



What's Happening In My Region?

1 Region 1 has decided to officially change their meeting name from YLC to Zero Gravity, which means "Nothing can hold us down." In January and February we had our Aging Out Seminars for our youth in Lubbock and Amarillo. We are currently preparing for our High School Graduates to transition into College by assisting with Hope Chest in the Badger Hearts Banquet. Badger Hearts is a nonprofit organization on Amarillo College Campus, they provide gifts to our youth as they settle into their homes and begin their new journey! We will be having our monthly Zero Gravity meetings, so if you are interested in being a part of our group please don't hesitate to contact Crystal Surace, Youth Specialist, 806-570-6589



2 It's been a great year in Region 2. I'm excited to be your new Youth Specialist and I look forward to meeting each and every one of you in the future. I hope that everyone will consider being part of the YLC, and speaking up about foster care in Texas. The first YLC meeting will be held in June, so please contact me for more information. As most of you know, PEAKS camp was a huge success and lots of fun. We came, we saw and we conquered!! Prom Party was held recently as well, and everyone had a great time dancing and picking out dresses. The summer will be a welcome relief for most of you, and especially those of you who are graduating. Congratulations class of 2014!! We are so proud of you!! Spring Robbins, Youth Specialist, 940-613-8154

3 Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) and the Regional Youth Specialist conducted an Aging out Seminar that consisted of a day filled with information to help youth transition from care. Region 3's Youth Leadership Council (YLC), Change for Today and Tomorrow (C4t2), voted and elected new officers to assist in coordinating events, meetings, fundraisers etc. C4t2 is gearing up for their community service project and so much more, so if you want to be a part of the fun. Be sure to contact the Regional Youth Specialist. Krystal Saldivar, Youth Specialist, 214-331-7724

4 The Annual PAL Graduation Ceremony for Region 4 will be held on May 21, 2014 at Jul's in Tyler. This celebration will honor one of the greatest milestones for 30 young men and women. Collette Stec, PAL Specialist, 903-509-5118

5 Congratulations to the Class of 2014! A special celebration will be held June 2014 for our graduating seniors. Save the Date for the Region 05 Teen Conference and Aging-Out Seminar scheduled for July 17, 2014 at Lamar University. Delores Duhon, PAL Staff, 409-951-3359

6 On March 29th Region 06 hosted yet another successful prom event for all its seniors. It was a fun filled day of with prom attire for the ladies and guys, games, giveaways, and finished off with a dance contest. Thanks to all who attended, and the HAY center for putting such a great event together. Gaby Valladares, PAL Staff, 713-699-6059

7 Region 7 is warming up and preparing for summer with our PAL events. We have had 3 events so far this year that encourage youth to be independent. Those events are Access Granted (college tour at Austin Community College) on February 22, 2014, Prom Rack (opportunity for youth to receive a free dress or tuxedo for prom) on March 29, 2014, and Bob Cat Day (college tour) at Texas State University on April 5, 2014. Please check with your PAL coordinator to get more information on upcoming Region 7 events. Michael Salazar, PAL Staff, 512-369-7149

8 Region 8 is getting ready for our annual graduation dinner that will be taking place on May 8th. The YAlA is working closely with team YTIA and giving back to San Antonio by volunteering at the San Antonio Food Bank. On April 12th we sorted 18,000 lbs. of food. This provided meals for 12,982 families. On April 17th the Youth Transition Center is having Easter in the Park. This is a great way for our youth to interact with great activities and creating long term connections within our community. Way to Go to go region 8, keep up the great work! Jennifer Elizalde, Youth Specialist, 210-431-5640

9 It's almost summer and for everyone living in Region 9 that means Life Skills Classes! If you will be 16 and older this summer and have not attended Life Skills classes, be on the lookout for your invitation to attend. They are going to be held June 16-21 in Odessa and June 23-28 in San Angelo. The statewide Teen Conference is also right around the corner. This year it will again be held in Denton from July 8-10, anyone interested in attending and living in region 9 contact me. Have a great summer! Tom Ellison, PAL Staff, 432-553-4158

10 Region 10 is currently working with University of Texas At El Paso (UTEP) to post the Youth Specialist Position! Our goal is to have this position posted by June 2013. For more information, please contact Molly Wegner, PAL Staff, 915-521-3950

11 The Region 11 YLC, Teens Advocating for Change Organization (TACO) has had a great Spring! We have held 5 Meetings per month, with great turn-outs. We have been discussing many topics that affect Youth Aging-out of Care, such as FAFSA, ETV and the tuition Waiver. In the Month of February, the group had guest speakers discuss love, healthy relationships and teen dating violence. Kassandra A. Villarreal, Youth Specialist, 361 878-7571

Celebrating 30 Years of P.E.A.K.S.



After 30 years, the PEAKS program is still going strong! Although I have been participating as a PEAKS volunteer for a long time, this was my first time being the PEAKS Camp Director. Even though my role has changed, the experience stayed challenging and empowering! I love PEAKS because it is a great program that allows young adults and their adult sponsors to grow as individuals and as leaders. The camp experience is transformational for most participants; increasing their self-esteem, building confidence, and helping them develop relationship skills they can use when they return home. I had a blast this year in my new role and I am very excited for this new journey!

This year, youth and their adult sponsors came together from all 11 regions across Texas. Camp took place at Camp Young Judaea, in Wimberley. To start off camp, we brought in Nina Rodriguez, from X8 drumming who has been part of the PEAKS schedule for many years. She brought excitement and energy and kicked off camp to a great start. While the PIGS excelled at the high ropes course, the ELEPHANTS got creative in colors and designs for tie-dye. The APES hit the bullseye in archery, and the KOWS were able to open up through poetry. All of the groups had a blast re-creating and redesigning outfits out of donated clothes during the SWAP o RAMA on the second night of camp. The models and the MCs then lit up the stage with PEAKS' own version of project runway! The last night of camp, we brought in Zell Miller, a well known poet and activist from Austin, to MC Write Away Live, a talent show incorporating the lessons from the creative writing activity that all groups attended earlier that day.

The PEAKS program couldn't have asked for a better 30th year! We hope that the next 30 years are just as great!

-Elizabeth Flint,
Youth Programs Coordinator, TNOYS

Celebrating National Foster Care Month!

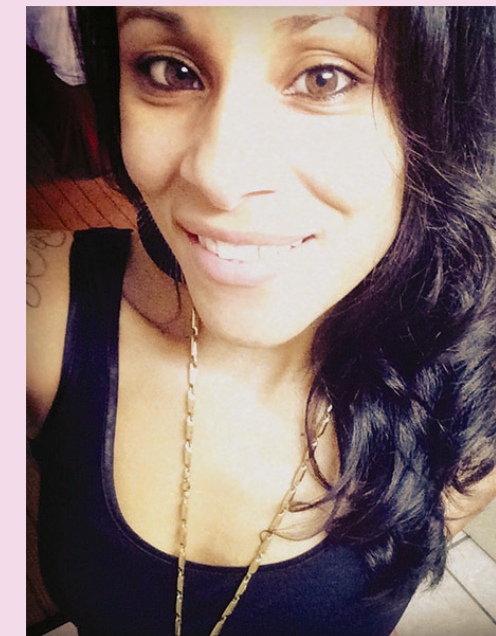
May is National Foster Care Month, a month set aside to acknowledge foster parents, family members, volunteers, mentors, policymakers, child welfare professionals, and other members of the community who help children and youth in foster care find permanent homes and connections. During National Foster Care Month, we renew our commitment to ensuring a bright future for the nearly 400,000 children and youth in foster care, and we celebrate all those who make a meaningful difference in their lives.

For more information visit : <https://www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth/more/about.cfm>



Congratulations
to the graduating
class of 2014 !

Alumni Spotlight.



April, a caseworker newly located in the San Antonio area is a former foster youth who aged out of care from El Paso Texas. Growing up, April thought that her foster care experience could have been better, and she felt a great passion for helping youth from similar situations.

"I've always said even as a teenager coming out foster care that I wanted to be a counselor or social worker. I've always wanted to work with youth in care," she said. April was able to attend the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) after high school, but she found college to be difficult. **"I lacked discipline, and I didn't have a car so I had to take the bus. Eventually my grades dropped,"** she said. Soon she was on academic suspension but that did not derail her goal of higher education **"I didn't want to stop going to school again,"** she said.

April attended community college and worked in order to pay her expenses. She soon heard about an opening for the Youth Specialist Position at the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). After interviewing for the position, she was hired as a Youth Specialist at DFPS.

She was excited and found the work fulfilling so she stayed at the position for seven years. Her experience as a Youth Specialist was

immensely positive. **"I got to travel, and do so many amazing things... including writing a press release at the Texas Supreme Court in Austin, working with youth, and finally being able to provide them with a platform to speak,"** she said. She calls the experience "therapeutic" because she was able to help youth in more ways than she could have ever dreamed. From being involved with P.E.A.K.S. camp to creating youth councils, April was making a difference in many youth lives. These experiences had a profound effect on her education. Many issues remained but she now had new motivation. She had to be responsible for the youth; she had to be responsible for the position. **"It was a real challenge... I was in a position where I had to set an example.... It really pushed me to keep going,"** she said.

After returning to UTEP, April was faced with another challenge: being a single parent. **"I delivered my baby in October of my junior year. And I was in the middle of a chemistry class when I went into labor and I had to be back in class."** Juggling school, work, and parenting was challenging and despite the negativity and the doubt of coworkers and friends alike, April pushed on with the help and support of a few people in her life. **"My supervisor was so supportive and genuinely cared about my future,"** she said. After eight years of hard work, April received her diploma! **"I knew that only 2% of foster kids graduate from college, and I wanted to be in that 2%,"** she said.

Today, April is a Caseworker, working in San Antonio and raising her daughter. She thinks that her experience as a former foster youth helps her perform better on the job. **"I believe that in my casework I'm more sensitive ...I try to take everything with me in my daily work. I remember how I felt when I was in the foster care system so I try to advocate for my families the best that I can,"** she said. San Antonio has given her a new start away from the judgmental and often negative stigmas that come from being a former foster care youth. **"It's just me and my daughter. And we're OK. No one knows I grew up in foster care and I'm able to recreate myself... I'm able to show my education and show my skills beyond foster care. I have the opportunity to show them that I'm capable of being responsible and independent."**

Recipe Corner

Sweet Potato Fries: A healthy low-fat snack option to regular fries.

Directions:

Ingredients:

1 lb sweet potato
1 egg white
2 teaspoons chili powder
1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
1/4 teaspoon onion powder
1/8 teaspoon salt

1-Peel and cut potatoes into 1/4 inch x 1/2 inch strips.
2-In a bowl, combine egg white and seasonings; beat well.
3-Add potatoes; toss to coat the fries.
4-Spray two baking sheets with nonstick cooking spray.
5-Place potatoes in a single layer on the two baking sheets.
6-Bake, uncovered at 450 degrees for 20-25 minutes or until golden brown.

My PALS

Hi my name is **Kevin**. Some people call me Kev or Kevo. I would like a pen pal to write me because I am in a correctional facility and it's hard not to have someone to write to or someone to relate to. I'm 18 years old and love rock and heavy metal music. I enjoy playing guitar and writing my own music. My favorite bands are Avenged Sevenfold and Bullet For My Valentine. Feel free to write me and we can get to know each other.



Do You Want a Pen Pal?

Send your responses or new letters to:

News for Us! Editor
2525 Wallingwood Dr.,
Suite 1503
Austin, TX 78746

Don't forget to write your name and address on all materials you send!



Poem and picture submitted by P.E.A.K.S participant.

Hello, my name is **Carlee**. I'm 16 going on 17 and I'm from Alvarado, TX near Ft. Worth. I just wanted to talk to someone who was going through the same thing I am. I'm living in Kaufman, TX at the moment, and I am loving every second with my foster family. I love to draw and watch anime. I am considered a tomboy because I LOVE football, basketball, baseball, hockey, and golf, even though I can barely play anything. I hope we have a little in common, it would be nice to talk about things.

Hey what's good? My name is **Jacob**. I just had my 17th birthday on March 25th. I am originally from San Antonio, TX but am in TYC right now. I've been through a lot, still going through a lot but am trying to make it out. Just need someone I can write to or talk to. Hit me up.

I am Maria
Society would label me as a foster kid who's happy, but really...
I am a tenacious young lady.
I was from an un-repairable family until 9 years old. I am a young lady smiling, but not showing my scars. I was a stoned girl who lost many but still faces time.
I am the sister who broke a promise to her young siblings.
I was treated as an animal by people who think I have no feelings.
I am a girl with thoughts, feelings, and opinions. I am a girl who hasn't told people what's going on. I am the one who's faced more struggles than faith. I am an attitude dealer who can shut down anytime.
I am someone who doesn't want to be pitied. I am somebody who can tell you that we foster kids aren't so different.
I am an 18 year old adult still facing obstacles. I am an adult who has created trouble, but fixed it. I am currently with foster parents who love and treat me as their own.
I am a young lady facing the stages of depression. I am worth more than what you think.
I am someone you judge wrong.
I am here until the end whether you like it or not.
I am Maria .

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Don't Become a Victim of Trafficking.

Domestic minor sex trafficking is the buying and selling of America's own children. Don't become a victim of trafficking. Children are being forced into sexual slavery more and more. Federal law defines domestic minor sex trafficking as the exchange of a sex act for anything of value. A sex act includes pornography, stripping, oral sex, massage parlors, etc. Anything of value includes a place to stay, a hamburger or higher status in a gang. Many times, the victims are vulnerable children fighting to survive. To learn more you can explore the helpful website **Traffick911** at **www.traffick911.com**

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News For US



Aging-Out Seminars

Know Before You Go!

Aging out of foster care can be a scary thing for some. Others look forward to the day they turn 18 so that they can finally leave foster care, and many find themselves wondering "what do I do now?" once they are independent. Many youth have questions about everyday life experiences and seek answers to questions such as "what constitutes a healthy relationship" and "how can I eat something that is healthy AND tasty?"

These are questions that are important because adults eventually need to make decisions that consider "what do I want vs. what do I need." Fortunately, Aging-Out Seminars have been designed to answer these questions and more! The topics presented at Aging-Out Seminars are made to give foster youth information on a wide variety of topics in order to help them make informed decisions. Workshops bring experts to share information and educate the audience, topics including: financial literacy, employment, human trafficking and safety, healthy relationships, and transitional living services such as the tuition waiver—just to name a few!

Aging-Out Seminars are offered to all youth in licensed or verified foster care at age 17. They are mandatory, but the one-day events are packed with prizes, food, and friendship. If you have questions about "what comes next" after leaving foster care, Aging-Out Seminars are the perfect place to get answers because they provide a safe, comfortable environment to learn and arm yourself with knowledge. For more information, contact your local PAL Staff, CPS Caseworker, or Youth Specialist.

Written by Tym Belseth, ETV Program Specialist/Youth Specialist