

What's Happening In My Region



6 Region 6 is going full steam with the Aging Out Seminars. The Aging Out Seminars are meetings that focus on alleviating the worries associated with "aging out" by giving answers to the questions that can be sometimes difficult to ask. We look forward in your participation and preparing you for what the future holds; and for those who may not be aware, the HAY center has recently changed their phone number so if you are trying to contact us please make a note of our new number, **713-250-7000**. Gaby Valladares, Youth Specialist 713-884-3300

7 Education and independence was the focus for region 7 this winter. Youths from all over the region attended various college campus tours, including visits to Texas A&M, The University of Texas at Austin, and Blinn College. The campus tours offered a fantastic opportunity for learning and gave the youths the chance to better understand about independence by attending our Access-Granted event that took place in February. Community support networks from different parts of the region made it to Access-Granted to present information on a multitude of issues, ranging from financial aid, to the dangers of drunk driving. Meagan LeLeux, PAL Staff 512-834-3813

8 It has been a great year so far in Region 8. Our Prom Event was on March 30th and it was amazing, a moment filled with magic and wonder. We then marched for Youth in Action Day at the Ccapitol on April 5th to give our support. We want to say congratulations to Earnest Jones; he is graduating from Sulross University with his BA degree, and to Oral Lutz for getting accepted into Texas State. We also want to congratulate Sebastian Nixon for acceptance into Texas A&M Commerce and Sarah Howell for acceptance in to Texas A&M Corpus Christi. Region 8 is on fire! Jennifer Elizalde, Youth Specialist (210) 216-1135

10 Region 10 is making a huge difference in the educational system by sharing their perspectives with school districts and higher education personnel to improve communication and produce better educational outcomes. Antonio P. and Jose S. have been leading the charge by advocating to the Commissioner at the Statewide YLC meeting. I invite you to participate in the Youth Advisory Board's talent show in May so we can show appreciation for foster parents. Come Speak Up and Speak Out, so you can also make a difference. April McWilliams, Youth Specialist 915-521-3815

11 The Teens Advocating for Change Organization of Region 11 has gotten into the spirit of Youth In Action Day. We discussed what we would like to ask the Commissioner and have been turning our focus to a more positive way of talking about foster care. We have been thinking about ways to make improvements in foster care and have started talking about solutions, instead of just the problems. Kassandra Villarreal, Youth Specialist 361-878-7571, 361-215-1476 cell

1 Region 1 has been busy designing YLC shirts and will also be working with the Amarillo DFPS to plan a Foster Parent Appreciation Day. We will present foster parents with letters and poems expressing our appreciation for all their hard work and dedication! If you wish to get involved or just require more information, call Jade Arias 806-677-1361!!

2 The Prom Party from Region 2 in April was a huge success. Many beautiful dresses were paired with our many beautiful young ladies as well as dashing tuxedos for our handsome fellows. Peaks camp was also successful and a blast, giving the youthful participants many opportunities for fun activities, excitement and bonding time. We are sure excited for what's to come next! (Senior Graduation Party and The Aging Out Seminars.) Courtney Valdez, PAL Staff 940-935-1938

3 Region 3 kicked off 2013 with a big conference at the University of Texas at Arlington. The conference had an array of events ranging from guest speakers to bowling. The foster youth and alumni group Change for Today and Tomorrow (C4T2) attended Youth in Action Day to visit with senators and representatives in order to advocate on behalf of children and youth in foster care. Finally, Region 3 had its PROM on the April 6, 2013. It was a lovely affair. Patricia Sneed, Service Program Administrator 214-951-7902

4 Valentine's Day was especially wonderful in Region 4. We spent the day with elderly veterans at the Watkins-Logan Veterans Home in Tyler, TX. Region 4 YLC: The Real Deal also participated in Youth In Action Day, where they had an opportunity to be heard at the State Capitol! The board members for The Real Deal would like to tell the foster youth in Region 4: "You are not alone! You can help us make a difference by getting involved with the YLC. Join us by contacting your caseworker, PAL staff, or the youth specialist and ask when the next meeting is". Jennifer Mace, Youth Specialist 903-533-4110

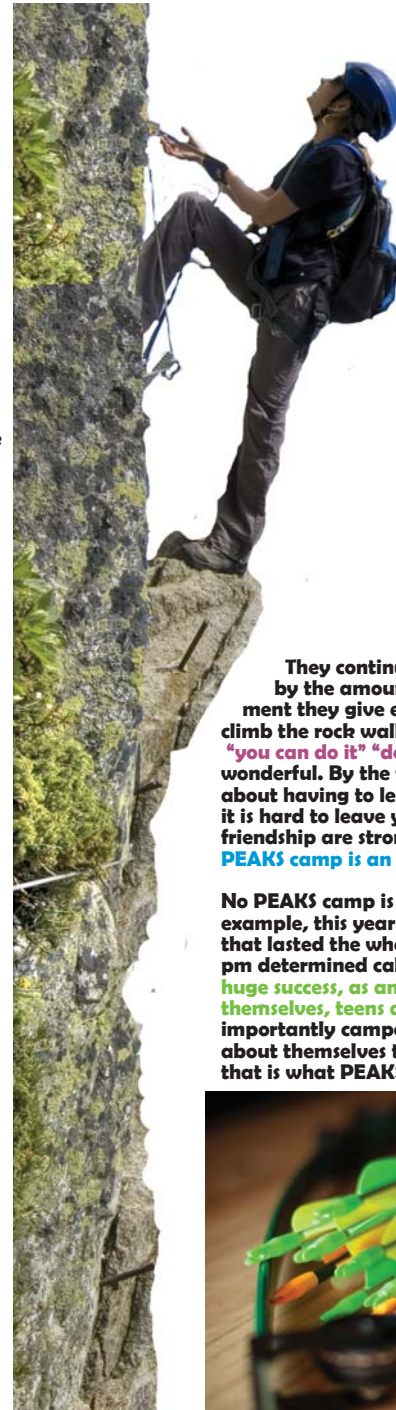
5 Graduation is among us and Region 5 is preparing for our Graduation Celebration for all our seniors. The celebration is set to be on June 12th at 11:30 am at St. Jude's Catholic Church in Beaumont, Texas. Stay tuned for the upcoming "Aging Out Seminar" and Regional Teen Conference. Shaneka Guidry, Youth Specialist 409-951-3368

For the last 29 years **PEAKS** camp has played an integral role in the development and empowerment of young people within the foster care system. The **PEAKS** experience is unique and influential for all who attend and provides young adults with bonds and memories that are cherished for a lifetime.

PEAKS, which stands for **Physical, Environmental, Activities, Knowledge and Skill** lasts 3 days and two nights. The Camp is chalk full of clever and experiential activities (be it physical or mental) that are designed to push and mold the participants. Activities such as **archery, rope course climbing, high elements (rock wall climbing), canoeing** and a few others all have their place in the camp's curriculum.

This year I had the opportunity to **Co-Direct PEAKS camp with Mike Roberson and Carina Moreno**. It was an experience I will cherish forever. I have been involved with **PEAKS camp since I was a little girl**. I grew up helping the **PEAKS** staff in all the fun activities, but I soon found that my **PEAKS** involvement helped me in discovering that I wanted a career in social work.

The time and resources needed to plan, budget and direct two full camps for young adults are intense, and it is much harder than you can probably imagine. It's even more difficult when your goal is to make sure that everyone is having fun in a safe environment. **Still, it's more than worth it!**



The experience of being a part of the **PEAKS** family is extremely rewarding and hard to explain unless you have experienced it yourself. **Personally, my favorite part about PEAKS is the transformation I see in the youth who attend.** The transformation happens in steps, the first occurring on day one of camp. These young adults arrive not sure of what to expect, and they are thrown into the fire, often knowing only themselves. Then through time the youth gain confidence and engage in activities such as **Swap O Rama, where they create costumes, dress up, and strut their stuff down a runway.**

They continue to grow and it is evident by the amount support and encouragement they give each other. Just watching them climb the rock wall with their group shouting **"you can do it" "don't give up"** is really wonderful. By the third day, everyone's in tears about having to leave. It's emotional because it is hard to leave your friend. Those bonds of friendship are stronger than you can imagine. **PEAKS camp is an experience unlike any other.**

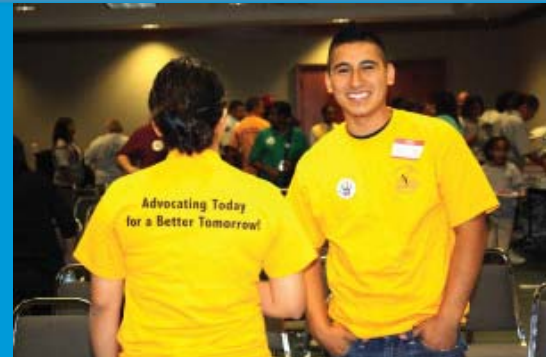
No **PEAKS** camp is ever really the same. For example, this year we had an impromptu dance that lasted the whole night (well, until the 11:00 pm determined cabin time)! **This year was a huge success, as and everyone enjoyed themselves, teens and adults alike.** More importantly campers discovered positives things about themselves that they never knew, and that is what **PEAKS** is all about.



Do You want a pen Pal ?
Send us a letter about yourself to this address
T N O Y S 2525 Wallingwood Dr., Suite 1503
Don't forget to write your name and address
on all materials.

Youth in Action Capitol Day 2013

Wow.



When hundreds of youth decide to make their voices heard, their mentors, supporters, and elected officials have no choice but to listen! As an advocate for youth and family services for many years, I have been to several advocacy days at the Texas State Capitol where passionate professionals work to steer policy decisions and laws to better support youth and families. These efforts are critical, but when the teens themselves are in the spotlight, the effect is incredible.

On April 5, 2013, nearly **300** young adults from all across Texas flocked to the Capitol for Youth in Action Capitol Day. Groups came from Houston, Dallas, Leakey, Corpus Christi, Tyler, San Antonio, and from here in Austin. Many were in foster care, and all were concerned about issues in their communities and state. Before coming, each group spent time with a teacher or adult mentor learning about the public policy process and about bills (potential laws) that might directly affect their lives and futures.

During the morning, youth stood before **hundreds** of their peers and gave inspired and thoughtful presentations on specific bills to a cheering crowd. They also had the chance to hear from legislative staff to get tips on how to best present their opinions. During the afternoon, they joined hundreds more supporters at a Child Protection Day rally on the Capitol steps, then walked the Capitol halls in small groups to meet with their hometown representatives. I had the chance to follow two of these groups as they talked to politicians about immigration reform, foster care college funds, and more. In each case, representatives stopped to listen, ask questions, and make notes to take with them into hearings. The young adults left understanding more about the complex Texas policy process, and knowing that they had made their mark!



Curious about college ?

Time waits for no man (or woman), and young adults who age out of foster care in Texas have the opportunity to attend any public institution of higher education (this includes community colleges, state universities, and more) for FREE!

College gives graduates an opportunity for a better career and increased job security.

Freshman and sophomores remember this: a good foundation can make or break everything.

If you attend school with the purpose of entering college from the beginning, the road will be much easier in the end. Once you get into the habit of studying and working hard, these habits will last you a lifetime.

So here are some things you need to know about the last two years of your high school experience: if you haven't received the best marks in some of your classes don't sweat, this is where you turn it around.

First, you need to meet with a guidance counselor and find out the key important dates and questions regarding your performance in school, such as your GPA and class rank. You need to understand the type of exams credits and other particulars that will be associated with your acceptance into college.

There are ways to work with a low GPA. Often many students have to turn towards a community college or junior college. The good thing about many community colleges is that they let most students enroll regardless of a low GPA.

The PSAT is the first test that is associated with your admission into college. The PSAT (or the practice SAT) is a standardized test that is not required for college admissions, but is still very valuable in that it provides great practice for the SAT or ACT. Also if a student's PSAT scores are high enough, one might qualify for a national merit scholarship.

The ACT is an achievement test, that is based off what a student might learn in school. The SAT is more of an aptitude test, measuring a persons reasoning and verbal abilities. To find out what test is better for you, be sure to discuss the options with your guidance counselor. Also make sure to register for the SAT or the ACT during the fall and mark your calendars for these specific dates. The exact dates can be found on the college board.org website or through a guidance counselor. Your foster parents, caseworker, or CASA volunteer might also be a great resource for you in your planning for college.

The best advice for picking a college is to narrow down your list to your top 5 choices. If you have the ambition to go to a more established university but first have to go to a community college, than you should see if the community college that you are looking into will be able to successfully transfer the credit you would receive. Be sure to make a list of the things that you want in a college and seek out the colleges that will be able to deliver.

Your senior year is more about follow through. If you have started on your path to college than you need to end strong, gearing up for any exams or completing all your projects and requirements to graduate. Some will take the SAT and ACT over again in the fall and for those students the same advice will apply, make sure you are prepared.

6 Facts About Advocacy

1. You are an asset. Remember you are important.
2. Link up with an organization that is like TNOYS, we love to hear your side of the things and want to make sure your voice is heard
3. Get to know your elected officials. Politicians have to respond to your needs. It's always good to know how to get in touch with people who can help change your life.
4. Get to know an issue (or two, or three). Advocacy is most effective when it comes from a place of understanding.
5. It's fun. Getting to know your state's legislative is useful especially when the bills affects you.
6. Anyone can be an advocate, there is no issue too small or too BIG !

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Read News for Us! Online at:
www.TNOYS.org

My name is Sinclair Walker, and I am the new Communication Specialist for Texas Network of Youth Services (TNOYS). More specifically, I am going to be developing a newsletter for you to read. I am excited, enthusiastic, and even thrilled to be coming aboard. I want to create something you will enjoy, something you can take pride in, and something that is going to be both fun and informational.

A little information on myself: I am a recent graduate of The University of Texas at Austin with a Bachelor's of Science in Radio TV and Film. Growing up I was obsessed with films and would watch them like I was hungry, always wanting to consume more! By the time I started high school I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to make movies, or write them at least. A decade later I've made a couple of short films, and I usually find myself thinking about the next BIG thing to write, whether it be a comedic action film, or a romantic comedy or even a film about Space Ninjas (I mean space and ninjas are cool so, it should make a good movie...).

I hope this gives you a better picture of who I am, and I hope that you will feel comfortable enough to tell me your dislikes and likes about the newsletter. After all, I will be writing to you, and it would be a shame for you not to have some part of what may be the greatest newsletter in the world.

Happy Reading,

News for Us! Newsletter - Helps you stay informed about current events in your region that affect you! Stay updated with stories about youth in care, information about youth rights and policies, stories about youth who left care, budgeting tips, health care information, college and vocational schools!

Remember to "Like" us on Facebook!!

Check out the NEW Texas Youth Connection Facebook page. It is located at the web address: www.facebook.com/TexasYouthConnection



This Facebook page provides current resources, benefits and other information such as National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) updates that are important to transitioning youth. The page will allow the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to connect with YOU!!

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News For Us

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Have a low GPA?
You can still get into college!

"Anyone can be an advocate, there is no issue too small or too big"

"PEAKS camp is an experience unlike any other"

Hundreds of Youth decided to Make their Voice's Heard.
Youth in Action Capitol Day

The Preparation for Adult Living Newsletter