



*Join our campaign to create a better Texas for young people!*

There are nearly 10 million young people ages 0-24 in Texas and many are in situations that put them at risk for abuse or neglect, criminal justice system involvement, or homelessness – all of which can be prevented. Texas Network of Youth Services (TNOYS) is a network of community-based organizations and their supporters working toward a shared vision of Texas where all young people have access to the resources, support, and opportunities they need to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. We work tirelessly, and in partnership with young people, to ensure that all youth have opportunities to meet their potential.

Critical to the success of TNOYS and our members is our partnership with the State of Texas. We have designed a campaign that invites state leaders and the public to join us in our work to recognize and value the inherent strengths of young people. *We hope you will join us in this important work.*

1. Prevent problems before they start by investing in proven Prevention and Early Intervention programs.

The most cost effective way to serve young people and their families is to prevent problems before they start and escalate to a crisis. The Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) division at the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) contracts with organizations across the state to provide services and interventions that are proven to prevent youth from ending up in the expensive foster care and juvenile justice systems. Texas should invest in new programs, as well as protect existing programs that have been proven to work. Texas should also create an Office of Child Safety at PEI that will review child fatalities and serious injuries to learn how to prevent them from continuing to happen in the future.

2. Address truancy, running away, and other challenging adolescent behaviors appropriately to reduce recidivism, prevent the draining of court resources, and protect youths' futures.

Sometimes challenging adolescent behaviors are actually normal adolescent responses to troubling situations. For example, truancy and running away may indicate a need for family counseling services, untreated mental health conditions, or that there is abuse or neglect at home. Texas should support programs like Services to At-Risk Youth ("STAR") that are designed to get to the root of these issues. Texas should also fix redundancies in the law that criminalize youth unnecessarily and drain court resources. Instead, Texas should equip courts with tools to leverage existing community resources to prevent adolescent behaviors from recurring.

3. Promote safe, nurturing living arrangements for young people who cannot remain at home with their parents by ensuring that foster care services are of high quality and are trauma informed.

When the State of Texas determines a child's home environment to be unsafe, he or she may be placed in foster care. Foster care placements come in all different shapes and sizes and may include foster families, relative caregivers, emergency shelters, residential treatment centers, and more. Texas should adequately fund all foster care and residential treatment services to ensure that children and youth placed in all of these settings are safe, and that their placements promote their health and well-being.



Texas should also promote the careful redesign of the foster care system, to improve outcomes for those in foster care. However, it is important to recognize that some youth may not be able to enter the new system for many years, so it is important to continue improving the existing system at the same time.

4. Provide services and supports for youth who are homeless and on their own.

Some young people end up needing a place to live before the government gets involved; for example, if they run away from home or get kicked out. Some experts believe there may be as many as 150,000 “unaccompanied” youth aged 12-17 in Texas, but since these youth are hard to track and definitions of homelessness vary, it is hard to know for sure. This makes it hard to ensure services such as housing and mental health services are available. Texas should establish a state definition for youth homelessness to promote better understanding of the issue.

5. Prevent the re-traumatization of people who have been traumatized by promoting trauma informed care principles and reducing seclusion and restraint practices when appropriate.

Some people may exhibit especially challenging behaviors as a result of trauma they have experienced. For example, a child may run away from a foster care placement when upset because running away is a coping mechanism he or she learned while living in an abusive home. For these people, addressing their behavior appropriately is especially crucial to their health and well-being. Restraint and seclusion practices are associated with high rates of patient/client and staff injuries and are proven to be traumatizing interventions. For this reason, it is important that service environments are trauma-informed and that seclusion and restraint practices are only used as a last resort.

6. Support young people in challenging situations through the transition to adulthood.

Growing up is hard work, especially when you are on your own or when you are struggling with mental health conditions. Being successful requires completing school, getting a job, staying out of trouble, and learning skills like using money wisely and paying bills on time. Young adults who face challenges including aging out of foster care, having a mental health condition, or being homeless, are just as capable of meeting these milestones as their peers, but they need help. Texas should continue to invest in resources to prepare youth who are struggling to grow into successful, independent adults.

7. Work in partnership with youth.

TNOYS respects and values the resiliency, capability, and insight of youth and strives to always work in partnership with young people. Involving youth in decisions is crucial to ensure that they have access to the resources, opportunities, and support they need to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. Texas should ensure that youth have opportunities to be involved in policymaking, including through task forces, councils, and committees.

Some of our youth partners will join us at the Capitol to advocate for the needs of young people.