



Higher Education Retention of Young Adults who have experienced Foster Care

Adopted April 16, 2013

Young adults who have experienced foster care lack the post secondary educational attainment of their peers. This disparity can lead young adults from foster care to depend on public welfare systems. This same disparity leads to higher incarceration rates (Courtney et al., 2004; Fowler et al., 2009; Vorhies et al., 2009) and decreased graduation rates (Fowler et al., 2009; Iglehart & Becerra, 2002; Leathers & Testa, 2006; Mares, 2010 ; Murray, 2004; Pecora et al., 2005). Dollars could be saved by providing upfront services to youth, savings that ultimately stimulate the entire economy. Instead of supporting these youth upfront with stability and educational access, they are often marginalized by the very institutions designed to protect them. Research indicates an average of 5% (Courtney, 2004; Pecora et al., 2005; Peters, 2010) or less of youth who experience care graduate from post-secondary education.

We have identified three areas that impact educational opportunities:

- 1. Building the Capacity of Higher Education to Serve Foster Youth*
- 2. Financial Resource availability*
- 3. Stable Living Arrangements*

The National Foster Care Youth and Alumni Policy Council (NFCYAPC) believes a holistic examination of the many factors impeding youth's access to higher education and a comprehensive, flexible list of solutions is needed.

BUILDING HIGHER EDUCATION'S CAPACITY TO SERVE FOSTER YOUTH

Individual educational success is impacted by barriers such as emotional preparation for transition, lack of ongoing support, difficulty navigating complex systems and multiple placements. The Council proposes the following recommendations to improve the capacity of educational institutions and other educational supports to serve young adults transitioning from foster care:

1. Develop a National Resource Center for Educational Attainment.

This Council recognizes the value of the federal government's investment in the Children's Bureau's National Resource Centers to support foster youth and homeless youth as well as their respective adult-supporter communities. The Council would like the Children's Bureau to add a tenth Resource Center and

create a National Resource Center for Educational Attainment. This resource center could provide information, resources, training and be a network for foster care advocates, states and organizations serving children and youth pre-k through post-secondary education.

2. Increase knowledge and skills of those who aid in the advancement of education of foster children.

Current and former foster youth reported that when their caseworker, foster parents, school counselors and other child welfare professionals were educated about the available resources and took individual time to discuss higher education with them, they were more successful in getting into a program in higher education. They also felt more supported and comfortable prior to attendance.

The Administration of Children and Families could recommend a set of standards for states to incorporate into their policies and procedures that would include requiring yearly training for foster care parents and state employees to understand and be able to assist transitioning youth and young adults with higher education preparation, collaborating with and inviting school counselors to attend transition meetings, notification to courts of transition plans and involvement of youth in the educational decision making.

3. Support the creation of programs with designated campus support staff who are trained to address the specific needs of young people from care.

Current and former foster youth report that they need additional support services on campus to help them navigate higher education life. There are several model programs that are currently being used, most notably the Guardian Scholars Program. This Council suggests at least one campus staff personnel and/or department be identified by the institution of higher learning and be trained specifically in foster care issues. This training should include a history of foster care culture and knowledge of resources available. The staff person should be available to assist students from foster care (giving the student the option to access this assistance) and inform fellow departments. The staff should be trained and assist in full financial aid package, academic advisement, employment services, mentoring and career counseling, tutoring, and supplemental support services.

These types of on-campus support services will provide current and former foster youth the best chance of reaching their higher education goals.

Two states, Ohio and Texas, provide exemplary models for providing trained educational liaisons to bridge the gap between higher education and aftercare agencies (See Appendix A).

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

While traditional families provide support for their children to attend institutions of higher education, the government fills this role for young adults who have experienced foster care. The financial burden of higher education can be a roadblock to success. The Council believes the following recommendations will decrease this burden and increase post-secondary graduation rates.

1. Eliminate age limits and provide a flat rate of \$5,000 annually for youth under the Educational and Training Vouchers (ETV).

Youth in care often have a chaotic upbringing, causing them to have a later start in post-secondary education compared to their non-foster care peers. Financial aid age limits create barriers for young adults who may not be prepared to attend higher education programs. The current regulations state, “To qualify for the Chafee ETV program, a youth must have received or was eligible to receive Independent Living Program (ILP) services between the ages of 16-19, and not reach their 22nd birthday as of July 1 of the current year. Youth can continue to participate in the Chafee ETV program until they turn 23 years of age if enrolled in a post secondary education or training program and making satisfactory progress toward completion of that program.”

The Council recommends eliminating the age barrier associated with ETV grants (while still maintaining the additional participation requirements) to allow current and former foster youth to attend college when they are ready: emotionally, physically and financially.

2. Develop a reverse scholarship program for foster youth college graduate.

In an effort to increase graduation rates among foster youth alumni, the Council proposes a Reverse Scholarship Program be created under the Department of Education. This program would incentivize graduates by removing Federal educational financial debt accrued during enrollment. In order to receive the reversal, recipients must demonstrate they exhausted all other grant opportunities prior to taking out Federal student loans. To be eligible for the program, students must have been enrolled in a course of study at least half-time and maintained satisfactory academic progress throughout the duration of enrollment. The scholarship reversal program should have a lifetime limit 7 years and be available to students at the Bachelor and Graduate levels.

3. Provide in-state tuition status for foster youth regardless of their current placement.

Foster youth often lack permanency and have no place to call home. Unlike students who come from traditional family structures, foster youth consider housing arrangements at higher education institutions “home” for the duration of their attendance. The National Policy Council recommends that foster youth be granted in-state tuition regardless of the state indicated on their FAFSA, similar to what’s provided to military personnel through the Higher Education Opportunity Act.

4. Provide tuition waivers for all current and former youth in care, regardless of the state.

21 states have recognized tuition waivers as the appropriate solution for foster youth to overcome financial barriers in higher education, including Oregon, Texas, and Florida. The preceding three recommendations are offered as interim solutions, while the ultimate goal is a federal tuition waiver. The Council recommends exploration begin to create a nationwide tuition waiver for foster youth so they are not limited by age requirements, local resource availability, or family circumstances beyond their control.

STABLE LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Youth in foster care attending institutions of higher learning are often put at risk of homelessness during gap-periods in the standard college school year including holidays and school breaks as dormitories close. For youth who are able to find housing, many discover it is at great expense to their own finances or personal relationships. In many cases, this barrier is merely owing to a lack of information on the part of a higher education setting or a child welfare agency. It is with these details in mind the Council presents the following recommendations to address stable living arrangements throughout the course of post-secondary education.

1. Support post-secondary institutions and child welfare agencies in establishing year round housing.

The Council recommends post-secondary education institutions be provided with guidance, either in the form of technical assistance or general information, about how to establish policies to implement year-round housing for youth in and from foster care.

The following is a short list of higher education institutions that have year round housing policies for youth in care: Seattle University, Western Michigan University, Wright State, Prairie View A&M University.

2. Collaborate with HUD to prioritize housing for foster youth in higher education.

The Council recommends the creation of priority year round housing solutions for foster youth, particularly where housing is traditionally unavailable (such as community colleges and vocational education institutions).

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Adopted as official recommendations by the full membership of the National Foster Care Youth and Alumni Policy Council on April 16, 2013.

About the National Foster Care Youth and Alumni Council

The National Foster Care Youth & Alumni Policy Council convenes to provide federal stakeholders with relevant and timely information as policies and procedures are created that will affect children and families throughout the country. The Council represents a collective viewpoint of youth and alumni who have experienced the child welfare system first-hand. The Council is a project in partnership between Foster Care Alumni of America and FosterClub, with generous support from Casey Family Programs. Advisory organizations include the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute, Foster Care to Success, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, National Foster Youth Action Network, Young Adult Training and T/A Network (a project of the Natl Resource Center for Youth Development), and Youth Communications.

Appendix A

Scholars Programs

Guardian Scholar Program

<http://www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov/pdfs/GuardianScholars.pdf>

Promise2Kids

<http://promises2kids.org/programs/guardian-scholars>

Orangewood Children's Foundation

http://www.orangewoodfoundation.org/programs_scholars.asp

Ball State University

<http://cms.bsu.edu/academics/centersandinstitutes/ssrc/guardianscholars>

Youth Foundation

<http://www.vvf.org/education/youth-foundation.aspx>

Texas REACH

www.texasreach.org

Ohio REACH

www.ohioreach.wikispaces.com