



FINANCIAL HANDBOOK FOR NEWLY LICENSED RESOURCE FAMILIES IN ALASKA

Updated February, 2020

Alaska Center for Resource Families
A Project of Northwest Resource Associates

*Alaska Center for Resource Families
840 K Street, STE 101
Anchorage, Alaska 99501
(907) 279-1799 1-866-478-7307*

FINANCIAL HANDBOOK FOR NEWLY LICENSED RESOURCE FAMILIES IN ALASKA

Acknowledgements

This handbook was originally written by Aileen McInnis of the Alaska Center for Resource Families. The first version was assembled with assistance from Tracy Spartz Campbell, Linnea Osborne, Susan Blumenshine, Lisa McClure, Sherryl Petrie, Paula Smith, Travis Erickson, Tammy Keech, and Brenda Ursel. This updated version received input from KariLee Pietz, Yurii Miller, Susan Frisby, Marnee Choquette, Sherryl Petrie, Sharyl Wharton, and Olivia Shears. The 2020 version was updated by Kimberly Mouriquand and Jodi von Brandt and included review by Jessie Jacobs, Linda Clapp-Damerow, Nikki Maidl, Kimberly Rowan, and Dee Pearson.

NOTE: This Handbook strives to be accurate and up to date. However, policies and procedures may change or be slightly different in your area of the state. In cases of conflicting information, regulations, statutes, and OCS policies and procedures take precedence over the information in this handbook. Direct any questions to your local OCS office.

Introduction

This handbook gives you an overview of how the financial aspects of licensed foster care works in the State of Alaska. The Department of Health and Social Services follows state and federal regulations and is given a set budget by the Alaska Legislature to fund its divisions including the Office of Children's Services. Policies and Procedures have been developed to guide these expenditures. This handbook gives you a general overview of the financial procedures you will use most as a resource parent.

*Alaska Center for Resource Families
840 K Street, STE 101
Anchorage, Alaska 99501
(907) 279-1799 1-866-478-7307*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Acknowledgements | 1 |
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Frequently Asked Questions | 4 |
| The Foster Care Stipend..... | 5 |
| Base/Standard Rates..... | 5 |
| Emergency Foster Care Rates | 6 |
| Emergency Shelter Foster Care Rates..... | 6 |
| Augmented Rates | 6 |
| What are the Basic Foster Care Rates? | 8 |
| Taxes | 9 |
| Receiving Your Stipend..... | 9 |
| Absences from the Home..... | 10 |
| What if your foster care stipend doesn't come?..... | 10 |
| Other Resources | 11 |
| Foster Wear Program | 11 |
| Emergency Relief Support..... | 11 |
| Alaska Temporary Assistance Program (ATAP) and Native Family Assistance Program (NFAP)..... | 11 |
| WIC (Women, Infants and Children Program)..... | 11 |
| Ideas from Other Resource Families: | 12 |
| Other Financial Issues..... | 13 |
| Clothing Allowance | 13 |
| When a Child Leaves Your Home | 13 |
| Special Needs Funds and One Time Items | 13 |
| Mileage Reimbursement | 15 |
| Always Get Pre-Authorized Approval..... | 15 |
| Damages and Loss | 15 |
| Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend | 16 |
| Child Care Assistance and Expenses | 16 |
| Request for Travel Funds | 17 |
| Purchase Authorizations | 17 |
| Savings Accounts..... | 18 |
| Independent Living Supports for Youth | 18 |
| Medical Expenses and Medicaid..... | 20 |
| Use a Medicaid Provider for Your Child's Health Care..... | 20 |
| What is Covered by Medicaid..... | 21 |
| If You Do Not Get Your Medicaid Card and a Child Needs Care... .. | 21 |
| Indian Health Service Health Coverage..... | 21 |
| Payment Out of Pocket and Reimbursement to Resource Parent | 22 |
| Medical Care While Travelling | 22 |
| An Overview of Medical Expenses: | 23 |



Frequently Asked Questions

| | |
|--|----------|
| <i>How do I get the foster care stipend? Who applies for it?</i> | P. 6 |
| <i>Who should I call if I am having trouble getting my foster care stipend?</i> | P. 9 |
| <i>When can you expect your foster care stipend to come?</i> | P. 10 |
| <i>Can I receive my foster care stipend by direct deposit?</i> | P. 10 |
| <i>What if the child is out of your home for a short time?</i> | P. 11 |
| <i>Should I declare the foster care stipend on my taxes as income?</i> | P. 10 |
| <i>Am I responsible for applying for the Permanent Fund Dividend for each foster child in my home?</i> | p. 17 |
| <i>Do I need to put my foster child on my own medical insurance?</i> | p. 21 |
| <i>Any suggestions on what other help might be out there for a resource parent to help stretch the foster care payment?</i> | P. 12 |
| <i>What if a child runs away from my home or ends up in the hospital? Do I continue to receive the foster care stipend during the time he is gone?</i> | P.11 |
| <i>Should I declare my foster child on my taxes as a dependent?</i> | P. 10 |
| <i>I'm a working parent. Does OCS pay for child care costs?</i> | P. 17 |
| <i>For small medical costs things, should I just pay out of my own pocket and ask for reimbursement from OCS later?</i> | P. 23 |
| <i>How do I find out what Medicaid will cover and who is a Medicaid Provider in my community?</i> | P. 21 |
| <i>My foster youth wants to attend technical school after high school. He might be interested in college too. Are there any resource out there to help him attend?</i> | P. 19-20 |



The Foster Care Stipend

Resource families are not paid a salary for what they do. Licensed resource families, however, do receive a monthly foster care stipend for each foster child in their home. Stipends are intended to offset the costs associated with caring for a child so that the cost of care does not burden the resource family. The rates are established through regulation by the Department of Health and Social Services and include *base/standard rates, emergency shelter rates, and augmented rates*. Due to geographic differences in the cost of living, stipend rates vary by geographic area. Check with your local office for current rates. You may also contact **the Provider Payment Unit** located in the Office of Children’s Services Central Office located in Juneau at 1-877-465-2215.

Licensed foster care providers will receive monthly reimbursements for providing care to a child in state’s custody based on your assigned worker’s electronic verification of the number of days a child resided in your home. The stipend includes the day the child is placed in your home, but not the day the child leaves. Your family should have a stable income to rely upon other than the stipend and not depend on the stipend alone to pay rent or for time sensitive necessities. The monthly stipend is issued for services rendered in the preceding month. That means it is possible that you may not receive your first foster care stipend until up to six weeks after a child is first placed in your home.

Base/Standard Rates

The rate for the child in your home will most often be the **standard rate**. Standard rates for foster home care include stipend for the following plus an indication of what is expected of the resource family to spend on this item: (Note: The percentages listed behind the item are estimates and vary from month to month.)

- food, including meals and snacks (35%);
- shelter, (room and board) including utilities and use of household furnishings and equipment, and daily supervision, including those activities that a parent would normally carry out to assure protection, emotional support, and care of the child (14%)
- general recreation for the foster child such as picnics, swimming lessons, recreational equipment, and other items costing less than \$100 per item that are appropriate to the ages of the children in care and sufficient in quantity to promote normal growth and development, community sports, and movies (12%)
- clothing replacement (10%)
- usual transportation expenses on behalf of the foster child, including the purchase of bus passes for a child old enough to take a bus, and reasonable local travel to the child's home for visitation (6%)
- school supplies and regular school activities (5%)
- games, toys, books (5%)

- other/miscellaneous items such as first aid supplies, bandages, aspirin, and cough syrup and other items considered usual in the care and supervision of a child (5%)
- baby-sitting and pre-school expenses (4%)
- personal items and grooming care for the foster child, such as toothpaste, toothbrushes, diapers, soap, combs, haircuts, shoe polish, replacement of formula bottles and nipples, safety pins, and other essentials (2%)
- an allowance for the foster child appropriate to the age of the child (2%)

Emergency Foster Care Rates

Emergency foster care rates are paid to a licensed resource family when children are placed in a home with less than 24 hours notice. Emergency shelter rates for a child may be paid for a maximum of 10 days for any one placement. Emergency shelter rates are 125% of the standard rate. If the child continues to stay in your home for more than ten days, the stipend rate then would revert to standard stipend level.

Emergency Shelter Foster Care Rates

Emergency Shelter Foster homes hold a specialization to provide care for children on an emergency only basis. These foster homes have a contract agreement for this type of care. Emergency shelter rates are augmented with \$40 per day for the first 10 days of placement. Emergency Shelter rates can only be extended with the protective services manager's approval and cannot extend past 30 days. If the youth remained in the home past the 30 days, the standard stipend rate would go into effect.

Augmented Rates

Increased rates may be paid for children placed by the OCS if the level of care a child requires has been assessed and determined by the OCS to exceed the basic (standard) level of care. When the standard rate is augmented, an extra amount is added to the daily rate for a certain period of time. The assessment needed to document augmented/difficulty of care is completed by the OCS worker. **Augmented rates** or ongoing costs should be approved at the time of placement. Re-determination must be made every six months and when the child changes placement. You may be asked to complete additional training in order to be approved for a requested augmented rate.

For a calendar of Foster Care Stipend Payment and Adoption Subsidy payments, go to the state OCS Publications page and look for **Foster Care & Adoption Payment Calendar**. (<http://dhss.alaska.gov/ocs/Pages/publications/default.aspx>) check this link

Each request for augmented rates is assessed and reviewed on a case by case basis by OCS and Based on Available funding. Augmented rates for the following situation may be approved:

Difficulty of Care Augmented Rate: A child may be eligible for a difficulty of care augmented rate if he requires more intensive care and supervision from foster family to

support the child's identified specific need. There are two levels of support provided in a difficulty of care augmented rate.

- Specialized Care: Children have identified special needs that require more intensive care and supervision from the foster parent.
- Structured Care: Children have identified severe problems that require specialized training by the care provider and a structured environment and their needs are more than can be provided through basic or specialized care.

Intensive Augmented Rate: OCS may pay an intensive augmented rate for the additional care, supervision, and management that a foster parent provides to maintain a child with complex medical conditions and/or a child with intellectual or developmental disabilities in a home environment. A child who receives an intensive augmented rate is not eligible to receive a difficulty of care augmented rate.

A child may be eligible for an intensive augmented rate if:

- She is pending an assessment and approval for a Children with Complex Medical Conditions (CCMC) waiver through the Division of Senior and Disability Services (DSDS) or
- She is approved but waitlisted on the Developmental Disabilities Registration and Review (DDRR) for an Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) services waiver through DSDS or
- She is on a Medicaid home and community-based waiver, but OCS determines the services received through the waiver and other agencies are not sufficient to cover the cost of the child's care.

What are the Basic Foster Care Rates?

Check with your local office for current rates. You may also contact **the Provider Payment Unit** located in the Office of Children’s Services Central Office in Juneau at 1-877-465-2215. Foster care rates are subject to appropriation. This means that OCS may propose new rates to the legislature each year and if changes are approved, they will go into effect the following fiscal year. There are several factors that determine what the foster care rate will be for the child placed in your home. Age, Standard or Emergency Rate, and Geographical Location.

- **Age:** There are three different rates based on the age of the child in your home in the order from smallest to largest amounts. See table below for example.
- **Standard Rate** This is the basic rate for each complete day the child is in your home and is given when the child is placed in your home on a nonemergency basis.
- **Emergency Rate:** This rate is given for up to 10 days when a child is placed in your home on an emergency basis with less than 24 hours’ notice.
- **Geographical Location:** This is the rate that is determined based on the location of the foster home due to cost of living differences. The standard rate listed above will be adjusted by the geographic multiplier. Example: If you were living in Shishmaref, there is a geographic multiplier that would increase the standard daily rate for a child 0-5 to \$38.52.

| Age | Standard Daily Rate* |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 0 to 5 years | 26.03 |
| 6 to 11 years | 29.86 |
| 12 to 20 years | 31.46 |

*At the time of this publication (September 2019)

You can find the current rates, to include geographic multipliers, by visiting <http://dhss.alaska.gov/ocs/Documents/FosterCare/pdf/fostercarerates.pdf>

For any questions about the foster care rate or payment issues that you cannot clear up through your caseworker, contact **the Provider Payment Unit** located in the Office of Children’s Services Central Office located in Juneau at 1-877-465-2215.

Taxes

Because the foster care payment is considered a reimbursement and not a wage or salary, the foster care payment is not considered as taxable income by the Internal Revenue Service.

Resource parents will typically not list their foster children as dependents on their tax returns.

However, if a child has lived with you for more than half of the year, no one else is claiming the child as a dependent, and the child did not contribute more than half of their own support, you might qualify to claim that child as a dependent on your taxes. Refer to IRS Publication 17 or contact your local IRS Office for additional information to see if you qualify for this deduction.

While foster care stipend funds are not considered taxable income by the IRS, stipends received by contracted stand-by emergency homes to keep beds available are taxable.

Adoptive parents may be potentially eligible for a federal tax credit under section 23 of the Internal Revenues code of 1986. To learn more about the adoption tax credit, what qualifies as an adoption expense, and what defines an eligible child, please speak with a tax consultant and see the IRS website at <https://www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc607>.

For more information on taxes, refer to IRS Publication 17 or consult a qualified tax professional or your local IRS Office You can also find the most current version of this publication at <http://www.irs.gov/uac/Publication-17,-Your-Federal-Income-Tax-1>

Receiving Your Stipend

OCS uses a system of computerized payment to licensed homes. When you first become licensed, your licensing worker will enter all your provider information in the state child welfare data system called ORCA (Online Resources for the Children of Alaska). When a child is then placed in your home, the caseworker for the child enters placement information in the ORCA system. At the beginning of the month following the child's placement, the caseworker is required to "verify" the placement dates are correct. This verification process triggers the payment process in the ORCA system. Your first payment should arrive near the beginning of the second month that you are providing care.

There is an Electronic Payment option available for foster care stipend using a Financial EFT (Electronic Fund Transfer) to enable electronic transfer of payments directly to your bank. Talk to your social worker about filling out the Electronic Payment Agreement Form in order to set this up. You can also find out more about this option at the website <http://doa.alaska.gov/dof/acct/epay.html>

As with any computerized system, human error may generate inaccurate payments or overpayments. It is important to review your payment monthly to ensure you are paid for the days a child is in your care. Every effort is made to ensure your payments are accurate. You should be notified in writing of any overpayment as well as your right to request a first level

review hearing if you think the overpayment was accurate. This will allow you the opportunity to make payments on the overpayment to prevent a financial hardship.

Absences from the Home

The division may authorize continued foster care payments during a child's absence under certain circumstances:

Runaways –If a child is missing, is a runaway or is gone for more than 12 hours the stipend may be paid for up to five days if authorized by the worker. The five-day payment may be authorized only if the resource family immediately notifies the caseworker of the unapproved absence of 12 hours or more. If, after exceeding 5 days, the intent is to return the child to the resource family, payment will resume when the child returns. If it is determined the child will not return to your home payment will be made only through the date of the determination, not the full five days. If the absence from a foster home extends beyond five nights, payment will resume when the child returns to the foster home and the assigned worker authorizes payment.

Hospitalization, Home Visits, Detention – Payment to you may continue for up to 14 days for home visits, in cases of hospitalization for medical or psychiatric care, or if the child is placed in short term detention if the child is expected to return to your home or if a determination has not been made. If it is determined the child will not return to your home payment will be made only through the date of the determination, not the full 14 days.

What if your foster care stipend doesn't come?

If you do not receive your foster care stipend by the 15th of the month, first, you should contact your caseworker to make sure the information was entered into ORCA. If it has, ask your caseworker for help in getting the stipend. If your caseworker can't help you, call OCS Provider Payments in the OCS Central Office at **1-877-465-2215**.

For a calendar of Foster Care Stipend Payment and Adoption Subsidy payments, go to the state OCS Publications page and look for **Foster Care & Adoption Payment Calendar**. (<http://dhss.alaska.gov/ocs/Pages/publications/default.aspx>)

Other Resources

Emergency Relief Support

Unlicensed relative caregivers may be eligible for emergency relief support, also called ERS. ERS is designed to provide support to unlicensed relative families in a crisis situation until they can complete the Foster Care Licensing process or find other options to support the children in care. ERS funds will stop after:

- a. 60 days or
- b. The provider becomes a licensed foster parent or
- c. The provider begins receiving TANF/ATAP benefits or
- d. The child moves from the home.

Alaska Temporary Assistance Program (ATAP) and Native Family Assistance Program (NFAP)

Unlicensed relative providers may choose to apply for the Alaska Temporary Assistance Program (ATAP) or a Native Family Assistance Program (NFAP) (if living within an area served by a Native Family Assistance Program) for cash Assistance. These payments can help with food, housing, clothing and school costs for a relative child in care. Find out more information about ATAP by visiting:

<http://dhss.alaska.gov/dpa/Pages/atap/default.aspx>

and for NFAP please visit <http://dpaweb.hss.state.ak.us/main/manual/nfap/NFAPguide.pdf>

WIC (Women, Infants and Children Program)

Foster children under five years are eligible for WIC (Women, Infant and Children's) Program, which provides and EBT card to get milk, peanut butter, cheese, cereal, and formula. For families in rural Alaska, WIC will ship WIC supplies to your village if the resources are not readily available. Find out more about the WIC Program at

<http://dhss.alaska.gov/dpa/Pages/nutri/WIC/default.aspx>



Foster Wear Program

A program called Foster Wear helps resource families with discounts at selected stores throughout Alaska. Check the OCS website at

<http://dhss.alaska.gov/ocs/Pages/fosterwear/default.aspx>

or contact the Alaska Center for Resource Families for a list of participating stores.

Ideas from Other Resource Families:

Thrift stores and free community clothing exchanges can be wonderful when kids come with nothing and the initial clothing allowance doesn't quite go all the way.

Foster children qualify for free lunches and breakfasts with school districts, even if your family is over the income qualifications.

Check with your local OCS office about a "starter kit" for an emergency placement. Some offices have community members who have assembled these kits with toothbrushes, paste, soap, shampoo, and sometimes pajamas and blankets to help with emergency placements.

The Alaska Center for Resource Families has assembled resource listings for Anchorage, Mat Su, Juneau, and Fairbanks that can help with supports for families. You should receive a copy of this resource book in Core Training for Resource Families or go to www.acrf.org and look under the Resource Tab for "Family Resources."



Other Financial Issues

Clothing Allowance

If, when a child enters the foster care system, the amount and quality of the child's clothing does not meet a minimum standard, OCS may approve a limited one-time clothing allowance of up to \$400. The clothing allowance does not apply when the child moves from foster home to foster home. A clothing allowance is used only when the child initially comes into custody and does not have basic items such as pants, shirts, shoes, snowsuit or boots. Make sure to complete a **Clothing Inventory** when the child comes into your home. When listing a child's clothes on the inventory, list only clothing that is wearable and fits the child.

The child should participate (as appropriate to his age) in the purchase of clothing needed. Clothing purchased should be well-fitting, attractive, seasonable, and appropriate for the child's age, sex, and individual needs, comparable to that worn by other children in the community. After placement, the monthly stipend is to be used for the costs of maintaining and routine replacement of items as the need arises. Should the placement for the foster child be changed, clothing purchased for the child is to go with the child at the time of change. Clothing purchased for a foster child belongs to the foster child, not the resource family home in which the child resided.

When a Child Leaves Your Home

When a child leaves your home to return home or move to another placement, you should send along all clothes, items, and toys purchased with the foster care payment or clothing voucher. A child should leave your home with an adequate wardrobe if he/she has been in your home for any length of time. To make sure a child leaves your home with an adequate amount of clothing, complete a **Clothing Inventory Form. (06-9741)**

Special Needs Funds and One Time Items

One-time and special needs items are goods or services that are not included in the stipend because they are one time or short-term costs that exceed \$100. You may request these funds/items for a foster child when there are no other resources for payment. Other avenues for payment (scholarship or grant programs through schools or other civic or tribal organizations) must first be exhausted. These items are not guaranteed to be approved for payment but will be considered based on the needs of the child.

Examples of items that may be, but are not required to be, approved onetime costs include:

- Special beds or mattresses, prosthetic devices, orthopedic shoes or appliances and aids for children with disabilities. (Check with the Division of Behavioral Health for any assistance they may be able to offer).
- Special event costs such as graduation costs if the child is placed less than 90 days before the event.
- Initial and emergency clothing
- Prescribed special foods
- Summer Camps
- Athletic or Arts programs
- Airfare to assist a child participate in one family vacation in a 12-month period with the child's resource family if consistent with the case plan. (See below for more information.)

REMEMBER: It is important to make your request prior to incurring the cost of the one-time item. Requests made after the fact may be denied.

Examples of goods or services not included in requests for special funds:

- Private school tuition
- Car rental
- Meals
- Theme park admission
- Any good or service purchased without preauthorization

How do I request special needs funds?

- Check with your OCS caseworker first. As of the date of this publication, Anchorage and the Southcentral Region still put these requests in with their caseworker; this may change later in 2020. All other regions can contact the Special Needs Funds Hotline directly.
- Make a request via phone call or email directly to the Special Needs Funds Hotline. 1-855-60-FUNDS (38637) or hss.ocsservicearray@alaska.gov
- Staff will collect information about what is needed, and the store of your choice.
- Staff will determine if the request is allowable within the OCS Special Needs Matrix.
- Staff will send you written approval **prior** to purchasing the goods or service.
 - Staff will send you a purchase authorization to take to the store of your choice to purchase the item(s)
 - OR you will receive an email approval to make the purchase and submit the receipt for reimbursement

To find out more about the RFF process (Request for Funds), go to the Child Protection Manual located online at the OCS website under Publications, and look for section **6.2.2.7 REQUEST FOR SPECIAL NEEDS FUNDS.**

Not sure if an item is allowed? Just give the hotline a call or email. The hotline staff can help you determine if an item is part of the OCS Special Needs matrix.

Mileage Reimbursement

OCS may reimburse the costs of transportation that exceed 50 miles a week per child to frequent, scheduled home visits, or medical or therapeutic appointments such as physical therapy or counseling. Mileage reimbursement must be pre-approved by the child's assigned worker. This rate is the same as for a state employee reimbursement for transportation.

Always Get Pre-Authorized Approval

Remember to get approval and the Purchase Authorization before you put money out of pocket. A social worker can *apply* for the special funds but *cannot give approval* for funds. Approval has to come from a supervisor, a staff manager or state office depending on the size of the request. Not all requests are approved, so make sure you have approval or a Purchase Authorization in hand before you spend money. If you have received an approved Purchase Authorization, save your original receipts and attach them to the Purchase Authorization to send to the Accounting Department in your region

Damages and Loss

Costs related to modest damages and losses are normal in the care of children and are included in the standard rate. However, the OCS may reimburse a resource family for damages and loss up to \$6000 under certain circumstances. These may include financial losses resulting from physical injury inflicted by a foster child to a member of the resource family household or to property of the household not covered by other insurance protection the resource family may have. These losses must be documented by the resource family. Documentation includes filing a report with a law enforcement agency as required by the OCS and corroborated by the OCS. The following circumstances must exist:

- The damage or loss is a result of a deliberate act with malicious intent or with gross negligence on the part of the child.
- The resource family provided adequate supervision and exercised appropriate precautions considering the child's maturity and behavioral history.
- Damage or loss claimed does not include rental or other payment for lost time or lost use of the damaged or lost items.
- The damage or loss exceeds \$100 for a single event or \$150 cumulative.

You must submit a completed must complete a **Foster Parent Report of Stolen/Damaged Property or Personal Injury (06-9440)** form within 72 hours from the time of the loss or physical injury. You may obtain this report form from your local or regional office. A resource family home is expected to own basic home insurance, if purchasing their home. Renters may be able to purchase renter's insurance. The \$6000 is intended to cover the deductible in case of fire or other major damage if all the above conditions are met. You will be asked to submit 3 estimates to your social worker for review prior to the authorization of a PA.

Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend

Resource families do not apply for the PFD for the children in their home. The OCS caseworker is responsible for applying for the foster child's Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend Check for every year the child is in care. The money will be held in trust for the child until the child emancipates from foster care or until custody is returned to the birth parents or to a permanent placement where the child is not in OCS custody.

For children who are adopted, PFDs are held in trust and released directly to the child on the child's 18th birthday, or a court order from the judge during the adoption hearing can release the PFD to the adoptive parents directly. Adoptive families will need to discuss this with their adoption attorney. For children who are in a legal guardianship, the PFDs are held in trust by OCS until the child reaches his or her 18th birthday at which time, the PFD trust is then released directly to the child.

Child Care Assistance and Expenses

In some pre-approved situations, a child in foster care may be placed in licensed child care for a regular part of the day. Child care may be partially paid for by OCS to ensure the continuity of care due to the employment of the resource parent(s). The OCS Child Care Unit can help your family determine if you are eligible for child care assistance.

Here are some things to keep in mind if you will be requesting assistance with child care.

- All child care requests must be reviewed and preapproved by the OCS Child Care Unit.
- Contact an OCS Child Care Payment Specialist with specific questions regarding licensed or approved child care providers before you make a commitment with the provider.
- Choose a child care provider meeting the child's and resource family's needs.
- Provide the OCS Child Care Payment Specialist with all pertinent information on the child care: contact person, address, telephone number, etc.
- This type of assistance is used strictly for child care services. OCS will not pay day-care late fees, additional charges for early/late drop-off or pick-up, activity or transportation fees.
- Contact your caseworker or your local child care referral agency to ensure child care provider is licensed. In communities where there are few licensed child care options, families may use a licensed foster home for child care.
- OCS will provide up to \$700 monthly for child care services or up to the published rates for the child care facility. Resource parents pay any charges above that amount.
- Resource parents should never name themselves as guarantors.

Contact the OCS Child
Care Unit at:
907-465-5648 or
1-844-465-5648

Or email at
ocschildcare@alaska.gov

Request for Travel Funds

OCS wants to support resource families in involving foster children in family activities such as vacations and travel. If you want to travel with your foster children, plan ahead and talk to your worker as far ahead of the event as you can to get the necessary permissions. Travel assistance can be requested through the Request for Funds process once in a twelve-month period when resource families want foster children to go on vacation with them that requires airfare. It is imperative that as much advanced notice as possible is given when resource families request funds for foster children to travel. The deadlines for submitting travel request for holidays or summer vacations vary by region. Please contact your foster child's caseworker with any questions.

As a side note, not all travel requests are approved automatically. You may need to work with OCS and your support network to arrange safe and appropriate respite for the child if they are not able to accompany you in your travels.

Other Travel Tips for Resource Parents Traveling with Children in Care:

- Ensure that requests for travel are done well in advance, at least 4 weeks prior to planned out of state travel. This ensures the caseworker has ample time to put in the request and obtain supervisor approval.
- Travel costs may be partial in reimbursement. As of the date of this publication, travel reimbursement costs have been limited to \$800 per child.
- Once approval is granted, Resource Families will be responsible for booking the foster child's travel, this is to omit complications of OCS trying to match your flight with the child's flight.
- Keep the receipt, boarding pass, and travel itinerary for each child in placement to give to your caseworker once travel is complete to submit a request for reimbursement. Make sure to keep a copy for your records.
- Reimbursement will not occur until once travel is complete and receipt and boarding pass are received by accounting.

Purchase Authorizations

A Purchase Authorization (PA) must be approved and issued before other (non-medical, non-child care) child-related expenses in excess of the standard foster care rate are incurred. Examples include extraordinary clothing, family travel or required personal incidentals. Once a purchase has been completed, resource parents are to attach the PA to the original bill/invoice, and/or include original receipts.

The PA and invoice/receipts must be sent to Regional Finance Office, not the caseworker. Payment will be made directly to the service provider or the resource family will be reimbursed.

Using Purchase Authorizations A Purchase Authorization is the written approval and paperwork giving you the ability to purchase a preapproved item or service.

- Purchase Authorizations (PA) are for one-time use and are not to be copied.

- Use of a PA is limited to the stated purpose. Do not use it to buy something else for your family.
- PAs are specific to individual child(ren) in the care of a resource family.
- Since PAs represent an expenditure of the State of Alaska and federal funds, each expenditure is subject to review and oversight.

Resource parents are urged to contact the OCS Regional Finance Office with questions regarding the appropriate use of PAs.

Savings Accounts

Money earned by a child in foster care (including gifts and allowances) is a child's personal property. If a child has over \$200, help the child establish a personal bank account. No member of a resource family may borrow or spend money acquired by the child in foster care. You may need to restrict the amount of spending money a child has access to if in the child's best interest. When a child receives a substantial amount of money from any source other than the Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend (such as earnings, gifts, etc.) report this to the placement worker.

Independent Living Supports for Youth

Independent Living Funds

Resource families who are raising adolescents and will be supporting youth as they age out of foster care should know about Independent Living Fund supports for youth in care. For youth in out-of-home care who are 16 years or older, limited federal funds are available to help provide for educational and vocational preparation costs, and to help to prepare a youth for independent living. Funds can be used for obtaining a high school diploma, career exploration, vocational training and placement, daily living training, money management training, self-care training, social development training, work and study training, post-secondary education and more. These funds need to be applied for through the Independent Living Specialist in your OCS region. Contact the Independent Living Specialist in your region for more information about what is available.

Who Is Eligible?

For Youth in Foster Care: Any youth in out-of-home care age 16 or over is eligible. It does not matter whether they are in residential care, in a foster home, or in an unlicensed relative placement.

For Youth No-Longer In Custody: Any youth who has reached the age of 16 or older while in state foster care and has not yet reached the age of 21 is eligible. This includes youth who have been adopted, entered into guardianship, or have returned home after turning 16.

Education and Training Vouchers (ETV)

The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program was authorized under the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act in January 2002. These funds assist eligible current and former foster youth in attending post-secondary education and training programs. The education or training

program must meet the certain criteria such as awarding or bachelors or 2 year degree or is a vocational program that provides training for gainful employment.

University of Alaska Tuition Waiver

The University of Alaska in partnership with the Office of Children's Services provide fifteen Presidential tuition waivers per year to eligible foster youth and former foster youth. The Tuition Waiver may be combined with an Education or Training Voucher (ETV) that will pay for up to \$5,000 per year towards books fees, room and board. Students will still need additional funding through work, Pell grants, savings, loans and scholarships to complete a degree. For more information of the University of Alaska Tuition Waiver, go to the Independent Living Program Page on the State of Alaska OCS website at

<http://dhss.alaska.gov/ocs/Pages/independentliving/default.aspx>

The easiest way to find the Independent Living Specialist for your Region is to ask your social worker for contact information or call your local OCS office.

Or go to the State of Alaska OCS website page of Independent Living and find contact information at <http://hss.state.ak.us/ocs/IndependentLiving/contact.htm>

Medical Expenses and Medicaid

When children come into the foster care system, OCS is responsible for their basic medical care. Most children who enter foster care are eligible for Medicaid. Medicaid covers the cost of the foster child's medical care, dental care, pharmaceutical services and any health needs.

When a child is placed in your home, the caseworker (or in some offices, a social services associate) submits an application to OCS's Regional Medicaid Eligibility Unit who makes an eligibility determination for the child. Each OCS region has its own Medicaid Eligibility Unit who processes the applications within 30 days of submission. Upon approval, a Medicaid card is then mailed to the address on the form. Take this card to the medical provider (doctor, pharmacy or hospital) and use for payment at the time of the child's appointment.

If the child already has a medical or dental care provider, it should be noted on the *Consent Form for Emergency and Routine Medical Care*. You may choose your own health provider, but for continuity of medical care, it is very important to consider using the child's current health care provider. If you choose a different provider, check to be sure that the provider accepts Medicaid. If you have trouble locating a health care professional in your area who accepts Medicaid, contact the OCS office in your area or a public health center. Or call the **Alaska Medicaid Recipient Helpline** at 1-800-780-9972. Be sure to take *Consent Form for Emergency and Routine Medical Care* with you when you seek medical care.

Use a Medicaid Provider for Your Child's Health Care

By regulation, if the child is Medicaid eligible, a resource parent needs to use a Medicaid Provider for non-emergency care. If emergency treatment is needed, then the foster care provider should seek treatment immediately without prior authorization but must notify OCS as soon as possible. OCS may enroll the medical provider if they are not a Medicaid provider.

Resource parents should not pay for medical procedures out of pocket and then apply for reimbursement. Medicaid cannot reimburse for resource parent expenses, and the State of Alaska might not approve reimbursement for the expense.

To find out who accepts Medicaid in Alaska or what is covered by Medicaid,
Call the **Alaska Medicaid Recipient Helpline** at 1-800-780-9972.

Or e-mail
RecipientHelp@xerox.com

Call Monday through Friday between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. After hours, please leave a message and your call will be returned the following business day.

What is Covered by Medicaid

Medicaid covers the cost of the foster child's medical care, dental care, pharmaceutical services and any health needs. However, be aware that the Office of Children's Services has the legal custody for a child in foster care, so First Health may not release information about a particular child directly to the resource parents. Resource parents should address any major medical needs or treatment directly with the child's social worker. Nearly every major pharmacy, including those at Fred Meyers, Wal-Mart, Safeway, and Carrs stores accepts Medicaid.

If You Do Not Get Your Medicaid Card and a Child Needs Care...

The Medicaid Card will be sent directly to the address on the application. The foster care provider should immediately advise OCS if he or she did not receive the Medicaid card.

If you need to take a child to a health provider, and you have not yet received your Medicaid Card, you have several options. First, start with your social worker who will contact the Regional Medicaid Eligibility Unit. This unit can issue emergency coupons, or fax over the needed information to your health providers. If your social worker is unavailable, you can contact the Medicaid Eligibility Unit directly and explain your situation. If you don't know how to reach them, contact the receptionist of the office or region that you are in and ask to talk directly to someone in the Medicaid Unit. These folks can help you get the Medicaid card you need to get the care for the child.

If a child is not Medicaid eligible, payment for medical care may be handled in one of several ways. If a child has no resources for medical care, OCS is financially responsible for these services. However, prior authorization from OCS is required. Before any discretionary medical or dental treatment is provided, it must be pre-authorized by OCS or DJJ. Medicaid criteria will be used by OCS to determine if a procedure or treatment is routine regardless of the child's eligibility for Medicaid.

Indian Health Service Health Coverage

Alaska Native/American Indian children must be enrolled or a descendent of an enrolled tribal member with a federally recognized Tribe in order to receive health benefits from the Indian Health Service (IHS).

Resource families can use the IHS clinic in their community for eligible foster children. (In Anchorage, that clinic is the Alaska Native Medical Center.) If the application for Medicaid indicates that a child may be of American Indian or Alaska Native ethnicity, the Unit will determine eligibility for Indian Health Services treatment. If a child receives services at an IHS clinic, the clinic may bill Medicaid to recoup part of its services but a resource parent is not restricted to taking a child to IHS medical services only. The resource parent may take the child to any medical providers who accept Medicaid. ***However, for the continuity of care, you should strongly consider using the child's current health care provider.***

Payment Out of Pocket and Reimbursement to Resource Parent

If you pay out of your own pocket for things such as inexpensive prescriptions, you are taking the chance that you will not be reimbursed by OCS.

By regulation, if the child is Medicaid eligible, a resource parent needs to use a Medicaid Provider for non-emergency care. This includes prescriptions and regular doctor visits and treatment. If emergency treatment is needed, then the foster care provider should seek treatment immediately without prior authorization but must notify OCS as soon as possible. OCS may enroll the medical provider if they are not a Medicaid provider. If the foster care provider elects to use a non-Medicaid provider for non-emergency procedures, there is no guarantee that the state of Alaska will reimburse them. Remember that all non-emergency procedures outside of routine medical care needs prior authorization from OCS.

If the foster care provider requires over the counter medical items, then they should request prior authorization from OCS and receive approval before spending the money. Regulations require that the foster care provider seek prior authorization for non-emergency medical work. Any discretionary medical procedures not covered by Medicaid must be prior authorized and consistent with the child's case plan. The procedures/treatment must also follow Medicaid criteria.

If the child is not Medicaid eligible, then OCS is financially responsible but again the resource parents must receive prior authorization. A verbal assurance from your social worker is not a guarantee of payment. Make sure a request for funds has been approved and a Purchase Authorization has been sent to the provider prior to the appointment date. Resource parents should never write themselves down as the guarantor when seeking medical services.

Medical Care While Travelling

When you are planning to travel with a child care, remember to take with you:

- The Authorization for Travel form
- The Consent for Emergency and Routine Medical Care, and
- The child's Medicaid card.

In the event of an emergency that requires medical treatment and/or hospitalization, you must have proof that the child has medical coverage. Should the physician or the hospital refuse to accept Medicaid, contact the assigned worker for reimbursement procedures. You will need a receipt for services rendered.

Generally, Alaska Medicaid Benefits cannot be used out-of-state unless the service is pre-authorized by Medicaid and the medical provider is enrolled with the Alaska Medicaid System. In these cases, contact you assigned worker if medical services are needed out-of-state.

An Overview of Medical Expenses:

- If the child has emergency medical issues, seek treatment immediately. (Remember to take your *Consent Form for Emergency and Routine Medical Care*.)
- Foster parents should get a Medicaid card in the mail to use for medical payment. When arranging non-emergency medical appointments, take this card with you or if you have not yet received the card for the child in your care, arrange for a Medicaid authorization or Purchase Authorization (PA) or from your caseworker.
- Present the Medicaid card or PA to the medical provider. This ensures the medical bill will be paid through Medicaid or by OCS.
- Do not name yourself as a guarantor on any medical-related expenses. OCS should be listed at the guarantor. Contact your OCS Regional Finance Office with any questions.
- If an error is made and a medical bill is received, immediately contact the OCS Regional Finance Office.
- When a child leaves your home, make sure that the Medicaid card goes with the child to the next placement or is returned to the case worker so that medical care can be continued.