Texas Network of Youth Services (TNOYS) is a statewide member network that strengthens services and support for youth and families. We share a vision of Texas where all youth and young adults are valued, their strengths are recognized, and they have access to the resources and support they need to succeed.

2021 was a year of growth and resilience for TNOYS and our members. From difficult obstacles like winter storm Uri and the ongoing pandemic to new partnerships and policy wins, this year showed us the need for equitable systems and the change that is possible when we center young people and the providers that serve them. TNOYS’ four strategic priorities guided our work this year in our pursuit of the vision we share with our members where all Texas youth and young adults are valued, their strengths recognized, their voices heard and respected, and they have access to the resources, opportunities, and support they need to thrive. As I reflect on our accomplishments, two milestones that stand out are TNOYS’ strategic planning and the internal growth that will help make this vision a reality.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Racial inequities in systems are a daily, harmful reality for the youth and young adults TNOYS and our members work with on a daily basis. In 2021, TNOYS redoubled our efforts to understand and combat these inequities through internal work to take ownership of how we change the organization from within. We also worked to embed DEI resources throughout our conferences, trainings, and technical assistance to improve the field as a whole.

Youth Voice/Youth-Adult Partnership: TNOYS knows that the best way to serve youth and young adults is to center their voices and invest in them as leaders. This year, our Youth Voices, Young Adult Leadership Council, and AmeriCorps programs engaged over 75 young people from across systems and around the state so they can be meaningfully involved in building change.

Cross-System Collaboration: Because youth and young adults often become involved with multiple systems, TNOYS works to break down silos and build alignment across issue areas. From our 38th Annual Conference to building capacity in Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Youth (CSEY) services, to the TEHCY Program Summit, we ensured that professionals and young people have opportunities to collaborate across systems.

Research and Performance Driven Programming: Our work in 2021 was grounded in the latest evidence-based practices. TNOYS conducted original qualitative research with providers and youth and implemented a Youth Participatory Action Research model that trains youth to conduct research that improves their lives, communities, and the systems intended to serve them. Our policy agenda, resources, guides, and toolkits were all informed by these efforts.

You can find a full summary of what we accomplished in the body of this report, organized by Policy, Practice, and Partnerships—our three-pronged approach. We are excited to share these accomplishments and all we have in store for an impactful new year.
TNOYS has always made youth-centered training and technical assistance a priority. Our 38th Annual Conference once again convened youth-serving providers across Texas, and we continued the momentum by partnering with Texas Education Agency (TEA) to co-host the second annual Texas Education for Homeless Children and Youth (TEHCY) Program Summit.

Our team also developed numerous evidence-based resources in collaboration with youth and young adults. With support from the Office of the Texas Governor Child Sex Trafficking Team, TNOYS launched youth-led trainings for providers on the issues of CSEY and the Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool. We partnered with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) and the Supreme Court of Texas Children’s Commission to update the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Independent Living Study Guides (ILSGs) to make them youth-informed resources that assist youth and young adults in the critical transition to adulthood.

Looking ahead, we have big plans to expand our impact with a training series on Equity, trainings on the Youth Thrive™ framework and Building Alliances with Youth, and much more. We will also continue to build capacity for our network and young people through the development of resources and guides on pregnancy and parenting, the legal rights of youth in foster care, trauma-informed care, and the intersections of CSEY and homelessness.

During the 87th Texas Legislative Session, TNOYS focused our agenda on addressing inequities and strengthening services in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our efforts were successful thanks to the many youth-serving providers, youth, and young adults who joined in our advocacy, as well as the funders that made our work possible: Reissa Foundation, Houston Endowment, Meadows Foundation, and The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health. TNOYS staff worked closely with legislative offices and provided testimony to support our priorities. Additionally, we mobilized member organizations and youth and young adult partners to spread awareness through social media, virtual office visits, and virtual and in-person testimony.

Our work continued through statewide and federal partnerships. Together with the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, TNOYS convened over 60 providers and young people to influence the federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness. In 2022, we will continue to listen to and learn from young people and providers to guide our agenda for the 88th Texas Legislative Session and deepen our understanding of the health needs of systems-involved youth and young adults through our new partnership with the Episcopal Health Foundation.

**87TH TEXAS LEGISLATIVE SESSION HIGHLIGHTS:**

- **SB 2054:** Eliminates barriers to accessing a driver’s license for youth in or previously in foster care and YYA experiencing homelessness.
- **SB 452:** Expands the definition of evidence-based programs and practices. This will increase the available prevention and early intervention programs.
- **HB 700:** Includes provisions to increase support for youth aging out of care. It allows for earlier transition planning, makes sure youth have access to their important documents, and allows youth aging out of foster care to obtain college credit when they complete Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) classes so they can lock in their tuition waiver.

TNOYS secured multiple wins during the 87th Texas Legislative Session:

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**POLICY**

**PRACTICE**
2021 was an important year for youth engagement at TNOYS. Thanks to support from the Children’s Justice Act Task Force, TNOYS launched our Youth Engagement Roadmap: a new blueprint to more meaningfully engage and invest in youth and young adults (YYA).

Young people engaged with TNOYS along many stages of the roadmap, particularly through three exciting programs. Our Youth Voices: Listening Sessions and Storytelling program amplifies youth voices so that we can better center their needs. The Young Adult Leadership Council (YALC) is a work-based learning program that equips youth and young adults with professional and leadership skills and the chance to guide the direction of youth services in Texas. Finally, TNOYS’ new AmeriCorps program, funded by OneStar Foundation, enables young adult participants with lived experiences to influence change for other young people who are systems-involved through youth-adult partnerships and job skill training. An especially exciting highlight this year was seeing the Youth Engagement Roadmap in action when three former YALC members went on to expand their skills by joining the AmeriCorps program.

Next, TNOYS is excited to relaunch PEAKS— our flagship experiential learning camp for youth preparing to transition out of the foster care system—with new enhancements to popular programming and new additions for youth. We’re also expanding our focus on the needs of young people as they transition into adulthood and out of systems through new partnerships with the Texas Opportunity Youth Network and the State Policy Advocacy and Reform Center along with the development of best practices for employing young people with lived experiences.

TNOYS’ work would not be possible without our 100+ dedicated members serving Texas’ most vulnerable yet resilient youth and young adults. We know these organizations and individual professionals face many challenges as they continue to maintain and expand services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are incredibly grateful for all that they do!

In 2021, TNOYS expanded our efforts to connect our members with funding, professional development, and partnership opportunities. Our efforts include expanding our email marketing and social media outreach, 1-on-1 support, and a new members-only portal with exclusive networking groups and trainings.
2021 brought several exciting opportunities for TNOYS’ youth and young adult partners to make an impact and build skills that will help them achieve their goals.

For Brenda Woolley, working with TNOYS has helped her make a difference for young adults like herself who have experienced the foster care system. Brenda first learned about TNOYS when a caseworker at Buckner International shared information on the newly reimagined Young Adult Leadership Council. As Brenda explains, she knew immediately that the YALC was “a chance to learn more about things they don’t teach in school,” like leadership development, storytelling, and advocacy.

Brenda achieved many milestones while on the YALC, with a standout moment being her powerful testimony during the 87th Texas Legislative Session. Now, she is continuing her journey as part of the newly launched AmeriCorps Program. Her experience as a former YALC member has allowed Brenda to build meaningful relationships with current YALC members, enabling them to truly grow as leaders and advocates. As Brenda explains, “I’ve seen day in and day out the impact of TNOYS. I see how much they highlight our voices, and I wanted to continue and help develop that through my own work.”

Learn more about TNOYS’ youth engagement work and how you can support programs like the YALC and AmeriCorps Program at tnoys.org/youth-engagement.

“AmeriCorps members with lived experience are able to help other youth meet their needs because they have already walked in their shoes. Our AmeriCorps members are able to connect with our youth on a different level and this allows them to inform team members on best practices when engaging youth in services.”

–Breanna L. Haile, Harris County Resources for Children and Adults

Above all, Breanna hopes AmeriCorps members leave Harris County Resources knowing that their voices and experiences are valued. The Harris County Resources team is excited to learn from this experience as they work to guide youth during the critical transition out of systems and into adulthood.