



Texas Foster Care Handbook for Youth

From the voices of youth in foster care
and foster care alumni

A collaborative effort of the Texas Department of Family and Protective
Services (DFPS) and the DFPS Youth Leadership Committee





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Mission Statement

"We as members of the PAL Youth Leadership Committee feel that each youth in foster care should have an understanding of their rights, privileges, and responsibilities while in the Texas foster care system. Our hope is that this handbook will also increase understanding of how the system works. We are hoping to address many of the questions youth have regarding foster care. The handbook contains basic information to get you started. It does not include everything you could or even should know about the Texas foster care system. If a youth needs additional information, he or she should talk to his or her caseworker, foster care provider, Attorney Ad Litem, PAL Coordinator, mentor or other trusted adult."

(The PAL Youth Leadership Committee serves as a voice for youth in foster care for the state of Texas. The committee encourages teens to use this information in a responsible way and work cooperatively with Child Protective Services of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.)

Youth Perspectives About Foster Care

What does it mean to be placed in foster care? It means to move to a safe place when it's not safe in your family or home as a result of abuse or neglect. A Judge of the local District Court or County Court-at-Law can place you in foster care under the custody of Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. You may have questions about new routines and rules in your placement. Be sure to talk to your care providers (foster parents) about the rules and routines to help you in your adjustment.

Being removed from your own home can bring up lots of feelings. It's very important to talk to somebody that you trust about your feelings, like: counselors, foster parents, caseworkers, PAL staff, teachers, CASA (Court Appointed Special




Advocate) workers, etc. Remember, all of your feelings are okay and most importantly, it is not your fault. Below are some ways that youth felt when they first entered the foster care system:

- ◆ "I felt as though I was being punished. I was in total rage and upset at myself until I noticed that me entering foster care was for a good cause. I strongly disliked those that were affiliated with the department. Now that two years have rapidly passed, I see why that course of action was taken. Many people see foster care as a negative reinforcement to help children that are bad or crazy, but I strongly urge those people to look into this realm of love filled with people."
- ◆ "When I was first placed in foster care I was scared. I didn't know what to expect. I was in my English class and the secretary of the school called me out of class. I saw my sister and brother in the office and thought that something was wrong. Then a lady caseworker told me that I was going to leave my home. I was shocked, confused, and scared. I thought that I was being punished or something. I always wanted to run away. Now, I am seventeen and have been in foster care for five years and love it. To those who are still in foster care today, I know that you think that you are alone and scared but there are other youths that feel the same, including me. Hang in there and life will be great for you."
- ◆ "When I was initially placed in foster care, I was mad at the world. I was sad over losing my family."
- ◆ "At first I was scared, sad, mad, and even ashamed because of the situation I was in. Then later found out that there were no right or wrong feelings. I even felt guilty but then I realized that it wasn't my fault. Being placed in foster care was just a chance for me to be saved and loved."

Common Terms and Phrases

- ◆ **Attorney Ad Litem:** A lawyer assigned by the court to represent the youth's interest in a civil abuse and neglect case, which will determine who will have managing conservatorship over the youth. The Attorney Ad Litem must represent the opinion of the youth whether or not the attorney agrees with the youth's opinion.
- ◆ **APS Guardianship:** If a youth with serious disabilities turns age 18 or older and needs someone to make decisions for him or her, Adult Protective Services (APS) may be appointed guardian for the youth. The youth must be severely incapacitated (not able to take care of himself or herself) before this would happen.

- ◆ **Biological/Birth Family:** The family you were born into, your birth mother and father, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.
- ◆ **CASA worker:** (Court Appointed Specialist Advocate) A volunteer who works with you, your caseworker, and the courts to advocate and help you while you are in foster care.
- ◆ **Caseworker:** A staff person who works with you and your family while you are in foster care.
- ◆ **Managing Conservator/Guardian:** The adult or adults who the Court/Judge has decided has the right to make decisions about you and your life. Note: When you are younger than 18, the common term used by the Texas courts is "managing conservator." If you are 18 or older, the common term is "guardian."
- ◆ **PAL Mentor:** A volunteer friend, consultant, and guide to help you prepare for adult living from the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program (not available in all areas of Texas).
- ◆ **Permanency Planning Team (PPT):** A group that consists of people such as the caseworker, foster parents, and PAL Coordinator who are involved in the youth's case. Meetings are focused on the youth's needs and plans for the future in foster care. The group's goal is to help youth have a stable, permanent place in which to live and grow up.
- ◆ **Plan of Service:** A plan that is developed with your Child Protective Services caseworker and care provider (foster parent) and sometimes other helpful adults. The plan has your needs and goals in it. You should be actively involved in developing your plan of service.
- ◆ **Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Program:** A program that helps youth develop skills and resources needed for adult life after foster care. Through Chafee Foster Care Independence Program funds, and state and community matching funds, eligible youth can also receive financial help with housing, educational, and other needs for a limited time after leaving foster care.
- ◆ **Respite Care:** Care provided by a family different than your foster family for a short term like a weekend or a week.
- ◆ **Service Levels:** This term replaces "Levels of Care" as of September 1, 2003. The service levels describe the needs of individual youth so that the Child Protective Services can provide the appropriate services. The service levels are basic, moderate, specialized, and intense, depending on the type and amount of services a youth needs.
- ◆ **Sibling visits:** Visits with your brothers or sisters while you are in foster care.
- ◆ **Substitute Care:** Care provided to youth when they are removed from their birth family and are placed in the state's custody. (Examples: foster homes, emergency shelters, relative homes, and group homes)

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- ◆ **Termination of Parental Rights:** In some cases, the agency may petition (request) that your biological/birth parents no longer have any legal rights pertaining to you and therefore, their parental rights are ended. Child Protective Services works closely with parents before a step like this is taken. Termination of parental rights can happen if parents have serious problems that make it too difficult for them to safely take care of you. It usually happens when reuniting with your family has been ruled out and adoption is a possibility. If the court terminates parental rights, it means you are free for adoption. When parental rights are terminated, your parents no longer have access to information about you and do not work with your caseworker anymore.

Foster Youth Rights and Responsibilities

As a foster youth, you have the right to:

- ◆ Live in a safe, healthy, and comfortable home where you are treated with respect.
- ◆ Be free from physical, sexual, or mental abuse by anyone.
- ◆ Be given adequate and healthy food, adequate clothing, and receive medical and dental care.
- ◆ Depending on your case plan and level of maturity, keep your own money and have a bank account.
- ◆ Make and receive confidential phone calls and send and receive unopened mail (unless prohibited by court order or case plan).
- ◆ Attend Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) classes or activities if you are 16 or older (as appropriate to your case plan).
- ◆ Attend your court hearing and speak to the judge.
- ◆ Visit and have contact with your family, including your brothers and sisters (unless prohibited by court order or case plan).
- ◆ Contact your caseworker, Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), probation officer, or attorney ad litem at any time (as coordinated with your placement and caseworker).
- ◆ See your caseworker regularly (once a month in most cases).
- ◆ Attend school and religious services and activities of your choice (as coordinated with your placement and caseworker).
- ◆ Complain to the DFPS Consumer Affairs Office at 1-800-720-7777 if you feel any of your rights have been violated or ignored, and to be free from threats or punishment for making complaints.



You also have a responsibility to:

- ◆ Work with CPS to develop a permanent case plan for you.
- ◆ Work cooperatively with your caseworker and care provider to make sure that your needs and case plan issues are addressed.
- ◆ Work with your caseworker and care provider concerning rules at your placement and follow the rules responsibly.
- ◆ Participate fully and try your best to make good decisions.
- ◆ Follow the CPS chain of command (see p. 9) and grievance procedures when you have a complaint about the way you are treated.

Respecting your right to privacy:

- ◆ If you are younger than age 18, you may not be put on television, newspaper, or radio unless you and your caseworker give permission to do so. Your caseworker will also have to get permission from your managing conservator. If you are older than 18, there is more flexibility and it is up to you whether you want to participate in media activities.

Foster Parent Responsibilities

Foster parents have the responsibility to:

- ◆ Keep you safe and provide your basic needs for daily care.
- ◆ Treat you with dignity and respect.
- ◆ Keep information about you and your family confidential, unless it is in your best interest to give information to professionals.
- ◆ Show understanding, give guidance, and unconditional acceptance.
- ◆ Participate in permanency planning team (PPT) meetings and other case-related staffings.
- ◆ Prepare you for moving to your next placement whether it is going home, to another placement, or independent living.
- ◆ Help in your growth and development by encouraging your success in areas such as school and daily life skills.
- ◆ Make sure you get medical and dental care.
- ◆ Work with your caseworker to coordinate development and implementation of your case plan.
- ◆ Help you, or get you help, to deal with your thoughts and feelings about being in foster care.



- ◆ Get enough training to be a care provider for youth who have been abused and/or neglected.
- ◆ Make their home ready to welcome you.
- ◆ Help you in continuing to learn about your culture and heritage.

Definitions of Different Kinds of Foster Care Placements

- ◆ **Family Foster Home:** A private residence in which a youth resides. This home is the most family-like setting available to youth who are removed from their biological home.
- ◆ **Kinship Care:** Living with a relative or someone not related who you consider to be like family, instead of a foster home or group home.
- ◆ **Therapeutic Foster Home:** This foster home provides special care to youth with behavioral and emotional needs. The foster family receives additional specialized training and support.
- ◆ **Group Home:** This is a licensed facility with 24-hour staff, which provides residential care for 12 or fewer youth. This placement provides individualized treatment for youth such as psychiatric consultation, and group and individual services.
- ◆ **Residential Treatment Center (RTC):** Similar to the above type of foster care placement, except that residential care is for 13 or more youth.
- ◆ **Emergency Shelter:** A facility that provides care for youth in crisis on a short-term basis, typically as long as to four weeks. The shelter is licensed to provide care for 13 or more youth.



Visitation Rights

When the goal of foster care is to return you to, or maintain a healthy relationship with your biological parents, the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services is committed to arranging a visitation plan that is based on the safety of you and your parents. The agency may extend visits as the parent-child relationship improves and will provide any help you and your parents need to make visits successful. Visitation can also be scheduled with relatives, siblings, and/or other individuals with whom you have a positive and meaningful relationship.

The caseworker's role is to schedule all visitations. The separation and loss you may feel from being removed from your family can be hard. You should work with your caseworker on setting up a visitation plan. The amount of visitation is different for every case and is based on reasons such as why you came into foster care, the physical distance between you and the individual(s) you are visiting, and everyone's schedules. Visits should be in a relaxed and natural setting, such as the parent's home, community parks, or centers. If a conflict arises and you or your visitor cannot attend, you should call your caseworker to cancel the visit and talk about rescheduling.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality means that information about you and your situation is private. Information in your case record at the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services cannot be shared with others unless it is to meet your needs or is court ordered. Some confidential information, like medical, education, and/or reasons for your removal from your biological/birth home, may be shared with your care provider and professionals with whom you are meeting. You can ask your caseworker what information is shared. All professionals, including your care provider, must keep the information that is given to them confidential. Friends or other people may ask why you are no longer living with your family. Remember, it is your right to tell or not tell them about your situation. These questions may be difficult to answer. It may help to talk with your caseworker, care provider, or other adult you trust, so you can answer them in a way that lets you feel comfortable.



Chain of Command

If you are placed in a foster home, group home, or other facility and feel that you are not being treated fairly, there are people who you can turn to for help. If you have gone through the CPS Chain of Command (see below titles for the CPS Chain of Command), including contacting your attorney ad litem, and do not feel that your problem is being resolved, you may call the DFPS Consumer Affairs at 1-800-720-7777.



Caseworker (Start Here)	Supervisor	Program Director	Program Administrator	District Director
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Some Frequently Asked Questions

QUESTION: Can I get my driver's license while I am in foster care?

ANSWER: A youth can get a driver's license while in foster care if he or she meets the eligibility criteria of the Texas Department of Public Safety. Talk with your caseworker and care provider to determine if this is in your best interest. When a youth in state conservatorship applies for a Texas driver license, the youth's application must be:

- ◆ accompanied by a copy of the court order appointing the state as the youth's managing conservator; and
- ◆ signed by the supervisor of the youth's worker, or another staff member at a higher level than the supervisor.

The agency does not provide automobile insurance for youth. Questions about securing automobile insurance may be referred to the Texas Department of Insurance or any insurance company that provides automobile insurance.



QUESTION: Can I have a car while I am in foster care?

ANSWER: Foster youth having cars is handled on a case-by-case basis. Some group homes or foster homes do not allow youth to have a car while they are living there. However, depending on your level of maturity, transportation needs, and individual situation, you can discuss this with your caseworker. Some youth who work save money and are able to purchase a car. You must get your caseworker's approval before purchasing a car as it may affect your eligibility for foster care assistance or federal benefits you receive. Paying for insurance is a challenge that also must be addressed by anyone who has a car. Issues about car insurance, and owning and maintaining a car are covered in the PAL life skills training.

QUESTION: What is a transitional living plan?

ANSWER: When you are age 16 or older, agency staff will work with you to create a transitional living plan to help you prepare for life after foster care when you are an adult. This plan should be coordinated with your service plan. Your caseworker and foster care provider (and probably the PAL program staff) will discuss options, resources, and plans with you to address the following needs for adult living:

- ◆ medical/dental services, including information about extended Medicaid coverage, if available;
- ◆ housing;
- ◆ food;
- ◆ transportation;
- ◆ financial;
- ◆ social/emotional/religious/spiritual;
- ◆ educational/job training;
- ◆ cultural/heritage; and
- ◆ community resources.

You should participate in developing and revising your transitional living plan. Discharge planning is similar to transitional living planning. The same types of topics are discussed related to your discharge from foster care.

QUESTION: Can I remain in foster care after I turn 18?

ANSWER: Yes. In Texas you have the right to remain in foster care until you turn 20, if you can complete high school or an Individual Education Plan by the end of the month of your 20th birthday. You have the right to remain in foster care until the end of the month of your 19th birthday if you are enrolled in a full-time vocational or GED program that you can complete by that time. Some agencies may not let you stay in their program if you are not in school or a vocational program.



If you meet the criteria above, you will be asked to read and sign a voluntary foster care agreement that specifies expectations of your continued placement, and the agency's roles and responsibilities. The agency realizes you should be given more freedoms as an adult, but it is important that you still abide by the rules within the foster or group home.

The PAL Youth Leadership Committee advocated for a provision that affects youth who graduate from high school in May and don't start college or a vocational program until September. Youth may also remain in foster care at a basic rate of care for up to 3 1/2 months if you have completed high school and have been accepted at a college or educational/vocational program that does not begin immediately. You must work with your caseworker to plan for the future so that your caseworker can request extended foster care in a timely manner before your 18th birthday.

QUESTION: If I leave foster care and go away to college, will I have a place to stay during school holidays and vacations?

ANSWER: Some agencies or foster parents will help you arrange a place to stay over the holidays (Christmas break, the summer, etc.) if you don't have somewhere to go and the dorms close. If you have a close relationship with your former foster parents or group home staff, they may provide help for you during these times. The agency can offer you other options or give you a list of places you can go. It is important to talk with your PAL coordinator or your caseworker if you want specific information about planning for college. You should talk to your foster parents and caseworker to find out what your options are if you go away to college.

QUESTION: What help can I get when I am ready to leave foster care to be an adult?

ANSWER: When you are ready to leave foster care for adulthood, you may receive help from your caseworker, the PAL program, and other community resources. While you are still in care, the PAL life skills classes are available to teach you how to find an apartment through classroom instruction and give you hands-on help in actually looking for one, if that is part of your transition plan. The PAL trainers, foster parents, or group home staff should take you to meet landlords or real estate agents, if appropriate for your transitional living plan. They will help you get in touch with community organizations, previous foster parents, and/or relatives who can help you. Your caseworker, in coordination with the PAL program, participates in discharge planning activities as you plan to leave foster care. Staff discuss with you options, resources, and plans related to housing, your important records, medical/dental services, finances, education, employment, emotional support, and other areas of adult living.



If you feel you are not getting help, call your caseworker and ask for a meeting. Let him or her know that you are willing to help yourself, but that you also need help and information from him or her and the agency. It is very important to begin saving money (if you are able to work) while you are in foster care, so that you are able to move toward self-sufficiency once you are on your own. You may be eligible for some start-up funds through the PAL program to help you move on to independent living. (See PAL section and Benefits for Youth Leaving Foster Care section.)

The Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Program

Background

The PAL program was started in 1986 to help older youth in foster care prepare for their departure from state care. Through the PAL program, youth acquire skills and resources they will need to be healthy, productive adults. Supportive services and benefits are provided to eligible youth up to age 21 (and in some cases up to age 23 for certain educational/vocational needs) to assist when they leave foster care. The program is funded primarily by federal Chafee Foster Care Independence Program dollars, with the state and local communities providing a twenty per cent cash or in-kind match.

PAL program policy requires that each youth 16 and older who is in paid substitute care receive services to prepare for adult living. PAL services are aimed at improving the youth's self-esteem and ability to face challenges and decisions in their lives.



Services

Independent Living Skills Assessment

- ◆ Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA) is available on the internet at www.caseylifeskills.org

Independent Living Skills Training

- ◆ Personal and interpersonal skills
- ◆ Housing and transportation
- ◆ Planning for the future
- ◆ Job skills
- ◆ Health
- ◆ Money management

Support Services

Examples of some support services that are provided as funding allows:
(may not be available in all areas)

- ◆ Vocational assessment and/or training
- ◆ GED classes
- ◆ Preparation for college entrance exams
- ◆ Drivers' education
- ◆ High school graduation expenses (if not available from another source)
- ◆ Counseling
- ◆ Volunteer mentoring to provide guidance and support

Benefits/Financial Assistance

- ◆ Transitional Living Allowance
- ◆ Aftercare Room and Board
- ◆ Education and Training Vouchers

Case management

Provided by community contractors or PAL staff while young adults receive financial assistance. The agency makes efforts to partner with local housing authorities, workforce development boards, and other community resources to make sure that youth in need receive services to help them move on to adulthood more successfully.



Other PAL Activities

PEAKS (Physical and Environmental Activities for Knowledge and Skills) Camps — Two five-day experiential camps accommodate 40 youth each. An adult, preferably the youth's caseworker, accompanies the youth. Activities include ropes course activities, canoeing, expressive arts, swimming, nature hikes, and journal writing. The camps are focused on increasing self-esteem, improving communication and problem solving skills, and building leadership skills.

Statewide Teen Conference — The Statewide Teen Conference is held on a college campus. Approximately 175 youth attend a three-day conference with motivational speakers and workshops related to preparing for adulthood.

PAL College Conference — Texas A&M University at Commerce holds a weekend college conference each year. Approximately 70 youth participate in two days of workshops related to attending college. Youth are offered individualized assistance in filling out financial aid applications and other college application forms. (Several other colleges offer one-day conferences)

Statewide Youth Leadership Committee (Youth Advisory Board)— The Statewide Youth Leadership Committee consists of one current or former foster care youth from each region. The youth provide input and a youth perspective for policy and program development. They formulate recommendations for improving services to children and youth.

Regional Activities — Several regions have regional Teen Conferences. If regional funding is available, other activities may include: wilderness trips, discharge planning conferences, mentor programs, support groups, job development workshops, and youth forums, etc.



Another Resource for Youth Leaving Care

The Texas Youth Hotline is a resource for youth who are younger than 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.

Benefits to Youth Moving from Foster Care to Adulthood

The Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 increased services and support to youth in foster care preparing for adulthood and making the transition to adult living. The Chafee Foster Care Independence Program provides services to help youth get an education, receive vocational services, find employment, access medical services, obtain housing, and establish relationships with supportive and caring adults to improve outcomes for youth's transition to adult life.

Texas has the following benefits to help youth when they move from foster care to adulthood. It is very important to stay in contact with your caseworker and regional PAL Program Coordinator in order to access these benefits.

Transitional Living Allowance

(Up to \$1,000 to distribute in increments not to exceed \$500 per month)

- ◆ Must have been in DFPS paid foster or other residential care at some time within the 24 months prior to starting the allowance;
- ◆ Must be a U.S. citizen or qualified alien;
- ◆ Must have completed at least 5 hours of training in each of 5 of the 6 PAL life skills core elements (Any substitution of training hours or variance must be approved by the regional PAL supervisor);
- ◆ Must be making or have made a move into an independent living arrangement, or a supervised or semi-supervised setting (may not receive payments while incarcerated);
- ◆ Must not be living with a designated perpetrator while receiving assistance;
- ◆ Must be employed, be actively seeking employment (for those youth who are able to work), be enrolled and attending school or college, or be receiving pre-vocational or vocational training services; and
- ◆ Must provide all information required by regional CPS staff.

Note: All payments must be made by the young adult's 21st birthday



Aftercare Room and Board Assistance

(based on need, up to \$500 per month with a total cap of \$3000 of accumulated payments per young adult to help with rent, utilities, deposits, etc. - variances to payment totals may be considered in emergency or special circumstances)

- ◆ Must be between ages 18 and 21;
- ◆ Must be a U.S. citizen or qualified alien;
- ◆ Must have aged out of foster care at age 18 or older (DFPS conservatorship and control must have been maintained until age 18);
- ◆ Must be in an educational/vocational or pre-vocational program, employed or actively seeking employment (for those youth who are able to work); and
- ◆ Must prove financial need.

Payments will be made to the landlord, vendor, apartment complex, utility company, or host home. Your PAL staff or contractor must maintain receipts. You may be asked to obtain the receipt(s). While you are receiving financial assistance, you will have a case manager to support and encourage you. He or she will help you find out about other community resources and services, such as Welfare to Work assistance or Housing and Urban Development (HUD) benefits, for which you may be eligible.

Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program

The purpose of the Education and Training Voucher Program is to help youth ages 16 to 23 begin, continue, or complete postsecondary education and training programs by providing additional resources. The program offers funds (based on need, up to \$5000 per youth per year, not to exceed the cost of attendance as defined in Section 472 of the Texas Higher Education Act) to eligible youth to enable them to attend college, universities, and vocational training institutions. Costs may include residential housing, room and board costs, tuition/fees (for non state supported institutions or if youth is not eligible for the state tuition and fee waiver for former foster care youth), personal items, books/supplies, child care, transportation needs, and computer or other required equipment. The program is being administered by DFPS, Division of Child Protective Services at State Office.

Those qualified for ETV are:

- ◆ Youth between ages 16 and 21 who have a high school diploma or equivalent and are attending a 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
- ◆ Youth who are beyond the age of compulsory school attendance (age 18) and are attending an accredited or preaccredited program that provides not less than one year of training toward gainful employment.

Who is eligible?

- ◆ Youth in DFPS foster care who are at least 16 and who are likely to remain in foster care until turning 18, or
- ◆ Youth who age out of DFPS foster care but have not yet turned 21, or
- ◆ Youth who are adopted from DFPS foster care after turning 16 years old who are not yet 21, or
- ◆ Youth participating in the education/training voucher program on their 21st birthday can remain eligible until 23 as long as they are enrolled and making satisfactory progress toward completing their postsecondary education or training program.

Transitional Medicaid

(A provision of federal Chafee Foster Care Independence Act and Texas State Law)

- ◆ Must be a current Texas resident between ages 18 and 21;
- ◆ Must be a U.S. citizen or qualified alien;
- ◆ Must have aged out of foster care at age 18 or older (DFPS conservatorship and control must have been maintained until at least age 18);
- ◆ Must have no other medical coverage (private insurance or other category of Medicaid);
- ◆ Must not have resources valued at more than \$10,000; and
- ◆ Must meet the Texas Department of Human Services (DHS) income guidelines for this category of Medicaid.

Note: Youth who qualify will be initially certified for the Transitional Medicaid as they age out of foster care by a foster care eligibility specialist. The youth's caseworker coordinates with the eligibility specialist to make sure the certification process is initiated.

- ◆ Must call the DHS Centralized Benefits Section at 1-800-248-1078, ext. 9658, or ask for Transitional Foster Care Medicaid, for annual recertification and to report change of address. Information may be faxed to (512) 908-9515.

Tuition and Fee Waiver (for Higher Education)

(a provision of Texas State Law, Section 54.211 of the Texas Education Code. While U.S. citizenship or qualified alien status is not required, it is strongly encouraged as young adults without such status will have difficulty obtaining any federal financial assistance at college.)

To be exempt from the payment of tuition and fees at a Texas state supported institution of higher education, the youth must:

- ◆ Have been in substitute care on or after:

- the day preceding the 18th birthday
- the day the youth graduated from high school or received the equivalent of a high school diploma; or
- the day of the youth's 14th birthday, if the youth was eligible for adoption (parental rights being terminated) on or after that day; and
- ◆ Enroll as an undergraduate by their 21st birthday or not later than whichever of the following dates occurs first:
 - three years after the date the youth was discharged from foster or other residential care, or
 - three years after the date of high school graduation or completion of an equivalency of a high school diploma (GED), or
- ◆ Have been adopted and the subject of a written adoption assistance agreement.

Note: This is a provision of Texas State Law, Section 54.2111 of the Texas Education Code that was added in September 2003. Adoption assistance staff have been designated as the contact persons for this newest provision of the tuition and fee waiver benefit. Your regional PAL Program Coordinator can provide you with the name and contact information of the person who can help you access this benefit.

Other Help for College

To receive financial aid from the government such as a PELL Grant, you must apply for federal financial aid by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for each year that you attend college. To apply for federal financial aid, visit web site www.fafsa.ed.gov

- ◆ To Search for Scholarships:

- www.finaid.org	- www.rams.com/srn
- www.orphan.org	- www.easi.ed.gov
- www.fastweb.com	- www.collegefortexans.com
- www.collegeboard.org	- www.thecb.state.tx.us

Formal College Partnerships

Texas A&M University at Commerce offers staff or faculty mentors for youth, and an unlimited number of scholarships for residential housing. The University of Texas at Arlington provides a 50 percent discount on residential housing. The University of Texas at Pan American in Edinburg provides six residential housing scholarships per year. Texas State University, Western Texas College, and Texas A&M at Kingsville provide scholarships. Texas A&M University at College Station is providing a supportive staff person to assist PAL students at the university. Texas Tech University provides some supportive services for PAL students. The University of Houston central campus offers the Urban Experience program to provide extra support services to persons formerly in foster care.



Inspirational Youth Quotes

- ◆ "Coming into foster care is like walking into a dark room, walking into a dark room with no idea of what to expect. Trying to adjust to life's demands is not an easy task, but putting forth ambitions and attributes will help brighten your path" (Lerrion B).
- ◆ "People are like birds, they just want to fly away," and "Life is like a jewel, each day should be precious." (Rochelle O).
- ◆ "When I first got in CPS I was 16. At first, I thought everything was my fault. I thought I would never see or talk to my parents. I just felt like life was hopeless. But now I am 19 years old, I have so much going for me because of the tuition fee waiver, extended Medicaid, etc. I am so grateful that I have all of this back up support...people helping me realize it wasn't my fault." (Samika J).
- ◆ "When I first moved into care we had just got new house parents. I had to endure people not liking me for the color of my skin. After the battle scars, I came out strong and full of love" (Sonya W).
- ◆ "Once you're in care, you think life is over, but actually your life has just begun so always make the best of your life" (Bobbie M).
- ◆ "Life will kick you down and sometimes you need to depend on someone to get you back up" (Amanda R).
- ◆ "Once a man told me 'Death is eternal; life isn't,' so make the best out of each day" (Michael E).
- ◆ "It is sometimes best to accept what's different and uphold the inevitable" (Lerrion B).



Notes



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