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## ARIZONA ED CONNECTIONS

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*Arizona Education Connections* is a newsletter highlighting some of the important work happening in Arizona to improve the education outcomes for foster youth. By fostering connections between practitioners, policy makers and community organizations, we hope to strengthen statewide efforts on behalf of these children. For more information or to contribute content to future communications, please contact Taylor Chambers at [tchambers@youthlaw.org](mailto:tchambers@youthlaw.org).



*Your FosterEd Arizona Team*

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## FosterEd Arizona Launches in Maricopa County

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FosterEd is now serving youth in Maricopa County! On August 21, 2017, FosterEd Arizona opened its Phoenix Office and welcomed seven new Education Liaisons to the team. Our entire staff spent the week together learning from one another and our partner organizations in preparation for working with young people in the field. That work began on

August 28th, when Education Liaisons reported for their first day in their co-located offices. We have five, soon to be six, liaisons serving students in foster care in Maricopa County. Three liaisons are co-located in Department of Child Safety (DCS) offices and two liaisons cover three high schools within the Phoenix Union High School District: Fairfax, Chavez, and Maryvale. We also continue to serve students in Pima County and welcomed two new Education Liaisons to the Pima County Team.

FosterEd liaisons co-located in DCS offices partner with the youth's DCS Specialist to resolve emergent issues that could lead to disengagement with school if not addressed promptly. For example, on her first day in the field, one Education Liaison helped a youth experiencing a change in foster placement remain in her school of origin. FosterEd liaisons co-located in high schools partner with school staff to provide long-term support to youth with higher needs to ensure they graduate from high school with a wide range of possibilities for their futures. During week one at a Phoenix Union high school, one of our liaisons was able to connect with a young man worried about graduating and getting into college because he is credit deficient. FosterEd will work with both of these young people to identify an education champion, bring together an education team, and create an education plan to help the young person achieve their goals.

FosterEd's launch in Maricopa County is the first step toward statewide expansion. It is supported, in part, by the Foster Youth Education Success Fund, established by the State Legislature in 2016 via passage of House Bill 2665. The expansion is the culmination of many months of planning and preparation by members of FosterEd's Maricopa Leadership Team. Members include representatives from: DCS, Phoenix Union High School District, Casey Family Programs, Children's Action Alliance, Arizona Children's Association, Arizona Charter Schools Association, Mercy Maricopa, the Maricopa County Juvenile Court, Greater Phoenix Educational Management Council, ASU Preparatory Academy, Maricopa County Education Service Agency, and the Bridging Success Programs at ASU and Maricopa Community Colleges. We are so grateful to the leadership team and all of our community partners for the warm welcome we have received in Maricopa County and look forward to collaborating together to improve educational outcomes for our students in foster care.

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## **New Arizona Staff Learn From Partners**

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A multi-agency panel discussion was the culminating event of a successful week of onboarding for FosterEd Arizona's new Education Liaisons. The discussion highlighted the collaboration of multiple agencies with the shared goal of maximizing efforts for children in foster care. This multi-agency team believes that all students in the state's care can be successful, no exceptions. Panel members included: Greater Phoenix Educational Management Council, Phoenix Union High School District, Maricopa County Education Service Agency, Department of Child Safety, Children's Action Alliance, Mercy Maricopa, and Arizona Children's Association.

The Education Liaisons from FosterEd Arizona were reminded they don't need to "reinvent the wheel". There are many agencies working together to help children in foster care. With so many valuable partners at the table we cannot begin our work with a deficit mindset looking instead to build on the many assets already in place. Using these resources is key in breaking cycles, bringing down barriers, and creating solutions that will empower these children to be our future leaders.

The panel provided a powerful reminder of the importance of taking the time to really know these children and to acknowledge the positive attributes and assets they possess. They are problem solvers, creative, resourceful and more. When working with youth in foster care, we must remember to value their voice and learn from them, because they are the most knowledgeable expert on themselves.

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#### FosterEd Arizona Education Liaisons and Sites

Partnering with Phoenix Union

Ashely Dickerson- Maryvale HS

Jaron Neal- Betty Fairfax HS and Cesar Chavez HS

Partnering with Tucson Unified School District

Jennifer Harris- Palo Verde HS

Shane Carr- Catalina Magnet HS

Partnering with Arizona Department of Child Safety

Jennie Hedges- Pima County

Julee Aros-Thornton- Pima County

Jessica Montoya- Maricopa County

Sandra Ortega- Maricopa County

Victoria Gonzales- Maricopa County

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## FosterEd Volunteers Can Change Lives

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FosterEd Volunteers fill a variety of roles that support our students in their self-identified goals. Some volunteers meet with students to talk through their issues at school, or help with homework. Other times, a volunteer, a stranger with a big heart and some spare time, makes the difference in a student's future by becoming a determined member of their Educational Team as an Education Champion.

When Catelin\* was in training to be a FosterEd Education Champion, she mentioned helping her granddaughter get through the difficult process of applying to college. The timing was right: there was a FosterEd student, Andy\*, who was about to embark on this challenge and needed the support of an Education Champion.

Catelin and Andy worked together for more than a year. Caitlin, along with Andy's education team: his foster mom, FosterEd Education Liaison, and Department of Child Safety Specialist, supported and empowered Andy as he decided what he wanted to study, what school he would attend and filled out all of the required application forms. His education team was there for Andy when he struggled to find scholarships, had second thoughts about attending college, achieved great SAT scores, and graduated from high school. We won't say this year-long commitment didn't come with its frustrations, but it's hard to argue that it wasn't worth it. This August, Andy entered as a freshman at the

University of Arizona and we found Catelin eager to help another foster youth achieve their education goals.

For more information on volunteering with FosterEd, email [alarson@youthlaw.org](mailto:alarson@youthlaw.org).

*\*Names changed*

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## **Interview with Christy Wagner, Director of Student Centered Engagement FosterEd Arizona**

### **Please tell us about your background.**

I have worked in the education field for more than twenty-five years. My previous experience in education involves working with pre K-12 students in the areas of early childhood, special education, gifted education, and with English language learners. I also have expertise in postsecondary education working with graduate students and training teachers at a number of universities.

Outside of work, I enjoy the outdoors of my native state, Arizona. I have been married for more than twenty years and have three children.

### **What brought you here to FosterEd?**

While teaching, I would often come across children in the state's care. I was amazed at their resiliency, work ethic, and drive to improve. I saw the impact that a stable environment had on their education. This experience is what motivated me to work towards education and systems change for children in care.

### **What are you most excited about when it comes to being part of FosterEd?**

I am most excited to help youth in foster care by offering guidance and opening access to a wide array of possibilities for their future. I strongly believe that all students, especially children in the state's care, deserve opportunities for educational success. It is important to me as a member of the FosterEd Arizona community that we can ensure these successes.

### **Why is this work important to you?**

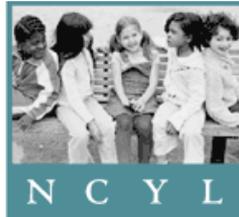
As a licensed foster care provider and adoptive parent, I am passionate about advocating for youth in foster

care. I want to ensure that all students in the state's care have the educational opportunities that all students deserve.

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*Arizona Education Connections* is a publication of FosterEd Arizona. For more information about FosterEd visit [foster-ed.org](http://foster-ed.org).

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