The Texas Foster Youth Health Initiative (TFYHI) builds relationships across child welfare and adolescent health systems to promote optimal health for child welfare-involved youth. This report describes our work and progress of this Initiative from July 2022 to December 2022.

**OUR GOAL:**
Youth in foster care feel connected, safe, and empowered and make informed decisions about their sexual health and relationships.

**WE:**
ARE DESIGNED BY YOUTH FOR YOUTH.
Our Young Adult Consultants will be leading the design of our youth engagement strategies that aim to empower, inform, and support youth in care.

VALUE INDIVIDUALS AND THEIR EXPERIENCES.
Through continuous collaboration and engagement of stakeholders and participants, we are building experiences for youth and their caregivers that inform, support, and strengthen skills.

RECOGNIZE NO ONE LIVES IN A BUBBLE.
We take into account that thoughts and behaviors are shaped by relationships and the environment. Addressing the biases and barriers youth face will happen every step of the way.

ARE THE FIRST STATEWIDE LEARNING COMMUNITY OF OUR KIND IN TEXAS.
We’re not just delivering a sex ed class to youth or a training for caregivers. We are bringing together child welfare professionals and adolescent health leaders to develop sustainable interventions and improve systems.

INCLUDE & SUPPORT CAREGIVERS.
We recognize the critical part adults play in a young person’s life. Our Caregiver Consultants will help us develop tools and resources for adults so they feel comfortable with ongoing conversations about sex and relationships and can support the youth in their care.
Through interviews with child welfare professionals, mentors, and foster caregivers, we learned that adults often fear providing youth with too much—or not enough—information about sexual health. This often leads adults to avoid conversations about sexual health altogether, leaving youth without critical information and guidance. We confirmed a clear need for child welfare organizations to develop policies and practices to support sexuality education and access to sexual and reproductive healthcare for youth.

In October 2022, in partnership with UN|HUSHED, we released a Sample Policy intended to help child welfare agencies develop their own organizational policies around these important topics.
In early 2022, we began developing our THRIVE youth curriculum with input from young adults with lived experience, caregivers, and community stakeholders. We piloted the 10-hour curriculum in spring and summer 2022 and have continued incorporating feedback from youth participants, agency staff, and THRIVE facilitators. We’re striving to make the curriculum more interactive and engaging for youth and find the best format for implementation.

With our child welfare agency partners, we’re exploring different formats for delivering THRIVE. So far, we’ve offered two-day workshops and series of three, five, or 10 sessions. Flexible implementation formats allow agencies to choose the option that will best meet the needs of the youth and families they support.

To date, 141 youth from across Texas have participated in a THRIVE pilot. Participant feedback indicates THRIVE encourages youth to reflect on their relationships and boundaries and supports open conversations between youth and agency staff. Learn more about the curriculum and check out our THRIVE resources for youth!

We are continuously refining our curriculum for youth in care:

**THRIVE**

10 hour curriculum for youth in foster care ages 14-21

We disseminated our findings:

We shared what we’ve learned about bridging the gap between child welfare and sexual health education through presentations at the Healthy Teen Network Conference in Miami, FL, the Texas Child Care Administrators Conference in Round Rock, TX, and the American Public Health Association Annual Meeting in Boston, MA.

We also published a journal article in Prevention Science about shifting the focus of sexuality and relationship education in child welfare toward building skills for ongoing conversations, connection, and consent.

*I didn’t believe I would soak in as much as I did. I know now what signs to look for in a healthy and unhealthy relationship because ultimately I need to take care of myself.*

-Youth THRIVE participant

*For staff, attending the THRIVE program together with youth was a bonding experience. Youth opened up to staff and talked a lot about healthy relationships.*

-Staff at THRIVE host child welfare agency

Photo: Team members Tia Brooks, Sharon Hoefer, and Barbara Ball presented alongside Young Adult Consultant Carlie Patrick (right) at the Healthy Teen Network conference in Miami, FL.
Our next steps:

We will continue to test and refine interventions in spring 2023.

We will explore how to sustain our network and interventions for the future.

We will continue disseminating interventions and lessons learned through conference presentations and trainings. See our website to learn more.

If you have any questions about TFYHI, please contact TFYHI Project Manager, Sharon Hoefer at sharon.hoefer@austin.utexas.edu.

TFYHI BY THE NUMBERS

From July 2022 - December 2022:

- 15 consultants (7 youth) (8 caregivers) advised our work.
- 203 caregivers, mentors, professionals and youth attended a TFYHI Training.
- 212 stakeholders were engaged throughout the state.