



CDSS

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REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL

- State Law Change
- Federal Law or Regulation Change
- Court Order
- Clarification Requested by One or More Counties
- Initiated by CDSS

July 24, 2013

ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE NO. I-35-13

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS
 ALL COUNTY CALFRESH PROGRAM SPECIALISTS
 ALL COUNTY CHILD WELFARE SERVICES PROGRAM MANAGERS
 ALL COUNTY CHIEF PROBATION OFFICERS
 ALL INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM MANAGERS
 ALL INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM COORDINATORS
 ALL COUNTY TRANSITIONAL HOUSING COORDINATORS

SUBJECT: BEST PRACTICES FOR INCREASING ELIGIBLE YOUTH
 PARTICIPATION IN THE CALFRESH PROGRAM

REFERENCE: ALL COUNTY LETTERS (ACL) 09-25 AND 11-78; ALL COUNTY
 INFORMATION NOTICE (ACIN) I-22-12

The purpose of this ACIN is to communicate with counties about best practices to engage former foster youth and Non-Minor Dependents (NMDs) in applying for and receiving CalFresh benefits. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) would like to emphasize the importance of providing youth who are exiting foster care and non-minor dependents with one-on-one assistance filling out the benefits application on-line, by fax, mail, or in person, and submitting it to the proper CalFresh office. It is the goal of CDSS to ensure all eligible youth are referred to and connected with CalFresh benefits.

Background

In response to concerns regarding the low participation level of eligible youth in the CalFresh program, CDSS issued ACL No. 09-25 and ACIN No. I-22-12 to provide instructions to increase the participation of former foster youth in CalFresh. Since these letters were released, CalFresh applications and participation rates have risen. While this increase is encouraging; there are still a large number of youth exiting care without applying for or receiving CalFresh benefits. As noted in ACL 09-25, many of these youth exit their foster home or group home with little or no income/assets, but still do not apply for the nutritional benefits provided by CalFresh.

Per W&IC section 391(e)(5) and Manual of Policies and Procedures section 31-525.86, counties are responsible for ensuring that youth who are exiting foster care receive information and referrals to apply for CalFresh benefits. This letter lists the best practices that counties have employed to engage youth to increase youth participation in the CalFresh program. These best practices aim to provide youth with the skills, knowledge, and understanding of the CalFresh application process while they are still in care, so if the need arises once supporting themselves, they are able to access and obtain the services they need.

Youth Exiting From Foster Care

Prior to termination of foster care, a youth will be working with their county social worker or probation officer to prepare for exiting from foster care and their transition to supporting themselves. It is recommended that during transitional conferences or individual meetings with the youth held within 30 days of the planned exit, the social worker or probation officer complete the CalFresh application with youth and explain where to submit the completed application. This includes providing the location and mailing address of the CalFresh office, the local phone number for phone and faxed applications, a demonstration of the online application process and a list of where the youth can receive assistance with the application or the Notice of Action (NOA) within their community. If possible, the social worker or probation officer should introduce youth to the eligibility worker who will be processing their applications. In some counties, ILP programs are co-located with the CalFresh eligibility staff, affording the opportunity for the eligibility workers to meet the youth face-to-face and to answer any questions the youth may have.

For youth exiting care, the CalFresh application *may be submitted* up to 30 days prior to the termination of foster care benefits, but the application will not be processed until the CalFresh office is notified that the termination of foster care benefits has occurred (ACL 09-25). It is recommended that the social worker or probation officer assist the youth with follow-up on the application to ensure that they receive benefits, if they are eligible. If the youth is not filing within the last month prior to the termination of foster care, it is best practice for the social worker to review the importance of promptly filing the CalFresh application, and to advise the youth on how to ask the CalFresh eligibility worker for expedited services.

Non-Minor Dependents (NMDs)

The Extended Foster Care (EFC) program, also known as the "AFTER 18 Program," allows youth to remain in foster care under court jurisdiction beyond age 18 as a non-minor dependent (NMD) and receive supportive services. The NMD population can be complex in regards to CalFresh benefits because their eligibility will be determined on a case-by-case basis and depends on their placement type and individual circumstances. Additionally, because the personal and living circumstances of NMDs can change quickly, their eligibility may be impacted with every change in their living, education, or employment

circumstances. For more information on NMDs receiving CalFresh benefits, please refer to our Frequently Asked Questions located at:

<http://www.childsworld.ca.gov/res/pdf/FAQFosterCare/AB12AnswerQ1.pdf>

The CDSS recommends providing all NMD youth with one-on-one assistance to learn the process to apply for and receive CalFresh benefits, so they have the knowledge and ability to access benefits if and when the need arises. When possible, the county social worker or probation officer should introduce the NMD to the CalFresh eligibility worker, and provide assistance with the application and any required follow-up documentation. This assistance familiarizes the NMD with the multiple-step process and ongoing requirements to receive CalFresh benefits, including re-certification.

Best Practices: Youth Engagement

Youth engagement has a crucial impact on youth applying for and receiving CalFresh benefits they need. The CDSS recommends the social worker or probation officer stress the importance of these benefits as a free nutritional resource available to the youth, and help the youth to overcome the “stigma” or resistance they may have regarding the CalFresh program or “being on food stamps.” The CDSS recommends the child welfare social worker or probation officer guide the youth through the process from application to NOA, rather than filling out the application and submitting it for them, as this will help the youth develop their knowledge of the benefits process. Even if the youth initially does not wish to apply for benefits, we encourage the social worker and probation officer to walk them through the process so if they change their mind later, they will know where to apply for CalFresh benefits and how to identify themselves as a former foster youth in need of assistance.

Below are some best practices for social workers and probation officers to engage youth to apply for CalFresh benefits:

- Discuss CalFresh benefits with youth at the transition meeting/conferences as part of the emancipation process;
- Provide the youth with a step-by-step procedural guide that helps them walk through the application process;
- Provide youth with the website (<http://www.benefitscal.org/>) and assist them with completing the online application;
- Introduce the youth to the specified eligibility worker;
- Locate ILP workers in the local community centers rather than at the Child Welfare Services office. This results in better youth engagement, youth become familiar with them, and the youth know where to seek help even if they are no longer a part of the Child Welfare System;
- Remain in contact and follow up with youth on a consistent basis to provide guidance throughout the application and approval process. Some youth do not understand the NOA letter. If they are denied CalFresh benefits because they

incorrectly filled out the form, or didn't file the application in a timely fashion, they are not likely to follow up or appeal. However, if a social worker, eligibility worker, or probation officer follows up they are likely to correct the mistake and receive benefits.

- Provide the contact information for the local legal aid office if a youth is denied benefits so the youth can receive assistance with filing an appeal.

Additional Best Practices:

The CDSS has identified the following practices which have also increased the rates of completed CalFresh applications and participation rates of exiting foster youth:

- Include CalFresh participation outcomes as part of the contract with ILP service providers;
- Designate Cal-Fresh eligibility workers who are subject matter experts on foster youth applications and funding, who can expedite their CalFresh applications, and who can connect with the youth directly;
- Co-locate ILP coordinators, probation officers, social workers and eligibility workers so they are able to work together to assist the foster youth in applying for and receiving benefits;
- Allow youth's NOA to be sent to the Child Welfare Services office until stable housing is obtained by the youth; and
- Provide program guides with step-by-step instructions for social workers and probation officers to follow at specific intervals of the case planning/emancipation planning process.

Communication and coordination between the social worker or probation officer, and eligibility workers contributes to ensuring each youth is afforded the information and skills to obtain necessary supportive services upon exiting the foster care system.

If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact the ILP Policy Unit at ILPpolicy@dss.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Original Document Signed By:

KAREN B. GUNDERSON, Chief
Child and Youth Permanency
Children and Family Services Division