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## Transitional home for foster kids ready

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By Nancy Martinez - Express-News [RSS](#) | [EMAIL](#) | [PRINT](#) | [SAVE](#)

Ryan Lawson, Armando Mendez and Matt Lozano grew up in the Texas foster care system because of abuse or neglect. Because they weren't adopted, they aged out when they turned 18.

They each say they would be living on the streets today if it weren't for St. Jude's Ranch for Children's transitional living program.

Friday, the teens saw the place they will soon call their own — St. Jude's new transitional home, funded last year by an Impact San Antonio Foundation \$100,000 grant.

Together, the trio rushed around the new, furnished home, checking out the rooms, backyard and common areas. "We love it," said Lawson, 19.

The 3,400-square-foot, two-story house near SeaWorld is now complete, and residents will move in soon. It will have room for 12 people, ages 16 to 21, to live and learn life skills to transition into the community.

"It feels normal — sort of," Mendez, 18, said through a wide smile.

The unmet need for transitional housing is one that local social workers know too well. In 2007, more than 1,400 Texas children aged out of the foster care system.

At Roy Maas Youth Alternative's Turning Point, a transitional living program, senior program director Rebecca Durand said 13 of their 14 beds for foster children who aged out of the system are taken. She knows a waiting list will form when students graduate from school in May.

Gary Urdiales, supervisor of community programs for Casey Family Programs, said he often meets children who have nowhere to go when they turn 18.

"Housing for former foster children is a definite need. San Antonio is under-resourced," Urdiales said. "Many of these children couch surf with friends."

St. Jude's Home is one more place where Urdiales can refer former foster children who feel like they are in a hopeless situation.

Also this week, there's more hope for children who often fall through the cracks. The Texas Senate approved a bill by Sen. Jane Nelson, R-Flower Mound, to improve outcomes for abused and neglected children and to provide better support for young adults aging out of the foster system.



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Armando Mendez, 18 (from left), and Ryan Lawson, 19, look around with Gilma Dominguez of St. Jude's Bulverde, and Theo Alexander, transitional program manager.

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