Providing Support and Guidance to College Students with Foster Care Experience

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Background of Foster Youth & College

**Foster Care**

Purpose
Types of Placement: Traditional (45%), Kinship (32%), Group Home (6%), and Supervised Independent Living (1%)

**Statistics**

Approximately 440,000 foster youth nationwide
30,000 youth age out between the ages of 18 - 21 annually
Within four years:
50% have no earnings or average annual income of $7,500
70% will be on government assistance
25% will not have completed high school
20-30% attempt post-secondary education
<12% will ever earn their college degree

**Barriers**

Unemployment
Homelessness
Relationships/Connections
First-Generation
Awareness of resources
The Field Center provides technical assistance to help PA colleges and universities develop campus-based support programs for foster youth.

How?
- Provide consultation
  - on-site and remotely
- Application guided our program development
  - vision
  - sustainability
  - operations
  - point of contact
  - our barriers

University of Pennsylvania Field Center Website  https://fieldcenteratpenn.org/
7 Life Domains

- Finances and Employment
- Housing
- Education
- Physical and Mental Health
- Supportive Relationships and Community Connections
- Cultural and Personal Identity
- Life Skills
Education

Challenges:
- Students may have
  - moved several times and attended various schools
  - not been encouraged to enroll in college-prep courses
  - not been told they were smart enough

Responses:
- Provide stability
  - build trusting relationships (Point of Contact)
  - guide them to resources to help them build appropriate academic skills
- Make connections early
  - begin meeting with the students before they attend the college
    - workshops while in high schools, college open houses, New Student Orientation, Summer Bridge
  - “warm transfer”
Housing

Challenges:
- Increased risk of homelessness or “couch surfing”
- Discharge from foster care also disrupts other support services
- Students in residence halls may be without housing during semester breaks
- Community college students - lack of affordable housing that is accessible for school, work, and support services

Responses:
- Offer Residence Halls with availability during semester breaks and holidays
- Develop community partnerships to ensure affordable and accessible housing for community college students
- Support and encourage students to stay in care as long as possible to take advantage of supports
Finance and Employment

Challenge
- Help students identify employment opportunities on campus and in the local community.

Response
- Work alongside students to identify employment opportunities:
  - Referral to student aid for federal work-study award.
  - Provide comprehensive list of campus wage-payroll positions (ie. physical plant, cafeteria, office work etc.)
  - Work with campus career services to identify employment opportunities in the community.
  - Assist students with any issues relating to transportation if work placement is off campus.
Finance and Employment

Challenge
- Help students maximize financial aid opportunities

Response
- Work alongside students to identify funding opportunities that minimize dependence on student loans when possible:
  - Scholarship research assistance.
  - Referral to student aid for federal work-study award.
  - Assistance with FAFSA preparation and resolution of verification issues.
  - Assistance with university dependency review process.
  - Assistance completing Chafee Grant application.
  - Assistance with eligibility determination and application for tuition waiver.
PA Chafee Grant Awards

2018-19 Academic Year PA Chafee Grant:

- Provided 376 Chafee grants
- Totaling $1.62 million
- Maximum award $5,000 - average award: $4,308
- Over 90% of recipients have a $0 Expected Family Contribution (EFC)
- Jointly administered for Pennsylvania by PHEAA and the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS)
Chafee Student Eligibility

New applicants must:

- Submit a completed Chafee application to PHEAA by December 31
- Applications reviewed by PHEAA/DHS to confirm the student:
  - Eligible for services under the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program
  - Was in foster care or was discharged or adopted after age 16
  - Complies with the age requirements:
    - New applicant on or prior to their 21st birthday
Fostering Independence Tuition Waiver

New Commonwealth of PA program effective 2020-21

- Program provides a postsecondary tuition waiver to eligible foster youth
- PHEAA working with DHS, PA Department of Labor and Industry (L&I), and PA Department of Education (PDE) on details
Fostering Independence Tuition Waiver

How to use the waiver:

- Tuition waiver applies only to tuition and mandatory fees
- Eligible youth may receive waiver for up to five academic years (consecutive or not) or until age 26
- Tuition waiver will only be applied to tuition and mandatory fees charged starting in Fall 2020

How to apply for the waiver:

- Must submit a FAFSA® and PA Chafee Grant Application (may also be required to apply for additional state and institutional aid)
- Information available on PHEAA.org and brochures available
Physical and Mental Health

Challenge
- Most young people in foster care have grown up experiencing abuse and neglect, often resulting in post-traumatic stress disorder (Day, Schmidt & Unrau, 2017).

Response
- Complete student intake assessing needs using life skills assessment tool (ie. Casey Family Programs Life Skills Assessment).
- Identify what services student may be eligible to receive based on their needs.
- Make timely connections to services that support mental and physical health
  - Campus Counselor, Campus Social Worker, Community Social Worker, Community Counseling, Liaisons through CYF, Medicaid, etc.
Supportive relationships & Community Connections

Challenges:
- Students may view relationships as transient and transactional.
- They may be unaccustomed to creating lasting friendships or relationships.
- Students may feel more comfortable relating to peers.

Responses:
- Work to establish relationships with agencies and case workers who may already be working with students, like KidsVoice and the Educational Liaisons through CYF.
- Create social components to programming to allow students to interact with each other. Consider having highly engaged students from a previous year’s program be involved in planning and implementation for the following year.
Personal and Cultural Identity

Challenges:
- Systemic and Institutional Racism and “Otherism”
- Lack of connectedness with other students with foster care experience
- Hiding status due to fear of stigma

Responses:
- Developing spaces on campus for students with shared backgrounds and identities to “find” each other (example: Committed drop-in space for students with foster care experience)
- Connecting students to clubs related to their racial, ethnic, sexual and/or gender identities
- Professional development for faculty and staff to increase awareness and change behavior around Systemic and Institutional biases
- Examining institutional policy

- Research suggests that LGBTQ+ children are more likely to be removed from their homes than their heterosexual/cisgender peers, as are children of color.
Life Skills

Challenges:
● Students may have experienced a forced independence in the foster care system; they may have learned to take care of themselves at a younger age or in ways beyond their developmental age.

Responses:
● Build upon transactional relationships and incorporate opportunities to talk about physical needs, emotional well-being, and adjustment to college with mentors and peers.

● Create staff and mentor trainings which are trauma-informed.
Challenges
Wins
References & Resources

University of Pennsylvania Field Center Website  https://fieldcenteratpenn.org/
Fostering Success Michigan Website  http://fosteringsuccessmichigan.com
Foster Care Statistics 2019  https://www.ifoster.org/6-quick-statistics-on-the-current-state-of-foster-care/
Independent Living Programs  https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Youth_and_Young_Adults/Transitional_Living/Extended_Foster_Care/supervised_independent_living.asp


Foster Care to College Newsletter: info about issues related to foster youth & higher education across PA; Email: swasch@upenn.edu
Foster Club Transition Toolkit (Planning for youth aging out of foster care): Fosterclub.com
Join the Proposed Advising Community for NACADA by searching for @ACforcare on Facebook
Questions
Our Contact Information

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