



TNOYS Response and Texas Youth Serving-Organization Needs, re: COVID-19

The mission of Texas Network of Youth Services (TNOYS) is to strengthen services and support for Texas youth and families to help them overcome challenges to achieve healthy development. TNOYS is a network of members who share a vision where all youth and young adults in Texas are valued, their strengths are recognized, their voices are heard and respected, and they have access to the resources, support, and opportunities they need to meet their goals.

TNOYS members provide services across the state of Texas and across the continuum of care, ranging from prevention and early intervention services that keep families together, to community-based services such as shelters and drop-in centers for young people experiencing homelessness, to residential and aftercare services for youth involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Challenges facing Youth-Serving Organizations and Systems:

TNOYS is in daily contact with its member organizations to identify and address their needs. TNOYS member organizations are experiencing or are concerned about many challenges, including the following, as a result of COVID-19:

- **Increased Need for Services:** Providers serving non-systems involved youth are anticipating or already seeing increased demand for services. For example, more young people experiencing homelessness may seek services as they can no longer secure meals at school due to school closures, they can no longer access free WIFI in public spaces, and congregating with other groups of homeless persons may be dangerous and increase community spread of Covid-19. Other providers are experiencing or anticipating increased need for services including family and individual counseling, rental assistance, meals, and other support.
- **Threat to Residential Capacity:** Some foster families and residential operations are closing their doors to new placements to reduce risk of exposure for staff and children and youth who are already in their care. This has the potential to significantly reduce system capacity, which was already insufficient. Longer-term, foster care providers are anticipating needs for new residential capacity, as early data already indicate rate of abuse and neglect may be increasing due to COVID-19. Those who offer residential services for young adults experiencing homelessness are anticipating needing new/additional capacity as nearly all of the young adults in some of their programs have lost jobs, which means they may need services for a longer period. This is, of course, in addition to any new clients who may need services due to job losses.
- **Increased Workforce Costs:** Providers are experiencing increased personnel costs, due to use of PTO and also need to offer hazard pay in order to maintain adequate staffing levels. At the same time, some organizations are needing to pay employees to work overtime to account for those who are out due to sickness of themselves or a loved one, or because they do not have child care. Additionally, many residential operations need more staff than normal to maintain staffing

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ratios, due to clients not being away for school or work. These increased costs are significant financial burdens.

- Other Workforce Challenges: Residential providers are concerned about their ability to continue to meet staffing ratios if the pay increases outlined above do not ensure adequate staff coverage. Some are equipping administrative staff to serve in direct care roles as a last resort.
- Increased Supply Expenses: Due to increased demand and a need to have extra supply on hand, providers are experiencing increased costs associated with purchasing of additional food, toiletries, medical supplies, cleaning supplies, etc. School closures mean that many organizations are needing to provide more meals than were budgeted. Some organizations are reporting that utility bills are higher due to more youth being at the facility for longer periods.
- Challenges Securing Supplies: Providers are reporting challenges with securing needed supplies, including Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), cleaning products, and groceries. Many grocery stores are rationing certain items, such as eggs and tomato products, which means residential operations cannot buy the amount needed to feed all of the youth they serve. They report sending numerous staff out to make grocery runs that were previously able to be handled by one person. Some of the companies that provide bulk groceries for residential programs are taking new customers now but are behind.
- Other Increased Expenses: Providers are also experiencing increased costs related to education, entertainment, and/or recreation, including the purchase of computers or tablets to facilitate online learning and/or other equipment and supplies to keep young people engaged constructively during this period of isolation and through school closures. Some organizations are expending resources to secure child care for clients and/or staff as a result of school and day care center closures.
- Costs Associated with Going Remote: Nearly all organizations are reporting costs associated with transitioning to a remote work environment. For providers offering remote counseling or case management these costs may be especially high, as they include servers and infrastructure in addition to laptops or tablets with HIPPA compliant video conferencing software.
- Cancelation of Fundraising Events: Many organizations have had major fundraisers canceled, limiting their ability to cover increased expenses.
- Need for New Referral Systems: Organizations offering services that are not residential, such as family counseling services, are experiencing lower client caseloads due to school closures, given that schools are typically a major referral source. This threatens the long-term viability of these programs, which bill the state at a fee-for-service rate and is unfortunate given that many families have especially high levels of need for support at this time. Service providers are working to raise public awareness of what they offer and build new referral systems. In most cases, their services are critical youth and families during these trying times.

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TNOYS Response:

TNOYS also speaks daily with representatives from state leadership, regulatory agencies, and partners at the federal level. TNOYS is utilizing its established role as a cross-system convener to facilitate information sharing and coordination of resources. TNOYS activities in response to COVID-19 include:

- TNOYS launched an online Emergency Response Resource Center with guidance for youth-serving organizations and professionals on responding to COVID-19. The resource center includes guidance for providers on developing emergency response plans and implementing recommended public health protocols, as well as updates from state and federal regulatory agencies.
- TNOYS is convening virtual meetings to provide a peer-to-peer platform for targeted types of provider organizations to troubleshoot challenges and share ideas.
 - TNOYS convened its Emergency Shelter Task Force, which is comprised of Texas' emergency shelters for children in foster care, for 71 registrants. The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) and the Office of the Governor (OOG) participated.
 - TNOYS convened its Transitional Services Task Force, which is comprised of those who provide services for young adults who will soon age out of or recently aged out of foster care, including Preparation for Adult Living, Supervised Independent Living, and transitional living programs, for 62 registrants. DFPS participated in this meeting.
 - TNOYS convened providers of the Family and Youth Success program (formerly the "STAR") program, which provides family crisis intervention services in all 254 counties.
 - TNOYS convened its Statewide Collaborative on Youth Homelessness for 81 registrants and brought the state's youth-serving regulatory agencies, service providers, school districts, and others together to share information and coordinate on provision of services for young people who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk and who may not already be connected to services. Participants included the OOG, DFPS, the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, the Texas Education Agency, public school districts, and more.
- TNOYS is relaying guidance from the OOG, DFPS, and other state and federal leaders and regulatory agencies to its members through regular bulletins.
- TNOYS is working with OOG, Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services, and multiple state agencies to distribute needed supplies such as masks, hand sanitizer, and laptops and tablets to child and youth-serving organizations.
- TNOYS is also coordinating with Texas Homeless Network and Texas Association Against Sexual Assault to share information and streamline support being offered for provider organizations.
- TNOYS is making plans to support Family and Youth Success Program providers in marketing their free counseling and support services to youth and families in need.
- TNOYS is collaborating with national stakeholders, including the National Network for Youth, the US Interagency Council for the Homeless, and federal regulatory agencies, to keep Texas' youth-

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serving organizations informed of federal regulatory guidance and to advocate for needed funding and flexibility during this difficult time.

Support Needed from State and Federal Regulatory Agencies:

Texas' youth-serving organizations need the following guidance and support from state and federal policymakers and regulatory agencies:

- Clear and direct guidance on implementation of precautions and development of response plans. This guidance should address hygiene, sanitation, isolation, screening, staffing and more.
- Collaboration to address workforce challenges, including staffing ratios.
- Increased government funding to cover the new or increased expenses associated with the challenges in the list above.
- Flexibility to allow quick grant budget modifications to address needs as they arise. This includes flexibility allowing for quick modifications to personal categories and for addition of virtual meeting tools and/or other relevant technology.
- Cancellation or delay of *routine* monitoring visits and audits to ensure staff is available to support youth in their care.
- Flexibility with grant match requirements, in recognition that match dollars may be lost due to cancellation of fundraisers and/or may need to be spent on emergency expenses.
- Modification of output or outcome targets for community-based services that are not residential, such as counseling sessions, in-home visits, etc.
- Temporary flexibility around training requirements, including flexibility to complete some training online rather than in-person.

TNOYS greatly appreciates the partnership and collaboration of state leadership and regulatory agencies during this difficult time.

Support Needed from Philanthropy:

Significant support is also needed from the philanthropic community at this time.

- The primary need of Texas youth-serving organizations is for operating support to ensure that they will have capacity to meet youth and family needs. Operating support would ensure that organizations can continue to provide services, by addressing increased workforce costs, supply costs, and other increased costs, as well as helping to fill in gaps from missed revenue. Operating support could also be used to expand capacity to meet anticipated future need. Additionally, operating support can be used to meet basic needs of clients who have lost jobs, through rental assistance, food assistance, and more.

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