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Informational Letter

Transmittal:	06-OCFS-INF-10
To:	Commissioners of Social Services Executive Directors of Voluntary Authorized Agencies
Issuing Division/Office:	Strategic Planning and Policy Development
Date:	December 29, 2006
Subject:	Meeting the Clothing Needs of Foster Care Youth ages 12 through 20 Years in Out of Home Placement
Suggested Distribution:	Directors of Social Services Adoption Supervisors Planning Coordinators Staff Development Coordinators
Contact Person(s):	See Page 6
Attachments:	Yes– Guide to Clothing Inventory List
Attachment Available Online:	yes

Filing References

Previous ADMs/INFs	Releases Cancelled	Dept. Regs.	Soc. Serv. Law & Other Legal Ref.	Manual Ref. Standards of Payment for Foster Care of Children – Program Manual	Misc. Ref.
89 ADM-14		427.16	SSL 398-a		

I. Purpose

The purpose of this Informational Letter (INF) is to provide guidance to social services districts and voluntary agencies on meeting the clothing needs of youth 12 through 20 years of age placed in foster care.

II. Background

In response to the 2001 New York State's Child and Family Services Review, the Office of Children and Family Services Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) included an integrated set of actions to provide adolescents in foster care with the supports needed for them to develop into healthy functional citizens with permanent attachments to supportive adults, families and communities. During 2003, the Adolescent Strategy Workgroup, comprised of representatives from public and private agencies, other state agencies and youth, was formed to strengthen services to adolescents and improve their achievement of permanency. Also in 2003, the New York State's Office of Children and Family Services Foster Care Youth Leadership Team, Youth In Progress, was established. Youth In Progress (YIP) is comprised of teams of youth leaders, each youth with an adult mentor, from each of the six regional foster care youth leadership groups. The mission of YIP is "to enhance and advance the lives of today's and tomorrow's foster youth by giving them a sense of self and responsibility." The Adolescent Services and Outcomes Work Group and the YIP team have been working together to strengthen services to adolescents.

Youth in foster care have long indicated the need for improvements in the way their clothing needs are met. In 2004, the YIP team identified this as a priority. There was a concern that the regulations on the standards on clothing for children in foster care, Title 18 Codes, Rules and Regulations of the State of New York (18 NYCRR) Section 427.16, were too broad, resulting in major differences in the way in which the clothing needs of foster care youth are addressed. In addition, there was concern the policy and procedural requirements, including the clothing inventory list, published in 89 ADM-14 issued on April 10, 1989, needed to be updated.

During 2005, the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) surveyed local social services districts and voluntary agencies to determine policies and practices concerning meeting the clothing needs of foster care youth. Forty-three districts and twenty-nine voluntary agencies completed the survey. The survey findings indicated that the time frames and standards by which initial and replacement clothing needs are met vary across the state. In addition, the extent of youth involvement in selecting and purchasing clothing also varies across the state.

In addition, OCFS supported the YIP team making a video to highlight the concerns related to clothing. This video is available through your OCFS Regional Office and the Adolescent Services Resource Network. OCFS recommends that local district and agency managers and staff view this clothing video to better understand how clothing impacts a young person's self-image, and his/her achievement of positive outcomes.

Recognizing the importance of the issues raised by the YIP team concerning clothing, including the need to update the clothing inventory list, OCFS in partnership with the YIP team developed good practice guidelines to assist local social services districts and voluntary agencies in meeting the clothing needs of adolescents placed in foster care.

This is the first step OCFS is taking to address concerns related to clothing and provide updated guidance to an outdated clothing inventory list. At a later date, OCFS plans to issue a subsequent communication to address the clothing needs of all children and youth placed in foster care. In the meantime, while work is being completed on a clothing inventory list for children from birth through 11 years of age, OCFS strongly recommends that districts and agencies follow the good casework practices outlined below when addressing the clothing needs of youth 12 through 20 years of age placed in foster care.

III. Program Implications

The guidance provided in this INF provides local districts and voluntary agencies with good casework practice for meeting the clothing needs of youth ages 12 through 20 years placed in foster care. This guidance is applicable to youth in all types of placement: foster boarding homes, and congregate care. In addition, this guidance is applicable to youth who are in OCFS custody and placed in a voluntary agency foster care setting.

This INF recommends time frames for providing the initial clothing needs of youth when they enter foster care, including time frames for meeting their emergency clothing needs and other immediate clothing needs. In addition, this INF recommends time frames for assessing and providing for replacement clothing needs. Attached to this INF is an updated Guide To Clothing Inventory List for assessing initial and replacement clothing needs. Finally, this INF provides guidance on the role of youth involvement when meeting the clothing needs of children in foster care.

Initial Clothing

Emergency Clothing Needs

Within 24 hours of a youth 12 years of age or older entering foster care, the local social services district or contract voluntary agency should assess and provide for the youth's emergency clothing needs. Emergency clothing needs are defined as those items of clothing the youth absolutely needs. For example, if it is winter, a youth must have a winter coat.

Immediate Clothing Needs

Within the first week of placement, the local social services district or contract voluntary agency should assess and provide for any other immediate clothing needs beyond the emergency clothing needs that the youth may have. Immediate clothing needs are defined as those articles of clothing that the youth must have over the next few days to attend school, meet with caseworker, go to court, visit with parent, etc.

Initial Clothing Needs

Within 30 days of placement, the local social services district or contract voluntary agency should assess and provide for the youth's initial clothing needs. The attached Guide To Clothing Inventory List should be used to determine the adequacy level of the youth's clothing. For clothing to be considered adequate, it should be in good condition, be attractive and fit appropriately. If it is determined that the youth needs additional clothing, and this clothing is not otherwise available from the youth's home or previous placement, the local social services district should authorize an allowance for the purchase of the necessary initial clothing.

Initial Clothing Allowance

Reimbursement for initial clothing, including any emergency and immediate clothing needs, **is not subject to the Maximum State Aid Rates (MSARs) for replacement clothing** promulgated by OCFS. The local social services district that places the youth in foster care will determine the amount of the initial clothing allowance. The amount should be sufficient to provide the clothing items listed on the Guide To Clothing Inventory List, to the extent the youth needs such clothing.

When a Youth Transfers to Another Foster Care Setting

When a youth is transferred from one foster care setting to another (for example from congregate care to a foster home), the youth's initial clothing needs should be reassessed and provided for within 30 days of the transfer. The Guide To Clothing Inventory List should be used to reassess a youth's initial clothing needs. If clothing is needed, an initial clothing allowance should be issued for the new placement. **Again, this allowance is not subject to the MSARs for replacement clothing.** Clothing purchased for a youth in care belongs to that youth and the youth keeps the clothing when transferred to a new placement.

Replacement Clothing

Every three months the local social services district or contract voluntary agency should assess a youth's need for replacement clothing and purchase the necessary replacement clothing. It is recommended that clothing needs be reassessed when the youth is getting ready to go back to school and with the change in seasons. A youth's replacement clothing needs should be determined using the Guide To Clothing Inventory List. For clothing to be considered adequate, it should be in good condition, attractive and fit appropriately.

For youth placed in foster homes, each local social services district must specify payment rates for replacement clothing. Reimbursement for the cost of replacement clothing is subject to the MSARs for replacement clothing published annually by OCFS for youth placed in foster homes.

For youth in congregate care, replacement clothing costs are covered by foster care funds made available to the congregate care provider through MSARs paid by local social services districts. MSARs established annually for each congregate care program define the reimbursement limit for all foster care expenditures including replacement clothing expenditures. **However, as with youth in foster homes, an initial clothing allowance**

is to be paid separately from the MSAR established for the operational costs of the congregate care program.

Youth Involvement

Youth involvement is recommended when meeting the clothing needs of foster care youth. The Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) recognizes that for youth to make a successful transition to self-sufficiency and achieve positive outcomes, adolescents need to be assisted in developing a set of competencies and basic life skills. The foster care experience should provide the nurturing, support and teaching that a family would provide. Opportunities to build strengths and to practice new skills should be incorporated into a youth's daily living, with developmentally appropriate goals and expectations.

Youth 12 years of age and older should be able to provide input into selecting and purchasing their clothing. It is recommended that youth involvement begin earlier than 12 years based on developmental appropriateness. Youth 16 years of age and older should be responsible for purchasing their clothing with some support from a caring adult.

Clothing Guide

As noted above, an updated Guide To Clothing Inventory List for youth 12 years of age and older is attached to this INF. These clothing guidelines should be met when addressing the clothing needs of youth 12 years of age or older placed in foster care.

Special Payments for Youth In Foster Homes

Local social services districts are reminded that they may authorize special allowances to cover the costs of additional clothing for religious ceremonies, educational activities (such as proms, dances, or award ceremonies), summer camp activities, special physical conditions, or to replace clothing that is stolen or destroyed.

Districts are also reminded that CFCIP funds may be used to purchase prom attire, caps and gowns for graduation, and clothing for job/college interviews. CFCIP expenditures are claimed on the RF-4, "Independent Living Program for Foster Care Children" (LDSS-3871). Refer to the Fiscal Manual, Volume 2, Chapter 3 for instructions on completing the RF-4 claim, and 06-OCFS LCM-06 Federal Fiscal Year 2005-2006 Independent Living Allocations.

Cash Gifts/Earnings

The replacement clothing allowance should not be reduced when a youth has a part-time job or receives a cash gift. A youth should not be expected to use such funds for needed replacement clothing. A youth should be allowed to use money earned or cash gifts to purchase something extra or special for themselves or to save for the future.

OCFS expects that implementation of the new framework for assessing and meeting the clothing needs of youth 12 through 20 years of age in all types of foster care will result in improved self-images for youth as well as the opportunity to develop and improve basic life skills. This in turn will enhance opportunities for youth to achieve positive outcomes and make a successful transition to self-sufficiency.

IV. Contact Persons

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GUIDE TO CLOTHING INVENTORY LIST – GIRLS

Categories	12-20 Years
Section A – Year Round	Quantity
Undershirt (tank tops, camisoles. etc.)	7
Undergarments (panties, etc.)	12
Sleepwear (pajamas, etc.)	3
Bathrobe	1
Socks (dress, casual, trouser socks)	12
Pantyhose (stockings, knee-highs, tights)	5
Bra (sports bra, etc.)	7
Slip	1
Casual Outfit	2
*Formal Outfit (suit/skirt with blazer, etc.)	2
Track Suit (sweat suit, wind suit, etc.)	2
Casual Shirt (t-shirts, turtlenecks, etc.)	7
*Dress Shirt (button-down, polo, etc.)	3
Casual Pant (jean, khaki, etc.)	7
Dress Pant (work wear, formal wear)	3
Skirt	2
Pullover (hooded sweatshirt, fleece, etc.)	4
Hat (cap, fitted hat, etc.)	3
Rain Gear	1
Shoes	2
Sneakers	1
Slippers	1
Section B -- Summer	
Lightweight Jacket	1
Shorts	6
Summer Shirts	5
Swimwear	1
Section C – Winter	
Mittens or Gloves	1
Winter Jacket	1
Boots	1
Winter Hat	2
Additional Items	
Luggage (suitcase, etc.)	2
Wallet	1
Purse	1
Belt	2
Book Bag (backpack, etc.)	1
Gym Bag (duffel, etc.)	1

GUIDE TO CLOTHING INVENTORY LIST - BOYS

Categories	12-20 Years
Section A – Year Round	Quantity
Undershirt	10
Undergarments (boxers, briefs, etc.)	12
Sleepwear (pajamas, etc.)	3
Bathrobe	1
Socks (casual, dress, etc.)	12
Suit Jacket or Sport Coat	1
Track Suit (sweat suit, wind suit, etc.)	2
Casual Shirt (t-shirts, turtlenecks, etc.)	7
* Dress Shirt (button down, polo shirt, etc.)	3
Casual Pant (jean, khaki, etc.)	7
* Dress Pant (work wear, formal wear)	3
Pullover (hooded sweatshirt, fleece, etc.)	4
Hat (cap, fitted hat, etc.)	3
Rain Gear	1
Shoes	2
Sneakers	1
Slippers	1
Section B – Summer	
Lightweight Jacket	1
Shorts	6
Summer shirts	5
Swimwear	1
Section C – Winter	
Mittens or Gloves	1
Winter Jacket	1
Boots	1
Winter Hat	2
Additional Items	
Luggage (suitcase, etc.)	2
Wallet	1
Tie	1
Belt	2
Book Bag (backpack, etc.)	1
Gym Bag (duffel, etc.)	1

* One dress outfit may be sufficient for younger youth between the ages of 12 and 14 years who are not engaged in employment or educational or vocational programs that would require them to wear dressy clothes.