# What's It All About:

## A Handbook for Youth in Alternative Care

Missouri Department of Social Services

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# Introduction

First and foremost, we hope you're okay. We understand placement in the foster care system is challenging and full of emotions. You might be angry, upset, completely overwhelmed, or shocked. Maybe you're even relieved. All of these emotions are perfectly normal, and we're here to guide you through them and into the next steps of your care. We want you to know that you are not alone and your best interest is our top priority. We are here to help you through this process, to lend an ear, or to answer any and all questions. This book — along with your team of professionals, your parents, and your resource family — is here to support you during your time in out-of-home care and give you some direction about your rights and responsibilities.

We don't expect you to read this book from cover to cover. We've divided it into two parts and multiple sections for you to easily find what you need:

- The first part is for youth who are at least 14 years old who are transitioning into foster care and addresses questions and concerns you might have, as well as certain procedures, rules, and meetings they must abide by.
- The second part is for older youth who are beginning to plan their adult lives beyond foster care. This section highlights the opportunities and resources available to help you succeed in your education, work life, and family.

Our primary goal is to make sure you are safe, healthy, and properly cared for physically, mentally, and emotionally. We hope to provide your parents with the resources and tools they need to take care of you and, ultimately, place you back into their care if it is safe to do so.

If you have any questions or concerns, we encourage you to reach out to your Case Worker (also called Case Manager) or lean on your resource family for support. They do these jobs because they care, and they want to help you.

# Important Names and Phone Numbers

Name

Address

| Case Worker | Work Cell Phone | Email |
|---|---|---|
| Supervisor | Phone | Email |
| Deputy Juvenile Officer | Phone | Email |
| Guardian Ad Litem | Phone | Email |
| CASA Worker | Phone | Email |
| Juvenile/Family Court Judge | Phone | Email |
| Chafee Specialist | Phone | Email |
| Older Youth Transition Specialist | Phone | Email |
| Other | Phone | Email |

# PART ONE

# Older Youth in Out-of-Home Care

# Common Questions

## What can I expect going into placement?

When the court rules it is no longer safe for you to stay in your home, you move to out-of-home care. This means that you temporarily live with a trusted adult until it is safe for you to return home. This trusted adult is known as a resource provider, but you may also hear them called foster parents or resource providers. Leaving home can be sad or scary. It is completely normal for you to experience many different feelings. If you need emotional or mental-health support during this time, you are not alone. Talk to your Children's Service Worker, so they can make sure you have the support you need.

## Can I stay with my siblings?

We make every effort to keep siblings together. We understand this is a difficult time and that being with siblings can help ease some of the stress. If we are unable to place you with your siblings, we will make sure you are able to see one another during visits and will continue to try to find a placement option that will keep you together.

## When will I go back home?

Unfortunately, it's hard to say for sure. A judge will check on your family's progress along the way and will ultimately decide when it's safe for you to go back home.

## Will I be able to get new clothes?

Each youth who enters care is provided a yearly clothing allowance that renews on the date when custody was taken. Please ask your Case Manager about your clothing allowance and any needs you may have for clothing items.

## What do I tell my friends and family?

Some of your friends and family might ask why you are no longer living with your family, and sometimes they might not agree with the decisions that are made. Although well-intended, they might try to get you to talk about things you are not ready to. They are just curious and want to make sure you are okay. While they may really care about you, you do not have to talk to them about it if you don't want to. You can always just say something like, "I'm not ready to talk to you about this. Maybe another time."

## Will I still go to my old school?

We do everything we can to keep you at your old school. However, if we are unable to find placement nearby, you might have to go to a different school temporarily.

## When will I see my parents again?

If a judge agrees, you will be able to spend time with your family during scheduled visits. We will be scheduling visits as soon as possible. These visits will allow you to spend time together and work towards the goal of returning home.

# Your Rights & Responsibilities

The Foster Care Bill of Rights is in Section 210.564 of Senate Bill No. 160. You can read the full bill by visiting **revisor.mo.gov.**

You have rights while in alternative care based on the Foster Care Bill of Rights, including the right to:

- Adequate and appropriate food, clothing, and housing
- Protection and safety
- Medical diagnosis and treatment
- Education
- Emotional security
- Legal Representation by an attorney, who is called your Guardian Ad Litem or GAL (210.160)
- A permanent home
- Live with any siblings whenever possible, if your sibling(s) is also being placed outside the home Maintain contact with siblings, if you're not placed together (Article 5, lines 32-37)
- Visits with your parent(s)
- Participate in your case planning (when appropriate)

You also have responsibilities while in alternative care, including:

- Participating with the assigned worker and care provider in developing rules and guidelines to follow
- Going to school
- Helping create your visitation plan and behaving responsibly during visits
- Taking part in developing a permanency plan and committing to that plan
- Participating in permanency planning reviews
- Keeping scheduled appointments and following any prescribed treatment
- Acting responsibly and appropriately in school, religious, cultural, and neighborhood activities

# Placement Options

You have a voice when it comes to where you are placed. Although the final placement decision is made by the court, be sure to let your Case Worker know about any adults you would feel comfortable staying with (**210.565.9**). Placement options include:

## Parental Care

You are placed with your non-custodial parent, or the parent that you do not normally live with. Even though you are with a parent, you are still considered to be in Children's Division custody until you can reunify with your custodial parent (the parent you normally live with) or the non-custodial parent is granted custody.

## Relative Care

You are placed with a blood or step relative (ex. grandparent, cousin, stepsibling, etc.) or someone you know. The relative and all household members age 17 and older must agree to a child abuse and neglect and criminal background check before you can be placed in their home. There are additional requirements, like a safety check of the household, we will need to do as well. Your Case Worker can provide more information on these requirements.

## Traditional Foster Care

This is a home where the foster parent(s) have been licensed by the state to provide alternative care to one or more children. Foster parents are referred to as resource providers, and they have received training and completed background checks. This type of foster care is provided to the majority of children in alternative care.

# Elevated-Needs Placement Options

In some circumstances, you might need a place to go that helps with specific problems you are facing, like medical issues or struggles with behavior. While it might feel scary, these placement options are designed to help you grow and thrive while in care. If you are upset or angry with your placement, please reach out to your Case Worker. We want to help you learn how to cope with those feelings, talk about them, and understand where they are coming from.

## Medical Foster Care

This type of care helps with physical, emotional, or psychological conditions that require extra care and attention. The resource providers may receive special training to manage your condition and are required to provide more intensive care to you.

## Residential Care

The is a facility that is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The staff will work with you on any behavioral issues and you will work with a therapist on a regular basis. The facility will also encourage family therapy and will want you to participate. Residential facilities are not in every county, so this placement option may require traveling for visits.

## Youth with Elevated Needs-Level A

Resource providers who have completed background checks and additional training to help prepare them for working with children with behavioral issues can provide this type of care. They will also provide behavioral modification and meet regularly with a consultant to address any ongoing concerns and discuss improvements in your behavior.

## Youth with Elevated Needs-Level B

Resource providers who have completed background checks and specialized training to help them work with children with behavioral issues provide this type of care. These resource providers also meet regularly with a consultant to assess the your progress. This placement option is mostly used if you have elevated needs and are coming out of residential care or you are trying to avoid placement in residential care.

# Your Case Worker

You will be assigned a Case Worker to help you and your family throughout your time in foster care. Their job is to make sure you are in a safe environment and that all of your needs are being met. Their goal, along with the court's, is to provide you a safe, permanent place to live and to help you and your family through all of the legal work it takes to get you there.

Contact your Case Worker immediately if you are having problems or you are in dangerous situation, like:

- Someone hurt you or is threatening you
- Sexual harassment or sexual abuse
- You are thinking of running away

**If you can't reach your Case Worker, ask to talk to someone else immediately. Tell them that it is a problem that can't wait. If no one answers, call 911 or the police. If you are being abused, you can also call the Missouri Child Abuse & Neglect Hotline at 1-800-392-3738.**

## Other reasons to call

- For information on your family or case plan
- To tell them about an award you've won (they do love to hear about your achievements!)
- To get additional money for new clothes or a special outfit you need
- To get copies of personal documents like a birth certificate or Social Security card
- Anytime you have questions

## Tips for the conversation

- Introduce yourself: "Hi, this is Joe Jones. I live with the Smiths. I was hoping that you could help me with a problem I'm having."
- If you get an answering machine or voicemail, you can leave the same message. **Please be sure to leave your name and phone number, so they can call you back.**
- Speak clearly and slowly. Think about what you are going to say before you call so that your thoughts are organized when you are trying to explain your situation.

# When Things Don't Feel Quite Right

If you feel that someone on your team is not listening to you, it is best if you are able to discuss these feelings with your Case Worker or resource provider and try to straighten out the problem.

Talking it out is the easiest way to say what is on your mind. If you have a serious problem or something that needs to be brought to attention, start with your Case Worker, and don't be afraid to ask to speak to them in private if you would like.

Other people you can talk to include your:

- Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) - if you are not sure who your GAL is, you can ask your Case Worker or your Deputy Juvenile Officer
- Juvenile Officer
- Foster Parent
- Counselor
- Chafee Specialist
- Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)
- Older Youth Treatment Specialist (OYTS)

## Filing a Complaint (Grievance)

If you have a concern about the services you received through the Children's Division, you may file a grievance. Anyone who received services within the last 30 days can file a grievance. If a child under the age of 12 would like to file a grievance, they will need the help of a parent, guardian, out-of-home care provider, or Guardian Ad Litem (GAL). To file a grievance, visit your local Children's Division office and ask for a Service **Delivery Grievance Form (CS-131).** Follow the instructions and complete Section A of the form and return it to your local office.

The grievance process cannot help with complaints about a court ruling, a current state statute, judicial assignments (including the GAL or Court Appointed Special Advocate), foster/adoptive licensing revocations or denials, or any subsidy denials.

## Office of Child Advocate

The Office of Child Advocate will make sure you get protection and care from everyone helping you. If you feel like you are not being treated fairly, they can investigate for you and are allowed to make recommendations in cases involving:

- Risk of abuse, neglect, or other harm
- Child protection or child welfare services

The Office of Child Advocate has the right to review all records kept by the Children's Division, but they will not disclose your identity to the agency without your permission.

To contact the Office of Child Advocate, call **866-457-2302** or visit **oca.mo.gov.**

# Rules & Expectations

When you move in, don't be afraid to ask about the rules, expectations, and routines. Your resource providers make the day-to-day decisions about your activities, duties, and chores. If you have any personal or religious reservations, don't hesitate to bring them up with your Children's Service Worker or your resource family, so they can help accommodate you.

The following rules apply regardless of where you live:

**Smoking/Tobacco:** You are not allowed to purchase, smoke, or chew tobacco or tobacco products, including vapes and e-cigarettes.

**Haircuts:** You should be able to express your desires regarding your hairstyle and changes you would like to make.

**Driving:** If you are of legal age to drive and want to get your license, talk to your Case Worker and/or Chafee worker for assistance.

**Employment:** If you want to work, talk to your Case Worker and Family Support Team first. Your job cannot interfere with school work, study periods, sleep, normal community contacts, or visits with your family. You will not be able to have a job involving operating dangerous machinery unless adequate safety equipment and proper adult supervision are provided.

**Body Piercings/Tattoos:** You must have written permission from your birth parents before having any type of tattoo or piercing, including ears, unless you are over 18.

**Religion:** You are allowed to practice the religion of your choice as long as it is not injurious to your physical, mental or emotional health. resource providers are expected to offer the opportunity for religious education and attendance of services.

**Social Networking:** Your resource providers can post pictures of you doing family activities, school events, and community functions if you're comfortable with it. The fact that you are in foster care is protected information but being in foster care should not make you feel excluded as a member of the family.

**Phone Calls/Mail:** You are allowed to send/get mail or have phone calls with friends, parents, grandparents, and other family members unless there is a court order stating otherwise.

# Household Rules Worksheet

| Rule | Consequence |
|---|---|
| | |
| **The rules and consequences identified on this worksheet have been discussed and explained.** | |
| **Care Provider:** | **Date:** |
| **Care Provider:** | **Date:** |
| **Youth:** | **Date:** |

# Permanency Planning

The goal of Permanency Planning is just like it sounds—to plan for your permanent living situation and to make sure that you receive proper care the whole way through. Your time in foster care is meant to be temporary**,** so permanency for you is one of the main goals your team will work toward with you and your family. Despite everyone's best efforts, it might not be possible for you to return home. You will be in these meetings with your parents, your parents' attorney, your resource providers, your Case Worker and his/her supervisor, your Deputy Juvenile Officer, your CASA worker, and your Guardian Ad Litem. Depending on your situation, other people you know may be invited. You may also ask that a support not listed above be included. Generally, the goal is for you to return home with your parents, if it is safe (**211.447 and 211.183 pages 16-20**), but some other common permanency options are:

## Long-term placement with a relative

This is not completely permanent and it does not prevent adoption or guardianship. Placement with an approved relative without adoption or guardianship is not a legally final permanency option so the court must continue to hold annual permanency hearings.

## Guardianship

This is usually recommended when you are placed with a relative care provider. The provider is given legal custody of you, but your parents do not have to give up their parental rights. The guardian has the legal rights of a parent to make decisions for you, but if circumstances change and your parents believe they can adequately provide for you, they can petition the court to regain custody of you.

## Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) *(Only for ages 16+)*

This option is appropriate when there is a specific long-term placement for you and when it has been documented to the Court that compelling reasons exist which make the other permanency options unacceptable. An example of this would be if there is a significant bond between you and your parent(s), but they cannot care for you due to a disability.

## Adoption

This option requires the termination of parental rights. This should only be chosen when it is clear that your parents will not be able to adequately provide for your safety and well-being.

# Your Family Support Team

Like your Permanency Planning Team, your Family Support Team (FST) is there to help plan for your future and reduce the amount of time you are away from your parents or not in a permanent home.

Generally, the team will meet every 30 days until the Court Adjudication Hearing to review progress, revise the treatment plan, and recommend that you return home or another option. If you need to be moved for any reason, an Family Support Team meeting should always be held beforehand. If you are moved because of an emergency and a meeting cannot be held, you should have one within 72 hours.

If you are at least 12 years old, you should attend your Family Support Team meetings. These meetings should be scheduled around school hours when possible and should be scheduled at a time and place that is convenient to you and your family. You and your family are vital members of the team and should be present at all meetings.

You are encouraged to bring your own ideas to the table and involve yourself in all of the topics. You might even want to lead your own Family Support Team meeting at some point. Yes, it is true – a meeting YOU can organize and lead. It may sound intimidating at first, but once you're comfortable it is very rewarding and even fun. Ways to show that you are ready to lead your own meetings are by achieving goals set in previous ones and showing your leadership skills in discussion. Just imagine how great it would feel to take the reins of your own life! After you get the hang of a few FST meetings, think about asking those at the table about the possibility of you taking charge. They will be impressed and supportive of your decision and help you if you need anything along the way.

# Family Visits

A visit with your biological parent or another visitor can be awkward, especially at first. The whole situation and setting of the meeting is new and can take some getting used to. Sometimes bringing an activity helps break the ice. Having something fun to do can put people at ease and can make the visit less awkward. Some fun activities you can try with your family are:

1. **Play a board game or card game.**
2. **Start a photo album or scrapbook.**
3. **Work on your Lifebook —** This is a collection of personal souvenirs and keepsakes, including information on your family and foster family history, your life experiences, and items that reflect who you are, like art, pictures, and school awards.
4. **Start a family book club —** Choose a book that both you and your bio-parents or siblings can be reading in between visits and then you can discuss the book together.
5. **Make a family tree —** It might not seem important now, but it can be interesting to learn about your family history.
6. **Make shared journals —** Write down what you want to tell your family members in between visits and have your family do the same. Swap journals at each visit and pick up where the other person left off!
7. **Show your school work —** Ask your Chafee Specialist to help you create a portfolio to keep copies of all your best schoolwork in to show off your hard work!

# Court Information

The court system can be tricky to navigate. It's completely normal if you are overwhelmed or frightened. Ultimately, the court's job is to protect you and make sure you are cared for. So, If you find that you are nervous or scared, just remember that you are surrounded by a group of people working for what is in your best interest.

You will have people tasked to help you with court. You will be assigned a Deputy Juvenile Officer (DJO) to help you with your court-related questions and an attorney appointed to represent you in court. Since you were removed from your home, your attorney is called a Guardian Ad Litem (GAL). Your GAL is responsible for representing your best interest in Court, making recommendations to the judge, and making your wishes known even when they differ from the GAL's recommendations. It's a good idea to get to know your GAL before Court. You may request another GAL if you feel that you are not being understood. The Juvenile Court makes the final decisions in all cases. The court removes children from their homes, approves the permanency plans and visitation schedules with your parents, and decides if you can safely return home. In some jurisdictions, you might have a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) assigned to you.

The court will take your opinion into consideration. So, make sure your Children's Service Worker, Deputy Juvenile Officer (DJO), GAL, and CASA know what you want to happen in your case and what you want the judge to know. You can speak to the judge when you are in Court and the judge may ask you questions directly. You are encouraged to answer and share information that you think is important for the judge to know. No one is allowed to speak to the judge alone. If you disagree with the judge, let your GAL know immediately and they may then voice your concern to the judge.

# Court Hearings

There are a number of different hearings that will occur regarding your case. It might seem like a lot, and you might even think that it's unnecessary, but it's important. The purpose for all of these hearings is to make sure that you are properly cared for and that good decisions are made for your safety and well-being. The types of hearings regarding your case include:

### Protective Custody

This hearing is held within 72 hours of you being taken out of your home to decide if removing you was appropriate and if you should stay in the temporary custody of the Children's Division.

### Adjudication Hearing

This hearing is held within 30 to 60 days of you entering alternative care and is an evidentiary hearing on whether the allegations that led to your removal from your home are true. The adjudicatory hearing determines if you will be placed in the legal custody of the Children's Division and will no longer be in temporary custody.

### Dispositional Hearing

This hearing must be held within 90 days of your removal from your home to determine your permanency plan. This hearing may be held immediately after the adjudication hearing.

### Dispositional Review Hearing

This hearing should be held within 90 days of the Dispositional Hearing and may be held as often as needed to determine the appropriate permanency plan for you. These hearings will stop only when the Permanency Hearing has been held.

### Permanency Hearing

This hearing must be held within 12 months of you entering care. This hearing determines your permanency plan and if the Children's Division has made reasonable efforts to finalize this permanency plan. This hearing must be held annually.

### Permanency Review Hearing

This hearing may be held as often as is necessary, but must be held at least every 6 months following the Permanency Hearing. The purpose of this hearing is to determine if the permanency plan in place is the most appropriate option for you and whether the Children's Division has made reasonable efforts to finalize the plan.

# Courtroom Tips

1. You have a right to be present in the courtroom during your hearings (210.564).
2. You MUST be consulted about your permanency plan. You have a right to know the recommendation of your Case Worker, Deputy Juvenile Officer (DJO), GAL, and/or CASA before court.
3. Talk to your foster parents (resource providers, resource provider) or case manager about transportation to court.
4. Talk to your Deputy Juvenile Officer about what to expect to happen in court.
5. Wear something nice. A nice, clean outfit with no holes or offensive messages makes a good impression.
6. Do the best you can to answer questions asked of you. But if you don't understand a question, don't be afraid to say, "I don't understand."
7. Answer questions honestly. It will be difficult to face your family and say things that might hurt them or accurately determine what is best for you. When you are worried about hurting your loved ones, that they might not believe or agree with, but remember your testimony is important so the court can remember that your safety is the top priority.
8. Refer to the judge as "Your Honor" or "Sir" or "Ma'am."
9. Courtrooms have very specific proceedings, so don't interrupt when others are speaking. Instead, let your DJO or Attorney know if you have something to say, and they will help you make that step.
10. You have the right to ask to leave the courtroom if you become uncomfortable or upset.
11. Ask your DJO if you can visit the courtroom before the hearing. Sometimes something as simple as getting acquainted with the space can help with stress and uncertainty.
12. It's a good idea to create and bring a small portfolio that has your school papers, report cards, etc.
13. You can write down some notes if you are worried about remembering what you want to say.

# PART TWO

# Youth Transitioning to Independent Living

# Transitional Living Options (Ages 16+)

When reunification, adoption, or foster care are not representative of your goals, it is usually because you are ready to start preparing for life on your own. Common options include:

## Transitional Living Program (TLP)

This program is for older youth (age 16 or older) whose permanency goal is independent living — not reunification, adoption or legal guardianship. This program provides a supportive living environment while paving a path for the transition from out-of-home care to self-sufficiency.

## Transitional Living Advocate (TLA)

This program is similar to the Transitional Living Program, but instead you live with an advocate who provides a safe place to stay, continued life-skills training, encouragement, and guidance in employment, education and/or training, and preparation for successful transition from Children's Division custody. It is hoped the advocate will become a life-long friend and mentor to you. Once a TLA placement occurs, you will receive a monthly allowance that is used to pay your advocate for their services and for other expenses such as clothing, school/work, personal hygiene, transportation, etc.

## Transitional Living Group Home (TLG)

A licensed, residential site where older youth (ages 16-18) work on a plan for independent living and completion of their educational/vocational programs in a supervised group setting. This may be an option if you are enrolled and actively participating in Chafee Foster Care Independence Program services. Typically if you enter a TLG, you have been residing in a residential treatment facility. You will be expected to keep a job (20 hours maximum, if in school) and develop goals for your future.

## Transitional Living Single and Scattered Site Apartments (TLS)

If you are between the ages of 18-20, this gives you the opportunity to practice life skills in an apartment setting. You will get support and guidance, but supervision is minimal. To be considered for TLS, you must make responsible decisions, keep a job, and have a clear understanding of the financial and emotional demands of living independently. You should also be enrolled and actively participating in Chafee Foster Care Independence Program services.

## Independent Living Arrangement

An Independent Living Arrangement is a state-approved and subsidized placement option if you are 17 or older and cannot return home. Your case manager and Family Support Team determines suitability by assessing your motivation, abilities, skills, and independent-living capabilities with the ultimate goal of emancipation. There are a variety of housing options available to you, if you have demonstrated the skills and ability to live in an independent living arrangement. Whatever option you choose, it must be stable, safe, and in a community setting that allows you full access to services and resources to help fully develop independent living skills.

# Chafee Aftercare

You may need to be signed up for Chafee Aftercare to be eligible for many independent living programs listed on the previous page. Chafee provides support services for youth who are no longer in Aftercare. If you left foster care after the age of 18 or older and are not yet 23, you are eligible. Services are flexible, short-term, and intended as a safety net for youth after leaving Children's Division custody. Contact your local Children's Division office to apply.

## WHAT SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE?

If you left foster care after the age of 18 or older and are not yet 23, you are eligible for the following services:

**Support services:** These services will provide referrals to resources. This may be one-on-one contact for guidance or to just talk to someone you trust about what is happening in your life. You should have an identified personal advisor who could be a community member, co-worker, job mentor, friend, someone you recognize who has a personal interest in you and truly cares about you.

**Emergency funds:** These funds are considered short-term assistance that allow you to continue working toward independence. This might include auto repairs, utility payments, food and rent.

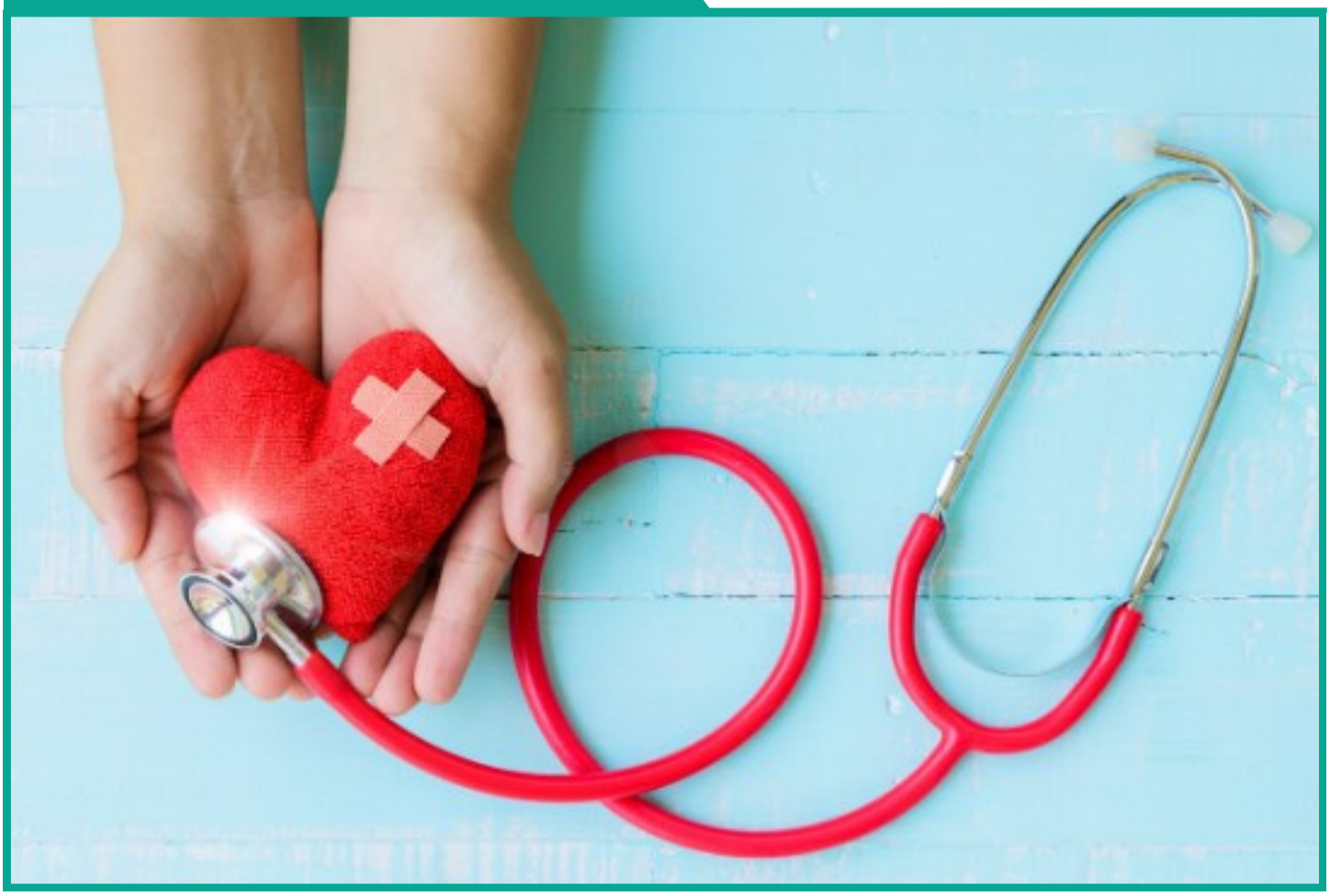
**Educational Assistance:** The Missouri Education and Training Voucher program offers funds (up to $5000 or cost of attendance) for you to attend college and vocational training institutions. Missouri Reach and Missouri CCE are also available.

**Healthcare Assistance:** Missouri Medicaid, or MO HealthNet, is automatically available for former foster youth through age 26 to provide medical and behavioral healthcare coverage. You must have been in care 30 days prior to your 18th birthday or on your 18th birthday to get Medicaid coverage. You will need to provide your current address to your local Children's Division office.

**Job training:** This may include a referral to a training site with possible financial assistance during the training period. Training in an occupation allows you to find more than a part time job and become self- sufficient.

**Housing:** This helps with room and board expenses to cover what would be considered a safe place for you to stay. This is meant to be flexible and short term (90 days or less) to stabilize your living situation. This may include food, rent, security deposits, utility deposits, start-up kits of supplies, and necessary furniture.

# Healthcare Options



## Health Care Coverage for Former Foster Youth

If you were in care at least 30 days before your 18th birthday or later and are not yet 26 years old, you are eligible for healthcare coverage through Missouri Medicaid, or MO HealthNet, regardless of how much money you make or what you own. We will need your current address to send you your MO HealthNet ID card. You will also be assigned a Managed Care health plan and you will get a separate ID card from your health plan. **You must bring both of these cards to every appointment.** Your behavioral healthcare and prescriptions will also be provided by MO HealthNet. For more information and to apply, visit **mydss.mo.gov.**

If you have health insurance from another source (like your job), you must use your third-party insurance before using MO HealthNet. You will also need to inform your medical or behavioral services provider that you are eligible for MO HealthNet.

## Comprehensive Psychiatric Services

These services are offered through the Department of Mental Health and include Targeted Case Management, Community Psychiatric Rehabilitation, and Outpatient Community-Based Services. To learn more, visit **dmh.mo.gov/mentalillness**.

# Higher Education

As a youth in foster care, your school will designate a staff member as your "Educational Liaison." This person will advocate for your educational needs. Youth in foster care are also eligible for free school meals without completing an application. The Children's Division needs to provide the school documentation to let them know you are a youth in foster care whose placement is the responsibility of the State.

## High School Equivalency (HiSET)

Sometimes finishing high school just isn't in the cards and that's okay. If you want to pursue a rewarding career or continue your education, getting your high school credential is the most important step you can take. Colleges and many employers require one. The HISET® exam can help you achieve this goal. For more information on achieving high school equivalency, visit **tinyurl.com/DESEHiSET** or call **573-751-3504**.

## The ACT

The ACT is a national, college-admissions exam that tests in English, math, reading, and science. The ACT results are accepted by all 4-year colleges and universities in the United States. Most colleges and universities require this prior to admission. Your score can be used for some scholarships and determining your acceptance into the school. Youth in foster care are eligible to take the ACT for free. Information can be found at **act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act.html**

## FAFSA

If you are a high school senior or have already graduated and want to go to college, apply for federal financial aid by completing the Free Application for Student Financial Aid (FAFSA). Since you are in foster care, you can mark yourself down as a one-person family which will help you to receive the most financial aid available. You can find more information at **studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa**

## Missouri Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program

The ETV Program provides post-secondary education and training funds to help eligible youth interested in pursuing a higher education. You must be a current or former foster student who meets one of the following:

- Were adopted or obtained legal guardianship from foster care after their 16th birthday
- Were placed in kinship guardianship after your 16th birthday
- are currently eligible for Chafee services - which includes students that have exited Children's Division custody at age 18 or later until the age of 21

Youth in this program may receive up to $5,000 per year toward their education, including tuition, fees, room & board, supplies, books, etc. Eligible youth may apply for post-secondary education/training assistance by completing the application online at **fc2sprograms.org/missouri/** and submitting the required forms available on the DSS website at **dss.mo.gov/cd/older-youth-program/education.htm**

# Higher Education

## Missouri Reach: Money for college is within your reach

Beginning in the 2011 fall semester, the Missouri Department of Social Services and the Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development started offering eligible youth a waiver that may be applied to offset the tuition and fees at Missouri public colleges and universities.

You are eligible for a voucher if:

- You are a legal resident of Missouri, who has been in foster care or other residential care on or after:
  - The day you graduated from high school or received a GED; or
  - The day preceding (before) your 18th birthday; or
  - The day of your 14th birthday, if you were eligible for adoption
- You have graduated from high school or passed the GED examination within the previous three years.

Students must apply before their 21st birthday and be currently accepted by or attending a Missouri public college or university. Priority is given to students who have earned 30 college credits and have a 2.5 or higher GPA prior to applying for this program. Students must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) annually and also apply for other student financial assistance; other than student loans, in compliance with federal financial aid rules, including the federal Pell grant.

Foster Care to Success, a national non-profit organization, provides administrative services for the tuition waiver program. In order to apply, youth must go to **fc2sprograms.org/Missouri/** and complete the online application.

## The Missouri Reach Credential Completion and Employment (CEE)

This program is a short-term, targeted assistance program to help youth successfully pursue an education or training pathway that leads to a recognized credential and entry into the workforce. Youth ages 19-25 are eligible. Other considerations include:

- The credential must be earned in less than 9 months.
- The maximum award amount is $8,000 over a 12-month period.
- CCE participants may not simultaneously receive postsecondary funding from ETV or Missouri Reach Tuition Waiver or any other specific public education and training funding (ex. workforce stipend)
  - NOTE: Exceptions may be approved by the Older Youth Program Development Specialist or Older Youth Transition specialist in cases of need or extenuating circumstances

To apply, visit **fc2sprograms.org/missouri/** and complete the online application. Older Youth Transition Specialists will verify eligibility once you apply.

# Joining the Workforce

## Job Corps

This is a technical/educational program to help people with low income and between the ages of 16 and 24 earn their high school diploma or GED. For youth who already have a high school diploma, Job Corps can help you prepare for college through partnerships with local colleges. Courses in independent living, employability skills, and social skills are offered to all Job Corps students to help you make the transition into the workplace. While enrolled in the program, you will receive housing, meals, basic medical care, and biweekly living allowances. For more information, visit **jobcorps.gov**.

## AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps membership is open to U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents age 17 and older. Members serve full or part time over a 10- to 12-month period. Once their service is completed, members receive an AmeriCorps Education Award of up to $4,725 to pay for college or graduate school or to pay back qualified student loans. During their service, members receive health coverage, training, and student loan deferment. About half the members also receive a modest annual living allowance.
To learn more, visit **americorps.gov/join**.

## Vocational Rehabilitation

This helps individuals with disabilities become employed. A Vocational Rehabilitation counselor will determine eligibility for services. To be eligible, you need to have a physical or mental impairment that affects your ability to work. You will then work with a counselor who will help you develop a plan for rehabilitation. Learn more at **tinyurl.com/DESEVocationalRehabilitation**.

## Missouri Career Centers

Missouri Career Centers are located throughout the state and offer resume preparation, career assessment, online training, and workshops as well as direct access to Workforce Investment Act Youth Programs. A map of the locations and other information is available at **jobs.mo.gov/job-centers**

## MoJobS

This is a labor-exchange and job-matching system available to you at no cost through the Missouri Division of Workforce Development at **mo.gov/work/job-seekers/**.

## Work Opportunity Tax Credit

These are private, for-profit businesses across the state that hire targeted groups with barriers to employment and are eligible for a federal tax credit. This is something that you can let a potential employer know and it may be an incentive for an employer to hire you. To learn more, visit **jobs.mo.gov/employer/incentives/work-opportunity-tax-credit.**

# The Military & The Workforce

## US Military Careers

Joining the military is another way to jumpstart your career or education with many benefits. Before serving in the military, there are a few things a young adult can do to prepare. The Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery Career Exploration Program (ASVAB) can help you find a suitable job. To enlist, you must meet physical requirements and be 18 years old, or 17 with parental consent. Youth must also have graduated from high school. College students interested in entering the service as officers may elect to enroll in their school's Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program or other service-oriented commissioning programs. Military academies and colleges provide another route to a college degree and officer status. To explore more, visit **todaysmilitary.com.**

## Selective Service for Men ages 18+

Also known as the draft, registration with Selective Services is extremely important. Failure to register may result in fines up to $250,000, up to 5 years in prison, or both. In addition to being subject to prosecution, failure to register might permanently forfeit your eligibility for certain benefits. Not registering is a felony. Registering with Selective Service does not mean you are joining the military, that you are signing up for the all-voluntary armed services, or that you will be drafted. No one has been drafted since 1973, and it cannot go into effect unless ordered by Congress and the president. You can register by:

- Visiting **sss.gov/register/**
- Going to a U.S. Post Office where you can pick up a "mail-back" registration form
- Mailing back your registration card (most men will get a reminder card around their 18th birthday)

## Additional Employment Information

- Department of Economic Development: **ded.mo.gov/community/workforce-resources**
- Missouri State Government: **jobs.mo.gov/jobseeker**
- US Bureau of Labor Statistics: **bls.gov**
- America's Career Resource Network: **www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/cte/acrn.html**
- US Department of Labor: **dol.gov**
- US Bureau of Labor Statistics – Employment Projections: **bls.gov/emp**

# Leaving Care

## Youth Have a Right to Official Documents Including:

- Original or certified copy of your Birth Certificate Original Social Security Card
- Driver's license or State ID Card
- Medical records (ex. immunizations, current medications)
- Health insurance information
- Educational records (ex. diplomas, report cards, IEP, list of schools attended)

## When You Leave Care, You Should Also Have The Following Documents:

- Financial statements from any financial institutions you have an account with
- Portfolio, Lifebook, and previous placement information
- Death certificates when parents are deceased
- Religious documents and information
- A list of known relatives, with relationships, addresses, telephone numbers, and permissions for contacting involved parties
- A resume, when work experience can be described
- A verification letter on state letterhead and signed by your Case Worker which tells when you came into care and when you left
- Documentation of tribal eligibility or membership (if this applies to you)
- Documentation of immigration, citizenship, or naturalization (if this applies to you)

## Re-Entry

Any youth 18 or older, but not yet 21, who was in foster care at any time in the two-year period preceding the youth's 18th birthday may be eligible for re-entry. You may want to consider re-entry if you feel you need additional support and it is in your best interest to have custody returned to the Department of Social Services. **RSMo 211.036**

# Assisted-Living Programs

## Public Housing & Housing Choice Vouchers

This was established to provide safe rental housing for eligible, low-income families, the elderly, and persons living with disabilities. Assistance may be available to you during the last few months of care, if you are remaining in care until you are 21. This is also a resource for you after you transition from care. Eligibility is based on:

- Annual gross income
- Whether you qualify as elderly, a person with a disability, or as a family
- U.S. citizenship or eligible immigration status

Your local Public Housing Agency will determine your eligibility and check your references. The housing agency will deny applicants whose habits and practices are expected to have a detrimental effect on other tenants or on the project's environment. If you are interested in applying for public housing, contact your local Housing Authority at: **hud.gov/sites/dfiles/PIH/documents/PHA_Contact_Report_MO.pdf**

## SNAP (Food Stamps)

This program helps people buy food through a monthly benefit that is loaded on a Missouri EBT card. EBT cards can be used in any grocery store or retail location that displays the Quest® sign. The benefits may be used to purchase food or food products with a few exceptions. Anyone can apply for SNAP. To apply, visit **mydss.mo.gov.**

## Temporary Assistance (TA)

This program provides cash assistance to families with children. It may also be used to prevent non-marital pregnancies in an effort to encourage two-parent families. To learn more and apply, visit **mydss.mo.gov.**

## Foster Youth to Independence Housing Voucher Program (FYI)

This program provides housing financial support assistance to young people leaving care, or no longer in care, who are experiencing housing instability of homelessness. Eligibility includes:

1. Youth between the ages of 18-24 who left care at age 16 or after
2. Youth exiting foster care to independence within 90 days

Learn more: **hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/fyi**

# New-Parent Resources

## Women Infants and Children (WIC) Program

This program provides supplemental foods, nutrition education, and no-cost healthcare referrals to women, infants, and young children who are at medical or dietary risks. Risk or conditions must be determined by a health-care professional. For more information about the program, eligibility, and application process, visit **health.mo.gov/living/families/wic/.** If you have questions about the WIC program call **800-392-8209** or email **WICinfo@health.mo.gov.**

## Head Start & Early Head Start

These programs are available to young children (ages 0-5) and help promote school readiness for children in low-income families by providing educational, health, nutritional, and social services. Parents are also provided social services including help with child care. Services are also available to migrant and seasonal farm-worker families. To qualify for this benefit program, you must be a parent or primary caregiver of a young child who lives in Missouri. You must also meet certain income guidelines. Other qualifications may apply regarding your age, employment status and income.

- For more information, visit **tinyurl.com/Early-Head-Start**
- To find a center in your area, visit **eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/center-locator**

# Acknowledgement

I have received the *What's It All About: A Handbook for Youth in Alternative Care*. My Case Worker has reviewed the information contained in the guidebook with me so I understand its contents. I know that I may contact my Case Worker with any questions regarding this handbook.

Youth

Date

# Commonly Used Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| **A** | |
| **AC** | Alternative Care (Children/Youth placed out of their own home) |
| **ACRB** | Alternative Care Review Board |
| **APPLA** | Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement |
| **ASFA** | Adoption Safe Families Act |
| **B** | |
| **BID** | Best Interest Determination |
| **C** | |
| **CAC** | Child Advocacy Center |
| **CA/N** | Child Abuse/Neglect |
| **CANHU** | Child Abuse/Neglect Hotline Unit |
| **CANRB** | Child Abuse or Neglect Review Board |
| **CASA** | Court Appointed Special Advocate |
| **CCE** | Credential Completion and Employment Program |
| **CD** | Children’s Division |
| **CFSR** | Child and Family Services Review |
| **CPS** | Child Protective Services |
| **CSTAR** | Comprehensive Substance Treatment and Rehabilitation |

| | |
|---|---|
| **CWM** | Child Welfare Manual |
| **CYAC** | Children of Youth in Alternative Care |
| | **D** |
| **DD** | Division of Developmental Disabilities |
| **DCN** | Departmental Client Number (Each Person's ID# with DSS) |
| **DESE** | Department of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **DJO** | Deputy Juvenile Officer or Juvenile Officer |
| **DLS** | Division of Legal Services |
| **DMH** | Department of Mental Health |
| **DOB** | Date of Birth |
| **DHEWD** | Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development |
| **DHSS** | Department of Health and Senior Services |
| **DRH** | Dispositional Review Hearing |
| **DSS** | Department of Social Services |
| **DVN** | Department Vendor Number |
| **DYS** | Division of Youth Services |
| | **E** |
| **ETV** | Educational Training Voucher |

| | |
|---|---|
| **F** | |
| **FACES** | Family and Children Electronic System |
| **FAFSA** | Free Application for Student Financial Aid |
| **FCCM** | Foster Care Case Management Agency |
| **FCS** | Family Centered Services |
| **FSD** | Family Support Division |
| **FST** | Family Support Team |
| **G** | |
| **GAL** | Guardian ad Litem (Child/Youth in Foster Care's Attorney) |
| **H** | |
| **HCY** | Healthy Children and Youth Screening |
| **HIPAA** | Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act |
| **HiSet** | Hich School Equivalency Test (Formerly GED) |
| **HUD** | United States Department of Housing and Urban Development |
| **I** | |
| **IA** | Independent Assessor |
| **IAP** | Individualized Action Plan Goals |
| **ICPC** | Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children |
| **ICWA** | Indian Child Welfare Act |

| | |
|---|---|
| **IEP** | Individualized Educational Plan |
| **IIS** | Intensive In-Home Services (Formerly Family Preservation) |
| **ILA** | Independent Living Arrangement |
| | **JKL** |
| **JO** | Juvenile Officer |
| **KIDS** | Children's Income Distribution System |
| **LOC** | Level of Care Determination |
| **LYAB** | Local Youth Advisory Board |
| | **M** |
| **MACF** | Missouri Alliance for Children and Families |
| | **N** |
| **NCMEC** | National Center for Missing and Exploited Children |
| **NYTD** | National Youth in Transition Database |
| | **O** |
| **OHI** | Out-of-Home Investigation Unit |
| **OYP** | Older Youth Program |
| **OYTS** | Older Youth Transition Specialist |
| **OSCA** | Office of State Courts Administrators |

| | |
|---|---|
| **PQ** | |
| **PCH** | Protective Custody Hearing |
| **PPR** | Permanency Planning Review Hearing |
| **R** | |
| **RCST** | Residential Care Screening Team |
| **S** | |
| **SMHK** | Show Me Healthy Kids |
| **SSA** | Social Security Administration |
| **SSI** | Supplemental Security Income |
| **SSN** | Social Security Number |
| **SYAB** | State Youth Advisory Board |
| **T** | |
| **TANF** | Temporary Assistance for Needy Families |
| **TAPA** | Temporary Alternative Placement Agreement |
| **TDM** | Team Decision Making Meeting |
| **THV** | Trial Home Visit |
| **Title IV-E** | Federal Funding for Child Services Programs |
| **TLA** | Transitional Living Advocate |
| **TLG** | Transitional Living Group Home |

| | |
|---|---|
| **TLP** | Transitional Living Program |
| **TLS** | Transitional Living Scattered-Site Apartment |
| **TPR** | Termination of Parental Rights |
| **U - Z** | |
| **WIC** | Women, Infants and Children |
| **YEN** | Youth with Elevated Needs |