

We advocate for public policies and priorities that benefit young people who are struggling and their families.



Our advocacy during the 83rd Texas Legislative Session led to an increase of \$59 million in funding for services for youth and families. This includes restoration of cuts made last session to crisis intervention services for youth who run away from home, have family conflict, or are in other crisis situations, as well as new funding for shelters, foster parents, and others who care for youth who cannot remain at home safely with their parents.

We partnered with youth to protect the state tuition and fee waiver, which waives the cost of tuition at public institutions of higher education for youth who age out of foster care. We successfully pushed for legislation to make it easier for certain homeless youth to obtain housing. And we were instrumental in improving the juvenile justice system, including by promoting legislation to reduce the practice of seclusion with youth in crisis.

Our professional and program development services ensure that those in the field are fully equipped to meet the complex needs of the youth and families they serve.

This year we provided training for 460 people who are making a difference in the lives of young people.

We provided intensive support services for reducing the use of seclusion and restraint for 7 Resident Treatment Centers that serve more than 400 youth at any one time.

We offered 21 workshops for youth services agencies on topics including Crisis Intervention, Motivational Interviewing, Solution Focused Brief Therapy, Trauma-Informed Care, Child Development, Conflict Resolution, Leadership & Supervision, Cultural Competency, and Ethical Decision-Making.



We used "The 6 Core Strategies to Reduce the Use of Seclusion and Restraint," which was recently endorsed by the Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) as an evidence-based practice, as a roadmap for this work. We also distributed information resources to 78 Texas Residential Treatment Cente reducing the use of seclusion and restraint.

TNOYS staff presented at 8 conferences this year, on topics including prevention and early intervention, juvenile justice, family violence, transitioning youth, and program evaluation.

We coordinated an annual conference to enhance the professional development of over 250 youthworkers, clinicians, and administrators.

We challenge negative perceptions of young people by working in partnership with youth and demonstrating what they are capable of.



We developed and launched the TNOYS Youth Engagement Fund, an initiative to create meaningful opportunities for young people to work in partnership with policymakers.

We facilitated two four-day camps for 120 youth in foster care to attend during Spring Break in Wimberley, Texas. PEAKS is a therapeutic camp designed to help youth in at-risk situations build relationships with caring adults, find strengths within themselves, and develop important life skills.

We hosted a forum for 287 youth in foster care and other at-risk situations to share their concerns about community issues with legislators at the State Capitol during the legislative session.

We coordinated a three-day leadership conference for 88 youth living in communities across Texas with high rates of juvenile crime. The annual CYD Teen Summit offers workshops for youth on topics ranging from teamwork to personal identity, and youth gain competencies to serve as leaders in their communities.

We coordinated a conference at Austin Community College to prepare youth in foster care for adult living.

Agency Members

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TNOYS has undergone some exciting transitions this year. Meet our new staff!

Christine Gendron is the Executive Director of TNOYS. Although new to the position, she has been connected to TNOYS for many years and did the organization's public policy work in the past. She is an Aggie, but she plays both sides of the field with a Master's degree from the LBJ School of Public Affairs at UT Austin. Christine has also worked as a senior researcher at the LBJ School, where she evaluated several innovative initiatives to promote the well-being of children and families. She has done private consulting work and authored publications on youth services. Ask her about her recent backpacking trip in Yosemite!

Lara O'Toole worked for over 11 years in youth and community serving organizations before joining TNOYS as our Director of Professional and Program Development. She has worked in a laboratory preschool, an inner-city elementary school, the domestic violence and sexual assault field, a teen parent program—and yes, even youth poetry slams, hip hop creative writing projects, and social justice theatre arts events. Lara's undergraduate degree is from Vassar and her Masters of Social Work from UT Austin. She enjoys being active in the community, yoga, movies, being outside, and exploring the city and world with her fiancée.

Jack Nowicki has over 35 years of experience working with youth and families, including at TNOYS for the last 14 years. He is also a lecturer at the UT School of Social Work. Jack is certified in ICA Group Facilitation Methods, trained as a trainer in the "Strengthening Families Program" and the "Be Proud! Be Responsible" curriculum, and a Certified Master Practitioner of Neuro-Linguistic Programming. He received his Master of Science in Social Work from UT Arlington. Jack enjoys digging in his garden and listening to live music.

Elizabeth Flint is our youth development aficionado and expert. She is responsible for overseeing PEAKS Camp (PEAKS stands for "Physical and Environmental Activities for Knowledge and Skills"), News For Us (a quarterly newsletter we distribute to teens in foster care), and the CYD Teen Summit (an annual leadership conference for youth at risk of juvenile delinquency). Elizabeth has been working with TNOYS for three years and has been involved with PEAKS camp since she was a child. She recently graduated from UT Austin with a Bachelor's degree in Social Work.

Duncan Cormie, our Policy Specialist, led the charge for young people at the State Capitol this year after directing residential programs at Lifeworks for almost 15 years. He is experienced with advocacy and youth engagement at the organizational, community, and state levels. Duncan is also an accomplished public speaker and was founder and President of the Toastmasters chapter at Lifeworks. He has a Masters in Social Work and is a Licensed Child-Care Administrator. When he is not out with his two children, you can find Duncan bird watching on a nature trail.

Sinclair Walker is our communications guru, graphic designer, and social media expert. Basically anything related to art, words, or media: he does it. You may have seen his articles in News For Us, the newsletter we produce for Texas foster youth. Sinclair has a Bachelor's of Science degree in Radio, Television, and Film from UT Austin and he hopes to be a screenwriter one day.

Althea Pestine is the Evaluation Specialist for TNOYS. Currently in the Masters of Public Affairs program at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at UT Austin, Althea studies public policy and program evaluation. She has a B.A. from the University of Rochester in Statistics and Religion and has worked in youth service settings and actuarial internships. When not studying, evaluating, or teaching, Althea enjoys exploring Austin on foot and trying out new recipes.

Cindy Warren works as our (volunteer!) Administrative Coordinator. We are lucky to have Cindy—she has over 13 years of experience as an administrative assistant and a Bachelor's degree. Our resident Canadian and pianist, Cindy moved with her husband to Austin in January. Cindy is enjoying being a tourist, getting to know Austin and its people, and checking out the unique restaurants and vibrant

Xavier Mathabela is an intern from St. Edward's University School of Management and Business, where he is working on his Master of Arts in Organization Development. He is excited about the opportunity to use his expertise to support TNOYS through some major transitions! In addition to his background in OD, Xavier brings over 12 years of experience working with youth at agencies including Lifeworks, Austin Children's Shelter, and True Brilliance. On his personal time Xavier loves spending time with his two boys, creating music on the guitar, and playing futsal (Brazilian Style Soccer).

Check out our new website at Tnoys.org
And stay connected on our [Facebook!](#)
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We share a vision of Texas where all young people are valued, their strengths are recognized, and they have access to the resources, support, and opportunities they need to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

Their future is our business.