

# EXHIBIT F-2



## Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Children and Family Services

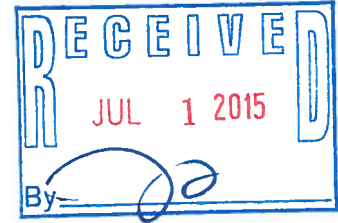
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July 1, 2015



Varnaria Vickers-Smith, Legislative Analyst  
Senate Interim Children and Youth Committee and the  
House Aging, Children and Youth, Legislative and Military Affairs Committee  
Arkansas Bureau of Legislative Research  
One Capital Mall, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, Room R-516  
Little Rock, AR 72201

RE: Initial Filing - Regular Promulgation

Dear Ms. Vickers-Smith:

Please place the Division of Children & Family Services on the Children & Youth Committee agenda for review of the Rules as listed on the Questionnaire. The public comment period is from July 1, 2015 to July 31, 2015, with an effective date of October 1, 2015.

Enclosed are copies of the Questionnaire, Summary of Changes, Financial Impact Statement and Rule.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Christin Harper, Policy & Professional Development Administrator, Division of Children and Family Services, P.O. Box 1437, (Slot S570), Little Rock, Arkansas 72203-1437; phone 682-8541; email [christin.harper@dhs.arkansas.gov](mailto:christin.harper@dhs.arkansas.gov) or fax 682-6968.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cecile Blucker" with "by B.D." written in smaller letters to the right.

Cecile Blucker


Director, Division of Children and Family Services

# BUREAU OF LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES  
Division of Children and Family Services  
AMENDING ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS

- TITLE: Revised Rule
- CFS-007: Youth Acknowledgment of Rights in Foster Care
  - PUB-50: Be Your Own Advocate: A Roadmap to Your Time in Arkansas Foster Care
- PROPOSED EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2015
- STATUTORY AUTHORITY: A.C.A. 9-28-103
- NECESSITY AND FUNCTION: Revised Rule
- **PUB-50: Be Your Own Advocate: A Roadmap to Your Time in Arkansas Foster Care**
    - Revised to better describe the rights of juveniles ages 14 and older in DHS custody concerning education, health, visitation, and court participation per federal public law 113-183 and Arkansas Act 1038 of the 90<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Regular Session as well as address other issues affecting this population of youth in foster care.
- New Rule
- **CFS-007: Youth Acknowledgment of Rights in Foster Care**
    - Created to serve as the required acknowledgement form that juveniles ages 14 years and older will sign to verify they have been provided with a copy of the document (PUB-50) describing the rights of juveniles in DHS custody concerning education, health, visitation, and court participation per federal public law 113-183 and Arkansas Act 1038 of the 90<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Regular Session.

PAGES FILED:

  
Signature

Name: Cecile Blucker Title: Director

Section: Division of Children and Family Services

Department of Human Services

PROMULGATION DATES: July 1, 2015 – July 31, 2015

CONTACT PERSON: Christin Harper  
DHS-DCFS Policy Unit  
Phone: (501) 682-8541

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**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FILING PROPOSED RULES AND REGULATIONS  
WITH THE ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL AND JOINT INTERIM COMMITTEE**

**DEPARTMENT/AGENCY** Department of Human Services  
**DIVISION** Division of Children and Family Services  
**DIVISION DIRECTOR** Cecile Blucker  
**CONTACT PERSON** Christin Harper, Policy & Professional Development Administrator  
**ADDRESS** P. O. Box 1437, Slot S570, Little Rock, AR 72203-1437  
**PHONE NO.** (501)682-8541 **FAX NO.** (501) 683-4854 **E-MAIL** christin.harper@dhs.arkansas.gov  
**NAME OF PRESENTER AT COMMITTEE MEETING** Christin Harper  
**PRESENTER E-MAIL** christin.harper@dhs.arkansas.gov

**INSTRUCTIONS**

- A. Please make copies of this form for future use.
- B. Please answer each question **completely** using layman terms. You may use additional sheets, if necessary.
- C. If you have a method of indexing your rules, please give the proposed citation after "Short Title of this Rule" below.
- D. Submit two (2) copies of this questionnaire and financial impact statement attached to the front of two (2) copies of the proposed rule and required documents. Mail or deliver to:

**Donna K. Davis  
 Administrative Rules Review Section  
 Arkansas Legislative Council  
 Bureau of Legislative Research  
 One Capitol Mall, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
 Little Rock, AR 72201**

\*\*\*\*\*

1. What is the short title of this rule? Revisions to Transitional Youth Services Program Publication and Form

2. What is the subject of the proposed rule? To issue a revised publication that describes the rights of juveniles 14 and older who are in DHS custody and corresponding acknowledgement form per federal public law 113-183 and Arkansas Act 1038 of the 90th General Assembly, Regular Session

3. Is this rule required to comply with a federal statute, rule, or regulation? Yes  No

Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Children's Bureau Program Instruction 14-01 and Titles IV-B and IV-E, as amended by Public Law 113-183 enacted 09-29-14.

If yes, please provide the federal rule, regulation, and/or statute citation. \_\_\_\_\_

4. Was this rule filed under the emergency provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act? Yes  No

If yes, what is the effective date of the emergency rule? \_\_\_\_\_

When does the emergency rule expire? \_\_\_\_\_

Will this emergency rule be promulgated under the permanent provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act? Yes  No

5. Is this a new rule? Yes  No

If yes, please provide a brief summary explaining the regulation. Form CFS-007 is a new form to meet the requirement of federal public law 113-183 and Arkansas Act 1038 of the 90<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Regular Session to have juveniles ages 14 and older sign an acknowledgement that the juvenile has been provided a copy of the document describing the rights of the juvenile in DHS custody concerning education, health, visitation, and court participation.

Does this repeal an existing rule? Yes  No

If yes, a copy of the repealed rule is to be included with your completed questionnaire. If it is being replaced with a new rule, please provide a summary of the rule giving an explanation of what the rule does. \_\_\_\_\_

Is this an amendment to an existing rule? Yes  No

If yes, please attach a mark-up showing the changes in the existing rule and a summary of the substantive changes. **Note: The summary should explain what the amendment does, and the mark-up copy should be clearly labeled "mark-up."**

6. Cite the state law that grants the authority for this proposed rule? If codified, please give the Arkansas Code citation. A.C.A. § 9-28-103

7. What is the purpose of this proposed rule? Why is it necessary?

- PUB-50: Be Your Own Advocate: A Roadmap to Your Time in Arkansas Foster Care
  - o Revised to better describe the rights of juveniles ages 14 and older in DHS custody concerning education, health, visitation, and court participation per federal public law 113-183 and Arkansas Act 1038 of the 90<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Regular Session as well as address other issues affecting this population of youth in foster care.
- CFS-007: Youth Acknowledgment of Rights in Foster Care
  - o Created to serve as the required acknowledgement form that juveniles age 14 years and older will sign to verify they have been provided with a copy of the document describing the rights of juveniles in DHS custody concerning education, health, visitation, and court participation.

8. Please provide the address where this rule is publicly accessible in electronic form via the Internet as required by Arkansas Code § 25-19-108(b).

AR Secretary of State Website

DHS/DCFS CHRIS public:

<https://ardhs.sharepointsite.net/CW/Notice%20of%20Rule%20Making/Forms/AllItems.aspx>

9. Will a public hearing be held on this proposed rule? Yes  No

If yes, please complete the following:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

10. When does the public comment period expire for permanent promulgation? (Must provide a date.)

July 31, 2015 \_\_\_\_\_

11. What is the proposed effective date of this proposed rule? (Must provide a date.)

October 1, 2015 \_\_\_\_\_

12. Do you expect this rule to be controversial? Yes  No

If yes, please explain. \_\_\_\_\_

13. Please give the names of persons, groups, or organizations that you expect to comment on these rules? Please provide their position (for or against) if known.

We do not know of any specific groups of persons who would comment. \_\_\_\_\_

**FINANCIAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

**PLEASE ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS COMPLETELY**

**DEPARTMENT** Department of Human Services  
**DIVISION** Division of Children and Family Services  
**PERSON COMPLETING THIS STATEMENT** Cecile Blucker  
**TELEPHONE NO.** (501)682-6248 **FAX NO.** (501) 682-6968 **EMAIL:** cecile.blucker@dhs.arkansas.gov

To comply with Ark. Code Ann. § 25-15-204(e), please complete the following Financial Impact Statement and file two copies with the questionnaire and proposed rules.

**SHORT TITLE OF THIS RULE** Revisions to Transitional Youth Services Program Publication and Form

- 1. Does this proposed, amended, or repealed rule have a financial impact? Yes  No
- 2. Is the rule based on the best reasonably obtainable scientific, technical, economic, or other evidence and information available concerning the need for, consequences of, and alternatives to the rule? Yes  No
- 3. In consideration of the alternatives to this rule, was this rule determined by the agency to be the least costly rule considered? Yes  No

If an agency is proposing a more costly rule, please state the following:

(a) How the additional benefits of the more costly rule justify its additional cost;

\_\_\_\_\_

(b) The reason for adoption of the more costly rule;

\_\_\_\_\_

(c) Whether the more costly rule is based on the interests of public health, safety, or welfare, and if so, please explain; and;

\_\_\_\_\_

(d) Whether the reason is within the scope of the agency's statutory authority; and if so, please explain.

\_\_\_\_\_

4. If the purpose of this rule is to implement a federal rule or regulation, please state the following:

(a) What is the cost to implement the federal rule or regulation?

**Current Fiscal Year**

**Next Fiscal Year**

General Revenue \_\_\_\_\_  
Federal Funds \_\_\_\_\_  
Cash Funds \_\_\_\_\_  
Special \_\_\_\_\_

General Revenue \_\_\_\_\_  
Federal Funds \_\_\_\_\_  
Cash Funds \_\_\_\_\_  
Special Revenue \_\_\_\_\_

Revenue

Other (Identify)

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Other (Identify)

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Total 0.00

Total 0.00

(b) What is the additional cost of the state rule?

**Current Fiscal Year**

**Next Fiscal Year**

General Revenue \_\_\_\_\_

General Revenue \_\_\_\_\_

Federal Funds \_\_\_\_\_

Federal Funds \_\_\_\_\_

Cash Funds \_\_\_\_\_

Cash Funds \_\_\_\_\_

Special Revenue \_\_\_\_\_

Special Revenue \_\_\_\_\_

Other (Identify) \_\_\_\_\_

Other (Identify) \_\_\_\_\_

Total 0.00

Total 0.00

5. What is the total estimated cost by fiscal year to any private individual, entity and business subject to the proposed, amended, or repealed rule? Identify the entity(ies) subject to the proposed rule and explain how they are affected.

**Current Fiscal Year**

\$ 0.00

**Next Fiscal Year**

\$ 0.00

6. What is the total estimated cost by fiscal year to state, county, and municipal government to implement this rule? Is this the cost of the program or grant? Please explain how the government is affected.

**Current Fiscal Year**

\$ 0.00

**Next Fiscal Year**

\$ 0.00

7. With respect to the agency's answers to Questions #5 and #6 above, is there a new or increased cost or obligation of at least one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) per year to a private individual, private entity, private business, state government, county government, municipal government, or to two (2) or more of those entities combined?

Yes  No

If YES, the agency is required by Ark. Code Ann. § 25-15-204(e)(4) to file written findings at the time of filing the financial impact statement. The written findings shall be filed simultaneously with the financial impact statement and shall include, without limitation, the following:

(1) a statement of the rule's basis and purpose;

(2) the problem the agency seeks to address with the proposed rule, including a statement of whether a rule is required by statute;

(3) a description of the factual evidence that:

(a) justifies the agency's need for the proposed rule; and

- (b) describes how the benefits of the rule meet the relevant statutory objectives and justify the rule's costs;
- (4) a list of less costly alternatives to the proposed rule and the reasons why the alternatives do not adequately address the problem to be solved by the proposed rule;
  - (5) a list of alternatives to the proposed rule that were suggested as a result of public comment and the reasons why the alternatives do not adequately address the problem to be solved by the proposed rule;
  - (6) a statement of whether existing rules have created or contributed to the problem the agency seeks to address with the proposed rule and, if existing rules have created or contributed to the problem, an explanation of why amendment or repeal of the rule creating or contributing to the problem is not a sufficient response; and
  - (7) an agency plan for review of the rule no less than every ten (10) years to determine whether, based upon the evidence, there remains a need for the rule including, without limitation, whether:
    - (a) the rule is achieving the statutory objectives;
    - (b) the benefits of the rule continue to justify its costs; and
    - (c) the rule can be amended or repealed to reduce costs while continuing to achieve the statutory objectives.

# DCFS SUMMARY OF CHANGES FOR JULY 1, 2015 PROMULGATION

## **SUMMARY OF DCFS REGULAR PROMULGATION**

The purpose of this regular promulgation is to make revisions to the Division's Transitional Youth Services Program publication describing the rights of juveniles ages 14 years and older who are in DHS custody and to create a corresponding acknowledgement form per Act 1038 of the 90th General Assembly, Regular Session.

# *Be Your Own Advocate!*



**A roadmap  
to your time in  
Arkansas foster care**

PUB-50 (098/20152)

Created in partnership with the Arkansas Youth Advisory Board

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## Why am I here?

Being separated from your home and family is a big deal. But it's important for you to know that it's not your fault.— You have the right to be healthy and safe in your home. Your parents have a responsibility to take good care of you. When this isn't happening a report may be made to the Arkansas Child Abuse Hotline. If the report is accepted, people from the Department of Human Services, Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) (check the glossary) and the cCourts will get involved to help you and your family. Sometimes this involvement results in children and youth like you being temporarily placed out of your home and into foster care.

*Teens coming into foster care need to realize that it will be very difficult in the beginning, but I promise, it does get better. When I came into foster care I was very upset and didn't want to cooperate with anybody. But after a couple months living with my foster parents, I have grown to love them. In my situation, I chose to stay in foster care and hopefully pursue my dreams with them, rather than live with my original parents. Teens who just arrive in foster care think it's so horrible and they'll never be happy, but if it turned out well for me, it could turn out well for anyone.*

*◆ Rachel, Yellville ◆*

While you're away from your home, you will live with a temporary family who will take care of you. This is called foster care.

## Is it normal to feel this way?

Foster care is not easy. It can be difficult being separated from your family, moving to a new place, meeting new people, changing schools—even under the best of circumstances. You might be confused, relieved, angry, sad, scared, or you might not even know how you feel. All of these are completely natural. In fact, these are the same ways that youth all over the country say they felt during their first days in foster care, too.

If things weren't very good in your old home—if you were abused or neglected—it can be easy to feel like you somehow deserved it, or that there's something wrong with you. Nothing could be further from the truth. You, just like everybody else, are loved and deserve to be safe and happy.

Some of these feelings will go away, or change and some may not. Some feelings will take longer than others to work through and figure out. The important thing is not to worry about it! Remember, you don't have to handle everything by yourself. Talking about how you're feeling can help a lot, so be sure

to share what you're going through with your therapist, your caseworker, or anyone else you trust. And if you want to talk with other youth in foster care who've gone through some of the same things you have, don't forget about there are resources like FosterClub.com and your Youth Advisory Board. We'll talk more about them later.

Young teens coming into foster care need to realize that it will be very difficult in the beginning, but I promise, it does get better. When I came into foster care I was very upset and didn't want to cooperate with anybody. But after a couple months living with my foster parents, I have grown to love them as if they were my own Mom and Dad. In my situation, I chose to stay in foster care and hopefully pursue my dreams with them, rather than live with my original parents. Teens who just arrive in foster care think it's so horrible and they'll never be happy, but if it turned out well for me, it could turn out well for anyone.

◆Rachel, Yellville◆

### *Will just anyone know I am in foster care?*

No! You can tell people if you want to, but this is your personal information. DCFS will protect your right to privacy. Only the people involved in your case—including school officials and medical professionals—will have access to your personal information.

When I first entered into foster care I was five years old. I had no idea about what was going to happen or even if I was going to see my parents again. I can tell you if you're scared, it's normal and it's ok. I also want you to know that it will get better. Enjoy it as much as you can. You're only in foster care because they want to help you.

◆Alyssa, Morrilton◆



## Who's here to help me?

While the reasons for your removal can be complicated, there are a lot of people who are here to help.

Your **caseworker** is the DCFS person whose job it is to look out for you. If you are placed in a different county from your "home" county, you may also have a **secondary caseworker**. Both your primary and secondary caseworkers will help you understand why you are here. Every situation is different so you should talk to your caseworker about why you are in foster care.

In your first month in foster care or when you move to a new foster home, your caseworker must visit you at least once a each week. ~~After the first month of foster care, your caseworker must visit you at least once a month in your foster home, but then y.~~ Your caseworker must also contact you you every week once a week by person or by phone and/or see you in other places like visiting you at school or driving you to appointments. Your caseworker ~~should~~ will give you his or her contact information so you can contact him or her whenever you have a question or otherwise need assistance need help.

~~He or she~~ Your caseworker will work with you and your family to make a **case plan** (look in the glossary for more info). The goal of the case plan is to help make your home safe and healthy again so that you can return ~~fix the issues that brought your family to the attention of DCFS. It is important for everyone involved in the case plan to complete their different case plan activities and services that are assigned to them. When everyone works together and is responsible for their case plan activities, there is a better chance the case plan goals will be achieved. Ultimately the judge will decide if the necessary case plan goals have been met.~~ If it becomes clear after several months that the goals of the case plan will not be met, Sometimes, though, this isn't possible, and your caseworker will work to find another permanent family for you. This can be with a relative or someone else who will love and care for you.

If you are 14-years-old or older, you will also have a Transitional Services Coordinator who will help you with your transitional plan (which we will talk about later). Your coordinator, along with the rest of your team, will help make sure you are learning skills and gaining information that you will need when you become an adult. prepare you for life as an adult.

Other people you may meet from DCFS are Program Assistants (PAs) who sometimes help drive youth to appointments or supervise visits with your parents if supervised visitation is a part of your case plan. You may also meet your caseworker's Supervisor. Supervisors can help provide extra support when needed. If for some reason you can't reach your caseworker or Transitional Services Coordinator, you can always contact your caseworker's Supervisor.

Your **attorney ad litem** (AAL) is the person who will represent you best interests in court. It is his or her job to make sure that your legal rights are protected. He or she will help you better understand your rights and the legal process. You should also make sure you have your AAL's contact information so that you can easily call or email him or her with questions or concerns.

Sometimes, you may also have a **CASA volunteer**. -CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocate. This is a person from the community who volunteers to help you while you are in foster care. -They will spend time with you and get to know you, so they can help the judge understand how you feel and what you want. Every case is different, so not everyone has a CASA. But if you don't have one and you think you'd like one, ~~be sure to ask~~ the judge if it's possible.

## YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO...

- ✓ Be nurtured by foster parents who meet your needs or be placed in the custody or foster home of relatives or fictive kin, if appropriate
- ✓ Be heard and involved with the decisions in your life
- ✓ Have complete information and direct answers to your questions
- ✓ Be informed about and have involvement when appropriate with your birth family and siblings
- ✓ Have ongoing contact with other important people in your life
- ✓ Have reasonable access to your caseworker or other person at DCFS
- ✓ Express your opinion and have it treated respectfully
- ✓ Request support and services that you need
- ✓ Have individualized care and attention
- ✓ Be notified of changes impacting your permanence, safety, and well-being
- ✓ Have a stable, appropriate placement
- ✓ Receive free appropriate education, training, and career guidance to prepare you for adulthood
- ✓ Have reasonable access to and have your best interest represented by an attorney-ad-litem in all court proceedings
- ✓ Receive quality child welfare services
- ✓ Have a plan for your future and the support needed to achieve it
- ✓ Receive a copy of your case record upon exiting foster care
- ✓ Be cared for without regard to race, gender, religion, or disability

You may also have a **therapist**. This person is here to listen to you and talk with you. They are specially trained to help you deal with your emotions in a healthy way.

*When I first entered into foster care I was five years old. I had no idea about what was going to happen or even if I was going to see my parents again. I can tell you if you're scared, it's normal and it's ok. I also want you to know that it will get better.- Enjoy it as much as you can.- You're only in foster care because they want to help you.*

◆Alyssa, Morrilton◆NAME

You will also have a **Transitional Services Coordinator** who will help you with your transitional plan (which we will talk about later). Your coordinator, along with the rest of your team, will help prepare you for life as an adult.

Young teens coming into foster care need to realize that it will be very difficult in the beginning, but I promise, it does get better. When I came into foster care I was very upset and didn't want to cooperate with anybody. But after a couple months living with my foster parents, I have grown to love them as if they were my own Mom and Dad. In my situation, I chose to stay in foster care and hopefully pursue my dreams with them, rather than live with my original parents. Teens who just arrive in foster care think it's so horrible and they'll never be happy, but if it turned out well for me, it could turn out well for anyone.

◆Rachel, Yellville◆

## *Where will I live?*

While you are away from your family, there are different places where you might live. These are called approved placements.

In a **fFoster hHome**, you will live with a temporary family who will take care of you. You will have a foster mom or a foster dad or both. You may have foster brothers and sisters. You might

## YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO...

Receive love, protection, nurturance, and support until you reach adulthood.

Live with a willing and appropriate relative.

Live with your siblings (there are some exceptions, though—refer to *When can I see my family?*)

Be free from harm, neglect, and abuse.

Receive a quality education.

Receive physical care and medical attention.

Enjoy life with a family.

Receive constructive discipline.

Grow into an independent and self-sufficient young adult.

Appeal a change in placement and request assistance from your AAL or CASA.

Speak with your caseworker.

Be represented by legal counsel.

Choose your own religion and beliefs.

Choose your own friends and participate in activities that are important to you.

Have privacy.

Be involved in your case plan.

Understand what's going on in your life.

Have a childhood and “be a kid.”

also live in a foster home that is considered **Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC)**. TFC foster parents are specially trained to help youth who are dealing with emotional and behavioral issues.

If you have a relative or other people who you know and trust like a godparent, a good friend's parent, or a coach (sometimes called “fictive kin”) who are willing and able to take care of you, you have a right to live with them. This is called a **Provisional Foster Home**. Tell your caseworker if you know of any relatives or fictive kin who might want to be your Provisional Foster Family. Relative and fictive kin have to meet certain safety standards before DGFS can make them a Provisional Foster Home. Once those safety standards are met, then the good news is Provisional Foster Homes can be opened much more quickly than non-provisional foster homes. Sometimes Provisional Foster Homes can be opened as quickly as a couple of days.

When you first come into care, you might stay at an **Emergency Shelter** if there are not any available foster homes. Emergency Shelters These facilities care for youth on a short term basis. You might also live in a **Residential Facility**, sometimes called a **Group Home**. This is a home or facility where a number of unrelated youth live with house parents (check the glossary) or staff who will care for you. There are different types of group homes. Some are Christian. Some are private and some are run by the state. If you have emotional and behavioral difficulties, you may be placed in a **Residential Treatment Facility** where specially trained staff can help meet your needs.

### *What if I need something?*

**Ask.** Your foster family receives a monthly board payment to help meet your needs, like food, clothing, and school supplies. This also goes to providing you with an allowance. If you need extra money for something special like camp or a field trip, your foster parents can ask DGFS to help you pay for it. DGFS will also help pay for certain graduation expenses like a class ring, senior pictures, and your cap and gown. You can go to the doctor or dentist when you need to.

The most important thing to remember is that you can talk to your foster parents and caseworker about what you want or need.

### *What do I do when there's a problem?*

Sometimes you might get frustrated if you encounter a problem and you feel like you aren't getting what you need. Share your frustration with your primary or secondary caseworker and give them a chance to address your concerns. Also be sure to let your attorney know what is going on. Make sure you have the office phone number and cell phone number of your caseworker and attorney ad litem so you can communicate with them often.

### *When will I see my family?*

You have the right to spend time with your parents every week unless the judge decides that it is not in your best interest. You can also write them and call them if the judge allows it. You have a right to live with your siblings while you are in foster care. Sometimes this may not happen because either DCFS or the eCourts believe that it is not in your best interest or there is not a foster home that has room for you and all of your siblings together. It is not currently possible for you and all of your siblings to be placed together. In these situations, it is DCFS's job to keep trying to find a place where you and your siblings can all live together.

If you and your siblings have been placed in different homes, you have the right to spend time with them at least once a every other week. This weekly contact with your siblings might be face to face or it might be a phone call, email, or through Skype, Facetime or a similar program.

There are some exceptions. If your sibling has been placed in a residential treatment facility or the case plan in a different statesays you cannot see your siblings, you may not be able to see them as often. However, DCFS or your placement provider should never prevent you from seeing your siblings as a way to punish you for bad behavior unless it is for a safety reason.

Because staying connected with your siblings is so important, you also have the right to also stay connected with your brothers or sisters by sharing celebrations like birthdays and holidays and even attending events like their athletic games, school plays, and graduations. DCFS needs to include you in your siblings' case plan staffing and permanency planning decisions (see "" for more information) even if you have different caseworkers. Your caseworker will also let you know if your sibling goes to a new foster home or other placement or leaves foster care. If you have siblings who are not in foster care, DCFS will do its best to make sure you can also have contact with those siblings as long as it is in your best interest and approved by the court.

You also have the right to spend time with other relatives such as your grandparents and great-grandparents as long as the eCourts approve. Talk to your caseworker about spending time your family.

### *Will just anyone know I am in foster care?*

No! You can tell people if you want to, but this is your personal information, and DCFS will protect your right to privacy. Only the people involved in your case—including school officials and medical professionals—will have access to your personal information.

### *What are my rights?*

**Be your own advocate!** (Check the glossary.) The most important right you have is to know your rights. When you know your rights, you can be a stronger advocate for yourself. Speak up. Voice your

concerns. -Ask questions.- Talk to your primary or secondary caseworker, AAL, CASA, or therapist. They are here to help you!

The blue box on the left of this page provides you with a summary of your rights. The other information on the next few pages will provide a few more details about your rights related to your living situation, visitation, court participation, education, health, etc. and what to expect in foster care.

Your rights include...

**You have the right** to receive love, protection, nurturance, and support until you reach adulthood.

**You have the right** to live with a willing and appropriate relative.

**You have the right** to live with your siblings (there are some exceptions, though—look in the section *When can I see my family?*)

**You have the right** to be free from harm, neglect, and abuse.

**You have the right** to receive a quality education.

**You have the right** to receive physical care and medical attention.

**You have the right** to enjoy life with a family.

**You have the right** to receive constructive discipline.

**You have the right** to grow into an independent and self-sufficient young adult.

**You have the right** to appeal a change in placement and request assistance from your AAL or CASA.

**You have the right** to speak with your caseworker.

**You have the right** to be represented by legal counsel.

**You have the right** to choose your own religion and beliefs.

**You have the right** to choose your own friends and participate in activities that are important to you.

**You have the right** to privacy.

**You have the right** to be involved in your case plan.

**You have the right** to understand what's going on in your life.

**You have the right** to have a childhood and "be a kid."

## *What laws protect me and other youth in foster care?*

**The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997**—This is a federal law that puts emphasis on the importance of the health and safety of children and youth in foster care. It also helps make it easier for children with special needs to be adopted.

**Fostering Connection to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008**—This is a federal law that is helping children and youth in foster care by promoting permanent families for them through relative guardianship and adoption and improving education and health care. The law also extends federal support for youth to age 21 and increases their opportunities for success when they finally leave care.

**Act 391 of 2009**—This is an Arkansas law that created the **Transitional Plan** which is a way for youth in foster care to be involved in planning for their future. It also allows youth to stay in care past the age of 18 if they are in an educational program or if they are employed for a certain number of hours.

**Act 1311 of 2009**—This is an Arkansas law that requires DHS to notify the grandparents and other relatives that a youth has been placed in foster care thus giving relatives an opportunity to be involved in the case, visit the youth, and/or have the youth live with them.

## *What do I do when there's a problem?*

Sometimes you might get frustrated if you encounter a problem and you feel like you aren't getting what you need. Share your frustration with your primary or secondary caseworker and give them a chance to address your concerns. Also be sure to let your attorney know what is going on. If the problem continues and you feel like you're not being heard, call the DCFS Client Advocate at 501.683.2735.

This is my second time back in foster care, and I've been in care for a year and ten months. My first moments were scary. I didn't know what to think, where I would go, or how things were going to be. I thought I was going to be in a world where people hurt and let you down. But that's not always the case. You will be taken care of. Be more open. Speak up. Voice your opinions. It was hard for me, but I encourage you to not be scared and voice how you feel.  
◆Raven, Little Rock◆

## *Where will I live?*

While you are away from your family, **you have the right to have a stable, appropriate placement.** There are different kinds of places you may live:

In a foster home, you will live with a temporary family who will take care of you. You will have a foster mom or a foster dad or both. You may have foster brothers and sisters. You might also live in a foster home that is considered **Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC)**. TFC foster parents are specially trained to help youth who are dealing with emotional and behavioral issues.

If you have a relative you have a right to live with them if they meet safety standards. You also have the right to live with other people you know and trust like a godparent, a good friend's parent, or a coach (sometimes called "fictive kin") who are willing and able to take care of you, if appropriate. This is called a **Provisional Foster Home**.

Tell your caseworker if you know of any relatives or fictive kin who might serve as your Provisional Foster Family. As mentioned above, relative and fictive kin have to meet certain safety standards before DCFS can make them a Provisional Foster Home. Once those safety standards are met, then the good news is Provisional Foster Homes can be opened more quickly than non-provisional foster homes. Sometimes Provisional Foster Homes can be opened as quickly as a couple of days.

When you first come into care, you might stay at an **Emergency Shelter** if there are not any available foster homes or appropriate relatives or fictive kin. Emergency Shelters care for youth on a short-term basis. You might also live in a **Residential Facility**, sometimes called a **Group Home**. This is a home or facility where a number of unrelated youth live with **house parents** (check the glossary) or staff who will care for you. If you have emotional and behavioral difficulties, you may be placed in a **Residential Treatment Facility** where specially trained staff can help meet your needs.

## *What if I need something?*

*Ask. Your foster family receives a monthly board payment to help meet your needs, like food, clothing, and school supplies. This also goes to providing you with an allowance. In addition, in November you will be given some extra money to buy holiday gifts for your family and friends. If you need extra money for something special like camp or a field trip, your foster parents can ask DCFS to help you pay for it. You can go to the doctor or dentist when you need to.*

*The most important thing to remember is that you can talk to your foster parents and caseworker about what you want or need.*

*Never forget yesterday, but always live for today because you never know what tomorrow can bring or what it can take away.*  
◆Amanda, Boston◆

## When will I see my family?

You have the right to spend time with your parents every week unless the judge decides that it is not in your best interest. You can also write them and call them if the judge allows it.

You have a right to live with your siblings while you are in foster care. Sometimes this may not happen because either DCFS or the courts believe that it is not in your best interest, or there is not a foster home that has room for you and all of your siblings. In these situations, it is DCFS's job to keep trying to find a place where you and your siblings can all live together.

If you and your siblings have been placed in different homes, you have the right to spend time with them at least once a week. This weekly contact with your siblings might be face-to-face or it might be a phone call, email, or through Skype, Facetime or a similar program.

There are some exceptions. If your sibling has been placed in a residential treatment facility or the case plan says you cannot see your siblings, you may not be able to see them as often. However, DCFS or your placement provider should never prevent you from seeing your siblings as a way to punish you for bad behavior unless it is for a safety reason.

Because staying connected with your siblings is so important, you also have the right to spend birthdays and holidays with your siblings and even attend events like their athletic games, school plays, and graduations. DCFS needs to include you in your siblings' case plan staffing and permanency planning decisions (see "" for more information) even if you have different caseworkers.

Your caseworker will also let you know if your sibling goes to a new foster home or other placement or leaves foster care. If you have siblings who are not in foster care, DCFS will do its best to make sure you can also have contact with those siblings as long as it is in your best interest and approved by the court.

You also have the right to spend time with other relatives such as your grandparents and great-grandparents as long as the courts approve too. Talk to your caseworker and attorney about spending time your family.

## What services and supports are available to me?

You have the right to receive quality child welfare services. Your caseworker will work with you and your family to make a case plan (look in the glossary for more info). The goal of the case plan is to help fix the issues that brought your family to the attention of DCFS. The services in your case plan will depend on your individual needs and strengths. They might include services like counseling or tutoring.

It is important for everyone involved in the case plan, including DCFS and your parents, to complete their different case plan activities and services. When everyone works together and is responsible for their case plan activities, there is a better chance the case plan goals will be met. Eventually the judge will decide if the case plan goals have been achieved. If it becomes clear after several months that the goals of the case plan will not be met, your caseworker will work to find another permanency goal for you like adoption or guardianship. There will be more information later in this booklet about permanency and the different permanency goals.

As a teenager, life skills (check the glossary) classes will be offered to you. Life skills classes will cover different topics like how to cook, how to open a bank account, and how to fill out a college application, and write your resume. Life skills classes are also a great opportunity to spend time with other youth who are in foster care. If you are not currently participating in life skills classes, talk to your caseworker or transitional services coordinator.

Here are some other services and supports you should know about:

### **Casey-Ansell**

If you are 14-18, you will take the Casey-Ansell or similar assessment, which is like a “test.” You won’t get a grade on the assessment. The assessment just helps DCFS know what kinds of life skills classes and other services or supports would be most helpful to you.

### **Youth Advisory Board**

The Arkansas Youth Advisory Board (YAB) is made up of a group of foster youth between the ages of 16-21 who are or have been in Arkansas's foster care system. These current and former foster youth are here to help represent your wants, goals, and needs and to advocate for you. YAB’s goal is to make foster care in Arkansas better.

A YAB board member will be available to talk to you upon your request—just ask your transitional services coordinator who your YAB representative is. Anything said to a YAB board member is strictly confidential unless it is going to harm you or someone else. If the YAB board member feels that what you have shared would benefit you, he or she may ask your permission to share it with your coordinator or other DCFS staff.

Usually the YAB puts on a Youth Leadership Conference each year. Be sure to ask your caseworker, transitional youth services coordinator, or YAB representative about it if you are interested in attending.

If you would like to know more about the Youth Advisory Board, or you would like to know more about how you can get involved, ask your case worker or your transitional services coordinator.

### **Arkansas ETV Program**

The Education Training Voucher (ETV) program awards grants to current and former foster youth to help pay for college or vocational training programs. Students may receive up to \$5,000 a year based on their cost of attendance.

#### **What are the Eligibility Requirements?**

1. You must be a current or former foster student who:
  - was in foster care on your 18th birthday and aged out at that time; OR
  - was adopted from foster care with the adoption finalized AFTER your 16th birthday; OR
  - remains in foster care and have completed a secondary education; OR
  - will have your foster care case closed between the ages of 18 and 21.
2. You must be a U.S. citizen or qualified non-citizen.
3. Your personal assets (bank account, car, home, etc.) are worth less than \$10,000.



4. You must be at least 18 but younger than 21 to apply for the first time. You may reapply for ETV funds, if you have a current grant, up to the age of 23.
5. You must have been accepted into or be enrolled in a degree, certificate, or other accredited program at a college, university, technical, vocational school. To remain eligible for ETV funding, you must show progress toward a degree or certificate.

### **How do I use the funds?**

Funds can be used to pay for tuition, balances due at school, on-campus room and board, meal cards, books and school supplies (such as uniforms, tools, equipment), one computer package, federal student loans, and study abroad through qualifying schools.

Once the above expenses have been addressed, ETV funds can pay for other items, including rent, food, transportation, health insurance premiums, disability services, and dependent child care expenses to licensed child care providers.

Funds may not be used for educational or vocational courses shorter than one year in duration and/or which do not lead to a degree or certification, coursework at non Title-IV schools, cell phone bills, personal loan repayments, banking late fees, bounced check fees or lost/stolen debit card transactions, computer games or DVDs, and dorm room or apartment damages.

If you have any other questions about the ETV program, access the link below.

To apply, go to <http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dcf/Services.aspx>, click on Arkansas Education and Training Voucher Program (ETV) and follow the instructions.

## **Do I have a say in what happens to me and my case?**

Absolutely! You have the right to be heard and involved with the decisions that affect your life. This includes the right to participate in the development of your case plan, which includes your Transitional Plan (see below for more information), and the right to participate in all staffings and court hearings related to your foster care case.

If you enter foster care when you turn 14 or if you come into care after the age of 14, DCFS will make sure you are actively involved in the development of your Transitional Plan. The Transitional Plan includes all the life skills (check the glossary), resources, and future-planning for your successful transition into a self-sufficient life. It is a way for you to be involved in planning for your future. There are a lot of parts to your transitional plan. It will include plans about your education, employment, health, housing, and lifelong connections as well as other things.

To help you create your Transitional Plan, you have the right to a Transitional Team. In addition to helping you with your Transitional Plan, the Transitional Team is there to support you and make sure you develop and maintain healthy relationships with adults you trust who will continue help you even after you leave foster care.

In addition to your caseworker, transitional services coordinator, and attorney, you can choose other people who you would like want on your Transitional Team in addition to your caseworker, transitional services coordinator, and attorney. The Division is allowed to have input on who you select

to be on your Transitional Team. If you are comfortable with it, you can lead the Transitional Team meetings with assistance from your caseworker.

Your caseworker will schedule your Transitional Team meetings at least once every six months. If you want to have your Transitional Team meetings more often, just ask your caseworker.

*What if I need something?*

*Ask.* You have the right to request support and services that you need. Your foster family receives a monthly board payment to help meet your needs, like food, clothing, and school supplies. This also goes to providing you with an allowance. If you need extra money for something special like camp or a field trip, your foster parents can ask DCFS to help you pay for it. DCFS will also help pay for certain graduation expenses like a class ring, senior pictures, prom, and your cap and gown.

The most important thing to remember is that you can talk to your foster parents and caseworker about what you want or need.

## *What about school?*

If at all possible you have the right to receive a public education, training, and career guidance to help prepare you for adulthood. DCFS and the school you went to before you came into foster care will work together to make sure you can stay in your same school if that is in your best interest and your foster care placement is reasonably close. Even if your foster care placement is in a different school district, there are laws that say DCFS and the schools will work together to develop a transportation plan to help you stay in your same school to the extent it is reasonable and practical and if that plan doesn't put it won't mean additional costs to the school.

If you have to change schools, that change will happen quickly so you don't miss out on school. Even if the new school hasn't gotten your records from your old school, you can still go ahead and start going to classes.

Each school is supposed to should have its own a staff member who helps make sure youth who are in foster care are getting what they need. This person is called the foster care liaison. If you want to, ask your teacher or principal who your foster care liaison is.

Finally, you also have the right to participate in all school resources, services, and extracurricular activities that are available to all of the other students in the school.

## *Can I just be a normal teen?*

There is nothing normal about foster care, but you are a normal teen. Remember that foster care is a legal designation, not who you are. —YAs such, you have a right to “normalcy.” Normalcy means having participating in normal-age appropriate activities and having similar experiences and opportunities

### *So what does normalcy look like?*

#### *Here are a few more examples...*

- ✓ Spending the night with friends -- no background checks required.*
- ✓ Learning how to drive - --ask your caseworker about the DCFS Driver's License & Car Insurance Reimbursement Program.*
- ✓ Connecting with friends on social media - --but be safe and watch what you post online. Never post anything you would not say to someone's face and remember once something is online, it*

that other youth have like hanging out with and spending the night with friends, going on field trips, getting a job, dating, participating in sports and other extracurricular activities, and using social media responsibly.

However, normalcy does not mean doing whatever you want. Even teens who are not in foster care have rules to follow. Please be respectful of the rules and other boundaries your foster parents or other caregivers set. For example, be sure to follow curfew. Expect foster parents to monitor your social media activity enough to make sure you are safe and following court orders. And even though it might be annoying, your foster parents or other caregivers are doing a good job if they are asking you questions about what you are doing and how you are spending your time.

For day-to-day normalcy activities your foster parents are expected to make decisions on your behalf just like they would for their biological children. When making decisions related to normal age-appropriate activities, foster parents and other caregivers must consider things like your age, maturity level, potential risk factors and appropriateness of the activity, your best interest, your behavioral history and then balance that information with the importance of encouraging your emotional and developmental growth.

If you are in a group home or other residential facility, there should be someone there who is designated to make decisions related to normalcy.

Foster parents and other caregivers can always ask for guidance from the caseworker if need be. There are some situations for which they must get approval from your caseworker like if you want to travel out-of-state.

~~However, normalcy does not mean doing whatever you want. Even normal teens who are not in foster care have rules they must follow. So please be respectful of the rules and other boundaries your foster parents or other placement providers set. For example, be sure to follow curfew. Expect foster parents to monitor your social media activity just enough to make sure you are safe and following court orders. If you want to participate in a particular activity or event, let your foster parent or placement provider/other caregiver know ahead of time. If you let them know ahead of time, they have more time to consider it, support you if appropriate, and even help arrange for transportation if needed.~~

~~For day-to-day activities your foster parents are expected to make decisions on your behalf just like they would for their biological children. They can always ask for guidance from the caseworker if need be. If you are in a group home or other residential facility, there should be someone there who is designated to make decisions related to normalcy. Your foster parents are expected to set boundaries and if you do not think some of the rules or decisions your foster parents or placement providers/other caregivers make are fair, respectfully talk with your caregiver and caseworker about it.~~

### *What do I do when there is a problem?*

Sometimes you might get frustrated if you encounter a problem and you feel like you aren't getting what you need. Share any frustrations with your primary or secondary caseworker and give them a chance to address your concerns. Also be sure to let your attorney know what is going on. Make sure you have the office phone number and cell phone number of your caseworker and attorney ad litem

~~so you can communicate with them often. There is a place at the end of this booklet to write those phone numbers down.~~

~~So what does normalcy look like? It looks like being able to spend the night with your friends without having to get background checks on your friends and their parents.~~

## *Who else is here to help?*

While DCFS and the Courts have an official responsibility to you, there are lots of other organizations with lots of people who can help you, too, with whatever you need:

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)/[www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)**

Are you feeling desperate, alone or hopeless? Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. It's a **free, 24-hour hotline** available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. Your call will be routed to the nearest crisis center to you. Call for yourself or someone you care about. It's free and confidential.

**National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)/[www.nvdh.org](http://www.nvdh.org)**

Help is available to callers **24 hours a day, 365 days a year**. Hotline advocates are available for victims and anyone calling on their behalf to provide crisis intervention, safety planning, information and referrals to agencies in all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Assistance is available in English and Spanish with access to more than 170 languages through interpreter services. If you or someone you know is frightened about something in your relationship, please call the National Domestic Violence Hotline.

**National Runaway Switchboard: 1-800-RUNAWAY/[www.1800runaway.org](http://www.1800runaway.org)**

Call if you are a teenager who is thinking of running from home, if you have a friend who has run away and is looking for help, or if you are a runaway ready to go home. The **24-hour crisis line** has an experienced front-line team member ready to help you now. They provide crisis intervention and travel assistance to runaways. They provide information and local referrals to adolescents and families. They give referrals to shelters nationwide. They also relay messages to or set up conference calls with parents at the request of the youth.

**National Youth Crisis Hotline: 800-442-HOPE (4673)**

Provides counseling and referrals to local drug treatment centers, shelters, and counseling services. Responds to youth dealing with pregnancy, molestation, suicide, and child abuse. **Operates 24 hours, seven days a week.**

**Boys Town/Girls Town National Hotline: 1-800-448-3000/[www.boystown.org](http://www.boystown.org)**

**Open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year**, this hotline is staffed by specially trained counselors who can help with suicide prevention, sexual abuse, parenting troubles, anger, physical abuse, school issues, chemical dependency, relationship problems, depression, emotional abuse, and runaways.

**Nationwide RAINN National Rape Crisis Hotline: 800-656-4673/[www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)**

This nationwide partnership of more than 1,100 local rape treatment hotlines provides victims of sexual assault with free, confidential services around the clock.

**BACA (Bikers Against Child Abuse):** [www.bacausa.com](http://www.bacausa.com)

BACA is a nonprofit organization that exists to provide aid, comfort, safety, and support for children who have been sexually, physically, and emotionally abused. BACA is dedicated to the principle that one of the basic rights of childhood is to be safe and protected. When the child's family and environment have failed them, BACA stands ready to provide it for them. BACA is a strong organization of dedicated individuals who are willing to sacrifice any and all to protect and secure a child's basic right to a happy childhood.

## *FosterClub*

FosterClub is the national network for young people in foster care—a place to turn for advice, information, and hope.

Being placed in foster care can be a chaotic and anguishing experience for a young person. FosterClub is dedicated to providing a peer support network for children and youth in foster care. Further, FosterClub believes that the experiences young people have in foster care place them in a position to effect change within the system, inform and motivate their peers, build public awareness and create public will for improved care for abused and neglected children.

FosterClub is about providing youth a voice within the system that so heavily impacts their lives. Whether advocating on their own behalf, in concern for siblings or family members, or speaking out on behalf of their 513,000 peers currently in the system, FosterClub's websites, publications and events provide a youth-friendly network which helps the voices of young people to be heard.

FosterClub is dedicated to providing the tools, training and forum to help young people secure a brighter future for themselves and the foster care system. Join today at [www.fosterclub.org](http://www.fosterclub.org)!

### Helpful suggestions from Toby at FosterClub

**Friends.** Don't lose connection! Some of the best people that I knew, I lost connections with because I don't speak to them anymore. I miss them a lot. I regret not keeping communication with some of them.

**Moving.** Many foster youth tend to move very often. At times they are unable to take everything they want with them on such a short notice. It really sucks that people have to think in a mind setting where they could be moved any day. But realistically, if you know you might be moving, think of the stuff that you want to take with you, wherever you may go.

**School.** I know that personally I moved from school to school very often. Let your voice be heard, and talk about staying in the same school district! I, on occasion, moved from school district to school district, and I was very lucky to graduate on time.

**Documents.** DOCUMENTS ARE VERY IMPORTANT! Your State ID, Birth Certificate, Social Security Card, etc. are very important wherever you are in life. If you have them in your possession, great! Don't lose them.

**Employment.** If you have a job, try to stay with it! I know personally that on many times in my life I had to quit a job because of my foster care situation. Don't bury yourself in that hole!

**Keep a positive attitude!** In general, life can get you down. This is especially true for foster youth and/or anyone aging out of the system. Keeping a positive attitude will make things run a bit smoother. Promise!

## *Youth Advisory Board (YAB)*

The Arkansas Youth Advisory Board (aka YAB) is made up of a group of foster youth between the ages of 16-21 who are or have been in Arkansas's foster care system for any length of time. The current and former foster youth are a responsible, mature, and respectful group of youth who are here to help represent your wants, goals, and needs and to advocate for you.

YAB's Our goal is to better the foster care system as a whole in the State of Arkansas make foster care in Arkansas better. We advocate, mentor, and represent youth in foster care not only in Arkansas, but also on a national level.

A YAB board member will be available to talk to you upon your request just ask your transitional services coordinator who your YAB representative is. Anything said to a YAB board member is strictly confidential unless it is going to harm you or someone else. If the YAB board member feels that what you have shared would benefit you, he or she may ask your permission to share it with your coordinator or other DCFS staff.

Usually the YAB puts on a Youth Leadership Conference each year. Be sure to ask your caseworker, transitional youth services coordinator, or YAB representative about it if you are interested in attending.

If you would like to know more about the Youth Advisory Board, or you would like to know more about how you can get involved, just ask your case worker or your transitional services coordinator.

## *What are DCFS's responsibilities to me?*

It's DCFS's job to:

1. Find the best place for you to live while you are in foster care. This means finding a family foster home, relative foster home, or other care facility that best meets your needs in the least restrictive environment and is close to your family to make it easier to stay in contact (as long as you can still be safe).
2. Make sure you have planned, regular visits with your family and relatives.
3. Provide you with the opportunity to practice your faith and participate in the religious activities of your choice.
4. Give you honest information regarding your case and any DCFS or eCourt decision affecting you.
5. Protect your rights (check out the section *What are my rights?*).
6. Involve you in your case planning, conferences, staffings, and court hearings whenever possible.

7. ~~Keep a record of your legal documents such as birth certificate, social security card, and court orders for you while you're in care.~~
8. ~~Communicate with your school about what's going on in your life to make sure you're getting what you need while you're in school.~~
9. ~~Help you return to your family if it is in your best interest or find a new family with relatives or adoptive parents if you cannot safely return home.~~
10. ~~Support you as you grow up, and help you learn skills you need to live a productive and satisfying life.~~

### ~~*What are DCFS's responsibilities to my biological family?*~~

1. ~~Offer and provide services that will help keep your family together.~~
2. ~~Let you and your parents know why it was necessary to temporarily move you and place you with a foster family.~~
3. ~~Not judge or criticize your family. Acknowledge that your family is part of your life.~~
4. ~~Let your family know how they can still be involved in your life while you are in foster care.~~
5. ~~Let your family know what they must do to have you return home.~~
6. ~~Include your family when creating the case plan.~~
7. ~~Give your family every possible support and service for achieving the goals of your case plan to help you return home.~~
8. ~~Return you to your family if and when the necessary changes or conditions required by the court have been made.~~

### ~~*What responsibilities does my biological family have?*~~

1. ~~Provide any and all important information about you and your family to DCFS.~~
2. ~~Tell your caseworker about any special needs you have, you including health conditions, school information, and important family customs or cultural practices, and any special needs.~~
3. ~~Participate in staffings and court hearings.~~
4. ~~Work with your caseworker to create a case plan that will help you return home.~~
5. ~~Participate in the services to support therequired in the case plan goals andand work on meetachieving the case plan goals.~~
6. ~~Be involved, as often as possible, in your medical appointments or social or religious activities as long as the case plan allows that involvement.~~
7. ~~Keep in contact with your caseworker and keep them updated on what they are doing to achieve the goals of themmeet the case plan goals.~~
8. ~~Maintain contact and communication with you and keep appointments to visit with you.~~
9. ~~Talk to your caseworker or their lawyerlawyer if they have any concerns.~~
10. ~~Provide financial support for you. The court will decide how much they need to pay to DCFS to help take care of you.~~
11. ~~Let DCFS know as soon as possible if they wish to give up their rights as a parent and end their relationship with you.~~

Some tips to help you through foster care...

Be calm and respectful. It will pay off!  
Know that you are not alone!

Find out who your case worker is and get his or her contact info.  
Be patient and try to ask lots of questions.  
Try to be positive and be very honest!  
◆Shady, Fort Smith◆

## *Court Process*

Because the court makes most of the decisions regarding you and your family, it is important that you understand the court process, which will include different kinds of multiple court hearings. You have a right to participate in all court hearings related to your foster care case. If, at any time, you have questions regarding the court process, talk to your caseworker, AAL, or CASA.

**Reports and Investigation**—The Arkansas State Police (ASP) investigate all reports of severe maltreatment and are required by law to initiate these investigations within 24 hours of receiving a report. Severe maltreatment includes things such as sexual abuse, broken bones, and internal injuries. DCFS investigates all other types of maltreatment reports and must do so within 72 hours.

**Emergency Removal**—DCFS, law enforcement (with exception of CACD staff), and physicians have the authority to remove a youth from his or her home for up to 72 hours without notifying the parents if they believe the youth's health or safety are at risk. Most emergency removals occur as a result of a report to the Child Abuse Hotline. During this time, a youth will stay with a foster family.

**Emergency (Probable Cause) Hearing**—The emergency hearing must be held within five working days after an emergency removal to determine if DCFS or ASP acted correctly in removing the youth.

**Adjudication Hearing (Trial)**—The adjudication hearing is held within 30 days after the probable cause hearing unless the court finds a good reason cause to extend the hearing for an additional 30 days to wait until 60 days to have the probable cause hearing. The purpose of the adjudication hearing is for the judge to decide determine whether there is enough proof to "substantiate" the allegations are substantiated by the proof (found true) of child abuse or neglect or, in other words, decide the allegation are true. In order to be found true, DHS/DCFS must prove that, due to parental unfitness or child maltreatment, the youth is at great risk for serious harm.

**Disposition Hearing**—The disposition hearing usually occurs immediately right after the adjudication hearing if the judge has determined the youth dependent-neglected (see glossary). The purpose of the disposition hearing is to decide determine what action will be taken. The judge will decide determine if whether it is safe for a youth to return home or if whether the youth must remain under the care of DHS/DCFS in foster care. The judge will also order services to reunify and/or preserve the family. If the court determines a youth must remain away from home stay in foster care, the court will approve a case plan for the youth and parents. The case plan will include orders like how often parents and their children will to visit each other as well as a plan to and what kind of services will be put in place to help the youth safely return home.

**Review Hearings**—The first review hearing must be held within six months of the emergency removal. Review hearings must be held at least every six months for as long as the youth is in foster care. The purpose of a review hearing is for the judge to reexamine the situation, decide determine whether the court orders and approved case plan are being followed, and decide determine whether everyone each party is working to achieve the goals of the case plan.



**Permanency Planning Hearing**—The permanency planning hearing must be held no later than 12 months from the emergency removal. The purpose is for During the permanency planning hearing, the judge to decide where the youth should permanently live. These options may include 1) Return the youth to his or her family, 2) Continue working on the plan to return the youth to his or her family 3) Approve a plan to terminate the parental rights of the parents, 4) Approve a plan to allow the youth to be adopted.

**Termination of Parental Rights**—Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) can be voluntary or court ordered. TPR is a permanent, legal action in which that means a parent gives up all rights and responsibilities from that point on and legally ends the relationship with his or her child. Parents can volunteer to have their parental rights terminated or the court may order TPR. After TPR, another family can adopt the youth.

### Transition

If you enter foster care when you turn 14 or if you come into care after the age of 14, DGFS will give you an opportunity to be actively involved in planning for your future. This includes actively participating in staffings, court hearings, and in the development of your **Transitional Plan**.

The Transitional Plan includes all the **life skills** (check the glossary), resources, and future planning for your successful transition into a self-sufficient life. It is a way for you to be involved in planning for your future. There are a lot of parts to your transitional plan. It will include plans about your education, employment, health, housing, and lifelong connections as well as other things.

To help you create your Transitional Plan, you have the right to a **Transitional Team**. In addition to helping you with your Transitional Plan, Your caseworker will help the Transitional Team is there to support you and make sure you develop and maintain healthy relationships with adults you trust who will continue help you even after you leave foster care, you complete a **Transitional Plan** and a **Life Plan**

You can choose who you would like on your Transitional Team in addition to your caseworker, transitional services coordinator, and attorney. The Division is allowed to have input on who you select to be on your Transitional Team. If you are comfortable with it, you can lead the Transitional Team meetings with assistance from your caseworker.

• Your caseworker will schedule your Transitional Team meetings at least once every six months. If you want to have your Transitional Team meetings more often, just ask your caseworker! He or she will also help you develop and maintain healthy relationships with adults you trust who will be a resource to you after you leave foster care.

#### **What is a Transitional Plan?**

The Transitional Plan includes all the **life skills** (check the glossary), resources, and future planning for your successful transition into a self-sufficient life. It is a way for you to be involved in planning for your future. There are a lot of parts to your transitional plan. It will include plans about your education, employment, health, housing, and lifelong connections as well as other things.

#### *What services and supports are available to me?*

You have the right to receive quality child welfare services. Your caseworker will work with you and your family to make a **case plan** (look in the glossary for more info). The goal of the case plan is to help fix the issues that brought your family to the attention of DGFS. It is important for everyone

involved in the case plan to complete their different case plan activities and services. When everyone works together and is responsible for their case plan activities, there is a better chance the case plan goals will be met. Ultimately the judge will decide if the case plan goals have been achieved. If it becomes clear after several months that the goals of the case plan will not be met, your caseworker will work to find another permanency goal for you. This can be with a relative or someone else who will love and care for you.

The services in your case plan will depend on your individual needs and strengths. They might include services like counseling or tutoring.

As a teenager, life skills classes will be offered to you. Life skills classes will cover different topics like how to cook, how to open a bank account, and how to fill out a college application, and write your resume. Life skills classes are also a great opportunity to spend time with other youth who are in foster care. If you are not currently participating in life skills classes, talk to your caseworker or transitional services coordinator.

Here are some other services and supports you should know about:

### Casey-Ansell

If you are 14-18, you will take the Casey-Ansell or similar assessment, which is like a "test." You won't get a grade on the assessment. The assessment just helps DGFS know what kinds of life skills classes and other services or supports would be most helpful to you.

### Youth Advisory Board

The Arkansas Youth Advisory Board (YAB) is made up of a group of foster youth between the ages of 16-21 who are or have been in Arkansas's foster care system. The current and former foster youth are a responsible, mature, and respectful group of youth who are here to help represent your wants, goals, and needs and to advocate for you. YAB's goal is to make foster care in Arkansas better.

A YAB board member will be available to talk to you upon your request—just ask your transitional services coordinator who your YAB representative is. Anything said to a YAB board member is strictly confidential unless it is going to harm you or someone else. If the YAB board member feels that what you have shared would benefit you, he or she may ask your permission to share it with your coordinator or other DGFS staff.

Usually the YAB puts on a Youth Leadership Conference each year. Be sure to ask your caseworker, transitional youth services coordinator, or YAB representative about it if you are interested in attending.

If you would like to know more about the Youth Advisory Board, or you would like to know more about how you can get involved, ask your case worker or your transitional services coordinator.

### Arkansas ETV Program

The Education Training Voucher (ETV) program awards grants to current and former foster youth to help pay for college or vocational training programs. ETV grants are funded by the federal government and administered by the states. Students may receive up to \$5,000 a year based on their cost of attendance.

### *What are the Eligibility Requirements?*

- ~~— You must be a current or former foster student who:~~
- ~~— was in foster care on your 18th birthday and aged out at that time. OR~~
- ~~— was adopted from foster care with the adoption finalized AFTER your 16th birthday. OR~~
- ~~— remains in foster care and have completed a secondary education. OR~~
- ~~— will have your foster care case closed between the ages of 18 and 21.~~
- ~~— You must be a U.S. citizen or qualified non-citizen.~~
- ~~— Your personal assets (bank account, car, home, etc.) are worth less than \$10,000.~~
- ~~— You must be at least 18 but younger than 21 to apply for the first time. You may reapply for ETV funds, if you have a current grant, up to the age of 23.~~
- ~~— You must have been accepted into or be enrolled in a degree, certificate, or other accredited program at a college, university, technical, vocational school. To remain eligible for ETV funding, you must show progress toward a degree or certificate.~~

### *How do I use the funds?*

~~Funds can be used to pay for tuition, balances due at school, on-campus room and board, meal cards, books and school supplies (such as uniforms, tools, equipment), one computer package, federal student loans, and study abroad through qualifying schools.~~

~~Once the above expenses have been addressed, ETV funds can pay for other items, including rent, food, transportation, health insurance premiums, disability services, and dependent child care expenses to licensed child care providers.~~

~~Funds may not be used for educational or vocational courses shorter than one year in duration and/or which do not lead to a degree or certification, coursework at non Title IV schools, cell phone bills, personal loan repayments, banking late fees, bounced check fees or lost/stolen debit card transactions, computer games or DVDs, and dorm room or apartment damages.~~

~~If you have any other questions about the ETV program, access the link below:~~

~~To apply, go to <http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dcf/Services/dcfServices.aspx>, click on Arkansas Education and Training Voucher Program (ETV) and follow the instructions.~~

### *Who makes health decisions for me?*

~~DCFS, with help from your foster parents or other placement provider/caregiver, is responsible for making sure you receive regular and appropriate physical and mental health services. There are certain times DCFS will be required to take you to the doctor and other health care providers, but you can~~

also have the right to go to the doctor or dentist whenever you need to go. For major things like surgery, the court must give approval unless it is an emergency.

Your caseworker must also give you information about the health care needs of youth who are in foster and aging out of foster care. This includes options for health insurance after exiting care. Your caseworker should also speak to you about the importance of designating another individual to make health care treatment decisions for you in case something happens to you, and you do not have a relative who would be authorized to make those decisions after you exit foster care.

As a teenager, you need to know how to make safe, smart decisions about your body and sexuality. If you chose to be in a relationship with someone, always make sure you feel safe and respected in that relationship. Never feel pressured to be sexually active if you are not ready to be. You are encouraged to wait before becoming to be sexually active.

However, if you choose to be sexually active, do so responsibly and within a healthy, loving relationship. For young women, you have a right to be on regular birth control like the pill or patch if you want to, but you are not required to be on regular birth control either. However, both young men and young women who choose to be sexually active need to protect themselves and their partners from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and pregnancy each time you are sexually active by using condoms.

Talk to your caseworker, foster parent, or placement provider about questions you may have about safe sex.

## *What else do I need to know?*

### Credit Reports

If you are 146-years-old or older, you have the right to obtain a copy of your credit report free of charge to you each year you are in foster care. It is important to review your credit report each year to make sure other people have not tried to use your identity to open up credit card accounts or other types of loans or services for themselves. You do not want other people using your identity to open up credit cards or other services because that could hurt your credit score especially if the people using your identity are not responsible. You want to have a good credit score so that when you are an adult, it will be easier to do things like turn on utilities (such as water and electricity) in your apartment, apply for your own credit cards, and even apply for a loan to buy a home one day.

You have the right to receive help with understanding your credit report. DCFS will help you check your credit report as part of your transitional plan. If you are 16 or 1714-years-old or older, DCFS will work with the credit reporting agencies to make sure there are not any problems with your credit reports. If there are problems with your credit report, DCFS or its partners will help fix those problems.

If you are 18 or older, you can access your credit report by going to [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com). You are entitled to a free credit report one time each year from each of the three national credit reporting companies (Experian, TransUnion, Equifax).

## Permanency

One word you may hear a lot while you're in foster care is "permanency." Permanency can mean different things to different people (see the text box on the side). Generally permanency means a legally established relationship through reunification (going back to your parents or the person from whom you were removed), adoption, or guardianship as well as an emotional attachment between youth and caregivers, family members, and other adults who play a positive role in the youth's life.

Placement in foster care is meant to be temporary. At some point you will no longer be in foster care.

### 29 Things a Permanent Connection Can Mean

1. Lifelong relationship
2. Family
3. Friendship
4. Unconditional love
5. Ongoing support
6. Extended family-like relationship
7. Knowing that someone cares
8. Continuity
9. Someone to go home to
10. Sharing life's ups and downs
11. Someone to call on in times of crisis
12. Someone to call "just because"
13. Being there
14. Defining family together
15. Sharing holidays
16. Celebrating special times together
17. Someone to check in with regularly
18. Shared history
19. Assistance with major decisions
20. Growing and changing together
21. Being accepted no matter what
22. Someone to trust
23. Having someone to stand by you
24. Knowing someone is proud of you
25. Knowing that you are not alone
26. Having a safe haven
27. Being a part of something
28. Feeling free to be yourself
29. Having positive role models



You might reunite with your family. You might get a legal guardian (check the glossary). You might be adopted by a relative or another family. Or you might "age out" (check the glossary) of foster care at age 18 or 21. No matter what your situation is, it is important to maintain and develop meaningful relationships with caring adults that will last a lifetime.

Getting adopted or getting a legal guardian does not mean that you are losing your original family. It means you are gaining more family. You can have a safe and permanent adoptive family and keep connections to past families who are important to you.

Take time to think about who is important to you and who you want to be in your life forever—even after you leave foster care. Your caseworker can help you get connected and stay connected with the important people in your life.

Consider asking an adult you trust to adopt you. You might think you don't want to be adopted now, but having someone you are permanently and legally connected to may become more important as you get older. It's never too late to be adopted!

Look at the questions listed below on the next page and see just a few of the reasons why having supportive, caring adults in your life is important!

- ◆ Where will you go for the holidays?
- ◆ Where will you do laundry?
- ◆ Who will you turn to for health and legal advice?
- ◆ Who will you talk to about your problems?
- ◆ Who will you call in an emergency? Where will you stay if you have an emergency?
- ◆ Who will make medical decisions for you if you become sick or seriously injured?
- ◆ When you have children, who will they call grandma and grandpa?

Talk to your caseworker if you have more questions about lifelong connections and permanency.

Your caseworker will also help you get the life skills training you need, complete an application for health insurance, apply to a college or vocational program, and apply for financial aid. (Check out the section on the **Arkansas ETV Program**.)

You will also create a **Life Plan** which is a detailed to-do list that you will make along with your caseworker, AAL, foster parents, transitional services coordinator, and anyone else who is important to you such as teachers, **mentors** (check the glossary), coaches, etc. It will include the goals you have and the activities you will complete in the areas of education, employment, health, housing, and lifelong connections.

### **Extended Foster Care**

If you are in foster care when you turn 18, **you also have the right to transition into and participate in the Extended Foster Care Program until you turn 21-years-old.** While staying in foster care may seem like the last thing you want to do, there are actually really great reasons to stay in foster care until you are 21.

Participating in the Extended Foster Care Program allows you to have continued support from DCFS. You do not necessarily have to live in a foster home, but you can if you want to and there are appropriate foster homes available. Depending on your strengths, needs, and goals, you may live in dorm of the college you attend or maybe even get your own apartment, if appropriate. In Extended Foster Care, you will continue to receive a board payment, participate in Life Skills classes, and receive other important benefits.

Because the Extended Foster Care Program is another turning point in terms of you reaching adulthood, you do have to hold up your end of the bargain. To participate in the Extended Foster Care Program, you have to do at least one of the following:

- 1) Be completing high school or a program leading to an equivalent credential like earning your GED; or,
- 2) Be enrolled in an institution which provides a college or vocational education; or,
- 3) Be participating in a program or activity designed to promote, or remove barriers to, employment like JobCorps or AmeriCorps; or,
- 4) Be working at least 80 hours per month; or,
- 5) Be incapable of doing any of the above described activities due to a medical condition.

Ask your caseworker or transitional services coordinator for more information about the Extended Foster Care Program.

Remember, the best option for you is adoption or guardianship—having a lifelong, legal connection to someone who loves you is very important! But if neither of these is an option, you should strongly consider staying in care until you are 21. Otherwise you could be missing out on major benefits such as money to help you pay for housing, college, health care, transportation, and more.

### **After Care Services**

If you choose to leave foster care after you turn 18 but before you turn 21, there are some funds for after care services. To access after care services, you must have been in foster care until your 18<sup>th</sup> birthday but then elect to leave foster care within a reasonable time frame before you turn 21. You must also have a budget and a plan that includes participation in education, employment, training, or treatment in order to be eligible for after care.

You can request after care support for up to \$2,000, but generally cannot receive more than \$500 of after care support in any one month. After care support may include money for things like education or training programs, housing, insurance, housing set-up, transportation, utility bills like your water or electricity bills, or utility deposits.

After care services money will not be given directly to you. Instead, it will be paid to the person or business providing the service or good to you. However, reimbursement for appropriate purchases may be made to the you if documentation of the expense (like a receipt) is provided. After care support does not include amounts available through ETV. Youth eligible for after care may also participate in life skills classes.

## *So now what?*

We know there is a lot of information in this booklet. Take time to read through it, or at least keep it somewhere you can find it if you want to read through it or have questions later. If there is anything you don't understand in this booklet or you don't find the answers you are looking for, please ask your caseworker, Transitional Services Coordinator, or attorney-ad-litem. Remember they are here to help you!

**Don't ever forget how important you are! Remember to always speak up, ask questions, and**

**BE YOUR OWN ADVOCATE!**

### Extended Foster Care

If you are in foster care when you turn 18, you also have the right to transition into and participate in the Extended Foster Care Program until you turn 21 years old. While for some youth staying in foster care may seem like the last thing you want to do, there are actually really great reasons to stay in foster care until you are 21.

Participating in the Extended Foster Care Program allows you to have continued support from DCFS. You do not necessarily have to live in a foster home, but you can if you want to. Depending on a particular youth's or strengths, some may even live in college dorms or their own apartments. In Extended Foster Care, you will continue to receive a board payment, participate in Life Skills classes, and receive other important benefits.

Because the Extended Foster Care Program is another turning point in terms of youth reaching adulthood, you do have to hold up your end of the bargain. To participate in the Extended Foster Care Program, you have to do at least one of the following:

- Be completing highschool or a program leading to an equivalent credential; or,
- Be enrolled in an institution which provides a college or vocational education; or,

- Be participating in a program or activity designed to promote, or remove barriers to, employment like JobCorps or AmeriCorps; or,
- Be working at least 80 hours per month; or,
- Be incapable of doing any of the above described activities due to a medical condition.

Ask your caseworker or transitional services coordinator for more information about the Extended Foster Care Program. If you are 14-18, you will take something called the Ansell-Casey Assessment (more info in the Glossary) an assessment that is like a "test." You won't get a grade on the assessment. The assessment just helps DCFS know that will help determine what kinds of life skills classes would be most helpful to you. In addition to the life skills training, you may also receive tutoring and other services.

### **After-Care Services**

You may choose to stay in care past the age of 18 (until you are 21) if you are enrolled in college or a vocational program or if you are working at least eighty hours a month toward gaining self-sufficiency. If you choose to stay in care, you may receive help to pay for room and board, start-up assistance, and life skills classes.

Remember, the best option for you is adoption or guardianship—having a lifelong, legal connection to someone who loves you is very important! But if neither of these is an option, you should strongly consider staying in care until you are 21. Otherwise you could be missing out on major benefits such as money to help you pay for housing, college, health care, transportation, and more.

### **After-Care Services**

## ***Lifelong Connections and What is Permanency?***

One word you may hear a lot while you're in foster care is "permanency." Permanency can mean different things to different people (see the text box on the side). Generally permanency means a legally established relationship through reunification (going back to your parents or the person from whom you were removed), adoption, or guardianship as well as an emotional attachment between youth and caregivers, family members, and other adults who play a positive role in the youth's life.

Placement in foster care is meant to be a temporary solution. At some point you will no longer be in foster care. You might reunite with your family. You might get a **legal guardian** (check the glossary). You might be adopted by a relative or another family who will love you. Or you might "**age out**" (check the glossary) of foster care at age 18 or 21. No matter what your situation is, it is important to maintain and that you develop meaningful relationships with caring adults that will last a lifetime.

These lifelong connections are a big part of **permanence** (check the glossary).



Getting adopted or getting a legal guardian does not mean that you are losing your original family. It means you are gaining more family. You can have a safe and permanent adoptive family and keep connections to past families who are important to you.

Take time to think about who is important to you and who you want to be in your life forever—even after you leave foster care. Your caseworker can help you get connected and stay connected with the important people in your life.

Consider asking an adult you trust to adopt you. You might think you don't want to be adopted now, but having someone you are permanently and legally connected to may will become more important as you get older. It's never too late to be adopted!

Look at the questions listed below and see just a few of the reasons why having supportive, caring adults in your life is important!

- ◆ Where will you go for the holidays?
- ◆ Where will you do laundry?
- ◆ Who will you turn to for health and legal advice?
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- ◆ Who will you call in an emergency? Where will you stay if you have an emergency?
- ◆ Who will make medical decisions for you if you become sick or seriously injured?
- ◆ When you have children, who will they call grandma and grandpa?

Talk to your caseworker if you have more questions about lifelong connections and permanency.

**Don't ever forget how important you are! Remember to always speak up, ask questions, and**

**BE YOUR OWN ADVOCATE!**

Never forget yourself. Never forget that you are somebody and that you matter. Never forget that a future lies ahead better and brighter than the past. Never forget that the world can be yours and happiness waits for you to take it.

- ◆ Andrew Bridge, former youth in foster care, and author of *Hope*

MARKUP

## Appendix 1: Responsibilities

In this booklet we've talked about your rights and responsibilities. Here is a summary of others' responsibilities. *'s-Boy*

### Youth Advisory Board (YAB)

The Arkansas Youth Advisory Board (YAB) is made up of a group of foster youth between the ages of 16-21 who are or have been in Arkansas's foster care system. The current and former foster youth are a responsible, mature, and respectful group of youth who are here to help represent your wants, goals, and needs and to advocate for you. YAB's goal is to make foster care in Arkansas better.

A YAB board member will be available to talk to you upon your request—just ask your transitional services coordinator who your YAB representative is. Anything said to a YAB board member is strictly confidential unless it is going to harm you or someone else. If the YAB board member feels that what you have shared would benefit you, he or she may ask your permission to share it with your coordinator or other DCFS staff.

Usually the YAB puts on a Youth Leadership Conference each year. Be sure to ask your caseworker, transitional youth services coordinator, or YAB representative about it if you are interested in attending.

If you would like to know more about the Youth Advisory Board, or you would like to know more about how you can get involved, ask your case worker or your transitional services coordinator.

## Arkansas ETV Program

The Education Training Voucher (ETV) program awards grants to current and former foster youth to help pay for college or vocational training programs. ETV grants are funded by the federal government and administered by the states. Students may receive up to \$5,000 a year based on their cost of attendance.

### What are the Eligibility Requirements?

1. You must be a current or former foster student who:
  - was in foster care on your 18th birthday and aged out at that time. OR
  - was adopted from foster care with the adoption finalized AFTER your 16th birthday. OR
  - remains in foster care and have completed a secondary education. OR
  - will have your foster care case closed between the ages of 18 and 21.
2. You must be a U.S. citizen or qualified non-citizen.
3. Your personal assets (bank account, car, home, etc.) are worth less than \$10,000.
4. You must be at least 18 but younger than 21 to apply for the first time. You may reapply for ETV funds, if you have a current grant, up to the age of 23.
5. You must have been accepted into or be enrolled in a degree, certificate, or other accredited program at a college, university, technical, vocational school. To remain eligible for ETV funding, you must show progress toward a degree or certificate.

### How do I use the funds?

Funds can be used to pay for tuition, balances due at school, on-campus room and board, meal cards, books and school supplies (such as uniforms, tools, equipment), one computer package, federal student loans, and study abroad through qualifying schools.

Once the above expenses have been addressed, ETV funds can pay for other items, including rent, food, transportation, health insurance premiums, disability services, and dependent child care expenses to licensed child care providers.

Funds may not be used for educational or vocational courses shorter than one year in duration and/or which do not lead to a degree or certification, coursework at non Title-IV schools, cell phone bills, personal loan repayments, banking late fees, bounced check fees or lost/stolen debit card transactions, computer games or DVDs, and dorm room or apartment damages.

If you have any other questions about the ETV program, access the link below.

To apply, go to <http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dcfs/Pages/dcfsServices.aspx>, click on Arkansas Education and Training Voucher Program (ETV) and follow the instructions.

### *What are DCFS's responsibilities to me?*

1. Find the best place for you to live while in foster care. This means finding a foster home, relative foster home, or other facility that best meets your needs in the least restrictive environment and is close to your family to make it easier to stay in contact (as long as you can still be safe).
2. Make sure you have planned, regular visits with your family and relatives.
3. Provide you with the opportunity to practice your faith and participate in the religious activities of your choice.
4. Give you honest information regarding your case and any DCFS or court decision affecting you.
5. Protect your rights.
6. Involve you in your case planning, conferences, staffings, and court hearings whenever possible.
7. Keep a record of your legal documents such as birth certificate, social security card, and court orders for you while you're in care.
8. Communicate with your school about what's going on in your life to make sure you're getting what you need while you're in school.
9. Help you return to your family if it is in your best interest or find a new family with relatives or adoptive parents if you cannot safely return home.
10. Support you as you grow up, and help you learn skills you will need as an adult.

### *What are DCFS's responsibilities to my biological family?*

1. Offer and provide services that will help keep your family together.
2. Let you and your parents know why it was necessary to place you in foster care.
3. Not judge or criticize your family. Acknowledge that your family is part of your life.
4. Let your family know how they can still be involved in your life while you are in foster care.
5. Let your family know what they must do to have you return home.
6. Include your family when creating the case plan.
7. Give your family services and supports to meet the case plan goals to help you return home.
8. Return you to your family if and when the changes or conditions required by the court are met.

### *What responsibilities does my biological family have?*

1. Provide any and all important information about you and your family to DCFS.
2. Tell your caseworker about you including health conditions, school information, important family customs or cultural practices, and any special needs.
3. Participate in staffings and court hearings.
4. Work with your caseworker to create a case plan that will help you return home.
5. Participate in the services required in the case plan and work on meeting the case plan goals.

6. Be involved, as often as possible, in your medical appointments or social or religious activities as long as the case plan allows that involvement.
7. Keep in contact with DCFS to give updates on how they are meeting the case plan goals.
8. Maintain contact and communication with you and keep appointments to visit with you.
9. Talk to your caseworker or their lawyer if they have any concerns.
10. Provide financial support for you. The court will decide if and how much your parents need to pay to help DCFS take care of you.

### *Appendix III: Who else is here to help?*

While DCFS and the courts has an official responsibility to you, there are lots of other organizations with lots of people who can help you, too. Here are just a few:

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)/www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org**

Are you feeling desperate, alone or hopeless? Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. It's a free, 24-hour hotline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. Your call will be routed to the nearest crisis center to you. Call for yourself or someone you care about. It's free and confidential.

**National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)/ www.nvdh.org**

Help is available to callers 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Hotline advocates are available for victims and anyone calling on their behalf to provide crisis intervention, safety planning, information and referrals to agencies in all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Assistance is available in English and Spanish with access to more than 170 languages through interpreter services. If you or someone you know is frightened about something in your relationship, please call the National Domestic Violence Hotline.

**National Runaway Switchboard: 1-800-RUNAWAY/www.1800runaway.org**

Call if you are a teenager who is thinking of running from home, if you have a friend who has run away and is looking for help, or if you are a runaway ready to go home. The 24-hour crisis line has an experienced front-line team member ready to help you now. They provide crisis intervention and travel assistance to runaways. They provide information and local referrals to adolescents and families. They give referrals to shelters nationwide. They also relay messages to or set up conference calls with parents at the request of the youth.

**National Youth Crisis Hotline: 800-442-HOPE (4673)**

Provides counseling and referrals to local drug treatment centers, shelters, and counseling services. Responds to youth dealing with pregnancy, molestation, suicide, and child abuse. Operates 24 hours, seven days a week.

**Boys Town/Girls Town National Hotline: 1-800-448-3000/www.boystown.org**

Open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, this hotline is staffed by specially trained counselors who can help with suicide prevention, sexual abuse, parenting troubles, anger, physical abuse, school issues, chemical dependency, relationship problems, depression, emotional abuse, and runaways.

**Nationwide RAINN National Rape Crisis Hotline: 800-656-4673/www.rainn.org**

This nationwide partnership of more than 1,100 local rape treatment hotlines provides victims of sexual assault with free, confidential services around the clock.

**BACA (Bikers Against Child Abuse): www.bacausa.com**

BACA is a nonprofit organization that exists to provide aid, comfort, safety, and support for children who have been sexually, physically, and emotionally abused. BACA is dedicated to the principle that one of the basic rights of childhood is to be safe and protected. When the child's family and environment have

failed them, BACA stands ready to provide it for them. BACA is a strong organization of dedicated individuals who are willing to sacrifice any and all to protect and secure a child's basic right to a happy childhood.

## Appendix I: Who else is here to help?

While DGFS and the eCourts have an official responsibility to you, there are lots of other organizations with lots of people who can help you, too, with whatever you need. Here are just a few:

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)/www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org**

Are you feeling desperate, alone or hopeless? Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. It's a **free, 24-hour hotline** available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. Your call will be routed to the nearest crisis center to you. Call for yourself or someone you care about. It's free and confidential.

**National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)/www.nvdh.org**

Help is available to callers **24 hours a day, 365 days a year**. Hotline advocates are available for victims and anyone calling on their behalf to provide crisis intervention, safety planning, information and referrals to agencies in all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Assistance is available in English and Spanish with access to more than 170 languages through interpreter services. If you or someone you know is frightened about something in your relationship, please call the National Domestic Violence Hotline.

**National Runaway Switchboard: 1-800-RUNAWAY/www.1800runaway.org**

Call if you are a teenager who is thinking of running from home, if you have a friend who has run away and is looking for help, or if you are a runaway ready to go home. The **24-hour crisis line** has an experienced front-line team member ready to help you now. They provide crisis intervention and travel assistance to runaways. They provide information and local referrals to adolescents and families. They give referrals to shelters nationwide. They also relay messages to or set up conference calls with parents at the request of the youth.

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environment have failed them, BACA stands ready to provide it for them. BACA is a strong organization of dedicated individuals who are willing to sacrifice any and all to protect and secure a child's basic right to a happy childhood.

## FosterClub

FosterClub is the national network for young people in foster care—a place to turn for advice, information, and hope.

Being placed in foster care can be a chaotic and anguishing experience for a young person. FosterClub is dedicated to providing a peer support network for children and youth in foster care. Further, FosterClub believes that the experiences young people have in foster care place them in a position to effect change within the system, inform and motivate their peers, build public awareness and create public will for improved care for abused and neglected children.

FosterClub is about providing youth a voice within the system that so heavily impacts their lives. Whether advocating on their own behalf, in concern for siblings or family members, or speaking out on behalf of their 513,000 peers currently in the system, FosterClub's websites, publications and events provide a youth-friendly network which helps the voices of young people to be heard.

FosterClub is dedicated to providing the tools, training and forum to help young people secure a brighter future for themselves and the foster care system. Join today at [www.fosterclub.org](http://www.fosterclub.org)!

### Helpful suggestions from Toby at FosterClub

**Friends.** Don't lose connection! Some of the best people that I knew, I lost connections with because I don't speak to them anymore. I miss them a lot. I regret not keeping communication with some of them.

**Moving.** Many foster youth tend to move very often. At times they are unable to take everything they want with them on such a short notice. It really sucks that people have to think in a mind setting where they could be moved any day. But realistically, if you know you might be moving, think of the stuff that you want to take with you, wherever you may go.

**School.** I know that personally I moved from school to school very often. Let your voice be heard, and talk about staying in the same school district! I, on occasion, moved from school district to school district, and I was very lucky to graduate on time.

**Documents.** DOCUMENTS ARE VERY IMPORTANT! Your State ID, Birth Certificate, Social Security Card, etc. are very important wherever you are in life. If you have them in your possession, great! Don't lose them.

**Employment.** If you have a job, try to stay with it! I know personally that on many times in my life I had to quit a job because of my foster care situation. Don't bury yourself in that hole!

**Keep a positive attitude!** In general, life can get you down. This is especially true for foster youth and/or anyone aging out of the system. Keeping a positive attitude will make things run a bit smoother. Promise!

## Appendix III: DHS County Office Contact Information

If you can't get a hold of your caseworker, here are the phone numbers for all of the DHS County Offices. Ask the operator to speak with your caseworker or the DCFS County Supervisor when you call.

### Area 1 County Office Phone Numbers:

Benton: 479-273-9011  
Carroll: 870-423-3351  
Madison: 479-738-2161  
Washington: 479-521-1270

Pulaski Southwest: 501-371-1121  
Pulaski East: 501-371-1309  
Pulaski Jacksonville: 501-371-1260

### Area 2 County Office Phone Numbers:

Crawford: 479-474-7595  
Franklin: 479-667-2379  
Johnson: 479-754-2355  
Logan: 479-963-2783  
Scott: 479-637-4141  
Sebastian: 479-782-4555  
Yell: 479-495-2723

### Area 7 County Office Phone Numbers:

Bradley: 870-226-5879  
Calhoun: 870-798-4201  
Cleveland: 870-325-6218  
Dallas: 870-352-5115  
Grant: 870-942-5151  
Jefferson: 870-534-4200  
Lincoln: 870-628-4105  
Lonoke: 501-676-3113  
Prairie: 870-998-2581

### Area 3 County Office Phone Numbers:

Clark: 870-246-9886  
Garland: 501-321-2583  
Hot Spring: 501-332-2718  
Howard: 870-845-4334  
Montgomery: 870-867-3184  
Perry: 501-889-5105  
Pike: 870-285-3111  
Polk: 479-394-3100  
Saline: 501-315-1600

### Area 8 County Office Phone Numbers:

Clay: 870-598-2282  
Craighead: 870-972-1732  
Fulton: 870-895-3309  
Greene: 870-236-8723  
Izard: 870-368-4318  
Lawrence: 870-886-2408  
Mississippi: 870-763-7093  
Randolph: 870-886-2408  
Sharp: 870-856-1053

### Area 4 County Office Phone Numbers:

Columbia: 870-234-4190  
Hempstead: 870-777-8656  
Lafayette: 870-921-4283  
Little River: 870-898-5155  
Miller: 870-773-0563  
Nevada: 870-887-6626  
Ouachita: 870-836-2591  
Sevier: 870-642-2623  
Union: 870-862-6631

### Area 9 County Office Phone Numbers:

Cleburne: 501-362-3298  
Crittenden: 870-732-5170  
Cross: 870-238-8553  
Independence: 870-698-1876  
Jackson: 870-523-9828  
Poinsett: 870-578-5491  
Stone: 870-269-4321  
White: 501-268-8696  
Woodruff: 870-347-2537

### Area 5 County Office Phone Numbers:

Baxter: 870-425-6011  
Boone: 870-741-6107  
Conway: 501-354-2418  
Faulkner: 501-730-9900  
Marion: 870-446-2237  
Newton: 870-446-2237  
Pope: 479-968-5596  
Searcy: 870-448-3153  
Van Buren: 501-745-4192

### Area 10 County Office Phone Numbers:

Arkansas: 870-946-4519  
Ashley: 870-853-9816  
Chicot: 870-265-3821  
Desha: 870-222-4144  
Drew: 870-367-6835  
Lee: 870-295-2597  
Monroe: 870-747-3329  
Phillips: 870-338-8391  
St. Francis: 870-633-1242

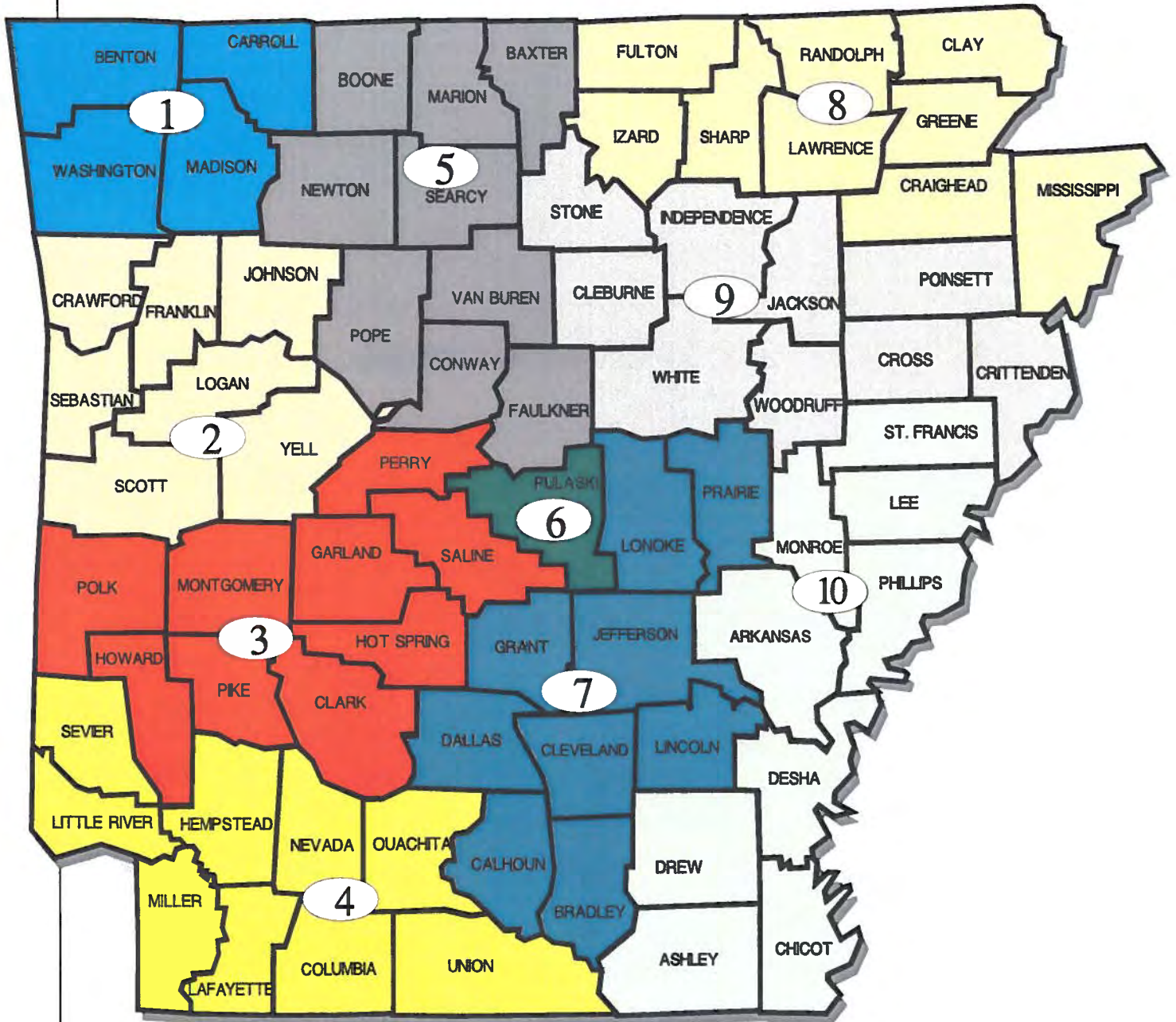
### Area 6 Office Phone Numbers:

Pulaski South: 501-682-9330  
Pulaski North: 501-682-0141



## Appendix VIII: Area Map

In order to be your own advocate, it is helpful for you to know what county you live in and the area to which that county belongs. Find your county and corresponding area on the map below.



## Appendix IV: The Court Process

When you come into foster care, there will be several different types of court hearings – and you have a right to participate in all of them! Below is a description of the different kinds of court hearings involved in foster care cases. If, at any time, you have questions regarding the court process, talk to your caseworker, AAL, or CASA.

**Emergency (Probable Cause) Hearing** – The emergency hearing must be held within five working days after an emergency removal to determine if DCFS acted correctly in removing the you from your biological parents, guardians, or custodians.

**Adjudication Hearing** – The adjudication hearing is held within 30 days after the probable cause hearing unless the court finds a good reason to wait up until 60 days after the day the you were removed to have this hearing. During the adjudication hearing, the judge decides whether there is enough proof to “substantiate” the allegations of child abuse or neglect or, in other words, decide if the allegations are true. In order to be found true, DHS/DCFS must prove that, due to parental unfitness or child maltreatment, you are at great risk for serious harm.

**Disposition Hearing** – The disposition hearing usually occurs right after the adjudication hearing if the judge has decided you are **dependent-neglected** (see glossary). The disposition hearing is to decide what action will be taken. The judge will decide if it is safe for you to return home or if you must stay in foster care for a longer period of time. If the court determines you must stay in foster care, the court will approve a case plan for the youth and parents. The case plan will include orders like how often parents and their children will visit each other and what kind of services will be put in place to help the youth safely return home.

**Review Hearings** – The first review hearing must be held within at least six months of the emergency removal. Review hearings must be held at least every six months for as long as you are in foster care. The review hearing is for the judge to reexamine the situation, decide whether the court orders and approved case plan are being followed, and decide whether everyone is working to achieve the goals of the case plan. If you and your siblings are not placed together, the court will review your case every three months to make sure DCFS is still working to find a place where you and your siblings can live together and that you are having some kind of contact with your siblings at least once a week. This three month court review for siblings who are not placed together may or may not take place at a formal court hearing.

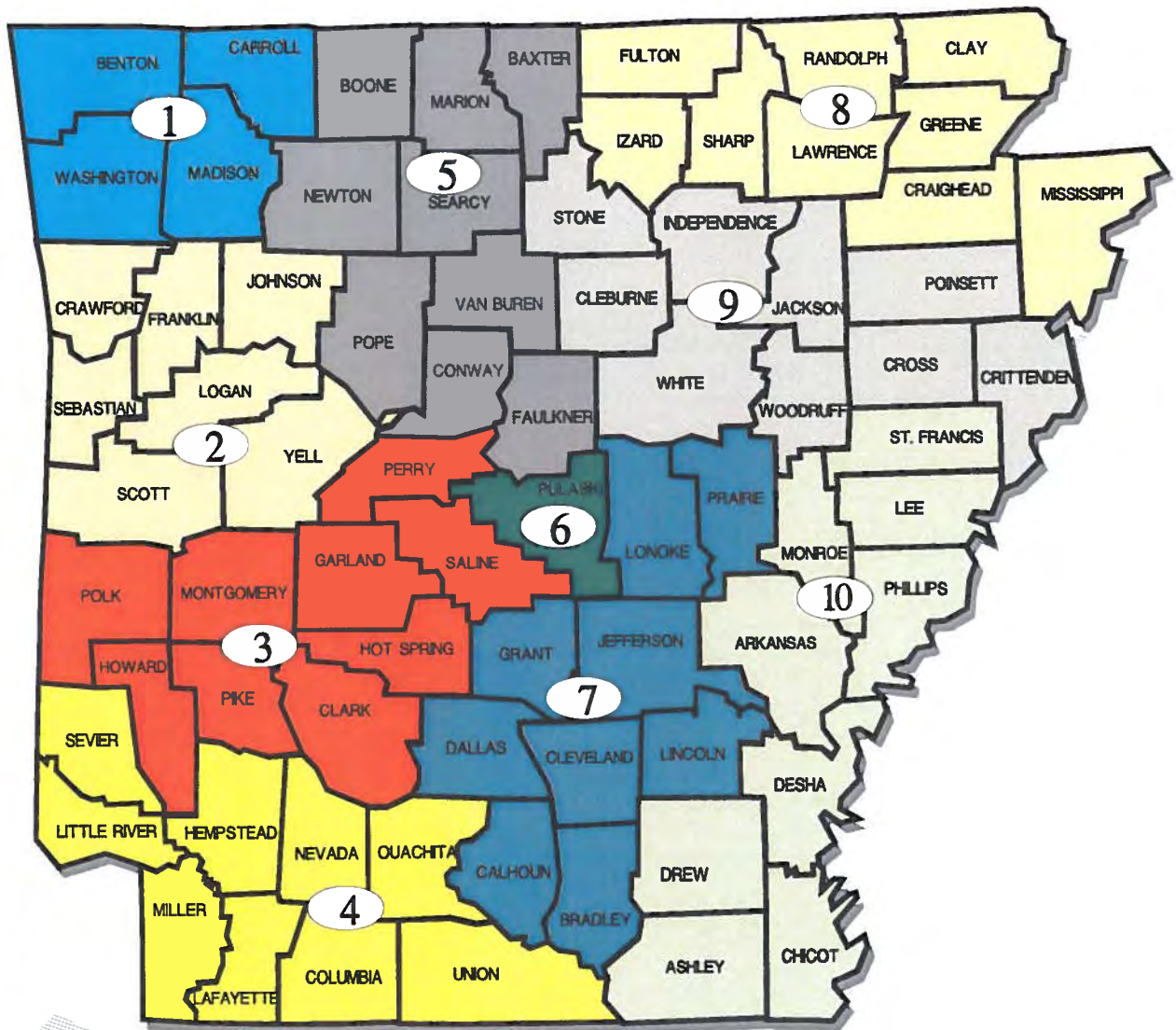
**Permanency Planning Hearing** – The permanency planning hearing must be held no later than 12 months from the emergency removal. During the permanency planning hearing, the judge decides what your permanency goal will be. These options include, from best to worst, 1) Placing you with a fit parent Return the youth to his or her family, 2) Continue working on the plan to return the youth to his or her family Returning you to another guardian or custodian if that is who you were removed from 3) Approve a plan to terminate the parental rights of the parents Giving your parents more time to work on their case plan goals if they have made progress but still need some extra time to finish meeting their case plan goals, 4) Approve a plan to allow the youth to be adopted Adoption, 5) Guardianship, 6) Permanent custody with a relative or fictive kin, 7) If you are 16-years-old or older, Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) which means the Division if responsible for preparing you to age out of foster care at 18 or 21.

**Termination of Parental Rights** – Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) is a permanent, legal action that means a parent gives up all rights and responsibilities from that point on and legally ends the

relationship with his or her child. Parents can volunteer to have their parental rights terminated or the court may order TPR. After TPR, another family can adopt the youth.

MARKUP

# Area Map



**Area 1 County Office Phone**

**NumbersSupervisors:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Benton: 479-273-9011
- \_\_\_\_\_ Carroll: 870-423-3351
- \_\_\_\_\_ Madison: 479-738-2161
- \_\_\_\_\_ Washington: 479-521-1270

**Area 2 County SupervisorsOffice Phone**

**Numbers:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Crawford: 479-474-7595
- \_\_\_\_\_ Franklin: 479-667-2379
- \_\_\_\_\_ Johnson: 479-754-2355
- \_\_\_\_\_ Logan: 479-963-2783
- \_\_\_\_\_ Scott: 479-637-4141
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sebastian: 479-782-4555
- \_\_\_\_\_ Yell: 479-495-2723

**Area 3 County Office Phone**

**NumbersSupervisors:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Clark: 870-246-9886
- \_\_\_\_\_ Garland: 501-321-2583
- \_\_\_\_\_ Hot Spring: 501-332-2718
- \_\_\_\_\_ Howard: 870-845-4334
- \_\_\_\_\_ Montgomery: 870-867-3184
- \_\_\_\_\_ Perry: 501-889-5105
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pike: 870-285-3111
- \_\_\_\_\_ Polk: 479-394-3100
- \_\_\_\_\_ Saline: 501-315-1600

**Area 4 County SupervisorsOffice Phone**

**Numbers:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Columbia: 870-234-4190
- \_\_\_\_\_ Hempstead: 870-777-8656
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lafayette: 870-921-4283
- \_\_\_\_\_ Little River: 870-898-5155
- \_\_\_\_\_ Miller: 870-773-0563
- \_\_\_\_\_ Nevada: 870-887-6626
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ouachita: 870-836-2591
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sevier: 870-642-2623
- \_\_\_\_\_ Union: 870-862-6631

**Area 5 County SupervisorsOffice Phone**

**Numbers:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Baxter: 870-425-6011
- \_\_\_\_\_ Boone: 870-741-6107
- \_\_\_\_\_ Conway: 501-354-2418
- \_\_\_\_\_ Faulkner: 501-730-9900
- \_\_\_\_\_ Marion: 870-446-2237
- \_\_\_\_\_ Newton: 870-446-2237
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pope: 479-968-5596
- \_\_\_\_\_ Searcy: 870-448-3153
- \_\_\_\_\_ Van Buren: 501-745-4192

**Area 6 Office Phone NumbersSupervisors:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Pulaski South: 501-682-9330
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pulaski North: 501-682-0141
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pulaski Southwest: 501-371-1121
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pulaski East: 501-371-1309
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pulaski Jacksonville: 501-371-1260

**Area 7 County SupervisorsOffice Phone**

**Numbers:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Bradley: 870-226-5879
- \_\_\_\_\_ Calhoun: 870-798-4201
- \_\_\_\_\_ Cleveland: 870-325-6218
- \_\_\_\_\_ Dallas: 870-352-5115
- \_\_\_\_\_ Grant: 870-942-5151
- \_\_\_\_\_ Jefferson: 870-534-4200
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lincoln: 870-628-4105
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lonoke: 501-676-3113
- \_\_\_\_\_ Prairie: 870-998-2581

**Area 8 County SupervisorsOffice Phone**

**Numbers:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Clay: 870-598-2282
- \_\_\_\_\_ Craighead: 870-972-1732
- \_\_\_\_\_ Fulton: 870-895-3309
- \_\_\_\_\_ Greene: 870-236-8723
- \_\_\_\_\_ Izard: 870-368-4318
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lawrence: 870-886-2408
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mississippi: 870-763-7093
- \_\_\_\_\_ Randolph: 870-886-2408
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sharp: 870-856-1053

**Area 9 County SupervisorsOffice Phone**

**Numbers:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Cleburne: 501-362-3298
- \_\_\_\_\_ Crittenden: 870-732-5170
- \_\_\_\_\_ Cross: 870-238-8553
- \_\_\_\_\_ Independence: 870-698-1876
- \_\_\_\_\_ Jackson: 870-523-9828
- \_\_\_\_\_ Poinsett: 870-578-5491
- \_\_\_\_\_ Stone: 870-269-4321
- \_\_\_\_\_ White: 501-268-8696
- \_\_\_\_\_ Woodruff: 870-347-2537

**Area 10 County SupervisorsOffice Phone**

**Numbers:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Arkansas: 870-946-4519
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ashley: 870-853-9816
- \_\_\_\_\_ Chicot: 870-265-3821
- \_\_\_\_\_ Desha: 870-222-4144
- \_\_\_\_\_ Drew: 870-367-6835
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lee: 870-295-2597
- \_\_\_\_\_ Monroe: 870-747-3329
- \_\_\_\_\_ Phillips: 870-338-8391
- \_\_\_\_\_ St. Francis: 870-633-1242

## Appendix VI: Glossary

**Aging Out**—When a youth leaves foster care because they turn a certain age, usually 18 or 21. Aging out usually results in loss of support from the state for things such as foster care payments, housing, living costs, and health services. Consider staying in care as long as possible so you can receive these important benefits!

**Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment**—This is a test that all youth in foster care ages 14 and older will take to help evaluate their life skills in the following nine areas: career planning, communication, daily living, home life, housing and money management, self care, social relationships, work life, and work and study skills. Youth will take the test every six months to see what progress they have made. When youth get a high enough grade to show that they have the necessary life skills, they no longer have to take the test.

**Advocate**—A person who speaks up on behalf of themselves or someone else in an effort to ensure that their rights are protected and/or to gain services or other benefits.

**Case Plan**—This is a written plan that a youth and his or her family along with foster parents, caseworker, and AAL will make. The goal of a case plan is to help find a permanent placement for a youth, either with bio-parents or someone else who will love and care for the youth.

**DCFS**—The Division of Children & Family Services is the state agency whose job is to keep children and youth safe. DCFS is just one of ~~ten~~ divisions within the Department of Human Services.

**DHS**—The Department of Human Services is the bigger agency of which DCFS is a part. In addition to DCFS, DHS includes the following divisions: Aging & Adult Services (DAAS), Behavioral Health Services (DBHS), Child Care & Early Childhood Education (DCCECE), County Operations (DCO), Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS), Medical Services (DMS), Services for the Blind (DSB), Youth Services (DYS), and Community Service and Nonprofit Support (CSNS)~~Volunteerism (DOV)~~.

**~~Dependency~~-Neglected Juvenile**—~~This is the term used for~~ When a child or youth whose health and/or safety are ~~is~~ at substantial risk of harm as a result of ~~the following:~~ abandonment, abuse, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, neglect, ~~or~~ parental unfitness or being present in a dwelling or structure during the manufacture of methamphetamine with the knowledge of a parent, guardian, or custodian.

**House Parents**—People who supervise and provide care to young people in a group home or residential facility.

**Life Skills**—Important abilities and skills for a young person to possess so ~~he or she~~they can successfully transition to adulthood. These include skills and knowledge about taking care of daily life, relationships, employment, housing and home life, money management, health and self care.

**Legal Guardianship**—Placement with a person who is charged with the legal responsibility for the care and management of a child or youth. ~~A~~ legal guardian ~~will be under the supervision of the court and~~ will be required to appear in court from time to time to give ~~periodic~~ reports about the youth's status.

but other involvement such as caseworker visits and the youth appearing in court will stop. A youth is no longer in foster care if a legal guardian is appointed for him or her.

**Mentor**—Somebody, usually older and with more experience, who provides advice and support to a young person.

**Permanence**—For a child or youth in foster care, to have an enduring family-like relationship that is safe and meant to last a lifetime.

1



*Who can I contact?*

Who is my **Primary Caseworker**? \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Who is my **Secondary Caseworker**? \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Who is my **attorney ad litem (AAL)**? \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Who is my **CASA worker**? \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Who is my **therapist**? \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Who is my **County Supervisor**? \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Who is my **Area Director**? \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

# Be Your Own Advocate!



A roadmap  
to your time in  
Arkansas foster care

PUB-50 (09/2015)

Created in partnership with the Arkansas Youth Advisory Board

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## *Why am I here?*

Being separated from your home and family is a big deal. But it's important for you to know that it's not your fault. You have the right to be healthy and safe in your home. Your parents have a responsibility to take good care of you. When this isn't happening a report may be made to the Arkansas Child Abuse Hotline. If the report is accepted, people from the Department of Human Services, **Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS)** (check the glossary) and the courts will get involved to help you and your family. Sometimes this involvement results in children and youth like you being temporarily placed out of your home and into foster care.

*Teens coming into foster care need to realize that it will be very difficult in the beginning, but I promise, it does get better. When I came into foster care I was very upset and didn't want to cooperate with anybody. But after a couple months living with my foster parents, I have grown to love them. In my situation, I chose to stay in foster care and hopefully pursue my dreams with them, rather than live with my original parents. Teens who just arrive in foster care think it's so horrible and they'll never be happy, but if it turned out well for me, it could turn out well for anyone.*

◆Rachel, Yellville◆

## *Is it normal to feel this way?*

Foster care is not easy. It can be difficult being separated from your family, moving to a new place, meeting new people, changing schools—even under the best of circumstances. You might be confused, relieved, angry, sad, scared, or you might not even know how you feel. All of these are completely natural. In fact, these are the same ways that youth all over the country say they felt during their first days in foster care, too.

Some of these feelings will go away or change and some may not. Some feelings will take longer than others to work through and figure out. Remember, you don't have to handle everything by yourself. Talking about how you're feeling can help a lot, so be sure to share what you're going through with your therapist, your caseworker, or anyone else you trust. If you want to talk with other youth in foster care who've gone through some of the same things you have, there are resources like FosterClub.com and your Youth Advisory Board. We'll talk more about them later.

## *Who's here to help me?*

While the reasons for your removal can be complicated, there are a lot of people who are here to help.

Your **caseworker** is the DCFS person whose job it is to look out for you. If you are placed in a different county from your "home" county, you may also have a **secondary caseworker**. Both your primary and secondary caseworkers will help you understand why you are here. Every situation is different so you should talk to your caseworker about why you are in foster care.

In your first month in foster care or when you move to a new foster home, your caseworker must visit you at least once a week. After the first month of foster care, your caseworker must visit you at least once a month in your foster home, but your caseworker must also contact you once a week by phone and/or see you in other places like at school or driving you to appointments. Your caseworker will give you his or her contact information so you can contact him or her whenever you have a question or need help. If you don't have your caseworker's office phone number and cell phone number, ask him or her to give it to you.

Youth 14-years-old or older will also have a **Transitional Services Coordinator** who will help you with your transitional plan (which we will talk about later). Your coordinator, along with the rest of your team, will help make sure you are learning skills and gaining information that you will need when you become an adult.

Other people you may meet from DCFS are **Program Assistants (PAs)** who sometimes help drive youth to appointments or supervise visits with your parents if supervised visits are a part of your case plan. You may also meet your caseworker's **Supervisor**. Supervisors can help provide extra support when needed. If for some reason you can't reach your caseworker or Transitional Services Coordinator, you can always contact your caseworker's Supervisor.

Your **attorney ad litem (AAL)** is the person who will represent your best interests in court. It is his or her job to make sure that your legal rights are protected. He or she will help you better understand your rights and the legal process. You should also make sure you have your AAL's contact information so that you can easily call, text, or email him or her with questions or concerns.

Sometimes, you may also have a **CASA**. CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocate. This is a person from the community who volunteers to help you while you are in foster care. They will spend time with you and get to know you, so they can help the judge understand how you feel and what you want. Every case is different, so not everyone has a CASA. But if you don't have one, and you think you'd like one, ask the judge if it's possible.

You may also have a **therapist**. This person is here to listen to you and talk with you. They are specially trained to help you deal with your emotions in a healthy way.

*When I first entered into foster care I was five years old. I had no idea about what was going to happen or even if I was going to see my parents again. I can tell you if you're scared, it's normal and it's ok. I also want you to know that it will get better. You're only in foster care because they want to help you.*

◆*Alyssa, Morrilton*◆

## YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO...

- ✓ Be nurtured by foster parents who meet your needs or be placed in the custody or foster home of relatives or fictive kin, if appropriate
- ✓ Be heard and involved with the decisions in your life
- ✓ Have complete information and direct answers to your questions
- ✓ Be informed about and have involvement when appropriate with your birth family and siblings
- ✓ Have ongoing contact with other important people in your life
- ✓ Have reasonable access to your caseworker or other person at DCFS
- ✓ Express your opinion and have it treated respectfully
- ✓ Request support and services that you need
- ✓ Have individualized care and attention
- ✓ Be notified of changes impacting your permanence, safety, and well-being
- ✓ Have a stable, appropriate placement
- ✓ Receive free appropriate education, training, and career guidance to prepare you for adulthood
- ✓ Have reasonable access to and have your best interest represented by an attorney-ad-litem in all court proceedings
- ✓ Receive quality child welfare services
- ✓ Have a plan for your future and the support needed to achieve it
- ✓ Receive a copy of your case record upon exiting foster care
- ✓ Be cared for without regard to race, gender, religion, or disability

## *What are my rights?*

**Be your own advocate!** The most important right you have is to know your rights. When you know your rights, you can be a stronger advocate for yourself. Speak up. Voice your concerns. Ask questions. Talk to your primary or secondary caseworker, AAL, CASA, or therapist. They are here to help you!

The blue box on the left of this page provides you with a summary of your rights. The other information on the next few pages will provide a few more details about your rights related to your living situation, visitation, court participation, education, health, and what to expect in foster care.

## *Where will I live?*

While you are away from your family, **you have the right to have a stable, appropriate placement.** There are different kinds of places you may live:

In a **foster home**, you will live with a temporary family who will take care of you. You will have a foster mom or a foster dad or both. You may have foster brothers and sisters. You might also live in a foster home that is considered **Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC)**. TFC foster parents are specially trained to help youth who are dealing with emotional and behavioral issues.

**If you have a relative you have a right to live with them if they meet safety standards. You also have the right to live with other people you know and trust** like a godparent, a good friend's parent, or a coach (sometimes called "fictive kin") who are willing and able to take care of you, if appropriate. This is called a **Provisional Foster Home**.

Tell your caseworker if you know of any relatives or fictive kin who might serve as your Provisional Foster Family. As mentioned above, relative and fictive kin have to meet certain safety standards before DCFS can make them a Provisional Foster Home. Once those safety standards are met, then the good news is Provisional Foster Homes can be opened more quickly than non-provisional foster homes. Sometimes Provisional Foster Homes can be opened as quickly as a couple of days.

When you first come into care, you might stay at an **Emergency Shelter** if there are not any available foster homes or appropriate relatives or fictive kin. Emergency Shelters care for youth on a short-term basis. You might also live in a **Residential Facility**, sometimes called a **Group Home**. This is a home or facility where a number of unrelated youth live with **house parents** (check the glossary) or staff who will care for you. If you have emotional and behavioral difficulties, you may be placed in a **Residential**

Treatment Facility where specially trained staff can help meet your needs.

## *When will I see my family?*

**You have the right to spend time with your parents** unless the judge decides that it is not in your best interest. You can also write them and call them if the judge allows it.

**You have a right to live with your siblings while you are in foster care.** Sometimes this may not happen because either DCFS or the courts believe that it is not in your best interest, or there is not a foster home that has room for you and all of your siblings. In these situations, DCFS must keep trying to find a place where you and your siblings can all live together.

**If you and your siblings have been placed in different homes, you have the right to spend time with them at least once a week.** This weekly contact with your siblings might be face-to-face or it might be a phone call, email, or through Skype, FaceTime or a similar program.

There are some exceptions. If your sibling has been placed in a residential treatment facility or the case plan says you cannot see your siblings, you may not be able to see them as often. However, if your case plan allows for visits with your siblings, DCFS or your placement provider should never prevent you from seeing your siblings as a way to punish you for bad behavior unless it is for a safety reason.

Because staying connected with your siblings is so important, **you also have the right to spend birthdays and holidays with your siblings and even attend events like their athletic games, school plays, and graduations.** DCFS needs to include you in your siblings' case plan staffing and permanency planning decisions (see the section on "Permanency" on page 11 for more information) even if you have different caseworkers.

Your caseworker will also let you know if your sibling goes to a new foster home or other placement or leaves foster care. If you have siblings who are not in foster care, DCFS will do its best to make sure you can also have contact with those siblings as long as it is in your best interest and approved by the court.

**You have the right to spend time with other relatives such as your grandparents and great-grandparents as long as the courts approve too.** Talk to your caseworker and attorney about spending time your family.

## *What services and supports are available to me?*

You have the right to receive quality child welfare services. Your caseworker will work with you and your family to make a **case plan** (look in the glossary for more info). The goal of the case plan is to help fix the issues that brought your family to the attention of DCFS. The services in your case plan will depend on your individual needs and strengths. They might include services like counseling or tutoring.

It is important for everyone involved in the case plan, including DCFS and your parents, to complete their different case plan activities and services. When everyone works together and is responsible for their case plan activities, there is a better chance the case plan goals will be met. Eventually the judge will decide if the case plan goals have been achieved. If it becomes clear after several months that the goals of the case plan will not be met, your caseworker will work to find another permanency goal for you like adoption or guardianship. There will be more information later in this booklet about permanency and the different permanency goals.

As a teenager, **life skills** (check the glossary) classes will be offered to you. Life skills classes will cover different topics like how to cook, how to open a bank account, and how to fill out a college application,

and write your resume. Life skills classes are also a great opportunity to spend time with other youth who are in foster care. If you are not currently participating in life skills classes, talk to your caseworker or transitional services coordinator.

Here are some other services and supports you should know about:

### **Casey-Ansell**

If you are 14-18, you will take the Casey-Ansell or similar assessment, which is like a “test.” You won’t get a grade on the assessment. The assessment just helps DCFS know what kinds of life skills classes and other services or supports would be most helpful to you.

### **Youth Advisory Board**

The Arkansas Youth Advisory Board (YAB) is made up of a group of foster youth between the ages of 16-21 who are or have been in Arkansas’s foster care system. These current and former foster youth are here to help represent your wants, goals, and needs and to advocate for you. YAB’s goal is to make foster care in Arkansas better.

A YAB board member will be available to talk to you upon your request—just ask your transitional services coordinator who your YAB representative is. Anything said to a YAB board member is strictly confidential unless it is going to harm you or someone else. If the YAB board member feels that what you have shared would benefit you, he or she may ask your permission to share it with your coordinator or other DCFS staff.

Usually the YAB puts on a Youth Leadership Conference each year. Be sure to ask your caseworker, transitional youth services coordinator, or YAB representative about it if you are interested in attending.

If you would like to know more about the Youth Advisory Board, or you would like to know more about how you can get involved, ask your case worker or your transitional services coordinator.

### **Arkansas ETV Program**

The Education Training Voucher (ETV) program awards grants to current and former foster youth to help pay for college or vocational training programs. Students may receive up to \$5,000 a year based on their cost of attendance.

#### ***What are the Eligibility Requirements?***

1. You must be a current or former foster student who:
  - was in foster care on your 18th birthday and aged out at that time; OR
  - was adopted from foster care with the adoption finalized AFTER your 16th birthday; OR
  - remains in foster care and have completed a secondary education; OR
  - will have your foster care case closed between the ages of 18 and 21.
2. You must be a U.S. citizen or qualified non-citizen.
3. Your personal assets (bank account, car, home, etc.) are worth less than \$10,000.
4. You must be at least 18 but younger than 21 to apply for the first time. You may reapply for ETV funds, if you have a current grant, up to the age of 23.
5. You must have been accepted into or be enrolled in a degree, certificate, or other accredited program at a college, university, technical, vocational school. To remain eligible for ETV funding, you must show progress toward a degree or certificate.

#### ***How do I use the funds?***

Funds can be used to pay for tuition, balances due at school, on-campus room and board, meal cards, books and school supplies (such as uniforms, tools, equipment), one computer package, federal student loans, and study abroad through qualifying schools.



Once the above expenses have been addressed, ETV funds can pay for other items, including rent, food, transportation, health insurance premiums, disability services, and dependent child care expenses to licensed child care providers.

Funds may not be used for educational or vocational courses shorter than one year in duration and/or which do not lead to a degree or certification, coursework at non Title-IV schools, cell phone bills, personal loan repayments, banking late fees, bounced check fees or lost/stolen debit card transactions, computer games or DVDs , and dorm room or apartment damages.

If you have any other questions about the ETV program, access the link below.

To apply, go to <http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dcfs/Pages/dcfsServices.aspx> , click on Arkansas Education and Training Voucher Program (ETV) and follow the instructions.

## *Do I have a say in what happens to me and my case?*

Absolutely! **You have the right to be heard and involved with the decisions that affect your life.** This includes the right to help develop your case plan, including your Transitional Plan (see below for more information), and the right to participate in all staffings and court hearings related to your foster care case.

If you enter foster care when you turn 14 or if you come into care after the age of 14, DCFS will make sure you are actively involved in the development of your **Transitional Plan**. The Transitional Plan includes all the life skills, resources, and future-planning for your successful transition into a self-sufficient life. It is a way for you to be involved in planning for your future. There are a lot of parts to your transitional plan. It will include plans about your education, employment, health, housing, and lifelong connections as well as other things.

To help you create your Transitional Plan, **you have the right to a Transitional Team**. In addition to helping you with your Transitional Plan, the Transitional Team is there to support you and make sure you develop and maintain healthy relationships with adults you trust who will continue help you even after you leave foster care.

In addition to your caseworker, transitional services coordinator, and attorney, you can choose other people who you want on your Transitional Team. The Division is allowed to have input on who you select to be on your Transitional Team. If you are comfortable with it, you can lead the Transitional Team meetings with assistance from your caseworker.

Your caseworker will schedule your Transitional Team meetings at least once every six months. If you want to have your Transitional Team meetings more often, just ask your caseworker.

## *What about school?*

**You have the right to receive a public education, training, and career guidance to help prepare you for adulthood.** DCFS and the school you went to before you came into foster care will work together to make sure you can stay in your same school if that is in your best interest. Even if your foster care placement is in a different school district, there are laws that say DCFS and the schools will work together

to develop a transportation plan to help you stay in your same school to the extent it is reasonable and practical and if that plan doesn't put additional costs to the school.

If you have to change schools, that change will happen quickly so you don't miss out on school. Even if the new school hasn't gotten your records from your old school, you can still go ahead and start going to classes.

Each school should have a staff member who helps make sure youth who are in foster care are getting what they need. This person is called the foster care liaison. If you want to, ask your teacher or principal who your foster care liaison is.

Finally, **you also have the right to participate in all school resources, services, and extracurricular activities that are available to all of the other students in the school.**

## *Can I just be a normal teen?*

There is nothing normal about foster care, but you are a normal teen. **You have a right to "normalcy."** Normalcy means participating in normal-age appropriate activities and having similar opportunities that other youth have like hanging out with friends, going on field trips, getting a job, dating, participating in sports and other extracurricular activities, and using social media responsibly.

However, normalcy does not mean doing whatever you want. Even teens who are not in foster care have rules to follow. Please be respectful of the rules and other boundaries your foster parents or other caregivers set. For example, be sure to follow curfew. Expect foster parents to monitor your social media activity enough to make sure you are safe and following court orders. And even though it might be annoying, your foster parents or other caregivers are doing a good job if they are asking you questions about what you are doing and how you are spending your time.

For day-to-day normalcy activities your foster parents are expected to make decisions on your behalf just like they would for their biological children. When making decisions related to normal age-appropriate activities, foster parents and other caregivers must consider things like your age, maturity level, potential risk factors and appropriateness of the activity, your best interest, your behavioral history and then balance that information with the importance of encouraging your emotional and developmental growth.

If you are in a group home or other residential facility, there should be someone there who is designated to make decisions related to normalcy.

Foster parents and other caregivers can always ask for guidance from the caseworker if need be. There are some situations for which they must get approval from your caseworker like if you want to travel out-of-state.

If you want to participate in a particular activity or event, let your foster parent or other caregiver know ahead of time. If you let them know ahead of time, they have more time to consider it, support you if appropriate, and even help arrange for transportation if needed. If you do not think some of the rules or

### ***So what does normalcy look like? A few more examples...***

- ✓ *Spending the night with friends - no background checks required.*
- ✓ *Learning how to drive - ask your caseworker about the DCFS Driver's License & Car Insurance Reimbursement Program.*
- ✓ *Connecting with friends on social media - but be safe and watch what you post online. Never post anything you would not say to someone's face and remember once something is online, it follows you forever.*

decisions your foster parents or other caregivers make are fair, respectfully talk with your caregiver and caseworker about it.

**Some tips to help you through foster care...**

Be calm and respectful. It will pay off!

Know that you are not alone!

Find out who your case worker is and get his or her contact info.

Be patient and try to ask lots of questions.

Try to be positive and be very honest!

◆Shady, Fort Smith◆

## *Who makes health decisions for me?*

DCFS, with help from your foster parents or other caregiver, is responsible for making sure you receive regular and appropriate physical and mental health services. There are certain times DCFS is required to take you to the doctor and other health care providers, but **you have the right go to the doctor or dentist whenever you need to go**. For major things like surgery, the court must give approval unless it is an emergency.

Your caseworker must also give you information about the health care needs of youth who are in foster and aging out of foster care. This includes options for health insurance after exiting care. Your caseworker should also speak to you about the importance of designating another individual to make health care treatment decisions for you in case something happens to you, and you do not have a relative who would be authorized to make those decisions after you exit foster care.

As a teenager, you need to know how to make safe, smart decisions about your body and sexuality. If you chose to be in a relationship with someone, always make sure you feel safe and respected in that relationship. Never feel pressured to be sexually active if you are not ready to be. You are encouraged to wait before becoming sexually active.

However, if you choose to be sexually active, do so responsibly and within a healthy, loving relationship. For young women, you have a right to be on regular birth control like the pill or patch if you want to, but you are not required to be on regular birth control either. However, both young men and young women who choose to be sexually active need to protect themselves and their partners from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and pregnancy each time you are sexually active by using condoms.

Talk to your caseworker, foster parent, or placement provider about questions you may have about safe sex.

## *What else do I need to know?*

### **Credit Reports**

If you are 14-years-old or older, you have the right to obtain a copy of your credit report free of charge each year you are in foster care. It is important to review your credit report each year to make sure other people have not tried to use your identity to open up credit card accounts or other types of loans or services for themselves. You do not want other people using your identity to open up credit cards or other services because that could hurt your credit score if the people using your identity are not responsible and do not pay their bills, for example. You want to have a good credit score so that when

you are an adult, it will be easier to do things like turn on utilities (such as water and electricity) in your apartment, apply for your own credit cards, and apply for a loan to buy a home.

You have the right to receive help with understanding your credit report. If you are 14-years-old or older, DCFS will work with the credit reporting agencies to make sure there are not any problems with your credit reports. If there are problems with your credit report, DCFS or its partners will help fix those problems.

If you are 18 or older, you can access your credit report by going to [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com). You are entitled to a free credit report one time each year from each of the three national credit reporting companies (Experian, TransUnion, Equifax).

### **29 Things a Permanent Connection Can Mean**

1. Lifelong relationship
2. Family
3. Friendship
4. Unconditional love
5. Ongoing support
6. Extended family-like relationship
7. Knowing that someone cares
8. Continuity
9. Someone to go home to
10. Sharing life's ups and downs
11. Someone to call on in times of crisis
12. Someone to call "just because"
13. Being there
14. Defining family together
15. Sharing holidays
16. Celebrating special times together
17. Someone to check in with regularly
18. Shared history
19. Assistance with major decisions
20. Growing and changing together
21. Being accepted no matter what
22. Someone to trust
23. Having someone to stand by you
24. Knowing someone is proud of you
25. Knowing that you are not alone
26. Having a safe haven
27. Being a part of something
28. Feeling free to be yourself
29. Having positive role models

### **Permanency**

One word you may hear a lot while you're in foster care is "permanency." Permanency can mean different things to different people (see the text box on the side). Generally, permanency means a legally established relationship through reunification (going back to your parents or the person you were removed from), adoption, or guardianship. Permanency also means an emotional attachment between youth and caregivers, family members, and other adults who play a positive role in the youth's life.

Placement in foster care is meant to be temporary. At some point you will no longer be in foster care. You might reunite with your family. You might get a **legal guardian** (check the glossary). You might be adopted by a relative or another family. Or you might "age out" (check the glossary) of foster care at age 18 or 21. No matter what your situation is, it is important to maintain and develop meaningful relationships with caring adults that will last a lifetime.

Getting adopted or getting a legal guardian does not mean that you are losing your original family. It means you are gaining more family. You can have a safe and permanent adoptive family and keep connections to past families who are important to you.

Take time to think about who is important to you and who you want to be in your life forever—even after you leave foster care. Your caseworker can help you get connected and stay connected with the important people in your life.

Consider asking an adult you trust to adopt you. You might think you don't want to be adopted now, but having someone you are permanently and legally connected to may become more important as you get older. It's never too late to be adopted!

Look at the questions on the next page and see just a few of the reasons why having supportive, caring adults in your life is important!

- ◆ Where will you go for the holidays?
- ◆ Where will you do laundry?
- ◆ Who will you turn to for health and legal advice?
- ◆ Who will you talk to about your problems?
- ◆ Who will you call in an emergency? Where will you stay if you have an emergency?
- ◆ Who will make medical decisions for you if you become sick or seriously injured?
- ◆ When you have children, who will they call grandma and grandpa?

Talk to your caseworker if you have more questions about lifelong connections and permanency.

### **Extended Foster Care**

If you are in foster care when you turn 18, **you also have the right to transition into and participate in the Extended Foster Care Program until you turn 21-years-old.** While staying in foster care may seem like the last thing you want to do, there are actually really great reasons to stay in foster care until you are 21.

Participating in the Extended Foster Care Program allows you to have continued support from DCFS. You do not necessarily have to live in a foster home, but you can if you want to and there are appropriate foster homes available. Depending on your strengths, needs, and goals, you may live in dorm of the college you attend or maybe even get your own apartment, if appropriate. In Extended Foster Care, you will continue to receive a board payment, participate in Life Skills classes, and receive other important benefits.

Because the Extended Foster Care Program is another turning point in terms of you reaching adulthood, you do have to hold up your end of the bargain. To participate in the Extended Foster Care Program, you have to do at least one of the following:

- 1) Be completing high school or a program leading to an equivalent credential like earning your GED; or,
- 2) Be enrolled in an institution which provides a college or vocational education; or,
- 3) Be participating in a program or activity designed to promote, or remove barriers to, employment like JobCorps or AmeriCorps; or,
- 4) Be working at least 80 hours per month; or,
- 5) Be incapable of doing any of the above described activities due to a medical condition.

Ask your caseworker or transitional services coordinator for more information about the Extended Foster Care Program.

Remember, the best option for you is adoption or guardianship—having a lifelong, legal connection to someone who loves you is very important! But if neither of these is an option, you should strongly consider staying in care until you are 21. Otherwise you could be missing out on major benefits such as money to help you pay for housing, college, health care, transportation, and more.

## After Care Services

If you choose to leave foster care after you turn 18 but before you turn 21, there are some funds for after care services. To access after care services, you must have been in foster care until your 18<sup>th</sup> birthday but then elect to leave foster care within a reasonable time frame before you turn 21. You must also have a budget and a plan that includes participation in education, employment, training, or treatment in order to be eligible for after care.

You can request after care support for up to \$2,000, but generally cannot receive more than \$500 of after care support in any one month. After care support may include money for things like education or training programs, housing, insurance, housing set-up, transportation, utility bills like your water or electricity bills, or utility deposits.

After care services money will not be given directly to you. Instead, it will be paid to the person or business providing the service or good to you. However, reimbursement for appropriate purchases may be made to the you if documentation of the expense (like a receipt) is provided. After care support does not include amounts available through ETV. Youth eligible for after care may also participate in life skills classes.

## *So now what?*

We know there is a lot of information in this booklet. Take time to read through it, or at least keep it somewhere you can find it if you want to read through it or have questions later. If there is anything you don't understand in this booklet or you don't find the answers you are looking for, please ask your caseworker, Transitional Services Coordinator, or attorney-ad-litem. Remember they are here to help you!

**Don't ever forget how important you are! Remember to always speak up, ask questions, and  
BE YOUR OWN ADVOCATE!**

## *Appendix 1: Responsibilities*

In this booklet we've talked about your rights and responsibilities. Here is a summary of others' responsibilities.

### *What are DCFS's responsibilities to me?*

1. Find the best place for you to live while in foster care. This means finding a foster home, relative foster home, or other facility that best meets your needs in the least restrictive environment and is close to your family to make it easier to stay in contact (as long as you can still be safe).
2. Make sure you have planned, regular visits with your family and relatives.
3. Provide you with the opportunity to practice your faith and participate in the religious activities of your choice.
4. Give you honest information regarding your case and any DCFS or court decision affecting you.
5. Protect your rights.
6. Involve you in your case planning, conferences, staffings, and court hearings whenever possible.
7. Keep a record of your legal documents such as birth certificate, social security card, and court orders for you while you're in care.
8. Communicate with your school about what's going on in your life to make sure you're getting what you need while you're in school.
9. Help you return to your family if it is in your best interest or find a new family with relatives or adoptive parents if you cannot safely return home.
10. Support you as you grow up, and help you learn skills you will need as an adult.

### *What are DCFS's responsibilities to my biological family?*

1. Offer and provide services that will help keep your family together.
2. Let you and your parents know why it was necessary to place you in foster care.
3. Not judge or criticize your family. Acknowledge that your family is part of your life.
4. Let your family know how they can still be involved in your life while you are in foster care.
5. Let your family know what they must do to have you return home.
6. Include your family when creating the case plan.
7. Give your family services and supports to meet the case plan goals to help you return home.
8. Return you to your family if and when the changes or conditions required by the court are met.

### *What responsibilities does my biological family have?*

1. Provide any and all important information about you and your family to DCFS.
2. Tell your caseworker about you including health conditions, school information, important family customs or cultural practices, and any special needs.
3. Participate in staffings and court hearings.
4. Work with your caseworker to create a case plan that will help you return home.
5. Participate in the services required in the case plan and work on meeting the case plan goals.
6. Be involved, as often as possible, in your medical appointments or social or religious activities as long as the case plan allows that involvement.
7. Keep in contact with DCFS to give updates on how they are meeting the case plan goals.
8. Maintain contact and communication with you and keep appointments to visit with you.
9. Talk to your caseworker or their lawyer if they have any concerns.
10. Provide financial support for you. The court will decide if and how much your parents need to pay to help DCFS take care of you.

## *Appendix II: Who else is here to help?*

While DCFS and the courts has an official responsibility to you, there are lots of other organizations with lots of people who can help you, too. Here are just a few:

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)/[www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)**

Are you feeling desperate, alone or hopeless? Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. It's a **free, 24-hour hotline** available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. Your call will be routed to the nearest crisis center to you. Call for yourself or someone you care about. It's free and confidential.

**National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)/ [www.nvdh.org](http://www.nvdh.org)**

Help is available to callers **24 hours a day, 365 days a year**. Hotline advocates are available for victims and anyone calling on their behalf to provide crisis intervention, safety planning, information and referrals to agencies in all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Assistance is available in English and Spanish with access to more than 170 languages through interpreter services. If you or someone you know is frightened about something in your relationship, please call the National Domestic Violence Hotline.

**National Runaway Switchboard: 1-800-RUNAWAY/[www.1800runaway.org](http://www.1800runaway.org)**

Call if you are a teenager who is thinking of running from home, if you have a friend who has run away and is looking for help, or if you are a runaway ready to go home. The **24-hour crisis line** has an experienced front-line team member ready to help you now. They provide crisis intervention and travel assistance to runaways. They provide information and local referrals to adolescents and families. They give referrals to shelters nationwide. They also relay messages to or set up conference calls with parents at the request of the youth.

**National Youth Crisis Hotline: 800-442-HOPE (4673)**

Provides counseling and referrals to local drug treatment centers, shelters, and counseling services. Responds to youth dealing with pregnancy, molestation, suicide, and child abuse. **Operates 24 hours, seven days a week.**

**Boys Town/Girls Town National Hotline: 1-800-448-3000/[www.boystown.org](http://www.boystown.org)**

**Open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year**, this hotline is staffed by specially trained counselors who can help with suicide prevention, sexual abuse, parenting troubles, anger, physical abuse, school issues, chemical dependency, relationship problems, depression, emotional abuse, and runaways.

**Nationwide RAINN National Rape Crisis Hotline: 800-656-4673/[www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)**

This nationwide partnership of more than 1,100 local rape treatment hotlines provides victims of sexual assault with free, confidential services around the clock.

**BACA (Bikers Against Child Abuse): [www.bacausa.com](http://www.bacausa.com)**

BACA is a nonprofit organization that exists to provide aid, comfort, safety, and support for children who have been sexually, physically, and emotionally abused. BACA is dedicated to the principle that one of the basic rights of childhood is to be safe and protected. When the child's family and environment have failed them, BACA stands ready to provide it for them. BACA is a strong organization of dedicated individuals who are willing to sacrifice any and all to protect and secure a child's basic right to a happy childhood.



## *FosterClub*

FosterClub is the national network for young people in foster care—a place to turn for advice, information, and hope.

Being placed in foster care can be a chaotic and anguishing experience for a young person. FosterClub is dedicated to providing a peer support network for children and youth in foster care. Further, FosterClub believes that the experiences young people have in foster care place them in a position to effect change within the system, inform and motivate their peers, build public awareness and create public will for improved care for abused and neglected children.

FosterClub is about providing youth a voice within the system that so heavily impacts their lives. Whether advocating on their own behalf, in concern for siblings or family members, or speaking out on behalf of their 513,000 peers currently in the system, FosterClub's websites, publications and events provide a youth-friendly network which helps the voices of young people to be heard.

FosterClub is dedicated to providing the tools, training and forum to help young people secure a brighter future for themselves and the foster care system. Join today at [www.fosterclub.org](http://www.fosterclub.org)!

### Helpful suggestions from Toby at FosterClub

**Friends.** Don't lose connection! Some of the best people that I knew, I lost connections with because I don't speak to them anymore. I miss them a lot. I regret not keeping communication with some of them.

**Moving.** Many foster youth tend to move very often. At times they are unable to take everything they want with them on such a short notice. It really sucks that people have to think in a mind setting where they could be moved any day. But realistically, if you know you might be moving, think of the stuff that you want to take with you, wherever you may go.

**School.** I know that personally I moved from school to school very often. Let your voice be heard, and talk about staying in the same school district! I, on occasion, moved from school district to school district, and I was very lucky to graduate on time.

**Documents.** DOCUMENTS ARE VERY IMPORTANT! Your State ID, Birth Certificate, Social Security Card, etc. are very important wherever you are in life. If you have them in your possession, great! Don't lose them.

**Employment.** If you have a job, try to stay with it! I know personally that on many times in my life I had to quit a job because of my foster care situation. Don't bury yourself in that hole!

**Keep a positive attitude!** In general, life can get you down. This is especially true for foster youth and/or anyone aging out of the system. Keeping a positive attitude will make things run a bit smoother. Promise!

## *Appendix III: DHS County Office Contact Information*

If you can't get a hold of your caseworker, here are the phone numbers for all of the DHS County Offices. Ask the operator to speak with your caseworker or the DCFS County Supervisor when you call.

### **Area 1 County Office Phone Numbers:**

Benton: 479-273-9011  
Carroll: 870-423-3351  
Madison: 479-738-2161  
Washington: 479-521-1270

### **Area 2 County Office Phone Numbers:**

Crawford: 479-474-7595  
Franklin: 479-667-2379  
Johnson: 479-754-2355  
Logan: 479-963-2783  
Scott: 479-637-4141  
Sebastian: 479-782-4555  
Yell: 479-495-2723

### **Area 3 County Office Phone Numbers:**

Clark: 870-246-9886  
Garland: 501-321-2583  
Hot Spring: 501-332-2718  
Howard: 870-845-4334  
Montgomery: 870-867-3184  
Perry: 501-889-5105  
Pike: 870-285-3111  
Polk: 479-394-3100  
Saline: 501-315-1600

### **Area 4 County Office Phone Numbers:**

Columbia: 870-234-4190  
Hempstead: 870-777-8656  
Lafayette: 870-921-4283  
Little River: 870-898-5155  
Miller: 870-773-0563  
Nevada: 870-887-6626  
Ouachita: 870-836-2591  
Sevier: 870-642-2623  
Union: 870-862-6631

### **Area 5 County Office Phone Numbers:**

Baxter: 870-425-6011  
Boone: 870-741-6107  
Conway: 501-354-2418  
Faulkner: 501-730-9900  
Marion: 870-446-2237  
Newton: 870-446-2237  
Pope: 479-968-5596  
Searcy: 870-448-3153  
Van Buren: 501-745-4192

### **Area 6 Office Phone Numbers:**

Pulaski South: 501-682-9330  
Pulaski North: 501-682-0141

Pulaski Southwest: 501-371-1121

Pulaski East: 501-371-1309

Pulaski Jacksonville: 501-371-1260

### **Area 7 County Office Phone Numbers:**

Bradley: 870-226-5879  
Calhoun: 870-798-4201  
Cleveland: 870-325-6218  
Dallas: 870-352-5115  
Grant: 870-942-5151  
Jefferson: 870-534-4200  
Lincoln: 870-628-4105  
Lonoke: 501-676-3113  
Prairie: 870-998-2581

### **Area 8 County Office Phone Numbers:**

Clay: 870-598-2282  
Craighead: 870-972-1732  
Fulton: 870-895-3309  
Greene: 870-236-8723  
Izard: 870-368-4318  
Lawrence: 870-886-2408  
Mississippi: 870-763-7093  
Randolph: 870-886-2408  
Sharp: 870-856-1053

### **Area 9 County Office Phone Numbers:**

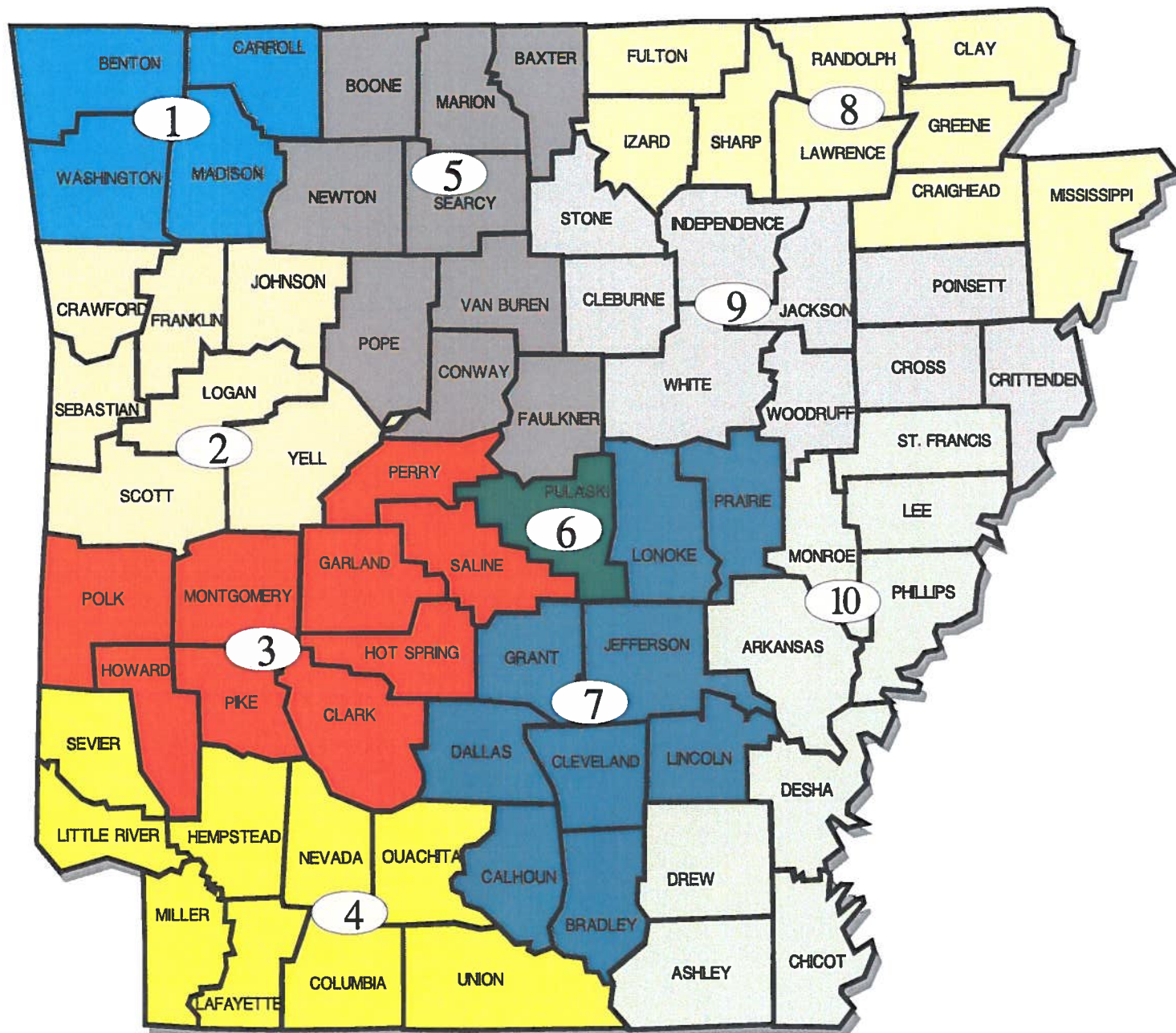
Cleburne: 501-362-3298  
Crittenden: 870-732-5170  
Cross: 870-238-8553  
Independence: 870-698-1876  
Jackson: 870-523-9828  
Poinsett: 870-578-5491  
Stone: 870-269-4321  
White: 501-268-8696  
Woodruff: 870-347-2537

### **Area 10 County Office Phone Numbers:**

Arkansas: 870-946-4519  
Ashley: 870-853-9816  
Chicot: 870-265-3821  
Desha: 870-222-4144  
Drew: 870-367-6835  
Lee: 870-295-2597  
Monroe: 870-747-3329  
Phillips: 870-338-8391  
St. Francis: 870-633-1242

## Appendix IV: Area Map

In order to be your own advocate, it is helpful for you to know what county you live in and the area to which that county belongs. Find your county and corresponding area on the map below.



## *Appendix V: The Court Process*

When you come into foster care, there will be several different types of court hearings – and you have a right to participate in all of them! Below is a description of the different kinds of court hearings involved in foster care cases. If, at any time, you have questions regarding the court process, talk to your caseworker, AAL, or CASA.

**Emergency (Probable Cause) Hearing** – The emergency hearing must be held within five working days after an emergency removal to determine if DCFS acted correctly in removing the you from your biological parents, guardians, or custodians.

**Adjudication Hearing** –The adjudication hearing is held within 30 days after the probable cause hearing unless the court finds a good reason to wait up until 60 days after the day the you were removed to have this hearing. During the adjudication hearing, the judge decides whether there is enough proof to “substantiate” the allegations of child abuse or neglect or, in other words, decide if the allegations are true. In order to be found true, DHS/DCFS must prove that, due to parental unfitness or child maltreatment, you are at great risk for serious harm.

**Disposition Hearing** – The disposition hearing usually occurs right after the adjudication hearing if the judge has decided you are **dependent-neglected** (see glossary). The disposition hearing is to decide what action will be taken. The judge will decide if it is safe for you to return home or if you must stay in foster care for a longer period of time. If the court determines you must stay in foster care, the court will approve a case plan for the youth and parents. The case plan will include orders like how often parents and their children will visit each other and what kind of services will be put in place to help the youth safely return home.

**Review Hearings** – The first review hearing must be held within at least six months of the emergency removal. Review hearings must be held at least every six months for as long as you are in foster care. The review hearing is for the judge to reexamine the situation, decide whether the court orders and approved case plan are being followed, and decide whether everyone is working to achieve the goals of the case plan. If you and your siblings are not placed together, the court will review your case every three months to make sure DCFS is still working to find a place where you and your siblings can live together and that you are having some kind of contact with your siblings at least once a week. This three month court review for siblings who are not placed together may or may not take place at a formal court hearing.

**Permanency Planning Hearing** – The permanency planning hearing must be held no later than 12 months from the emergency removal. During the permanency planning hearing, the judge decides what your permanency goal will be. These options include, from best to worst, 1) Placing you with a fit parent, 2) Returning you to another guardian or custodian if that is who you were removed from 3) Giving your parents more time to work on their case plan goals if they have made progress but still need some extra time to finish meeting their case plan goals, 4) Adoption, 5) Guardianship, 6) Permanent custody with a relative or fictive kin, 7) If you are 16-years-old or older, Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) which means the Division is responsible for preparing you to age out of foster care at 18 or 21.

**Termination of Parental Rights** – Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) is a permanent, legal action that means a parent gives up all rights and responsibilities from that point on and legally ends the relationship with his or her child. Parents can volunteer to have their parental rights terminated or the court may order TPR. After TPR, another family can adopt the youth.

## *Appendix VI: Glossary*

**Aging Out**—When a youth leaves foster care because they turn a certain age, usually 18 or 21. Aging out usually results in loss of support from the state for things such as foster care payments, housing, living costs, and health services. Consider staying in care as long as possible so you can receive these important benefits!

**Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment**—This is a test that all youth in foster care ages 14 and older will take to help evaluate their life skills in the following nine areas: career planning, communication, daily living, home life, housing and money management, self-care, social relationships, work life, and work and study skills. Youth will take the test every six months to see what progress they have made. When youth get a high enough grade to show that they have the necessary life skills, they no longer have to take the test.

**Advocate**—A person who speaks up on behalf of themselves or someone else in an effort to ensure that their rights are protected and/or to gain services or other benefits.

**Case Plan**—This is a written plan that a youth and his or her family along with foster parents, caseworker, and AAL will make. The goal of a case plan is to help find a permanent placement for a youth, either with bio-parents or someone else who will love and care for the youth.

**DCFS**—The Division of Children & Family Services is the state agency whose job is to keep children and youth safe. DCFS is just one of ten divisions within the Department of Human Services.

**DHS**—The Department of Human Services is the bigger agency of which DCFS is a part. In addition to DCFS, DHS includes the following divisions: Aging & Adult Services (DAAS), Behavioral Health Services (DBHS), Child Care & Early Childhood Education (DCCECE), County Operations (DCO), Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS), Medical Services (DMS), Services for the Blind (DSB), Youth Services (DYS), and Community Service and Nonprofit Support (CSNS).

**Dependent-Neglected Juvenile**—This is the term used for a child or youth whose health and/or safety are at substantial risk of harm as a result of abandonment, abuse, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, neglect, parental unfitness or being present in a dwelling or structure during the manufacture of methamphetamine with the knowledge of a parent, guardian, or custodian.

**House Parents**—People who supervise and provide care to young people in a group home or residential facility.

**Life Skills**—Important abilities and skills for a young person to possess so he or she can successfully transition to adulthood. These include skills and knowledge about taking care of daily life, relationships, employment, housing and home life, money management, health and self care.

**Legal Guardianship**—Placement with a person who is charged with the legal responsibility for the care and management of a child or youth. A legal guardian will be required to appear in court from time to time to give reports about the youth's status, but other involvement such as caseworker visits and the

youth appearing in court will stop. A youth is no longer in foster care if a legal guardian is appointed for him or her.

**Mentor**—Somebody, usually older and with more experience, who provides advice and support to a young person.

**Permanence**—For a child or youth in foster care, to have an enduring family-like relationship that is safe and meant to last a lifetime.

## *Who can I contact?*

Who is my **Primary Caseworker**? \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Who is my **Secondary Caseworker**? \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Who is my **attorney ad litem (AAL)**? \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Who is my **CASA worker**? \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Who is my **therapist**? \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Who is my **County Supervisor**? \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Who is my **Area Director**? \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_



**ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**  
**Division of Children and Family Services**  
**Youth Acknowledgment of Rights in Foster Care**

*This form will be provided to youth in foster care ages 14 and older to sign after the youth's Family Service Worker (FSW) or Transitional Services Coordinator (TSC) has explained PUB-49: "Pamela's Guide" and PUB-50: "Be Your Own Advocate!" to the youth and the youth has been provided copies of these publications to take with them. Youth in foster care will receive these publications and this form within thirty days of entering foster care or within 30 days of their 14<sup>th</sup> birthday, whichever comes first.*

Please check the boxes that are true:

- My FSW caseworker or Transitional Services Coordinator (TSC) gave me PUB-49: "Pamela's Guide" and PUB-50: "Be Your Own Advocate!" to take with me.
- My FSW caseworker or TSC explained the main points of PUB-49: "Pamela's Guide" and PUB-50: "Be Your Own Advocate!" to me.
- My FSW caseworker or TSC let me ask any questions I had about PUB-49: "Pamela's Guide" and PUB-50: "Be Your Own Advocate!".
- My FSW caseworker or TSC also let me ask any other questions I have about the Transitional Youth Services Program and/or my rights while I am in foster care.
- I understand the information in the PUB-49: "Pamela's Guide" and PUB-50: "Be Your Own Advocate!". This means I understand the rights I have related to:
  - School
  - Health
  - Visits with my parents, other adult relatives, siblings, and/or other people who are important to me and play a positive role in my life
  - Court participation
- I understand that if I think of other questions about my rights or anything else related to my case or being in foster care, I can ask my FSW caseworker or TSC about those questions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Youth Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Youth Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
 DCFS FSW Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
 DCFS FSW Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date