



TEXAS
Department of Family
and Protective Services

Foster Parent Recruitment Study

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Introduction

As required in Section 16 of Senate Bill 11, 85th Texas Legislature, the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) shall, “conduct a study on the feasibility of developing a program to recruit and provide training for young adult caregivers.” In accordance with the legislation, a young adult caregiver is a foster parent between the ages of 21 and 36 who is verified to foster children ages 14 of age and older. When evaluating the feasibility of such program, DFPS was to consider methods to recruit and provide training for young adult caregivers. DFPS was also to assess the potential impact the program would have on the foster children participating in the program, including whether the program would result in:

- increased placement stability;
- fewer behavioral issues;
- fewer instances of foster children running away from a placement;
- increased satisfactory academic progress in school;
- increased acquisition of independent living skills; and
- an improved sense of well-being.

DFPS was required to complete a study no later than December 31, 2018 and report the results of the study to the governor, lieutenant governor, speaker of the house of representatives, and members of the legislature as soon as possible after the study is completed.

Research

There is limited national research that exists around the targeted recruitment of young foster parents to serve older youth. The [Capacity Building Center for States](#) provided DFPS with a summary of a few relevant findings, although none specifically aimed at recruiting young foster parents to work with older youth. The Capacity Building Center for the States pointed to limited research suggesting that young foster parents have a harder time adjusting to the role because they may lack parenting experience of their own. This is especially true if the foster child has behavioral problems (Bachus, 2008)¹.

¹ Bachus, S. (2008). Nevada foster parent satisfaction. *UNLV McNair Research Journal* (4th ed.), 1-15. Retrieved from <http://caeo.unlv.edu/mcnair/journals%2FMcNairJournal-2008.pdf>

Additionally, the Capacity Building Center for States located a specific study that cited motivation, support, and retention strategies specific to young foster parents.

MacGregor, Rodger, Cummings, & Leschied (2006) suggested young foster parents would benefit from gradual introduction to the role as well as having a peer group or a partner foster home for ongoing support.² These studies suggest that if Texas is interested in implementing such a program, setting up necessary supports for young foster parents would be critical to success.

The department's research efforts identified a few studies that point to the increased age of foster parents as a significant factor in placement stability and successful outcomes (Dozier & Lindheim, 2006; Oosterment et al., 2007).³ While this alone is not enough to abandon efforts to recruit young foster parents, research suggests that age is one of a handful of factors associated with more successful foster parents.

Recruitment and Training

Currently, there are no restrictions to anyone interested in becoming a verified foster parent between the ages of 21 and 36 as long as the prospective foster parent meets the requirements set forth in the Texas Minimum Standards for Child Placing Agencies. Child Placing Agencies (CPA) that are licensed in the state of Texas to provide foster care and adoption services are responsible for screening and verifying any prospective foster parent(s) based on the minimum standards.

During the verification process CPAs conduct various screening activities, which include a thorough home study interview process. This interview aids with assessing a prospective foster parent's ability to care for a child(ren), which includes demographic information (age, gender, ethnicity), number (capacity), and level of need of the child(ren) (emotional, medical, intellectual/developmental). This assessment also takes into consideration the foster parent's identified desire to serve specific populations. This information assists the CPA in determining how to best match children/youth with the

² MacGregor, T.E., Rodger, S., Cummings, A.L., & Leschied, A. W. (2006). The needs of foster parents: A qualitative study of motivation, support, and retention. *Qualitative Social Work*, 5(3), 351-368. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325006067365>

³ Dozier, M. & Lindheim, O. (2006). This is my child: Differences among foster parents in commitment to their young children. *Child Maltreatment*, 11 338-345. doi: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1077559506291263>; Oosterment et al. (2007). Disruptions in foster care: A review and meta-analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29(1), 53-76. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2006.07.003>

individual foster home. Therefore, if a foster parent is interested in fostering a youth between ages 14 and 17, this would be identified as a part of the Child Placing Agency's foster home assessment. To this end, a separate program to verify young foster parents would not need to be established, as this is already feasible through the existing verification process.

CPAs also perform routine assessments of their foster families to determine if there should be a change in the child population (including age, gender, ethnicity) the foster family is recommended to work with based on the history of placements into their homes.

Recruitment Efforts

When a child enters foster care, it is the responsibility of DFPS to ensure that the child has a safe, home-like setting that can care for the child until they can safely reunite with their family, or achieve permanency through the transfer of custody to a relative/fictive kin, through adoption or /transitional/ independent living services. DFPS recognizes that diligent recruitment must generate foster and adoptive families that meet the demographic characteristics of children in care.

DFPS contracts with residential care providers across the state that provide a range of services to meet the unique needs of children in foster care. Examples of contracted placement settings include foster family and cottage-style homes, emergency shelters, and residential treatment centers. Over the past few years, DFPS has made targeted efforts to increase capacity for children and youth with complex needs. These efforts have resulted in a number of strategies to increase foster care capacity statewide including Community Based Care, Treatment Family Foster Care, and the implementation of the Intense Plus services. Detailed information about these initiatives can be found in the [FY 19 CPS Business Plan](#).

Demographic data of the characteristics of the children needing foster and adoptive homes is available to the public on the [DFPS website](#). Additional info is available to all DFPS staff through the Data Warehouse reports that are updated monthly. Currently, DFPS is using the demographic information to develop strategic plans for recruitment and track progress. In fiscal year 2018, a statewide [Foster Care Needs Assessment](#) was published. The Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) provided forecasting data, which in conjunction with an historical analysis of placement practices, provided an assessment of statewide foster care capacity needs. This report includes an assessment of the placement capacity recently available from local foster care providers

and seeks to estimate where a catchment area may need to target recruitment efforts in order to ensure an adequate placement array for youth in fiscal year 2019.

Using the completed needs assessment and other available data, CPS has developed plans to address the foster care capacity needs in each region. DFPS collaborated with external stakeholders and sought their input in targeted recruitment planning for each area of the state which includes targeting recruitment needs for older youth. Stakeholder meetings were held in all the regions and included the judiciary, Court Appointed Special Advocates, residential child care providers, and DFPS staff. CPS has published regional strategic plans for targeted capacity development on the DFPS website.

Training

Currently, Minimum Standards does not restrict any person between the ages of 21 and 36 from becoming a foster parent, as long as the prospective foster parent meets the other requirements set forth in Minimum Standards and Guidelines for Child Placing Agencies. However, private Child Placing Agencies may have internal policies regarding age requirements for their agency. Regardless, these standards require all foster parents to receive orientation and additional pre-service training.

Pre-Service Training

All potential caregivers must complete at least 35 hours of competency-based pre-service training before becoming verified to foster. Pre-service training includes training on the developmental stages of children, fostering children's self-esteem, constructive guidance and discipline of children, strategies and techniques for monitoring and working with children who have a history of trauma, and normalcy. Other required pre-service training topics include:

- trauma informed care;
- the different roles of caregivers;
- measures to prevent, identify, treat, and report suspected occurrences of child abuse, neglect, and exploitation;
- procedures to follow in emergencies, such as weather related emergencies, volatile persons, and severe injury or illness of a child or adult;
- preventing the spread of communicable diseases;
- cardiopulmonary resuscitation and first aid training; and
- administration of psychotropic medications (if caring for a youth that is taking psychotropic medications).

If a foster parent needs additional training on specific topics not already covered under pre-service training, the Child Placing Agency that verified the family must ensure the foster parents receive the training.

Pre-service training provides an opportunity for the family and DFPS to assess whether foster care is a good fit for the family. Pre-service training curriculum is developed to apply to all children in care, including those ages 14 to 17. Therefore, a separate program would not necessarily need to be established.

Annual Training

Foster parents are also required to complete annual training on topics that are pertinent to caring for the children that could be placed in their home. Supplementary foster parent training is offered through a number of partners to provide current and prospective foster parents with ongoing training related to caring for children in DFPS conservatorship. A majority of foster homes are verified through private child placing agencies that contract with DFPS. These agencies require and provide annual training for foster parents. Additionally, DFPS provides funds to the Texas Foster Family Association, which is the state level foster parent association, to help educate verified foster parents in both the public and private sector. Examples of other organizations that provide training to foster parents are universities, the Council on Adoptable Children, Superior Health, and local foster parent organizations. These trainings are typically provided through a collaboration between individual regions and external organizations. Training can be given in regional conference venues or through shorter single topic training sessions throughout the year.

Current Population of Young Adult Caregivers

Table 1 reflects data on non-relative young foster parents currently verified to care for children in DFPS conservatorship and is separated by region of the foster parents' residence. There are currently no verified, non-relative, foster parents in Texas who are under the age of 26. Therefore, the table includes information for non-relative verified foster parents aged 26 to 36.

- Of all young foster parents, 13% of primary foster parents are under the age of 30, with Regions 2 and 10 having the most foster parents under the age of 30 (20%), and Region 9 having the least (9%).

- Of the total number of available beds in foster homes with young adult caregivers, 58% of the beds are licensed for children aged 12 or over, ranging from 33% in Region 9 to 74% in 3W.
- Foster parents under the age of 30 are equally likely to be licensed for a child 12 years of age or older as foster parents that are 30-36 years of age.
- Of the total number of available beds in foster homes with young adult caregivers, 27% of the beds are licensed as therapeutic, ranging from 8% in Region 5 to 38% in Region 11.
- Parents under 30 years of age are more likely to be licensed as therapeutic (41%) than foster parents between the ages of 30-36 (25%).

Table 1. Current Population of Young Adult Caregivers⁴

Region	Homes	Beds	% Primary Parent Aged 26 to 30	% Secondary Parent Aged 26 to 30	% Therapeutic	% Child 12 or Older
1	179	413	15%	14%	30%	54%
2	151	446	20%	22%	24%	66%
3E	373	987	10%	11%	49%	70%
3W	369	994	15%	18%	50%	74%
4	148	375	14%	12%	22%	45%
5	51	132	16%	14%	8%	27%
6a	314	801	11%	9%	21%	49%
6b	236	598	11%	10%	29%	54%
7	509	1275	12%	15%	10%	48%
8	369	967	15%	16%	14%	65%
9	86	199	6%	8%	8%	33%
10	20	48	20%	5%	30%	65%
11	126	381	10%	18%	38%	64%
Unknown	15	25	13%	0%	7%	27%
Grand Total	2,946	7,641	13%	14%	27%	58%

(Source: DFPS DRIT 89133 and 87323)

⁴The above data does not include relative young adult caregivers verified for foster care. The number of relative young adult caregivers verified for foster care are represented on a much smaller scale than the number of non-relative young adult caregivers verified for foster care.

Youth Leadership Council

In April 2018, DFPS spoke with older youth who serve on the Statewide Youth Leadership Council (YLC). The Statewide Youth Leadership Council includes two youth or young adults (ages 16 to 21) per region. It gives youth who are, or were in foster care, a forum to address issues that affect children and youth and make recommendations to DFPS. The youth were provided information on the study and purpose of the discussion. The group was then asked a series of questions related to living with a young adult caregiver and outcome measures. The Statewide Youth Leadership Council provided feedback on the following questions:

Do you think living with a foster parent in this age range (21-36) would be different than an older foster parent? If so, how?

The general consensus was that living with a young adult caregiver would be different than living with an older foster parent. Many older youth expressed how it would be different depended on the foster parents and if they are good foster parents, regardless of age. The youth appeared to base their responses on their personal experience in foster care.

One youth just wanted someone who would let them make their own decisions. Other youth indicated that younger caregivers are still in training on life experiences too and that older people have enough experience. One youth stated that some foster parents can be older in age, but still act young. Another youth stated, "Older people have been through more stuff. Younger people have a harder time handling situations." Similarly, one youth previously lived with someone 50 years old and now lives with someone who is 26 years old. The youth reported that the previous foster parent who is 50 years old understood how to talk to her, knew how to work with her, and set a routine, so there was more structure. Another foster youth mentioned that you can learn things from older foster parents and "they have the best stories."

However, other youth on the Youth Leadership Council felt that they could relate to young adult caregivers better, and brought up issues like music, popular culture, and learning life skills together. One youth mentioned that older foster parents are set in their ways and stated, "We do not want people to try to be our parent, but would prefer someone who will relate. Older foster parents think teenagers are too loud, and they do not like that." However, other youth on the council disagreed mentioning that this is not applicable to all older foster parents.

Do you think an older youth in foster care living with a foster parent in this age range (21-36) would make it more likely they would stay in the home longer (placement stability)? Why/why not?

The general consensus on this question was that this would depend on the characteristics of the specific foster parent and not the age of the foster parent. One youth thought that young adult caregivers should foster young children. However, one youth mentioned that he just needs someone who can keep up with him and stay active because he needs stuff to do.

Do you think an older youth in foster care would have fewer behavioral issues living with a younger foster parent? Why/why not?

Most youth agreed they would have a hard time with a younger foster parent because the foster mother would be more like an older sibling than a parent. The council reported that some youth have a hard time with younger foster parents and that the age of the foster parent should depend on the child's service level. One youth stated, "With younger foster parents, it seems we do better, but it's because they do not catch us when we are doing something wrong." Another youth talked about her foster mother who is 50 years old. She reported that her foster mother creates a lot of structure by only allowing a certain type of clothes and having the family attend church. She stated that she thinks the foster mother, "does what she does to better them, and teach them to have respect for themselves, and to have peace within." This same foster youth reported that she does not see herself with a young foster parent.

On the other hand, some of the youth did say that they felt like they would fit in better with a younger foster parent because they could relate better. A couple of youth also thought younger foster parents are more accepting to children who identify as a person who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ).

Do you think an older youth in foster care would be less likely to run away if they were living with a younger foster parent? Why/why not?

Multiple youth on the council said that this depends on the child, not the age of the parent. One youth stated, "The foster parent's age does not matter. If you are going to run, you are going to run." Another youth commented that again, it depends on the child's service level. One youth said that older foster parents make it harder to run because they put sensors on the doors. Overall, the youth council agreed that youth just want to live with someone who cares about them.

Do you think foster youth would do better in school if they were living with younger foster parents? Why/why not?

In response to this question, youth talked about living with younger foster parents would be more like living with a roommate. Therefore, if the youth is goal oriented, it would be a good option. However, if the youth wants someone that can give them structure, it will not be better. They agreed that again, it depends on the youth.

Do you think foster youth would learn more independent living skills residing with a younger foster parent?

The youth determined that older foster parents would assist the foster youth in learning more independent living skills because they have more life experiences.

Do you think a youth in foster care would be happier or healthier living with a younger foster parent (improved sense of well-being)?

The general consensus was that this is based on the person the child is, not on the parent. One youth stated, "If you want to do good, you will no matter what."

Tracking Outcomes

The legislation mandated that "DFPS shall consider the potential impact that the program will have on the foster children participating in the program." Below are identified outcomes and DFPS' ability to track data associated with these outcomes.

Increased Placement Stability

This outcome can be tracked using data currently available to DFPS. Currently, DFPS has the ability to track the number of placements a child has had since being in care and the length of each placement. For the purpose of tracking this outcome, it would be more appropriate to analyze the length of the child's placement when placed with the young adult caregiver and compare this timeframe to the length of time the child was, on average, in previous foster home placements with foster parents older than age 36. This would only work for children who had multiple foster home placements with foster parents of different ages.

If participating in the program results in increased placement stability for a child, it would be difficult to conclude the program was the sole factor in improving placement stability. There are many factors that contribute to successful placements. One factor that could contribute to increased placement stability would be the proximity of the

foster home to the child's previous placement as this would determine if the child would have to switch schools or move to a new community and lose existing relationships. The proximity of the child's foster home to the child's biological family or other positive connections would need to be considered as this would affect the child's ability to maintain contact with important people in the child's life. Whether or not the youth is placed with his or her sibling(s) or has visits with the sibling(s) is also a factor that contributes to placement stability. Additionally, community support surrounding the child and the foster parents can also be an indicator of placement stability that cannot be directly associated with a foster parent's age. There are many other factors that would need to be analyzed as contributing factors related to placement stability, separate from the age of the foster parent.

Fewer Behavioral Issues

There is not an accurate way to track fewer behavioral issues as an outcome. Currently, children have a service level, but this pertains to a child's level of needs, some of which may be behavioral, but will also include educational, medical, and developmental needs. Data would likely need to be tracked manually and analyzed on an individual basis, which would be difficult to maintain.

If a child's behavior were to improve, it would be hard to correlate to the foster parent's age. A child's therapist and psychiatrist could have a significant impact on the child's behavioral issues. Different treatment interventions will have different outcomes depending on the child, history of trauma, and behavioral needs. In addition, the resources available to the foster parent may vary depending on where the family lives. For example, if the foster family lives in a rural area, their access to resources may be more limited than a family that lives in an urban area. The services the child receives at school could also contribute to fewer behavioral issues. Therefore, it would be difficult to link a foster parent's age as the sole contributing factor to a decrease in a child's behavioral issues.

Fewer Instances of Foster Children Running Away from a Placement

This outcome can be tracked using data currently available to DFPS. However, it would be difficult to conclude that a foster parent's age or training received was a factor that caused the child's instances of running away to decrease. According to the [DFPS Annual Foster Youth Runaway Report for Fiscal Year 2017](#), the main factors youth have reported to be reasons they ran away are anger at CPS or the child welfare system,

disliking the rules of the placement, desire to be on one's own, desire to see the youth's family and relatives, and frustration and anger with the caregivers.

Two of the above reasons, disliking the rules of the placement and frustration and anger with caregivers, could be associated with the foster parents. However, the rules of the placement vary with each household and youth will react to rules differently. Some children may be agreeable with some rules, whereas other children may not. This is similar with youth feeling frustrated with their caregivers. It would be difficult to determine if the main factor contributing to the child's behavior or feelings are a result of the foster parent's age or training received. There are multiple other factors that could contribute to a child running away from a placement such as distance to positive connections, unsatisfactory community life, or issues at school.

Increased Satisfactory Academic Progress in School

DFPS has access to data on a child's academic progress in school on an individual child level. However, DFPS does not consistently have access to data that allows DFPS to extrapolate outcomes for cohorts. CPS currently partners with the Texas Education Association to exchange and examine child specific data to better identify children in foster care and in the school setting. The data exchange occurs annually.

One of the primary factors that determines a child's academic progress in foster care is the child's academic progress prior to entering foster care. This would not be influenced by the child's current placement. The child's school environment would also be a large factor contributing to academic progress.

CPS partners with the Supreme Court of Texas Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families and various community partners to improve educational outcomes for children. Specifically, a workgroup is looking at behavior interventions and other practices used in school to reduce the higher instances of disciplinary actions for students in foster care. These initiatives could also positively influence a child's academic progress in school that would be unrelated to the age of the child's foster parents.

Increased Acquisition of Independent Living Skills

The acquisition of independent living skills is difficult to track. Many independent living skills are soft skills that are not measureable, for example: interpersonal skills, communication, work ethic, problem-solving, and adaptability. CPS could attempt to link a child's placement to the completion of life skills training offered through the

Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program, but this is not a perfect measure as completion of the program in itself does not indicate how many skills were acquired.

Because the majority of independent living skills are needed once the child is no longer in foster care, outcomes would need to be tracked for youth after they leave foster care, which is data that DFPS could not easily obtain. Acquisition of independent living skills could be contributed to a variety of factors other than the child's primary caregiver. Other factors to consider in tracking this outcome would be the connection to the foster parents once the child leaves foster care or if the foster parent is an extended foster care option for the child.

Improved Sense of Well-being

This outcome could not be tracked using quantitative data and would require a qualitative approach to obtaining information. Therefore, it would be difficult to accurately measure, as the data may vary as the child advances developmentally, or could change based on the child's mood and state of mind at the time of the interview. Many factors other than a youths' primary caregiver can affect a child's sense of well-being such as self-esteem, participation in the community, peer support, educational setting, relationship with birth family connections, or other life events. In addition, a child who is placed with an ideal young adult caregiver may still not feel an improved sense of well-being due to life circumstances, history of trauma, self-esteem issues, or mental health issues.

Conclusion

There is nothing precluding young adults from serving as foster parents today. While DFPS has not identified any young adults under 26 serving as foster parents, there are a number of young adults aged 26-36 currently serving. Child placing agencies and DFPS currently recruit foster parents in a variety of settings in communities throughout the state. These events are accessible to all ages of adults.

Additionally, because anyone between the ages of 21 and 36 can already become verified foster parents for youth ages 14 to 17, increasing capacity in this specific age group would likely require additional resources to target recruitment or offer an incentive to prospective foster parents and may distract from overall recruitment efforts. Further, tracking and associating outcomes solely to a foster parent's age would likely present a number of challenges. Many outcomes are associated with a

combination of factors that are both internal and external to the child themselves. Pinpointing one single factor that leads to a child's success or challenges may not be able to be determined.

The most significant aspect of this study was the perspective of older youth who have personal experience living in the foster care system. These youth indicated that the age of a foster parent is not as important as having a quality foster parent who is able to meet their individual needs, regardless of age.