

Who is there for youth aging out of the foster care system or experiencing homelessness? ACH is.

The LIFE Project

Supervised independent living for young adults.

At the turn of this century, professionals in the child-welfare field began to recognize the need for programs to provide supportive care to youth older than 18, especially those aging out of the foster system. Annually, tens of thousands of young people transition out of foster care without the typical experiences that teach self-sufficiency skills. They also lack the family support and community networks to help them make successful transitions to adulthood.

Research reveals that these youth need more than life skills, they need enduring relationships with caring adults. It also shows that these family-like relationships should ideally continue as youth transition from their teen years into full adulthood.



These realities compelled ACH to expand its programming to address the needs of 18-21-year-olds transitioning from foster care to independent adulthood or, in some instances, those already experiencing homelessness. In 2009, we made the decision to offer an Extended Foster Care program and a Rapid Re-Housing and Case Management program for homeless young adults. In 2011, in coordination with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, we at ACH broadened our foster care services to include a residential program with transitional living elements. Today this program is known as the Learning Independence From Experience or LIFE Project.

Our expenses are greater than our resources.

2022 Operating Expenses:

\$1,216,416

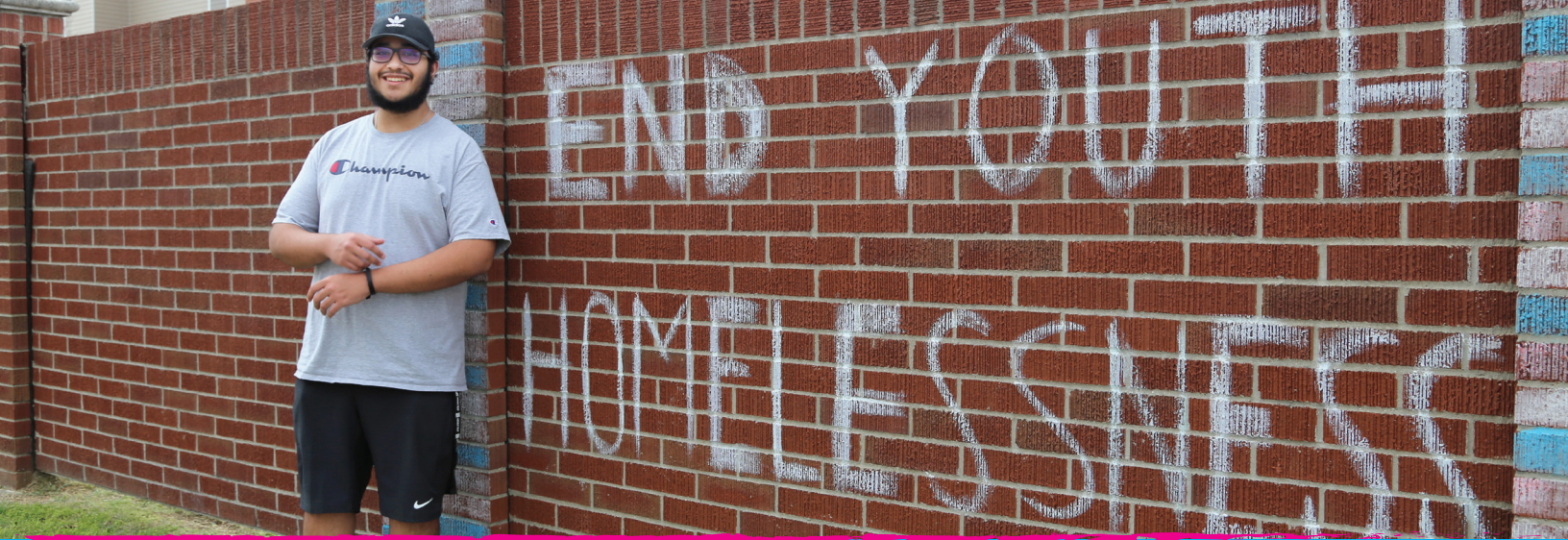
Projected Program Funding Gap:

\$669,885

Unfortunate realities.

Youth who age out of foster care experience poor outcomes at a rate much higher than the general population.

- Every year, more than 23,000 children in the U.S. age out of the foster system.
- At the age of 18, 20% of the children formerly in foster care become instantly homeless.
- At the age of 24, only one of two of these adults has some form of gainful employment.
- The chances for this same population to receive a college degree at any point in their lives are less than 3%.
- Seven of 10 girls who age out of the system become pregnant before the age of 21.
- 25% of children who age out suffer from direct effects of PTSD.
- One out of every two children who age out of the system develop substance dependence.



The LIFE Project is managed by a supervisor, who works alongside youth care counselors to advise and guide LIFE Project participants. Each of these young adults works with a case manager to create and implement a Plan of Service addressing their enrollment in the program. Program participants and case managers meet weekly to discuss progress.

The LIFE Project

All too often, youth from challenging backgrounds reach their late teens having developed few of the life skills and trusted adult relationships necessary for a self-sufficient, productive life. Whether on their own because they aged out of foster care or because they are homeless, these teens are highly motivated and want a helping hand to change their situations. The ACH LIFE Project was created to help young adults ages 18-21 gain self-confidence and become self-sufficient.

Participants are offered dormitory housing on the ACH Wichita Street Campus. Up to nineteen males can live in the Rees-Jones Family Residential Building, six females in the Virginia and Meto Miteff Family Home, and five girls in the ACH Wedgwood Campus Stocker House.. Case managers provide program participants assistance in finding safe and affordable apartments or on-campus housing at a college or university. All youth are required to attend college or vocational school, work at least part-time, or a combination of the two.

With guidance from ACH staff, participants have the liberty to come and go at will while learning proficiencies critical to life success in six key areas:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| 1 Health & Safety | 2 Housing & Transportation | 3 Job Readiness |
| 4 Financial Management | 5 Life Decisions & Responsibilities | 6 Personal & Social Relationships |

They even learn the most practical activities important to daily living such as grocery shopping, food preparation and laundry.

Upon entering the LIFE Project, participants sign a contract requiring that they:

- Participate in an educational program and/or have gainful employment for a minimum of 20 hours per week.
- Participate in the life skills program.
- Open a savings account and save at least 20% of their income.
- They must also agree to a variety of additional guidelines and behavioral expectations.

Consistent with the tradition of family, ACH Child and Family Services serves as a continuing resource for information, crisis management, referral and counseling to youth who have made the transition to independence.

Program Snapshot

In 2021, the LIFE Project served **53 young adults**. Of those, 31 were female, 20 were male, and two were transgender. There were 12 program participants aged 13-18 and 41 aged 19-24 years. 18 of the LIFE participants were from Tarrant County, 10 from Dallas County, and 25 from other counties.

RACE / ETHNICITY

ASIAN (NON-PACIFIC ISLANDER)	1
BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN	14
MULTI-RACIAL, MULTI-ETHNIC	3
UNABLE TO DETERMINE	6
OTHER	1
UNKNOWN	9
WHITE	11
WHITE/HISPANIC	8