

Child and Family Services of NWMU

Independent Living Plus Program Statement

Next Level

Next Level is Child and Family Services of Northwestern Michigan's (CFS) version of Independent Living Plus (ILP). This program is designed to provide foster youth 16-19 the opportunity to develop and retain a strong set of independent living skills and transition them to a successful young adulthood. Next Level is for teens to reside in a staff supported or host home Independent Living placement, who are not yet self-sufficient enough to be in general independent living placements (i.e. living on their own), but have the motivation, potential, and beginning skill set to work towards that goal. The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), other private child placing agencies, and the CFS Foster Care program provide the majority of referrals to ILP. Youth must have an open Foster Care court case in order to be eligible for the ILP program.

Youth who are candidates for ILP have a strong desire to gain independent living skills and might not do well/be doing well in a traditional foster family setting for various reasons. It's likely that they have limited supports within the community and need help building their support network as they are gaining their independent living skills.

Next Level provides services to youth through either a staff supported housing unit that can house up to 7 teens, or through Host Homes available throughout Northern Michigan. Soon after the ILP youth enters the program they will help to identify their treatment team and create an ILP plan. The team will always consist of the youth, a CFS ILP coach, the youth's foster care worker, as well as other potential supportive persons such as involved family members, their Guardian Ad Litem (GAL), and other significant people in their life. As part of the overall assessment process, the youth will be assessed using the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment, identifying their current independent living skills and areas for improvement. If other assessments or services are needed, this will be discussed with each ILP youth. The results of the Casey Life Skills assessment, as well as any other assessments used and the input from the ILP youth and their team, will help to inform the goals and action steps in the Independent Living Plus Plan and Agreement. Specific action steps and target dates for completion will be identified for each goal. This plan will be reviewed and updated at least quarterly with the youth. The plan will include at a minimum a goal related to education and/or employment, a goal related to mental health support, and additional goals for gaining general independent living skills. Examples of skills to be gained from involvement in this program include:

- Financial literacy
- Daily living
- Self-care
- Housing and money management
- Civic engagement
- Transportation
- Work and study life
- Accessing physical health services
- Accessing general community resources
- Career and education planning
- Substance abuse prevention

Financial support for youth in ILP is derived from state monies as managed by the DHHS contract. Participants receive a stipend of \$357.28 every two weeks. All ILP youth are expected to be gainfully

employed, in school, or both. Youth are expected to pay a small portion of their stipend towards rent at either the housing unit or their host home and maintain a bank account.

ILP contact requirements consist of a minimum of four contacts with the ILP coach each month, at least two of which will be face to face and at least one in the home. Youth will also receive at least four hours of ILP instruction per week, the majority of which will be practical and hands-on. The youth will also have quarterly meetings with the treatment team to review their progress towards the independent living goals and updated Casey Life Skills results.

When a youth in the Next Level program has successfully completed all of their identified treatment goals and obtained their identified independent living skills, the Next Level Team will assist them in transitioning into their next phase and housing situation. Depending on their age, youth could be eligible for general independent living through their foster care case (age 16-19+), or Young Adult Voluntary Foster Care (age 18-21). Both options continue to provide the young adult with foster care case management services and a connection to Child & Family Services to support them on their journey. As a result of their engagement in the Next Level program, these youth will have gained the skills needed to live successfully in the community and will receive help identifying their next long-term living arrangement prior to exiting the Next Level program. Continuing foster care case management with Child & Family Services through a less intensive program will allow for continuity and assure their overall success. It is our hope that all teens who successfully complete the CFS Next Level Program will become happy, healthy, productive, and self-sufficient members of their community.