

Operation Backpack: Foster Kids in the Independent Living Program

By [Angela Spears](#)
First Coast News

JACKSONVILLE, FL -- The 9th Annual Operation Backpack is right around the corner.

First Coast News is teaming up with the Junior League of Jacksonville, Family Support Services of North Florida and area Kmart stores.

You can drop off backpacks and gift cards for children in foster care Saturday, September 1, from 8 a.m. - 1 p.m. at local Kmart stores.

Thousands of kids are in the system. Thirty-eight percent of them are newborns to 4 year olds.

What happens to them when they turn 18? Six-percent are in that category.

As long as they have been in foster care for 6 months, they can take part in the Independent Living Program.

Micah Grey is taking full advantage of what it has to offer.

He is always busy looking for job opportunities. "I like to think positive. I like to think about my future, my past."

His past hasn't been easy. Micah and his siblings went into foster care when he was 13.

"We was living with my mom at the time, me and my siblings, and we pretty much were neglected," said Micah. "You know my mom she has been dealing with a drug addiction since I was a young man, a child pretty much."

Micah has a relationship now with his mother. But he still remembers what it was like living with his grandmother, then his father, then with his mom.

"I remember me and my brother and our friends went out to the Trout River catching fish bringing 'em home and cooking 'em. We did what we had to do to survive."

Micah's mom put him in foster care. Looking back, he says that was a blessing in disguise.

"When I entered foster care my mind was like, I was young and I was out in the street. I was wild, I'll put it like that. I wasn't a tame child at that time you know."

He says he learned responsibility. And now at 22, he is still part of the system. He's in the Independent Living Program. According to Micah, "It gives you money to help you support yourself to help you pay for your bills while you are in college."

With all he's accomplished, Micah says looking back on his past has helped get him to this point.

"When I entered foster care I thought it was this big bad thing, but little did I know foster care was one of the greatest things that could have ever had happen to me."

Micah currently goes to FCCJ. He's considering his options. He does know he wants to eventually get two masters degrees.

Foster kids, like Micah, can be in the Independent Living Program up to age 23. There are 3 requirements:

- 1) They have to have been in the system for at least 6 months at any point in their life.
- 2) They have to turn 18 while they are in a foster home or group home.
- 3) They have to be a ward of the state of Florida.

Through this program, foster children are eligible to get money for college. Also, there are options in the Independent Living Program for those who are adopted at age 16 or 17.

For more information on the program, call (904)421-5800 or click on the link above.

If you'd like more information on Operation Backpack (drop off locations or how to donate online), click on the Operation Backpack icon on the home page.

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- [information on independent living program](#)