

What are my rights as a Teen in DCF care?

DCF Youth: What you need to know about the Independent Living Program and other DCF Youth Programs.

If you are Committed to DCF there are programs that can help you learn to live on your own.

DCF Programs include:

Community Life Skills
Preparation for Adult Living Settings (PALS)
Community Housing Assistance Program (CHAP)
and other programs for youth.

What is the Community Life Skills Program?

Community Life Skills is a class offered to DCF youth ages 15 - 21 to help you learn important, practical skills. This includes skills such as banking, grocery shopping, and renting an apartment, as well as learning about resources in your community and how to access them.

What is PALS?

PALS is a program for youth who are ready for some independence, but not yet ready to be living completely on their own. PALS has two programs:

- a group home, or
- a transitional apartment program.

What is a transitional apartment program?

In a transitional apartment program, you live in an apartment, usually with a roommate. This apartment is supervised by program staff who have keys to your apartment and will come into your apartment to check on things. You can have visitors at your apartment, but they have to be on an approved list. The program also has classes to help you learn to manage your apartment and progress toward your goals.

Are the PALS programs like living at a shelter?

No. The transitional apartment programs and group homes give you more independence than a shelter. Most programs have a lot of rules, but these are meant to help you learn to be independent. If you want a copy of the rulebook for the transitional apartment program, come see us or call us.

How old do I have to be for the PALS program?

You have to be at least 14 years old and your DCF treatment plan must include independent living.

What is CHAP?

This program is for youth who are ready to be living on their own. In the CHAP program, you can live in an apartment of your own, or you can live with other people. The CHAP gives you some money for rent (up to \$1249 per month depending on where you live), and to help pay your bills (up to \$449 per month depending on how much money you make and where you live). You will be assigned a case manager who will visit you regularly to see how you are managing your money, and to check out your apartment.

Who can be in CHAP?

In order to be admitted to CHAP, you must:

- be committed to DCF (this means DCF is your legal guardian),
- be 17 years old or older,
- take, or already have taken, a DCF approved life skills class,
- be mature and responsible (according to your DCF worker),
- be working at least part time (or be actively looking for a job),
- be going to a school or vocational program full time.

How long can I stay in PALS or CHAP?

Once you are over 18, you can voluntarily stay with DCF as long as you are in high school or some other educational or vocational program. You can stay in these independent living programs until you are 21, as long as you follow the rules of the program. In some cases, you can stay in the program until you are 23.

What if I don't want to be committed to DCF anymore?

You can sign yourself out of DCF, but you should NEVER sign yourself out of DCF without talking to your lawyer. If you sign out of DCF, you can lose the opportunity to have DCF help pay for an apartment, your living expenses and healthcare, and to pay for college or some other school for you. Please call us, or see us, if you have questions about this.

Does my baby have to be committed to DCF to live with me?

No. Your baby does not have to be committed to DCF in order to live with you in the Independent Living Program or any other DCF placement. If the Department of Social Services does not help you pay for child care while you are in independent living, DCF will help you pay for child care while you work or go to school.

Can I get an adult mentor through DCF?

Yes, any youth in the Independent Living Program can get an adult mentor through DCF. Ask your DCF worker about this.

Can I get help paying for college?

Yes. DCF will help you pay for college if you are committed to DCF through your 18th birthday. You will have to sign a voluntary agreement to stay with DCF, apply for scholarships, contribute \$500 per year, and be in school full time.

Can I get my driver's license?

Yes, you can get your driver's license if you and your worker decide you are ready to learn to drive. DCF will pay 50% of the cost of the driver's education program for the first course.

Do I have a right to get money from DCF for high school activities like the prom, class ring and graduation clothes?

Yes, DCF must give you up to \$440 to pay for the following:

- senior year pictures
- prom expenses
- senior class dues
- class ring
- senior class trips
- graduation cap and gown

How do I get into an Independent Living Program?

Your DCF worker has to refer you to these programs. There is an interview process for most programs.

Where can I get help?

If you have questions about Independent Living Programs or about your legal rights, Call CCA's Teen Legal Clinic at 860-570-5327.

