

# **Supplemental Security Income**

**Alliance for Children's Rights**

**CASA Training**

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# SSI/SSP: What is it?

- Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a Federal income supplement program funded by general tax revenues (not Social Security taxes):
- It is designed to help aged, blind, and disabled people, who have little or no income; and
- It provides cash to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter.

# Basic Eligibility

Children and adults may be eligible for SSI/SSP benefits if they meet the following criteria:

- Little or no income\*
- Few or no resources
- Citizen of the United States or certain categories of immigrant - AND -
- Disabled – Marked or severe functional limitation expected to result in death or last for at least 12 continuous months\*\*

- \*Income of parents is considered in determining whether a child is eligible for SSI. However, this is not the case for children in foster care or legal guardianship.
- \*\* Persons 65 and older who meet the financial eligibility rules do not need to establish disability.

# SSI/SSP: What Do They Get?

- Effective January 1, 2015, the Federal benefit rate is \$733 per month for an individual.
- Some states, including California, pay a state supplement In 2015 an individual is eligible for \$889.40 or \$944.40 if he/she is blind.
- All SSI recipients receive Medi-Cal.

# What is a Disability?

- Physical and/or Mental impairment that has or will last 12 months or result in death
- Children- (Under 18 or under 22 and in school) – Cannot function in an age appropriate manner
- Adults – Cannot engage in substantial gainful employment
- State law takes the guess work out of it for children in foster care. A screening tool guides counties as to when an application should be filed. See:  
<http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/getinfo/ac107/pdf/07-1-.pdf>

# When Does SSI End?

- No definite end date – depends on the disability, income and resources
- SSA conducts a Continuing Disability Review (“CDR”) in the month before the month the youth turns 18 to determine if the youth will remain eligible for SSI benefits under the adult rules
- SSA conducts periodic reviews approximately every three years to determine ongoing eligibility

# Benefits to Transitioning Youth

- Avoid homelessness
- Medi-Cal
- Can leave foster care with up to \$2,000 in resources
- Can have a part-time job
- Ticket to Work program
- Recipients can also receive scholarships and ILP services without effecting SSI eligibility

# Non-Minor Dependents (NMDs)

- NMDs who are eligible for, or are receiving SSI can participate in Extended Foster Care (EFC) even if they receive the SSI payment benefit instead of AFDC-FC, or a combination of both payments.
- If the NMD is receiving federal AFDC-FC in lieu of the SSI payment (payment placed in suspense) because the AFDC-FC payment is higher, DCFS must ensure that the NMD received only state funded AFDC-FC at least one month in any twelve (12) month period to ensure the NMD maintains SSI eligibility upon exiting foster care.
- The DCFS SSI Unit coordinates this process with the SSA Office. \



# Examples

- Jennifer suffered from profound PTSD that was unresolved by the time she left foster care. She had tried but was unable to sustain employment. SSI help stabilize her in transitional housing where she received supportive mental health services and attended nursing school on a part time basis. Eventually Jennifer no longer needed or qualified for SSI because she was able to secure full-time employment as an RN.
- Cory was prenatally exposed to multiple substances and suffered from psychosis, bipolar disorder and severe asthma. He aged out of foster care into homelessness until SSI was established. His SSI check now provides him with the ability to live in a board and care where his medications are supervised. Cory will likely receive SSI for his entire life.

# How does it work in Los Angeles and how can CASA help?

- WIC 13757 mandates are directed at Counties only. In Los Angeles, the screening for disabilities is done by case carrying social workers.
- Screening tool is forwarded to DCFS's Department of Revenue Enhancement in Glendora. Staff there prepare and file an application for SSI with the local Social Security Office in Pasadena.
- If the application is denied, the Minor's Attorney is notified and the matter is referred to The Alliance for Children's Rights for further advocacy.
- CASAs should confirm with the minor's attorney that all children 16.5 and older with whom they work have been screened for SSI. Once the matter is with The Alliance, assist with gathering of medical and other records, assist with transport to hearing and appointments, and possibly testify at hearing.