

i'm 18 soon, what are my OPTIONS?



Prior to your 18th birthday, your case manager should discuss the possibility and benefits of you receiving voluntary services from DCS and you should meet with an Independent Living Specialist.

A lot of us can't wait to leave DCS custody. My time in the system had been both positive and negative, but I wanted to get out of "the system." Turning 18 meant independence. I was excited. But I was scared, too. My case manager talked to me about something called "post-custody" or "voluntary services." My first thought was "No way—I'm out of here!" But, when she explained what it was, I realized that it was a really great option to help me to achieve my own personal dreams and goals and that it would give me the support I needed to succeed. I didn't want to be a statistic. My life had been hard, but it's made me stronger, and I knew that I was going to reach my goals.

What is voluntary post custody?

Once you turn 18, you're no longer officially in custody of the state of Tennessee. However, if you have an educational plan you can sign up for voluntary services. You should know your rights and responsibilities before you sign up for these services. ([Link to Rights and Responsibilities](#)) Your case manager and the Independent Living Specialist should be able to help you do this. DCS can help you with some of your expenses such as housing, transportation, tuition and other expenses until you are 21. Some of this will be through payments to foster parents, others will be what are called "Chafee" funds, and school expenses may be paid through an "ETV," Educational and Training Voucher ([Link to How can I afford to go to school](#))

What's an educational plan?

This can be a little tricky, but basically this means that you are in school (college, vocational, training program) or are planning to go to school in the very near future. This may also mean that you are working somewhere that is providing a training program to prepare you for a job. Some people at DCS might disagree about whether or not you meet the qualifications for an educational plan. If that happens, be sure to follow the DCS chain of command until you feel like you understand the decision that has been made.

What are the benefits of voluntary custody/post-secondary services?

There are some real benefits to the post-custody services. For example, I still have an independent living specialist and case manager who work with me and make sure I get what I need. Now that I'm an adult, it's a really different relationship than when I was a kid. If I have a problem, my team will try to work with me to get it straightened out. They help me with paperwork and applications like my TennCare application and my FAFSA application to get financial aid for college. My team works to make sure I have

housing, and I can access Chafee funds as long as I keep my grades up! Some of this can continue all the way until I turn 23. If I hadn't decided to take advantage of voluntary services, it would have been really tough to continue my education. Now I am making a new life for myself!

What if I still don't want voluntary services or don't want to continue my education?

School is not for everyone. If you aren't planning to continue your education right now, your case manager should help you to connect with a career counselor that can help you find a career that matches your needs and talents. The Nashville Career Advancement Center is a great place to start. ([see employment](#)).

You are still eligible for a "start up grant" from DCS, which is \$???. This can help with some of the expenses you will have with housing and other necessities. In addition, if you are struggling, you can contact your Community Service Agency (website- www.mccsa.com/TransitionalYouth.htm). They have a Transitional Living Program to assist former foster youth who are NOT in voluntary care with emergency needs.

What if I'm already 18 or older?

DCS works with other agencies, such as Youth Villages and Monroe Harding, to provide transitional living services. Remember, you can be in the Opportunity Passport ([link](#)) even if you don't participate in post-custody.