

Preparing for Independence: Building Practical Life Skills, Transition Planning & Support Services

CASA Conference

October 1, 2026



MIKE DEWINE
GOVERNOR OF OHIO



PRESENTERS



Laurie Wright, MSW, LISW-S, Ohio Department of Children and Youth, Independent Living (IL) & Transition Age Youth (TAY) Human Services Developer

- Joined ODJFS in September 2021 as a statewide trainer for child protection staff; now contributes to the IL TAY team, supporting efforts that help young people in foster care move toward self-sufficiency
- 30 years at Franklin County Children Services primarily working as a new employee training supervisor, ongoing supervisor, and caseworker.



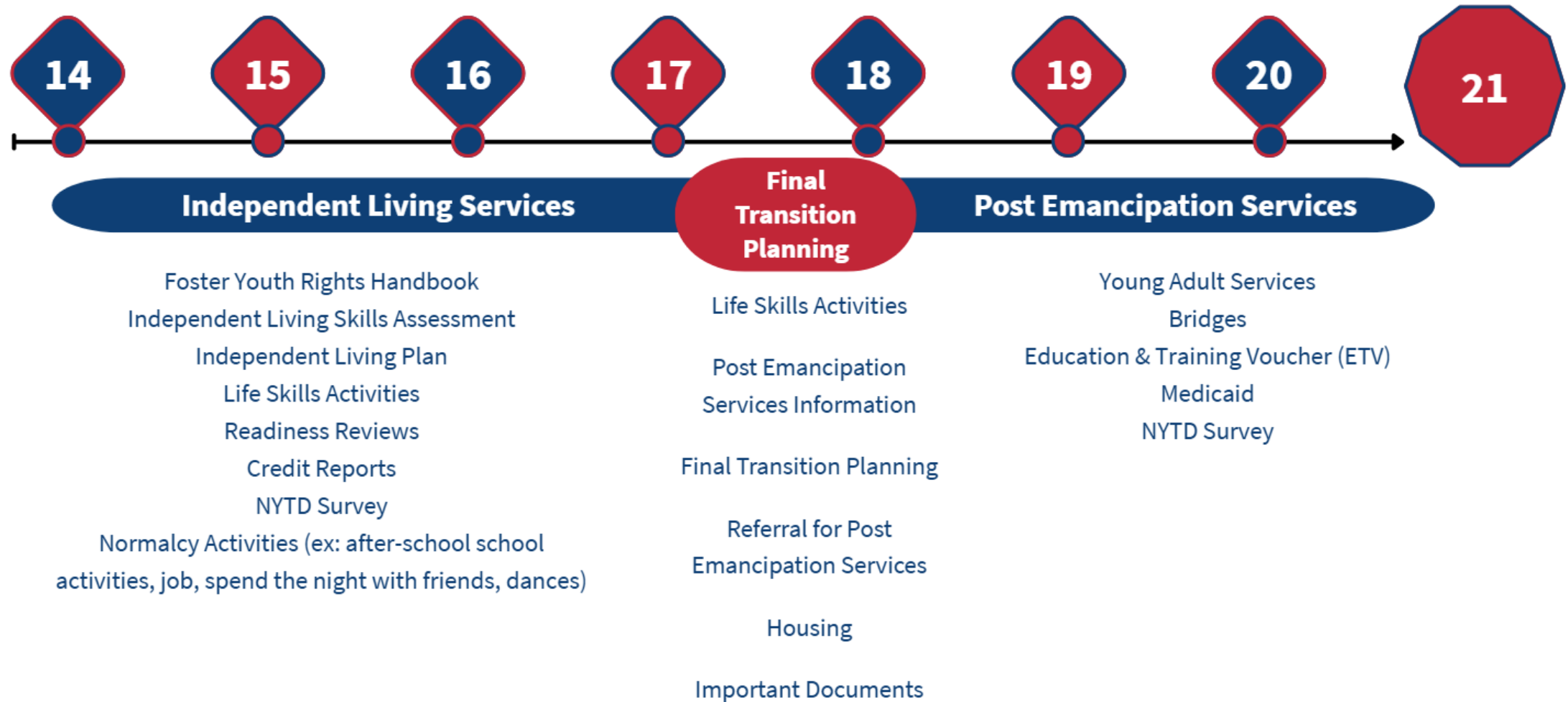
Sarah Levels, MSW, Ohio Department of Children and Youth, Bridges Human Services Developer

- Joined ODJFS in December 2016 to develop and implement Bridges
- 26 years in child protective services, 8 of those as the IL Supervisor for Franklin County Children Services

AGENDA

- **Preparing for Independence**
- **Final Transition Planning**
- **How You Can Advocate**
- **Young Adult Extended Services (YAES)**
- **Resources**
- **Questions/Contact Us**

INDEPENDENT LIVING (IL) & TRANSITION AGE YOUTH (TAY) SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

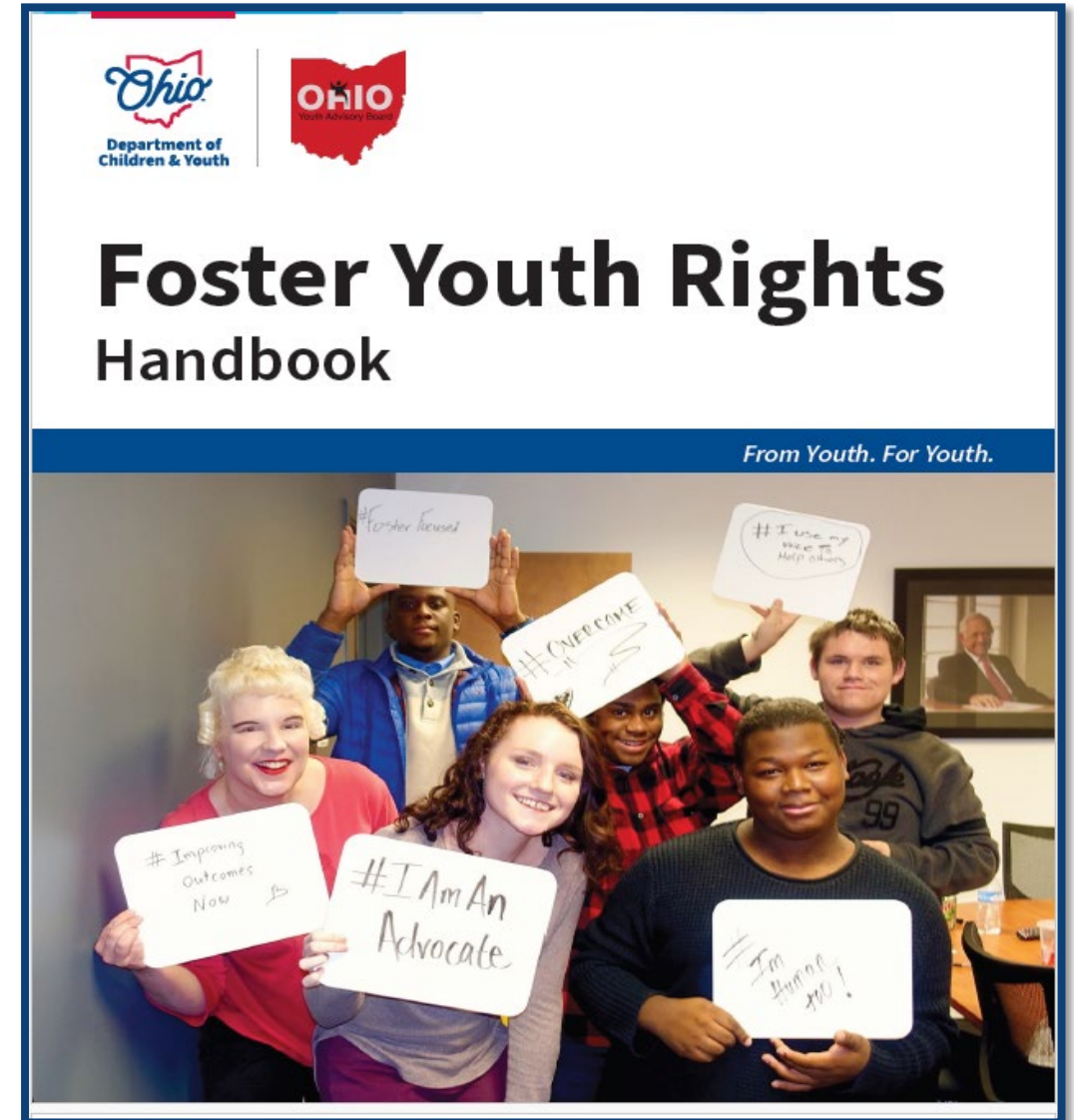


Ohio Administrative Code 5180:2-42-19 and 5180:2-42-19.2

FOSTER YOUTH RIGHTS HANDBOOK ([DCY 01677](#))

- Provided to all foster youth at age 14
- Details the rights of a foster youth
- Includes helpful resources and messages of encouragement from previous foster youth

**NOTHING ABOUT US
WITHOUT US!**



BUILDING PRACTICAL LIFE SKILLS – IL ASSESSMENTS & IL PLANS

- **Independent Living Life Skills Assessment** – completed by age 14
 - Identifies youth's life skill areas that need growth
 - Input needed from the youth, the youth's caregiver, and the youth's caseworker
- **Independent Living Plan** – completed within 30 days of the IL assessment
 - Based on the IL assessment and the developmental age of the youth
 - **Youth driven** and includes input from the youth's caseworker, the resource caregiver, and two youth-appointed adult supporters
 - Made up of goals, action steps, and services that are designed to be updated as the youth develops
 - Includes a contact directory of supportive adults
 - Copies are to be provided to the youth and youth's caregiver within 30 days of completion
 - IL plans are to be reviewed no less than every 180 days – readiness reviews

PERMANENT ADULT CONNECTIONS

- Everyone needs a consistent, trusted person they can count on for guidance, support, assistance in a crisis, etc.
- The Public Children Services Agency (PCSA) works with the youth to develop and achieve meaningful, permanent connections with at least one caring adult.



NORMALCY

- A youth's access to and participation in age or developmentally appropriate activities, positive youth development and experiential learning similar to non-custodial peers.
- Examples of **normalcy** activities:
 - Participating in school sponsored activities
 - Spending time with friends doing activities that youth typically do together
 - Working on independent living activities



FINAL TRANSITION PLANNING

180 days before the youth turns 18 years old, the custodial agency must provide the youth with the information on:

- Final Transition Planning
- Post-Emancipation Services
 - Young Adult Services (YAS)
 - Bridges
- Eligibility Criteria to Enroll in Bridges

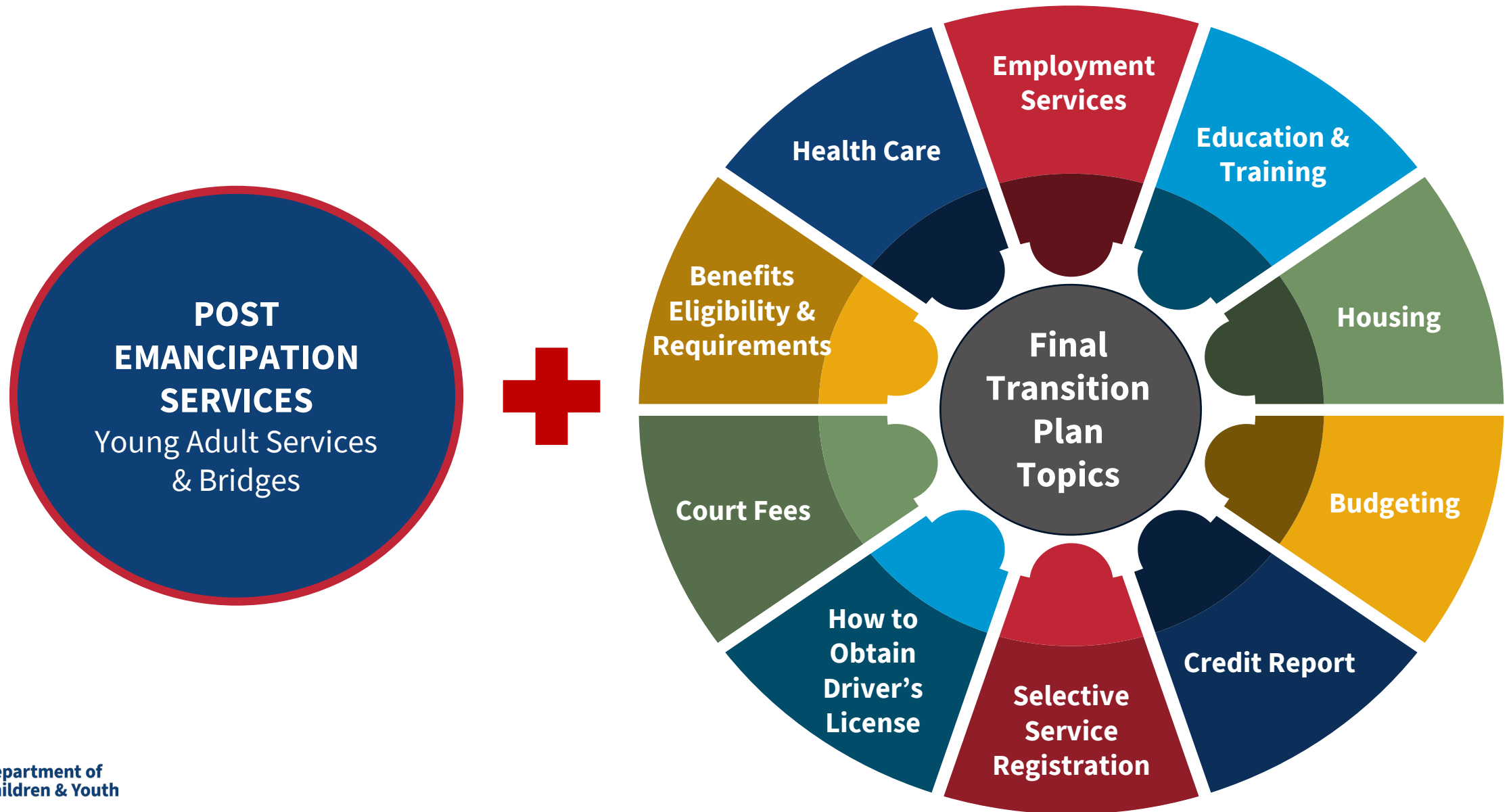


FINAL TRANSITION PLAN REQUIREMENTS

- At least 90 days before the youth's emancipation [*Ideally 90 days before turning 18*], PCSA develops a final transition plan with the youth. The plan is to be:
 - **Led by the youth** and updated if the youth's plans change
 - Copy provided to the youth
 - Reviewed by the PCSA with the youth during monthly visits until emancipation
- Emancipation is a **CRITICAL** time in the youth's life thoughtful planning is essential for a successful transition.



FINAL TRANSITION PLAN REQUIREMENTS



TRANSITION CONSIDERATIONS FOR OLDER YOUTH WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

- Post emancipation services are voluntary
- Young adults with Developmental Delays (DD) often have lifelong needs that are better served through the adult DD system
- Coordination with the local Board of DD is **critical** to ensure adequate continuity of care needed for the former foster youth's long-term safety and well-being



REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

- **Prior to the youth's emancipation** from the agency's custody, the agency must secure and provide to the youth:
 - An original birth certificate
 - An original social security card
 - A current state identification card and information about getting a driver's license
- The agency is to provide the following to the youth **when custody is terminated** due to reaching the age of emancipation:
 - A copy of the final transition plan
 - A copy of the youth's health and education records
 - A letter verifying that the youth emancipated from agency custody

HOW YOU CAN ADVOCATE

- Participate in PCSA meetings about the youth and advocate for the **youth's voice** to be heard and for the IL plan to be youth driven. Opportunities where this can be done:
 - Family Case Plan development meetings
 - Semi-Annual Reviews (SAR),
 - IL Plan development meetings,
 - Final Transition Plan development meetings,
 - Court hearings
- Help youth understand their rights outlined in the Foster Youth Rights Handbook and know what to do if they feel their rights are being violated.



YOUNG ADULT EXTENDED SERVICES (YAES)

Post Emancipation from PCSA:

- Young Adult Services (YAS)
- Bridges

Extended Services Post Permanency:

- Adoption Assistance Connections (AAC 21)
- Kinship Guardianship Assistance Connections to 21 (KGAP C21)



YOUNG ADULT SERVICES (YAS)

- YAS are brief intermittent services to help support the young adult's own efforts to live independently
 - Youth can request YAS up to their twenty-first birthday
 - YAS are provided by the PCSA where the young adult CURRENTLY resides.



BRIDGES

Program Overview:

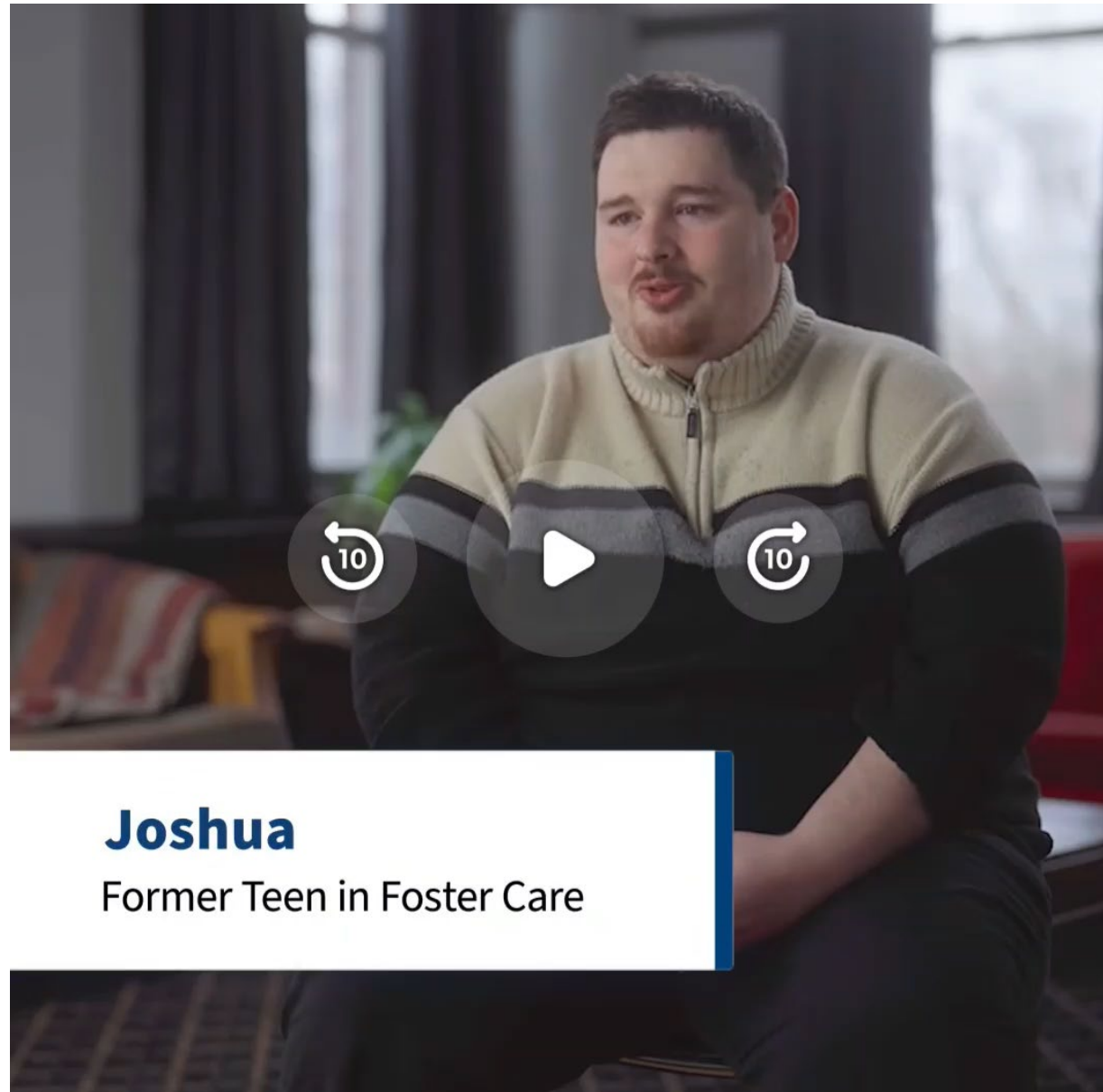
- Bridges is Ohio's voluntary extended foster care program for young adults who emancipate or leave foster care at 18, 19, or 20.
- Through a designated Bridges Liaison, the program provides monthly case management and financial assistance to help them secure stable housing and to stay focused on their education and employment goals.
- Bridges began enrolling participants in February 2018.

Current Impact:

- Currently, there are over 1,000 participants enrolled in Bridges.
- Bridges supports participants by helping them build self-sufficiency skills for long-term success.

BRIDGES

Josh, former Bridges
participant testimonial



Joshua

Former Teen in Foster Care

BRIDGES

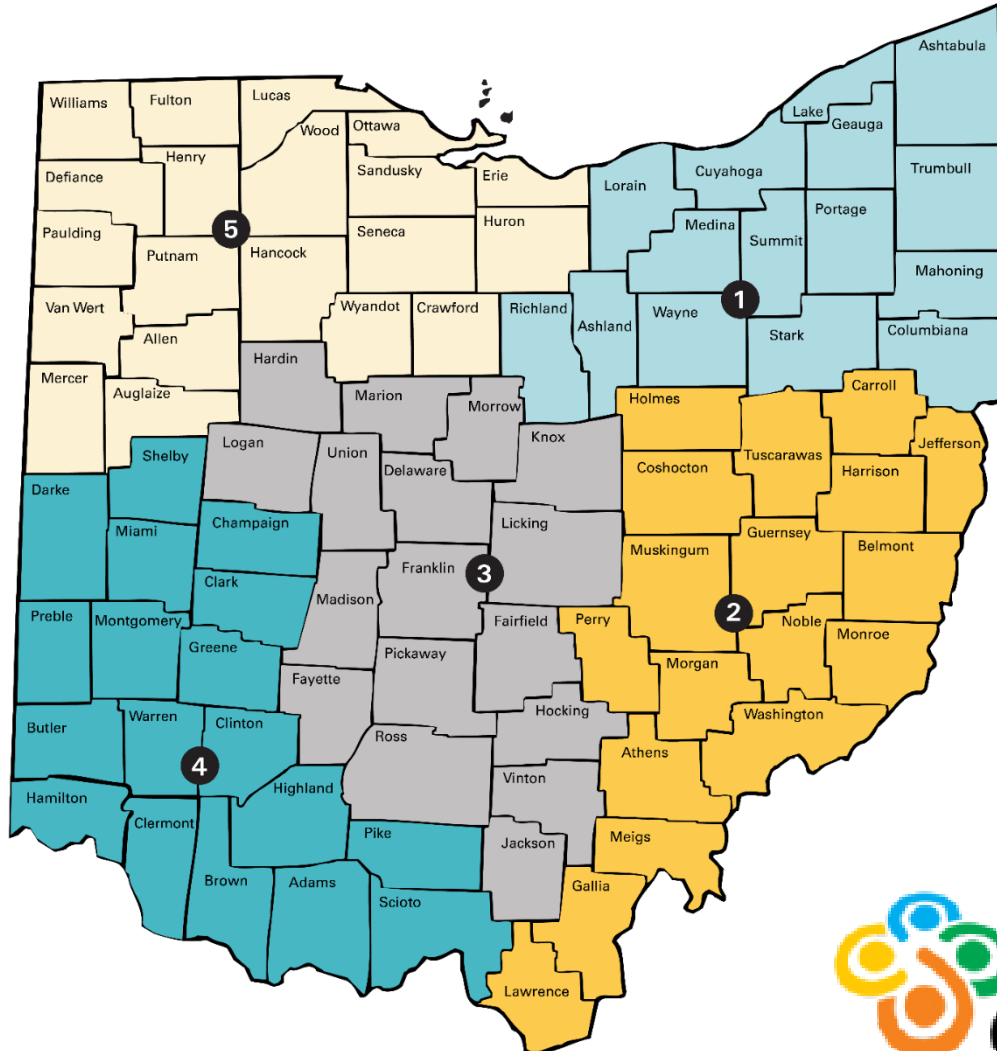
Program and Service Delivery:

- Bridges has 3 rules in OAC.
 - 5180:5-1-01 – Administration of Bridges
 - 5180:5-50-02 – Eligibility for Bridges
 - 5180:5-50-03- Title IV-E foster care maintenance program eligibility and reimbursability of bridges
- Administered by DCY, through a grant to Child & Family Health Collaborative of Ohio.
- Delivered through regional provider agencies offering case management, housing, employment, and education support.

Support Services:

- Housing and financial assistance, life-skills training, employment aid, education support, mental/physical health linkages

BRIDGES



Administration: admin@cfhcoho.org

Region 1: Northeast Region

ne.region@cfhcoho.org

Region 2: Southeast Region

se.region@cfhcoho.org

Region 3: Central Region

c.region@cfhcoho.org

Region 4: Southwest Region

sw.region@cfhcoho.org

Region 5: Northwest Region

nw.region@cfhcoho.org



BRIDGES ELIGIBILITY

- Young adult who left the custody of an Ohio PCSA at the age of 18, 19, or 20 years old; or
- Young adult who turned 18 when in the care & placement of an Ohio Title IV-E Juvenile Court; or
- Young adult who turned 18 when in the care & placement responsibility of DYS **and** are in a IV-E reimbursable placement setting; and
- Young adult must also meet at least one of the five eligibility criteria to enroll and maintain participation in the program:



BRIDGES ELIGIBILITY

- 1. Completing secondary education or a program leading to an equivalent credential;**
 - Enrollment in school to receive high school diploma
 - Enrollment in GED program
- 2. Enrolled in an institution that provides post- secondary or vocational education;**
 - Public or Private 4-year college or university
 - Community College
 - Vocational Programs
 - Technical Schools
- 3. Participating in a program or activity designed to promote, or remove barriers to, employment;**
 - Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program (CCMEP)
 - Job skills Training, Life Skills Training, Volunteering
- 4. Employed for at least eighty hours per month;**
 - Regular Employment
 - Internship/Externship
- 5. Incapable of doing any of the above activities due to a medical condition, which incapacity is supported by regularly updated information from a qualified practitioner**
 - Documentation supporting the medical condition must be submitted from a Qualified Practitioner



PATHWAYS TO BRIDGES

- **Youth in the process of transitioning out of care:**
 - **180 days** prior – PCSA introduces Bridges
 - **90 days** prior – PCSA refers an interested young adult to Bridges to start the “Warm Hand-Off”
 - Once PCSA custody terminates, young adult signs the Bridges application and signed Voluntary Participation Agreement (VPA) and eligibility documentation which is sent to DCY for approval
 - Bridges is NOT the youth’s transition plan
- **Young Adult who has already aged out:**
 - Young Adult can make a self-referral
 - Young adult is assigned to a Bridges Liaison to complete the application, VPA, and obtain eligibility documentation.
 - If not eligible and if the young adult wishes, Bridges will assist the young adult in connecting with the PCSA for Young Adult Services (YAS)
 - If eligible, the application, signed VPA, and eligibility documentation is sent to DCY for approval



**Any Adult Supporter can refer
a young adult to Bridges.**

BRIDGES SUPPORT

Bridges helps participants with the following types of housing:

- **In Home** - Former foster parents or other supportive adult offering housing and life skills support
- **Leased housing** - Affordable apartments or subsidized housing for rent or lease
- **Community Housing** - Transitional living programs or other supportive living housing in the community
- **College Room & Board** - Dorm housing and meal plan expenses, reducing costs so grants/ scholarships stretch further
- **Emergency Housing** - Temporary housing during crisis or disruption (e.g., hotel, a friend)



Bridges Services:

- Maintains regular contact through monthly in-person visits and weekly check-ins via phone, text, or video
- Provides financial assistance for basic needs (e.g., food, rent, utilities, clothing, personal incidentals, and transportation)
- Provides guidance, mentoring, and life skills training to increase self-sufficiency
- Collaborates on goal planning—encouraging short-term steps toward long-term achievements.
- Supports financial literacy through monthly, personalized budgeting and financial management activities
- Promotes self-advocacy and help navigating systems like healthcare, education, and employment
- Responds to crises and coordinates emergency services and aftercare support
- Helps participants build and maintain lifelong connections
- Educates young adults on accessing community resources beyond age 21



[Bridges](#)

[About Bridges](#)

[Apply](#)

[Bridges Offices](#)

[Supportive Services](#)

[Grievance Process](#)

[Resources](#)

[Contact Us](#)

Apply

[Your Responsibilities in Bridges](#)

[Who Can Join Bridges?](#)

[How to Apply](#)

If you are about to leave foster care:

Talk to your caseworker if you want to join Bridges. Your caseworker will contact Bridges about three months before you leave foster care. Bridges will help you fill out the application.

If you already left foster care:

If you left foster care and are under 21 (or know someone who is), fill out the Bridges referral form to get started. Someone from Bridges will contact you within two business days.

If you are over 21 and need help, please check [Resources for Foster Youth and Alumni](#).

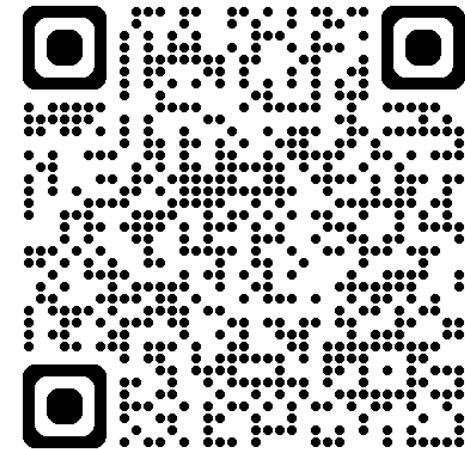
To Apply:

If you are a young adult, a caseworker, or a supporter, you can use the [referral Form](#). For more questions, contact your local [Bridges Offices](#).

LAUNCH 

Submit a Referral Form

Share this





Department of Children & Youth

Bridges

Belief that I can be **BETTER**

Trying my best is what matters and is success itself

Feel **WISER** and realized the
type of person I want to be

MOTIVATED to try harder and not give up

Having the power to **BELIEVE** in myself

Motivated to take control of my **FUTURE**.

Knowing **I AM CAPABLE** of things I
put my mind to

Being optimistic and **STRIVING** for goals

Getting into **COLLEGE**

Helping me get my GED and **TEACHING** me to budget

I would not have accessed mental health
care without her support. She strongly
ADVOCATED to me how much it would help
me, and she was right

How has Bridges helped you?

...grow as a man, seeing
where I was and where I
am now is amazing

...always have
someone to go and
TALK, because I
don't have parents

My Liaison **LISTENED** when I needed it most

I'm very **THANKFUL** for
my Liaison.

Finally **GRADUATING** High School, believing
in myself

I never thought that I would
have a **HOME** like this at the age
of 19. Thank You!

I was told I was nothing and was
waiting for the day I didn't wake up. I
am living a happy life and am so
thankful for Bridges giving me the
POWER to believe in myself.

Sobriety and picking up the pieces I
threw away. It helped me **ACHIEVE**
things I never thought I would achieve.

Future plans...when a few years
ago, never thought of even
having **GOALS**. Never expected
to get this far or even be alive.

Without Bridges, I wouldn't have
graduated high school, would've wound
up homeless, and never had been able
to continue my **EDUCATION**.

AAC 21 & KGAP C21

Adoption Assistance Connections to 21 (AAC 21)

AAC 21 serves 18-21 year olds who were adopted from foster care at age 16 or 17.

Eligibility:

- IV-E Adoption Assistance Agreement effective at age 16 or 17
- Adoption finalization occurred at age 16 or 17
- Adoptive parent(s) still providing support
- Age 18 but not yet 21
- Not married or enlisted in military
- Meets 1 of 5 criteria in OAC 5180:2-51-02(A)(4)

Services include:

- Monthly subsidy paid to adoptive parent(s)
- Medicaid coverage for young adult
- Referrals to services and supports in adoptive family community

AdoptionAssistanceToAge21@childrenandyouth.ohio.gov

Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program Connections to 21 (KGAP C21)

KGAP C21 serves 18-21 year olds who were placed into the legal custody of a kinship caregiver from foster care at age 16 or 17.

Eligibility:

- Federal KGAP Agreement effective at age 16 or 17
- Guardianship/custody occurred at age 16 or 17
- Kinship caregiver(s) still providing support
- Age 18 but not yet 21
- Not married or enlisted in military
- Meets 1 of 5 criteria in OAC 5180:2-55-02(A)(3)

Services include:

- Monthly subsidy paid to kinship caregiver(s)
- Medicaid coverage for young adult
- Referrals to services and supports in kinship family community

KGAPConnectionsto21@childrenandyouth.ohio.gov

MEDICAID COVERAGE

The Ohio Medicaid program includes health care coverage for youth, who emancipated from foster care, until age 26, regardless of income.

- Youth can receive Medicaid through the nationwide Former Foster Care Children (FFCC) program.
- An emancipated young person applies for Medicaid in the state in which they reside and are eligible, if:
 - Under the age of 26
 - Were in foster care under the responsibility of the State on or after 18th birthday
- PCSA is to assist the young person in connecting to Medicaid.
- Young adults entering Bridges continue to receive Medicaid automatically.



➤ Benefits.Ohio.gov
Self-Service Portal

➤ Medicaid.Ohio.gov



➤ The Medicaid
Hotline

1-800-324-8680

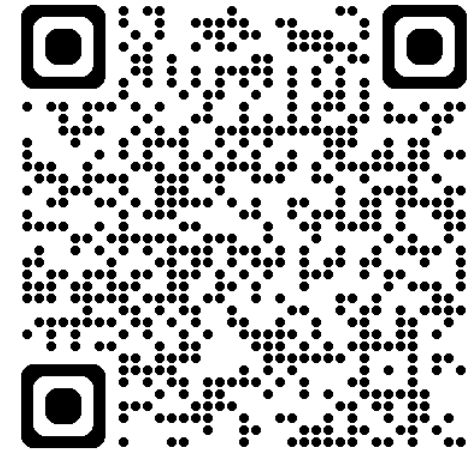
➤ County Shared
Services Hotline

1-844-640-6446

OHIO EDUCATION & TRAINING VOUCHER (ETV) PROGRAM

Eligibility Requirements:

- Must be a current or former foster youth who is one of the following:
 - Currently in foster care at age 17, have already earned a high school diploma or GED, and will remain in foster care until 18
 - Left agency custody on or after your 18th birthday
 - Left agency custody on or after your 16th birthday to be adopted or placed in a kinship guardianship
- You must have been accepted into or be enrolled in a degree, certificate, or other accredited program at a college, university, technical, or vocational school
- To remain eligible for ETV funding, you must maintain a 2.0 GPA



OHIO CAREER LAUNCH (FORMERLY CCMEP)

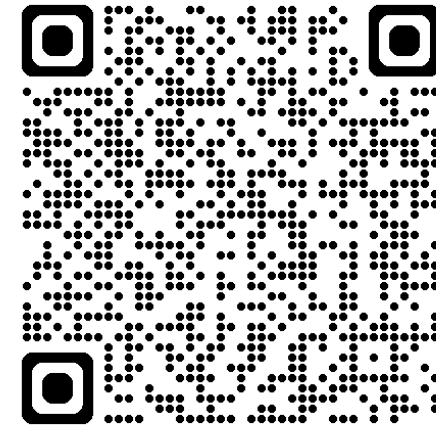
Ohio Career Launch helps low-income young adults build career paths, find employment and break the cycle of poverty. It offers a wide range of services specifically tailored to the individual.

Who is eligible for Ohio Career Launch?

Most low-income young adults ages 14 to 24

What services are available? The following are some examples, depending on the individual's unique needs:

- Paid and unpaid work experiences
- Career coaching
- Education and career training
- Tutoring
- Preparing for college or work credential training
- Supportive services, including transportation, childcare, housing, uniforms and work-related tools
- Help with budgeting
- High school equivalency training
- Counseling
- Mentoring



RESOURCES ON DCY WEBSITE

DCY / For Foster Youth

For Foster Youth

This site is for current and former foster youth, providing information on your rights, available resources, how to share your voice, and how to file a complaint if you feel that your rights are violated. The Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY) is committed to supporting youth and young adults from out-of-home care on their path to independence.

Featured in this section



Bridges

Bridges is a free program that helps young adults who used to be in foster care.



Foster Youth Bill of Rights

The Foster Youth Bill of Rights Handbook details the rights that a foster youth has when they enter the children services system.



Resources for Foster Youth and Alumni

Find resources related to education, health care, jobs, and services for youth who are or were in foster care.



Youth Voice

The Ohio Youth Advisory Board (OHIO YAB) works to influence policies and practice that impact current and former foster youth.

OHIO YOUTH OMBUDSMAN

This office investigates and resolves concerns and complaints submitted by or on behalf of children and youth involved with Public Children Services Agencies (PCSA), Title IV-E agencies, or private provider agencies.

- The Youth Ombudsman does not investigate allegations of abuse or neglect.
- They are not a crisis line to solve an immediate issue but can make recommendations for individual and system change.
- If anyone has concerns about a youth's rights being violated, they can contact the Youth Ombudsman at 1-877-649-6884 or online at: youthandfamilyombudsmen.ohio.gov



RESOURCES

Foster Youth Bill of Rights <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-administrative-code/rule-5180:2-5-35>

Foster Youth Rights Handbook <https://childrenandyouth.ohio.gov/for-providers/resources/forms>

Ohio Bridges Program <https://childrenandyouth.ohio.gov/for-youth/bridges>

Ohio Education & Training Voucher (ETV) OhioETV.org

Ohio Career Launch (formerly CCMEP) <https://jfs.ohio.gov/job-workforce-services/job-programs-and-services/ohio-career-launch>

Youth Ombudsman <https://youthandfamilyombudsmen.ohio.gov/> **1-877-649-6884**

QUESTIONS/CONTACT US

DCY Independent Living/Transition Age Youth Team

Transitional-Youth-Programs@childrenandyouth.ohio.gov



DCY Bridges Team

Bridges@childrenandyouth.ohio.gov

Adoption Assistance Connections to 21 (AAC)

AdoptionAssistanceToAge21@childrenandyouth.ohio.gov

Kinship Guardianship Assistance Connections to 21 (KGAP C21)

KGAPConnectionsto21@childrenandyouth.ohio.gov



MIKE DEWINE

GOVERNOR OF OHIO



CONNECT WITH DCY



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<https://www.instagram.com/ohiodcy/>



<https://www.youtube.com/@OhioDCY>



**THE HEART
OF IT ALL™**

Ohio.org

OHIO.ORG