

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT DIVISION
Workforce Service Delivery
Technical Assistance Bulletin #121

Program: Foster Youth

Topic: Non-Workforce Resources Available to Foster Youth

Date: June 8, 2006

This Technical Assistance (TA) Bulletin provides Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) with information about non-workforce resources that are available to identified foster youth.

In order for Boards to maximize or supplement the use of workforce-funded services for education and training programs and to avoid duplication of services to foster youth, it is important that Boards be aware of other non-workforce programs and a state tuition fee waiver available to foster youth. Some of these programs provide similar or duplicate services that are also available through the Texas workforce system. For example, Workforce Investment Act Youth formula funds for Individual Training Accounts may provide tuition for foster youth to complete training in a recognized occupation through an accredited educational institution. In Texas, tuition fees are waived for foster youth enrolled in these training programs. Foster youth enrolled in training are also eligible to receive vouchers that expand and supplement the tuition waiver in order for youth to meet their educational or vocational goals.

State Tuition Fee Waiver

Texas Education Code §54.211 exempts students in foster or other residential care from the payment of tuition and fees. Youth may attend state-supported vocational schools, colleges, and universities with tuition and fees waived. Youth who are adopted from foster care or who are eligible for adoption at age 14 or older are also eligible for this waiver.

A student is exempt from the payment of tuition and fees if the student:

- was in foster care or other residential care under the conservatorship of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) on or after:
 - the day preceding the student's 18th birthday;
 - the day of the student's 14th birthday, if the student is eligible for adoption on or after that day; or
 - the day the student graduated from high school or received the equivalent of a high school diploma; and
- enrolls in an institution of higher education as an undergraduate student not later than:
 - the third anniversary of the date the student was discharged from foster or other residential care, the date the student graduated from high school, or the date the student received the equivalent of a high school diploma, whichever date is earliest; or
 - the student's 21st birthday.

An institution of higher education is a legally authorized public or nonprofit educational institution that is accredited or granted preaccreditation status and either:

- provides a bachelor's degree program, or at least a two-year program that is acceptable for full credit toward a bachelor's degree, and admits only students having a high school diploma or its equivalent; or
- provides training to prepare students for gainful employment in a recognized occupation and admits only students who are beyond the age of compulsory school attendance (i.e., at least 18 years old).

Education and Training Voucher Program

DFPS administers and oversees the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program. The ETV program is funded by a state grant to provide postsecondary educational and training vouchers to eligible foster youth who are in—or age out of—foster care, or who are adopted from foster care after turning 16 years old.

The ETV program allows DFPS to expand and supplement the current assistance it provides to former and eligible foster youth. The program specifically helps foster youth to begin, continue, or complete their educational and vocational goals.

The following youth are eligible for the ETV program:

- Youth in DFPS foster care who are at least 16 and who are likely to remain in foster care until turning 18
- Youth who age out of DFPS foster care but have not yet turned 21
- Youth who are adopted from DFPS foster care after turning 16 and are not yet 21
- Youth participating in the ETV program on their 21st birthday. These youth can remain eligible until age 23 as long as they are enrolled and making satisfactory progress toward completing their postsecondary education or training program.

To qualify for the ETV program, youth also must be:

- between the ages of 16 and 21, have a high school diploma or equivalent, and be enrolled:
 - at least part time (six hours) in an accredited or preaccredited public or nonprofit program that provides a bachelor's degree; or
 - in not less than a two-year program that provides credit toward a degree or certification;or
- beyond the age of compulsory attendance (age 18) and enrolled at least part time (six hours) in an accredited or preaccredited program that provides training toward employment.

The ETV program helps youth with:

- residential housing;
- room, board, and food costs;
- tuition and fees (for a non–state-supported institution or if a youth is not eligible for the state tuition and fee waiver for former foster youth);
- personal items;
- books and supplies;
- child care;
- some transportation needs;
- computers or other required equipment;

- medical insurance through the school;
- student loans and fees from the loans; and
- costs for attending an institution of higher education that do not exceed \$5,000 a year.

Preparation for Adult Living Program

DFPS is responsible for administering and overseeing the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. In Texas, the independent living program that receives Chafee funding is known as the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program. The PAL program ensures that older youth (16 and older) in substitute care are prepared for their departure from DFPS care and support. PAL, in collaboration with public and private organizations, assists youth in identifying and developing support systems and housing for when they leave care. PAL gives these youth skills and training.

Youth receive an initial assessment around their 16th birthday to determine their general readiness to live independently. The results of this test are used to develop specific plans and training. DFPS is currently using the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment.

The PAL program assists youth in developing skills necessary to function as an adult. Training must cover the following areas:

- Personal and interpersonal skills
- Job skills
- Housing and transportation
- Health
- Planning for the future
- Money management

Support services, including those listed below, are optional services that are provided based on need and funding availability:

- Vocational assessments or training
- General Educational Development classes
- Preparation for college entrance exams
- Drivers' education courses
- High school graduation expenses
- Counseling
- Volunteer mentoring to provide guidance and support

Foster youth who fully participate in the PAL program are eligible to receive a transitional living allowance once they transition from care. The allowance may not exceed \$1,000, and it may be distributed in increments not to exceed \$500 per month.

Foster youth who are between 18 and 21 years of age and have aged out of the foster care system are eligible for aftercare room and board assistance. Financial assistance up to \$500 per month may be used for rent, deposits, utilities, and food or groceries. There is a lifetime cap of \$3,000.

If you have questions, please contact the assigned contract manager for your local workforce development area.