- PS Overview
- Adoptions
- Foster Care
- Child Abuse & Neglect
- Children's Trust Fund

- Facilities
- Probation & Aftercare
- Reintegration Centers
- Transition Services
- JJS Special Programs
- Volunteer Services

- BHS Overview
- Domestic Violence
- Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health
- Licensing & Certification

- RFP

CYFD Extending Support for Youth Turning 18 in Foster Care During Pandemic

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SANTA FE — New Mexico's Children, Youth & Families Department is making sure that young people who reach their 18th birthday during the COVID-19 pandemic can continue receiving seamless support from the agency for as long as the public health crisis continues.

"CYFD wants systems impacted older youth to know we are working to make sure they have the supports they need during the COVID crisis and beyond," said Cabinet Secretary Brian Blalock. "During the COVID crisis we are working to make sure no older youth who needs support is 'aged out' or exited from care."

CYFD has reorganized staffing patterns temporarily, making more staff available to contact and provide resources to meet the needs of young people who are nearing their 18th birthday and those who have turned 18. There are several dozen young people who will have "aged out" between February and July 2020, most of whom have accepted housing and financial support from the Department to help them during the pandemic. This support has included continuing to provide financial support to foster and kinship care providers to help support these young people remaining in their homes.

The Department is also reaching out to young people in the state who have "aged out" of care within the past 7 years. CYFD staff have been in touch with "close to 500" young people across the State who were recently in care to check in on their wellbeing and provide supports during the pandemic. Many young people have lost jobs or housing, and CYFD is working to get them critical basic needs such as housing vouchers, food, Medicaid, and financial assistance during this time.

CYFD has also continued to support youth participating in our Independent Living Program. Youth in this program were granted an additional stipend of $175 for the month of April to support needs that may have come up in the crisis.

While pandemic supports for older youth are critical, CYFD is also working to build longer term supports to make sure older youth have what they need in order to make a successful, stable transition to adulthood. In many foster care systems, young people age out at 18. New Mexico however, has been working hard to provide better transition and support services to young people 18-21. CYFD has recently created an Office of Transition Age Youth and has been continuing to plan for implementation of **extended foster care**, which begins July 1, 2020.

"We are here for our young people during this pandemic, and we are making needed changes now to set CYFD's systems up to continue to provide crucial supports that young people have told us they need in order to make a successful, stable transition to adulthood," said Hilari Lipton, the Director of Transition Aged Youth for CYFD.

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