



AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE IN TEXAS

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS AND COLLABORATIONS

April 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview	3
Research and Data Contributions	6
Shared Recommendations by People with Experience in Foster Care	9
Other Researched Based Recomendations	10
Conclusions	12

OVERVIEW

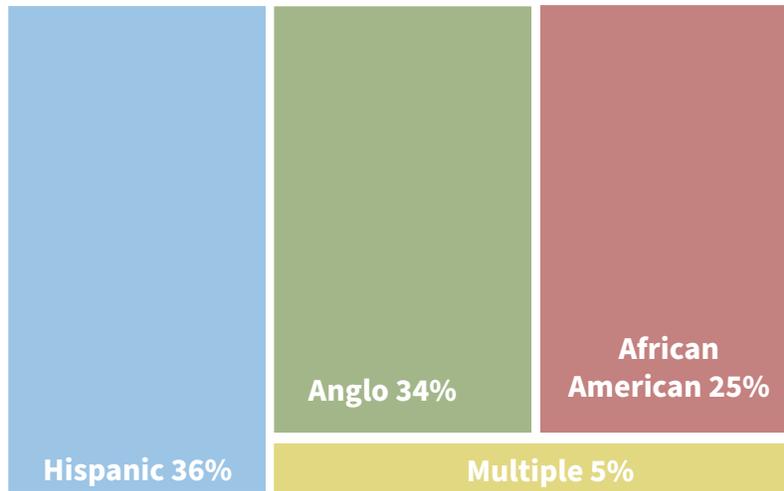


This white paper outlines the research and context around current and continuing struggles facing people with experience in foster care. Our purpose in sharing this information is to describe young adults aging out of care, to share initiatives aimed at supporting transitions and early adulthood, and lastly, to offer recommendations for improving outcomes for people who have experienced foster care in Texas.

In the Texas foster care system, the primary permanency goal for all families is usually family reunification, unless there are underlying circumstances for another permanency goal. The child enters the system and is usually placed in either a foster home or residential treatment center, apart from extreme circumstances where more restrictive placements are sought. Children come into the child welfare system for circumstances that are out of their control and can come into the system at any age. Some of the hardest to place children are older youth and, in addition to their age, some also have higher needs.

Many youth age out of the foster care system without a permanent placement. Emancipated youth accounted for 8% (n=1258) of all exits in 2020; more females (n=691) emancipated than males (n=567). When considering race identity of emancipated youth, the story changes depending on the data and geography. For example, figure 1 represents all emancipated youth in 2020 across the state. However, the numbers do not really tell us where youth are from and where the highest percent of youth are with one of the identities listed below. When this data is disaggregated, we find that although 25% of youth who emancipate are African American, 37% (n=112) of those youth come from DFPS Region 6, or the Houston area. The same is true for Hispanic youth, when 33% (n=145) of youth who emancipate come from Region 8, or the San Antonio area. The data pinpoints where large percentages of youth reside and can inspire communities to create innovative, targeted programming to meet the needs of their youth and families. Race is a crucial factor in tailoring programs that are effective and inclusive.

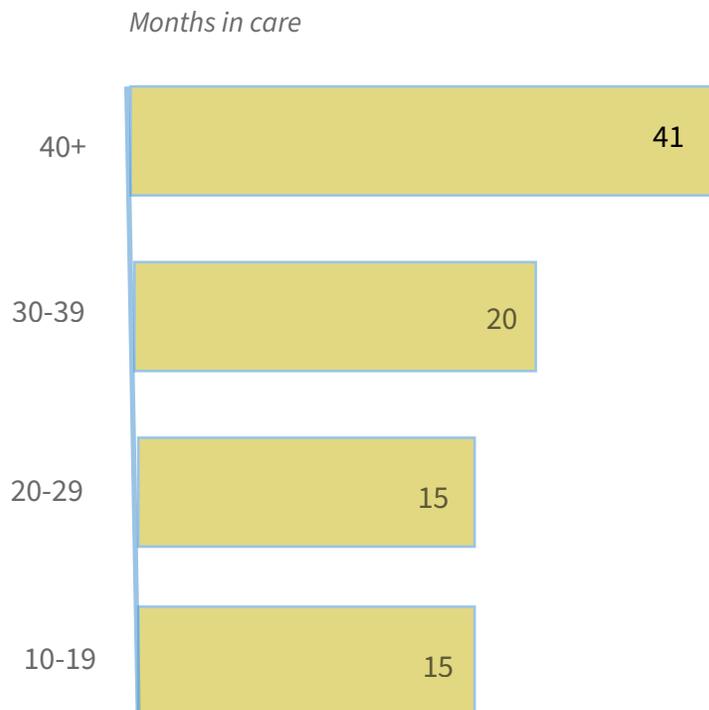
Figure 1. Emancipated Youth by Race



Statistically, the older the child is the harder it is to find an adoptive placement. Because of this, a lot of children who enter the child welfare system at an older age tend to spend more time in foster care and can ultimately age out of the system, as seen in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Percent of Time in Care by Months¹

percentages are based on children who emancipated



Aging out of the system, or emancipating, means that by the time the children turn 18, they become an independent adult and are no longer a ward of the state, unless they sign an extended foster care contract.

¹ During Fiscal Year 2020 as of August. DFPS data.

From point in time data on August 2020², 1,198 children were in extended foster care, which is a trend that holds consistent in any given year. If only 1,200 young adults participate in extended foster care in any given year, we can assume that there are at least 3,600 young adults who are eligible between the ages of 18-21 that do not participate in extended care. There are more women (n=635; 53%) than men (n=563; 47%) in extended foster care; 71% (n=855) of those in extended foster care are People of Color or chose “other” as their ethnicity/race; and, most alarming, 83% of adults (n=997) in extended foster care spent 2 or more years in foster care before emancipating from care. Finding more permanent placements for older foster youth in Texas must continue to be a concerted effort.

Aging Out Process

The aging out process is different depending on the unique situations of each young adult. The following bulleted items are processes crucial for aging out youth to prepare them for successful adult transitions.



Assessment and Paperwork

- Get documents, such as social security card, Texas ID or Texas Driver’s License, Medicaid card, and birth certificate
- Youth signs and Voluntary Extended Foster Care Agreement form (VEFCA) before they age out of care
- Caseworker helps youth with the Casey Life Skills Assessment

Education

- If given the opportunity, open a bank account and obtain information on financial literacy
- Prepare for postsecondary education
- Develop a transition plan, take PAL classes, and attend an Aging Out Seminar
- Attend a Texas Teen Conference and Circle of Support Meetings

There is no guarantee of success in adulthood once young adults completes these activities. Rather, these steps are the bare minimum youth need to *journey* into adulthood; much more is needed to ensure they are *ready* and they stay prepared to meet new challenges while in adulthood.

2 During Fiscal Year 2020 as of August. DFPS data.

RESEARCH AND DATA CONTRIBUTIONS

Preparation for Adult Living (PAL)

When children in the foster care system turn 14, they are automatically enrolled into the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program and are assigned a PAL caseworker. The PAL program provides services and benefits to children in foster to prepare for adulthood. The role of the PAL worker is to inform youth of healthy practices and life skills to help them succeed were they to age out of the foster care system. Of the children eligible to receive PAL,³ **8,612**, only **6,840** were served in the program in 2019. Each region operates PAL differently, which could explain the gap in those who are eligible and served. Nonetheless, a unified effort to make sure all children are adequately served in PAL is warranted.

Extended Foster Care

Extended foster care allows the children to stay in the system until they are 21. By doing this, they are able to receive more benefits such as a caseworker, assistance with independent living, and a \$1,000 transitional living stipend. The guidelines for extended foster care eligibility include, but are not limited to, the adult engaging in High school or GED classes, enrolling in college classes, working at least 80 hours a month, or participating in career trainings or programs.

Empirical data revealed in the CalYOUTH study, or what is known as the Midwest study⁴ on extended foster that young adults accessing benefits after care are offered the appropriate housing and formal and informal social supports needed to be successful adults. Even with formal supports, the study showed that young adults with experience in care still perform lower on wellbeing outcomes including education and health than their non-foster care peers. Yet, empirical evidence still supports increasing participation and improving quality of extended foster care as an avenue for empowering positive, healthy outcomes for young adults exiting care.

Extended foster care criteria exclude many young adults from extended foster care benefits. One in 10 participants in the Midwest study aged out of care as a runaway or as an incarcerated youth/adult. As a result, they were not eligible for benefits. Young adults with violent criminal pasts and other exclusion criteria run into similar roadblocks in Texas when they find they not eligible for extended foster care benefits. Extended foster care is a crucial benefit for young adults aging out of care.

Supervised Independent Living (SIL)

When a young adult ages out of care and opts into extended foster care, if an appropriate placement is found, they can move into a SIL placement. These placements are part of extended foster care and are offered by many organizations across the state in settings including homes, apartment buildings, and institutions of higher education. Of all extended foster care participants, 182 or 15% are in SIL placements⁵.

3 DPFS Data book: 2019 Preparation for Adult Living data

4 Courtney, M. E., Okpych, N. J., Park, K., Harty, J., Feng, H., Torres-García, A., & Sayed, S. (2018). Findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CalYOUTH): Conditions of youth at age 21. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

5 During Fiscal Year 2020 as of August. DFPS data.

Workforce Programs

The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) is innovating their approaches to supporting people who have experience foster care. Workforce directives give employment preference⁶ to people who have experienced foster care. As a result, any person who has experienced care who self-discloses their foster care experiences has preferential hiring status in the state of Texas until age 23. Employment programs that introduce young adults to apprenticeships or work experience programs are also available based on the need and geographic location in the state.

In addition to employment preference and workforce support, TWC is currently⁷:

- Updating their data management system to help with data transparency between DFPS and transition centers;
- Innovating the annual conference to both incorporate trauma-informed practice and incorporate young adult perspectives who have experienced foster care;
- Updating the TWC website to include more services and information; and
- Launching a statewide strategic planning process with aftercare service transition centers to improve referral systems and access to resources.

Tuition and Fee Waiver

The Texas Tuition and Fee Waiver⁸ is a program that covers tuition and fee expenses for any person who has experienced foster care and qualifies for the waiver. Even though higher education is practically cost-free for people who have experienced care, only about 36% enroll in higher education and only 1.7% graduate with a post-secondary education degree by age 24⁹. Even further, of the percentage who enroll in any given year, about 40% of the students who are eligible for the waiver do not use it. We can speculate reasons the students would not use the waiver, including lack of knowledge about the waiver, not understanding who to contact to activate the waiver, and/or not knowing one is eligible for the waiver. Regardless, advocating for students to use the waiver is critical, because students who utilize the waiver are 3.5 times more likely to obtain a degree¹⁰.

Foster Care Liaisons

Students with experience in foster care have both Pre-K-12 secondary education liaisons^{11, 12} and postsecondary education^{13, 14} (including vocations, 2-year, and 4-year institutions) liaisons to support them with in their education needs along their educational journeys. However, the liaison role is often given to someone as another duty as assigned, offering competing interests. Also, no one currently tracks whether liaisons receive trauma-informed training on their role. More research on these roles is warranted

6 Section 1. Subtitle B, Title 6, Government Code, is amended by adding Chapter 672

7 For more information, visit <https://www.twc.texas.gov/partners/foster-care-programs>

8 For more information, visit: https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Youth_and_Young_Adults/Education/state_college_tuition_waiver.asp

9 Watt, Toni, & Faulkner, Monica. (2020). The Texas tuition and fee waiver program for youth who have experienced foster care: An assessment of waiver utilization and impact. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 117, 105285.

10 Watt and Faulkner (2020)

11 Texas Education Code §33.904

12 For more information on how to search for Pre-K-12 liaisons, read: <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Guidance%20for%20how%20to%20find%20the%20foster%20care%20liaison%20contact%20information%20in%20AskTED.pdf>

13 Texas Education Code §51.9356.

14 For a list of higher education liaisons, visit: <http://www.collegeforalltexas.com/apps/financialaid/tofa2.cfm?ID=480>

to break down the nature of this role and the impact liaisons have on people with experience in care. Most importantly, liaisons require more support and funding to increase the amount of time and services they can provide to people with experience in foster care.

Delaying Pregnancy and Parenting Support

Youth and young adults with experience in foster care need both increased prevention efforts to delay pregnancy and parenting support for those who have children. Research¹⁵ clearly advocates for delaying pregnancy among people with experience in foster care to increase wellbeing outcomes and parenting outcomes with public health and educational interventions. Research¹⁶ also shows that two thirds of all first births occur for emancipated youth between ages 18-21; 1 out of 3 adolescences give birth to at least 1 child by age 21¹⁷.

Information on healthy relationships and family planning is most crucial after age 18, when many young adults lose their foster care benefits and connections.

Social Capital

It is clear across academic disciplines and professional practice that having a system of supportive people in life is beneficial to promote wellbeing outcomes. The need for a system of support, known as social capital, is increased and intensified for people with experience in foster care. Whether it be a need for peer support^{18 19} or adult mentors^{20 21}, people with experience in care face daunting challenges that require varied approaches and perspectives. All research investigating social capital for people with experience in care advocate for sustainable, long-lasting, and varied support systems of peers and caring adults to help young adults preserve through challenges and to have people with which to celebrate success.

15 Shpiegel, Svetlana, Cascardi, Michele, & Dineen, Michael, M.A. (2016). A Social Ecology Analysis of Childbirth Among Females Emancipating from Foster Care. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 60*(5), 563-569

16 Putnam-Hornstein, Emily, Hammond, Ivy, M.S.W, Eastman, Andrea Lane, M.A, McCroskey, Jacquelyn, D.S.W, & Webster, Daniel. (2016). Extended Foster Care for Transition-Age Youth: An Opportunity for Pregnancy Prevention and Parenting Support. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 58*(4), 485-487.

17 Putnam-Hornstein, E. et al. (2016).

18 Perez, Beatrix F, & Romo, Harriett D. (2011). "Couch surfing" of Latino foster care alumni: Reliance on peers as social capital. *Journal of Adolescence (London, England.)*, 34(2), 239-248.

19 Skobba, Kim, Meyers, David, & Tiller, Lori. (2018). Getting by and getting ahead: Social capital and transition to college among homeless and foster youth. *Children and Youth Services Review, 94*, 198-206.

20 Hook, Jennifer L, & Courtney, Mark E. (2011). Employment outcomes of former foster youth as young adults: The importance of human, personal, and social capital. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*(10), 1855-1865.

21 Rutman, Deborah, & Hubberstey, Carol. (2016). Is anybody there? Informal supports accessed and sought by youth from foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 63*, 21-27.

SHARED RECOMMENDATIONS BY PEOPLE WITH EXPERIENCE IN FOSTER CARE

What do people with experience in foster care suggest professionals do to improve the process, and therein, possibly improve the system for aging out youth? Findings from a recent national research study conducted and published by a person with experience in foster care, Sixto Cancel, documented how people with experience in foster care are healing and dealing with trauma that led to their involvement in care and the trauma that stemmed from their experience in care.²² Some of the findings are juxtaposed with their recommendations in each of the following areas below:

Healing and Dealing with Trauma

Findings	Recommendations
100% of foster youth have experienced trauma, either at home or as a result of being removed from their home	Intentionally introduce a shared vocabulary for talking about loss
Young people in the foster care system are more likely to experience additional trauma	Provide diverse tools and methods for healing from trauma
The system isn't set up to provide a stable, nurturing environment needed for healing	Cultivate a supportive, stable environment that young people can depend on

Centering Youth in Their Preparedness

Findings	Recommendations
The system doesn't do a good job laying out a clear timeline and path for youth aging out of care	Define preparedness from the perspective of young people
Young people's priorities for transitioning out of foster care are often different from the system's priorities	Set youth-centered goals for transition
Youth in foster care have ambitions for the future, but they are left on their own to figure out how to make their goals a reality	Help foster youth plan out how they'll meet these goals

²² Cancel, S., Fathallah, S., Nitze, M., Sullivan, S., & Wright-Moore, E. *Aged Out: How We're Failing Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care*. Think of Us. December 17, 2020. Read the report at: <https://www.thinkof-us.org/aged-out-report>

Helping Youth Build a Support Network

Findings	Recommendations
The system's focus on directly meeting the needs of foster youth can block opportunities for other caring adults to step in	Work with young people to map their support networks
Foster youth have unpaid, supportive people in their lives	Explore options for youth to be placed with an adult in their support network
Staff are often unaware of these outside relationships	
Young people will intentionally protect people in their lives from the system	Facilitate external relationships by identifying opportunities for supportive adults to be a helpful, caring presence in young people's lives

OTHER RESEARCH-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below address how new collaborations between state agencies, coalitions, and organizations can support young adults transitioning out of foster care.

Community-Based Care

Community-Based Care can play an integral role in improving outcomes from young adults aging out of care. Services in CBC are designed to serve the young adults near their family and school of origin to keep them close to home and close to their social networks. There is potential for youth to no longer feel like one person in a large system and instead be a part of a system with resources created especially for their needs. Social capital could increase in CBC systems where youth and young adults foster a sense of community and build positive, long lasting relationships with other professionals and peers as a result of those services. In a CBC system, we can:

1. Expand local capacity to serve more adults in SIL programs and find more permanent placements for older youth.
2. Help young adults build and sustain meaningful relationships after they age out of care.
3. DFPS can contract directly with providers and transfer the aftercare case management services to SSCC's so youth have one organization with whom they rely on for a continuum of care.

Advocating for Extended Benefits and Support

As evidenced in this paper, young adults aging out of foster care can use all the help they can get. Yet, many services have beginning and end dates that do not align with one another. We support the following extensions for adults who have experienced foster care:

1. **Extending Extended Foster Care** preferably to age 25 to match the deadline for the Texas Tuition and Fee Waiver and to get close to the temporary federal Chafee age extension²³ to age 26 (up to 27th birthday).
2. **Expanding SIL** in higher education and with providers across the state **both in capacity and in**

length. SIL is a part of extended foster care and as aligned with the previous recommendation, we recommend that access to SL programs be expanded to age 25 to match the deadline for the Texas Tuition and Fee Waiver. Expanding SIL to more institutions of higher education can fill gaps in SIL capacity for young adults.

3. **Expanding ETV** preferably to age 25 to match the deadline for the Texas Tuition and Fee Waiver.
4. **Change the narrative about extended foster care**—as this report highlighted, many young adults do not want to be associated with foster care when they age out. They are denying services that are beneficial and is empirically shown to increase their success after care. We need organizations to reframe extended foster care often and early as an expectation for young adults, even though it is an optional program.

Common Community Goals Across DFPS Regions for Improving Aftercare Outcomes

Each child welfare community has similar but different approaches to caring for people who have experienced foster care. Regardless of the geographical location, the amount of services available, or the capacity to serve those in care, a standard set of goals exist for professionals serving people with foster care experience.

1. **Delaying pregnancy:** The evidence for why we should help youth delay pregnancy is clear and outlined in this paper. Delaying parenthood is shown in research to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for people who have experienced care.
 - a. Efforts delay pregnancy might include:
 - i. Teaching all foster children and youth (at an appropriate age) abstinence+ sex education and family planning. These efforts should also extend into young adulthood after age 18.
 - ii. Reduce barriers for youth in accessing appropriate contraceptives
2. **Increasing HS graduation rates:** With HS graduation rates hovering between 50-60% annually for foster youth²⁴, efforts to increase the number who walk across the stage have never been more pressing.
 - a. Suggestions to increase graduation rates might include:
 - i. Quick and efficient credit recovery for kids ages 13-17 who lose educational credits because of placement changes
 - ii. Specialized tutoring services both on and off campus
 - iii. Building confidence about HS graduation and empowering young adults to see education and career training and success as an expectation rather than an option
 - iv. Connect older adults who did not graduate with a degree with GED programs in the community and at transition centers in each DFPS region
 - v. Involve young adults in activities that encourage (or demand) academic excellence as motivation to make good grades (e.g. sports, honors societies, etc.)
 - vi. Involve young adults in dual credit and/or career pathway programs that expose them to a range of professional opportunities
 - vii. Connect with and stay in close contact with K-12 foster care liaisons
 - viii. Build cross-collaborative partnerships to involve the youth you serve in neighboring programs that your organization/school might offer
3. **Increasing tuition waiver usage:** educating young adults about their post-secondary benefits is just the beginning. They need to be college and career prepared as early as 13 years old so that the tuition waiver becomes an ideal next step in their lives, instead of a daunting hurdle that they have been conditioned to avoid through lack of consistent and trustworthy mentors and caring adults.
 - a. Efforts to increase waiver usage rates might include:
 - i. Quick and efficient credit recovery for kids ages 13-17 who lose educational credits because of placement changes
 - ii. Reinforcing what benefits are available even if they have already been told
 - iii. Helping students fill out the FAFSA and the Texas Common Application so they can

- note they were in foster care and receive post-secondary education support
- iv. Encourage dual-credit or AP courses to lock in tuition waiver early
- v. Connecting early with K-12 and Higher Education Liaisons to communicate issues, worries, and challenges to applying to and persisting through post-secondary education
- vi. Promoting certificate and alternative post-secondary education options in addition to 2 and 4-year institutions

4. Expand or begin juvenile detention interventions: People who experience care often leave with a criminal record that hinders their ability to get a SIL placement/housing or a job/career, among other things.

- a. Efforts to expand or begin juvenile detention interventions might include:
 - i. Expunging criminal records so they can pursue their goals
 - ii. Partnering with organizations like the SMU Deadman School of Law, W.W. Caruth, Jr. Child Advocacy Clinic and the Texas Foster Youth Justice Project that work pro-bono to serve people who have experienced care and their criminal justice needs
 - iii. Having professionals represent young adults in trial

CONCLUSION

Considering the challenging nature of aging out of foster care, TACFS will continue to work with our member organizations across the state to improve outcomes for young adults transitioning out of care. We believe the recommendations listed in this paper are actionable steps communities can take to support young adults. Although our goal is to see that no young adult ages out of foster care, we understand that finding appropriate placements and time challenge this goal. However, we use the recommendations from this paper as a large step forward to tighten support around young adults who are aging out of foster care with little guidance and direction.