

**TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY & PROTECTIVE SERVICES
TRANSITIONAL LIVING SERVICES
STATE- AND FEDERALLY-FUNDED PROGRAMS
FOR INDIVIDUALS CURRENTLY OR FORMERLY IN FOSTER CARE**

***Contact Regional Preparation for Adult Living Staff for more information about these services at http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/PAL_coordinators.asp

PREPARATION FOR ADULT LIVING (PAL) SERVICES/BENEFITS: The DFPS Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program assists older youth in foster care prepare for their departure and transition from DFPS care and support. Supportive services and benefits are provided to eligible youth up to age 21 to become self-sufficient and productive adults. Funded by federal Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, State general revenue funds and/or community match (20%). PAL services include:

- Life skills assessment (Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment) to assess strength and needs in life skills attainment www.caseylifeskills.org
- Life skills training in the following core areas:
 - Health and Safety;
 - Housing and Transportation;
 - Job Readiness;
 - Financial Management;
 - Life Decisions/Responsibility;
 - Personal/Social Relationships
- Educational/vocational services
- Supportive services (based on need and funding availability) may include:
 - graduation items,
 - counseling,
 - tutoring
 - driver's education fees
 - mentoring
- A transitional living allowance up to \$1,000 - distributed in increments up to \$500 per month, for youth who participate in PAL training, to help youth with initial start-up costs in adult living.
- Aftercare room and board assistance (based on need) up to \$500 per month for rent, utilities, utility deposits, food, etc. (not to exceed \$3,000 of accumulated payments per youth)
- Case management to help youth with self-sufficiency planning and resource coordination.

THE CPS EXTENDED CARE PROGRAM ALLOWS YOUTH TO:

- Attend full time high school regularly up to the end of the month of their 22nd birthday; or
- Attend a full time certified vocational or technical program regularly that allows for a young adult to be hired into the workforce up to the end of the month of their 21st birthday. (The number of hours enrolled must be acceptable to the department and consistent with the transition plan.); or
- Attend full time GED (Graduate Equivalence Diploma) classes regularly up to the end of the month of their 19th birthday. (The number of hours enrolled must be acceptable to the department and consistent with the transition plan); or
- Allows for admission to a college, or to a vocational program not to exceed 3 ½ months following the end of the month in which they graduate from high school or complete the GED.

Youth must sign a voluntary extended foster care agreement before age 18 to establish eligibility for CPS Extended Care

With the implementation of **Fostering Connections on 10-01-2010**, a youth who ages out of foster care at age 18 will continue to be eligible for extended foster care provided the youth signs a voluntary extended foster care agreement before age 18 and is:

18 to 21 year olds and:

- regularly attending high school or enrolled in a program leading toward a high school diploma or school equivalence certificate (GED); or is

18 to 21 years old and;

- regularly attending an institution of higher education or a post secondary vocational or technical program; or
- actively participating in a program or activity that promotes, or removes barriers to, employment;

- employed for at least 80 hours per month; or
- incapable of doing any of the above due to a documented medical condition.

RETURN TO CARE PROGRAM ALLOWS YOUTH TO:

- Attend full time high school regularly up to the end of the month of their 22nd birthday; or
- Attend a full time certified vocational or technical program regularly that allows for a young adult to be hired into the workforce up to the end of the month of their 21st birthday. (The number of hours enrolled must be acceptable to the department and consistent with the transition plan.); or
- Attend full time GED (Graduate Equivalence Diploma) classes regularly up to the end of the month of their 21st birthday. (The number of hours enrolled must be acceptable to the department and consistent with the transition plan.); or
- Return on a break from college or technical or vocational program for at least one month, but no more than 4 months up to their 21st birthday

Youth must meet the Return to Foster Care requirements and sign a Voluntary Return to Foster Care Agreement.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING VOUCHER (ETV) PROGRAM: ETV is a federally-funded (Chafee) and state-administered program. Based on need, foster care youth ages 16 to 23 may be eligible to receive up to \$5,000 in financial assistance per year to help them reach their postsecondary educational goals if they meet the following criteria:

- Must meet college enrollment criteria and be enrolled at least 6 semester hours in an accredited or pre-accredited public or non-profit program that provides a bachelor's degree or not less than a 2 year program that provides credit towards a degree or certification; or
- If a youth is beyond the age of compulsory school attendance (age 18), she or he must be enrolled at least part-time (6 hours) in an accredited or pre-accredited program that provides training toward gainful employment; or
- Youth participating in the ETV Program on their 21st birthday can remain eligible until 23 years of age as long as they are enrolled and making satisfactory progress toward completing their postsecondary education or training program; or
- Youth interested in online correspondence and/or distance learning courses must contact ETV staff for prior approval.

For more information on ETV go to www.bcfs.net.etv

TUITION AND FEE WAIVER (Texas Law): This provides exemptions to individuals formerly in Texas state foster care (re: Section 54.211 and 54.2111 of the Texas Education Code) and adopted youth from payment of tuition and fees at Texas' state supported institutions of higher education. While U.S. citizenship or qualified alien status is not required, it is strongly encouraged as youth without such status will have difficulty obtaining any college federal financial assistance. To be exempt from the payment of tuition and fees youth must have been in DFPS conservatorship. Exemptions occur:

- the day before the student's 18th birthday;
- the day of the student's 14th birthday, if the youth was eligible for adoption (parental rights being terminated) on or after that day ;
- the day the student graduated from high school or received the equivalent of a high school diploma;
- a youth was adopted and the adoption occurred on or after September 1, 2009;
- permanent managing conservatorship of the youth was granted to a non-parent on or after September 1, 2009; or
- when a student is enrolled in a dual credit course or other course in which the student may earn joint high school and college credit.

Youth must be enrolled in an institution of higher education as an undergraduate¹ or in a dual credit course or other course for which a high school student may earn joint high school and college credit no be any later than the youth's 25th birthday.

¹Youth may enroll in AA-level courses or vocational / certificate courses at their local community colleges.

Adopted youth subject to an adoption assistance agreement that provides monthly payments and Medicaid benefits are also eligible for the tuition and fee waiver. There is no age limit that this student must meet to enroll in college in order to take advantage of the tuition and fee waiver.

TRANSITIONAL MEDICAID / STAR HEALTH: Provides continuous medical coverage to individual's age 18 to 21 that have aged out of foster care and meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Be a current Texas resident between 18 and 21 years of age;
- Be a U.S. citizen or qualified alien;
- Aged out of Texas foster care / DFPS custody at age 18;
- Have no other medical coverage (private insurance or other category of Medicaid);
- Have no resources valued at more than \$10,000; and
- Meet the Texas Department of Human Services (DHS) income guidelines for this category of Medicaid;

To report any address change contact [Jordan Young](#), DHS Centralized Benefits Section at 1-800-248-1078, ext. 9658 or 512-908-8131 or 8145.

FORMER FOSTER CARE IN HIGHER EDUCATION (FFCHE) PROGRAM. Effective October 1, 2009, the Health and Human Services Commission is required to provide health care benefits to certain former foster care youth who are at least 21 years or older, but younger than 23 years of age, who are eligible to receive assistance as an independent foster youth and who are enrolled in an institution of higher learning. To request the FFCHE application individuals must - contact Jordan Young, DHS Centralized Benefits Section at 1-800-248-1078, ext. 9658 or 2-1-1.

TEXAS YOUTH HOTLINE is a resource for youth who are under 21 years of age, including those who have aged out of the foster care system. Youth may contact the statewide hotline at **1-800-210-2278** for telephone counseling, information, and referrals. The hotline can help young adults locate services available in their communities

TEXAS YOUTH CONNECTION website, designed with input from youth is a resource for youth in the Texas Foster Care system, alumni of foster care or for youth seeking general tips and information. This website offers information and resources in education, finances, records, diversity, health, contacts, job links, food, housing, books, stories, hotlines and other hot stuff. This website will be the location of the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) Youth Survey. Check this resource out at: www.texasyouthconnection.org

TRANSITION PLANNING: The transition plan identifies services for each youth to accomplish goals to assist them in transitioning from foster care. The plan is used statewide and incorporated into the youth's plan of service and helps to ensure all youth are receiving consistent services. Procedures for identifying caring adults for youth and involving them in transition planning and Circles of Support help to ensure personal and community connections are incorporated into the transition planning process.

CIRCLES OF SUPPORT (COS): Circles of Support is a youth driven process based on the Family Group Decision Making model (FGDM) and is offered to youth beginning at 16 years of age. This is a facilitated meeting with participants that a youth identifies as "caring adults" who make up their support system. COS participants can be a youth's foster care providers, teachers, relatives, church members, a mentor and so on. These participants come together to review the youth's transition plan, identifying strengths, hopes and dreams, goals and needs in the areas of education, employment, health/mental health needs, housing, and PAL life skills training components. A section has been added to the transition plan template to address special needs for youth with disabilities. Each caring adult participant identifies a personal way they can help support the youth's transition plan and to help attain short- and long-term goals toward self-sufficiency. All participants sign the transition plan to seal their agreements.

Transition Centers provide an array of comprehensive services through a one-stop Center approach that includes access and referrals to community partners and resources. Services may include employment assistance, training, educational support and various transitional living services geared specifically to meet the individual needs of current and former foster youth ages 15 to 25. Additional services such as PAL classes, job search and job readiness classes, food and housing assistance, and substance abuse / mental health counseling may be incorporated into Center services. Transition Centers may also serve as a central clearinghouse where local partners such as Workforce Solutions, local community colleges and universities, or the Texas Youth Commission can meet on a regular basis to jointly serve the diverse needs of the youth. There are currently 10 Transition Centers independently operated and supported by partnerships between DFPS and their providers, the Texas Workforce Commission, and Casey Family Programs. These Centers are located in Houston, Dallas, Austin, San Antonio, Kerrville, Central Texas, Corpus Christi, El Paso, and Beaumont.

Transition Center Expansion (81st Legislative Session-Exceptional Item #14)- \$200,000 one-time funds were requested as seed money to expand transition centers in eight (8) other communities in Texas. The sites for these new Centers were identified in order to provide a consistent baseline of services to youth aging out of care or for older youth in areas of the state where transition centers were not available. New Transition Centers are expected to become operational the Summer of 2010 and will be located in:

- Fort Worth (Region 3)
- San Angelo (Region 9)

- Tyler (Region 4)
- McAllen (Region)
- Lubbock (Region 1); and
- Abilene (Region 2)

Transition Centers in Region 1 and Cameron County are expected to open in FY 2011.

Each identified area received a one time \$25,000 developmental grant. Effective and successful transition centers involve multiple partners (local, state, and federal), each of whom brings different strengths and resources in addition to serving a particular role to ensure success of the center. Grantees are expected to list and describe how partners and other collaborations will be involved in the provision of services to youth and in sustaining these Centers once DFPS funds end.

Youth Specialists (alumni of foster care) have been hired as full time Texas Department of Family and Protective Services employees in each region of our state. Youth Specialists and their supervisors play a key role in the development and support of local youth leadership councils. Youth specialists also serve to help strengthen the casework provided by CPS by informing policy and practice.

Texas Workforce Development Boards Partnership- Texas Family Code 264.121, as amended by Senate Bill 6 and enacted by the 79th Legislature (2005), required the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services and the **Local Texas Workforce Development Boards** to jointly develop and adopt an Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) addressing the unique challenges facing current and foster youth transitioning to independent living. 28 Workforce Boards and 11 DFPS regional offices have entered into an MOU to support foster youth.

The purpose of the MOU is to define the principal parties' responsibilities relating to:

- Furthering the objectives of the DFPS Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program;
- Ensuring services are prioritized and targeted to meet the needs of current and former foster youth; and
- Making referrals, where feasible, for short term housing for foster youth who need housing

Employment Preference to Former Foster Youth- Section 1. Subtitle B, Title 6, Government Code, is amended by adding Chapter 672 requiring state agencies to give an employment preference to former foster youth who were in the permanent managing conservatorship of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services on the day preceding the individual's 18th birthday over other applicants for the same position who do not have a greater qualification. An individual is entitled to an employment preference only if the individual is 25 years of age or younger (day before turning 26).

National Youth In Transition Data Base (NYTD)- The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) is a data collection system created to track independent living services and learn how successful states are in preparing youth to move from state care into adulthood. Texas will survey youth who are in foster care when they are age 17 and then do follow-up surveys of some youth at age 19 and the same youth again at age 21. Data Collection begins October 1, 2010.

More information related to Transitional Living Services is available at:

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