

# Los Angeles Times | LOCAL

LOCAL U.S. WORLD BUSINESS SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT HEALTH LIVING TRAVEL OPINION MORE

L.A. NOW POLITICS CRIME EDUCATION O.C. WESTSIDE NEIGHBORHOODS ENVIRONMENT OBITUARIES HOT LIST

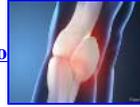
IN THE NEWS: GRADING THE TEACHERS | MCCOURT DIVORCE | BOX OFFICE | GLENN BECK | MANNY RAMIREZ | EMMYS



[The Asian secret to strong, lush hair](#)



[Why 2010 may be the best time to go to college](#)



[Breakthrough discovery for joint relief](#)

## Students raised in foster care to get priority housing at California universities

Experts say stable residency is crucial for students just out of foster care, who may have nowhere to go during school vacations. A new law requires public colleges to accommodate them year-round.

### Los Angeles Teacher Ratings »

Find a teacher:

Find a school:



Daysi Espinoza, a former foster child who is attending Cal State Fullerton, in her dorm room. (Robert Lachman / Los Angeles Times)

advertisement

883

121 tweets

[Share](#)

[retweet](#)

By Larry Gordon, Los Angeles Times

August 2, 2010

[E-mail](#) [Print](#) [Share](#) [Text Size](#)

[Like](#)

883 people like this. Be the first of your friends.



#### RELATED



[Former foster students](#)

ADS BY GOOGLE

**Best College Towns**  
Discover America's Top 13 College Towns to Visit w/Bing Travel Images  
[www.bing.com/Travel](http://www.bing.com/Travel)

**Become a Foster Parent**  
We'll give you the tools If you'll give them your heart!  
[www.nationalcounselinggroup.com](http://www.nationalcounselinggroup.com)

It can be lonely spending the summer in a mainly vacant college dormitory. But it's a worthwhile tradeoff for Daysi Espinoza, who's grateful to have a room at Cal State Fullerton to call home.

For Espinoza and hundreds of other former foster youths attending California's public universities, dorm rooms provide a much-needed stable residence. While classmates can retreat to childhood bedrooms and their families' embrace, these students are often on their own and want to stay in their dorms during vacations.

"It's definitely important," said Espinoza, 19, who lived in foster homes through most of middle school and high school. "Personally, having guaranteed housing has helped me so much."

State universities are paying much more attention these days to the academic, financial and housing needs of the relatively small group of former foster youths who are enrolled there. About 700 are enrolled at UC campuses and 1,200 in the Cal State system, plus several thousand at community colleges who might transfer to those four-year schools, estimates show.

---

[Get breaking news alerts delivered to your mobile phone. Text BREAKING to 52669.](#)

---

More schools are allowing — and paying for — those students to live on campus year-round. A recently enacted state law, which is expected to have a major effect in the fall, requires that all Cal State and University of California schools give former foster youth priority for campus housing, even if dorm space is limited. Universities also must work toward providing housing without vacation interruptions.

The law aims to avert homelessness and couch-surfing among students who are emancipated from the system at 18 and no longer eligible to live in state-supported foster homes. While some former foster children can stay with relatives and friends during college vacations, "the vast majority of our youth have nowhere else to go," said Jenny Vinopal, who runs programs for former foster youths in the Cal State system and is an official with California College Pathways, an organization that seeks to boost college attendance among foster youth statewide.

The prospect of guaranteed housing will send an encouraging message to younger foster teens that "if I work hard in high school, I can get my college education and have a place to live," she said.

Some government-supported transitional housing is available for former foster children. But young people can only stay in those homes for two years and the locations are not always conducive to college life. Some private foundations and charities, including the YWCA in Santa Monica, provide housing for such students, but space is limited.

"The fact is that foster youth are, in effect, children of the state and we are not good parents once they are 18," said Assemblywoman Nancy Skinner (D-Berkeley), who wrote the university housing law.

The track record of foster teenagers in higher education is grim. Only about 10% attend college and less than 3% earn a bachelor's degree, according to state statistics. Even though financial aid is available to cover their college expenses, many have erratic high school educations from being moved frequently among foster homes and can't meet four-year university requirements.

They can more easily enroll at two-year colleges, where they would also get housing priority under the new law. But only 11 of the state's 112 community colleges offer campus housing, and those schools are outside of big cities, officials report.

Cal State Fullerton, Cal Poly Pomona, [UCLA](#) and UC San Diego are among several university campuses that already offer uninterrupted housing to students who were in foster care. Those accommodations sometimes came in response to lobbying from campus groups, known as Guardian or Renaissance Scholars, that were formed to help foster students graduate.

UCLA junior Renee Tate recalled her panic in freshman year when she realized she might not have anywhere to live during winter break. An orphan, she did not feel she could return to Palmdale where she had lived in foster placement under the supervision of an older sister. UCLA officials put her in contact with the Bruin Guardian Scholars and allowed her to stay in the dorms year-round.

Tate, a 20-year-old sociology major, said living on campus during vacations can be "so quiet that it sometimes creeped me out." But, she said, she's delighted to have the stability. "For right now, this is it, this is home" said Tate, who works on campus and takes summer classes.

Ex-foster students at all UC campuses will get housing priority starting this fall, according to Judy K. Sakaki, the UC system's vice president for student affairs. It may entail moving students to a single hall during vacations for efficiency and safety, or making different arrangements for meals. "This is a population that deserves our attention," Sakaki said. "They are just fantastic students who have overcome incredible odds."

At Cal State Fullerton, which has a housing shortage during the regular school year, Espinoza and a roommate are the only occupants this summer in a comfortable four-person suite with a kitchen and a view of the campus arboretum. She has a few suitcases of clothes, some books and posters, a bedside Bible and a laptop. "I don't buy a lot of things since you don't know where you are going to move to," she said.

When Espinoza was 10, she left her native El Salvador for California with her father, an American citizen. After about three years, she was placed in foster care. She lived in Arleta, her third placement, during high school and graduated with good grades. She'll soon start her sophomore year; most of her university costs are covered by financial aid and extra help from the Guardian Scholars.

A double-major in Radio-TV-Film and Spanish, Espinoza works in the housing office, takes world

history classes this summer and dances with a salsa group. Her dorm room "just makes life a lot easier. Everything is so convenient," said Espinoza, a U.S. citizen who hopes for a career in Spanish-language media and dreams of one day bringing her mother to America.

[larry.gordon@latimes.com](mailto:larry.gordon@latimes.com)

Copyright © 2010, Los Angeles Times

ADS BY GOOGLE

**Best College Towns**

Discover America's Top 13 College Towns to Visit w/Bing Travel Images  
[www.bing.com/Travel](http://www.bing.com/Travel)

**Become a Foster Parent**

We'll give you the tools If you'll give them your heart!  
[www.nationalcounselinggroup.com](http://www.nationalcounselinggroup.com)

RELATED STORIES

POWERED BY 

*From the L.A. Times*

- Keeping parents' 'helicopters' grounded during college
- UC, CSU, community college chiefs plead for quick budget passage
- Community colleges cancel deal with online Kaplan University

*From KTLA*

- 21 LAUSD Schools Get an 'Early Start' | [ktla.com](http://ktla.com)

 E-mail  Print  Digg  Twitter  Facebook  Read This Later  Share

Comments (60)

[Add / View comments](#) | [Discussion FAQ](#)

**jrbrosrock** at 7:39 AM August 09, 2010

WOW .. the ignorance of some of the posters here is incomprehensible! If you have never walked even one foot in the life of a foster child you have NO business judging them. These kids did not ask to be born into this world or placed in the system. I do know from experience all they ask for is a "forever" home...in other words, they are wanting parents who will love them and nurture them. I know this because my husband and I adopted 3 girls, biological sisters (10, 4, 2 at the time). The oldest one after 3 days in our home said, "Maybe God didn't let you have kids because He knew we were coming". Give these kids a chance, they ARE the future of our Country.

**andrewggr** at 4:44 PM August 06, 2010

Here's hoping a 2x4 meets every racist, bigoted, self-centered poster on the head with the swiftness.

**WinstonCourt** at 3:31 PM August 06, 2010

Oh, why would we ever think it is an anchor baby getting this form of welfare? ROFLOL

*Comments are filtered for language and registration is required. The Times makes no guarantee of comments' factual accuracy. Readers may report inappropriate comments by clicking the Report Abuse link. Here are the full legal terms you agree to by using this comment form.*