



# The Bexar County Fostering Educational Success Pilot Project for Students with a History of Foster Care

## LEGISLATIVE FUNDING

\$1,750,000/year | \$10,500,000 over 3 bienniums

STATE'S INVESTMENT LEVERAGED AN ADDITIONAL \$3,419,000

\$2,500,000	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development - Housing First Program
\$80,000	Department of Family and Protective Services - Supervised Independent Living
\$100,000	Impact San Antonio Foundation Grant - Early Start Experience
\$20,000	Association of Public Land Grant Universities, Career Readiness
\$150,000	Cash gifts (\$97,000) and in-kind donations from individual and corporate donors
\$569,000	City of San Antonio - College Immersion Program, Tutoring, & Paid Internships



## INITIATIVE OVERVIEW

The mission of the **Bexar County Fostering Educational Success Pilot Project ("Pilot Project")** is to improve college enrollment, retention, and graduation rates for students with a history of foster care while increasing the number of children in foster care who understand that attending college is achievable and expected and are academically and emotionally prepared to do so.

The model is a trauma-informed, strategic framework that incorporates evidence of best practices, coaching, and holistic support to meet the educational aspirations and unique needs of youth with foster care history.

The Pilot is conducting research on the pipeline of educational support for students who have experienced foster care. The scope and scale of the research is novel and critical to understanding the Pilot's impact and how our model of cross-system collaboration may be replicated elsewhere in Texas and across the United States.

For the first time, partners across child welfare, the Children's Court, and two- and four-year colleges in Bexar County are working together for the common goal of improving educational outcomes for foster care alumni and children still in foster care. UTSA serves as the fiduciary agent and led the effort to implement and ensures the success of the Pilot.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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## IMPACT OF THE PROJECT TO DATE

- » **Nearly 740 youth in foster care and college received BCFES support or services**
- » **504 college students with a history of foster care have been provided comprehensive on campus services** from support programs established at UTSA, Texas A&M-San Antonio (TAMU-SA) and the Alamo Colleges District
- » **227 youth still in foster care or who have aged out participated in pre-college and career readiness** programming to increase college awareness and enrollment and advance emotional, life skills, and academic development before entering college
- » **52% increase in students served during the COVID-19 pandemic**
- » **55% increase in enrollment at UTSA** of students with a history of foster care from 2019 to 2022
- » **\$464,764 in emergency funds, incentives, and other financial assistance provided directly to students** to remove barriers to education for expenses such as housing, food, technology, and medical care
- » **31 students in extended foster care in Supervised Independent living programs operated by UTSA and TAMU-SA** allowing students to live in campus dormitories rather than traditional congregate care or foster home
- » **47 homeless or near homeless young adults with a history of foster care and 29 of their children were housed and provided comprehensive wrap-around services** in a novel UTSA & HUD funded rapid re-housing program. 27 of the young adults have advanced their academic and career goals. (GED, technical certification, and college enrollment.)
- » **New and transfer students** with a history of foster care participate in a week-long specialized orientation to give them an “Early Start” in transitioning to college
- » **Workshops** provided to youth in foster care and college students with a history of care addressing life domains of physical and mental health and well-being, housing, life skills, educational success, finances and employment, healthy relationships, and identity development
- » **Professional stakeholders representing over 40 different university departments, government and community agencies** participate in the Steering Committee and Strategic Action Groups or serve as institutional champions
- » Local, state, and national print, television and radio placements that **increase public awareness and engagement**

## PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS

- The University of Texas at San Antonio
- The Bexar County Children’s Court
- Texas A&M University-San Antonio
- The Alamo Colleges District
- Child Advocates San Antonio (Court Appointed Special Advocates)
- Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (Child Protective Services)
- Jewish Family Services
- Independent School Districts (Northside, Southwest, Judson, East Central, Schertz/Cibolo/Universal City, SAISD)
- South Alamo Regional Alliance for the Homeless/HUD
- San Antonio Bar Association
- Thrive Youth Center
- THRU Project
- Baptist Children and Family Services
- NxtLevel
- City of San Antonio (Internship Programs)
- City of San Antonio Ambassador Program
- City of San Antonio Opportunity Youth Collaborative
- SAWorks Summer Internship Program
- Family Services-Summer Internship Program
- UT Health Wellness 360
- Debbie Jennings, DNP, Doing Health LLC
- Healthy Futures of Texas
- SA Threads
- YTIA

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## PRE-COLLEGE PROGRAMMING

### COLLEGE BOUND DOCKET

*The College Bound Docket* is a nationally recognized Bexar County Children's Court restorative foster care court focused on college preparedness and enrollment and career goals. In partnership with the Bexar County Fostering Educational Success Pilot (cost sharing model) and CASA, the docket is a youth focused, team approach that is centered on direct engagement between the presiding judge and participating foster youth with referrals from judges, Child Protective Services, CASA volunteers, and attorneys ad litem. The docket works to remove any barriers to higher education and provides academic and enrollment support including laptop computers, tutoring, SAT or ACT preparation, assistance in obtaining legal and educational documentation, FAFSA and college application completion, campus visits, and college selection. Support is also provided for other expenses such as drivers' education, participation in graduation, sporting, or highschool extracurricular activities, emergency financial assistance, housing, and accessing mental health services. A Youth Advocate with lived experience and CASA volunteers work one-on-one with participating youth, and staff work directly with the university or college the youth will attend to ensure a continuity of support.

**110 youth still in foster care have participated in the docket with a 58% college enrollment rate. Students attend the University of Texas at San Antonio, Texas A&M University-San Antonio, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, Texas A&M University-Galveston, The Alamo Colleges, LoneStar College, Texas A&M University-Prairieview, Texas State University, Texas Tech University, and the University of Texas at Arlington.**

### CULTIVATING LEARNING IN MIDDLE SCHOOL AND BEYOND (CLIMB)

CLIMB is an 8-12<sup>th</sup> grade pipeline that provides a clear pathway from foster care to secondary education through a virtual and in-person specialized college-readiness and socioemotional curriculum. CLIMB serves youth in residential treatment centers and participating school districts. **86 middle and high school foster youth have participated in CLIMB and MOUs are in place with 8 independent school districts.**

### TUTORING, MENTORING & COLLEGE IMMERSION PROGRAM (ARPA FUNDED)

Launching in 2023, **UTSA will serve 100 additional youth still in foster care** through an immersion, tutoring, leadership development and shared learning experience program that pairs students still in foster care with UTSA Honors College students.

We expect improved academic achievement and increased rates of high school graduation and college enrollment. The program was designed with input from a student with a history of foster care who stressed financial incentives and development of a peer community.

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## CAREER READINESS AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

In collaboration with the City of San Antonio Ambassador Program, SA Works and Family Services, 50 college students and 60 high school age youth with a history of foster care will have paid internships to include transportation support, food, and incentives. The Pilot Project will work closely with all three programs to provide foster care sensitivity workshops and training for students and employers.

## HOUSING STABILITY

### HOUSING FIRST PROGRAM

UTSA is the first university in the country to develop and receive funding **(\$2.5M)** from the **US Department of Housing & Urban Development** for a **housing and supportive services program** for students with a **history of foster care who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness**. The **“Housing First”** program builds on our existing campus-based and community resources to provide up to 24 months of market rate housing, assistance with moving costs, rent and utility deposits, childcare, mental health services, legal services and life skill development. **We have provided housing and supportive services for 47 young adults along with 29 dependent children living with a parent or pending CPS reunification. 27 young adults have advanced their career or academic preparedness (GED, technical certification, and college enrollment).**

### SUPERVISED INDEPENDENT LIVING

**31 students in extended foster care have participated in Supervised Independent living programs operated by UTSA and Texas A&M - San Antonio.** UTSA and A&M-San Antonio contracted with Child Protective Services to serve as Supervised Independent Living (SIL) programs. Enrolled students who elect to extend foster care to age 21 live in the university dorms like any other student and receive a meal plan. Dorms are open 12 months of the year. As a compliment to the tuition and fee waiver, this allows students to pursue a near debt free college education.



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## **UTSA Student with a History of Foster Care**

“I wish this program had existed when I was aging out of foster care. I would have known so much more about college. I would have enrolled sooner and been better prepared.”

“I want to thank you for continuing to support students with a history of foster care especially during this pandemic. I admire and appreciate your leadership. The world needs light, especially right now and especially for those who have had to live with so much darkness. I remember what it felt like to be alone. I remember feeling like I was the cause of everyone’s problem. I remember feeling hopeless. I don’t feel alone, problematic, or hopeless anymore. You are changing so many lives including mine. Many lost souls will see light thanks to the changes you are making!

## **Bexar County Judge Peter Sakai, Bexar County Children’s Court Judge (Retired)**

“I want everyone to have the same educational expectations for kids in foster care that they have for their own children, and no less. Why shouldn’t we expect them to go to college? I want every kid in foster care to know what college is, that they are capable of going, and that there is a path forward to getting there. I want the colleges and universities to view kids in foster care like they do the highest performing students and blue-chip athletes. I am so grateful for our partnership with UTSA, A&M, and Alamo Colleges who are doing just that.”

## **Angela White, President & CEO, Child Advocates San Antonio (CASA)**

“Participating in the Fostering Educational Support Pilot Project is a natural fit for CASA. Our dedicated volunteers have always advocated for the educational needs of children in foster care, but the College Bound Docket allows our volunteers to play a deeper role and to see the children they advocate for over the finish line to college.”

## **Dr. Taylor Eighmy, President, The University of Texas at San Antonio**

“I firmly believe that as higher education administrators we have much to learn from the Pilot Project. If we learn how to best support students with a history of foster care, who in many respects have the greatest hurdles before them, we should be able to translate that knowledge to how we support all of our students. I am so proud that applied research created by the Pilot will inform policy and practice in higher education in Texas and throughout the United States.”

## **Dr. Cynthia Teniente-Matson, President, Texas A&M University-San Antonio**

“I am incredibly proud of A&M-San Antonio’s participation in the Bexar County Fostering Educational Success Pilot Project. Our students with a history of foster care have never been in greater need of support and I am so grateful that the Pilot Project is there for them during the pandemic. I often talk about my aspirations for supporting our students’ success in terms of creating ‘a conspiracy of high expectations.’ Such expectations are made achievable through partnerships among the dedicated individuals and organizations who share common goals—of course, through the remarkable efforts of these students who, against all the odds, are pushing beyond expectations.”

## **Dr. Mike Flores, Chancellor, The Alamo Colleges District**

“I am very grateful to the Texas Legislature for funding the Bexar County Fostering Educational Success Pilot Project. Providing support services that contribute to student success is a top priority at the Alamo Colleges District. This program enhances our services for students who have come through foster care and is also a step forward towards reaching our moonshot to end poverty through education in San Antonio.”

