

TTU PEGASUS Mentor Training

Working with Foster Care Youth

Foster Care Youth

What is Foster Care

When children have to be placed outside their home, and there is not an appropriate non-custodial parent or relative willing and able to care for them and there are not any close family friends that the court can give temporary legal possession, the court will ask Child Protective Services (CPS) to place the child temporarily in a foster care setting which include the following:

- foster family home or group home that have been either trained and verified by CPS, licensed by DFPS' Office of Residential Child-Care Licensing (RCCL), or verified by an RCCL-licensed child-placing agency
- residential group care facility that has been licensed by RCCL; or
- facility under the authority of another state agency (e.g. Buchner's, Pathways, etc.)

Foster care is meant to be a temporary situation for a child until a permanent living arrangement (e.g. grandparents, friends, adopted family, etc.) can be obtained. The foster care placement may become the permanent placement for the child, either as an adoptive home, as a home that has taken managing conservatorship of the child, or, if there are no other preferable options available, as a long term foster care placement.

Though CPS attempts to ensure quality services for children placed in foster care, such children may experience various placement changes over time due to lack of permanency commitments, licensing standards violations, court rulings, or changes in the foster home/facility. CPS has a variety of initiatives designed to increase placement options in order to have a diverse range of choices to match to individual child needs.

Transitional Living Services

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) provides Chafee Foster Care Independence Program services through its Transitional Living Services programs. These programs include Preparation for Adult Living (PAL), Education and Training Vouchers (ETV), and other related services and support of young people 16 to 21 years of age who are currently or formerly in foster care, or transitioning out of care.

Transitional Living Services includes:

- Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) programs
- the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program
- formal transition planning
- Circles of Support (COS)
- Extended Care for youth up to the age of 22 to complete high school or up to

- Medicaid for youth 18 to 21 years of age with a single application, youth surveys and assessments

DFPS established a Transitional Living Services Initiative as part of CPS Reform efforts. The general objective of the initiative has been to implement a systemic and integrated approach in transition planning and services affecting youth aging out of state foster care.

In order to consistently improve services, the initiative participants (including DFPS staff, alumni, and external partners) identified a baseline of transition and life skills training services. Establishing a consistent baseline of services helps to ensure that youth aging out of the foster care system can expect the same quality of services regardless of which region they are in.

PAL Program

The Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program was implemented in 1986 to ensure that older youth in substitute care are prepared for their inevitable departure from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services' care and support. At any given time, there are about 3,500 youth 16 years of age and older in substitute care. PAL program staff strive to provide each of these youth with skills and resources they will need to be healthy, productive adults.

Preparing youth for adulthood is much more than teaching them how to balance a checkbook and sign a lease. PAL services include involvement in programs aimed at improving youths' self-esteem and improving their ability to make responsible decisions. PAL helps youth face the challenges of adulthood and independence.

PAL policy requires that youth 16 and older who are in substitute care receive services to prepare them for adult living. With funding availability, regions may serve any youth 14 or older on whom Child Protective Services has an open case. There is no typical case for which PAL services are provided. Length of time in care ranges from one month to almost 14 years, with two to three years being the average. Many of the youth have endured emotional and psychological trauma, and most have few options for living arrangements once they are discharged from care. PAL, in collaboration with public and private organizations, assists youth in identifying and developing support systems and housing for when they leave care. PAL gives these youths skills and training, but most of all, PAL helps them realize that there are options.

Independent Living Skills Training

A foundation of the PAL program is the provision of training to assist youth in developing skills necessary to function as an adult. Some regions have staff that provide this training but most contract with individuals and private organizations to provide the training. In all cases, training must cover the following areas:

- Personal and Interpersonal Skills
- Job Skills
- Housing and Transportation
- Health
- Planning for the Future
- Money Management

Benefits/Financial Assistance

Before receiving PAL benefits or financial assistance, youth must first meet certain guidelines. Youths who fully participate in the PAL program are eligible to receive a transitional living allowance once they leave care. The allowance may not exceed \$1,000, and it may be distributed in increments not to exceed \$500 per month. Young adults who are between 18 and 21 years old and have aged out of the foster care system at age 18 or older are eligible for aftercare room and board assistance. Financial assistance up to \$500 per month may be used for rent, rent deposit, utilities, and food/groceries. There is a lifetime cap of \$3,000 of accumulated payments per client.

Case management is provided by community contractors or PAL staff while young adults receive financial assistance. Efforts are made to partner with local housing authorities, workforce development boards, and other community resources to ensure that youth in need receive services to help them achieve successful outcomes.

Resource for Youth Leaving Care

The Texas Youth Hotline is a resource for youths 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 and information and referrals. The hotline can help young adults locate services available in their communities.

Resources and References for Foster Care Youth

Buckner Children's Home

www.bucknerchildren.org

National Foster Care Month

www.fostercaremonth.org

Pathways Youth and Family Services

www.Pathway.org

The Parenting Center

1 (817) 332-6399

www.theparentingcenter.org

Rights of Children and Youth in Foster Care

<http://www.pathway.org/downloads/childrensrights.pdf>

Texas Child Abuse Hotline

1(800) 252-5400

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS)

www.dfps.state.tx.us

Texas Foster Family Association

1(512) 947-3367

www.tff.org

Texas Runaway Hotline

1 (888) 580-HELP

Texas Statutes and Education Code

<http://tlo2.tlc.state.tx.us/statutes/ed.toc.htm>