Campus Connections:

Securing Campus Housing & Other Supports for Youth Who Were in Foster Care

TEXAS Reach

Embracing Higher Education for Foster Youth

OneVoice A Collaborative for Health & Human Services **Texas**

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*A special thank you to Texas Representative Eddie Lucio III and his legislative staff for their dedication in addressing the housing needs of youth formerly in foster care.

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PURPOSE OF MEETING GUIDE

This publication was developed in response to Texas House Bill 452, which was passed in May 2011 and requires all public post-secondary institutions to assist young adults formerly in foster care, referred to in this publication as "foster care alumni." This manual is a step-by-step guide on how to build a comprehensive support system, including housing, for students who were formally in foster care.

The majority of young adults who were in the foster care system have post-secondary goals and want to achieve self-sufficiency and success. However, research has shown that very small numbers, as low as 3-11%, graduate or complete a post-high school college or training program (Casey Family Programs, December 2010). Without educational opportunities, young adults can get caught up in the cycle of poverty.

Low graduation rates of foster care alumni are due in part to the fact that many young adults who grew up in foster care are unprepared for college and do not have a supportive family network expecting them to succeed and guiding them through this huge life transition. Additionally, these students often do not have homes to return to when classes are not in session. Therefore, foster care alumni need supportive services and adults who can help them to navigate the college experience.

GETTING STARTED

Post-secondary institutions want every student to succeed and they play an important role in providing coordinated support to young adults who were formerly in foster care. This meeting guide is designed to assist institutions of higher learning in taking the first steps towards creating a successful team that will be responsible for building these support services. These steps include:

1. **Identify a campus leadership team**
2. **Schedule an initial meeting to begin the collaborative process**
3. **Set up support services**
4. **Conduct outreach to foster care alumni students**
5. **Evaluate**

> **For ongoing support in getting started, visit the Texas Reach website at**
> **http://www.texasreach.org to subscribe to the ReachList.**
> **Get instantly connected to a network of support!**

STEP #1) IDENTIFY A LEADERSHIP TEAM

Campus Team Members:

In order to be successful in building your team you will want to consider the potential needs, challenges and barriers that a student formerly in foster care might face and who on campus has the knowledge and ability to respond to these issues. The foster care alumni currently on your campus will be the best people to articulate the challenges they face.

Once you have identified what needs should be addressed, you can begin to bring together those best able to offer solutions. You may want to consider campus staff in the following areas:

- Housing/Residential Life
- Homeless Liaison
- Student Affairs
- Academic Advising/Counseling
- Office of Disabilities
- Transportation
- Financial Aid
- Academic Support (Reading, Writing, and Math Help Labs, Tutoring, First-Year Experience, and Study Skills)

Community Team Members:

The good news is that you don't have to do this work alone. Community members are important partners who bring a wealth of knowledge about community resources and non-traditional funding sources. The partnerships you build may lead to the development of new programs or ways to provide services to foster care alumni, particularly for housing and transportation needs. Each community is unique and there may be additional local foundations and organizations interested in supporting foster care alumni. A few suggestions for community partners are listed below:

- Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Staff
  - Help prepare youth, 16 and older, for their transition from foster care
- DFPS Regional Children's Protective Services (CPS) Youth Specialist
  - Employees of CPS who aged out of foster care; facilitate youth leadership councils that consist of young adults who were formerly in foster care and work to improve policies and practices for children and youth currently in foster care
- Aftercare Service Providers
  - Contracted by DFPS in each region to provide case management to foster care alumni up to age 21
- Transition Centers
  - Serve as a central location for PAL and other services for youth aging out of or who have left foster care

- Apartment Association
- City/County Housing Authority
- Regional Transit Authority
- County Child Welfare Board
  - Appointed volunteers that are responsible for coordinating county and state resources
- Foster Parent Associations
- Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)
  - Volunteers appointed by the court that represent the best interests of children in the child welfare system

Making the Invitation:

As you contact potential meeting participants you may let them know that:

- Your college or university is working on a unique initiative to address the needs of students who were formerly in foster care and are now in college. You are planning an initial meeting to discuss how community partners might benefit from this effort and assist these young adults in meeting their educational goals.
- To encourage participation, let them know that they have been specifically invited because their expertise and viewpoint will be critical to the development of this new initiative.

STEP #2) THE INITIAL MEETING

This section outlines the details that will need to be shared and discussed in your initial stakeholder meeting.

Making the Case:

During this part of the meeting you are providing an overview of the challenges faced by youth who were formerly in foster care as well as the number of youth who may potentially be in need of support on college campuses. Presenting this information at the first meeting will ensure that all stakeholders are aware of why this population needs particular attention. Sample language and statistics are below; however, you could also ask your partners from DFPS to present this information to the group.

A. Why are special programs critical to this cohort of college students?

Youth who grow up in and age out of foster care have experienced much upheaval and difficulty. Many have experienced multiple placements and highly structured settings. Although the child protection system is designed to reunify children with their families or identify another permanent placement for those who age out of care, the system does not always support successful outcomes for these youth. Research shows that many of these young people experience severe trauma before coming into care and unfortunately sometimes while in care. While all independent and first year students need support, these young people may need additional guidance. These young adults do not have the safety net of a family to turn to in times of crisis or need.

B. What do the numbers look like?

➢ As of December 2011 there were 3,924 youth ages 14-17 in foster care in Texas (DFPS Data Book, 2011). Over 1,400 turned 18 while in foster care.

➢ In Fiscal Year 2011, there were almost 3,000 foster care alumni at post-secondary institutions around Texas including:

Community Colleges	1,898
Public Universities	797
Technical Colleges	101
State Colleges	68
Health Related Institutions	1

These numbers were calculated based on tuition and fee waivers used by foster care alumni. The financial aid department of your institution may provide your team with a sense of how many students you may be trying to serve through your efforts.

Did you know?

Without appropriate support, only 330 (11%) of the 3,000 foster care alumni in Texas post-secondary institutions will graduate. (Calculation based on highest percentage of foster care alumni shown to graduate from college – Casey Family Programs, July 2011).

C. Federal and state laws related to supports for students who are foster care alumni

Providing meeting participants with a sense of what is legally required for foster care alumni can help increase their understanding of what roles partners could and should play in services planning. Three major pieces of legislation that are important to mention are:

Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA)

Amendments to this federal act extend support services to individuals who were in foster care after reaching age 13 and/or have aged out of the foster care system. These support services include tutoring, mentoring and assisting students to secure temporary housing during breaks in the academic year." In addition, if a post-secondary institution receives HEOA funds, it must provide outreach regarding financial aid eligibility.

McKinney-Vento Act

The McKinney Vento Act applies to homeless or unaccompanied youth who can be classified as "independent students." Youth who were in foster care at any time after the age of 13 were also added to this classification. This definition allows foster care alumni to apply for financial aid without a parent or guardian and makes them eligible for higher amounts of financial aid. *McKinney-Vento also defines as homeless a student living in a campus dormitory if they would otherwise be homeless were they not able to live in the dormitory.* Students can qualify for this provision up until the age of 21; however, campus personnel can request a waiver override so that the provisions of the act apply to a student up until the age of 23.

Texas House Bill 452, introduced by Representative Lucio III, was enacted in 2011. This legislation directs college and universities to assist youth formerly in foster care in finding housing in between school semesters. This law applies to any student who was under the conservatorship of the Department of Family and Protective Services preceding the student's 18th birthday or the date the student was emancipated by a court of law. To qualify, the student must also be enrolled full-time at the institution during the academic term prior to the time at which they request housing assistance and must be registered to enroll the following semester. HB 452 requires that post-secondary institutions assist qualifying students who do not have other reasonable temporary housing to obtain it.

STEP #3) SETTING UP SUPPORT SERVICES

Housing Options

At the meeting, it may be beneficial to consider other options exist to meet the housing needs of foster care alumni. Below are some ideas and examples.

➢ **Residence Halls**

In between semesters, on campus residence halls may remain open for students who do not have appropriate housing options. There are several issues to consider, including logistics, security and cost. Students and campus staff may be able to work with the local DFPS staff or other community partners to secure funds for these arrangements as well as for food and transportation during these break periods. Below are two examples of how post-secondary institutions met the housing needs of students in between academic breaks through "Break Housing."

Group Residence Hall Housing- Texas A&M Commerce	Individual Residence Hall Housing- University of Texas Pan American-
Texas A&M Commerce offers a residence hall option throughout the year for students that cannot or prefer not to go home. - A student makes a request for "Break Housing" to the Residential Life office and pays a small fee which is billed to the student's account—financial aid can cover this cost. - Only one hall is open during semester breaks; students not living in that hall move to the location of "Break Housing." - Food service is available during the summer, but not during Christmas or Spring Break. - Students always have access to a kitchen in the main hall to prepare their own food.	UT Pan American offers housing options for students registered for the next semester. - Students are asked to fill out a Break Housing Agreement Form. - Students remain in their current residence hall rooms over the breaks. - All student access to the residence halls is deactivated except for students residing in Break Housing. - A daily fee is charged to the student's account. - There are no food services available. - UT Pan Am also offers a $3,000 housing scholarship for students who qualify.

➢ **Privately Operated On-Campus Housing**

An additional option to explore is privately operated on-campus housing facilities. The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) learned that privately operated on campus housing facilities were already amenable to making year round housing available. Because of the relationships made with these facilities, UTSA staff were able to facilitate linking foster care alumni students to this resource.

➢ **Apartments**

Due to their abundance and year round availability, apartments are viable options for ensuring youth have appropriate housing. There are some challenges to this arrangement which are listed below along with potential solutions.

❖ Having access to a cosigner

Like many young adults entering college, many of those aging out of the foster care system do not have an adequate employment or credit history to be approved for an apartment without a cosigner. While the majority of students can look to a parent to serve in this capacity, foster care alumnus, in general, do not have a parent or other adult who can act in the role of co-signer. Building relationships with complex owners and managers can help post-secondary institutions provide more options to foster care alumni in need. Apartments that typically work with college students may be more willing to work with students that do not have access to a cosigner.

❖ Paying rent

One resource foster care alumni have for accessing apartment housing is their Education and Training Voucher (ETV). The ETV may pay for their living expenses, but apartments are not always familiar with that resource type and may be uncertain about accepting this form of reimbursement.

Explaining ETV to Apartments:
- Explain that ETV is like a college scholarship provided by and directly paid for by the state.
- Provide the apartment manager with contact information for the regional ETV coordinator (see chart at the back of this guide), if there are additional questions.
- Ensure the Letter of Guarantee of Payment is given to the apartment.
  - Typically, the apartment will approve the student after receiving a Letter of Guarantee of Payment from the ETV Coordinator. This letter will only be sent if the student was approved to receive the ETV and payments are made directly to the landlord.

Encourage the student to request a Purchase Voucher from their ETV coordinator for the whole semester to ensure the student has their rent secured. The student will need to provide the ETV coordinator the Tax ID from the apartment, utility company, or other services being rendered. The purchase voucher will be paid to the apartment or other providers in one lump sum.

For more detailed information on the ETV, please visit the following websites:

http://www.bcfs.net/netcommunity/page.aspx?pid=988
http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/etv.asp

Additional Support Services

Students need more than just housing in order to succeed. Below are options for additional supports you can consider.

1) Transportation & Meals
Students can use funds from employment, the ETV, Transitional Living Allowance or After Care Room and Board Assistance to pay for meals. Since on campus cafeterias or restaurants may not be open in between semesters campuses should identify nearby resources and transportation options that students can use to secure food.

2) Mentoring, Counseling, and Peer Support
- One-on-one counseling
- Mentors—peer and/or professional
- Group activities
- Clubs/student organizations

- Model: Foster Care Alumni Creating Educational Success - (FACES) is an organization at Texas State University-San Marcos that gives support and provides social activities for foster care alumni. For more information visit: http://www.vpsa.txstate.edu/programs-and-services/Foster-Care-Alumni.html.
- Model: Campus Champions - located at all Austin Community College (ACC) campuses, Campus Champions are made up of advisors that support foster care alumni students entering college. These advisors assist students with academic course selection and provide guidance and assistance throughout the student's experience at ACC. For more information visit, http://www.austincc.edu/fca/Page2.html.
- Model: Jump Start - located at Austin Community College, Jump Start provides campus tours, advising, registration and social activities specifically for foster care alumni.

3) Opportunities for Foster Care Alumni Student Leadership
Foster care alumni students can help design events and engage their peers. They can lead focus groups, kick off special events and even participate in work study. University of Texas El Paso hired a foster care alumnus to work in the Advising Office after the student graduated.

4) Special Events
- Welcome dinners
- Move in days
- Care packages
- Graduation Celebrations

Foster Care Benefits for Students

The state provides certain benefits to foster care alumni that may be beneficial in securing housing and other supports; therefore, they are important information to share with meeting participants.

Benefit	Details	Eligibility	Enrollment
Education & Training Voucher (ETV)	• Up to $5,000 per year based on need • For education related expenses which can include rent, utilities, childcare, computers, books, transportation and other personal expenses	• Youth age 16 (likely to remain in care till 18) • Youth who have aged out of foster care • Must be enrolled before age 21 • Youth using the ETV can participate up to age 23 as long as they are enrolled & making satisfactory progress toward completion of educational goals • Student must be enrolled at least 6 hours per semester or 3 in a summer semester	www.bcfs.net/etv or call 1-877-268-4063 to be directed to the ETV staff in your region
Tuition & Fee Waiver for Higher Education	• Applies only to Texas state supported colleges & universities to cover all tuition and fees	• In foster care on or after the day before their 18th birthday or when they graduated from high school/received GED • Must enroll and take one class before age 25. This "locks in" the student's eligibility for the waiver which at this time does not have an upper age limit.	**Contact: Regional PAL coordinator** http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/child_protection/preparation_for_adult_living/PAL_coordinators.asp; **Shannon Ramsey, DFPS Transition Lead - Shannon.ramsey@dfps.state.tx.us** *PAL staff or Adoption Eligibility Assistance staff will provide youth with a signed Tuition Fee Waiver letter to take to the registrar's office of the college, university, vocational or technical institute.*
STAR Health Medicaid	• Coordinated physical and behavioral health care services	• Students can continue with Medicaid enrollment after they age out of foster care up to the age of 21	www.yourtexasbenefits.com
Former Foster Care in Higher Education Program (FFCHE)	• Health coverage for youth after STAR Health Medicaid coverage ends	• From age 21 through first month of 23rd birthday • Making satisfactory academic progress • Must be enrolled in higher education • Aged out of DFPS • Meet income & asset limits	Call 1-800-248-1078 until 7/31/12 After 7/31/12, youth will need to Dial 2-1-1 and self-identify as a former foster youth to receive and update their Health Coverage Benefits
Transition Living Allowance	• A total of $1,000 to be distributed in increments that cannot exceed $500 per month • Can be used for any expenses the youth has after they transition from foster care	• Be at least 16 and likely to remain in care until 18 – qualify up to 21 years old at which time all payments must be made • Must be a US citizen or qualified alien • Must initiate allowance within 24 months of leaving paid foster or residential care • Completed PAL Life Skills Training • Must be moving into or living in an independent living arrangement (supervised or semi-supervised setting) • Must be enrolled and attending or college or a training/technical school	**Contact: Regional PAL coordinator** http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/child_protection/preparation_for_adult_living/PAL_coordinators.asp **If you cannot locate the information you need, contact the State PAL Specialist:** Gaye.vopat@dfps.state.tx.us; 512-438-5442
Aftercare Room & Board	• A total cap of $3,000 distributed in increments of $500 a month based on need • Exceptions to cap are considered in emergency or special circumstances • Can be used for rent, deposits, utilities & groceries	• Must have aged out of foster care • Must be a US Citizen or qualified resident • Must be enrolled in educational program • Must prove financial need	**Contact: PAL coordinator for the young adult (See back of guide)** **If you cannot locate the information you need, contact the State PAL Specialist:** Gaye.vopat@dfps.state.tx.us ; 512-438-5442

STEP #4) OUTREACH TO FOSTER CARE ALUMNI STUDENTS

As you meet with stakeholders both on campus and in the community, they will be curious about the numbers of students formerly in care on your campus. Below are steps that can help you identify and conduct outreach efforts to these students.

A. Identifying foster care alumni students
   - Most colleges and universities, through their Student Accounting Offices, Business Offices, or Financial Aid Offices, are able to identify students who have identified themselves as having been in foster care on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Question 52 or those students at your institution who are using the tuition and fee waiver.
   - You can reach out to foster care alumni before services are developed, to forecast interest/response, or you can wait until you have some basic supports available such as a campus foster care liaison or champion and notify them at that time.
   - Most schools that move forward do send out a letter notifying foster care alumni that a particular support is available and many provide this information on their website.
     - Model: Sam Houston State University's FORWARD Program: Moving Foster Youth Forward has a comprehensive website for foster care alumni with a whole page devoted to community resources. http://www.shsu.edu/~forward/

B. Provide training to campus staff to deepen their knowledge and awareness of the foster care experience and its potential impact on education.
   - Schools that interface with foster care alumni students have found it beneficial to obtain deeper training on the impact of the foster care experience on young people as they transition into adulthood in a college setting.

C. Contact regional PAL staff, CPS Youth Specialists, and other foster care providers to promote benefits and programs.

Step #5) EVALUATION

A number of programs have found it very helpful to begin tracking data right from the beginning of their initiative.   This can assist you in continuing to "make the case" to do this work and to explore further collaboration and funding.   The most commonly tracked data items are: number of students and their demographics, GPA, retention, enrollment in developmental courses, and graduation rates.

Once you have data on foster care alumni students, you can compare that data to similar data points on your general student population. This can be helpful as you evaluate which programs and resources are the most helpful.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Contact	Phone/Email
DFPS Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Regional Lead Staff	http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/child_protection/preparation_for_adult_living/PAL_coordinators.asp
State PAL Specialist – Gaye Vopat	Gaye.vopat@dfps.state.tx.us; 512-438-5442
Transitional Lead - Resources for Youth Aging out of Foster Care – Shannon Ramsey	Shannon.ramsey@dfps.state.tx.us; 512-438-2350
ETV & Youth Specialist Liaison – Courtney Jones	Courtney.Jones@dfps.state.tx.us; 512-438-3769
Apartment Associations of Texas	http://www.taa.org/apartmentassociations/
Transit Authorities	http://www.apta.com/resources/links/unitedstates/Pages/TexasTransitLinks.aspx#a2
Transition Centers	http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/txyouth/resources/local/default.asp Transition Centers provide a "one-stop" shop of resources for youth formally in foster care.
Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs	(512) 475-3800; http://www.tdhca.state.tx.us/

Housing Authorities in Texas

City/County/Region Covered	Phone Number
Austin	512-477-4488
Beaumont	409-951-7200
Dallas	214-951-8300
El Paso	915-849-3742
Fort Worth	817-333-3400
Galveston	409-765-1900
Georgetown	512-863-5565

City/County/Region Covered	Phone Number
Harris County	713-578-2100
Houston	713-260-0377
Kermit	512-477-8910
Montgomery	610-275-5720
Mt. Pleasant	903-572-2829
Nacogdoches	936-569-1131
New Boston	903-628-2951
San Antonio	210-477-6262
Sherman	903-893-3139
Temple	254-773-2009
Travis County	512-480-8245
Waco	254-752-0324
Wichita Falls	940-723-8389

Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Contacts:

Operated by Baptist Children and Family Services (BCFS); Phone: 1-877-268-4063; Fax: 210-208-5605
Website: http://www.bcfs.net/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?&pid=988

If you have difficulty reaching your coordinator, please call the ETV hotline at 1-877-268-4063 or the Program Director, Whitney Vela directly at 210-410-4655.

Counties Served	DFPS Regions	Regional ETV Coordinator
Region 1- Lubbock http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/contact_us/counties.asp?r=1 Region 2- Abilene http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/contact_us/counties.asp?r=2 Region 9- Midland http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/contact_us/counties.asp?r=9 Region 10- El Paso http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/contact_us/counties.asp?r=10 Region 11-Edinburg http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/contact_us/counties.asp?r=11	1, 2, 9, 10 and 11	Elizabeth Arizpe, earizpe@bcfs.net 210-240-6573
Region 3- Arlington http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/contact_us/counties.asp?r=3 Region 4- Tyler http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/contact_us/counties.asp?r=4	Regions 3 and 4	Michelle Marshall, mmarshall@bcfs.net 469-834-6858
Region 5- Beaumont http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/contact_us/counties.asp?r=5	Region 5	Whitney Vela, wvela@bcfs.net 210-410-9974
Region 6- Houston http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/contact_us/counties.asp?r=6 Region 8- San Antonio http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/contact_us/counties.asp?r=8	Region 6 and Region 8 LAST NAME (A-Mi)	Jennifer Guerra, jennifer.guerra@bcfs.net 832-247-4655
Region 7- Austin http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/contact_us/counties.asp?r=7 Region 8- San Antonio http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/contact_us/counties.asp?r=8	Region 7 and Region 8 LAST NAME (Mo-Z)	Marisol Lopez marisol.lopez@bcfs.net 210-332-8521

Additional Resources:

❖ Casey Family Programs. December, 2010. *Supporting Success: Improving High Education Outcomes for Students from Foster Care (Version 2.0).* Available at: http://www.casey.org/resources/publications/SupportingSuccess.htm.

❖ Casey Family Programs, July 2011, *Education Is the Lifeline for Youth in Foster Care*. Available at: http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/pdf/EducationalOutcomesFactSheet.pdf.

❖ Department of Family and Protective Services DataBook. 2011. Available at: www.dfps.state.tx.us/About/Data_Books_and_Annual_Reports/2011/default.asp.

❖ Texans Care for Children. *Transitions to Adulthood for Texas Foster Youth*. Available at: http://texanscareforchildren.org/Images/Interior/reports/trans*itions_to_adulthood_for_texas_foster_youth.pdf.*

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By linking higher education and child welfare decision makers from across the state and sharing resources and best practices, Texas REACH seeks to increase the number of former foster youth entering and succeeding in college.

One Voice Texas is a network of more than 100 public, private and non-profit organizations and individuals working together to ensure that the health and human services needs of all Texans are addressed in legislative, regulatory, funding and other public policy initiatives.