



FOR YOUR INFORMATION

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Issue 25-08 (REV)

Date: 05/09/2025

FREE YMCA LOS ANGELES MEMBERSHIPS FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

The purpose of this FYI is to inform staff of the “You Belong” initiative which offers free YMCA Los Angeles memberships for youth in foster care. Youth in foster care, ages 12-26 may now join one of the 27 YMCA locations at no cost. The You Belong: Foster Care Youth Initiative provides comprehensive services designed to assist youth in building stability, skills, and confidence to successfully transition into adulthood. The DCFS press release regarding the You Belong: Foster Care Youth Initiative can be found at: [Free YMCA LA Memberships for Youth in Foster Care | Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services](#).

Program highlights of the You Belong: Foster Care Youth Initiative include the following:

- Stability and Support Services
- Economic Stability and Workforce Development
- Civic Engagement and Leadership Development
- Family Support and Long-Term Stability

Who’s Eligible for Free YMCA Membership?

- LA County DCFS Foster Youth ages 12-21 in out-of-home care
- LA County DCFS Former Foster Youth ages 18-26 who were placed in out-of-home care
- LA County DCFS Resource Parents **ALONG** with their enrolled Foster Youth at either of these locations:
 - Weingart Wellness YMCA and Aquatic Center (South LA)
 - Antelope Valley Family YMCA

What’s included in the Membership?

Access to YMCA amenities, scheduled programs, and youth programs for ages 12–17, such as sports, after-school enrichment activities, Youth Institute, and Youth & Government (Y&G). Free access to swimming lessons or resident camps are also included. Level Up reimbursement is available to reimburse Caregiver or NMD for additional extracurricular/enrichment activity fees not covered by the YMCA. Transportation to the YMCA via STEER may be available for eligible cases; refer to office Education Specialist for details.

How Long is this Membership?

- Valid until foster youth is age 26; ends at age 27.
- Resources Parents membership is only valid while youth is placed in their home.

How to Refer a Youth?



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First Step: When a resource parent or social worker reaches out to refer their young person (**with open case**) ages **12-21**, the first step in the referral process is for the authorized Caregiver (or young adult 18+) to complete both the **Membership Application AND Waiver (linked below)**.

- **Membership Application** (Review & Sign: [English](#) | [Korean](#) | [Spanish](#))
- **Assumption of Risk and Liability Waiver** (Review & Sign: [English](#) | [Spanish](#) | [Korean](#))

NOTE:

- For Payment authorization section, input “DCFS You Belong” and zeros (i.e. 0000) to bypass Payment Authorization Section
- **For Former Youth ages 18-26, go directly to YMCA Branch (within the [28 participating locations](#)) to sign up;** inform staff that you would like to sign up for the free membership through the “You Belong” DCFS and YMCA initiative; they will ask for **your name/case name, date of birth, and contact info**, then email Level Up to confirm DCFS case/placement in out-of-home care. After confirmation, the YMCA will reach out to you to complete the next steps.

Second Step: After submission of application and waiver, authorized Caregiver (or young adult 18+) to send completion email to: fyimembership@ymcala.org

In email, provide the following:

- **Youth’s Full Name & Date of Birth**
- **YMCA Branch name (within the [28 participating locations](#)) they are interested in joining**
- **CC Level Up at:** levelup@dcfs.lacounty.gov

There are a total of 30 locations that are part of You Belong initiative. All 28 of the Metropolitan locations as well as the YMCA of San Gabriel (located in Alhambra) and the Glendale YMCA. Please refer to the following:

[List of Participating YMCA LA Metropolitan Locations](#)

Third step: YMCA Membership acquisition team will enroll the youth, confirming the facility that they will be joining, and send a welcome email with next steps/membership benefits.

To refer youth for a YMCA membership, please contact the Level Up Program at: levelup@dcfs.lacounty.gov.

If you have any questions regarding this release, please email your question to:

Policy@dcfs.lacounty.gov

YOU BELONG

Foster Youth Initiative



The YMCA of Metropolitan Los Angeles, in partnership with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), is implementing a comprehensive, data-driven initiative to transform outcomes for foster youth ages 12-26 across Los Angeles County. Through a network of programs and strategic partnerships, the You Belong: Foster Youth Initiative provides wraparound services designed to help youth build stability, skills, and confidence to transition successfully into adulthood.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Stability & Support Services

- Free Y membership for all foster youth ages 12-26, providing safe spaces and a sense of community
- Dedicated drop-in centers for transitional age youth offering safe spaces with resources, support, and community
- All Y centers serving as family visitation sites, creating warm, welcoming environments for family connections
- Evidence-based resilience programs designed specifically to help youth process trauma and build coping skills
- Wraparound case management from Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs)
- Housing referrals, transportation support, and basic needs assistance through strategic community partnerships
- Digital literacy and technology access to bridge the digital divide

Economic Stability & Workforce Development

- "Pathways to Belonging" - An 8-week intensive curriculum meeting three times weekly for youth ages 18-26
- Focuses on healthy living, civic engagement, character development, economic stability, and education equity
- Individualized support through case management and mentorship
- Hands-on activities in physical fitness, mental health awareness, financial literacy, and leadership
- Paid job training, internships, and placement opportunities with employer partners
- Financial literacy workshops and career exploration activities

Civic Engagement & Leadership Development

- Youth Advisory Boards to elevate foster youth voices in program decision-making
- Voter education and advocacy training to strengthen civic participation
- Community volunteerism opportunities that develop service mindsets while building valuable skills
- Leadership development through Model UN, Model Legislature, and community service projects

Family Support & Long-Term Stability

- Pilot Resource Parent Inclusion Program extending free Y memberships to resource parents in high-need areas:
 - Weingart Wellness YMCA and Aquatic Center (South LA)
 - Antelope Valley Family YMCA
- Comprehensive tracking of household engagement patterns
- Comparative analysis between household-wide access versus youth-only access
- Peer support groups for both youth and resource parents to build community and share experiences
- Evidence-based parenting classes to strengthen family relationships and develop effective parenting skills
- Family respite camps focused on healing, bonding, and community building
- Long-term engagement through monthly check-ins, quarterly workshops, and an annual summit

The Foster Youth Empowerment Initiative is more than a program—it's a movement to reimagine how our communities support foster youth.

By leveraging the Y's extensive network, diverse programming, and experience as the Center for Community Well-Being, the YMCA is uniquely positioned to create lasting change in the lives of foster youth across Los Angeles County.

The YMCA's Unique Role

As a Provider:

- Implementing specialized programming for foster youth
- Offering free access to YMCA facilities and resources
- Leveraging existing YMCA programming to support entire families
- Providing trauma-informed care across all foster youth programs

As a Convener:

- Establishing the Foster Youth Empowerment Advisory Task Force
- Creating a collaborative network of organizations serving foster youth
- Facilitating sharing of best practices among service providers

As a Connector:

- Developing strategic partnerships across various sectors
- Creating a centralized resource hub for foster youth and caregivers
- Connecting youth and families to essential services
- Establishing mentorship programs with community leaders

Expected Outcomes:

- Increased high school graduation rates and college enrollment
- Improved physical and mental health for foster youth and families
- Enhanced civic engagement and leadership skills
- Increased financial literacy and career readiness
- Reduced homelessness rates and risky behaviors among participants
- Data-driven insights from pilot programs to inform future expansion
- Stronger, more resilient family units

JOIN THE MOVEMENT

Every foster youth deserves the opportunity to feel safe, supported, and empowered. The YMCA is committed to walking alongside youth and families as they build lives of stability and purpose. Join us as a partner, funder, or advocate—and help create a future where no young person has to navigate adulthood alone.