

In Texas, an average of 1,300 young people age out of the foster care system at 18 each year. The negative outcomes associated with aging out, including homelessness, unemployment and mental health problems, are well documented.¹

To get a better understanding of what change is needed, in 2018 TNOYS and Texas CASA facilitated a workgroup of statewide stakeholders, surveyed nearly 200 service providers and Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) staff, and talked to youth and to stakeholders in other states. We also reviewed literature on best practices.

Our findings support findings of others that youth are aging out of foster care in Texas without the skills necessary to live independently. Youth exiting foster care struggle to find safe and supportive places to live, often not knowing where they will go next only weeks prior to turning 18.

Recommendations to Improve Life Skills Education:

- DFPS should work with outside stakeholders to develop and implement a guided medical self-care plan for youth who are 17 years of age and preparing to age out of foster care.
- Establish, maintain and fund a transitional living services program that includes:
 - life skills education for 14-15 year olds;
 - transitional living services and life coaching by regional Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) staff for youth aged 16-17;
 - case management services for youth 18-21;
 - PAL classes as one way, but not the primary way by which, life skills education is provided. Methods to provide life skills shall include, but not be limited to, individual and group experiential opportunities provided by contractors for youth and their caregivers.

Recommendations to Prevent Homelessness:

- DFPS must develop a protocol to help youth living in a residential treatment center (RTC) on their 17th birthday to achieve permanency and avoid aging out of an RTC.
- To ensure adequate time to arrange housing for youth who will be extending their time in foster care, require that DFPS begin preparation at least six months prior to the youth's 18th birthday.
- Require that a foster home placement not intending to keep a youth past his or her 18th birthday provide notice of discharge no later than 90 days, rather than at the standard 30 days, to allow for alternative arrangements for the youth to be made.

¹ National Youth in Transition Database numbers for Texas show us that from 17 years of age to 19, 25% of our youth experienced homelessness, 13% had children, 21% were incarcerated, and 61% were unemployed.

- For a youth who is already in a placement when he/she turns 18 and has the permission of the staff/caregiver, waive the background check requirement and allow this 18 year old to continue sharing a bedroom with a minor in care as long as the current maximum two year age difference (16/18) policy applies.
- Assist youth living in apartment Supervised Independent Living (SIL) placements with developing a rental history by requiring contractors to list them as a lease cosigner as long as there is no opposition from the landlord or property owner.
- DFPS and SIL placements shall have a process by which these placements can appropriately review a young adult's criminal history and exclude from placement approval, non-violent criminal offenses that are determined to have a low risk of impacting safety, well-being or the stability of the placement.
- Ensure young adults who aged out of foster care and who are not working or in school due to homelessness, are able to access Aftercare Room and Board benefits for housing and other supports for up to six months while they are attempting to fully qualify with employment or education.

THEIR FUTURE IS OUR BUSINESS.