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Foster care offers resources while children are in the system

Oct 13th, 2016 · by Angelika Hernandez, Special to the Independent · Comments: 0

Children in the Arizona foster care system have many government resources, but when they exit the system or age out, there are much fewer resources made available to them.

In the month of June, there were 18,287 children in Arizona state care, according to the Arizona Department of Child Safety, or DCS. Of those children, only 6,986 were in licensed foster care, according to DCS. Children leave the foster care system once they are adopted, reunited with their families or when they turn 18 and age out of the system.

“When a child is in foster care, they have a \$150-a-year clothing allowance, and then foster families are reimbursed \$19 a day for caring for them. And once they move into their future, all of those resources go away,” said Kris Jacober, executive director of Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation, president of the Arizona Association for Foster and Adoptive Parents and a former foster parent of 18 children.

Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation pays for, according to Ms. Jacober, “items and activities for kids in foster care that are not funded in any other way.” People who know a child in the foster care system can apply for an AFFCF award, however children are only eligible for these awards when they are in the foster care system. Once a child is reunited with their family, adopted or turns 18 and exits the foster care system, they no longer qualify for an AFFCF award.

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Child Crisis Arizona is an organization that provides resources to children in Arizona. The organization provides licensing and certification to families looking to foster or adopt children. There are also emergency shelters available in Maricopa County for children who need it.

“For me it’s all about the vision and the vision of the organization is safe kids and strong families,” said Torrie A. Taj, CEO of Child Crisis Arizona.

This organization provides training sessions, home inspections, case management, counseling and shelter to children in Arizona entering the foster care system looking for foster and adoptive parents.

The emergency shelter is only available to children entering the foster care system when they are, according to Ms. Taj, “1-year-old up until 8-years-old.”

Aid to Adoption of Special Kids is a licensing agency available to foster and adoptive parents and provides other resources such as counseling, training, support groups, and works in partnership with the Lodestar Family Connections Center, an organization that also provides resources to the families of foster and adoptive children. Children qualify for health benefits when they are in the foster care system, but when they age out those resources stop.

“They might qualify if their case manager at DCS is on top of things and gets them to transition into adult services and gets them assessed as an adult for ongoing behavioral health services. If they help them sign up into the healthcare exchange, they might be able to continue that, but that relies on somebody advocating for them,” said Russ Funk, director of community engagement for AASK.

“At 18 you’re legally adult and you can walk away from the system or you can place yourself back into foster care and participate in some of our independent living programs that will go on and you can remain eligible for those up to the age of 22,” said Mr. Funk.

About 800 children who walk away from the foster care system when they turn 18 end up on the streets, according to Mr. Funk.

Angelika Hernandez is a journalism student at the [Arizona State University Walter Cronkite School of Journalism](#) and wrote the article as a class assignment.

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