



## **Title IV-E Scholars Program Frequently Asked Questions**

**A Collaboration of the University Alliance, the Louisiana Child Welfare Training Academy,  
and the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services**

### **What is the Title IV-E Grant?**

The Federal Government provides funding through Title IV-E (pronounced "4 E") of the Social Security Act specifically for preparing and training child welfare professionals. These dollars are provided as an entitlement grant that is given to each state child welfare system. The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in Louisiana provides Title IV-E funding to the Louisiana University Workforce Alliance (called the University Alliance or UA) to provide stipends for students who wish to have a career in child welfare.

### **Where can I get the funding?**

Students across the state can attend one of seven public universities comprising the UA: Grambling State University, Louisiana State University, Northwestern State University, Southeastern Louisiana University, Southern University and A&M College (Baton Rouge), Southern University at New Orleans, and the University of Louisiana at Monroe. These universities each have a Title IV-E program through each social work department. They award stipends based on specific selection criteria.

### **How much is the stipend?**

Bachelor level students can receive \$7,500 and master level students can receive \$9,500.

### **What are scholars?**

Students who qualify and are selected to receive support and funding are termed "scholars". Child welfare scholars are those who practice with the intent of providing the most current evidence-based practice. These are individuals who believe that a lifelong pursuit of evidence-informed practice and ongoing evaluation is key to high level child welfare practice. The stipend is used as a monetary incentive for those who wish to work in child welfare. We award stipends to those we believe fit the role of "scholar".



### **How do I qualify for a stipend?**

Each university has slightly different requirements to be chosen as a scholar. Students must meet minimum GPA requirements at each university and be able to pass a background test and drug screen (completed prior to the internship beginning). Most require students to take child welfare elective courses. Students must commit to completing their field practicum/internship with the Department of Children and Family Services. Scholars are provided mentoring and ongoing support through the entire process.

### **How and when do I apply for a scholar position?**

Each university typically accepts applications in the Spring semester for the following academic year. Some universities accept applications during the fall semester for the spring and summer sessions. Interested individuals can contact the coordinator at each respective university for more information.

### **How are scholars selected?**

After receiving applications, coordinators will screen candidates to make sure they meet minimum GPA requirements and review any disclosures listed on the application. Once screened, students who meet minimum requirements must go through a Structured Interview Process. This is conducted by University and DCFS individuals. This interview includes a formal set of questions asked of all potential scholars as well as completion of a written assessment of skills. Interviews are scored by each interviewer with a minimum score required to be accepted. The minimum passing score is an 85 out of 100.

### **How do I find out if I am selected?**

Scholars who score high enough on the Structured Interview will be notified of acceptance by their university coordinator. This can take up to a few weeks after the interview for schools to make decision based on how many students apply and how long it takes to receive and compare scores.

### **I am selected, does that mean I am guaranteed a spot?**

No. Scholars who are offered a spot must complete several forms. Scholars must fill out a Physical Requirements and Conditions for Child Welfare Specialists form. This requires scholars to meet minimum physical, mental, emotional, and psychological requirements. Because DCFS workers work with vulnerable children and families, they are held to a higher standard. Individuals must be able to perform the tasks an entry level child welfare professional will be required to do; drive, lift up to 35 lbs., climb stairs, etc. Scholars must also be able to work in difficult situations with individuals who need empathy and boundary setting.

### **What if I have a record, can I still work for DCFS?**

Yes and no. Scholars must complete a drug screening and background check prior to beginning the internship. Those with criminal records should disclose any police involvement to the coordinator to discuss if it is possible to work for DCFS. Those with 3 or more speeding tickets will not be cleared for work with DCFS. Any crime such as certain drug convictions and harm to vulnerable populations, especially children, are automatic disqualifications.

### **Where do I complete my drug screening and background check?**

Students will complete the drug screening and background check with the local DCFS office. Human resource staff or the chosen supervisor will set up a time with the scholar to complete the screens prior to beginning the placement. No scholars can begin their internship hours until the screening results are received and reviewed by DCFS HR.

### **Are there other requirements to receiving the stipend?**

Yes. In order to receive the stipend, scholars sign a contract committing to working for DCFS for at least one year after graduation. This is a legally binding contract that students should read prior to signing.

### **Am I guaranteed a job with DCFS in the contract?**

No. Scholars who successfully complete their internship with DCFS and perform well are likely to be hired by DCFS. Most of our scholars are hired. Some do not perform well in the internship. In this case, scholars who do not do well are required to pay back the stipend. Others choose not to work for DCFS. A very small number are not hired for other reasons such as: receiving too many speeding tickets during the internship, legal involvement once the internship has begun, or a lack of open positions.

### **Can I elect to end the contract?**

Yes. Students have one option to get out of the contract. Students who complete the internship successfully and decide that they do not want to move forward in child welfare can pay back the stipend. Stipends are paid directly to DCFS as federal rules require that money to be recouped by the state agency.

### **Can DCFS end the contract?**

Yes. For those who successfully complete the internship, DCFS will attempt to hire them into a position. Individuals must complete a Louisiana Civil Service application prior to apply for any position. Should DCFS not have enough positions for scholars across the state, scholars are released from the one-year requirement without having to pay back the stipend. For those who do not successfully complete the internship, they are required to pay back the stipend and will not be hired by DCFS.

### **What does “successfully completing the internship mean”?**



Successful completion means that scholars finish all internship hours and receive a positive evaluation from their supervisor. This is contingent upon students performing in a professional and engaged manner. This includes showing up on time for agreed upon internship hours, performing tasks and duties as assigned by the instructor and/or coordinator, completion of evaluation documents, completion of licensure application, and ensuring all appropriate documents are provided to DCFS and the Louisiana State Board of Social Work Examiners (LABSWE). These documents include transcripts (sent to both HR and the LABSWE), LABSWE background check forms, final evaluation forms, and digital surveys. Scholars who do not meet professional expectations can be dismissed from the program prior to completion and are required to pay back the stipend. This can be due to performance issues or legal reasons.

### **What if I do not interview well?**

Each university will prepare scholars for this process and provide them with resources to succeed. Depending on the parish, scholars will complete another structured interview or an abbreviated interview after graduation with offices looking to hire them. Scholars who interview but are not hired due to performance in the internship or during the interview are required to pay back the stipend. Scholars are expected to put their best foot forward in the interview. This is considered the final evaluation of the scholar. Individuals wishing to “throw” the interview by underperforming are essentially failing their final evaluation and will have to pay back the stipend.

### **Do I have to pay the stipend back all at once?**

No. It is ideal for individuals who choose not to honor their contract, or underperform, to pay the stipend back all at one time. For those who cannot pay it back in full at one time, they can elect to complete a payment agreement with DCFS which must be completed in 24 months after notice of repayment.

### **How long does DCFS have to hire me before I am released from my contract?**

DCFS has 60 days from the effective date of the scholar receiving their license from the Board of Social Work to hire them. Scholars are required to complete their licensure application to the Board of Social Work prior to graduation. This process, including receiving back the federal background check, can take some time. Scholars are told when to apply during the semester they expect to graduate; typically, in October, March, or June. The required 60 day hiring period does not begin until a license is issued by the Board as social workers must be licensed to work for DCFS with a minimum Registered Social Worker (RSW) license (pursuant Civil Service rules). MSW students can be given a provisional CSW license prior to passing the LMSW license exam by the board of social work, however, they can apply the RSW license as that is the minimum for DCFS.

### **What positions or programs can I be hired for with DCFS?**

Scholars can be hired in any position with DCFS for which they meet the minimum requirements. This is determined by need and the decision is made by managers. Scholars have been traditionally hired by Family Services (FS) and Foster Care (FC). However, they can be hired by Home Development (HD), Child Protective Services (CPS), and State Office. This is the same for the internship, however most are placed in FS or FC. Scholars may also be transferred at any time in the first year to other programs. Many scholars are hired by the parish where they complete their internship, however this is informed by several factors: availability of positions, performance in the internship and interview process, and the needs of DCFS in terms of staffing.

### **Am I guaranteed a geographical limit of travel for a position?**

No. The contract does not specify how far a scholar may have to move or travel for work. Scholars are given the options to name their top three choices and hiring staff try their best to accommodate those choices. Scholars can be offered a position in any parish in Louisiana regardless of how far it is from their location at the time of offering the position. Scholars who do not want to move or travel long distances for employment can buy out of the contract. It is important that, prior to accepting the stipend, that scholars understand this possibility. Life factors should be taken into consideration prior to taking the stipend such as: willingness to

move, plans to marry or move in with a significant other, plans to purchase a home, plans to immediately pursue a graduate degree, etc.

### **Is there money for mileage if I have to travel long distances?**

That is complicated. Scholars can receive mileage reimbursement while completing the internship in some circumstances if they are placed in agencies where they have to drive far distances. When hired however, it is expected that employees cover the cost of driving to and from work as they are receiving a salary. In some instances, certain parishes may provide incentives for potential employees. These are rare and time specific and should not be used to make decisions to take the stipend or not.



### **You seem to be talking a lot about paying back stipends, why is that so important?**

Like any program, we have goals, and objectives. It is our ultimate goal to prepare the next generations of child welfare professionals. The money provided to the UA is ultimately contingent on how our graduates impact the child welfare system. We believe social work scholars provide a higher level of services to the children and families in Louisiana than non-social workers. We backup that belief with monetary and non-monetary supports to our scholars. When individuals take the stipend without the intention of honoring the one-year commitment, they are essentially misrepresenting themselves and taking a spot that someone more committed would take. We understand that life circumstances change and that individuals evolve in their thinking. These decisions, however, impact the longevity of our program. It is important that candidates present themselves honestly and ethically as they should want to start their social work careers in the right way.

### **When do I get my stipend?**

Every university is required to disburse the stipend through the university student account. Each university is slightly different in when they disburse the stipend. Most provide the stipend at the beginning of the internship process, however some split it between two semesters if students are required to complete the internship in two semesters. The amount is paid directly by each university to the student. Some universities adjust the cost of attendance based on the stipend. Check with your coordinator to find out how your university handles the disbursement and when to expect it.

### **What do I do if I have issues during the process or if I have questions?**

Your university coordinator is your lifeline to all things IV-E. They are experienced and have a universe of resources to support you in the process. If you have questions as a student, you can contact the Title IV-E program manager, Andrew Fultz, by emailing him at [fultz@nsula.edu](mailto:fultz@nsula.edu) or calling him at 318-305-4225. As an employee, or regarding hiring, you can contact the DCFS Title IV-E Liaison, Jerry Barrilleaux, by emailing him at [edgarjerry.barrilleaux.dcf@la.gov](mailto:edgarjerry.barrilleaux.dcf@la.gov) or calling him at 337-277-6777.

### **What opportunities for professional development are available to me?**

Our mission is to prepare you to do the work you will be doing for DCFS. Scholars will attend Community of Practice sessions during their internship with DCFS. We also offer these sessions to scholars in their first three years of employment. These are weekly/bi-weekly virtual sessions that offer a variety of learning opportunities, ongoing peer support, and mentoring by seasoned professionals. Scholars will be given a schedule of sessions for each semester at the beginning of each term. Attendance to these sessions is required and count as hours towards completing field. Scholars are also required to attend quarterly support group meetings held in person in each region or virtually. These offer further opportunities for development. The DCFS Training Unit and the Louisiana Child Welfare Training Academy (LCWTA) also offer required and elective training opportunities throughout the year to prepare for and enhance the work you will do as an employee. This includes opportunities for working towards license continuing education unit (CEU) requirements.

## **What do I do if I cannot make it to a community of practice session, support group, or other training events?**



True to life, things happen. Scholars may not be able to attend sessions due to issues in the field or personal issues. It is imperative that students work with their coordinator and field instructor (supervisor) to inform them of issues and make up that time. Some coordinators require reflection papers based on these sessions and training opportunities. Work with your coordinator to find out how to deal with missed sessions and trainings. Scholars are also provided with opportunities for learning such as the weeklong new worker training, lunch and learn sessions, one day trainings, conference, etc. to enhance the work they do in the field.

## **Will I attend New Worker Training as a scholar?**

Yes. We want you to attend New Worker Training. In fact, it is part of your learning journey. There are structured exercises required to be completed by scholars to prepare them for competent practice. Some scholars attend other classes during the week and cannot make it for a whole week away. New Worker Training is considered part of your field requirements and count as field hours. This training is offered virtually and face-to-face. Your coordinator will help schedule this weeklong training for you. You are expected to show up virtually or face-to-face on time and engaged each day. If you attend this training, you do not have to repeat it when you are hired. Those who miss the training can take it after graduation.

## **When should I apply for Civil Service?**

You will need to apply for Civil Service close to graduation or as soon as you are eligible. Applications are good for 90 days.

## **I plan to move out of state after graduation and I heard I can transfer my contract to another DCFS.**

Unfortunately, this is completely false. The funds that pay for the stipend are state dollars. If students decide to move after graduation, they must pay the stipend back as the program is designed to advance child welfare in Louisiana. It cannot be transferred as it is not a federal program.

## **Do I really have to pay back the stipend or can we just forget it?**

No, we cannot. That money is provided to us by the state in good faith that we will carry out our mission. Failure to pay the stipend back puts us in jeopardy of potentially having our funding reduced and impacting our own evaluation. In fact, we will attempt to recoup the stipend back in the form of collections which can greatly impact an early career social worker. It is imperative that individuals operate with integrity.

## **I am a DCFS employee. Can I receive a stipend if I attend an Alliance University?**

No, you cannot. Due to rules, individuals who are employed by the state cannot receive a stipend of any sort. However, you can receive funding through the Employee Education Support Program (EESP) to receive a portion of your tuition, or your entire tuition paid for by the grant. This requires a contractual agreement as well. Scholars who graduate with a BSW are given priority selection for this program after a minimum of two years on the job. For more information about the EESP program, contact Andrew Fultz at [fultz@nsula.edu](mailto:fultz@nsula.edu).

## **All of my colleagues are planning to go to graduate school right after receiving their BSWs. I am considering getting my MSW on my own. Can I do that?**

Yes. Any scholar can pursue their MSW in the first year of employment after graduating with their BSW. However, this is strongly discouraged as the demands of the job can impact scholars. It is important that you see this as a marathon, not a sprint. We encourage scholars to talk through this decision with their university coordinator, statewide staff, and knowledgeable individuals. For those that are patient, they can receive funding for their tuition after two years of successful work with DCFS.