

Students from Foster Care: Strategies for Improving Retention and Degree Completion

Presented by Julie Hamel, Kansas State University

What do we know about students from foster care?

- It is estimated that approximately 20,000 young people transition out of foster care annually when they turn 18 (Casey Family Programs, 2010).
- Research suggests that only 7-13% enroll in post-secondary institutions (Casey Family Programs, 2010).
- Approximately 43% of foster care alumni completed some type of post-secondary education, but only about ½ of those completed a certificate or degree (National Working Group on Foster Care in Education, 2008).
- It is estimated that only 2% of students from foster care earn Bachelor's Degrees, compared to 24% of the population overall (Casey Family Programs, 2010).

What traits or issues might they bring to the post-secondary environment?

- Varying degrees of personal psychological trauma
- Unstable living situations throughout childhood or adolescence
- First-generation status
- Possible racial or ethnic minority status
- Inadequate secondary education preparation due to frequent moves
- Economic hardship
- Lack of family support
- Long term connections to state institutions, court system
- Possible reluctance to identify or to access services

What challenges await them in the post-secondary environment?

- Lack of experience with college expectations and processes
- No parent to guide them through the enrollment, housing, or financial aid process
- Deficits in academic preparation and independent living skills
- Financial difficulties – no family “safety net”
- Lack of housing during long holidays and breaks
- Need for work
- Minimal career planning and/or few career role models

What support is available?

- Varies from state to state – may include tuition assistance, independent living funds, and/or a structured support system
- Varies from college to college, and may be tied to state support programs
- Mentoring programs may be available through state or local agencies

How can my institution start to address the needs of students from foster care?

- Are you able to identify students from foster care who are attending your institution?
- Can you develop relationships with the local or state organizations that work with youth from foster care?
- Who can inform you about the financial support that might be available to these students? Who on your campus needs to know about these programs?
- What academic and personal support systems might already be available on your campus?
- Are there foster care advocates already working at your institution?
- Do you have existing “umbrella” programs that might be accessed by students from foster care?
- Will the students utilize the support offered to them? When and where can this support be offered?

References

Casey Family Programs (2010). *Supporting Success: Improving Higher Education Outcomes for Students from Foster Care*. (Publication No. 325.1-3230-10).

National Working Group on Foster Care and Education (2008). *Educational Outcomes for Children and Youth in Foster and Out-of-Home Care*. Retrieved from <http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/pdf/EducationalOutcomesFactSheet.pdf>

Kaplan, S.J., Skolnik, L., & Turnbull, A. (2009). Enhancing the empowerment of youth in foster care: Supportive services. *Child Welfare*, 88, 1. 133-161.

Helpful Websites

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

<http://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm?event=website.viewArticles&issueid=124&articleid=3121>

http://www.co-invest.org/resources/347252_CFPIC_Insights.pdf

<http://www.nacac.org/adoptionssubsidy/factsheets/tuition.html>

<http://sparkaction.org/content/foster-care-college-life>

Julie Hamel, M.S., PhD student, Counselor Education & Supervision 101 Holton Hall 785-532-6492 Kansas State University
