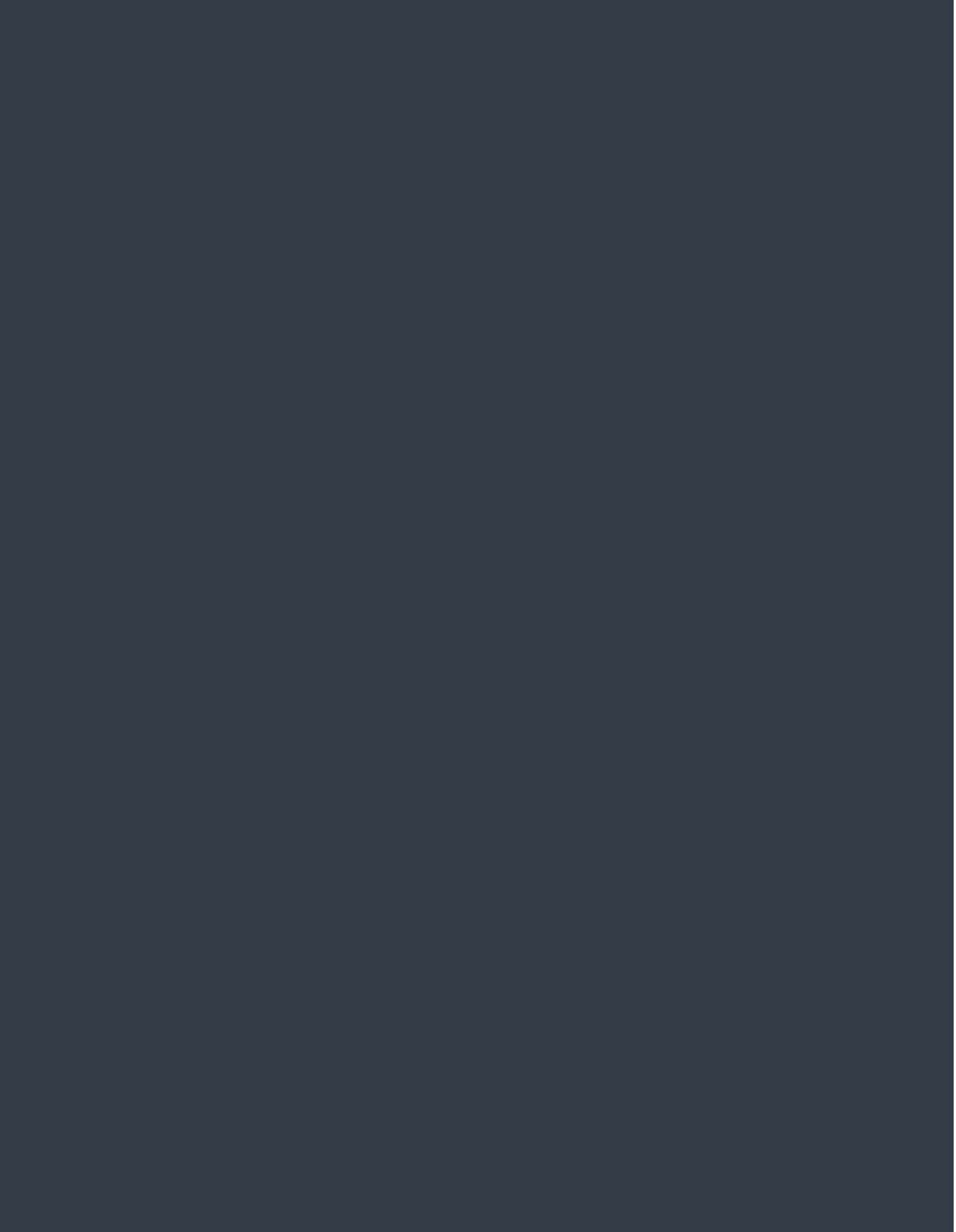




Texas Higher Education Foster Care Liaisons

Information & Reference Guide







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April 1, 2017

Dear Colleagues:

Research shows that although over 80% of youth in foster care report wanting to go to college, only 2-9% who attend college receive a bachelor's degree. In 2015, the Texas Education Code was amended to require liaisons at all public institutions of higher education in Texas. The higher education foster care liaison serves a critical role in bridging the gap between the students who want to pursue higher education and those who have the support needed to complete their degree.

This guide was developed to assist foster care liaisons in performing this new role. The guide includes in-depth information for liaisons who have advocated for and with foster care alumni for many years. The guide also provides guidance for new liaisons who are interested in developing a stronger support network at their institution.

With additional information, guidance, and support, liaisons can make a tremendous difference in a student's ability to succeed in higher education. Thank you for your dedication to improving outcomes for all students in Texas, including foster care alumni.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Raymund A. Paredes".

Raymund A. Paredes

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Table of Contents

Part I

Getting Started

Background	09
Maintaining privacy	16
Identifying foster care alumni	18
Asking what the student needs	23
Benefits overview	24
Liaisons and campus support programs	26
Helping students find a support system	29
Encouraging self-advocacy	32
Securing housing, food, and healthcare	34

Part II

In-depth

Benefits, services, and resources for alumni	38
Trauma informed practice	52
Glossary of helpful terms	56
Additional resources	60
Endnotes	63

Part I

Getting Started



Background	09
Maintaining privacy	16
Identifying foster care alumni	18
Asking what the student needs	23
Benefits overview	24
Liaisons and campus support programs	26
Helping students find a support system	29
Encouraging self-advocacy	32
Securing housing, food, and healthcare	34

Background

Under Texas Education Code (TEC) Section 51.9356, each institution of higher education must appoint at least one employee to serve as a liaison for students formerly in the conservatorship of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS).¹ Institutions of higher education include any public technical institute, public junior college, public senior college or university, medical or dental unit, public state college, or other agency of higher education as defined in the law.²

The law outlines the following duties for the higher education foster care liaison:

- Provide information to foster care alumni regarding support services;
- Inform these students about other resources available at the institution; and
- Provide any other relevant information to assist the students.³

To help liaisons fulfill these duties, this guide will provide information on the following topics:

- What challenges do foster care alumni face before, during, and after entering the postsecondary education environment?
- What is the role of the higher education foster care liaison?
- What network and supports are available to assist the liaison in this role?
- What benefits and resources are available to support the student?
- What is the impact of trauma on the student's ability to attain educational success?
- What is the difference between a liaison and a program and how to build capacity?

As the liaison, you play a critical part in facilitating educational success for a student population that has overcome many challenges to complete high school and seek higher education. The presence of a caring adult and consistent point of contact can have a tremendous impact on the lives of foster care alumni. Being a foster care liaison on your campus is an important job requiring a specific knowledge base.

This guide was created to:

- Offer you the tools needed to be successful in your position as foster care liaison at your campus;
- Identify key local, state, and national stakeholders and resources; and
- Highlight effective recruitment and retention strategies for working with foster care alumni.

Thank you for your dedication to supporting foster care alumni!



Key Terms

Higher education foster care liaisons serve as a point of contact both on and outside the college or university campus.

On campus, liaisons coordinate interactions between:

- Foster care alumni; and
- College and University professionals who serve the specific needs of foster care alumni (ex: financial aid, housing).

Outside campus, liaisons collaborate with:

- Higher education professionals interested in networking with foster care alumni across campuses; and
- Foster care liaisons at local independent school districts or charter schools, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), and/or the Texas Education Agency (TEA); and
- Child welfare stakeholders, including DFPS.

Note, many colleges and universities refer to the liaison with different titles such as “foster care champion” or “transition coaches”. For the purposes of this guide, the higher education foster care liaison will be referred to as the “liaison” or “higher ed liaison”.

K-12 district liaison is an individual appointed by a school district or open-enrollment charter school to facilitate the enrollment, records transfer, or withdrawal of students served in that district or school.

Tuition and fee waiver is an exemption, under state law, from tuition and fees charged by Texas public institutions of higher education. Many students formerly in foster care, including those whose custody was awarded to a non-parent and certain students who return to the legal responsibility of their parents, can qualify to have tuition and fees waived at state supported colleges or universities. There are a variety of other tuition exemptions and waivers for other student populations. This guide addresses the tuition and fee waivers under TEC Sections 54.366 and 54.367. Waivers cover tuition and fees but not living expenses, books, or supplies. You can find more details about the tuition and fee waiver on page 39.

Foster care alumni/students formerly in care are youth and young adults who experienced foster care or were a “dependent or ward of the state,” including those who exited foster care at age 18, referred to as “aging out.” This term also applies to the young adults who voluntarily remain in extended foster care between the ages of 18 and 21. Extended foster care is explained in greater detail later in the guide. The term “students formerly in care” is used interchangeably with “foster care alumni” throughout this guide. In this guide, these terms apply to students who are eligible for the tuition and fee waiver.



?? Foster Care 101

What is foster care?

When children can't live safely at home and an appropriate non-custodial parent, relative, or close family friend is currently unable or unwilling to care for them, the court can give temporary legal possession to DFPS. Child Protective Services (CPS) is a division of DFPS and assumes planning responsibility for children and youth who are removed from their parents. Courts place children in foster care by issuing a court order giving DFPS conservatorship of the child.

Foster care is meant to be temporary - to last only until a permanent living arrangement is found and CPS no longer has legal custody of the child. However, for some children, it can become permanent. CPS strives to obtain stability and positive permanency for every child who enters foster care, including placing children with their siblings. Despite these efforts, children in foster care may have to change placements several times while in foster care due to a variety of factors, such as changes in the foster home or facility, licensing standards violations, or court rulings. It is important to remember that foster care alumni may have encountered multiple challenges during childhood and this may affect their responses to both the postsecondary environment and outreach efforts.

Commonly used terms:

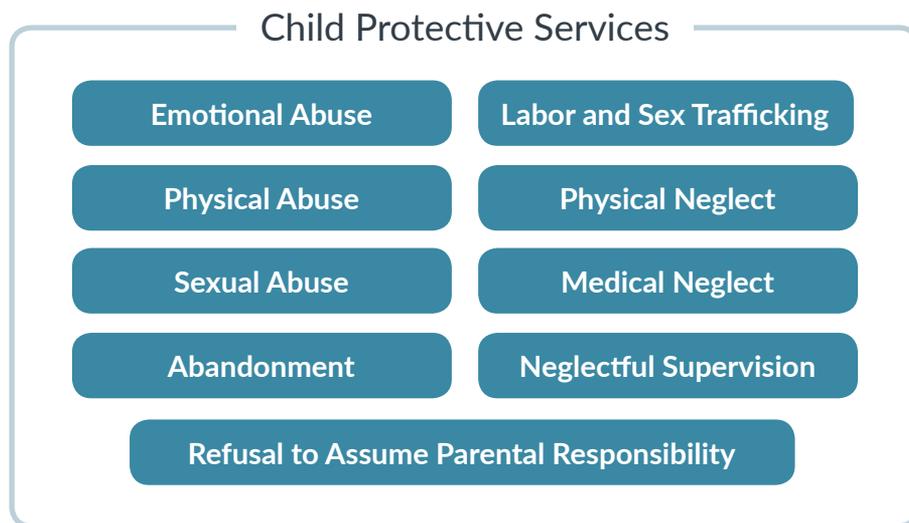
- **Conservatorship** is another term used to describe the status of a child or youth who is placed in DFPS legal care, custody, and control by a court order.
- **Temporary Managing Conservatorship (TMC)** is the awarding of conservatorship of a child or youth to DFPS. This may include a child remaining in their home with orders from the court for particular requirements to ensure the safety of the child or the removal of a child from the family for safety and well-being purposes.
- **Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC)** is the placement of a child or youth in the permanent conservatorship of an entity or person, by court order, (e.g. DFPS, relative) with no intention of returning the child to the parent's custody.

Although not as commonly referenced, "substitute care" is interchangeable with the terms "foster care" or "conservatorship." The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) uses the term a "dependent" or "ward of the court" which are other terms to describe "foster care." The term "foster care" is being used throughout this guide to refer to all children and youth who have been in DFPS conservatorship/substitute care.

How does a child or youth enter the foster care system?

A child or youth enters the foster care system when there is a “reason to believe” allegation of abuse and/or neglect. CPS must petition the court for approval to remove a child from his or her home because of safety concerns. Before a decision is made to remove a child, CPS must make reasonable efforts to safely maintain children with their families, including sometimes providing necessary supports and services. To ensure that reasonable efforts are made to keep children in their homes, courts must approve all decisions to remove a child from their home.

What types of abuse/neglect does Child Protective Services investigate?



Definitions of abuse and neglect which may result in an investigation and placement in foster care are laid out in the Texas Family Code.⁴

Where does a child or youth live when placed in foster care?

There are a variety of different placement types for children, youth, and young adults in foster care. Each placement is selected based on the child’s needs and the ability of the caregiver to best meet the child’s needs. The goal of each placement is to provide a child or youth with a safe, stable, and nurturing environment. Below is a list of placement types in which a child, youth, or young adult in foster care may live:

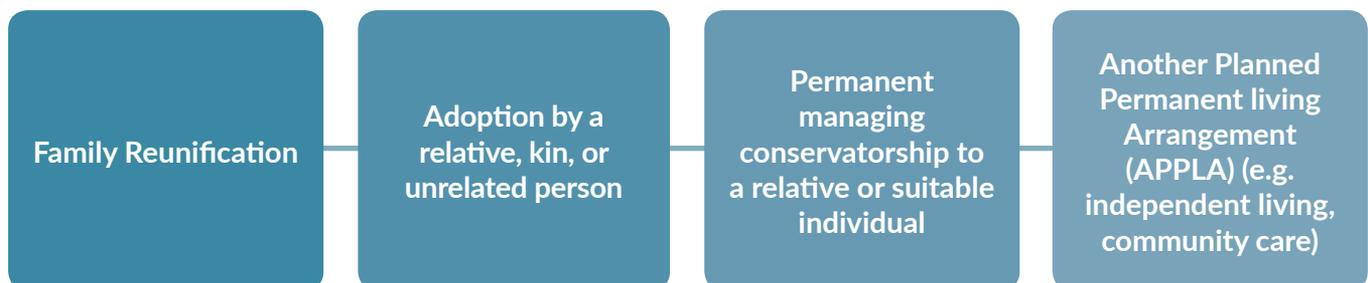
- **Kinship Caregiver:** A relative or fictive kin who provides care for a child. A relative is a member of the child’s biological family. A fictive kin is a person who has a longstanding and significant relationship with the child or with the child’s family.
- **Foster Home:** A state-licensed home (usually temporary) for children in foster care. Caregivers known as “foster parents” receive a reimbursement for providing room, board, and transportation for children living in their home.
- **Emergency Shelter:** A shelter facility that houses youth for up to 90 days while awaiting a longer term foster placement.

- **Group Home:** A licensed facility where multiple youth live. Staff oversee the facility and students live there 24/7.
- **Residential Treatment Centers (RTC):** Residential Treatment Centers are regulated by DFPS to provide placements and services to youth who require specialized services.
- **Extended Foster Care:** is a voluntary program that offers young adults (ages 18 up to 22) opportunities to continue their foster care placement and facilitate the transition to independence with DFPS supervision, if there is an available placement. To qualify, a young adult must have been in DFPS conservatorship the day before his or her 18th birthday.
- **Supervised Independent Living (SIL) program:** An option for young adults in extended foster care to live in a variety of settings including apartments, dorms, and shared housing. SIL allows young adults to live independently with increased responsibility and without 24-hour supervision. Young adults placed in SIL settings receive minimum case management services. This arrangement allows young adults to practice necessary independent living skills and achieve self-sufficiency in a supportive environment before leaving the placement.⁵

With the exception of the Extended Foster Care and SIL programs, many children and youth in foster care experience one or more of these types of living arrangements during their time in foster care. These experiences will undoubtedly influence the student's experiences in the postsecondary environment. For instance, some students may be used to strict rules and supervision and the unstructured dorm environment could be a challenge. The liaison should check in with these students to ensure their living arrangements are stable, safe, and appropriate to meet their needs.

How does a child or youth exit the foster care system?

DFPS strives to keep every child and youth's stay in DFPS conservatorship as brief as possible and seeks to find a permanent setting which includes a legal relationship to a family. Every child or youth in foster care has a permanency goal which is reviewed and approved by the court. This is a long term plan for the child that includes the following options:



If DFPS is unable to achieve positive permanency for a child or youth, then it is incumbent upon the agency to identify, develop, and support connections to caring adults who agree to provide support to the youth once the youth ages out of the foster care system. The APPLA goal is to be used as a last resort when other plans are inappropriate or have failed. The timing and exit to permanency may affect eligibility for key benefits so it is important for students to be aware of these details.



Impact of Foster Care on Education

According to the National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, 50% of youth in foster care complete high school by age 18.⁶ Although 84% of 17-18 year old youth in foster care report wanting to go to college, 20% of youth in foster care who graduate from high school attend college, and only 2-9% go on to attain a bachelor's degree.⁷ In the long term, research shows that young adults formerly in care are also more likely to be unemployed, earn significantly less income, and experience economic hardship⁸ than are young adults who have not been in foster care. To understand these outcomes, it is important to lay some context about the challenges facing students formerly in care.

First and foremost is a lack of stability in foster care. Although every situation is unique, when a child or youth enters foster care, their life is inevitably turned upside down. Many children and youth experience multiple living situations, referred to as placements, during their time in foster care. Some placements may be more of the nature of a shelter or a facility than a home. In 2015, 83.5% of children in substitute care 12 months or less had 2 or fewer placements but youth who aged out of foster care averaged 6.5 placements.⁹

Lack of school stability also impacts educational success. Of 17-18 year olds in foster care, 34% experience 5 or more school changes during their time in care.¹⁰ In Texas, the percentage of students in foster care who attended two or more schools in one school year is 6.5 times that of other students statewide.¹¹ Ultimately, this instability in the school setting often leads to a devastating loss of academic progress, credits, connections to peers and supportive adults, and opportunities to develop study and life skills. The gaps in learning and social development may create unique challenges for the foster care alumni on your campus such as feeling isolated, unprepared, or out of place.

Another difficult challenge for foster care alumni is addressing the history of trauma, grief, and loss associated with being removed from biological family including parents, siblings, or other relatives, as well as experiences with the foster care system itself. More information on serving foster care alumni through trauma informed practices is available later in this guide.

Foster care alumni are incredibly resilient but they may need additional support to persist and thrive in the postsecondary educational environment. With your help and support, foster care alumni on your campus can overcome these challenges and statistics to become part of a growing network who are graduating from colleges and universities as empowered, successful, independent, and productive adults.



Getting Started as a Liaison

You are designated as the liaison for foster care alumni at your institution. What do you do now?

This guide will take you through the expectations of the liaison. Remember, you are not alone in this process! Many universities, colleges, and vocational schools have paved the way in creating a set of best practices for working with foster care alumni on their campuses.

Here are some key considerations for liaisons:

What are some effective strategies to identify foster care alumni?

What other stakeholders should I contact to streamline the transition to higher education and encourage postsecondary success for foster care alumni?

How can I reach out to foster care alumni in a way that maintains their privacy?

What information do I need to relay to foster care alumni about available benefits and resources?

Who should I contact on campus to develop stronger supports for foster care alumni?

What are some common issues or concerns raised by foster care alumni?

Maintaining privacy

Youth and Young Adults Formerly in Foster Care Privacy and Confidentiality Under Federal and State Law

A personal right to privacy is a right enjoyed by all persons and protected by the United States Constitution. However, this right does not apply to all persons at all times. State and federal statutes may specify when certain types of information are deemed private or confidential, and prescribe circumstances under which information must or may be shared with persons who can demonstrate a need or entitlement to know.

The Family Education Records Privacy Act (FERPA) is federal law that governs information and documents obtained, generated, shared, or disclosed by all schools receiving federal funding. The law distinguishes public “directory information” from confidential “education records” and information.

When a student turns 18 years old, or enters a postsecondary institution at any age, the rights under FERPA transfer from the parents to the student. Unless advised to the contrary, schools may generally disclose “directory information” to any party without limitation. “Directory information” includes basic information about students, including names, addresses, telephone listings, photographs, class status, and fields of study. It is presumed not to be an invasion of privacy on its face.

With limited exceptions, FERPA prohibits the release of personally identifiable non-directory information in an education record without prior written consent from the adult student. An “education record” is defined as those records that are 1) directly related to a student, and 2) maintained by an educational agency or institution, or a by a party acting for the agency or institution.

Academic and financial records are examples of non-directory information. Among the exceptions is the disclosure to, or sharing of, education records to “school officials.” For example, disclosure without prior written consent may be appropriate under the following circumstances:

- To other schools to which a student is transferring;
- With specified officials for audit or evaluation purposes;
- To appropriate parties in connection with financial aid to a student;
- With organizations conducting certain studies for or on behalf of the school;
- With accrediting organizations;
- To comply with a judicial order or lawfully issued subpoena;
- With appropriate officials in cases of health and safety emergencies;
- To state and local authorities, within a juvenile justice system, pursuant to specific State law; and
- To state or county child welfare agencies when the agency is legally responsible for the care and protection of the student under the Uninterrupted Scholars Act.



For purposes of postsecondary institutions of higher education, FERPA expressly authorizes the sharing of education records between and among “school officials” who have a legitimate educational interest. Hence, registrars, bursars, and other officials responsible for maintaining financial and accounting records may disclose information to their school’s foster care liaisons based upon a showing that the liaisons have a legitimate education interest in the information. Similarly, the foster care liaisons may share education records obtained by them with other appropriate school officials.

Young adults aged 18 or older enrolled in an institution of higher education who are participating in Extended Foster Care pursuant to Texas Family Code Subchapter G, Extended Jurisdiction After Child’s 18th Birthday, are considered adults under law. Although consent to communicate with the school is requested as part of the Voluntary Extended Foster Care Agreement that is signed between the young adult and DFPS, the young adult is not required to agree to that communication to participate in Extended Foster Care. An Institution of Higher Education will need to obtain consent from the young adult as it would any other adult.

Foster care is often a complicated, emotional journey for the children and youth who experience it. When students overcome the instability of foster care and the chaos it can create, they often want a fresh start in the higher education environment. Some students formerly in foster care do not want to be identified, labeled, or stigmatized for their histories in foster care and they may resist being contacted or assisted. Other students may be distrustful of adults having faced rejection, neglect, or abuse from trusted adults in the past.

Nonetheless, it is important for foster care alumni to know whom to contact on campus for help if/when they do want to reach out. You may have to reach out multiple times a year. Correspondence should be sent in a way where the students know they can reach out to you for help, without being singled out as foster care alumni.

The importance of maintaining a student’s privacy cannot be overstated. Sensitivity, compassion, patience, and respect for boundaries are absolutely critical when communicating and working with students formerly in care. If a program or group is developed, discretion should be used for these students. It is strongly recommended that the group be consulted on every aspect around formation, marketing, outreach, and development of the program.

Identifying foster care alumni

It is critical to identify foster care alumni early on in their collegiate careers to ensure they receive any necessary assistance before or immediately upon arriving on campus. There are multiple methods to identify foster care alumni.



On Campus Methods

On campus methods may involve working with one or more offices or departments at your college or university. Having high-level administrative support will help facilitate this coordination and communication.

1 Use the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Step Three (Student) of the FAFSA contains questions that determine the dependency status of college students. In that process, applicants are asked whether they were in foster care or were dependents or wards of the court. Student Financial Aid offices can query the FAFSA databases for this information. The financial aid office will then offer a list of students you can email to inform them of your services and any programming you are offering for the semester.

- TIP: Request the information at the beginning of the fall, summer, and spring semesters. This will ensure you have an accurate and up to date list of students formerly in care.
- TIP: It is important that you email the students individually, rather than as a group, to protect their individual privacy regarding their foster care background. See the section on Maintaining Privacy, on page 15.

2 Request a list of students using the tuition and fee waiver for students formerly in care from the Business/Bursar/Cashier's Office.

This list is often more accurate than the list derived from the FAFSA questions.

- TIP: Use both contact lists to reach out to students. The FAFSA list may contain individuals who do not know about the tuition and fee waiver and need your guidance and support.
- TIP: Determine where the tuition and fee waiver information is verified and documented on your campus. If the process is not clear to you, it will not be clear to the student. Take any necessary next steps, such as creating a one pager or reaching out to students, to help clarify the process and procedures at your school.



Check out these websites from universities who have clear step-by-step instructions on how to submit the tuition waiver to their campuses:

- Texas State University-San Marcos
<http://www.studentsuccess.txstate.edu/programs/Foster-Care-Alumni/FAQs.html>
- Texas Woman's University
<http://www.twu.edu/foster-care-alumni/how-to-apply-to-twu/>

3 Cover the campus with posters and flyers. Place brochures in key offices.

Promote the services you offer. For example, distribute information to Federal TRIO programs, Student Health Services, Disability Services, Dean of Students, Financial Aid, Advising, Admissions, and other locations on campus. Publications should direct students to the higher ed foster care liaison.

4 Develop a network across campus.

To increase awareness and encourage better coordination, reach out to individuals on campus who may come into contact with foster care alumni. If others are aware of you and your role, foster care alumni will have a greater likelihood of getting connected to you and the information you have.

- ➔ TIP: Maintain accurate information about the number of students formerly in care so that the institution can better apportion resources to support this student population.

5 Engage student-led and self-identifying methods.

Engage in and support the development of a foster care alumni student organization on your campus. Not only does this approach empower the students to support themselves and each other through community development, it provides a way for students to educate and involve the broader university community organizations. Many universities offer funding for organizational activities, as well. A foster care alumni student organization creates an environment for students to create and foster healthy relationships with other faculty and students.

- ➔ TIP: Research your school's student organization list. This is generally easily accessible through a Dean of Students or similar website. If you have never advised and/or facilitated the creation of a student organization, contact your campus activities office where student organizations are housed and ask to meet with a student affairs professional who will guide you through the process.

Identifying foster care alumni



Off Campus Methods

Building a network with other education, child welfare, and community partners is a powerful tool in identifying students formerly in care.

1 Collaborate with local school district personnel.

Supporting youth in foster care will encourage better secondary and postsecondary outcomes. Building bridges to college and expanding postsecondary networks for students in foster care requires coordination with new networks to support successful transition to college. School district foster care liaisons serve as a central point of contact in the K-12 context to help facilitate transitions and encourage positive education outcomes for students in foster care.

- Contact information for school district foster care liaisons can be found at:
<http://mansfield.tea.state.tx.us/TEA.AskTED.Web/Forms/Home.aspx>

High school counselors are also directly involved in developing graduation plans for all students in Texas, including those currently or formerly in foster care. Contact your local school districts to find out who the designated counselors are on nearby campuses.

2 Develop relationships with local child welfare partners.

There are several points of contact at CPS, the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) coordinators, or PAL staff, being the primary point of contact for foster care alumni. PAL staff are located in every region and focus on assisting students with obtaining the tuition and fee waivers for college and with enrolling in the federal Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program. DFPS contracts with PAL Aftercare providers who provide foster care alumni with case management services that are focused on developing independence and problem solving skills. Also explore whether there are local Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) programs in your community.

- PAL Staff by Region:
https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Youth_and_Young_Adults/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/PAL_coordinators.asp
- PAL Aftercare Case Management Service Providers:
http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Youth_and_Young_Adults/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/aftercare.asp
- Texas CASA:
<https://texascasa.org/>



3 Participate in College Tours, Teen Conferences, and Education Consortia.

Part of connecting with CPS and its regional stakeholders and partners is becoming aware of opportunities to identify potential incoming students. There are opportunities to develop these meetings and events in your region if they do not already exist. These events create an opportunity for cross-system dialogue and problem solving ultimately leading to smoother transitions for the students when they arrive on your campus.

4 Link with Transition Centers and other community resources.

Transition centers are a one-stop resource for youth and young adults ages 15.5 up to 25 who primarily were in foster care. Some transition centers are PAL contractors for life skills training or Aftercare case management. Transition centers offer help with housing, employment assistance, enrolling in college, and mentoring, and can locate other services like substance abuse and mental health counseling.

- Transition Centers in Texas:
<https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/txyouth/contacts/transition.asp>

5 Network with other liaisons in higher education.

Other college liaisons can be a tremendous source of information, resources, and support. Developing a network can help students navigate the transition to higher education but also these partnerships make transfers between schools a more streamlined process.

- THECB maintains a list of liaisons on the College for All Texans website:
<http://www.collegeforalltexans.com/apps/financialaid/tofa2.cfm?ID=429>.



Identifying foster care alumni



Verifying Eligibility for the College Tuition and Fee Waiver

Students claiming foster care or dependent or ward of the court status at a Texas public institution of higher education need to obtain documentation of eligibility from DFPS. The college tuition and fee waiver form is used to verify foster care eligibility. The student's PAL staff or caseworker may have given this document to the student when the student exited foster care. DFPS state office staff, DFPS Preparation for Adult Living staff, DFPS Adoption Assistance Eligibility staff, CPS regional program director, or a CPS program administrator will verify eligibility for all foster care alumni.

A sample of the verification form is shown:

Form K-908-1003
Revised June 2016

DFPS VERIFICATION OF THE STATE COLLEGE TUITION AND FEE WAIVER

STUDENT INFORMATION	
Student's Full Name (Print):	Date of Birth:
ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR FOSTER YOUTH, ADOPTED YOUTH, CERTAIN YOUTH WHO EXIT FOSTER CARE TO RETURN TO A PARENT(S), AND YOUTH IN PERMANENT MANAGING CONSERVATORSHIP:	
In accordance with Section 54.366 and Section 54.367 of the Texas Education Code (TEC), and Title 40, Part 19 of the Texas Administrative Code (TAC), Chapter 700, section §700.1630 the individuals mentioned below are entitled to attend a state-supported college, university, or vocational college with tuition and fees waived. This waiver does not apply to books, dormitory costs, or other campus costs for which the student is responsible. The student submits the letter at the time of enrollment or registration. To facilitate enrollment, this letter serves to confirm that the student meets the tuition and fee waiver requirements because of one of the following:	
Use an X to mark the appropriate box:	
The student was in DFPS conservatorship on the day before the student's 18 th birthday The student was in DFPS conservatorship on or after the day of the student's 14 th birthday and the student was eligible for adoption on or after that date The student was in DFPS conservatorship on the day the student graduated from high school or received an equivalent of a high school diploma The student was in DFPS conservatorship on the day the student was adopted and the adoption occurred on or after September 1, 2009 The student was in DFPS conservatorship on the day permanent managing conservatorship (PMC) was granted to a non-parent and the PMC occurred on or after September 1, 2009 The student was age 14 or older on or after June 1, 2016 and subsequently exited DFPS's permanent managing conservatorship to the legal responsibility of the parent The student was age 16 or older on or after June 1, 2016 and subsequently exited DFPS's temporary managing conservatorship to the legal responsibility of the parent The student is currently in DFPS conservatorship and is enrolling in a dual college credit course or other course in which a high school student may earn joint high school and college credit Note: The above mentioned students must take advantage of the state college tuition and fee waiver by enrolling in a state-supported college or university no later than the student's 25 th birthday. (TEC 54.366) The student was adopted and is/was the subject of an adoption assistance agreement with DFPS that provided both monthly payments and Medicaid assistance. (TEC 54.367) Note: There is no age limit that this student must meet to enroll in a state supported college or university in order to take advantage of the tuition and fee waiver.	
CPS CONTACT INFORMATION	
Contact information for any questions concerning the state college tuition and fee waiver.	
Insert regional PAL staff or Adoption Eligibility Staff Name and Phone Number.	
We are pleased that _____ has decided to further his or her education at your institution and that the State of Texas is providing its general support. Thank you in advance for your efforts in helping _____ accomplish his or her academic goals.	
SIGNATURE	
I verify that the student listed above meets the marked eligibility criteria.	
Name and Title of Staff verifying that the above named student is eligible for the state college tuition and fee waiver:	Agency/Region #:
Signature of Staff:	Date Signed:

Page 2 of 2

Asking what the student needs



Once foster care alumni are identified, it is important to ask them about their needs. Although there are some common challenges, each individual student is likely to have unique needs. These student-specific situations are often the most challenging. Having a comprehensive network of individuals across your campus and community will help you respond to these needs.

At the same time, when students are contacted, many may not complete surveys or participate in focus groups. Thus, it may be difficult to get information on students' perceptions and opinions of useful or needed services. An alternative is to set up a database on academic progress for individual students. This provides the opportunity to review grades at the end of each semester. If the campus has an attendance taking method that is tracked through a shared system, this can also be used to identify a need to intervene for students at risk of dropping out.

For more information about interacting with foster care alumni through a trauma informed lens, please see page 50.

Benefits overview

A key function of the liaison is informing the students formerly in care about information and resources that may encourage their postsecondary persistence and completion.

COLLEGE PROGRAMS/RESOURCES FOR DFPS FOSTER YOUTH, ADOPTED YOUTH & CERTAIN YOUTH THAT EXIT TO A PARENT OR NON-PARENT OR ENTER THE PCA PROGRAM - JULY 2017

What is the STATE COLLEGE AND TUITION WAIVER?	What is the EDUCATION AND TRAINING VOUCHER (ETV) program?	What OTHER DFPS EDUCATION RESOURCES are available?
<p>The waiver provides exemption of tuition and fees at Texas public institutions of higher education for youth formerly in Department of Family & Protective Services (DFPS) conservatorship, adopted youth, and certain other youth. Students must enroll in a state supported school or a dual credit course by their 25th birthday.</p>	<p>The federal ETV program may provide <u>up to</u> \$5,000 an academic year to eligible students for college related expenses including rent, books, utilities, childcare, computers, personal expenses, transportation and tuition, if applicable. Funds awarded are based on the college's estimated cost of attendance.</p>	<p>The federal Preparation For Adult Living (PAL) Services program assists older youth in foster care and former foster youth to prepare to transition to a successful adulthood.</p>
<p>Who is Eligible?</p> <p>All individuals in DFPS Conservatorship (substitute care) in one of the circumstances listed below.</p> <p>FOSTER YOUTH:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the day preceding the student's 18th birthday; the day of the student's 14th birthday, if also eligible for adoption on or after that day; the date the student graduates from high school or receives the equivalent of a high school diploma. <p>RETURN TO THE LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY OF A PARENT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> if a youth was age 14 and older on or after June 1, 2016 and in DFPS's Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC); OR if a youth was age 16 or older on or after June 1, 2016 and was in DFPS's Temporary Managing Conservatorship (TMC). <p>PMC TO A NON-PARENT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PMC was granted to a non-parent on or after September 1, 2009. <p>ADOPTED YOUTH:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> adoption occurred on or after September 1, 2009; OR adopted and the subject of an adoption assistance agreement for monthly financial assistance and Medicaid. (No age limit for college enrollment for these students.) <p>DUAL CREDIT COURSES</p> <p>Students can use the waiver to enroll in a dual credit course that offers joint high school and college credit.</p>	<p>Who is Eligible?</p> <p>All individuals in DFPS Conservatorship (substitute care) in one of the circumstances listed below.</p> <p>FOSTER YOUTH:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> who are at least 16 and likely to remain in care until 18; or who age out foster care but are not yet 21. <p>YOUTH WHO ENTER PERMANENCY CARE ASSISTANCE (PCA):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> not yet age 21 and entered the PCA program after age 16 <p>ADOPTED YOUTH:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> not yet age 21 and are adopted after turning age 16 <p>OTHER:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Texas Juvenile Justice Department - youth must be in the custody of or under the jurisdiction of a local juvenile probation department AND were in a Title IV-E placement receiving Title IV-E payments on the day they turn 18. Tribal youth in tribal foster care <p>Students age 21 up to age 23:</p> <p>An eligible student who has participated in, applied for and been approved for ETV before his/her 21st birthday may remain eligible until the month of their 23rd birthday as long as they are continuously enrolled and making satisfactory academic progress toward completion of their school approved degree or certificate program.</p> <p>*Note: Undocumented youth are not eligible for ETV.</p>	<p>Who is Eligible?</p> <p>Youth in DFPS paid substitute care are the priority population for PAL services.</p> <p>FOSTER YOUTH/YOUNG ADULTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> who are at least age 16 or older and likely to remain in foster care until at least age 18. may qualify for PAL services up to their 21st birthday. <p>PAL Benefits/Services:</p> <p>Transitional Living Allowance - Up to \$1,000 and must meet the qualification requirements to include completion of PAL Life Skills Training.</p> <p>Aftercare Room and Board Assistance - Based on need and emergency, up to \$500 a month (not to exceed \$3,000 of accumulated payments) and have been in DFPS paid care at age 18 and meet qualification requirements.</p> <p>Other - Independent living skills training, support services as needed (i.e., counseling, driver education).</p> <p>PAL Staff Contact List:</p> <p>http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Youth_and_Young_Adults/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/PAL_coordinators.asp</p>



A brief overview of some key benefits is discussed below. A more in-depth explanation of these benefits begins on page 36.

COLLEGE PROGRAMS/RESOURCES FOR DFPS FOSTER YOUTH, ADOPTED YOUTH & CERTAIN YOUTH THAT EXIT TO A PARENT OR NON-PARENT OR ENTER THE PCA PROGRAM-JULY 2017

What schools, programs, and courses can be used with the STATE COLLEGE AND TUITION WAIVER?	What schools, programs, and courses can be used with the EDUCATION AND TRAINING VOUCHER Program?	What other DFPS SCHOLARSHIPS may be available?
<p>Eligible students can attend any Texas state-supported colleges and universities, including public medical school, public dental schools, or public technical institutes.</p> <p><i>GENERAL INFORMATION:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fees are waived if required for education purposes (i.e., lab or other mandatory fees). • skills training programs offered at community and technical colleges must be funded with state formula funds to be eligible for the tuition waiver. • DFPS PAL and other designated staff verify eligibility for the waiver letter (Form 1003). Students submit the waiver letter when registering for school. • adopted students who are subject to an adoption assistance agreement must meet required school Grade Point Average (GPA) and other course completion requirements. • Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THCEB) offer outreach programs to ensure that foster youth in grades 9-12 are aware of the tuition and fee waiver. <p>As of January 1, 2016 each state college/university now has a Foster Care Student Liaison to help former foster youth access services and receive assistance. Foster Care Student Liaison List</p> <p>The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board provides helpful information needed for youth/young adults to plan for college at http://www.collegeforalltexas.com/</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply Texas - College Application https://www.applytexas.org/adappc/gen/c_start.WBX • Compare Colleges Texas (2 and 4 year schools) http://comparecollegetx.com/ <p><i>Statutory Citation:</i></p> <p>Texas Education Code §§54.366, 54.367, 40 Texas Administrative Code §700.1630.</p>	<p>Eligible students can attend an *accredited or pre-accredited private, public or non-profit institution of higher education that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides a bachelor's degree or not less than a two-year program that provides credit towards a degree or certification; or • provides not less than a one-year program of training to prepare students for gainful employment in a recognized occupation; or • offers training programs and have been in existence for at least two years preparing students for gainful employment in a recognized occupation (training may be less than a year). <p>Students must enroll in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at least 6 semester hours; or • 3 semester hours if enrolled in a summer session or a dual college credit course. <p>Correspondence, Distance Education, or Continuing Education courses are allowed if part of a student's academic degree or certificate program. Prior approval by the ETV staff is needed to ensure proper school accreditation and course qualifications.</p> <p>Students apply at: www.texasetv.com or call 1-877-268-4063.</p> <p>More information about these college programs is available at the Texas Youth Connection website: https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/txyouth/education/paying_for_college.asp</p> <p><i>*Note:</i> all of the schools/programs listed above must be accredited or have been granted pre-accreditation status by an agency or organization that has been recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education.</p> <p><i>Statutory Citation:</i></p> <p>P.L. 110-351, 42 U.S.C. §677, 40 Texas Administrative Code §700.1613</p>	<p>If a youth/young adult aged out of DFPS foster care, completed the PAL life skills training program, and met other requirements they may be eligible for scholarships. These funds can be used to supplement any school expenses not covered by the ETV program, scholarships, or federal grants.</p> <p><u>DFPS SCHOLARSHIPS:</u></p> <p>Freshmen Success Fund for Foster Youth (est. April 2013): This is a one-time grant of \$1,000 available for first time college freshmen formerly in DFPS foster care. These grants must cover basic, non-tuition related expenses such as books and supplies, computers and software, tools and uniforms, and transportation. Students must be enrolled in a Texas state-supported college, university, or vocational school that accepts the tuition and fee waiver.</p> <p>C. Ed Davis-PAL Scholarship (est. July 2012): This scholarship is for basic, non-tuition needs for former foster youth who are majoring in government, political science, history, or other pre-law field. Scholarships are for \$1,000 per academic year and are available to sophomore, junior, or senior year students.</p> <p><i>Note:</i> Scholarships received may affect the amount of ETV funds to be awarded because they are factored in with other sources of funds received by the student.</p> <p>More information is available at the Texas Youth Connection website: https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/txyouth/education/scholarships.asp</p>

Liaisons and campus support programs

A liaison is a single individual that serves as a consistent, reliable source of information for the students in foster care at each institution of higher education in Texas. A campus support program is a comprehensive, coordinated network that involves partnerships in multiple departments throughout the institution. Several colleges and universities in Texas have built successful campus support programs.

EXAMPLE **Austin Community College (ACC) Foster Care Alumni (FCA) Program** - connects foster youth with ACC representatives, referred to as Campus Champions, provides one-on-one mentoring and addresses the legal, medical, housing, and financial challenges youth may face in college.

EXAMPLE **University of North Texas (UNT) PUSH** - a student organization that was created to raise awareness in the public and university communities about the experiences of youth in the child welfare system and to promote excellence, positive support, resources, and fellowship to foster care alumni and students.

EXAMPLE **Texas State University (TSC) FACES Program** - has a mission to create a campus-wide network of support to assist former foster care students achieve educational success by focusing on recruitment, retention, and graduation. Mentors and advocates provide support to foster care alumni through FACES in a variety of ways.

“Quite simply- without the [campus program] I would not been able to finish my college degree. I was faced, more than once, with circumstances that positioned me close to dropping out of college. The support I got from the [campus program] is something I am unconditionally grateful for. The [campus program] has not only helped me but I know it is constantly working to help other foster care alumni that experience situations like mine. Without someone to be there to assist I would be exactly what the statistics say what I would be. I owe a lot more than I can give to the [campus program].”

—Texas Foster Care Alumni

“Overall it was a fun and adventurous campus program that helped and supported me personally a lot from budgeting presentations, FAFSA, and presentations to coffee runs and hanging out with other foster alumni.”

—Texas Foster Care Alumni



“The [campus] program helped me navigate the world of higher education.”
– Texas Foster Care Alumni

Other existing campus support programs include:

- **Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD) Foster Care Program** - connects foster care alumni students to Transition Coaches at all DCC colleges.
- **Sam Houston State University (SHSU) Huntsville Forward Program** - serves as a resource to help and empower foster youth by providing the support system necessary to pursue higher education and to build meaningful relationships within the university that are important to successful and professional achievements.
- **Texas A&M Kingsville (TAMUK) Fostering Towards Success** - a new program focused on empowering students and giving back to children and youth in foster care in the surrounding community.
- **Texas Women’s University (TWU) Frontiers Program** - provides support and guidance to former foster youth enrolled at TWU.
- **University of Houston (UH) Urban Experience** - a program for educationally and economically under-served individuals. The program promotes scholarship, community service, and personal and professional development through mentorship and internship as a conduit for the development of well-trained professionals.
- **University of Texas-Austin (UT) SPARKS Program** - provides support systems to transition to UT-Austin and engage with the campus while in college. SPARKS serves as a resource to help students build meaningful personal and professional relationships that are important to success.
- **University of Texas-El Paso (UTEP) FHAR Program** - connects foster, homeless, and adopted individuals through education and advocacy with resources that will assist with their UTEP experience.
- **University of Texas-San Antonio (UTSA) ACCESS Center** - provides resources for former foster youth considering college or job training.
- **West Texas A&M University Buff Connections** - empowers foster care alumni and homeless students to utilize available support systems and resources resulting in a successful college experience.
- **Other Colleges: Lone Star Colleges in Houston, Texas State Technical Colleges, Prairie View A&M, Alamo Community College, Texas A&M-San Antonio, UT-Permian Basin, Amarillo College, West Texas A&M, University of Texas-Pan American, and Midland College** do not have specific programs for foster care alumni but have dedicated staff that are available to assist foster youth enrolled at their schools.



Statewide Support Network for Foster Care Alumni Programs

Education Reach for Texans (“Education Reach”) is a nonprofit organization with a mission of empowering Texans to champion postsecondary success for foster youth and alumni. Education Reach seeks to eliminate barriers to success and build support programs for foster care alumni attending public colleges and universities in the state of Texas. Education Reach is one of a growing group of organizations across the nation seeking to improve the success of foster care alumni in postsecondary education. Historically, the main means for achieving this goal has been to hold statewide convenings of postsecondary and child welfare professionals to facilitate sharing of ideas and spurring the implementation of campus-based support programs.

- For more information about Education Reach, visit <http://www.educationreachfortexans.org/>
- To learn more about the national movement to support foster care alumni in achieving postsecondary success, visit, <http://fosteringsuccessmichigan.com/campus-support>.
- To start a campus support program, please refer to the resource Supporting Success: Improving Higher Education Outcomes for Students from Foster Care: <http://www.casey.org/supporting-success/>.

“When I think about the [campus program], I automatically consider my colleagues in the organization as my family. The [campus program] makes me feel like I belong at the school and it has helped me to be around those who truly understand my story. Not only do I feel like I’m a part of a family, the greatest reward is when I can give back through community service and speaking about my experiences in order to help others, whether it’s kids enduring what I’ve endured, or foster and adoptive parents trying to better help their children”
—Texas Foster Care Alumni

“The [campus program] first and foremost was a place of unconditional support. Not only did we receive academic support but also emotional support from students who had also survived the foster care system. The program also made me a stronger advocate not only for myself but hopefully others as well.” —Texas Foster Care Alumni

“We had a great mentor that was there for us to talk to about anything, had ties and knew a lot about foster care alumni that could mentor us through good and hard times.”
—Texas Foster Care Alumni

Helping students find a support system



Attending college is a big step to take for any student who wants to pursue higher education. This is especially true for a student who experienced the foster care system as a child or youth. One of the secrets to postsecondary educational success is having a healthy and stable support system that provides practical and/or emotional support. Many children and youth in foster care have fewer opportunities to build or expand their support systems due to the instability and unpredictability of their foster care placements. For students who age out of foster care, there is often little or no support available. These students are often in crisis mode, focusing on other basic needs such as securing food and shelter. Other students who may have returned to their parents or been adopted face similar challenges when familial support is tenuous or non-existent after the student turns 18. Foster care alumni want and need the support that many students in higher education receive from family and other supportive adults.

The following questions represent common scenarios facing foster care alumni in the postsecondary environment. Below each question is advice from foster care alumni on how to address the challenges presented.

Helping students find a support system

What if the student expresses concerns that there is no one to call to ask questions about basic life skills (i.e. how to do laundry, cook a meal, shop, create a budget, etc.)?

- For institutions that provide housing, advise the student to reach out to the resident assistant (RA) or residence director (RD) for help while the student learns the skills. For example, the RA/RD could do laundry one or two times with the student until the student feels comfortable doing laundry alone. RAs are also students who are a bit older and have more experience on campus. They can help identify resources or services on campus. RDs are paid full time staff members who have graduated with their bachelor's degree and are also very knowledgeable about campus resources. At some schools, the RA/RD will put on events in the residence halls to help teach students about laundry, meal preparation, and creating a budget.



TIP: If these events do not occur at your institution, consider meeting with a few key stakeholders to determine whether this is feasible at your school.

- If the student aged out of foster care and lives off campus, the student can contact PAL staff or PAL Aftercare case manager for assistance with acquiring additional life skills, especially learning how to formulate a budget. This service is available until the student's 21st birthday.

What if the student is worried about being at risk of failing classes, a financial aid refund, purchasing textbooks, or food and/or housing insecurities?

- At many universities and colleges, faculty/staff mentors are provided to incoming students. If your school does not automatically provide mentors, students can reach out to student support offices at the school and ask to be matched with a mentor. Typically, the Dean of Students and the student involvement/activities office are very well connected to campus and can help students find mentors. Mentors can link the student up with resources to address their particular needs. Mentors may also be other foster care alumni that have been attending the school for a while.
- In addition, many students seek out employment in on campus offices or departments. This can be very beneficial for students; employers may join the student's support system and often write recommendation letters and recognitions for students in the future. Employers on campus are often more compassionate towards students and this can help during finals or mid-terms.
- Some students living in dorms may not have any place to live during the long school holidays or summer semester breaks. It is the responsibility of the school to refer a student to other community housing options. For those students under age 21, the PAL staff can assist with this.

"The program offered not only a safe place to express our thoughts and feelings but also gave us the understanding that if we as students stuck together we could achieve anything. The [campus] program is a much needed family for students that may not have support otherwise." –Texas Foster Care alumni

What if the student feels embarrassed, ashamed, overwhelmed, or anxious about college and cannot process feelings, emotions, or thoughts with anyone to help come up with solutions to problems?

- Feeling overwhelmed is common among new students at college. Linking the student up with the university's/college's counseling center can be very helpful. Many times the counseling center will have different types of programs, such as individual therapy appointments, small group therapy, self-care workshops, and special speakers. If the student is reluctant to receive counseling, finding out about the counseling center's calendar of events will give the student a better understanding of services without the commitment to seeing a counselor. Also, encourage the student to check out the counseling center's website and social media sites for more information about services without having to speak to a staff member.
- A Home Within also offers free counseling to youth who have aged out of foster care.¹² This may be another resource for foster care alumni.

What if the student expresses concerns about lacking connections to peers and supportive adults who can share in successes, struggles, and social activities.

- Some students may get discouraged if they don't have someone cheering in their corner and believing in them. Having someone who is proud of their accomplishments pushes them to achieve more and gives them the confidence they need to push forward. Working through challenges with someone else also help foster care alumni feel supported. Having a support system can provide a student with additional opportunities to be linked to other community or educational resources.
- Many students join a student organization on campus to make friends, network with other students who share their background or interests, and build up a support system. Joining a student organization is helpful when needing encouragement from others. No one can be successful alone in college. Some schools have established foster care student support networks. Contact the office of the Dean of Students to determine if this exists at your school. If there is not a foster care initiative, consider creating a student organization by visiting your student involvement/activities office.
- Organizations for Hispanic, African-American/Black, First Generation, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) and other student groups also exist at universities/colleges and help build community. Note, the American Bar Association Opening Doors Project started 6 years ago to provide the legal and child welfare community tools, resources, and support for improving outcomes for LGBTQ young people in foster care.¹³

 TIP: Connect with PAL staff or the PAL Aftercare case manager in your area to flag incoming students. Identifying interests and helping the student make connections early will make for a smoother transition to the higher education environment. Because the PAL Aftercare case manager may change over time, it is a best practice to reach out at regular intervals to maintain contact.

Encouraging self-advocacy



Like other students, foster care alumni must navigate the many educational offices and departments that exist at institutions of higher education. The student may not be aware of the existence of some departments or aware of how to access resources offered. It is important for students to understand how each department can help.

The following questions represent common scenarios facing foster care alumni in the postsecondary environment. Below each question is advice from foster care alumni on how to address the challenges presented.

The [campus program] has been such a blessing in my life - before joining, I always felt that my past as a foster child was something to be ashamed of and hidden. Now, I consider it one of the best parts of who I am, because my experience can help others in such a tangible way. I am not only more confident in who I am as a person, but I feel more empowered than ever to love people authentically and make a true difference in the world. The [campus program] has been the catalyst to becoming who I was always meant to be.” – Texas Foster Care Alumni

Encouraging self-advocacy

What if the student does not understand the different departments/offices and what their purpose is on your campus?

- Encourage the student to become familiar with the college website and take time to learn about technology on campus. This will benefit the student by explaining the different functions of each department but it will also help the student become more fluent in using technology to access academic assignments.
 - Examples of key departments/offices: Financial Aid & Scholarship, Learning/Writing Lab, Advising Centers, Office of Disability Services, Library, etc.
-  **TIP:** Identify individuals who can serve as points of contact at various departments and encourage students to call on them and ask questions. If there is a designated individual to ask for, foster care alumni may be more comfortable calling with questions.

“It would be very helpful for foster youth to have someone at the college that could help them with the various processes of registering for classes, adding and dropping classes, and navigating the system. I made a lot of mistakes because I did not know what I was doing and did not have anyone at my school to turn to.”
—Texas Foster Care Alumni

What if the student struggles with self-advocacy after approaching each department/office?

- It can be overwhelming for foster care alumni to have to explain resources like the tuition and fee waiver and the ETV program to staff, especially multiple times in one semester.
- Students must be reminded that college and university staff want students to be successful and they have to find a way to partner. If the student can remove some of these barriers and stress, the student is better able to focus on school and academics.
- Although self-advocacy can be challenging, once students practice this skill it becomes easier. Foster care alumni are still learning independent living skills in the college environment. Liaisons can help encourage the student to advocate for themselves, rather than doing the advocacy on behalf of the student. Students may get frustrated with staff who are unfamiliar with foster care or some of the resources available to foster care alumni. Building networks and connections with faculty and staff in various departments will help build the knowledge base so the school is well-equipped to serve students formerly in care.

Securing housing, food, and healthcare

Secure and stable housing is one of the basic things that all people need to survive. Often times, students who age out of foster care do not have stable housing. Students who experience food insecurity or inadequate healthcare may also find it nearly impossible to focus on school and reach their postsecondary goals. Stabilizing students by addressing their basic needs will shift the focus from crisis to creating greater opportunities for personal and academic growth.

The following questions represent common scenarios facing foster care alumni in the postsecondary environment. Below each question is advice from foster care alumni on how to address the challenges presented.

How can I help the student avoid housing instability and/or homelessness?

- If your school has a residential campus, foster care alumni may rely on dorm rooms to provide shelter. Many campuses reserve dorms for working students or students who do not have housing during academic breaks. Institutions of higher education must assist full time students who lack other reasonable housing alternatives between academic terms.¹⁴ If the school does not offer this option, you can advocate with your administration to help secure housing alternatives for students in need.
- It is important to identify safe places for foster care alumni to stay during school breaks. Students may not have adults they can depend on to provide housing and sometimes housing plans can fall through very quickly. Some students may face a period of homelessness during these times if secure plans are not made in advance.
- Breaks during the school and calendar year can often be busy for students with finals and big assignments due at the same time. Encourage students to secure break housing well before the end of the semester. Foster care alumni can reach out to PAL staff or PAL Aftercare case manager about their holiday plans and ask for information on financial resources if they decide to stay in the residence halls/dorms on campus.
- The student may be eligible to return to the DFPS Extended Foster Care program for a short time and if a placement is available during the school breaks. The PAL staff can help with this.





What do I do if the student is a parent and needs family housing?

- Although some colleges and universities provide housing for students with families, many do not. These students may not be able to afford their own apartments or houses and take time away from work to attend class.
- Becoming familiar with community, city, and school resources is vital for success for students who are parents. Reach out to the Dean of Students office on your campus for information on resources that support parent students. Contact PAL staff or the PAL Aftercare case manager for more information about community resources. Also, encourage the student to reach out to their academic advisor to create a class schedule that works for the student and supports work, child care, and academics.

What if the student experiences other food, financial, medical or other insecurities?

- Some students may need items related to housing such as toiletries, bedding/linens, jackets, kitchenware, and other items that are not covered with tuition and fee waiver or other financial sources.
- It is hard for foster care alumni to remember all the toiletries and personal hygiene supplies they may need when a student first transitions to college life and living on their own. Remind students to apply for resources early in advance and complete paperwork on time.

➔ **TIP:** Reach out to regional PAL staff or PAL Aftercare case managers about what students may need when they arrive at your school. With adequate time and preparation, the student will show up for school with all their basic necessities cared for so the student can focus on transitioning into the college environment.

As the liaison, you can help students navigate the higher education journey. By helping students make connections, advocate for themselves, and attend to basic needs, you can empower foster care alumni students to focus on their learning and personal and professional growth. Foster care alumni have just as much potential to succeed in the postsecondary environment as other students. By offering patience, infrastructure, encouragement, consistency, and support, the liaison can play a critical role in promoting postsecondary success for foster care alumni.

Part II

In-depth



Benefits, services, and resources for alumni	38
Trauma informed practice	52
Glossary of helpful terms	56
Additional resources	60
Endnotes	63

Benefits, services, and resources for alumni



Texas Department of Family and Protective Services Transitional Living Services Program

The DFPS Transitional Living Services program provides a multi-purpose, systemic, and integrated approach for youth and young adults to help in transitioning to a successful adulthood through coordinated permanency and transition planning. Transitional Living Services are available to youth and young adults ages 14 to 23 (depending on the program) and up to age 26 for continuous healthcare coverage. These services include life skills training, Aftercare case management, information about accessing healthcare services and benefits, higher education benefits, transition planning, and programs to extend foster care.

More information about Transitional Living Services for youth and young adults is available at these DFPS websites:

- http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Youth_and_Young_Adults/Transitional_Living/default.asp
- http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Youth_and_Young_Adults/default.asp

PAL Staff

The purpose of the Preparation for Adult Living program is to help youth transition to a successful adulthood through coordinated permanency and transition planning as they leave foster care and after. The PAL program provides services, benefits, resources, and supports to youth and young adults up to age 21. The PAL staff or Aftercare case manager serve as the subject matter experts for the Transitional Living Services program.

More information about the PAL program is located at:

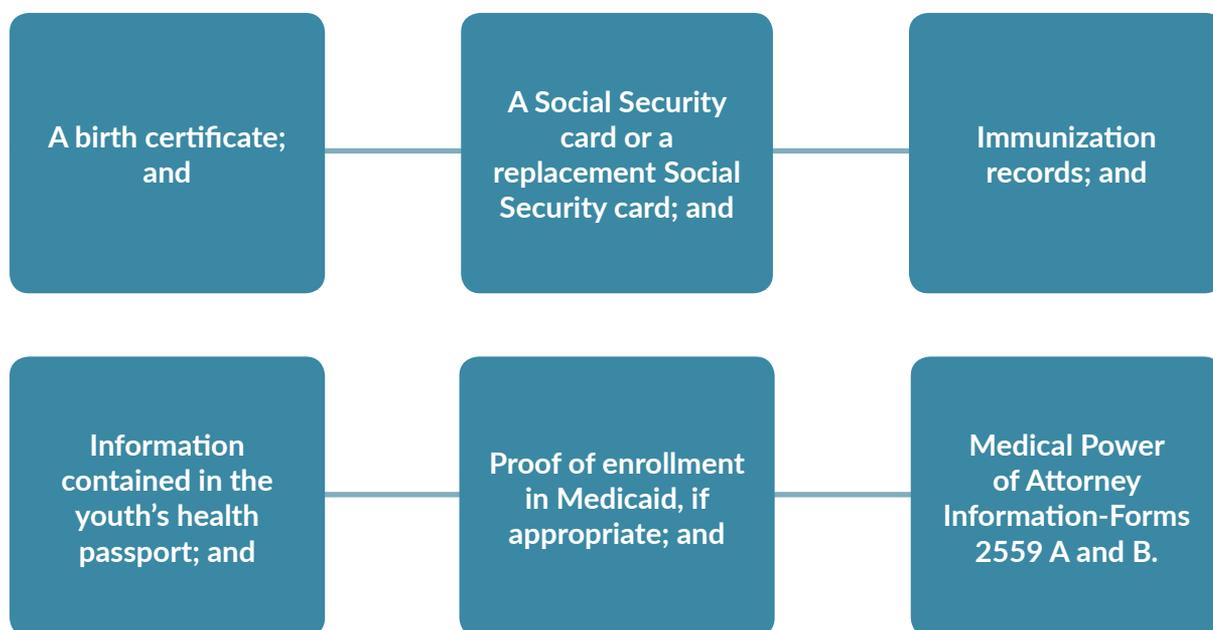
- http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Youth_and_Young_Adults/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/default.asp

PAL staff, as DFPS employees, are the main point of contact for services and resources related to transitioning out of foster care, including anything considered part of the Transitional Living Services program. They provide tuition waiver eligibility letters, Transitional Living Allowances, assistance with personal documents, and guidance with accessing benefits and services and more.



Provision of Personal Documents/Records at age 18

Young adults must have the proper documentation and identification documents when registering for college. To ensure that this occurs DFPS provides these documents to youth at least 90 days before turning 18 and leaving foster care. The youth signs for these documents upon receipt and they will either receive a copy or the original documents (if not already provided at age 16) and other information. These documents include:



In addition, by a youth's 16th birthday DFPS must supply the birth certificate, Social Security card, and Texas ID to the youth. Also, DFPS should ensure that any non-U.S. born youth have documentation of their immigration/citizenship status and take any necessary steps to ensure the youth obtains the needed immigration/citizenship status.

A young adult may request copies of these documents and other personal CPS records from DFPS Records Management. For more information, please visit:

- https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/policies/Case_Records/foster_youth.asp.

The PAL staff may also assist young adults in applying for or requesting copies of these documents. Information on how to make record or document requests is at:

- https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/txyouth/legal/personal_docs.asp

PAL Aftercare Case Manager/Management

Aftercare management is a process in which an individual youth or young adult has a case manager from an agency that has contracted with DFPS in the CPS region to provide case management services. Aftercare is an essential part of service delivery to assist youth and young adults up to age 21 and may begin before age 18, as appropriate and as part of the youth's transition planning.

The PAL Aftercare case manager works with the youth to identify needs, to develop a plan for self-sufficiency, arrange for services, and monitor the youth or young adult's progress toward meeting the goals of the plan. Participation in case management services is voluntary for foster care alumni, but is required if PAL financial assistance is to be provided. The case manager networks with community resources to address a wide range of transitional needs and make referrals when appropriate for the foster care alumni. Some of these needs may be finding affordable housing, enrolling in school, accessing employment and training opportunities, locating child care, and helping young adults access medical benefits and other healthcare services.

The PAL Aftercare case manager works for the agency that has contracted with DFPS in the region to provide after care case management services. An aged out foster youth is likely to have both a PAL staff member and an Aftercare case manager although they may not be working closely with both of them or identify them by these specific titles. You may have to clarify with the individual their specific role and agency. The PAL Aftercare case manager is likely the one assisting the young adult with navigating day to day issues.

PAL Aftercare case managers can assist the student with completing the FAFSA application and other needed applications and documents, such as ETV.

PAL Transitional Living Allowance

Up to \$1,000 is provided to young adults up to age 21 who completed the PAL life skills training to help with initial start-up costs in adult living. Payments are distributed based on the young adult's circumstances.

PAL Aftercare Room and Board Assistance (ages 18-21)

This is a type of financial assistance provided to prevent or alleviate homelessness, and help young adults achieve more positive outcomes in adulthood. Assistance is based on financial need and young adults can receive up to \$500 per month for rent, utilities, utility deposits, food, etc. (not to exceed \$3,000 of accumulated payments per young adult). The youth accesses this assistance by working with their PAL Aftercare case manager, who must conduct an assessment of financial needs before providing Aftercare room and board funds or other financial assistance. The case manager must develop strategies to help the young adult take on more responsibility and increase problem-solving skills so that the young adult learns to advocate for himself or herself in the future. Payments are distributed based on the young adult's circumstances.



Postsecondary Education Benefits and Information

Tuition and Fee Waivers for Foster Care Alumni (Tuition and Fee Waiver)

There are two state laws that exempt or waive payment of tuition and fees at state supported colleges or universities for foster youth currently or formerly in the conservatorship of DFPS and for those adopted from DFPS:

- TEC Section 54.366 Exemption for Students Under Conservatorship of DFPS; and
- TEC Section 54.367 Exemption for Adopted Students Formerly in Foster or other Residential Care.

Fees that are required for educational purposes are covered with this waiver but items such as parking or other optional fees are not covered by the waiver. Some vocational/certificate courses may not be exempt from tuition and fees. While Texas law provides tuition and fee exemptions for several categories of students, this guide is only addressing the tuition and fee waivers that apply to those who are or were formerly in the conservatorship of DFPS.

To be exempt from the payment of tuition and fees through TEC Section 54.366, the youth or young adults must have been in DFPS conservatorship:

On the day before the student's 18th birthday; or

On or after the day of the student's 14th birthday, if the youth was eligible for adoption (parental rights terminated) on or after that day; or

On the day the student graduated from high school or received the equivalent of a high school diploma; or

On the day preceding the date a youth was adopted if the adoption occurred on or after September 1, 2009; or

On the day preceding the date the permanent managing conservatorship of the youth was granted to a non-parent if that occurred on or after September 1, 2009; or

When a student is enrolled in a dual credit course or other courses in which the student may earn joint high school and college credit and if tuition hasn't been waived;

AND

Enroll in an institution of higher education as an undergraduate student or in a dual credit course or other course for which a high school student may earn joint high school and college credit not later than the student's 25th birthday.

Benefits, services, and resources for alumni

Effective with the Fall 2016 semester, a youth is eligible for a tuition and fee waiver if the youth was or is returned to the legal responsibility of the parent at:

- Age 14 and older and was in DFPS's permanent managing conservatorship; or
- Age 16 and older and was in DFPS's temporary managing conservatorship.

An adopted youth subject to an adoption assistance agreement that provides monthly stipends and Medicaid benefits, regardless of the date of adoption, is eligible for the college tuition and fee waiver through TEC Section 54.367. For these students there is no age limit for enrolling in college to utilize the tuition and fee waiver.

NOTE: Adopted students (with adoption assistance agreements & Medicaid) **must** meet the required school's financial aid GPA requirements and cannot complete credit hours considered to be excessive if they are to continue to utilize the tuition and fee waiver. Any child or youth adopted on or after September 1, 2009 from DFPS conservatorship will not be affected by these tuition restrictions per TEC Section 54.2001(g).

Proof of Hardship or Other Good Cause-Adopted Students

Colleges and universities are required by TEC Section 54.20019(d) to have policies allowing any student who does not maintain the grade point average to receive the TEC Section 54.367 waiver in any semester if the student shows proof of "hardship or other good cause". Contact the school's financial aid office to discuss a hardship or good cause exemption, if applicable.

Please note, the student may be restricted from accessing their tuition and fee waiver if they fail to be comply with the Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) policies of the institution.

The DFPS PAL staff and Adoption Assistance Eligibility staff verify eligibility for the tuition and fee waiver through Form K-908-1003. Students submit the waiver letter to the school's financial aid office at the time of enrollment.

Paying for College

The tuition and fee waiver is not included as income in the Expected Family Contribution and is not reported on the FAFSA. The college tuition and fee waiver, the PELL grant, scholarships, and loans are considered as other sources of funds when determining the amount of ETV funds an eligible student will receive. ETV funds are then factored in as an additional financial resource when meeting the set cost of attendance. Each school is responsible for applying the tuition and fee waiver for eligible students. Schools have their own appeals processes if a student's tuition and fee waiver is denied.

Students must review any bills and financial aid award letters they receive from the school to make sure that the tuition and fee waiver has been accurately reflected on it. Even though a student may have supplied the waiver to the school, the information may not have been sent to all the parts of the school that need it. Unfortunately, some aged out foster youth have signed up for loans when the tuition and fee

waiver was not included, thinking it was just paperwork related to the waiver. Others have been provided grant money only to find out that the school awarded them too much because they did not calculate in the tuition and fee waiver and the school has required them to repay excess funds.

Under TEC Sections 54.366 and 54.367, otherwise eligible foster care youth are entitled to a tuition and fee exemption while attending a Texas public institution of high education.

You can find additional information about the tuition and fee waiver at:

- https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Youth_and_Young_Adults/Post_Secondary_Education/college_tuition_waiver.asp.

Vocational/Technical Certificate Programs

Youth or young adults must check with each school to ensure that the courses they are enrolling in are exempt from tuition and fees. Some vocational/certificate courses may not be exempt from tuition and fees. In addition, courses that do not generate formula funding for the institution are not subject to the exemption.

Education and Training Voucher Program

ETV is a federally-funded and state-administered program specifically for youth who were in foster care. Based on the cost of attendance as established by higher education institutions, youth in foster care or other eligible youth and young adult's ages 16 up to the age of 23 may be eligible to receive up to \$5,000 in financial assistance per year to help them reach their postsecondary education goals. Students receiving ETV funding are allowed to use the funding to attend accredited or pre-accredited, nonprofit, private, or public institutions of higher education. Students must also submit a FAFSA when applying for ETV.

NOTE: Undocumented students are not eligible for federal financial aid or federal public benefits, including the ETV program.

Individuals eligible for ETV include:

- Youth in foster care who are at least 16 and are likely to remain in care until 18; or
- Youth who aged out of DFPS foster care but have not yet turned 21; or
- Youth who were adopted from DFPS foster care after turning age 16 and are not yet 21; or
- Youth who enter Permanency Care Assistance after age 16 but have not yet turned 21; or
- Youth who are in the custody of the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (formerly Texas Juvenile Probation Commission) and are in a Title IV-E placement that receives IV-E payments when turning age 18; or
- Tribal youth or young adults in tribal foster care; or
- The above eligible students who move out of state to attend school but were originally enrolled in ETV in Texas.

ETV program requirements

Students must apply for and be approved for ETV before their 21st birthday. “Being approved” means meeting school enrollment requirements, and being enrolled in at least 6 semester hours in an *accredited* or *pre-accredited* public or private, non-profit program/institution that:

Provides a bachelor’s degree of not less than a 2 year program that provides credit towards a degree or certification; or

Provides not less than a one-year program of training to prepare students for gainful employment; or

Has been in existence for two years and offers training programs to prepare students for gainful employment in a recognized occupation (training may be less than one year).

Students participating in the ETV Program on their 21st birthday may remain eligible until the month of their 23rd birthday as long as they are continuously enrolled in ETV and meet the satisfactory academic progress policies toward completing their postsecondary education or training program as determined by the institution. After age 21, the student must be continuously enrolled in the institution to remain eligible for the ETV program up to their 23rd birthday.

Students interested in specific educational programs through Correspondence Courses, Distance Education Courses, or Continuing Education courses must contact ETV staff for prior approval to ensure proper school accreditation and that courses lead to a degree or recognized certificate program. Courses must apply to a student’s academic degree or certificate program.

Note: Youth or young adults in DFPS foster care, enrolled in higher education, and eligible for ETV may have certain expenses paid by the ETV program (ex., books, computers, child care, and transportation). ETV will **not** cover residential housing, personal items, and food since this is provided for in the placement.

Before ETV staff can determine the amount of ETV funds the student can receive, the institution of higher education that the student is attending must first determine how much financial aid and other income sources the student has or will receive. Ordinarily, one factor considered by the institution is the Expected Family Contribution. Schools use the Expected Family Contribution to help determine eligibility for federal student aid and financial aid awards; however, students who were or are in foster care after age 13 are considered independent students and do not have to provide information on family income. Instead, the student must prove that he or she was in state foster care by submitting to the school, either:

- The College Tuition and Fee Waiver Letter; or
- A signed letter from a caseworker or PAL staff on DFPS letterhead that includes the student’s Social Security number and the dates that the student was in foster care.

A school’s SAP policies may include that the student maintains a certain grade point average, meets a pace/completion rate; and stay within a maximum amount of attempted hours as determined by the school.

A student may continue to qualify for the ETV program while on financial aid probation or after receiving a financial aid warning, if the student is still attending school, and complies with the school's policies on financial aid probation or financial aid warnings.

This situation allows the student to improve his or her grade-point average while still receiving ETV services. If it is the school's policy is to allow a student who is on financial aid probation or warning to continue to receive Title IV Higher Education Act funds, then the student may receive ETV funds; however, ETV staff may request additional documentation to ensure that the student is in compliance with the school's policies.

ETV funds are either paid directly to the student or a landlord, college residential division, utility company, bookstore, or other entity. Freshman and sophomore students will have their primary bills paid first before the remainder of the funds are given to them. This is to help make sure the student uses it for the intended educational support purposes. Juniors and seniors receive all of their ETV funds and pay their own bills. Aftercare case managers and PAL staff can assist with applying for ETV.

For more information about the Texas ETV Program visit:

- <http://www.TexasETV.com>



DFPS College Scholarships

Freshmen Success Fund for Foster Youth (est. April 2013)

This is a grant for first time college freshmen formerly in foster care. Each year there will be four one-time grants of \$1,000 available for young adults enrolling in their freshmen year. These grants are to cover basic non-tuition related expenses such as books and supplies, computers and software, tools and uniforms, and transportation. Students must be enrolled in a Texas state-supported college, university, or vocational/technical school that accepts the state college tuition and fee waiver.

C. Ed Davis-PAL Scholarship (est. July 2012)

This scholarship is for basic non-tuition needs for former foster youth who are majoring in government, political science, history, or another pre-law field. Scholarships are for \$1,000 per academic year and are available to sophomore, junior, or senior year students.

More information about these scholarships is available at:

- <https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/txyouth/education/scholarships.asp>



Texas Medicaid and Other Healthcare Information

Former Foster Care Children (FFCC) Healthcare Program

The FFCC program provides continuous healthcare coverage through age 25 to young adults who age out of Texas foster care and are receiving Medicaid when they age out. This population will receive healthcare services in two separate programs based on age:

- Young adults aged 18 through 20 will be enrolled in STAR Health but can switch to STAR upon request; and
- Young adults aged 21 through 25 will receive Medicaid through the STAR plan of their choice.

To be eligible for the FFCC program, the following criteria must be met:

- Young adult between 18 to 25 years old;
- In Texas foster care on his or her 18th birthday or older;
- Receive Medicaid when he or she aged out of Texas foster care; and
- A U.S. citizen or have a qualified alien status (Example: youth has I-551 permanent resident card).
Note, there are additional limits on eligibility for non-citizens who are age 21 and older.

Medicaid for Transitioning Foster Care Youth (MTFCY)

MTFCY provides medical coverage to young adults age 18 through 20 who are not eligible for the FFCC program because they were not receiving Medicaid at the time they aged out of foster care. The following eligibility criteria apply:

- 18 through 20 years of age;
- In Texas foster care at age 18, or older;
- No other healthcare coverage;
- Meet program rules for income; and
- A U.S. citizen or have a qualified alien status.

For more information visit:

- http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/handbooks/CPS/Files/CPS_pg_x10000.asp#CPS_10000

Your Texas Benefits

Young adults can use the YourTexasBenefits.com website to apply for, renew and manage their benefits at any time and place; the mobile app can be used to update their address, set alert messages, and manage their benefits. They can also call 2-1-1 and ask to speak to a “Foster Youth Specialist” for help with their Medicaid benefits.

STAR Member Helpful Numbers:

- 1-800-964-2777 or 1-866-912-6283.

Students under age 30 entering a Texas institution of higher education must be vaccinated for bacterial meningitis. Payments for doctor's visits and vaccination costs are covered by the FFCC Medicaid program for those who are on STAR Health. Those on STAR may not have coverage – it will depend on their particular plan. Encouraging vaccination while still in high school is an important way to prevent this from creating problems for students entering college.

You can find more information at:

- <http://texasfosteryouth.org/legal-resources/legal-resources-for-youth/medical-issues-health-insurance/>

Trial Independence (TI)

A young adult in DFPS conservatorship who turns 18 as well as a young adult enrolled in the Extended Foster Care Program may leave foster care for a TI period of 6 months (or up to 12 months with a court order). During TI, the young adult may be living independently and receiving other transitional living benefits such as PAL, ETV, and Texas Medicaid. During trial independence there is no CPS involvement beyond the provision of transitional living services. A young adult may return to Extended Foster Care during the trial independence time without losing DFPS transitional living services benefits for young adults.



DFPS Funded Housing Programs for Young Adults

Extended Foster Care (EFC)

EFC is a voluntary housing program for youth who turn 18 years old while in the conservatorship of DFPS. The EFC program provides opportunities for the youth to remain in a foster care, if a placement is available, in order to help them successfully transition to independence. If a youth is interested in EFC he or she must sign the Extended Foster Care Agreement provided by the CPS caseworker prior to turning 18. In order to be eligible for EFC a youth must meet one of the following criteria:

18 to 22 years old, and:

- Regularly attending high school or enrolled in a program leading toward a high school diploma or school equivalence certificate (i.e. GED); or is

Benefits, services, and resources for alumni

18 to 21 years old and;

- Regularly attending an institution of higher education or a postsecondary vocational or technical program (minimum six hours per semester); or
- Actively participating in a program or activity that promotes, or removes barriers to, employment; or
- Employed for at least 80 hours per month; or
- Incapable of doing any of the above due to a documented medical condition, which includes receiving Supplemental Security Income.

Supervised Independent Living

SIL is a placement setting option for young adults in Extended Foster Care. SIL allows young adults to remain in foster care and work on independent living skills while living in a less restrictive setting. Young adults in SIL receive case management in settings with minimal supervision. These types of settings allow young adults to practice necessary independent living skills and achieve self-sufficiency in a supportive environment prior to aging out of foster care.

While in SIL, young adults have an increased responsibility such as managing their own finances, making their own medical appointments, finding their own means of transportation, buying and preparing their own food, and, where applicable, learning how to work with a landlord.

Case managers assist young adults with learning valuable life skills, engaging in community resources, achieving educational goals, and making connections to caring adults. Case managers do a minimum of a monthly face-to-face visit and weekly phone contact. Rules for SIL settings vary by each provider.

More information about SIL is available at:

- https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Fostering_Connections/supervised_independent_living.asp

For a list of colleges/universities who currently support SIL programs, visit:

- <http://www.educationreachfortexans.org/sil-sites.html>

Young adults eligible for SIL are those who demonstrate a reasonable level of maturity, independence and the ability to manage expectations required in SIL with minimal supervision and case management. Further eligibility varies by the providers. Young adults must also be between the ages of 18 – 20.

The housing settings vary by provider and may include:



Return to the Extended Foster Care Program

Young adults who aged out of DFPS conservatorship may return at any time up until the age of 21 to participate in the Extended Foster Care Program if the youth:

- Is offered an available placement;
- Understands that court jurisdiction will be extended, if the court permits;
- Signs or re-signs a Voluntary Extended Foster Care agreement; and
- Agrees to meet one of the criteria described in the Extended Foster Care program within 30 days of being placed.

The determination of whether or not the young adult can return to care is made by PAL staff after a thorough screening process. This determination also takes into account the location of an available placement. The young adult may be offered a placement in Extended Foster Care or SIL.



Temporary Housing Assistance between Academic Terms

Texas' institutions of higher education are required to assist **full-time** students formerly in foster care in locating temporary housing between academic terms (Christmas and summer holiday breaks). Students must request the housing assistance and are encouraged to inquire at financial aid, student affairs, admissions, or housing/residence life/residential living offices. For more information, reference TEC Section 51.976.

The school assists students with making housing arrangements by providing a list of available housing resources within the community or by referring students to other resources or community partners that offer housing assistance.

If the student demonstrates a financial need, the institution may open up student housing such as dormitories, university-owned apartments, or other campus housing, or provide a stipend to cover reasonable costs for temporary housing. The schools are not required to provide these options and will vary depending on the specific schools policies.

If a student receives a stipend for housing assistance this does not prohibit the student from receiving additional stipends in one or more subsequent academic periods. The receipt of a stipend for housing assistance will not affect a student's ability to apply for or receive funds from the ETV program to cover the cost of attendance for the future semester, or to receive other similar academic assistance.

Local Housing and Urban Development (HUD) offices offer resources, pertinent links, and publications as part of their Special Needs Assistance Program (SNAP). Some Aftercare providers have developed partnerships with local HUD offices to provide housing vouchers. Wait time to get a HUD voucher can be several years and these partnerships are critical to quickly securing housing.

- http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/topics/rental_assistance

???

Frequently Asked Questions about Benefits and Resources



How long does the tuition and fee waiver last?

As long as the tuition and fee waiver was activated (enrollment in college credit-bearing course) by the young adult's 25th birthday it becomes a lifetime benefit in the State of Texas.



What type of degrees (Bachelors, Masters, PhD, professional certificates) can a student obtain with the tuition and fee waiver?

The tuition and fee waiver can be used to achieve all of these degrees and more (Doctorate and multiple majors). Degrees/certificates only apply to courses for which an institution of higher education receives formula funding which a majority of courses at state colleges receive.



What do I tell the student when our school doesn't accept the tuition and fee waiver?

You can also call the bursar's office, or the designated office responsible for financial aid, to look into why the college isn't taking the waiver. You can contact the foster care liaison at the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board for additional information.

The student will need to contact the regional PAL staff. The student can also contact the Texas Foster Youth Justice Project at 877-313-3688 or info@texasfosteryouth.org for free legal assistance.



Do students have to submit their tuition waiver letter every semester?

Some colleges require a new letter be submitted with every semester or every academic year. The purpose of the letter is confirm or verify that the student was in DFPS foster care, adopted, etc. thus ensuring that tuition and related fees are to be waived A new letter each year doesn't change their eligibility status. If the school uses the letter to financially account for students with exemptions the PAL staff can issue a new tuition waiver letter, if needed. However, most students submit the letter on an annual basis or once per academic career, depending on institution policy.



Can the student receive ETV while still in foster care? If so, what can it be used to pay for?

Yes, as long as the student meets the eligibility criteria. ETV pays for expenses specified by the school, including books, computers, and software, etc. If applicable, ETV pays for tuition and fees for private institutions. Expenses such as housing and food are not covered as they are paid for by DFPS to foster care providers to care for the student's needs.



What if the student does not know how to contact the PAL staff?

Contact information is located online at https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Youth_and_Young_Adults/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/PAL_coordinators.asp



Does the waiver apply to dual high school/college credit courses?

The foster care exemption (TEC Section 54.366) applies to dual credit courses. The exemption program for those previously in foster care (TEC Section 54.367) does not apply to dual credit courses.

Trauma informed practice

The information is a quick guide to understanding and responding to foster alumni with trauma histories.

Trauma informed care is a framework that has been widely adopted in social service agencies. Public schools and medical settings are emerging areas for trauma informed practices. Being “trauma informed” simply means understanding, recognizing, and responding to trauma and its effects. It means that we stop asking “why is he/she behaving like this” and start asking “what might have happened to this student and how can I help?”

For foster care alumni on college campuses, trauma informed approaches are critical for understanding and responding to needs. This brief guide provides an overview of trauma, the general impact of trauma, and potential impacts of trauma on college students.

Prevalence of Trauma

Trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances experienced by an individual as a harmful and/or life threatening experience.¹⁵ The experience of trauma can be psychological or physical. Examples may include car accidents, verbal threats, and/or child abuse. Each individual has his or her own individualized experience in relation to the trauma. For example, two people in the same car accident may experience the event in different ways. Finally, the effects of trauma may be immediate or delayed. One person might be in immediate shock while another person experiences the emotional impact days, months, or even years after an event.

Research on childhood trauma has helped explain the prevalence of trauma. Perhaps the most important study is the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACES).¹⁶ Researchers developed a list of 10 adverse experiences which includes: physical, psychological, or sexual abuse; violence against one’s mother; and living with household members who are mentally ill, suicidal, substance abusers, or were ever incarcerated. In general, 59% of adults are suspected to have experienced at least one of the adverse experiences in childhood. Foster youth experience much higher rates of adverse experiences as they are more likely to experience physical, sexual, and or psychological abuse as well as neglect during childhood years compared to the general population.¹⁷

Impact of trauma

Each individual’s reaction to a traumatic experience is personal, and what may be experienced as traumatic for one person may not be for another. The effects of experiencing trauma are sometimes immediate, but the effects may also be prolonged having severe impacts on mental and physical health.¹⁸



Experiencing trauma in the childhood years can have a significant impact on brain development. The brain develops rapidly during the early childhood years with later peaks in development during adolescence and early adulthood. Any trauma occurring during these times impact different parts of the brain resulting in possible cognitive loss, physical, emotional, and social delays, learning and memory deficits, and structural and functioning changes.¹⁹ When children experience repeated trauma, their stress system may become over-reactive, and responses that were once protective become dangerous for the brain. Therefore, the more traumatic events that a child experiences the more likely he/she is to have deficits in brain development.²⁰

The brains of traumatized individuals are often very sensitive to their environment. Being reminded of a traumatic event at school can make the brain perceive a threat when there may not actually be one. This can happen more frequently and more intensely in individuals who have experienced trauma. These reminders are called “triggers”, and may result in behavior that is confusing to outsiders.

Survivors of trauma are often themselves confused by their own reactions, particularly if they have had no counseling or assistance in identifying triggers and appropriate coping skills. For example, a student who grew up in a violent household may withdraw from a roommate who is having arguments with a boyfriend. Another example might be a student who has trouble managing respectful conversations with professors because he views them as parental authority figures similar to those who physically abused him. Finally, a student who has experienced neglect and often went without meals may not be concerned about failing to have enough funds to pay rent. While all these situations may be confusing for those around the student, it is important to remember that the student may also be confused.

Compounding factors

One of the more concerning issues foster youth face after they leave foster care is mental health. Foster youth exiting the system have higher rates of mental health problems and medical problems.²¹ Research shows that roughly half of foster care alumni between the ages of 20 and 33 meet criteria for at least one mental health disorder²² and 42% of foster youth between the ages of 18 and 19 meet criteria for depression.²³ It is a common belief that children in foster care receive counseling and many do. However, those therapeutic relationships are often disrupted by changes in foster care placements and/or lack of perceived confidentiality by the child. Additionally, many youth in foster care are prescribed psychotropic medication that they do not continue to take after they leave foster care.

In addition to increased rates of abuse, children and youth in foster care are more likely to experience grief and loss due to the separation from birth parents and relatives that is often abrupt and traumatic. These youth also experience grief and loss as a result of frequently changing foster homes and possibly being separated from their siblings. According to research, within the first year of placement in the system, foster youth may experience anywhere from 1 to 15 placements.²⁵ Older youth who leave foster care tend to have multiple placements in their teen years. The grief and loss may lead to feelings of mistrust and an inability to connect with adults such as professors, staff, and roommates on campuses.

Trauma informed practice

Many former foster youth have few resources to support them in their young adulthood. While they may qualify for some benefits with tuition and housing, their finances may be precarious as there may not be help for assistance when a car breaks down, something is stolen, etc. They may also lack a caring support network to provide them with advice on how to succeed in college.

Responding to foster care alumni

Every student is unique and every foster care alumni experience is unique. Each student should be treated as an individual. These are general guidelines that may be helpful in working with a student who has exited foster care. Even if you are not a trained mental health professional, you are a human who has the capacity to be present for another human being by *ASKing*, *LISTENing* and *AFFIRMing*. The goal is to provide a safe space to help someone share his or her burden, but not to become their therapist or sole source of support.

ASK. Oftentimes we suspect that something is upsetting someone, but we don't ask because we don't want to violate privacy. Asking is okay when it is done respectfully and when a person feels he or she has the option to decline to answer. Allowing a person space to share a part of her story may help them feel understood.

Ways to Ask

It seems like you have some hard stuff going on. If you want to talk about anything and ways that I can get you help, I am here. 

I have noticed other former foster youth struggle with feeling alone on campus. Do you ever feel that way? 

Sometimes people feel things that they can't really explain, like they get startled or upset about something without understanding why. Does that ever happen to you? 

It is completely fine to not want to talk about this with me or anyone else. I just want you to have the option. If you change your mind, you know where to find me. 

Ways Not to Ask

So, why did you go into foster care? 

Don't you want to be different from your parents? 

Haven't you ever had counseling? 

I need a good reason to allow you more time... 

LISTEN. If someone does share personal information with you, it is crucial to listen. Do not flip through papers, avoid eye contact, or try to fill silence with idle chatter. Be present when information is shared. If appropriate, offer affirmations like “I am sorry that happened to you”; “this must be hard for you to talk about”; or “Thank you for trusting me with this story.”

AFFIRM. Once a story is told, do not feel like you need to “fix” a situation or that you need to provide any wisdom to explain motivations or outcomes. Just affirm. It is very important to not challenge the student’s version of the truth. It is also important to not attempt to re-frame a story in a positive light. These statements are particularly short-sited “your mother must have thought she was doing the best for you” or “at least you’ll know how to be a better parent”. The need to put a positive spin on stories is generally something the listener needs to feel better. It is not what the student may need. Rather, affirm the speaker by discussing the student’s strengths and resources to help with trauma.

Here are some positive things to say:

It looks like you had some challenging experiences in your childhood. I talk to many students with similar experiences and they feel these experiences impact their day to day lives. Do you feel that way?



You have a lot of strengths.
No matter what, you can build on those strengths to control your future.



Most of the time people don’t want to talk about these things and they feel shame and feel alone. I think it is important that your experience be private, but also that you know that you are not alone.



ASK



LISTEN



AFFIRM

Glossary

Term	Abbreviation	Definition
<i>Attorney ad litem</i>	AAL	An attorney who provides services for the purposes of the legal action only, including representation of a child, and who owes to the person the duties of undivided loyalty, confidentiality, and competent representation.
<i>Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement</i>	APPLA	A permanent legal arrangement for a child designed to promote stability and permanency in a child's life; refers to permanent placements other than a reunification with a parent, adoption, or permanent managing conservatorship to a relative.
<i>Caregiver</i>		Caregiver may be a relative, guardian, or a representative, such as a foster parent, paid by a child placing agency or CPS to provide care to child or youth.
<i>Court Appointed Special Advocate</i>	CASA	A specially screened and trained volunteer, appointed by the court, who conducts an independent investigation of child abuse, neglect, or other dependency matters, and submits a formal report proffering advisory recommendations as to the best interests of a child. In some jurisdictions, volunteers without formal legal training, such as CASAs, are appointed to represent abused and neglected children, serving in the capacity of a Guardian ad litem. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.casaforchildren.org
<i>Caseworker</i>	CW	The CPS caseworker has multiple responsibilities to the child or youth in care. The CPS caseworker ensures children's needs are met while in foster care. The caseworker is the direct link with the child, caregiver, court system, and multiple service providers. Caseworkers and foster parents are to be notified by school staff if they have concerns about a child or youth in DFPS conservatorship.



Term	Abbreviation	Definition
Circle of Support	COS	Held soon after a youth who has been removed from the home reaches age 16. Primary purpose is to develop a transition plan for the youth and to connect youth to supportive and caring adults who can help the youth when the youth leaves foster care.
Child Placing Agency	CPA	Licensed by DFPS and required to conform to minimum standards, verify, and oversee non-agency foster placements.
Child Protective Services	CPS	A division of Texas DFPS that investigates reports of abuse and neglect of children. It also provides services to children and families in their own homes, places children in foster care, provides services to help youth in foster care make the transition to adulthood, and places children in adoptive homes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/child_protection/
Conservatorship	CVS	Legal care, custody, and control of a child given by court order.
Department of Family and Protective Services	DFPS	A state agency that is charged with protecting children, adults who are elderly or have disabilities living at home or in state facilities, and licensing group day-care homes, day-care centers, and registered family homes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.dfps.state.tx.us
Department of State Health Services	DSHS	A state agency that promotes optimal health for individuals and communities while providing effective health, mental health, and substance abuse services to Texans. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.dshs.texas.gov

Glossary

Term	Abbreviation	Definition
<i>Education and Training Voucher</i>	ETV	Education and Training Voucher is a federally funded and state administered program, that offers qualified young adults, ages 16–23 from foster care, financial assistance to attend post-secondary college and training programs.
<i>Guardian ad litem</i>	GAL	A person appointed by a judge to represent the best interests of an allegedly abused or neglected child. In many counties, the GAL is the CASA.
<i>General Residential Operation</i>	GRO	A residential child-care operation that provides child care for 13 or more children or young adults.
<i>Health and Human Services Commission</i>	HHSC	HHSC is the umbrella agency for four social services departments: Department of State Health Services (DSHS); Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS); Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS); and Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). • https://hhs.texas.gov/
<i>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth</i>	LGBTQ	The American Bar Association Opening Doors Project provides the legal and child welfare community with tools, resources, and support for improving outcomes for LGBTQ young people in foster care. • http://www.americanbar.org/groups/child_law/what_we_do/projects/openingdoors.html
<i>Preparation for Adult Living</i>	PAL	A program within CPS to provide support and services to help youth prepare for independent adult living upon departure from DFPS conservatorship.
<i>Permanent Managing Conservatorship</i>	PMC	Placement of a child in the permanent conservatorship of an entity or person, by court order, (e.g. Texas DFPS, relative) with no intention of returning the child to the parent’s custody.

Term	Abbreviation	Definition
<i>Residential Treatment Center</i>	RTC	Placement of a child in treatment where the child lives at the facility providing the treatment services.
<i>Texas Education Code</i>	TEC	The laws and statutes that govern Texas education law including early education through postsecondary education.
<i>Texas Family Code</i>	TFC	The laws and statutes that govern Texas family law including child protection.
<i>Transitional Living Services</i>	TLS	A systemic and integrated approach to transition planning, services, and benefits for older foster youth and those who have aged out. Services are available to youth and young adults ages 14 up to age 23.
<i>Temporary Managing Conservatorship</i>	TMC	The awarding of temporary conservatorship of a child to Texas DFPS while efforts are underway to determine if the child can return home or to another permanent living arrangement. This may include children remaining in their home with orders from the court for particular requirements to ensure the safety of the child or the removal of a child from the family for safety and well-being purposes.
<i>Transition Center</i>	TC	<p>Transition Centers are a central clearinghouse of one-stop services for current and former foster youth, youth experiencing homelessness, and other at-risk youth. There are 16 Transition Centers throughout Texas operated by DFPS and partnerships with the Texas Workforce Commission.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/txyouth/contacts/transition.asp

Additional resources



Texas-specific Information

Children's Commission maintains a resources page containing information about improving education outcomes for children and youth in foster care.

- Children's Commission Resources and Reports webpage - <http://texaschildrenscommission.gov/resources-reports.aspx>

DFPS has a specific staff and information directed at youth and young adults in foster care or transitioning out of foster care.

- Webpage includes postsecondary education and transitional living services – http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Youth_and_Young_Adults/default.asp
- Texas Youth Connection is a youth friendly website that contains tips on transitioning out of foster care and key contacts – <http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/txyouth/>
- The Texas Foster Care Handbook is a guide for youth to explain available benefits and resources – <http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/txyouth/foster-care-handbook.pdf>

Education Reach for Texans is a statewide nonprofit focused on bringing together foster care alumni and professionals who support their success.

- Website – <http://www.educationreachfortexans.org>
- Join a mailing list to stay up to date on campus support programs and other liaison information – <http://www.educationreachfortexans.org/signup.html>
- Campus Connections: Securing campus housing & other supports for youth who were in foster care a discussion of housing challenges and potential solutions – http://www.tasfaa.org/docs/conferences/2012/presentations/CampusConnections_SecuringCampusHousingAndOtherSupportsForYouthWhoWereInFosterCare.pdf

Texas Education Agency provides links, resources, and information about support student in foster care throughout elementary and secondary education.

- Foster Care and Student Success website – http://tea.texas.gov/index4.aspx?id=2147512292&menu_id=2147483761
- Foster Care and Student Success Resource Guide for district foster care liaisons – <http://tea.texas.gov/WorkArea/linkit.aspx?LinkIdentifier=id&ItemID=25769807334&libID=25769807337>



Texas RioGrande Legal Aid has a Texas Foster Youth Justice Project that provides legal advice, assistance, guidance, and representation to youth currently and formerly in care.

- The website has information on employment, education, finances, housing, identification documents, health/medical, etc. – <http://texasfosteryouth.org/>
- A Guide for Those “Aging Out” of Foster Care in Texas – <http://texasfosteryouth.org/download/57/>
- Aftercare providers develop local resource guides. Examples – <http://texasfosteryouth.org/resources-list/>

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

- Information about the tuition and fee waiver and contacts for liaisons – <http://www.collegeforalltexans.com/apps/financialaid/tofa2.cfm?ID=480>

National and Out of State Resources

California College Pathways has extensive information about California’s efforts to promote postsecondary success for foster care alumni.

- Website has links to financial aid, housing, planning, and campus support resources – <http://www.cacollegepathways.org/>
- Foster Youth Campus Support Programs Leadership Guide – http://www.cacollegepathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/13-7-25_fostercampus_final.pdf

Casey Family Programs is a national organization focused on the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and youth in foster care.

- Supporting Success: Improving Higher Education Outcomes for Young Adults in Foster Care, tips and guidance for higher education professionals – <http://www.casey.org/supporting-success/>
- It’s My Life: Housing provides a resource guide to housing and agencies – http://calswec.berkeley.edu/files/uploads/pdf/Resources/Publications/pdf/ItsMyLife_Housing.pdf

Additional resources

Child Welfare Information Gateway is a clearinghouse for a multitude of topics and research related to child welfare. Information on higher education resources

- <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/outofhome/independent/support/education/>

College Scholarships for Foster Youth contains information about potential public and private scholarship options

- <http://www.collegescholarships.org/scholarships/foster.htm>

First Generation Students helps students find colleges, hear stories from other first generation students, and get answers to commonly asked questions

- <http://www.firstgenerationstudent.com/>

Foster Care to Success is a national nonprofit focused on helping foster care alumni achieve postsecondary success

- <http://www.fc2success.org/>

Fostering Success Michigan aims to create a college going culture among foster care alumni in Michigan and uses a coaching model to support students in higher education

- <http://fosteringsuccessmichigan.com/>

Housing and Urban Development state-by-state directory of contacts

- www.hud.gov/index.html

Legal Center for Foster Care & Education develops guidance about the relevant laws affecting students in foster care

- <http://www.fostercareandeducation.org/>

U.S. Department of Education Foster Care Transition Toolkit

- <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/foster-care/youth-transition-toolkit.pdf>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) directory of health services

- <http://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) maintains a mental health services locator by state and territory

- <http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>

Endnotes

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- ¹ Texas Education Code §51.9356.
- ² Texas Education Code §61.003(8).
- ³ Texas Education Code §51.9356.
- ⁴ Texas Family Code § 261.001.
- ⁵ For more information, see https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Fostering_Connections/supervised_independent_living.asp.
- ⁶ National Working Group on Foster and Education, National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care (2014), available at <http://formedfamiliesforward.org/images/Fostering-success-in-Education-Jan-2014.pdf>.
- ⁷ *Id.*
- ⁸ Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 26, Courtney et al (2011) http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Midwest%20Evaluation_Report_4_10_12.pdf.
- ⁹ Open Data Portal, <https://data.texas.gov/>.
- ¹⁰ National Working Group, *supra*.
- ¹¹ Texas Blueprint Implementation Data Workgroup (2015). Texas commits to transform education outcomes of students in foster care: Findings from the Texas Blueprint Implementation Data Workgroup. Children's Commission & Child and Family Research Institute, The University of Texas at Austin.
- ¹² For more information, see <http://www.ahomewithin.org/>.
- ¹³ For more information, see http://www.americanbar.org/groups/child_law/what_we_do/projects/openingdoors.html.
- ¹⁴ Texas Education Code §51.978.
- ¹⁵ American Psychiatric Association (2000). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (4th ed., text rev.). Washington, DC: Author.
- ¹⁶ Felitti, V.J., Anda, R.F., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D.F., Spitz, A.M., Edwards, V., Koss, M.P., & Marks, J.S. (1998). Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, 14(4), 245-258.
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- ²⁰ McInerney, M., & McKlindon, *supra*.
- ²¹ Anctil, T. M., McCubbin, L. D., O'Brien, K., & Pecora, P. (2007). An evaluation of recovery factors for foster care alumni with physical or psychiatric impairments: Predictors of psychological outcomes. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29, 1021–1034.
- ²² Pecora, P. J. (2010). Why current and former recipients of foster care need high quality mental health services. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 37(1–2), 185–190.
- ²³ English, D., & Bradford, C. (2004). Foster youth transition to independence study. <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/CA/pub/documents/FYTfinal2004.pdf>.
- ²⁴ Anctil, T. M., McCubbin, L. D., O'Brien, K., & Pecora, P. (2007), *supra*.
- ²⁵ Buchanan A¹, Ten Brinke J², Flouri E. Parental background, social disadvantage, public “care,” and psychological problems in adolescence and adulthood. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry*. 2000 Nov;9(11):1415.; Clark C, Caldwell T, Power C, Stansfeld SA. Does the influence of childhood adversity on psychopathology persist across the lifecourse? A 45-year prospective epidemiologic study. *Ann Epidemiol*.2010 May;20(5):385–94. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.annepidem.2010.02.008>.
- ²⁶ Trauma Facts for Educators (adapted from “Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators”, 2008, The National Child Traumatic Stress Network).



TEXAS

Health and Human Services

**Texas Department of Family
and Protective Services**



SUPREME COURT OF TEXAS PERMANENT JUDICIAL
COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

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**Texas Higher Education
Coordinating Board**

EDUCATION
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