



# FOSTERED ARIZONA

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Program Progress  
& Impact

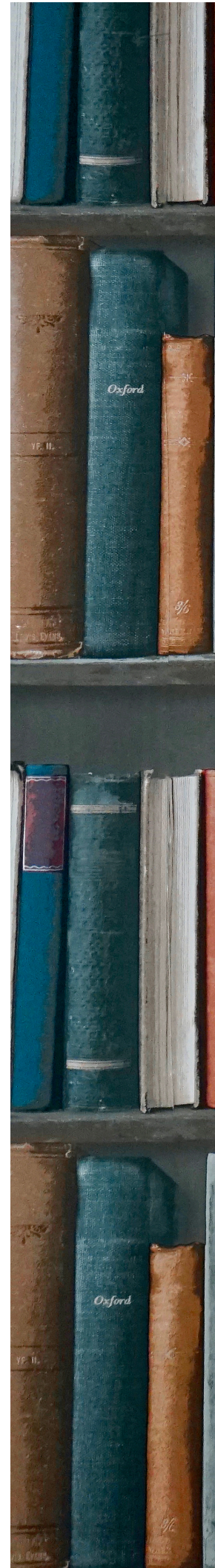
2017 - 2024





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# Introduction

FosterEd, a Compassionate Education Systems initiative of the National Center for Youth Law (NCYL), works to improve educational supports for children and youth in foster care. FosterEd Arizona was piloted in Pima County between 2014 and 2016. Promising results from the Pima County pilot and the release of a report that demonstrated Arizona's students in foster care consistently underperformed academically compared with their peers who are not in foster care drove Arizona policymakers to action. In 2016, House Bill (HB) 2665 was signed into law, which included provisions to establish and fund a statewide expansion of FosterEd.

FosterEd Arizona is guided by a framework that all foster youth should have an adult "in their corner" who is invested in the long-term educational success of each student, and an Education Team of engaged adults, including the family members, parents, other caregivers, teachers, representatives from the child welfare system, and behavioral health providers. The Education Team, coordinated by an Education Liaison, supports educational needs and goals through relationship building with the student and their team and the creation of an education plan based on each student's unique strengths and needs. FosterEd recognizes that the needs of every young person are individualized, requiring differing levels of time investment. For high-school-age youth with complex educational needs, Education Liaisons provide intensive services over a period of one to two years to ensure those young people are on a pathway toward high school graduation. Youth in kindergarten through grade 12 who have educational needs that can be addressed in a short period are served with responsive services for a period of one to six months.

In addition to intensive and responsive youth services, FosterEd receives referrals to provide support and assist professionals in addressing a wide array of educational needs and issues that arise during the school year. This has resulted in an increased capacity for FosterEd to respond and serve many more young people each year. After 10 years of implementing FosterEd in Arizona, we are proud to share this cumulative report covering programmatic data and highlights of youth served through this important legislation from the expansion beginning in the fall of 2017 to present.







Since the launch of the statewide expansion at the end of August 2017 through December 2024:



A total of **3,660 youth** have been referred to and served by FosterEd.



Provided services to students attending **96 school districts** across the state, partnering with teachers, school administrators, students and families to ensure high quality support.



More than **3,500 adults were supported, trained and engaged** to serve on youths' Education Teams.



Youth achieved **5,103** educational academic, social capital and social development goals.



Education Liaisons held **39,513** in-person and virtual youth, adult and team meetings and other engagement activities.



Published **10 large scale research and evaluation reports** to document progress and improve services.



# ABOUT FOSTERED'S PRACTICE MODEL

There are three primary elements of FosterEd's practice model: **Building Education Champions, Cultivating and Engaging Education Teams and Student-Centered Education Planning.**

## ENGAGING EDUCATION CHAMPIONS

Family and parental involvement in education is critical to ensuring each student's educational success. Young people in foster care often do not have adults in their lives who are focused on supporting educational progress and success. Education Liaisons serve as the glue that supports collaboration with young people and the adults in their corner and engage them to focus on supporting students on their educational journey. FosterEd focuses attention on the individual educational needs of each youth in foster care by identifying at least one person who can serve as the student's Education Champion, most often a biological parent or long-term caregiver. Education Liaisons partner with an adult in each young person's life who can be there for the long run and support the child educationally after state involvement ends.

## COORDINATED EDUCATION TEAMS

FosterEd recognizes that to fully support the educational strengths and needs of youth, adults who are important decision makers in their lives must be engaged. FosterEd engages many adults – family members, siblings, parents, teachers, social workers, coaches, mental health professionals, CASAs, attorneys and other advocates – and works to coordinate the efforts of these individuals in service to the students' educational goals.

## YOUTH-FOCUSED EDUCATION PLANNING

FosterEd believes that positive engagement and empowerment in education begins with first engaging the young person in the process of their educational decision-making. FosterEd is committed to ensuring "voice and choice" in shaping their education trajectories, resulting in a greater ownership and commitment on the part of each young person toward achieving their own educational success, particularly for young people who have experienced trauma.





# TIERS OF SUPPORT: MAXIMIZING REACH AND IMPACT

FosterEd recognizes that the educational needs of youth are individualized and may not require the same type of engagement or amount of time to address. By tailoring its services, FosterEd can maximize the number of youth effectively served. FosterEd's three tiers of support:

## SERVICE TIER 1: Intensive, Relationship- Focused

Intensive Education Liaisons provide individualized and long-term (1- to 3-year) intensive supports (weekly) to highest need grade 9–12 students. This tier of engagement with young people is time intensive and represents a true partnership between a FosterEd Liaison and each student. 278 youth have been served in this tier since 2017.

## SERVICE TIER 2: Responsive, Addressing Youth's Highest Needs

Time limited, relationship focused Education Liaisons provide short-term (3 to 9-month) youth-level interventions to address specific educational gaps and opportunities for all school aged youth. **1,568 youth have been served in this tier since 2017.**

## SERVICE TIER 3: Lighter Touch, Resolving Barriers

Addressing referrals and Increasing Capacity Through Training. To ensure maximum reach to as many youth as possible, FosterEd has engaged in a third tier of work, receiving a high volume of referrals and stepping in to assist in problem solving and solution finding for pressing issues that arise for young people. This tier has included the development of a training curriculum for child welfare and school personnel – to increase awareness of and knowledge about the resources available for youth in foster care and the laws in place to support their educational success.

**More than 1,300 students have been served in this tier since FosterEd began tracking youth supported in this tier in 2021.**

FosterEd led and facilitated 3,182 trainings were conducted since FosterEd began tracking this data in 2021.

# The Critical Role of Education Liaisons

Education Liaisons (ELs) staff the FosterEd program. In Arizona, 2 Program Directors lead and support the work of 10 Education Liaisons co-located in DCS Offices and Schools in Maricopa, Pima and Yavapai counties. Education Liaisons provide direct support to foster youth, leading the identification and engagement of education champions and a team of adults to support the youth educationally. They work to support the development of education plans and goals for each young person and maintain regular contact with the young person and their team to monitor, track, and achieve educational goals.



## HELPING YOUTH SET AND ACHIEVE GOALS



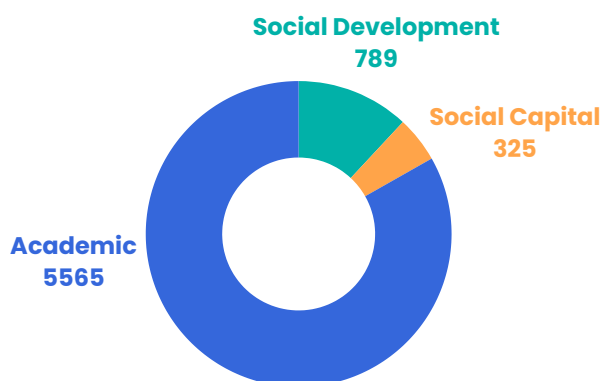
Education Liaisons partner closely with youth and their adult team members to identify their strengths and needs. This process of engagement leads to the development of goals that the student, their team and the Liason work in close concert to complete. The goals may focus on helping youth thrive by leveraging their strengths or improving in areas that need strengthening.

A total of 5,739 goals have been successfully completed by young people since 2017. The largest goal area is academic and these goals are specific to supporting the students' academic progress in school – this might be

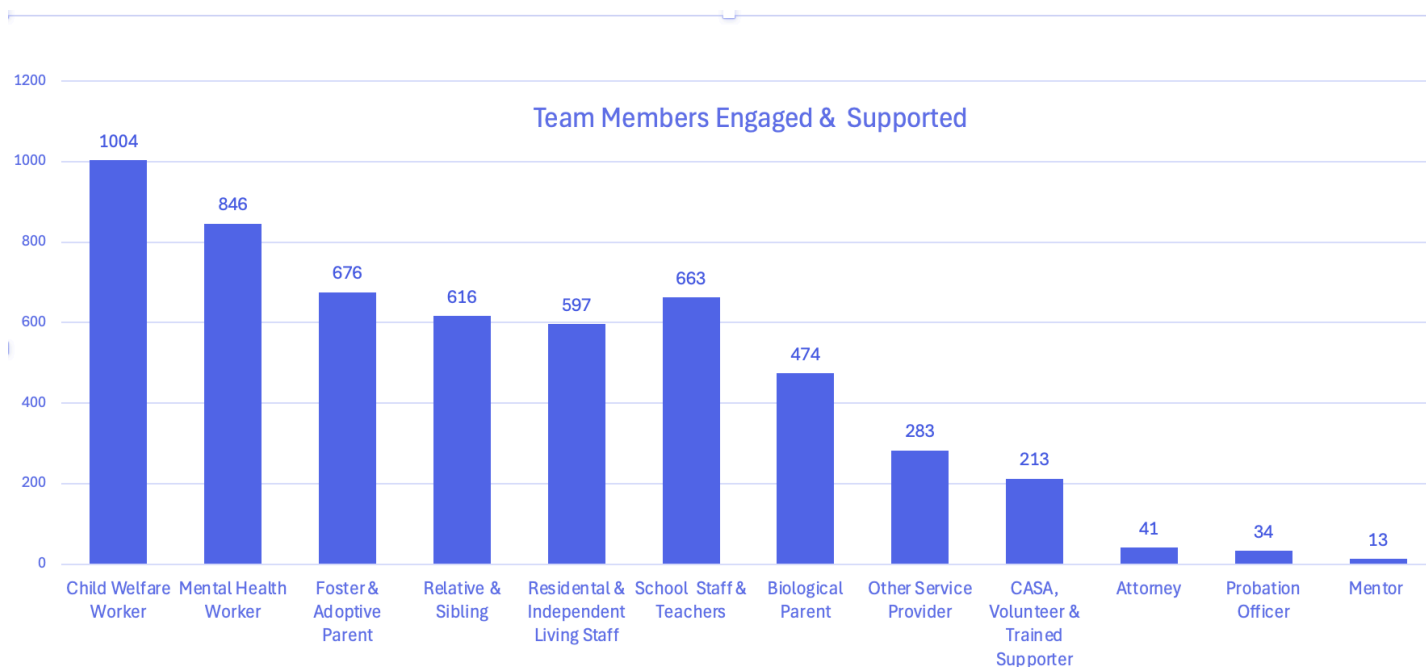
special education, tutoring, or enrolling in specific courses to remain on track to graduate.

Social capital goals include goals to help youth build relationships with adults or friends that improve their connectivity to resources. The most important aspect of this goal is that the goal connects the student to people in the school community and increased feelings of belonging at school. Social Development includes things related to healing to develop social/emotional learning skills. This might include engagement in extra curriculars, learning an instrument, joining a school event, or leadership opportunities.

### GOAL TYPE SINCE PROGRAM EXPANSION



# Building and Engaging a Support Team



OUR TEAM HAS WORKED WITH MORE THAN 3,500 UNIQUE INDIVIDUAL TEAM MEMBERS SINCE 2017.

These team members included behavioral health professionals, foster parents, family of origin members, grandparents, DCS case managers, school staff, and more. Often, we found ourselves working alongside the same friendly faces time and time again and this only strengthened our relationships with our partners and stakeholders and in turn encouraged more referrals to be submitted by recurring professionals within the department of Child Safety and school-based sites as well. This is why we often specified "unique" team members versus total number of touch points with adult supporters as that number is almost triple the one above!



# QUALITY TOUCHPOINTS MATTER

Education Liaisons invested heart, compassion and focus into building quality, trusting and empowering relationships with students and working in partnership with them to help them succeed in school. The importance and scope of these engagements can not be understated. Since 2017, our team entered notes from a total of **39,513 in person and virtual meetings**, school events, and 1:1 individual interactions with students.



# TRACKING REFERRALS AND ADDRESSING YOUTH NEEDS THROUGH CONSULTATIONS

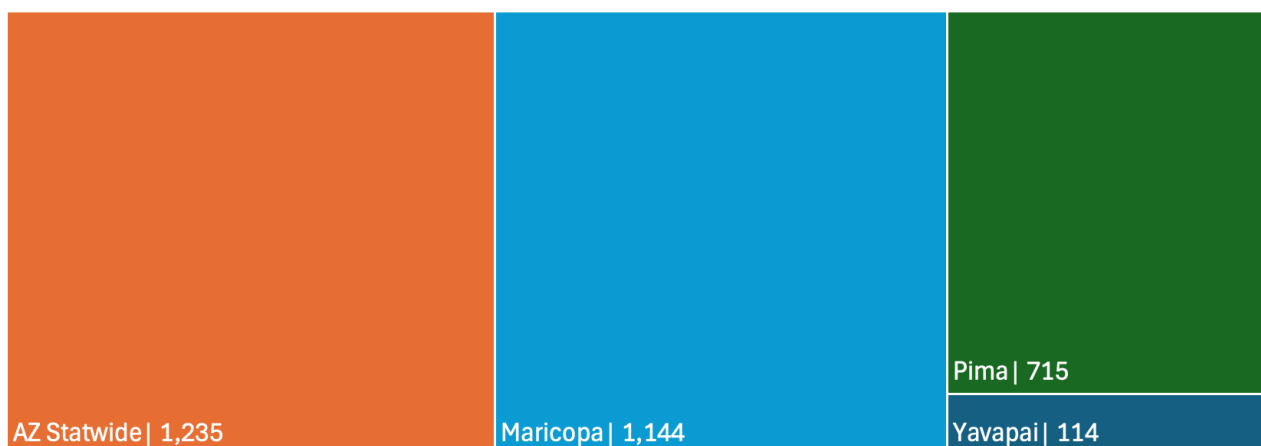


In service to the often-immediate educational needs for young people across the state, in January 2021, FosterEd added an additional pathway to serve young people – accepting referrals from many different sources and whereby the team was available to serve youth beyond county boundaries. This referral system ensured that anyone who reached out to FosterEd for support received attention and care in addressing a wide array of needs for young people. Our staff assisted in identifying the challenges and creating a plan to connect

the student or supportive adult to additional resources. Because FosterEd staff are experts on a variety of complex issues that arise, they were well-positioned to serve as a consultant and assist in resolving these issues in a way that also built capacity for other professionals as a process. Because FosterEd began collecting consultation and referral data a few years after expansion, this data does not capture the full extent of the number of youth and families that benefited from this tier of service.

## Youth Served Across All Tiers of Service

■ Yavapai ■ AZ Statwide ■ Pima ■ Maricopa



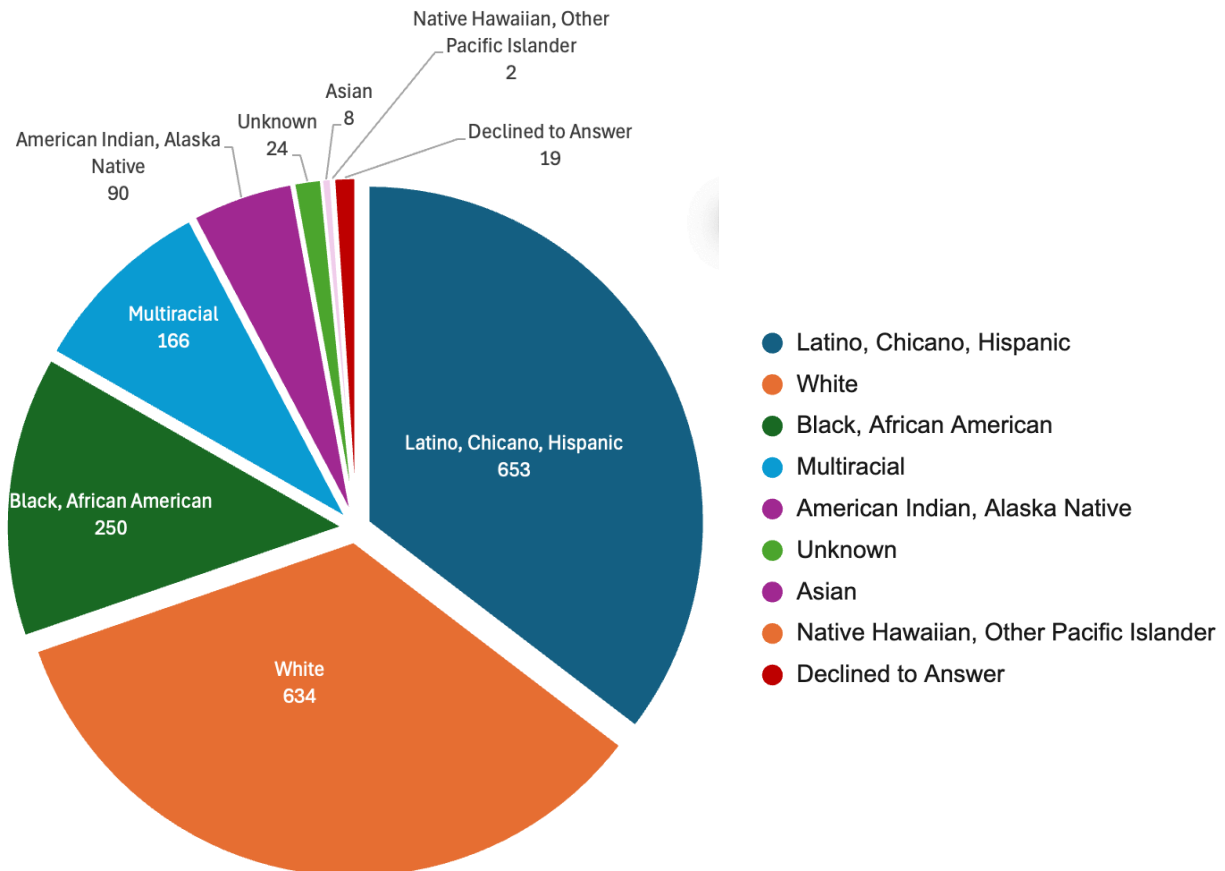


While the types of issues and needs addressed through this referral system are vast and varied, the following were the areas representing the greatest demand for support:

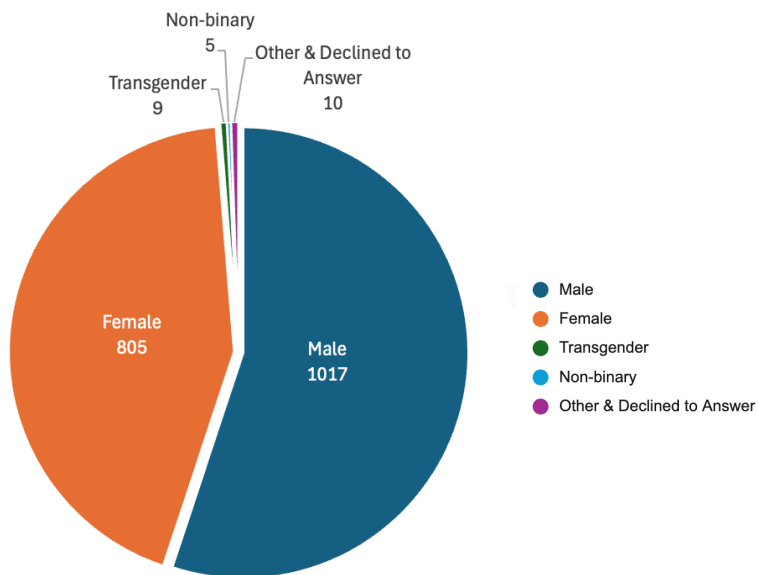
Immediate Enrollment	Best Interest Determination Meetings	Post Graduation Support
School Mobility	Behavior	IEP/Special Education
Credit Recovery	Enrollment in Appropriate Courses	Other Educational Issues

## Demographics of Youth Served

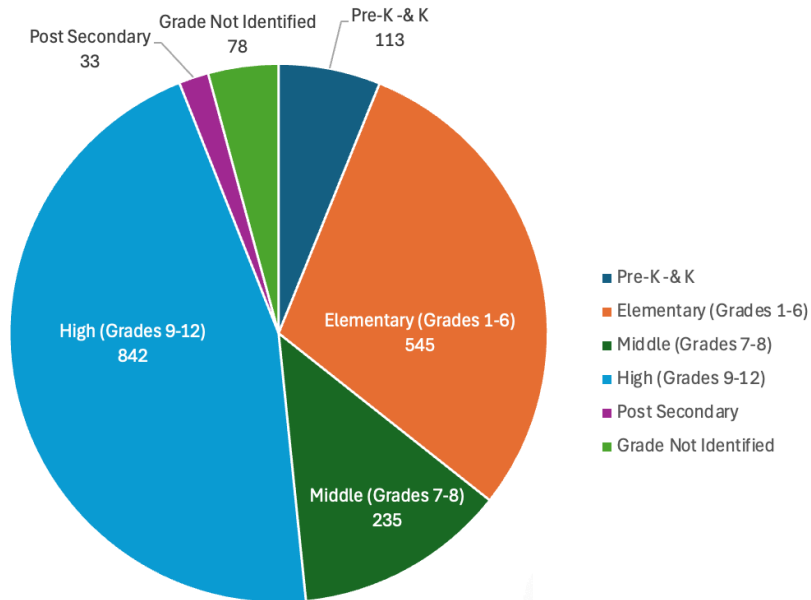
STUDENTS SERVED BY RACE



## STUDENTS SERVED BY GENDER



## STUDENTS SERVED BY GRADE



In total, FosterEd served nearly 100 school districts via direct support of a student within the district throughout the state of Arizona since 2017.



# Increasing Capacity Through Training and Technical Assistance

FosterEd Arizona developed trainings that included presentations and workshops that provided resources and supported stakeholders and community partners, building their knowledge and capacity to better support all youth in foster care. FosterEd created a number of resources to support a wide network of professionals, advocates and family members and also worked to keep people up-to-date on changing policies and laws that impact youth experiencing Foster Care. Over the years, our team would often meet with DCS sections or unity on a reoccurring basis so that DCS workers were well informed and so that new employees had the ability to learn and ask questions of FosterEd team members.

Sometimes, a community partner would ask our program to assist them and their staff in learning best practices for supporting the educational needs of youth and we always rose to the occasion. Below is some cumulative data reflecting the technical assistance and training our team provided throughout the state of Arizona since we began collecting this information in 2020. Since 2020, FosterEd trained a total of 3,182 professionals, with each receiving an average of 29 hours of training.



FosterEd has developed number of resources for the public to utilize in hopes it will continue to help advocates, youth, and families for years to come.

### Resource Directory

This is a spreadsheet that can be filtered by profession or role such as a caregiver, DCS worker, or school staff member and details a wealth of support resources for young people, families and professionals, including information on who to contact and for what reason or benefit.

### Education Champion Guidebook

This resource serves as an "onboarding manual" of sorts for anyone new to supporting youth experiencing foster care with their education. Our team has taken our very own training manual and turned it into something that anyone can utilize in support of youth in care. We have even developed a PowerPoint presentation to accompany the handbook for easier digestion and more in-depth information pertaining to some of the topics inside the guide.

### Comprehensive Foster Youth Education Toolkit

A comprehensive compendium of laws, policies and guidance for educators, social workers and other advocates working to support the educational success for young people in foster care.

### Information Guides

FAQs turned into brief info guides: These handy and brief guides were created based on the most frequently asked questions our team receives from the public and from the Department of Child Safety. We hope these easy to read and downloadable guides will come in handy.



# Student Success Stories

# Josey's story

*Josey was an 11th-grader who was recently un-enrolled from her school of origin due to a placement change. Josey had attended her high school since her freshman year and had developed many friendships there. She had planned to apply for the school's vocational program to get her cosmetology training and license. Her new group home enrolled her into the closest high school because they could not transport her to her school of origin due to staffing losses related to COVID. DCS reached out to FosterEd to see if we could somehow get Josey re-enrolled in her school of origin.*

*Josey's FosterEd Education Liaison reached out to the school of origin district and got the student immediately re-enrolled in accordance with ESSA guidelines. Josey was so happy and felt empowered when she learned about ESSA and her right to remain in her school of origin even if she moved outside of the school boundaries. Additionally, her Education Liaison was also able to secure a shared transportation agreement between DCS and the school district.*

*Josey was so grateful that she was able to go back to her school of origin with all of her friends. As a final goal, Josey and her Liaison worked together to complete and submit her cosmetology program application, which was quickly accepted! Josey is now finishing her last year of high school and is doing exceptionally well in the cosmetology program. She is so happy knowing that she will be able to work in a field she enjoys and will be able to take care of herself independently in the future.*



# J's story

*J is a recent high school graduate in Pima County. FosterEd and J have been working in partnership since 2014 and he's been working with the same Educational Liaison since the Summer of 2018, making J the longest served youth with FosterEd. Over the last seven years, J and FosterEd have been the only two consistent members of the team, making this partnership a really special and important one. J has experienced abuse of every kind throughout his life and navigates the lasting impacts of that harm daily. He has fought cancer and won but is now fighting it again. Throughout all of this, J's spirit has shone through, even on the toughest of days. He has never stopped advocating for what he wants and what's important to him. We've worked hard on lifting up his advocacy and supporting him in this way and so many others. One important goal for himself was to graduate high school. J's educational needs are unique and best met through the support of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). With J and his school team, we have worked to creatively find solutions to obtain necessary credits, maintain his engagement in school even throughout health challenges, build positive and supportive relationships with adult staff, and support him in gaining more positive social and emotional skills.*

*This spring, J was able to finally walk across the stage at his graduation with his group home holding up signs and cheering him on from the stands! When seeing J a week later and asking how it was, he lit up with one of the biggest smiles we've seen on him in a very long time. He was so incredibly proud of himself for accomplishing his goal of graduating from high school and earning that diploma. Although J is now in treatment for cancer again, we are hopeful that soon we will be able to start exploring what comes next for him; he really hopes it involves cars!*



# Noah's story

Noah Boan has worked with two liaisons, Jennifer and Rose. He began working with Jennifer when he was living in Tucson. At that time, he was struggling to assimilate to the general education population. He describes,

"Before that I was in special ed, just in one classroom, so I wasn't used to being a 'regular' student. Jennifer helped me get used to the new environment and into classes that I needed to be successful. She'd always ask me how I was doing and offered me tutoring when I was failing. She got me a really great tutor and my grades started going up. When Jennifer asked me what was different, I told her it was her and my tutor who helped me realize how capable I was in school. I started passing all of my classes!

Then I was told I'd be moving to Phoenix; I was really nervous about it. Jennifer told me that I'd be working with a new person, Rose. At first, I was nervous about having to open up to someone new, but once I met her, I felt at ease and I knew it was a good thing. Rose helped me because she made sure I continued school after I turned 18 and moved out of my old group home. I've graduated and she's showed me how to use different websites that have to do with FAFSA and college. Now I feel confident in doing these things. Both Jennifer and Rose have shown me that they care about school, but also about how I'm doing as a person. If I had to choose from one to ten how important they have been, I would pick higher than ten. Words can't explain how much their help has meant to me."



# KEY LESSONS LEARNED ALONG THE JOURNEY

There is no one size fits all, or even most.

Capacity to provide individualized attention is critical. After more than a decade of serving youth experiencing foster care has shown us that the unique needs of children and youth within this demographic vary greatly and require focused attention and direct services.

There have been many improvements over the years in terms of the services and support schools and the Child Welfare System provides youth in care and these continue to positively impact the educational outcomes for this group of students. Some of those improvements have been appointing dedicated district staff to oversee and support their district's children and young adults experiencing foster care to ensure they have what they need and that they do not go underserved. Another improvement has been the collaboration between the Arizona Department of Education and the DCS in areas such as transportation supporting youth in

staying in their schools of origin, Best Interest determination meetings in which many team members and supportive family members come together to discuss education and school stability and focus solely on this topic, and even sharing information that helps to maintain active records and educational history for youth in care, which can be extremely important for a population that can be very mobile at times. We have seen continuous improvement in these areas and know that this will help youth for years to come.

## STRATEGIES TO MITIGATE TURNOVER

Just as there are many bright spots, there are also areas of ongoing vulnerabilities that require continued focus. Public agencies – child welfare and education systems – experience high rates of turnover. For many new employees, they enter their roles with little to no knowledge of the specific educational laws and policies supporting youth in care. It is vital that new and existing employees receive ongoing training related to education, education advocacy, education rights, and special education specific to children in foster care. This is why FosterEd has created a number of support resources and tools – to provide some foundations for equipping staff working directly with young people with information that keeps them up-to-date with effective practice, laws and policies.

## TRANSPORTATION CRITICAL FOR STABILITY

TESSA provided key protections for children in foster care, including school stability and transportation requirements for child welfare and education agencies. Increased dedicated funding, availability of transportation to and from school for children no matter where youth are placed, and school stability protection for youth after reunification and/or adoption or guardianship are areas that could be supportive of the educational success of youth experiencing foster care.

## CONSIDER SCHOOL STABILITY AFTER EXITING CARE

For now, once children exit care the school they are enrolled in has no obligation to keep them enrolled or to accept re-enrollment because their ESSA protections end after DCS ends their involvement. This is extremely detrimental to youth as the harm caused by entering the foster care system has ripple effects that is lasting and impacts likelihood of graduating from high school and entering higher education. One way to be supportive in combatting these lasting effects is to ensure school stability even after reunification or exiting care so that children can hold onto the established routine, curriculum, and relationships vital to their success.

## THE RELATIONSHIP IS AT THE HEART OF PROGRESS FOR EVERY STUDENT

The importance of genuine relationship-building with children, youth, and all of the adults in their lives cannot be overstated. Consistent, genuine, trustworthy relationships are the key to success as it is the foundation needed for growth, communication, and overcoming challenges. FosterEd remained committed to this relationship building process from the beginning. FosterEd staff were often the first people called and were a necessary advocate, even with engaged champions and teams. When team members changed over time, FosterEd staff remained consistent. We treated each child referred to us as a human, not a case – in fact, we never referred to the youth we served as a “case” so that young people did not feel like a number and could feel our care and support. This is what makes our program so unique, so valuable, and so successful.



# Parting Appreciations and Gratitude

In June of 2025, NCYL's operation of direct services in Arizona will ramp down. Ongoing educational supports for children and youth in foster care will be provided by community-based agencies along with the Department of Child Safety in the years to come.

After a decade of serving children, youth, and families in Arizona our team is proud of this collective work. What initially began as a pilot in Pima County in 2014, became a thriving and impactful program deeply rooted in service and compassion spanning over the course of a decade. The ripple effects of the individual services delivered in partnership with youth will be felt for decades to come.

FosterEd has been grateful to have been welcomed by so many school districts, child welfare offices, and families for so long and has hope that there will be more to come in the way of positive changes in education for children experiencing foster care.

Our team extends a heartfelt thank you to all who have been a part of FosterEd's journey from the time of its conceptualization until now, and to the very many children, youth, families, and adult advocates who trusted in us to support them with educational needs big and small.



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