINANCIAL AID

Whether you decide to go on to college or a vocational school, your agency is responsible for helping you locate financial aid to pay for your program. This means, among other things, helping you find scholarships, filling out applications with you and helping to send them out. Make sure that when you're filling out applications, you indicate that you're an "independent" or "ward of the state." When you are in foster care, no one else's income information counts when it comes to financial aid—including your foster parents and your birth parents. This allows you to get the most financial aid possible.

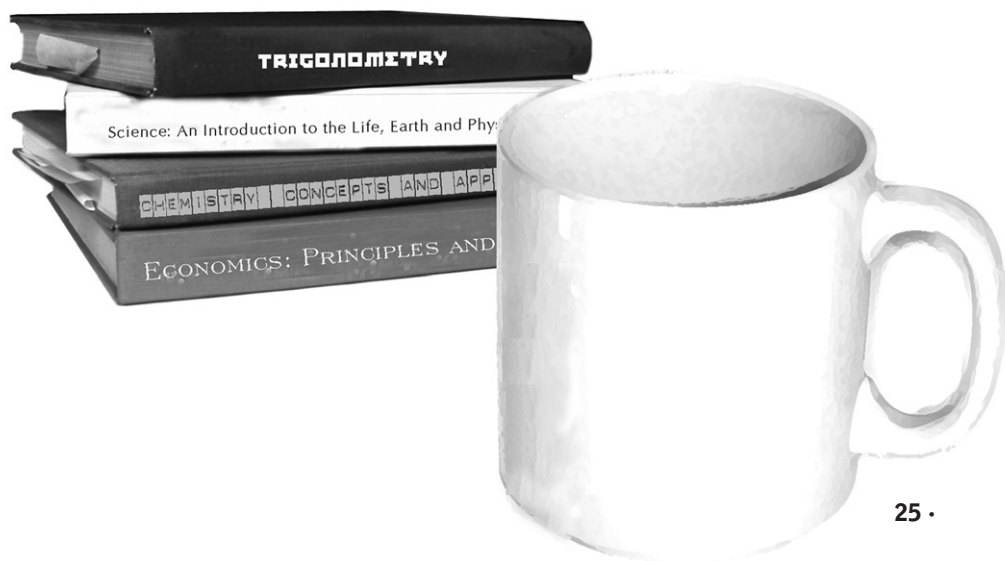
EDUCATIONAL TRAINING VOUCHERS (ETVs)

The New York Education and Training Voucher Program offers funds to current and former foster children for college or vocational programs. You can qualify for up to \$5,000 a year for four years, as you pursue higher education. ETVs can be used for tuition, books or other qualified expenses. For more details and to apply, you should go to:

web

www.statevoucher.org

and select New York as your state. Part of the application needs to be filled out by your school's financial aid office, so you should already be accepted to a school before you apply. You must apply for ETV before you turn 21 in order to be eligible.



SCHOLARSHIPS

There are a number of scholarships available for former foster care youth, including specific scholarships for cosmetology school, nursing school and other professional schools. As soon as you decide you would like to attend college, you should fill out the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), which is a form available online at:



web www.fafsa.ed.gov

or through your high school or any college's financial aid office. Remember that no one's income but yours should be included when filling out financial aid and scholarship applications, or be considered when you are awarded financial aid. There are a variety of online scholarship searches, such as FINAID (www.finaid.org) or FastWeb (www.fastweb.com). A listing of scholarships for foster care youth is also available at Lawyers For Children's website:

web www.lawyersforchildren.org



You can also contact Lawyers For Children at 212-966-6420 or 800-244-2540 for a copy of the listing—just ask for a member of the ACT Project Staff. Don't forget, your caseworker should also help you get as much financial assistance as possible!

ROOM & BOARD

This is a bit tricky. By law, your agency must pay for room and board for any foster care youth attending college away from "their placement." Once you turn 21, technically you are no longer in placement. However, ACS will often continue to pay for room and board until you graduate, if you are granted an "exception to policy" before you turn 21. You must tell your caseworker as soon as possible before you turn 21 that you wish to remain in foster care beyond your 21st birthday so that you can complete your college education. Your agency must then request an exception to policy from ACS. The exception to policy is ACS's permission for you to remain in care and continue to have ACS pay for your room and board while you are attending college. If you are told that you may not remain in foster care beyond your 21st birthday, contact your lawyer immediately.

EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS AND REFERRAL SERVICES



Your agency should help you gain job skills or even get a job before you leave foster care. If you are out of foster care and receiving public assistance, you can call the 24-hour job listing at 212-643-2881, extension 2, or call toll free: 877-585-JOBS (5627). Instructions are also available in Spanish.

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (DYCD)

OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

The NYC Department of Youth and Community Development's Out-of-School Youth (OSY) Employment Programs provide vocational training and education to 16–21 year olds. To qualify, you have to meet income requirements and you must not be in school (either because you dropped out or because you graduated) but still need basic skill development. Generally, you will meet the income requirements if you receive public assistance or food stamps, are homeless, or are in foster care. There are other requirements that you can find online at:

web www.nyc.gov/html/dycd

OSY programs offer GED preparation, vocational training, job placement and follow up after graduation from the program. Since it's a federally funded program, you must be a citizen or legal immigrant and provide certain documentation to participate. You can find OSY locations online at:

web www.nyc.gov/html/dycd



or by calling 212-676-8255.

IN-SCHOOL YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

The In-School Youth Employment (ISY) Program is similar to the OSY programs (see above), but is specifically geared to 14 - 18 year olds who are still attending school. The eligibility requirements are similar to the OSY programs, but they operate after the school day as an employment education program, and they include a summer employment work experience. You can find ISY locations online at:

web www.nyc.gov/html/dycd



or by calling 212-676-8255.

JOB REFERRALS AND JOB READINESS PROGRAMS

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES &
HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATION
PARTNERSHIP

The ACS Office of Youth Development and NYC Human Resources Administration work in partnership to provide employment through a number of organizations.

To qualify for the partnership, you must:

- ✦ be 18 years old;
- ✦ attend and complete a job readiness program (minimum 3 to 4 days);
- ✦ attend an orientation session (about 2 hours);
- ✦ obtain a letter stating that you're in foster care (usually from your agency);
- ✦ obtain an official copy of your birth certificate;
- ✦ have a photo ID;
- ✦ have your Social Security Card or Alien Registration Card (non-citizen).



To apply, you should contact the ACS Office of Youth Development at 212-361-1974/5. If you are having any problems obtaining the required documentation and your caseworker is unable to help you, be sure to call your lawyer.

JOB CORPS

Job Corps is run by the U.S. Department of Labor for young people ages 16 through 24. When you enroll, you can get vocational training, your GED or high school diploma, and job placement help. You will be paid a monthly allowance, and the longer you stay with the program, the more your allowance will be. Job Corps provides career counseling and aftercare for a year after you graduate. While you are in the program you live at the Job Corps center in a campus style dormitory setting.

To enroll in Job Corps, you must:

- ✦ be 16 to 24 years old;
- ✦ be a U.S. citizen or legal resident; and
- ✦ meet income requirements.



To join, you should call 800-733-JOBS or 800-733-5627, and an operator will refer you to the nearest Job Corps office to apply. You should ask your agency caseworker for all the details about whether Job Corps is right for you, and always feel free to contact your lawyer as well.

AMERICORPS

AmeriCorps is a public service organization in the United States where young people age 17 and older can volunteer for about ten months to a year. There are also part-time opportunities, and you can serve more than one term in some projects. You'll receive a small living allowance and, depending on the program you're in, you may get housing as well (unlike Job Corps, where housing is guaranteed). After you complete your term of service, you receive an educational award to use towards higher education or to repay student loans. The award is \$4,725 for one year of full-time service, and you have up to seven years after you end your term with AmeriCorps to claim the award. If you're part of AmeriCorps*VISTA, you may choose to get an end of service stipend of \$1,200, which you can use for any purpose, instead of the education award. To join AmeriCorps, you must be a citizen, U.S. national, or legal permanent resident of the U.S. You can call 800-942-2677 for an application packet, or apply online at:



web

www.americorps.org

NEXT GENERATION CENTER

The Next Generation Center is a comprehensive service center where young people ages 14-21 can receive services to prepare them for life and work. The services include leadership training, counseling and support groups, education services, health and fitness programs, employment and job readiness services, arts education, housing and legal assistance.

1522 Southern Boulevard (at 172nd Street)
Bronx, NY 10460
718-589-4441



web

www.childrensaidsociety.org/nextgen

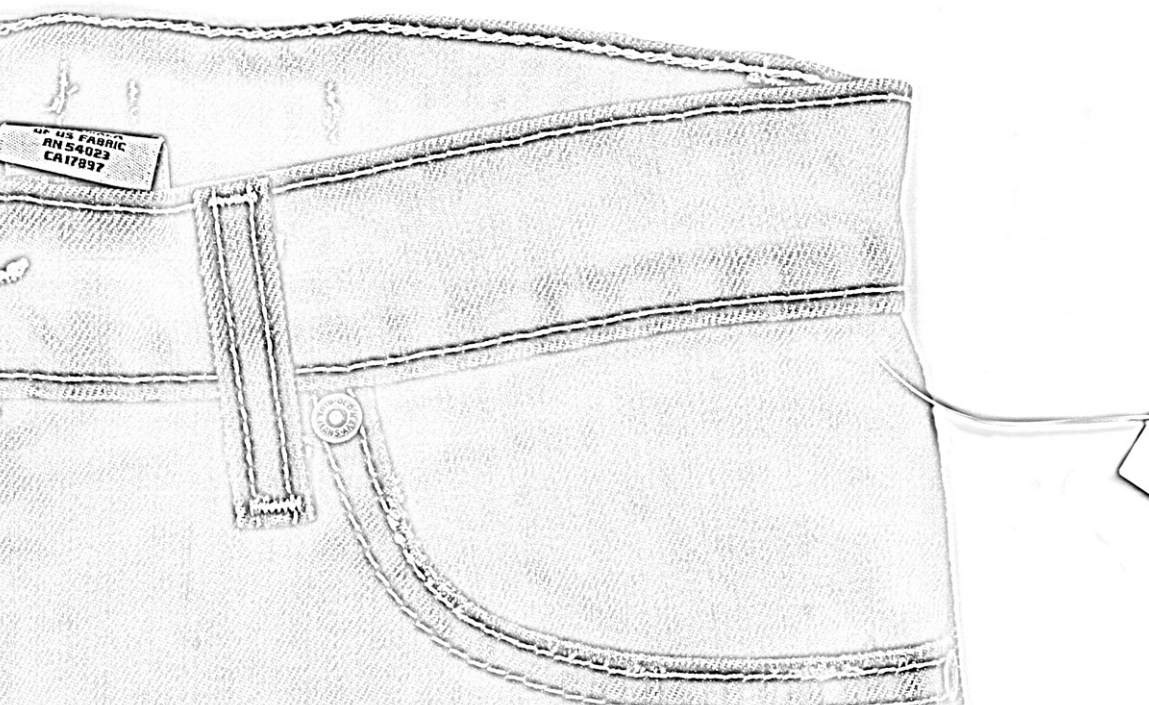
INDEPENDENT LIVING (IL) CLASSES

Independent Living (IL) classes are designed to prepare you to live safely and securely outside of the foster care system. At many agencies these classes are mandatory before you can move into certain apartments or programs designed for youth planning to leave foster care. However, there are certain circumstances that can excuse you from attending these IL classes. If you're still in high school or attending some other full time educational program, you shouldn't have to attend IL classes, or you should be offered the option of taking a test to demonstrate your skills.



ALLOWANCES

While you are in foster care, you are entitled to a monthly allowance. The amount of the allowance depends on your age. If you don't have your own bank account, the agency should keep your money for you, separate from regular agency funds. You can take money out of savings if necessary, but the agency will keep track of how much you take out – and so should you! When you open your own account or are discharged from care, the agency must give you the money they have held for you. You are also entitled to have your own personal belongings while in care. Those belongings should go with you even if you change placements. A bit of advice – save your receipts! If something is stolen, the agency may reimburse you if you can show proof of the cost of the item. Unfortunately, agencies are not obligated by law to reimburse you for anything other than stolen clothing, but it never hurts to try!



INDEPENDENT LIVING STIPEND

If you have a plan of independent living, or APPLA, the agency should offer you independent living skills classes, and if you attend regularly, you should receive an independent living stipend at the end of each month. If you have your own bank account, the stipend should be sent directly to you. If you do not have an account, the agency should hold your stipend for you and give it to you when you open a bank account or when you are discharged from foster care. Like your allowance, you are entitled to use this money, whether it is in your account or held by your agency.

CLOTHING ALLOWANCE

If you are 16 or older, the maximum clothing allowance is \$806 per year. Typically, agencies distribute this in payments of about \$200 every three months, or in your foster parent's monthly check. You are also entitled to receive special allowances to cover additional clothing costs for religious ceremonies, educational or summer camp activities, special physical conditions, and replacement for stolen or destroyed clothing. If you need an emergency clothing allowance, the agency should provide an amount up to the maximum clothing allowance for you.

Theft of clothing can be a major problem for young people in foster care. The best way to ensure that you will be reimbursed if your clothing is stolen is to **KEEP YOUR RECEIPTS!**

DISCHARGE GRANT

When you are discharged from care, you will be eligible for a discharge grant of up to \$750 from ACS. You can not receive this grant if you are AWOL from care. You are eligible for this grant if:

- ◆ you have been in foster care continuously for six months or more;
- ◆ you have a permanency goal of return to parent, discharge to a fit and willing relative, or independent living (APPLA);
- ◆ your goal is approved or ordered by the Court, and
- ◆ you haven't received a discharge grant within two years of the current discharge.

Every teenager aging out of foster care should meet all of these criteria.



PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

If you will not have a stable source of income when you leave foster care you may need help from public assistance (PA). In order to avoid a gap in benefits, the Human Resources Administration allows youth in foster care to submit applications for public assistance before they are discharged from foster care. You can submit an application for public assistance 45 days before your discharge from foster care. If you have a child, you can submit your application 30 days before your discharge from foster care. To apply for public assistance, you will need to go to the nearest NYC Job Center.



To find the nearest New York City Job Center, you can ask your caseworker, call 311 or find a list of job center sites online at the HRA website:

**CALL
311**

web

www.nyc.gov/html/hra/html/family_independence/job_center_sites.shtml

Food stamps are also included in the application for public assistance, or you can apply for them separately at a Food Stamp Benefits Office. Ask your agency caseworker for help with any of these applications.

HOW DO I APPLY?

To apply for PA, you should go to the nearest NYC Job Center to pick up an application. You can start the application process immediately, but you will need to provide supporting documents as soon as possible for your application to be processed. If you bring the application to the Job Center with your supporting documentation, an intake worker should review it with you the same day. You'll have your photograph and fingerprints taken, and an Eligibility Verification Review (EVR) should be scheduled. Someone from PA will come to visit your home to confirm your address and living arrangements. You'll receive a letter after this home visit indicating whether you're eligible for PA, and also telling you what benefits you'll receive.

WHERE DO I APPLY?

You can pick up an application at your nearest Job Center. They'll give you an application to start the process that day, and you will either be allowed to apply at that office or be directed to another Job Center based on either your location or a special need you may have. When you go to the Job Center, you should bring documents like ID, proof of address, utility or phone bills and old pay stubs from the last six months, if you were working. The more of these documents that you can bring with you, the faster the application process will be completed. If you don't have these documents and you can't get them, your HRA worker can suggest alternatives or help you get them.

Once you qualify for public assistance, you should continue to receive it as long as you continue to meet the qualifications and abide by the requirements of the program. If you find suitable employment with a sufficient income, you should no longer need public assistance and your case will be closed.



**Always make copies
of your important
documents.
Never let anyone keep
the original document.**

If you receive public assistance, you must try to find a job. One of the requirements for receiving benefits is that you actively seek employment or be in an approved training program. The only exceptions to this policy are for a disability or lack of childcare.

WHAT IF I AM DENIED BENEFITS?

If you are denied benefits, but think you are eligible, you can ask your HRA worker for a fair hearing request form, complete it and return it to your worker. You will then get a hearing where you can challenge the denial. You don't need a lawyer for the hearing. You can bring anyone you want to advocate for you, or you can represent yourself.

DENIED

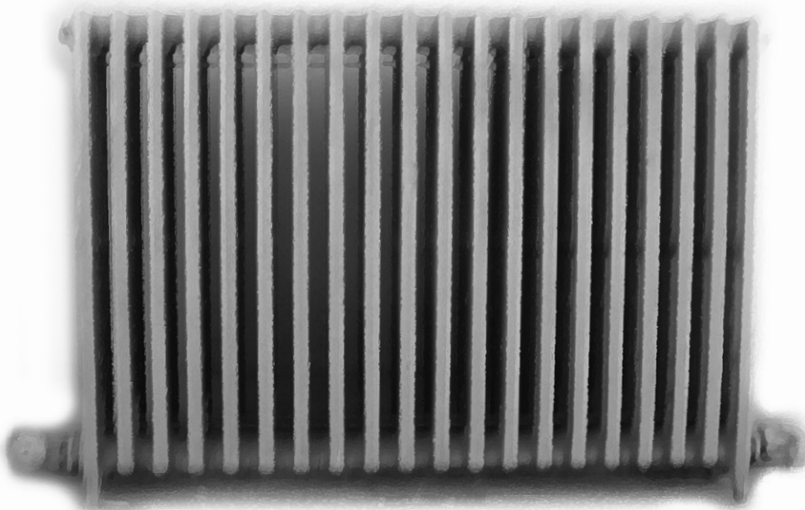
EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE OR SAFETY NET ASSISTANCE (SNA)

You may be eligible for emergency assistance (also called Safety Net Assistance), even if you don't qualify for regular public assistance benefits.

Generally, it is an emergency if you:

- ✦ have little or no food;
- ✦ have no shelter;
- ✦ are under threat of eviction, pending eviction, or homeless;
- ✦ have no fuel for heat during cold weather; or
- ✦ have had your utilities disconnected or you received a utility disconnection notice with a shut off scheduled within 72 hours.

If any of these circumstances describe your situation, you should go to your nearest Job Center immediately, and a worker will conduct an emergency interview to determine whether there is, in fact, an emergency. If an emergency exists, the worker will then determine what assistance to give you—emergency assistance doesn't have to be, and often isn't, in cash. However, if nothing but cash will do, you may be able to receive cash assistance. The Job Center must put its decision to grant or deny you emergency assistance in writing and give it to you.



FOOD STAMPS

You may be able to get food stamps if you:

- ✦ work and are paid low wages;
- ✦ have little or no income;
- ✦ get SSI or public assistance; or
- ✦ are homeless (even if you are staying with someone temporarily or are at a shelter).



NOTE: Even if you own a home and a car, you may still be able to get Food Stamp Benefits.



To apply, you can fill out an application at any Food Stamp Benefits Office. To get the address and phone number of the nearest Food Stamp Benefits Office, you can call 877-472-8411 or toll-free 1-800-342-3009. If you have applied for public assistance, you are automatically considered for food stamps. It may take up to 30 days for the application to be processed.

HEAT ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (HEAP)

If you have problems paying your energy bill, you may be eligible for assistance through HEAP if:

- ✦ you are a citizen or qualified alien; and
- ✦ you have an income at or below the income guidelines for the program, which are available online at <http://www.otda.state.ny.us/main/heap/>; and
- ✦ you receive food stamps, temporary assistance, Safety Net, or family assistance; or
- ✦ you receive SSI benefits; or
- ✦ you reside in subsidized housing and directly pay heating and energy costs.

web



There is also emergency assistance available if the electricity or natural gas is shut off or scheduled to be shut off, or if you only have a seven day supply of fuel or less. To apply for emergency assistance in New York City, call the Human Resources Administration at 877-472-8411. Elsewhere in New York State, you should call 800-342-3009, or go to the local Department of Social Services, which you can locate by checking the Office of Children and Family Services website at:

web

www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/localdss.asp.

MEDICAID

While you are in foster care, you are covered by Medicaid through the foster care system, but as soon as you are final discharged, your Foster Care Medicaid number is turned off. Before you age out or leave foster care, you should be transferred from Foster Care Medicaid to Community Medicaid, which would cover you for four months after leaving care. To do this, the agency must have the address where you will be living or can receive mail after you are discharged. Once you're on trial discharge or leave foster care, you will receive a "recertification package" to immediately reapply for Medicaid. Reapplying for Medicaid immediately is especially important if you have a prescription for medication that you take every day, or that you must have available to take in an emergency.



SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME (SSI)

SSI is a federal program that gives monthly cash payments to elderly people, as well as blind or disabled people of any age, including children. The quickest way to determine your eligibility is to ask your caseworker—you may already be receiving SSI benefits, in which case the payments should be going to the agency. You may be receiving SSI benefits based on disability from the time you were born, or based on a disability that will last until you're 18 years old.

When you turn 18, you must be re-evaluated for SSI according to the adult definition of disability. You should confirm with your caseworker or lawyer to make sure that this is being done. Your foster care agency should get notification of this re-evaluation (called a "continuing disability review" or CDR) if you were receiving benefits while in care. If you believe that you are eligible for SSI, but are not already receiving these temporary benefits, you can apply over the phone by calling 800-772-1213 or at your local Social Security office.



If you need help reapplying for SSI, call your lawyer.

If you're already receiving SSI benefits, be sure to find out to whom they are being paid. While you're in care, they must be paid to a "representative payee," who is in charge of receiving and distributing the money. The foster care agency is most likely acting as your representative payee, since any SSI benefits you qualify for while in care are legally supposed to be used by the agency to reduce the cost of caring for you.

When you leave foster care, you can either arrange to receive the SSI payments directly or designate a new representative payee. In certain circumstances, the Social Security Administration may insist that you have a representative payee. There are organizations that specifically do this as their business, or you can ask someone you know and trust if they'd be willing to be your payee. To change how these benefits are paid, including if you want them paid directly to you, you have to contact the Social Security Administration by sending a letter to their local office (a list of offices is available online at www.socialsecurity.gov). To designate a new representative payee, the payee must fill out an application at the local Social Security office. Your agency caseworker should help you fill out all of these applications and explain the details to you. If you can't get the help you need from your caseworker, call your lawyer.

web



BECOMING A PARENT

There are regulations and policies in place to provide special services and support for pregnant and parenting teens in foster care and for pregnant and parenting young people who have aged out of foster care.

PLACEMENTS WITH YOUR CHILD

Unless ACS files a neglect case against you, you and your child should be placed in the same foster home or facility. Any time a caseworker threatens to take your child away from you or to file a case against you, you should contact your lawyer immediately. Even if your caseworker suggests that you voluntarily place your child or give your child to someone else to take care of, you are not required to do so. Without a court case against you alleging child abuse or neglect, neither the agency nor ACS can take your child away from you or make you give someone else custody of your child. If ACS files a neglect or abuse case against you, you have the right to have a lawyer defend you. If ACS removes your child from you, the agency must explore any relatives as resources for placement of your child. If you find out that there is a plan to remove your child from your care or that a neglect or abuse case is being filed against you, contact your lawyer right away. If your child is removed from your care, be sure to give your caseworker the names of family or friends who you would like to care for your child until your child can return to you.

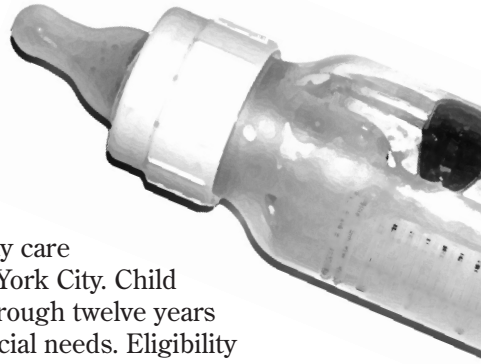
EXTRA ALLOWANCES

When your child is placed with you in a foster home, the foster parent will receive additional money from the agency for your child. The foster parent then has the choice of keeping the money and spending it on your child or giving the money directly to you so that you can spend it on your child. Whoever has the money is responsible for paying for your child's necessities. There is an additional diaper allowance of \$47 per month until your baby is four years old, and a special payment from the agency is available for a crib, high chair, stroller and car seat, if necessary.



SPECIAL PROGRAMS AND CHILD CARE

As a teen parent in foster care, you are entitled to certain preventive services and child care services.



SUBSIDIZED CHILD CARE (FORMERLY ACD)

Subsidized child care is free or low-cost day care provided by ACS for eligible families in New York City. Child care is available for children six weeks old through twelve years old, and possibly longer for children with special needs. Eligibility depends on your income, and why you need the child care. There are two types of programs covered by subsidized child care—ACS programs or private certified programs that require a voucher, which most people are familiar with as the “ACD voucher.”



You can call 888-469-5999 for NYC Child Care Resources and referrals for ACS funded programs, or you can call 311 for further information on how to apply for the ACD vouchers. Your agency should always be willing and able to help you with your child care needs.

SPECIAL HIGH SCHOOL AND GED PROGRAMS

LYFE



The LYFE program provides free child care for infants up to two years old in 44 New York City high schools and alternative schools. You can call the LYFE information line at 212-348-0608 to find out if your high school participates in the program.

GED



There is a GED program specifically geared to pregnant and parenting teens—New Beginning, located in Jamaica, Queens. You can call 718-739-0215 for more information.

TASA

If you leave foster care before your 20th birthday, you may be able to access assistance through the Teen Age Services Act (TASA) Program. TASA programs work with pregnant or parenting adolescents who are receiving Public Assistance or Medicaid, so you're only eligible after you leave foster care. TASA can help you access health services, public benefits, housing, education, family planning, parenting skills classes, and vocational programs. To enroll in TASA programs you can call 311 or go to:

web

home2.nyc.gov/html/acs/html/support_families/preventive_services_tasa.shtml

**CALL
311**

WOMEN IN NEED

Women In Need offers transitional shelters and permanent supportive housing, supportive housing for special populations of mothers with children, job training and placement, and child care for their clients. They often have a waiting list, and also require that you be certified as homeless, which means that you may have to spend some time in a shelter to qualify for their services. However, if you do qualify, the services and aftercare they provide are extremely helpful. You can contact Women In Need at 212-695-4758.



TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF) OR FAMILY ASSISTANCE (FA)

After you leave foster care, if you do not have enough income to support yourself and your child, you can apply for help from TANF (often pronounced “TAN-if”). TANF or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families is also referred to as Family Assistance. TANF is a federal government program that provides cash aid to low-income families and pregnant women. TANF is sometimes called “welfare”, or, “AFDC” (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) or “ADC” (Aid to Dependent Children). In New York City, you can receive TANF/FA if you have at least one child living in your home whom you (the parent) care for or who is cared for by another adult relative living in the home. You must have little or no income and no more than \$2,000 in savings or assets to receive TANF benefits. You can receive Medicaid and Foods Stamps and still receive TANF/FA. To apply for TANF/FA, go to the nearest New York City Job Center.

To find the nearest Job Center, you can ask your caseworker, call 311 or find a list of job center sites online at the HRA’s website:

web

www.nyc.gov/html/hra/html/family_independence/job_center_sites.shtml

WIC (Women, Infants & Children)

WIC stands for Women, Infants and Children. WIC is a program that provides nutritious food, milk, juice, formula and other services to low-income pregnant or breastfeeding women, and to infants and children up to age 5. In New York City, participants receive vouchers (WIC checks) that can be used at some supermarkets, groceries, bodegas, pharmacies and at farmers markets that participate in the WIC program. Places that accept WIC usually have a sign or sticker that shows that they will accept WIC checks.

To qualify for WIC, you must be seen by a health professional (a doctor, nurse, or nutritionist) who decides whether you are at “nutrition risk.” This evaluation can be done at a WIC clinic for free, or you can go to your own doctor. In order to receive WIC in New York, you must also live in

New York and be pregnant, have given birth within the past six months, or have a child under the age of five. If you are receiving WIC because you have children under the age of five, you will have to be recertified for WIC every six months. To apply for WIC, you will need to call the Growing Up Healthy Hotline, in advance, and schedule an appointment at one of the one hundred WIC sites in New York City.



Growing Up Healthy Hotline 800 522-5006

PREVENTIVE SERVICES

According to ACS policy and State law, if you have a child, you are entitled to preventive services if you request them from your agency. Preventive services are designed to keep you and your child together and healthy. There are providers that will visit you at home before and after your baby is born, such as Healthy Families of New York City, Nurse-Family Partnership, Room to Grow, and the Visiting Nurse Program. You can also request parenting classes, housekeeping services, home management services, and parent aide services from your agency.

If you need additional assistance, speak to your caseworker or call your lawyer.

CUSTODY, CHILD SUPPORT AND VISITATION

In order to change custody of your child, get child support or get a visitation order, you should go to the Family Court in the county where you live. If you have custody of your child, you are entitled to child support payments from the other parent until your child is 21 years old. You are entitled to these payments even if you are a student or unemployed, and even if you marry someone else or receive public assistance. If you receive public assistance, the Department of Social Services should file for child support, but if you're not on public assistance, you must petition for child support yourself. If the other parent refuses to pay child support after being ordered to do so by the Court, you can file a violation petition, and ask the court for a money judgment that deducts the money owed to you directly from the other parent's paycheck. When you go to Family Court to file a petition, ask for the Petitions Clerk. Most Family Courts also have information tables that are staffed with people who can assist you.



OTHER ISSUES TO CONSIDER BEFORE LEAVING FOSTER CARE

Before you leave foster care it is very important that you get identification with a photograph (drivers license, non-driver ID or U.S. Passport), and if you are an immigrant, it is very important that you clarify your legal status.

IMMIGRATION STATUS

If you were born in the U.S., make sure you have your birth certificate and Social Security card. If you were not born in the U.S., you need to have a green card to remain in the US legally. If you have a green card, you should apply for citizenship. To be eligible to apply, you must have lived in the U.S. while holding a green card for five years.



If you don't have legal status and aren't in the process of applying for it, you should immediately contact Lawyers For Children's Immigration Rights Project at 212-966-6420, The Door Legal Services at 212-941-9090, or the Legal Aid Society, Immigration Unit at 212-577-3300, for information on Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS). SIJS is an application for undocumented young people in foster care that may allow them to apply for a green card. This process can take up to two years, and must be completed before your 21st birthday. You should speak to an attorney about it as soon as possible.

LFC has created a handbook like this one for young people in foster care who need more information about their immigration status. You can request a copy of the immigration handbook in the *You Are Not Alone* series by phone or you can read and download a copy at:

web

www.lawyersforchildren.org



BIRTH CERTIFICATE



In order to get a copy of your birth certificate, you can contact the ACS liaison to the Office of Vital Records, at 212-341-3364. The application is also available online at:

web www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/vr/vrbappl.shtml

SOCIAL SECURITY CARD

You should call 800-772-1213, or visit your local Social Security office to apply for a card. The application is available online at:

web www.socialsecurity.gov/online/ss-5.html

DRIVER'S LICENSE OR NON-DRIVER PHOTO ID

You should go to the nearest Department of Motor Vehicles. The application for a non-driver photo ID requires that you provide acceptable proofs of identity and date of birth. Your agency can provide you with a letter attesting to your identity that may be counted as one of the required proofs of identity. Acceptable proofs of identity are listed at:

web www.nydmv.state.ny.us/idlicense.htm

LEGAL NAME CHANGE

If you want to legally change your name for any reason, you must file a name change petition in Civil Court. You will have to submit an original or certified copy of your birth certificate, a self-addressed envelope, an original and a copy of the name change order and petition, an original and two copies of the Request for Judicial Intervention form, and purchase an Index Number from the County Clerk for \$210. (You should check online to verify the current cost for an Index Number). Additional information and all of the necessary forms are available online at:

web www.courts.state.ny.us/forms/namechange.shtml

You do not need a lawyer to file this form.



REMEMBER, YOU CAN ALWAYS CONTACT YOUR LAWYER IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT LEAVING FOSTER CARE.



ABUSE AND VIOLENCE

You have the right to be safe from physical, sexual and emotional abuse when you are in foster care, while you are in school, and once you are on your own. It is against the law for anyone to cause you physical harm or to threaten to cause you physical harm.

ABUSE WHILE IN FOSTER CARE

Foster parents and staff at group homes and other foster care placements cannot use physical force to discipline the young people they work with. It is also against the law for staff to insult you or humiliate you or to create an environment in which you feel you are in danger. If you are being hit, beaten, slapped, intimidated, harassed, or touched sexually in a way that you don't like, tell someone you trust. If you feel you are in immediate danger dial 911 and call your lawyer.



If you are being abused in any way while in foster care, tell someone you trust, call your lawyer, or call the Child Abuse Hotline at 800-342-3720. At the Hotline, someone who works for the state of New York will talk to you and take down the information you provide. Then a caseworker or investigator will meet with you and talk to you and your foster parents or the residential staff about what happened.



You can also call the Children's Rights Unit at the Administration for Children's Services at 212-676-9421. They should send out a worker to talk to you about your complaint.



You should always call your lawyer if you are not happy with the results of the investigation or if you would rather have your lawyer call the Child Abuse Hotline or Children's Rights Unit for you. It is a good idea to call your lawyer ANYTIME you experience abuse so that your lawyer can help protect you and explain all of your options to you.

VIOLENCE AFTER FOSTER CARE

If you are experiencing violence or the threat of violence from family members, from someone else you live with, or from your boyfriend or girlfriend after you leave foster care, you should get help right away. If you think you are in immediate danger call 911.



Victims of domestic violence may seek assistance in Criminal Court, Family Court, and/or Supreme Court. You can get an Order of Protection through any of the three types of courts. An Order of Protection will allow you to have the person hurting you arrested if they violate the order by continuing to harass you or by coming in contact with you.

If you are afraid to call the police, there are many resources available to you, even if you are an undocumented immigrant. There are special shelters, legal services (including Orders of Protection) and even emergency financial support available to victims of violence.

If you are in need of advice or services as a result of domestic violence or violent crime, you can call your lawyer or the organizations below:



Day One

Helpline for youth: 800-214-4150

web www.dayoneny.org



Safe Horizon

Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-621-HOPE (4673)

Crime Victims Hotline: 866-689-HELP

Rape, Sexual Assault & Incest Hotline: 212-227-3000

web www.safehorizon.org



New York City Gay & Lesbian Anti-Violence Project (AVP)

24-hour hotline in English and Spanish: 212-714-1141

web www.avp.org



If you are being
hit, beaten, slapped, intimidated,
harassed, or touched sexually
in a way that you don't like,
tell someone you trust.

IF YOU ARE IN DANGER CALL



and call your lawyer

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE: FOSTER CARE AND FAMILY COURT TERMS

The terms defined below are often used by lawyers, social workers, caseworkers and judges when discussing foster care and foster care cases. Some of the terms below are used and explained in this handbook, while some are terms that you may hear used at a foster care agency or in court. If you have questions about any of these terms, contact your lawyer, your social worker, or your caseworker.

18-b Attorney

An attorney who may be assigned as the lawyer for a child or as the lawyer for an adult who cannot afford to pay for a lawyer.

ACS or Administration for Children's Services

The New York City agency responsible for overseeing and providing services to children and youth in foster care. ACS explains that its mission is "to ensure the safety and well-being of New York City children."

ACS Housing Subsidy

A monthly cash grant of up to \$300 that is paid directly to a landlord in order to cover all or part of the rent on an apartment for a young person over the age of 18, who is leaving the foster care system. The maximum subsidy is \$10,800 over three years, but the subsidy will always end at the age of 21.

Adjournment

The term used by the court when a case needs to be continued or re-scheduled for another day.

ARC or Adult Residential Care

A long-term living arrangement for young people who age out of the foster care system, but due to a physical or mental health disability, need to live in a residence that provides supervision, services, and support.

AFDC/ADC or Aid to Families with Dependent Children

This government program no longer exists; but AFDC and ADC are terms that are sometimes still used to refer to the new program, TANF. TANF stands for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and is often pronounced "TAN-if". TANF provides cash assistance to low-income families with children. TANF is often referred to as welfare.

Aftercare

The community-based services that are arranged by a foster care agency and provided to a young person, to their family, or to their guardian, after a young person is discharged from foster care. Aftercare services are designed to help young people remain safely at home and provide all services that are needed to make a successful transition out of foster care.

Aging Out

A term used to refer to young people who have reached or are about to reach the age of 21, when they will, except in rare instances, be discharged from foster care.

APPLA or Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement

The foster care permanency goal for a young person who is aging out of foster care and plans to live on their own in the community or who will be placed in adult residential care. APPLA is also sometimes referred to as a goal of independent living.

AWOL or Absent Without Leave from Foster Care

The status given to a young person who leaves their foster care placement without permission from their agency.

“B” Petition or Termination of Parental Rights Petition

“B” is the letter designation for a court case filed in New York City Family Court to end a parent’s legal right to care for his or her child. If the judge grants a Termination of Parental Rights petition (TPR), a parent’s legal right to care for his or her child is ended and the child can be adopted. If a child is freed for adoption at the end of a TPR case, the six-month permanency hearing will also be filed as a “B” case.

CASA or Court-Appointed Special Advocates

The volunteer advocates who advise and assist the court in some foster care cases in order to expedite services and ensure that court orders are followed.

COI or Court Ordered Investigation

A term used interchangeably with “I and R”, or Investigation and Report, to describe a court-ordered evaluation of the safety of a particular home or family. A COI is conducted by an ACS worker or a probation officer.

Contract Agency

An agency that has a contract with ACS (the Administration for Children’s Services) to provide foster care services to children and young adults in New York City. The term contract agency is used interchangeably with “foster care agency,” “provider agency,” or sometimes simply “the agency.”

Court Calendar

The list of cases that will be heard in a specific courtroom on a specific day.

Court Officers

The uniformed court staff who maintain order and safety in the courtroom and in the courthouse.

Court Part

The designation used to identify a courtroom. A courtroom is often simply referred to as a “Part” and identified by a number or letter. For example, in New York County Family Court, Part A is the name of the intake courtroom.

“D” Petition or Delinquency Petition

“D” is the letter designation for a case filed in New York City Family Court that charges a young person with engaging in criminal activity.

DHS or Department of Homeless Services

The agency responsible for providing short-term emergency shelter and other housing services for homeless individuals and families in New York City.

DOH or Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

The agency responsible for providing and overseeing health and mental health services for individuals in New York City.

Discharge Grant

A one-time grant of \$750 that is provided by a foster care agency to help young people who have been in foster care for at least six months with the expenses that are associated with leaving foster care.

DOE or Department of Education

The agency responsible for providing a free and appropriate education for all children in New York City.

DRC or Diagnostic Reception Center

A temporary, residential group setting for young people entering or in foster care, where psychologists and psychiatrists evaluate a young person’s mental health needs in order to help determine the best foster care placement for that young person.

Drop-In Centers

The NYC Department of Homeless Services offices that provide emergency shelter and other services for homeless families and individuals. Drop-in centers are open 24 hours a day and every day in each borough in order to provide emergency shelter and services. “Drop-in center” is also a term used by social service agencies to describe a place where individuals can get services such as hot meals, showers and counseling without an appointment. Drop-in centers can be located by calling 311.

DYCD or the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development

The agency responsible for funding and overseeing programs for runaway and homeless youth as well as job and internship programs for youth. The DYCD can answer questions on these topics at the NYC Youthline: 1 (800) 246-4646.

EAU or Emergency Assistance Unit

The term that is still sometimes used to refer to the NYC Department of Homeless Services office that provides emergency shelter and other services for homeless families and individuals. Drop-in centers have replaced the EAU and are open 24 hours a day and every day in each borough to provide emergency shelter and services. Drop-in centers can be located by calling 311.

Emancipation

The process by which a young person can receive public assistance as an independent adult before reaching the age of 18.

ETV or Educational Training Voucher

The federal funds available for former or current foster care youth to attend college or vocational programs. A young person must apply for ETV funds before his or her 21st birthday and can receive up to \$5,000 a year for four years. ETV funds can be used for tuition, books, or for certain living expenses.

FAFSA or Free Application for Federal Student Aid

The financial aid form used by high school and college students to apply for monetary educational assistance.

FA or Family Assistance

The government program that provides cash assistance to low-income families. FA is the same as TANF or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families

FCA or Family Court Act

The law that governs many of the proceedings that are heard in family court.

“Freed” Child

The term sometimes used to refer to a child after his or her parents’ rights have been ended by the court or after his or her parents have voluntarily given up their rights to his or her child. A “freed” child can be adopted.

Final Discharge

The term used when a young person is no longer in ACS custody or in foster care. With some rare exceptions, all youth in foster care are automatically final discharged upon turning 21. A young person in foster care may seek final discharge once he or she turns 18.

Food Stamps

A federal program to help low-income people purchase nutritious food. Food stamps are no longer stamps but are distributed in the form of a debit card.

Foster Care Agency

Any agency that has a contract with ACS (the Administration for Children’s Services) to provide foster care services to children and young adults in New York City. The term foster care agency is used interchangeably with “contract agency,” “provider agency,” or sometimes simply “the agency.”

GED or Graduate Equivalency Degree

An alternative degree earned instead of a high school diploma after passing the GED examination. GED programs are available to help prepare for the exam.

Green Card

The immigration document that allows someone who is not a US citizen to live and work legally in the United States (see “SIJS” below). A green card is not actually green and is officially called a Permanent Resident Card.

Group Home

A group foster care placement for young people in foster care who live in a home with foster care agency staff and go to work or school in the community.

Housing Lottery

The process used to select residents for some New York City or State supported low-income housing programs.

**HRA/DSS or Human Resources Administration/
Department of Social Services**

The New York City government agency responsible for providing temporary assistance to eligible individuals and families who need social services and financial support.

IL or Independent Living

The old name for the permanency goal for a young person aging out of foster care and planning to live on his or her own in the community or for a young person who will be placed in adult residential care. APPLA (see above) is the new name for a goal of independent living.

Independent Living Stipend

A small monthly cash grant that is available to young people who regularly attend independent living skills classes at his or her foster care agency.

IEP or Individualized Educational Program

The appropriate educational program or related services that must be provided by the Department of Education to any child or young person with a learning disability or other disability.

In Camera

Any part of a court proceeding that is held privately with the judge in the judge’s “chambers” or office.

I & R or Investigation and Report (See “COI”)

A term used interchangeably with COI or Court Ordered Investigation, to describe a court ordered evaluation of the safety of a particular home or family. A COI is conducted by an ACS (Administration for Children’s Services) worker or a probation officer.

ISY or In-School Youth

Programs for youth in their junior and senior years of high school that are run by the City of New York to help prepare them for high school graduation, college enrollment, or entering the adult work force.

Jiggetts

The New York City program that provides rent assistance to parents who are behind on rent and are being sued or evicted.

JRP or Juvenile Rights Practice

The part of the Legal Aid Society in New York City that provides free lawyers, called law guardians, to advocate for children and young people in New York State Family Court.

Law Guardian

A lawyer who represents children and young people in New York State Family Court.

LFC or Lawyers For Children

An organization in New York City that provides free lawyers, called law guardians, and social workers to advocate for children and young people in New York State Family Court.

“L” Petition or Voluntary Foster Care Placement Petition

“L” is the letter designation for a case filed in New York City Family Court when a child or young person is voluntarily placed in foster care by their parent or guardian. The six-month permanency hearing for children and young people voluntarily placed in foster care will also maintain the “L” docket number.

MHS or Mental Health Services

The agency that provides psychological and psychiatric evaluations of individuals involved in family court proceedings when ordered to do so by a family court judge.

“N” Petition or Neglect petition

“N” is the letter designation for the court petition that is filed in family court against a parent or other legal guardian who is suspected of abusing or neglecting a child in his or her care. If a child is placed in foster care after a finding of neglect, the six-month permanency hearing will also maintain the “N” docket number.

NYCHA or New York City Housing Authority

The agency responsible for providing housing for low- and moderate-income residents of New York City.

OCFS or New York State Office of Children and Family Services

The New York State government office that is responsible for child welfare and for oversight of the New York City Administration for Children’s Services.

OMH or New York State Office of Mental Health

The New York State agency that is responsible for providing and coordinating services to children, youth and adults with mental health illnesses. OMH runs both day treatment and residential programs for young people in foster care and for young people living on their own or with family members.

OMRDD or New York State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities

The New York State agency responsible for providing and coordinating services for children and adults with developmental disabilities. OMRDD runs both day treatment and residential programs for young people who are in foster care, who are living on their own, or who are living with family members.

One-Shot Grant

An \$1800 grant from ACS that is provided through the ACS Housing Subsidy program to youth leaving foster care. The grant is intended to help cover the costs of finding, renting, and furnishing an apartment.

OSY or Out-of-School Youth

A program of the New York City Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD) that offers job training, job placement, English language classes, GED programs, and other services to low-income youth over age 16 who are not attending school.

“P” Petition or Paternity Petition

“P” is the letter designation for a petition filed in New York City Family Court to determine the legal father of a child.

PA or Public Assistance

The cash assistance grant to low-income individuals or families that may include Food Stamps and other benefits. PA is often referred to as “welfare.”

PATH or Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing Office

The New York City Department of Homeless Services office that provides first-time homeless families and pregnant women with emergency housing assistance. The Path Office is located at 346 Powers Avenue (between 141st and 142nd streets), in the Bronx.

PPG or Permanency Plan Goal

The plan set by a foster care agency to achieve the best permanent living arrangement for a young person in foster care. The list of possible permanency plan goals (PPG) includes: return to parent, adoption, custody or guardianship, placement with a relative, or Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (independent living/adult residential care—see APPLA above).

Permanency Plan Review or Hearing (referred to as a “PPR,” “PPH” or “PH”)

The Family Court review of a foster care agency’s progress in reaching the permanency goal for a young person in foster care. A permanency hearing is held every six months and young people in foster care should be able to attend their own permanency hearings.

PINS Petition or Person In Need of Supervision

A New York State Family Court case brought by a parent or guardian who asks for the court’s help to supervise a young person under the age of 18 who has not committed a crime but whose behavior is “beyond the lawful control” of his or her parent, guardian or other lawful authority.

Preventive Services

The community-based services (such as family therapy, after school programs, parenting programs, day treatment programs) that are provided in order to keep a child or young person safely at home or to prevent a child or young person from entering foster care.

Provider Agency

Any agency that has a contract with ACS (the Administration for Children’s Services) to provide foster care services to children and young adults in New York City. The term provider agency is used interchangeably with “foster care agency,” “contract agency,” or sometimes simply “the agency.”

Preparing Youth for Adulthood or PYA

ACS’s (Administration for Children’s Services) written plan to provide improved preparation and services for young people aging out of foster care.

Rental Arrears Grant

A grant available to individuals and families through the NYC Human Resources Administration to prevent eviction due to past due rent or “arrears.”

Room and Board

The term used by colleges and other residential programs to refer to the cost of living expenses for food and housing.

RTC or Residential Treatment Center

A group living arrangement for young people in foster care who receive therapeutic services, education, and housing while living in a structured campus setting.

RTF or Residential Treatment Facility

A group living arrangement certified by the New York State Office of Mental Health for young people in foster care who receive services, education, and housing while living in a campus setting. While similar to an RTC, an RTF is a more closely supervised setting and is reserved for young people with specific mental health diagnoses.

Safety Net Assistance or SNA

The government program that provides temporary emergency assistance to single adults and young people living apart from any adult relative.

Section 8 Housing

A federally-funded program that provides vouchers directly to the landlord in order to help pay for housing for low-income New Yorkers.

SIJS or Special Immigrant Juvenile Status

A special federal immigration program available to young people in foster care who are not United States citizens. SIJS allows a young person in foster care to obtain a “green card” to remain in the United States legally even if his or her are not a citizen or a permanent legal resident. A lawyer must go to family court on behalf of a young person to obtain an order finding the young person eligible for SIJS status. SIJS may sometimes be available to young people who are living with a guardian or have been adopted.

SILP or Supervised Independent Living Program

A foster care placement available to young people over the age of 17 with a plan of APPLA or independent living. The young person living in a SILP will have his or her own apartment, usually with a roommate, and will receive supervision and services from his or her foster care agency. A SILP placement can last only 12 to 18 months.

Special Ed or Special Education

The programs run by the New York City Department of Education for students with learning or other disabilities.

SPR or Service Plan Review

A meeting held by a foster care agency every six months to identify and review the permanency plan for a young person in foster care, and to discuss available services. All young people in foster care, age 10 and above, should be invited to attend their SPR. Law guardians should also be informed of the SPR and invited to attend.

SSI or Supplementary Security Income

A cash grant for food, clothing, and housing that assists people with certain mental health diagnoses and people with other disabilities.

Supportive Housing

Housing provided by the government and private non-profit organizations for people with mental or physical disabilities, HIV/AIDS, and/or addiction problems. Supportive housing is linked to social and/or medical services that are often provided at the housing site.

TANF or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (often pronounced “TAN-if”)

The government program that provides cash assistance to low-income families with children. TANF is often referred to as welfare. TANF is also commonly known by its former names, “AFDC” (Aid to Families With Dependent Children) or “ADC” (Aid to Dependent Children).

TLP or Transitional Living Program

A 12 to 18-month residential program for homeless youth that offers education, life skills, and/or vocational training.

Trial Discharge

A 6-month period during which a young person is discharged from foster care, but is still in ACS (the Administration for Children's Services) custody and continues to receive assistance and supervision from the foster care agency.

TPR or Termination of Parental Rights

A court case filed in order to end a parent's right to care for his or her child. If the judge grants a TPR, a parent's legal right to care for their child is ended and the child can be adopted.

"V" Petition

"V" is the letter designation for the court petition that is filed in family court in order to obtain custody of a child or to obtain visitation with a child.

Vocational Training

Any career or technical education for teens that is specifically geared to obtaining a job. Vocational training can be found for a wide range of fields from building trades to cosmetology and the culinary arts.

VESID or Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities

The division of the New York State Department of Education that oversees all special education programs in New York State, and provides vocational training and jobs programs for New Yorkers with disabilities. VESID also provides help for people with disabilities who are having difficulty keeping their jobs. There are six VESID offices in New York City.

WIC or Women Infants and Children

A supplemental food program especially for pregnant and breastfeeding women and their dependent children, up to age five.

Youthline or NYC Youthline

A telephone helpline that is run by the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). The Youthline can answer questions about youth employment, education and training programs, runaway and homeless youth services, immigrant services, Beacon community centers, and more. The Youthline can be reached at 800-246-4646.

You are not alone!

NOTES