

FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

A path to independence

for San Francisco's foster youth 18+



Launchp^ds

Help youth successfully
transition from foster care
to adulthood.

Launchpads is a program of **Freedom Forward**, with funding from **The Tipping Point Community** and the support of **San Francisco Family and Children's Services**.



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What is Launchpads?

Participants have access to...



Vetted places to live with compatible hosts



Monthly subsidy from San Francisco County.



Additional funds for move-in costs and more



A social worker who checks in monthly



Conflict mediation and problem solving



A community of hosts, youth, and service providers



Getting started

What is Launchpads?

Launchpads connects San Francisco youth in extended foster care to hosts in the Bay Area. The hosts are willing to rent out space in their homes (usually a private bedroom, but it could be an entire unit) for below market value. We do this with an app where youth and hosts both create a profile. Hosts' profiles include information on the homes they're renting, and youth can look at the available homes. Launchpads is a project of Freedom Forward, a nonprofit that serves youth in San Francisco.

Launchpads makes it easier for social workers to help youth find housing that's safe, appropriate, and affordable. We find the people interested in hosting, do a thorough background check (using Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Checkr checks) and offer a six-hour training to prepare the hosts. We are also available for some support after move-in.

Which youth are eligible?

Youth in extended foster care who have had a SILP assessment, who are able to live with a high degree of independence, or who are recommended by their social worker. They must be approved by their social worker to participate. Because our program offers less support than

other placement options, Launchpads may be a good fit for young people who are fairly autonomous. We cannot currently support youth with an active substance abuse disorder or a history of violence, sexual predation, or child or elder abuse. We do not discriminate based on race, ethnicity, national origin, legal status, language, color, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

Who are the hosts?

In general, hosts are adults who want to support young people in their community. They come from a wide range of backgrounds and life experiences. Many have some experience related to the foster care system, including having been former foster parents, adopted out of the foster care system, been Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), or had relatives who were in foster care. To date, many people who have expressed interest in Launchpads have adult children who are away at college or living on their own.

How does someone become a host?

We advertise for hosts all over the Bay Area, and staff at Launchpads screen and approve all hosts before they can show up on the Launchpads app. To become an approved host, they have to:

- Complete a host application
- Complete a Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation background check
- Complete an online background search by a private company called Checkr.
- Provide two personal references

- Complete a thirty-minute interview
- Complete a six-hour training

Potential hosts are automatically excluded from participating if any background check finds:

- Any history of criminal child or elder abuse
- Any history of violent crime
- Any history of domestic violence

The app

Getting set up on the Launchpads app

Because Launchpads is an online platform, it's important for all users to set up accounts. If you are a social worker, this process should only take a few minutes.

First, go to <https://app.wearelaunchpads.org/>. Type in your work email and create a password. Then, once you are logged into the app, find the scroll-down menu to select your role (host, youth or social worker). Choose "social worker." You're done! It may take a few days for your account to go live because we need to approve your account before it will have full functionality.

Inviting youth to check out the Launchpads app

Once you are signed up, you can tell young people about the program, and they can create their own profiles on our platform. The process of creating a youth profile takes more time than creating a social worker profile, but it is still designed to be a simple process. Creating a youth profile requires that youth write a short bio about themselves, describe what they are looking for, and answer some basic demographic questions. They can then look at available homes, and if there are ones that they are interested in, they can message the hosts through the app.

Approving youth on the Launchpads app

Once youth sign up on the Launchpads app, it is their social worker's responsibility to approve them. Otherwise, the app will not let them message hosts. You will get an email notification that states that a youth from your caseload has signed up on the Launchpads app.

Approving youth requires a few steps on the app. If they have already completed their SILP readiness assessment and been deemed SILP-ready, and if you think they would be a good candidate for Launchpads, they will automatically be approved. If not, we'll ask a series of questions taken from the SILP assessment and follow up with you.

Our goal is to ensure that the candidates you refer will thrive in Launchpads, which offers more limited support services than are available in THP programs or some other housing options.

Launchpads matching and moving in

Matching process

The matching process is driven by the youth. Hosts cannot see which youth have profiles on the app. When a youth is interested in a home, they reach out to the host themselves to express interest. The online platform is a good place for youth to ask the host questions and to schedule a more in-depth conversation, similar to a conversation prospective roommates might have.

If the youth wants to move forward, they should contact their social worker to help set up an interview meeting with the host, and we ask that youth, host, and social worker all be present for that meeting (more on this below). Youth may also invite a Launchpads staff member to attend for additional support.

After the meeting, the youth and host are asked to wait 24 hours before deciding if they'd like the youth to move in. If both agree to move forward, the youth will sign a program agreement with Launchpads (which the social worker will also sign), and both the youth and the host will sign the shared living agreement, customized to the expectations of this home.

Role of the social worker

There are three primary functions of a social worker within Launchpads.

- 1) Referring youth and approving youth who sign up for the app
- 2) Supporting youth in the interview process
- 3) Completing a home inspection and shared living agreement

We discussed the referral and approval process above.

Supporting youth in the interview process

Typically, when a young person lives in a SILP, they have found and vetted their own housing. In Launchpads, we have found and vetted the host for them. But of course, both the youth and the host need to agree to live together. While youth have the power to reach out to hosts, the two parties can only agree to live together after a process in which both have a chance to ask one another questions. This process is in place to ensure that both parties feel like they can live together compatibly.

In the short term, we are asking you as a social worker to help arrange and participate in that process. Young people can add their social worker to conversations with hosts when they are ready to set up an interview with a host. The interview can occur over the phone or in person and should be scheduled ahead of time. Your role there is primarily to make the youth more comfortable. In addition, we hope you will answer any questions the host has about payment and your role as a social worker.

Home inspection and shared living agreement

As is the case with all SILP placements, you will support the home inspection and approval process (Forms SOC157A & SOC157B) and the creation of the shared living agreement (Form 1827).

Rules and expectations

For youth

In most cases, hosts are able to set their own rules based on what they believe will work best in their home. However, there are some rules we've put in place for all youth in Launchpads homes. We've listed these below. It will be valuable to discuss these rules, as well as rules that apply to specific households, with any nonminor dependents you refer to Launchpads.

Drugs and alcohol

Youth may not possess or consume illegal drugs while in a Launchpads home. In addition, if youth are under the age of 21, they may not possess or consume alcohol. If youth are over 21, we ask that they drink responsibly.

Use of products that cause house fires

Youth may not use candles, smoke, or burn incense in Launchpads homes.

Physical aggression

Physical aggression is strictly prohibited.

Weapons

No weapons are allowed in the home at any time.

Property destruction

It is important that youth leave the host's home in the same condition as when they moved in. If they do not, this may impact the return of their security deposit. (More details on the security deposit below.)

Verbal/written abuse

Verbal or written abuse, racial slurs, and physical violence or threats are unacceptable.

Romantic relationships

We encourage youth to engage in healthy romantic relationships, but not with their host.

Cleanliness

We ask youth to clean up after themselves and to talk with their host about how they want youth to help keep shared spaces clean and tidy.

Kindness

Kindness goes a long way in making things work! We ask that all program participants do their best to treat one another with kindness and respect.

For hosts

We also have expectations for hosts participating in Launchpads. Hosts must:

- Provide a welcoming, non-judgmental space that includes a private bedroom and access to the kitchen and

bathroom;

- Have homeowners' or rental insurance;
- Have written permission to sublet part of the space, if they are a renter;
- Complete the vetting process;
- Allow a social worker access to their home (typically once a month or less);
- Attend a six-hour Launchpads training; and
- Abide by the agreements they make with the youth.

And finally, we ask that hosts abide by the same rules we ask the youth to abide by:

Drugs and alcohol

Hosts may not possess or consume illegal drugs while hosting a Launchpads youth.

Physical aggression

Physical aggression is strictly prohibited.

Romantic relationships

Hosts may not in any way have a romantic relationship with youth while the youth are living in a Launchpads home as a Launchpads participant.

Verbal/written abuse

Verbal or written abuse, racial slurs, and physical violence or threats are unacceptable.

Kindness

Hosts must do their best to treat youth and social workers with kindness and respect.

Support for youth

As previously stated, our program has more limited support than some other placement options. However, we do have several support services available. We also know that you will continue to play your regular supportive role as the youth's social worker.

Orientation

We provide youth a ~1.5-hour orientation that includes information about Launchpads and the other resources Freedom Forward offers. We are aiming to keep this as short as possible.

Facilitated conversation and problem solving

We have partnered with a mediation group, Community Boards, to have ongoing facilitated conversations between hosts and the youth living with them. Within the first month after the youth moves in, a trained facilitator will contact the youth and host to set up a one-hour meeting. The goal is to make sure problems are dealt with as proactively as possible.

HYPE Center

Freedom Forward, the organization that runs Launchpads, has another program that offers many services for youth: the HYPE Center ("Helping Young People Elevate"). The HYPE center is a youth drop-in center for youth approximately 14-25, co-designed with a group of young people from the Bay Area. The center provides a variety of co-lo-

cated services, and youth have the opportunity to decide which services they believe would be helpful. Some of these services include:

- Therapy and mental health services provided by West Coast Children’s Clinic
- Peer advocacy provided by SPARK Youth Peer Advocates
- Education support through Five Keys
- Legal workshops provided by Justice at Last
- Financial literacy classes provided by the International Rescue Committee
- Care packages and access to funds to further their goals

Feel free to direct any youth on your caseload to the HYPE Center website (<https://www.hypecentersf.com/>).

Fun Fund

Launchpads has a small fund available to youth to help build their relationships with hosts. This fund allows youth to take their host out for a meal, a movie, or other fun activity. Youth can ask Freedom Forward for the \$150 allocated for this purpose.

Security deposit support

All rentals through Launchpads require a \$1200 security deposit. However, we recognize that many young people struggle to pay the upfront costs of a new rental. Because of this, Freedom Forward will pay \$1000 of the \$1200 deposit, and we ask that youth pay the other \$200. (They may talk to you about this if they do not have \$200.). If the youth lives in the home for six months or longer and leaves the home in the same condition as when they moved in, they will get to keep the entire \$1200 that is returned when they move out.

Moving out

Planned end of agreement

When the youth moves in, the host and youth will decide the duration of the living arrangement (e.g., a one-year rental). This timeframe should be spelled out in the shared living agreement that you will help them create. As the end of that time nears, youth will likely need your help planning their next steps and next living arrangement. In addition, we would love your support reminding youth of the things they’ll need to do to leave their former room in great shape; the Launchpads youth handbook includes a checklist!

Unexpected or unplanned moving out

We certainly hope that all matches will be successful, and that any challenges can be resolved with the help of the social worker, Launchpads, and Community Boards. But ultimately, youth and hosts may not get along. The youth may end the agreement at any time by providing written notice to Launchpads and hosts. If at all possible, we ask that they give one month’s notice. If a host wants to end a Launchpads match and have the youth move out early, that is possible too. By law, the youth is considered a lodger if they are living in the home along with the host. This means hosts are required to give the youth a 30-day notice to move out if they have lived there for less than a year, and 60 days if they have lived there over a year.

Return of security deposit

As described above, Freedom Forward will pay \$1000 of the \$1200 security deposit, and we ask that the youth pay \$200. If the youth lives in the home for six months or longer and leaves the home in the same condition they found it in, the host will give the entire \$1200 to the youth when they move out.

Other rights and obligations

Right to confidentiality and privacy

Launchpads will not share information about any youth without the youth's express permission. If the youth feels it would be helpful for their social worker to speak on their behalf to a host or anyone at Launchpads, they can sign a waiver allowing you to speak to others on their behalf.

Relevant documents

We have included relevant forms and documents along with this handbook. These include Forms SOC157A, SOC157B, SOC157C, and 1827, as well as the Launchpads youth program agreement. This sample agreement can be modified to reflect the agreements made between

hosts and youth. Both the youth and their social worker will sign this agreement when a youth is ready to move into a Launchpads home.

Do you have any questions about Launchpads? Or suggestions to improve our program? We want to hear from you! Please feel free to reach out anytime. You can email Monica@freedom-forward.org. We look forward to supporting young people in finding safe and comfortable homes!

1 in 4 youth exiting foster care experience homelessness within 2 years.

We are looking for hosts and others to join our community.
Learn more at wearelaunchpads.org.



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