**Keys to Independence Driving Program for Children in the Child Welfare System**

**Program Overview**

Keys to Independence is a statewide program that helps remove barriers to youth in foster care obtaining a learner’s permit and/or a driver’s license. The program, which is intended to serve children ages 15-21, provides support to foster children and their families through a coordinated effort that includes face to face meetings, text, email and telephone support, and financial assistance.

Financial support provided to eligible participants is intended to cover the complete cost of attaining and maintaining a driver’s license including driving courses, learners permit exams and fees, driver’s license exams and fees. Participants under the age of 18 are eligible to receive the cost of auto insurance. From ages 18 to 18.5 the K2I program provides coverage for youth provided they own a vehicle or are on a foster parent’s insurance policy.

Over its 4-year history, the Keys to Independence program has grown steadily year over year and to date has served nearly 3700 children in the state of Florida, 963 of which have received their learners permit, 488 of which have earned their full drivers’ licenses.

**The Challenge**

Prior to the authorization of the Keys to Independence Act, few adolescents and young adults in Florida’s foster care system had achieved a driver’s license. In 2013, the Florida Department of Children and Families conducted a study to measure the overall state of affairs for children ages 15-18 in Florida’s relatively new privatized child welfare system of care. Estimates provided by the 2013 *My Services* Survey indicate that just 20 youth (ages 16 and 17) had obtained a driver’s license.

Normalcy, or the idea that children within the foster care system should enjoy the same benefits, privileges and yes, even challenges, that children outside the child welfare system face is a critical part of a successful case plan for any abused or neglected child. The ability to drive to work, school, or to just visit a friend’s house is an important part of that normalcy. Florida began widespread adoption of ‘normalcy’ practices in the years ahead of the legislation and remains committed to proactively engaging youth in meeting this vital milestone.

**The Solution**

The Keys to Independence Act, authorized in 2014 by the Florida Legislature, recognizes that a young adult will be less likely to be fully independent without a driver’s license. A driver’s license enables a youth to have a job, go to school, engage socially, and contribute to their community. The Keys to Independence Act Program is intended to create opportunities and solutions to help youth in foster care overcome barriers to getting a license, including reimbursing the cost of licensure, driver’s education, other costs incidental to licensure and motor vehicle insurance for eligible children in out-of-home care who successfully completed a driver’s education program.

**Procedures After Processing a New Participant Application**

1. All initial contact after processing new app is via email
2. All initial contact goes to participant plus any of the following that we have contact information for: GAL, Case Manager/Independent Living Worker, Foster Parent, group home staff, mentor.
3. Contact moves to telephone, text, and email after 4 Hour Course and Learner’s License Exam have been completed
4. Participant demo info is stored in an in-house database designed by K2I. Database calculates participant Category immediately after we enter participant info, and updates participant category as they achieve additional milestones
5. Participants are never deleted from the K2I Database; their status is either Eligible or No Longer Eligible for the purposes of reporting data on active participants. Any closed participant record can be reactivated via a single button in the database

Category 1: 15 – 17 Without a Permit or License:

1. Determine whether participant has completed 4 Hour Course & Learner’s License Exam
   1. Advise participant of availability of prepaid codes through K2I that allow them to take both requirements online
   2. If participant has completed 4 Hour Course & Learner’s License Exam, provide advice for obtaining the Learner’s Permit in step 2 below:
2. Steps for obtaining the Learner’s Permit
   1. Verify the participant has an original Social Security Card
   2. Verify the participant has a certified copy of their Birth Certificate
   3. Direct the participant to make an appointment at a local Department of Highway and Motor Vehicle Safety (DHMVS) or Tax Collector’s office via the [OASIS](https://services.flhsmv.gov/Oasis/) system:
   4. Advise the participant that a $54.25 fee will need to be paid when the permit is picked up; K2I will reimburse the fee in full when a receipt and completed Reimbursement form are submitted to [info@keystoindependencefl.org](mailto:info@keystoindependencefl.org)

Category 2: 15 – 17 Learner’s Permit Less Than 12 Months:

1. We will contact the participant to inform them of the date they will be eligible to take their Road Test (either their 18th birthday or the 12-month anniversary of their permit, whichever comes first)
2. We will schedule and prepay for Six (6) hours of behind the wheel training with a driving school in the youth’s area 60 days before the date they are eligible to get their license
3. Behind the wheel lessons include pick up/drop off service from the youth’s placement

Category 3: 15 – 17 Learner’s Permit 12 Months or More

1. We will contact the participant and attempt to sign them up for behind the wheel classes and a road test ASAP
2. If the participant expresses disinterest in getting a license, we will set their record for a follow up call 60 days later

Category 4: 18 – 21 Without a Permit or License

1. Determine whether participant has completed 4 Hour Course & Learner’s License Exam
   1. If neither has been completed either requirement, advise participant of availability of prepaid codes for the 4 Hour Course through K2I that allow them to take it online
   2. Advise participant that adults must take the Learner’ s License Written Exam at a DHMVS or Tax Collector’s Office in accordance with State law
   3. If participant has completed 4 Hour Course & Learner’s License Exam, provide advice for obtaining the Learner’s Permit in step 2 below:
2. Steps for obtaining the Learner’s Permit
   1. Verify the participant has an original Social Security Card
   2. Verify the participant has a certified copy of their Birth Certificate
   3. Direct the participant to make an appointment at a local Department of Highway and Motor Vehicle Safety (DHMVS) or Tax Collector’s office via the [OASIS](https://services.flhsmv.gov/Oasis/) system:
   4. Advise the participant that a $54.25 fee will need to be paid when the permit is picked up; K2I will reimburse the fee in full when a receipt and completed Reimbursement form are submitted to [info@keystoindependencefl.org](mailto:info@keystoindependencefl.org)
3. Adult participants may skip Step 2 above; however, they will need to source their own adult driver and vehicle to assist with practice and to provide a vehicle to take the road test with. Driving Schools will not give lessons to anyone without a Learner’s Permit Card in their possession. We strongly encourage all participants get their Learner’s Permit, and we pay for it.

Category 5: 18 – 21 With a Permit

1. We will contact the participant and attempt to sign them up for behind the wheel classes and a road test ASAP
2. If the participant expresses disinterest in getting a license, we will set their record for a follow up call 60 days later

Category 6: Participant Has a Driver’s License

Participants in this category are eligible for insurance benefits only, dependent upon their age and case status

**Auto Insurance**

Addressing the car insurance issue has been a major part of K2I’s success. A lack of accessible and affordable car insurance is a major barrier to young adults gaining employment, attending school and participating in regularly scheduled extracurricular activities. K2I helps to alleviate this issue by providing insurance to participating youth within certain parameters.

Minors under the age of 18 who successfully participate in the program are provided with auto insurance with no other conditions. From ages 18 to 18.5 the K2I program provides coverage for youth provided they own a vehicle or are on a foster parent’s insurance policy.

Extended Foster Care is part of Florida’s Child Welfare system that allows youth to stay in Foster Care until they are 21 years of age (22 if they have a disability). Youth in Extended Foster Care are eligible for up to six months of auto insurance through K2I.

Youth who participate in PESS (Postsecondary Education Support and Services) are reviewed on a case by case for one insurance payment or the minimum payment required to start the policy, whichever is lower.

K2I staff will review post permanency applications for insurance funds on a case by case basis. In these cases, turning 18 and leaving care is included in the definition of “permanency” up to age 18.5

**Statistics**

* Driver’s License Obtained by Youth, Average Growth by Fiscal Year: 55%
* Permits Obtained by Youth, Average Growth by Fiscal Year: 59%

**Keys to Independence – Raw Permit & License Data by Fiscal Year**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Drivers License** | **Monthly Average** | **Permit** | **Permit Monthly Average** | **Permit Growth** | **License Growth** |
| **FY 14-15** | 30 | 3.75 | 66 | 8.25 |  |  |
| **FY 15-16** | 64 | 5.33 | 167 | 13.92 | 40% | 47% |
| **FY 16-17** | 113 | 9.42 | 228 | 19.00 | 73% | 57% |
| **FY 17-18** | 180 | 15.00 | 354 | 29.50 | 64% | 63% |
| **FY 18-19\*** | 80 | 13.33 | 147 | 24.50 | - | - |
| **TOTALS** | **467** | **9.37** | **962** | **19.03** | **59%** | **55%** |
| *\*6-month period as of 12/21/2018* | | |  |  |  |  |

**Average Costs**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 4 Hour Course | $ 16.00 |
| Learners License Exam | $ 22.95 |
| Learner's License Fee | $ 54.25 |
| Behind the Wheel Lessons\* | $ 360.00 |
| Road Test Package\*\* | $ 100.00 |
| Six Months of Auto Insurance\*\*\* | $ 1,800.00 |
| TOTAL | $ 2,353.20 |
|  |  |
| *\*Behind the Wheel Lessons vary by location* |  |
| *\*\*Road Test Package varies by location* |  |
| *\*\*\*Insurance varies by location and youth placement (foster parent policy vs. individual policy)* | |

* Youth receiving all services would cost approximately $2353.20 in the first six months, and approximately $1800 every six months after.
* The max cost per youth would be approx. $10,553.20. To meet the maximum cost, a youth would need to hit all of the following milestones through the Program:
  + Get their Driver’s License at age 16
  + Receive the insurance benefit as a minor from 16 – 17.99 years, then the 6-month grace period of insurance for ages 18 – 18.5
  + Collect the $1,000 deductible reimbursement after being involved in an auto accident

**Statutory Authority – Florida**

409.1454 Motor vehicle insurance and driver licenses for children in care.

(1) The Legislature finds that the costs of driver education, licensure and costs incidental to licensure, and motor vehicle insurance for a child in out-of-home care after such child obtains a driver license create an additional barrier to engaging in normal age-appropriate activities and gaining independence and may limit opportunities for obtaining employment and completing educational goals. The Legislature also finds that the completion of an approved driver education course is necessary to develop safe driving skills.

(2) To the extent that funding is available, the department shall establish a program to pay the cost of driver education, licensure and other costs incidental to licensure, and motor vehicle insurance for children in out-of-home care who have successfully completed a driver education program.

(3) If a caregiver, or an individual or not-for-profit entity approved by the caregiver, adds a child to his or her existing insurance policy, the amount paid to the caregiver or approved purchaser may not exceed the increase in cost attributable to the addition of the child to the policy.

(4) Payment shall be made to eligible recipients in the order of eligibility until available funds are exhausted. If a child determined to be eligible reaches permanency status or turns 18 years of age, the program may pay for that child to complete a driver education program and obtain a driver license for up to 6 months after the date the child reaches permanency status or 6 months after the date the child turns 18 years of age. A child continuing in care under s. [39.6251](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=0000-0099/0039/Sections/0039.6251.html) may be eligible to have the costs of licensure and costs incidental to licensure paid if the child demonstrates that such costs are creating barriers for obtaining employment or completing educational goals.

(5) The department shall contract with a not-for-profit entity whose mission is to support youth aging out of foster care to develop procedures for operating and administering the program, including, but not limited to:

(a) Determining eligibility, including responsibilities for the child and caregivers.

(b) Developing application and payment forms.

(c) Notifying eligible children, caregivers, group homes, and residential programs of the program.

(d) Providing technical assistance to lead agencies, providers, group homes, and residential programs to support removing obstacles that prevent children in foster care from driving.

(e) Publicizing the program, engaging in outreach, and providing incentives to youth participating in the program to encourage the greatest number of eligible children to obtain driver licenses.