

INCREASE THE INDEPENDENT LIVING SUBSIDY FOR YOUNG ADULTS IN EXTENDED FOSTER CARE

Turning 18 in foster care is overwhelming. We need to practice being independent, away from constant supervision. But most of us are not equipped to manage life completely on our own. About half (49%) of Arizona’s young people turning 18 in foster care are living in a group home or institutional placement, which is the least optimal place for an emerging adult.¹ We must receive continued assistance and practice with decision-making as we move from dependence on the child welfare system to a life of our own.

Fortunately, DCS offers voluntary extended foster care and services up to age 21. Participation in extended foster care increases the odds that we will become successful adults. Youth who participate in extended foster care are

MORE LIKELY TO:

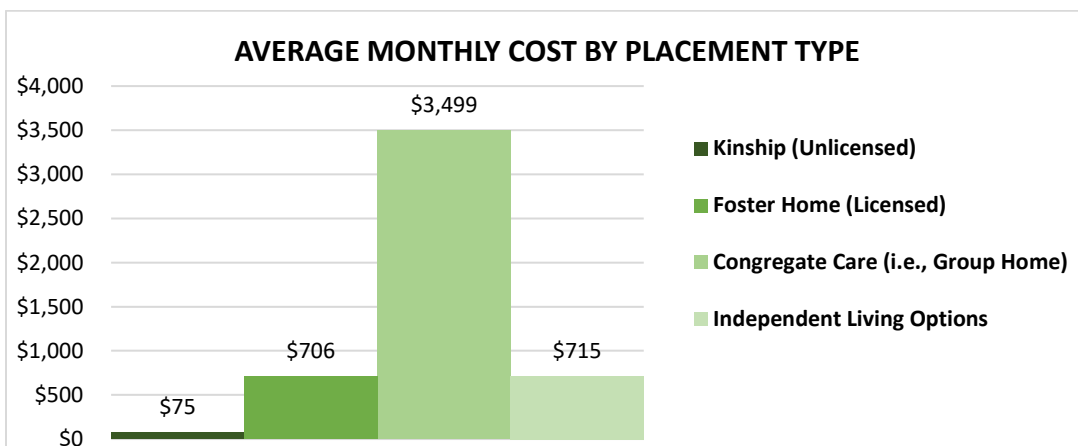
- ★ complete high school
- ★ enroll in college
- ★ be consistently employed
- ★ feel supported by a professional

LESS LIKELY TO:

- ★ need public food assistance
- ★ experience major economic hardship
- ★ become pregnant
- ★ be arrested or convicted of a crime²

HOUSING OPTIONS FOR YOUTH IN EXTENDED FOSTER CARE

When a young person opts-in to extended foster care, they get the support of a DCS Case Specialist and **help with housing**. DCS may provide housing by continuing to pay for placement with a **foster parent** or in a **group home** or, if appropriate, **the young person may live independently and receive an Independent Living Subsidy**.³ The subsidy provides a monthly stipend to support our transition from a structured living environment to an alternative living arrangement such as an apartment or college dormitory.

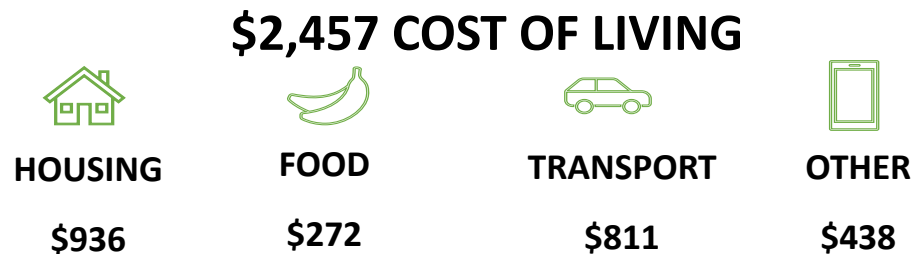


¹ Arizona Department of Child Safety, Semi-Annual Child Welfare Report; Reporting Period January 1, 2021 through June 30, 2021.

² Courtney, M. E., Okpych, N. J., & Park, S. (2018). Report from CalYOUTH: Findings on the relationships between extended foster care and youths’ outcomes at age 21. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

³ Arizona Department of Child Safety, Annual Supportive Resources Report (Kinship, Independent Living, Housing), November 2019

During the state budget reductions in 2009, the Independent Living Subsidy was lowered from \$795 to a maximum of \$715 per month. In 2015, the current structure was introduced; **subsidy starts at \$715 per month and is reduced every 6 months by \$50. The goal of this structure was to support us while gradually reducing our dependence. However, the cost of living keeps going up!** In Maricopa County, the average monthly cost of living is estimated to be \$2,457.⁴ The estimated cost of living is higher in some counties and lower in others.



Moving out during late adolescence is considered a normal developmental milestone in many cultures.⁵ But those of us who age out of foster care without a permanent family need consistent resources and guidance to find and maintain a safe and stable place to live. To better reflect our life circumstances and ensure stability we recommend the following:



RAISE THE INDEPENDENT LIVING SUBSIDY: Increase the subsidy **\$1,200** to better reflect the current cost of living and the fact that young people receiving the subsidy are responsible for their own housing costs.



KEEP IT EQUITABLE: Do not reduce the subsidy every 6 months. Dependable, consistent support allows us to exercise critical budgeting skills as we prepare for a time without financial support and provides us with an important safety net when unexpected life events happen.

“The Independent Living Subsidy was vital for me as a youth aging out of care. I would have never been able to afford housing without it, but the subsidy does not reflect the cost of living, and it is hard for young adults to get on their feet.” – Sora

“I was often scared I wouldn’t have enough money. There was a lot of stress about work, school, and money. The Independent Living Subsidy definitely helped but as it decreased, I found myself struggling with my finances.” – TJ

FISCAL IMPACT: An increased state investment of approximately \$2.5M will increase the Independent Living Subsidy to approximately \$1,200 per month while leveraging more than \$5M in federal funds.

ABOUT FOSTERING ADVOCATES ARIZONA: Led by the voices of young people with lived experience in foster care, Fostering Advocates Arizona (FAAZ) connects young adults with advocacy, information, resources, and support to ensure their successful transition to independence.

⁴ Economic Policy Institute, March 2022. Based on 2020 cost of living not including health care, childcare costs and taxes. <https://www.epi.org/resources/budget>

⁵ Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, Promoting Safe and Stable Housing for Young People, 2017.