

Flourish



If you have experience in the foster care system, this volume may be beneficial to you. The foster care system can be both overwhelming and confusing at times. This volume will help you both navigate this system and help guide you with what comes next. There are multiple resources available to youth who are currently or have experienced foster care. Being in foster care also puts you in a position where you can use your own experiences to help advocate for future youth in foster care.



The Flourish magazine series is a resource for Iowans. The series provides key information on a variety of subjects but is not meant to be all-encompassing. Refer to the Iowa HHS website for the most current version of each magazine. This material is intended to offer support and general guidance. It is not meant to direct specific actions or replace individual judgement. The included strategies may be helpful to the reader, but not all strategies will work for all individuals. Readers are encouraged to consult qualified professionals for advice specific to their individual circumstances.

Being in court-ordered foster care can make you eligible for specific programs or services that can assist you while in care and after you transition to adulthood. These programs or benefits may include additional funding toward your higher education, Medicaid coverage, professional supports to assist in everyday living and skill-building, and potential temporary financial benefits. If you have an HHS case manager or juvenile court officer, they can tell you if you meet placement criteria that let you get these benefits.

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Checklist

- Make sure you have important documents including your birth certificate and social security card and store them in a safe, secure place (see the Identity magazine for more information on important documents).
- If you are at or around age 18, ask your caseworker for a letter that includes your foster care status. This is your proof of foster care that you can use this to prove eligibility for certain programs.
- Ask your case manager about the benefits you can receive because you are/ were in foster care.
- Visit the HHS website where transition programs are described: [Transitioning Into Adulthood | Health & Human Services](#)
- Reach out to AMP to see if joining is the right option for you.



Contacts

Relationship _____

Relationship _____

Name _____

Name _____

Phone # _____

Phone # _____

Relationship _____

Relationship _____

Name _____

Name _____

Phone # _____

Phone # _____



Visit the Flourish Magazine webpage

hhs.iowa.gov/family-community/flourish-magazine

Common Words

In Iowa, foster care is defined as any out of home placement when the juvenile court has ordered an out of home placement.

That placement could be, among others, a group home, shelter, family foster care or relative care. Foster care status can make you eligible for certain programs or services. For example, if you are in foster care at age 13 and older, you can get preferred status for federal college funding. If you have an HHS case worker or a juvenile court officer, they can tell you about helpful programs and services.



Foster care: When a child is removed from a parent's custody as a result of juvenile court action and placed in the care and responsibility of HHS.

Kinship care: When a child stays with a relative or fictive kin because they have been removed from their parent(s) or legal guardian(s) and placed in foster care.

Kin: an adult who is a blood relative of the child.

Fictive Kin: An adult person who is not a relative of the child but has a positive emotional relationship with the child or their family.

Guardian: A person who is not a parent of the child, but a court has decided they will have a permanent relationship with the child and help make important life decisions that are in the best interest of the child.

CINA: A Child In Need of Assistance (CINA) has to be decided upon, or adjudicated, by a court. A child will participate in kinship or foster care while the CINA is in place. This court decision will also come with services and programs to help the parent or guardian meet their goals and achieve reunification.

Permanency: a stable, long-term living situation for youth in foster care

Reunification: A child who was removed from the care of their parent(s) or legal guardian(s) and has been determined by a court to be able to go home and be cared for by their parent(s) or legal guardian(s).

Adoption: When a person who is not a child's biological parent legally has parental rights transferred to them.

Transition Planning: Transition planning services help ensure teenage youth in foster care are prepared for adulthood regardless of foster care placement type.



Identity

It's pretty common for children in foster care to be referred to, or even to refer to themselves as a "foster kid". It's important to remember that being in foster care is temporary, being in foster care doesn't define who you are as a person, and it doesn't predict your future. Think about foster care as an experience, not an identity.

Your Rights

You have rights while you are in foster care. Your HHS case worker should go through your rights with you and help support you to make sure your needs are met. The information on your rights comes from Iowa HHS employee manual 18-C(2) and Iowa HHS form 470-5337.

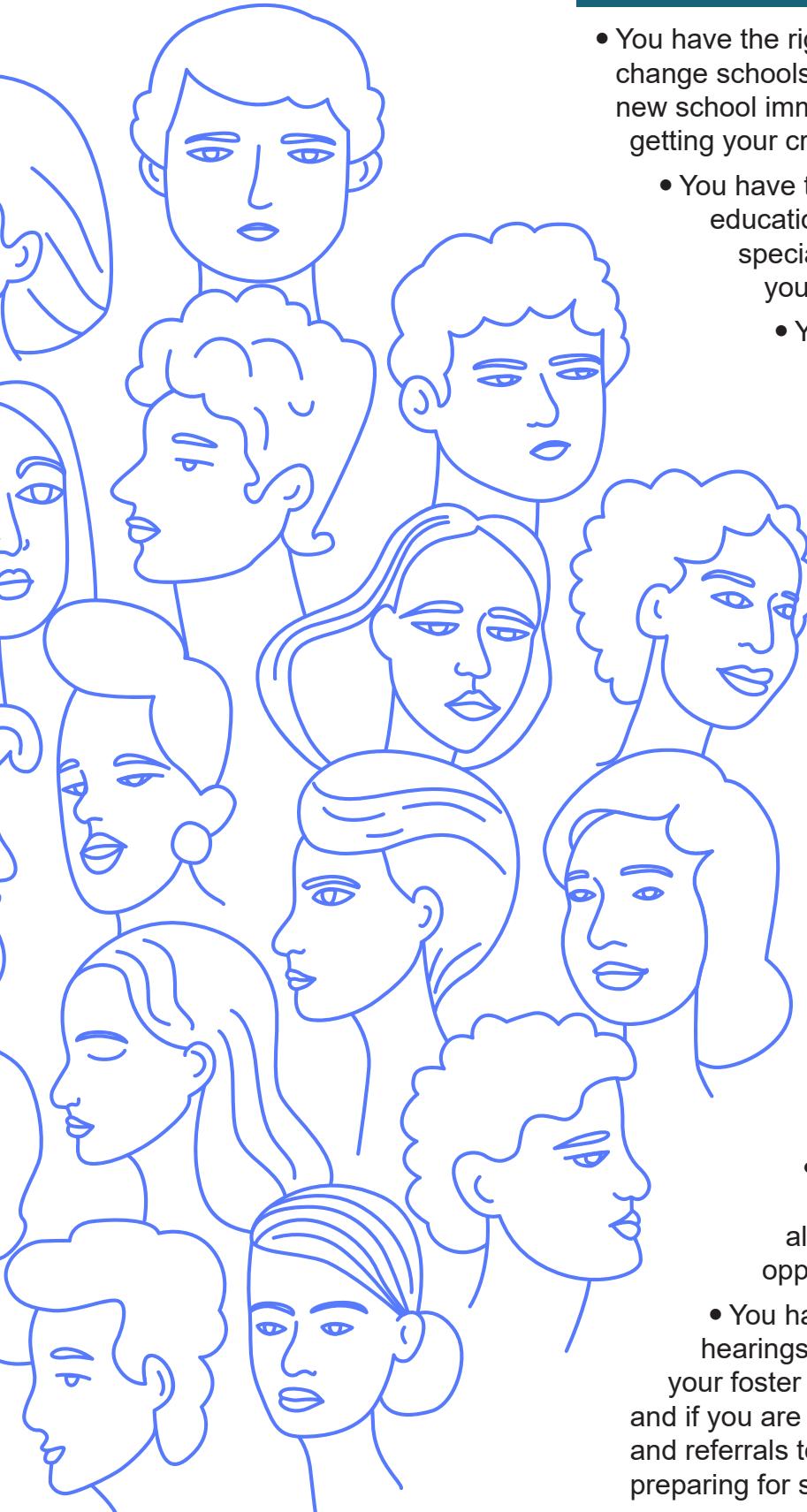
Health

- You have the right to receive annual physicals including eye, ear and dental exams. You also have the right to any routine, follow-up and emergency treatment, as needed.
- You have the right to have your mental health needs assessed by a professional, and to receive recommended treatment and services.
- If you leave foster care at age 18 or older, you have the right to receive your most up-to-date health records and options for continued health care coverage.
- You have the right to stay safe and free from abuse or exploitation.
- At age 18 or older, you have the right to appoint a durable power of attorney for health care. In case you ever become unable to participate in health care decisions, and you do not have or do not want a relative who would otherwise be authorized under state law to make such decisions, the person appointed will make health care decisions for you.

Documents

- If any consumer credit reports exist for you, you have the right to receive a copy every year while you are in foster care. Your caseworker will assist you in understanding the credit report and resolving any inaccuracies.
- If you leave foster care at age 18 or older, you have the right to receive your certified birth certificate, social security card, and driver's license or state identification card.





Education

- You have the right to education stability. If you must change schools, you have the right to be enrolled in your new school immediately and to receive assistance in getting your credits transferred.
- You have the right to be enrolled in an appropriate educational setting that is fitting for you. If you need special services, those will be made available to you.
- You have the right to receive assistance with your educational and career goals and review your goals regularly with your case worker and transition team. Your transition team should assist you with college planning and financial aid applications.
- You have the right to participate in extracurricular activities. In general, fees related to school classes and related activities are waived for children in foster care.
- If you leave foster care at age 18 or older, you have the right to be provided with your education records.

Court Participation

- You have the right to representation through a guardian ad-litem and an attorney, if necessary, to advocate for your best interests and desires.
- You have the right to identify two people to help you develop your case plan, who may also advocate for you to participate in healthy opportunities and activities that interest you.
- You have the right to participate in your court hearings and case reviews which will determine if your foster care placement is still appropriate for you and if you are receiving the services, supports, activities and referrals to programs that would best assist you in preparing for successful adulthood.

Education: Scholarships and Grants



Typically, students take professional pictures during their senior year of high school. These are known as senior pictures. Families Helping Families of Iowa offers [free senior pictures](#) for youth currently in foster care.



Steps to Get Financial Aid

Step 1: File the FAFSA in October of your senior year in high school. You'll need to file again for every year that you plan to be in college.

- Go to studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa
- If you will turn age 18 in court-ordered foster care, remember to check “yes” when the application asks whether you are a “ward of the court.” This information is important as it alerts financial aid officials to look at only your income and assets when determining your award amount. If the financial aid processor requests additional information to process your application, submit it promptly.
- When you finish the FAFSA, you'll see a prompt asking if you want to complete the Iowa Financial Aid application as well. Say yes. That prompt leads to something called the “Eligibility Wizard,” a short series of simple questions to determine whether you might be eligible for additional state aid. If you're not eligible, you're done. If you meet initial eligibility requirements, you'll see instructions to continue the application process for those additional grants and scholarships.



Step 2: Complete the State of Iowa Financial Aid Application in October of your senior year in high school.

- You'll need to file again for every year that you plan to be in college.

Step 3: Look for other grant and scholarship opportunities.

- Sources include your college or university, your high school, community groups, religious organizations, professional organizations and corporations. Your high school counselor can help you get started. Remember: You should never pay for a scholarship search, and you will never be asked to pay money up-front to "guarantee" a legitimate scholarship. Check out the list of scholarship resources on the following page.
- This is the application for the ETV- Education & Training Voucher Program and the All Iowa Opportunity Scholarship specifically for youth who aged out of the foster care system.

Iowa College Aid Processing System (ICAPS)

The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program

The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program provides awards of up to \$5,000 per year to students who age out of foster care and students who are adopted after age 16. Grant awards are sent directly to the college or university and can be used to pay for tuition/fees, room/board, book/supplies and personal/living expenses. Once the student's campus account has been paid, any leftover funds will be issued to the student. [Education & Training Voucher | Department of Education](#).



All Iowa Opportunity Scholarship (AIOS)

All Iowa Opportunity Scholarship (AIOS): Students attending eligible Iowa colleges and universities will be eligible for funding. Students who age out of Iowa's foster care system, age out of the State Training School, and students adopted from foster care in Iowa after age 16, receive priority for these awards.

Foster Care to Success

Former foster youth and adopted youth for post-secondary education, internship and mentoring.

Last Dollar Scholarship

A Last-dollar Scholarship is a need-based financial aid to cover the gap between the total cost of college and the financial aid you've already received. It applies to careers that are in high demand in Iowa. Check out the list of eligible programs on their website.

Richard and Linda Harrell Foster Care Scholarship

This scholarship program seeks to encourage and support African American high school students, who are or have been in foster care, pursue higher education by offsetting tuition costs, student loans and/or expenses; while providing a mentor to help them transition and succeed through their first year of college.



Transportation

If driver's education is provided by your high school, you should not have to pay because being in foster care qualifies you for free & reduced lunch. If your high school does not provide or contract a company for driver's ed, it is still beneficial to take driver's ed through a private agency. Not only does Driver's Education help you be a better driver, but you can also receive a discount on your car insurance for taking the course. If you are in court-ordered placement, there may be funds that you can access to help pay for part/all of the cost.

Employment

Internships: There are national internships specifically for youth that have been in foster care

FosterClub All-Star Internship Program

FosterClub, the national network for youth in foster care. The All-Star Internship program was launched in 2004 and successfully incorporated current and former foster youth as facilitators and leaders of teen conference activities. The All-Stars get training on how to turn their experiences in foster care into expertise, in order to positively influence peers in foster care, professionals and policy makers, on a variety of topics pertaining to child welfare. Selected individuals will spend a portion of their summer living in Oregon and traveling to various locations across the country to train and inspire others. This is a competitive internship program. Interns receive a weekly stipend and housing during their assignment. To learn more about eligibility criteria and the annual application deadline visit: www.fosterclub.com/allstar-internship.





CCAI's Foster Youth Internship (FYI) Program

The Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute's (CCAI) Foster Youth Internship (FYI) is a unique internship program that gives those who have spent time in the foster care system a chance for their voice to be heard on Capitol Hill. Selected interns spend two months in Washington, D.C. interning for a Member of Congress. Interns also spend time researching a topic of their choice to develop improved policy in a given child welfare related area. The recommendations are combined into a joint internship-class report that is presented to policymakers at the conclusion of the internship program. Past participants have gotten their recommendations incorporated into federal bills. This is a competitive internship program. Interns receive a weekly stipend and housing during their assignment. To learn more about eligibility criteria and the annual application deadline visit: www.ccainstitute.org/programs/view/foster-youth-internship-about

Iowa Jobs for America's Graduates (iJAG)

This job preparation programming may be in your local high school or college campus.

Finances and Money Management

While you are in care it is important to learn how to manage your money. Start looking at how much money you are making and compare it to how much it costs for housing, utilities, food, transportation and other things you regularly buy (cost of living). If you think you will be spending more than you make, you will want to work more hours, look for a job that pays more than you are making now or find ways to spend less money.

Ways to start your money management journey

- Talk to supportive adults
- Take money management or financial literacy classes
- Get a job
- Start using a bank account
- Use Aftercare resources

The State of Iowa is responsible for running your credit report each year if you are in a court ordered out-of-home placement after age 14. If anything fraudulent (not something you did) shows up on your credit report, your HHS case manager or JCO will help get your credit report corrected.



Iowa Aftercare Services Program (Aftercare)

Financial assistance is available to support youth achieving their self-sufficiency goals. See the Community-Building Programs section for more information.

Foster Fund\$



This is a reimbursement grant (you get paid back) of up to \$400 for youth in any out-of-home placement for needs other than medical expenses. The item(s) purchased with this money is for the foster youth and must go with the foster youth if they move placements. [AMPIOWA](#)



Opportunity Passport



Opportunity Passport® is a program that gives you \$1 for every \$1 of your savings you use for approved purchases like housing costs, college, trade school or transportation. To be eligible for this program you must be 14-26. You will need to take a Financial Capability Training before you receive any money.

[DMACC Evelyn K Davis Center - Our Programs](#)

Spread your Wings Scholarship Program



Families Helping Families provides scholarships of up to \$500 per year for youth ages 2-18 in foster care. This can be used to join extracurricular activities like art, music, sports and other activities. [familieshelpingfamiliesofiowa.org/programs/](#)

Housing

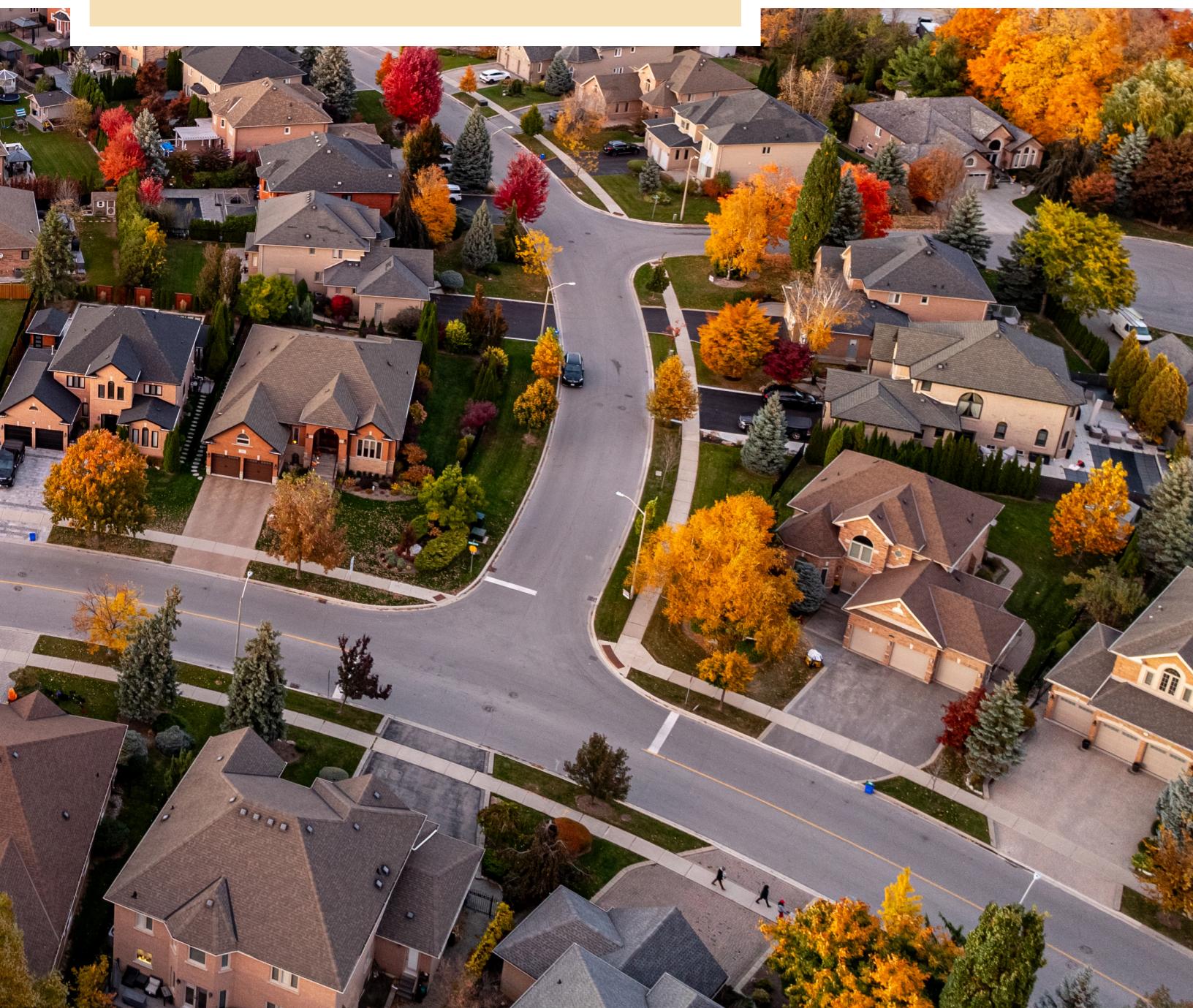
Moving outside of the support of foster care sounds exciting but is also very stressful. It can help to prepare for this transition ahead of time and talk about your options with your team of people you go to for support. Have you thought about where will you live when you leave foster care? Your case worker can help you think of housing options that could work best for you.

Housing Options

- Biological family
- Adoptive family
- Former foster family
- Friends or parents of friends
- Transitional Living Program (TLP) apartment
- Dorm room (If attending college/university)
- Section 8 low-income housing (apply when 18 years old)
- [Foster Youth to Independence \(FYI\)](#)
- Adult supported community living arrangement (Medicaid programs)



The Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) and Family Unification Program (FUP) allow Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) to provide Tenant Protection Vouchers (TPV) for up to 36 months to young adults ages 18-24 with a history of child welfare involvement. If you qualify, HHS and Aftercare will help with the application process. Aftercare or another approved service will provide supportive services, such as money management, basic life skills, and housing counseling, while receiving the FYI Voucher. https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/fyi



Safety

You may know many people through the places you've lived. It's important to know who you can trust and not to go with people you don't trust or aren't sure if you trust. If you are in a situation that is not safe, call a trusted adult or the police.

Prepare to stay safe through:

- Supportive adult relationships
- Positive self-image and strong self-esteem
- Understanding of healthy relationships
- Consent and refusal skills
- Perception of legal rights
- Knowledge of online safety
- Using digital privacy settings
- Awareness of trafficking
- Having basic needs met
- Community connections and extracurricular activities



Self-Care and Health

Advocating for yourself is self-care. Youth Transition Decision-Making (YTDM) meetings are a great opportunity to advocate for yourself. You get to help plan for your future as you transition into adulthood and out of foster care.

If you are in foster care you are covered by Medicaid. You will be assigned a Managed Care Organization (MCO). This is your health insurance provider. If you are aging out you may hear people talk about EMIYA. The **Expanded Medicaid for Independent Young Adults (EMIYA)** program that provides health coverage to young adults transitioning to adulthood from foster care.

EMIYA currently provides Medicaid coverage to eligible youth:

- Who are under age 26
- Who were in a foster care placement when they turned age 18
- Who were receiving federal Medicaid when they turned age 18

Note: Other eligibility requirements may apply

Youth covered by the EMIYA program receive covered services through existing Medicaid provider networks.

Your MCO may offer:

- Transportation to medical appointments
- A cell phone
- Programs to earn money for your health

Visit your MCO's website to see a full list of the services they provide.



Community and Connections

It is important to identify strong relationships in your life or people you can go to for support. These relationships may be family or in your community.

You may find support with:

- Biological family
- Friends
- Parents of friends
- Mentors
- Coaches
- Teachers
- Community groups



Your relationships will be different with each person and that means you might go to different people when you need different types of support.

Examples of supportive relationships include:

- One of your family members is always there for you and will be the person you call in an emergency.
- Your friend's mom will let you do laundry at her house.
- Your aftercare advocate gives you helpful, honest advice when you have questions.

Connections are important to keep when they are healthy for both people. It's important to remember there might be challenges with complex family dynamics, safety concerns, or barriers in locating/finding family members. If you can keep these



Family

Family can be your biological family. You can also build your family from people in your life who love you and want the best for you. It's important to feel safe, secure and supported by the people you call your family.

Ways to connect with or stay connected with family

- Meetings led by your case worker
- Voice or video calls
- Technology- messaging apps, social media, online games
- Family therapy
- Support groups

Reaching age 18 is both an exciting and challenging time, no matter your life circumstances. Youth in or coming out of foster care experience some unique challenges however it is important to be familiar with your local community resources that can assist in times of need and help continue building living skills. Please refer to the Community & Connections Magazine to get connected.

My Connections



 Name	 Relationship	 Contact Information

Community-Building Programs

Consider using your foster care experience to be a voice in youth-led groups, such as AMP, Youth Advisory Board, Community groups. Below are groups that can assist you with effectively sharing your experiences to make a difference in the local, state, and federal levels.

Achieving Maximum Potential (AMP)

AMP is the Iowa Foster Care Youth Council. It's a support group for teens in foster care and a place to advocate for change in the foster care system. Reach out to AMP to see if joining is the right option for you at weareampiowa.com.





The Iowa Aftercare Services Program (Aftercare)

The Iowa Aftercare Services Program (Aftercare) is a case management program for youth who exit foster care services at or around the age of 18. Aftercare provides support and guidance through regular, individual meetings with a self-sufficiency advocate. Advocates assess the participant for life skills and help the youth develop a self-sufficiency plan, complete with developmentally appropriate goals and objectives. Financial assistance is available to support youth achieving their self-sufficiency goals. [Home - Iowa Aftercare Services Network](#)

Aftercare advocates help

- Set and reach personal goals.
- Find and keep a safe place to live.
- Obtain funds to pay for emergency expenses and bills.
- Enroll in college or job training, and/or get a job.
- Find a doctor, dentist, or counselor.
- Master skills you need to live on your own.

Pre-Aftercare

1

- 17-18 years old
- Preparing to exit foster care.

Core Aftercare

2

- 18-20 years old
- Were in foster care until 18 years old **or** Exited foster care between 17.5 and 18 years old **OR** Exited foster care through adoption or the Subsidized Guardianship Program at or after 16 years old **OR** Placed at the State Training School for at least 6 months and exited between 17.5 and 18 years old

Extended Aftercare

3

- 21-22 years old
- Participated in Core Aftercare and have a need to continue in the program.

State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council (SIYAC)

The State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council (SIYAC) builds communication between a group of youth from across Iowa between the ages of 14 and 20 and the governor, general assembly and state and local policymakers regarding programs, policies, and practices affecting youth and families.

This is an opportunity to advocate for youth on important issues affecting youth.



Foster Club

Foster Club is a national network created for youth run by young people who experienced foster care. Their website is www.fosterclub.com.

Foster Club's mission is to provide encouragement, motivation, information, education and benefits for foster youth. Permanency Pact is a great tool that is free and on their website to help you figure out who can support you into adulthood.



National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) Surveys

When you are 17, 19, and 21 you will be asked to complete the NYTD survey. This survey provides information on your educational level, employment opportunities, access to health insurance, and more. This information helps state administrators and legislators understand how prepared youth are to enter adulthood and the services they have been provided during their time in foster care.

Visit the Community & Connections Magazine to learn more about building community and connections.



Navigating Court

If you are placed out of home, you are likely involved with Juvenile Court. You will be appointed a Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) and/or Attorney. Your GAL will help you and the court decide what is in your best interest. If what you want is different from what your GAL believes is in your best interest, you will also be appointed an attorney who will advocate for what you want and your GAL will advocate for what they believe is in your best interest.



You have the right to go to court and should always try to attend.

Ask your caseworker to help arrange for you to get there. If you cannot go for some reason, or you do not want to go, then you should ask your caseworker, (GAL), or attorney if you can join by video or telephone during the hearing. You can also write a letter to the judge asking questions and explaining what you want, keep in mind this will be made part of the court file and everyone involved will be provided a copy.

Don't be afraid to ask questions about what is happening. Bring up your concerns in court if no one has addressed them. If you are placed away from your siblings and wish to keep in contact with them, your caseworker should arrange for you to keep in touch. The judge in your case works very hard to make decisions that are in your best interests. Let the judge know what is important to you! If you have any concerns about how you are feeling, or if you are unsure about what is going to happen to you or your family, talk to someone who is working with you in your case. If you don't have anyone in your case who you want to talk to, find a friend or trusted adult you can talk to. Ask the people involved in your case for their phone numbers and save them so you have them when needed.

