



Information Packet: Foster Youth Attending College

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Overview/ Introduction:

“The majority of foster youth have college aspirations,” (Day, et.al., 2012). However, foster youth face many challenges that make it difficult, and sometimes impossible, to consider a college education. Some of these burdens include a history of trauma, lack of financial support, academic challenges, lack of preparation, and a culture of low expectations. “The child welfare system has traditionally done a poor job of encouraging foster youth to pursue post-secondary education or providing them with information to help them navigate the complex college application process,” (Day, et.al., 2012). This helps to explain why many foster youth have difficulty not only going to college, but successfully earning a degree. Statistically speaking, under 10% of foster youth attend college, and an even smaller percentage graduate (Promises2Kids.org). Foster youth who attend college may face additional hurdles while there. One such hurdle is the cost of living. “Youth in foster care cannot succeed academically if they have basic unmet school-related needs,” (Day, et. al., 2012). Foster youth may need to take on full-time work to make ends meet. Working 15-20 hours per week can make it very difficult for foster youth to succeed academically and earn a degree. Furthermore, studies suggest that the most pervasive challenge is a lack of supportive relationships with adults in and out of school.

Fortunately, there are a number of services that exist today for foster youth pursuing higher education. Programs exist in many states nationwide, and as this issue gains more publicity and attention, more is being done to help fund these programs and improve what is already in place. In fact, “Foster Youth Success Alliance (FYSA), based in Children’s Aid Society, just obtained \$1.5 million from the New York State government to fund opportunity programs for CUNY and SUNY that will support students who are currently and were formerly in foster care,” (Catherine Hilyard, New Yorkers for Children, personal communication, May 4th, 2015). These programs offer college preparation services, provide support in filling out financial aid applications and provide mental health and academic support to foster youth. Scholarships and grants such as the California Chaffe Grant and The Orphan Foundation of America Scholarships for Youth in Foster Care can help foster youth pay for college. Foster youth can seek out additional financial aid and scholarships with the help of many programs, such as Foster Care to Success and New York City College Line. In addition, programs like Project Myself (in New Jersey), California College Pathways, and Western Michigan Seita Scholars program all

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offer mentorship, counseling and academic support to help foster youth achieve success throughout their college careers.

While there are a growing number of programs in place for foster youth attending college, additional support is needed. First and foremost, there is a need for a change in agency culture with regard to the expectations we have for foster youth attending college. Foster youth must believe that it is possible for them to earn a degree. Moreover, “implementing a change in how elementary and high school records are transferred with the students,” is critical, “as many students change homes and schools up to five times a year,” (Nancy, 2008). There is a need for more access to information about the programs that currently exist, as many foster youth may not be aware of what is available. More funding is needed to improve existing programs and create new ones. Funding is also needed to provide free tuition or tuition waivers and coverage of living expenses for foster youth who cannot afford college tuition, housing, books, and any other necessary expenditures. Finally, foster youth themselves report an overall lack of emotional support from adults in and out of college. There is a need for additional academic and social-emotional support from teachers, social workers, case workers, mentors and foster parents to assist foster youth in applying to college and earning a degree. “It is critical that child welfare, K-12, and higher education systems work together to support the postsecondary educational aspirations of court wards. This includes the creation of campus-based programs that provide foster care alumni with wraparound services and supports not only during the transition from high school to college, but also from the start of their first semester until the day they graduate,” (Day, et.al., 2011). Foster youth deserve the opportunity to pursue higher education, and with the right support, funding and programming available to them, earning a degree can become a reality.

Fact Sheet:

- Research shows that, by age 19, 54-58% of foster youth graduate from high school compared to 87% of youth in the general population. (Tzawa-Hayden, A., 2004).
- In one study, over 70% of 15 to 19 year old youth in foster care expressed a desire to attend college, and 19% expressed a desire to attend graduate school. (Day, et.al., 2012).
- “Fewer than 10 percent of foster youth attend college. Of the 10 percent of foster care youth who are successful in enrolling in a post-secondary program, only 26 percent of them will complete any kind of degree or certificate.” (Tzawa-Hayden, A., 2004)
- Studies “suggest that college students who have been in foster care continue to lag behind their peers with respect to college retention and graduation, even when compared to low-income, first generation students,” (Day, et.al., 2011).
- “Up until recently, education has not been something that was on the radar for child agencies. Their primary focus was protection and safety,” (Nancy, 2008).
- Campus support programs work. In California, nearly three times as many foster youth scholars who participate in campus support programs remain in college than their peers nationwide. (California College Pathways Website)
- Foster youth can receive financial aid that can help pay for tuition as well many living expenses, such as rent and transportation.
<http://www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov/10facts.html>
- Foster Care to Success provides foster youth with The Education Training Voucher (ETV). The ETV provides youth in care with up to \$5,000 in tuition assistance for each year that they are in college. (Catherine Hilyard, New Yorkers for Children, personal communication, May 4th, 2015)
- ACS can provide foster youth with an Exception to Policy (ETP). An ETP allows foster youth to receive financial assistance from ACS while in college even after aging out of care. ACS can also pay for a youth’s college room and board with a college room and board (CRB) payment. Youth must apply to receive an ETP and/or CRB. (Catherine Hilyard, New Yorkers for Children, personal communication, May 4th, 2015)

Best Practice Tips:

Motivate and Prepare:

- Studies suggest that one major factor contributing to low college attendance and graduation rates for foster youth is a lack of college preparation. To this end, foster youth would benefit from their high schools providing college workshops, information sessions, college information fairs and career days to motivate foster youth to attend college.
- Colleges and high schools should work together to create mentoring programs where a high school student can shadow a college student. This way, foster youth can get a sense of what college is like, and will have someone to speak to for advice and support.
- Agencies, schools and foster families should create a culture of high expectations for foster youth. Children in foster care must believe that they can graduate from college!

Be sensitive and confidential:

- Those who are working with foster youth should always make sure to secure confidentiality because only youth in foster care can self identify as being in foster care.
- Those working with foster youth should be aware of all of the challenges preventing foster youth from entering college, including financial deficits, difficulty with the application process, history of trauma, lack of emotional support, academic challenges.

Inform:

- Those working with foster youth should familiarize themselves with the various programs out there that support foster youth in applying to college and attending college.
- Programs for foster youth entering college should find new ways in which to reach out to foster youth applying to and attending college.
- “Financial skills training is vital for youth themselves but also for foster parents to enable them to help young people in their care as they move on into the adult world,” (Kirk, et. al., 2011).

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Advocate:

- Foster youth and individuals working with them should advocate for financial, academic and psychosocial support throughout the process of applying to college and attending college.

Connect:

- Foster youth would benefit from being matched with adult mentors who can guide them through the college application process, and then offer them support and guidance throughout their college careers.
- Foster youth would also benefit from taking part in extracurricular activities in college where they can explore their interests and form new relationships.

Make Change:

- All colleges should “implement a structured support system to help foster youth.” This support system should include academic, social, emotional and financial support. (Pederson, Psych Central website).
- Changes should be made to the ways in which foster youth records are transferred from high school to college- being that foster youth often have multiple addresses- to make the transition smoother.
- College programs should be accessible and collaborative, as college success for foster youth must be as important to colleges serving foster youth as it is to foster youth themselves.
- Additional funding is necessary to make college more accessible to foster youth. “Even a relatively small fee, like the cost of books and/or Metro Cards, can prevent a youth in care from attending college,” (Catherine Hilyard, New Yorkers for Children, personal communication, May 4th, 2015).
- “Foster care alumni could be given priority placement in federally-funded work study programs,” (Day, et.al., 2011).

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Model Programs:

New Yorkers for Children Guardian Scholar Program

<http://newyorkersforchildren.org/article/apply-to-join-the-guardian-scholars-program/>

The New Yorkers For Children (NYFC) Guardian Scholars program is a comprehensive program for youth in foster care who are enrolled at Hunter College, John Jay College, City College, or Kingsborough Community College. The Guardian Scholars program provides an academic scholarship that can be used towards tuition, room and board, textbooks, school supplies, and other living expenses. NYFC provides the essential financial, academic, and emotional support for Guardians Scholars during their entire college experience.

The Seita Scholars Program at Western Michigan University:

<http://wmich.edu/fosteringsuccess/seita>

The Seita Scholars Program boasts increased success rates for foster youth in college, including graduation rates above the national average and involvement in other leadership and advocacy activities. The program offers coaches, financial aid, care packages, work study, academic support, career mentoring, etc. This program serves as a model for other similar college programs in Michigan.

California College Pathways:

<http://www.cacollegepathways.org/>

California College Pathways offers information, support, resources and tools for foster youth interested in attending college. They help foster youth access financial aid and campus support services state-wide. California College Pathways is extensive and informative, allowing access to information about attending college for foster youth and those working with them.

Project Myself:

<http://socialwork.rutgers.edu/InstituteForFamilies/officeofchildwelfareinitiatives/TFY/Projects/MYSELF.aspx>

Project MYSELF is a program for youth aging out of foster care in the New Jersey area. The program helps prepare foster youth for their post-secondary education by providing them with college readiness programs, job and life skills, crisis intervention, academic support, and support coaches.

Pathways to College: Scholars Program

<http://pathwaystocollege.org/>

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Pathways to College selects high school students in schools “where academic interest is minimal to moderate,” helps them to develop communication, leadership and academic skills, provides them with mentoring and coaching in college and career readiness, and trains them to become leaders in their own schools and inspire others to achieve a higher education. “Within a supportive, expectant and confident atmosphere, it provides the tools and guidance necessary for students and families to make informed choices and effective plans for higher education and for personal and career development.” This program not only gives students the tools and support to pursue a higher education, but also encourages them to make change and advocate for themselves and their peers.

Legislation and Policy:

California Fostering Connections to Success Act (AB12):

<http://www.cafosteringconnections.org/about-the-act/>

California’s Fostering Connections to Success Act is a policy that extended foster care benefits for eligible youth until age 21. This makes pursuing education after high school more realistic for current and former foster youth. This act provides housing and financial support until the age of 21 for these foster youth which makes the idea of college more attainable. Essentially, by choosing to stay in foster care while attending college, youth will have the chance and the necessary support to succeed.

Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act:

This act, amended in 2013, makes college more affordable for homeless and foster youth. According to this act, youth under the age of 24 who are determined homeless would be independent students. In addition, this act provides homeless and foster youth in-state tuition for college as well as a plan to assist them in accessing housing during their academic years. This act would also work with other child welfare agencies and school districts to recruit homeless and foster youth. Most importantly, the act will include recommendations on how the Department of Education can improve the educational attainment rates of homeless and foster youth.

John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (1999):

The Foster Care Independence Act established this program in order to increase funding for independent living readiness for foster youth. Former and current foster youth are eligible to receive services funded by Chafee, including educational and employment training until age 21.

Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program:

This program was added to the Foster Care Independence Act in 2001. This is the first federal program that targets the post-secondary educational needs of former and current foster youth. States can use these funds to provide foster youth with up to \$5,000 for their college education. Youth can remain a part of the program until the age of 23, given that they are making significant progress towards completing their program.

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The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008:

This act has numerous provisions for foster youth regarding their educational needs.

“These include provisions to promote educational stability and to expand eligibility for the ETV program to youth who exit foster care through adoption or relative guardianship when they are at least 16 years old” (Day, et.al., 2011).

The College Cost Reduction Act of 2009:

This act makes it possible for foster youth who were in care at 13 years old or older to claim their independent status while applying for financial aid.

Websites and Resources:

Goddard Riverside Options Center

<http://www.goddard.org/page/options-college-counseling-114.html>

The Goddard Riverside Options Center in New York City provides support for foster youth looking to attend college. The Center offers educational counseling, assistance with financial aid, and admissions, visits to colleges and more.

New York City College Line

<http://nyccollegeline.org/>

The New York City College Line website provides information for anyone interested in applying to college. The site has many frequently asked questions about college. It provides information about financial aid and scholarships. The site also provides tips on how to succeed in college and how to prepare for college.

California Ombudsman for Foster Care

<http://www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov>

The California Ombudsman for Foster Care website was set up as a tool to assist foster youth in advocating for themselves. The website provides foster youth with important information about their rights. They provide a toll-free telephone number for foster youth in California that can be used to express concerns and complaints. This website provides an education page with a college navigator and tools and resources for preparing for college. They further provide a fact sheet with ten facts all foster youth should know, including how to receive financial aid for college and living expenses.

Foster Youth in Transition: Michigan Department of Human Services

<http://www.michigan.gov/fyit/0,4585,7-240-44289---,00.html>

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This website offers a ton of information for foster youth in Michigan planning to attend college. It includes information about how to prepare and apply for college, financial aid and scholarship information, a list of colleges and universities in Michigan, etc.

Foster Care to Success

<http://www.fc2success.org>

“Foster Care to Success (FC2S) partners with organizations, foundations, and individuals to deliver scholarships to foster youth across the country.” This website offers information about scholarships and grants that foster youth can apply for. In addition, the website explains FC2S’s Academic Success Program- a program that provides foster youth in college with trained volunteer coaches to mentor them and “to provide students with the encouragement and guidance they need to do well academically and personally.” Foster Care to success administers the Education Training Voucher (ETV), which provides youth in care with up to \$5K in tuition assistance for each year that they are in college.

College Scholarships

<http://www.collegescholarships.org/scholarships/foster.htm>

The College Scholarships website provides information about how to apply for scholarships and grants for college that are exclusively available to students who are in the foster care system. This website lists various public and private scholarships and describes the process of applying to each one. The website also provides information about State-Specific Foster Child Scholarships and Tuition Waiver Programs.

Conrad N. Hilton Foundation

<http://www.hiltonfoundation.org/foster-youth>

The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation provides tools, resources and information for transition-age foster youth. The website outlines their program strategy approach which includes needs and opportunities for transition-age foster youth in California and New York. It also outlines sample activities for supporting foster youth on the path to self-sufficiency.

Youth Success NYC

<http://www.youthsuccessnyc.org/>

Youth Success is a great resource for foster youth and former foster youth living in New York City. It provides tools, information and recourses on various topics such as jobs, housing, advocacy, mental health, etc. The website has a thorough education page which provides useful information for foster youth interested in applying to college (who have or have not graduated from high school) including: a list of private and public colleges, financial aid and scholarship

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options, college counseling services, the college application processes, etc. The site includes stories and advice from other foster youth.

California Student Aid Commission/ California Chafee Grant for Foster Youth

<https://www.chafee.csac.ca.gov>

https://www.csac.ca.gov/pubs/forms/grnt_frm/chafee_factsheet.pdf

This website describes the California Chafee Grant that foster youth can apply for to receive money to help pay for college. The grant can also be used to assist in paying for transportation, rent, and/or childcare while in school.

Foster and Adoptive Family Services/ New Jersey Foster Care Scholars Program

<http://www.fafsonline.org/njfc-scholars-program/>

This website describes the New Jersey Foster Care Scholars Program which lists several scholarship opportunities for foster youth. As the website describes, “AFS’ Private Scholarships and Opportunity Grants provide foster youth with the support they need to complete their education and live independently.”

Promises2Kids/ Guardian Scholars Program

<http://promises2kids.org/guardian-scholar>

The Guardian Scholars program as part of Promises2Kids, provides support for foster youth in California who are looking to apply to college. The program provides foster youth with a partial financial scholarship as well as mentoring support and college prep. It boasts an 85% success rate for former foster youth. You can apply to be a guardian scholar through the website.

PrepNOW!

<http://prepnw.fedcap.org/>

Fedcap’s PrepNOW! program is designed to increase college enrollment and graduation rates among youth in foster care in New York City. The program provides tips for both foster youth and foster parents for how to motivate foster youth to attend college, and addresses the values inherent in this process. The website further provides knowledge and skills for how to go about applying to college, such as: how to advocate for yourself, how to write a personal essay, how to pay for college, how to search for the right college, etc.

New Yorkers for Children

<http://newyorkersforchildren.org/>

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New Yorkers for Children provides supports programs for youth in foster care. The website provides information about the programs they provide, including their Guardian Scholars program- a program that offers financial, academic and emotional support for foster youth enrolled at Hunter College, John Jay College, and Kingsborough Community College.

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