

## Facts about Independent Living

- Independent Living is a federal program that began in 1989. The law requires Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services to assess every foster child at age 16 to help establish a permanency plan for that child's future.
- As required by law, Hamilton County trains foster children in independent living skills, beginning at age 16. The training prepares them for living on their own, which, for many, is the unfortunate, but necessary reality. Training includes daily living skills, referrals for education, training or employment, relationship development, and tactics for connecting with community services.
- Hamilton County also goes beyond the basics with a special program created and administered by Lighthouse Youth Services, a private, non-profit, child-serving agency. Lighthouse operates the program under a contract with Job and Family Services. The program provides qualified foster teens with their own apartments. Lighthouse in effect becomes the parent for these teens who have been forced out into the world at an early age. To earn and keep an apartment, the teens must be working and/or attending school.
- A bill currently in the Ohio Senate would extend Independent Living services to young people who have aged out of the foster care system without a successful, permanent connection to a family. HB 38, Independent Living Youth, which stems from the federal John H. Chaffee Act of 1999, would require the public child welfare system to provide skills training and transitional services to youth in custody and to those emancipating out of custody until they turn 21. It would also require collaboration and coordination among various agencies that have a role to play in helping these young people become self-sufficient.