

Enough is Known for Action Series

Supporting the Educational and Career Success of Foster Youth under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

This technical assistance document is part of a series of resources the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education (Departments) developed to provide strategies and examples of State and local partnerships that facilitate the reengagement of out-of-school youth. Other technical assistance documents address strategies for serving out-of-school English language learners, and justice-involved youth. More information can be found here: https://ion.workforcegps.org/resources/2016/01/29/22/51/Enough_Is_Known_for_Action_Youth_Webinar_Series.

Focusing specifically on the needs of foster youth, this document builds on the preceding technical assistance document that outlines ways workforce development boards (WDBs), local educational agencies (LEAs), and community agencies can collaboratively re-engage at-risk and out-of-school youth. Without a consistent, supportive home life, foster youth face many obstacles, such as emotional challenges, instability, and trauma. Foster youth are usually in one of three situations: (1) living in a foster family or group home, in custody of the child welfare system; (2) running away from foster care and most likely homeless; or (3) aging out of foster care and most likely homeless. With less than 10 percent of foster youth graduating from college,¹ it is clear that foster youth are in need of greater guidance and emotional support to help them become college- and career-ready. This document provides a list of examples of practices that have been shown in research and in the field to impact the educational, employment, and general welfare of foster youth.²

i. Provide Support, Including Trauma-Informed Care

Foster youth often have endured numerous traumatic experiences, such as trauma that caused their removal from the home, the trauma of separation from families, and the potential trauma involved with numerous removals and placements in out-of-home care.³ Trauma exposure among children and youth is associated with lifelong health, mental health, and related problems. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), as the number of traumatic events experienced during childhood increases, the risk for health, social and physical problems in adulthood also rises. This includes depression, alcoholism, drug abuse, suicide attempts, uncontrollable anger, financial difficulties, and family problems.⁴ This risk makes it all the more important for current and former foster youth to receive wrap-around services in order to help these youth heal from trauma, and for foster parents to learn to provide trauma-informed care to support the healthy development of foster youth.⁵ Thus, it is

¹ Fostering Success in Education: National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care, January 2014, <http://cdn.fc2success.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/National-Fact-Sheet-on-the-Educational-Outcomes-of-Children-in-Foster-Care-Jan-2014.pdf>

² These resource materials are provided for the user's convenience. The inclusion of these materials is not intended to reflect their importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, or products or services offered. These materials may contain the views and recommendations of various subject matter experts as well as hypertext links, contact addresses and websites to information created and maintained by other public and private organizations. The opinions expressed in any of these materials do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. The U.S. Department of Education does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of any outside information included in these materials.

³ http://www.nrcpfc.org/is/downloads/info_packets/PTSDandChildren_in_FC.pdf

⁴ http://www.integration.samhsa.gov/SAMHSA_Short_Report_2011.pdf

⁵ <http://www.ifapa.org/resources/trauma-informed-care.asp>

important that local service providers are adequately trained to meet the unique needs of youth involved in the child welfare system.

Example: Texas

The Foster in Texas (FIT) program uses a Trauma Systems Therapy model with foster parents to help foster youth recover from trauma. The program educates foster parents on the symptoms of trauma and helps them understand the causes for their foster child’s behavior and how to help the child deal with his/her trauma in appropriate ways. Parents dealing with a child’s trauma without proper tools and understanding can experience “compassion fatigue” leading to feeling numb, burned out, and unable to handle the child’s sadness and distress. Experts in the field agree that with greater understanding through trauma-informed education programs for parents a wide range of behavioral and social problems can be lessened.

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Example: Placer County, California

iFoster, a national nonprofit organization with a mission of providing life-changing resources to children in foster care, is partnering with employers in the grocery industry to provide job opportunities for foster youth who are aging out of the system. The iFoster jobs program partners with businesses that provide foster youth opportunities for full- and part-time jobs that come with benefits, scholarships and tuition reimbursement, and career advancement. For example, Raley’s Family of Fine Stores, a grocery retailer with 12,000 employees, partnered with iFoster to train front-line staff on the impact of trauma on essential employment skills, resulting in greater job retention among foster youth.

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ii. Build Relational Supports/Connections to Caring Adults

Ongoing support from at least one permanent, caring adult can make an enormous difference in the life of a vulnerable youth.⁸ Youth who have been removed from their families, many of whom have been through multiple moves, have experienced significant loss. They often have not had the same opportunities as other youth to develop social skills and supportive, lasting relationships. While transitioning into and out of foster care, it is vital that these youth have stable, ongoing connections, particularly with extended family and other caring adults, such as teachers, mentors and case managers who can provide the emotional support they need.

⁶ <https://www.upbring.org/programs-and-services/foster-in-texas/becoming-a-foster-parent/faqs/>

⁷ iFoster, Accessed November 16, 2016, <https://www.ifoster.org/Default.aspx>

⁸ Helping Youth Transition to Adulthood: Guidance for Foster Parents, Child Welfare Information Gateway, April 2013, https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/youth_transition.pdf

Example: New York, New York

Good Shepard Services' Chelsea Foyer program implements research-informed best practices and evidence-supported models to strengthen its services to foster youth. A key component of the program is providing housing and on-site support services, such as case management, to former foster youth: each resident works with a case manager who assists him or her with creating an individualized action plan outlining goals in education, employment, housing, health, and other areas. Residents meet with case managers at least twice a month. Case managers focus on specific tasks that the resident needs to accomplish, such as filling a prescription, finding a high school equivalency program, or applying for a job. Case managers strategize about how tasks can be accomplished, discuss what to expect, and debrief and regroup after the task is complete. Independent living counselors are on-site during afternoons and overnight to ensure constant support for youth. Other on-site support services include life-skills development, workforce development, community building, and housing and aftercare services.

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iii. Establish Shared Procedures and Designated Contacts Across Agencies

Improving the academic success of foster youth requires the effort of schools, child welfare agencies, and the workforce system. In order to successfully collaborate, it is critical for these agencies to form positive relationships with colleagues in the complementary agency, supplemented by regular, ongoing communication to discuss concerns and adjust policies and practices based on lessons learned. To build a solid foundation for collaboration, these entities should develop formal processes to jointly develop priorities, policies, and practices at both the state and local level. This will ensure that all providers are knowledgeable about services available for foster youth.

Example: Los Angeles, California

The Los Angeles Opportunity Youth Collaborative (OYC) brings together public agencies, nonprofit organizations, education systems, and employers through a framework of collective impact. The OYC leverages existing resources and efforts for transition-age youth (TAY) in Los Angeles and maximizes opportunities to brighten the futures and improve outcomes for young people aging out of foster care. The OYC creates linkages among the many systems and community organizations that serve current and former foster youth. It also aims to improve policies and resolve system barriers that impact the ability of TAY to benefit from education and employment opportunities. The OYC supports youth on pathways to high school graduation or high school equivalency attainment, postsecondary enrollment, credential completion, workforce readiness and gainful employment.

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⁹ Chelsea Foyer Residential Services, Good Shepard Services, Accessed November 16, 2016, <https://goodshepherds.org/program/chelsea-foyer/>

¹⁰ L.A. Opportunity Youth Collaborative, <http://kids-alliance.org/opportunity-youth-collaborative/>

Example: Hamilton, Ohio

Kids in School Rule! (KISR!) is a four-partner collaboration among Cincinnati Public Schools, Hamilton County Jobs and Family Services (JFS), Hamilton County Juvenile Court, and the Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati. Seeking to promote stability and valuable opportunities for foster youth, KISR! transcends the communication and coordination barriers that typically exist between child welfare and educational systems. KISR has worked to develop cross-system data collection and create systemic changes that promote academic success for foster care youth. To help meet project goals, two education specialists assist JFS case managers with education-related issues and serve as the point of contact regarding student participants. In addition, each Cincinnati school has a KISR! liaison to support students. To ensure the educational needs of children are met, magistrates in Hamilton County Juvenile Court review educational information about each KISR! child in foster care or under court-ordered protective supervision.

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iv. Plan and Provide Extensive Support for a Youth's Transition Out of Foster Care

Many youth in foster care are not prepared for opportunities after high school, such as career, and technical education or training, or postsecondary education. While in care, frequent school changes and learning and behavioral difficulties may interfere with educational achievement. After leaving care, some youth are further held back because many lack knowledge about educational opportunities, skills to navigate the admissions processes, funds to pay for tuition and housing, and encouragement from the adults in their lives.¹² Foster youth who are planning to go to college should be informed of campus disability support services, if needed, and financial aid options. This information can be found in the Application Verification Guide for Federal Student Aid.¹³ For all of these reasons, foster youth need comprehensive services to prepare them to be self-sufficient adults once they age out of foster care.

Example: East Lansing, Michigan

Fostering Academics Mentoring Excellence (FAME) is a resource center for Michigan State University (MSU) students who are former foster youth, were in kinship care, or are otherwise independent. This program was created to increase the educational outcomes for young adults who age out of foster care and to ensure that these MSU students receive needed supports in order to graduate. FAME has various programs to ensure these youth's success, including the Coach Program, which provides each student with a Life Skills Coach who regularly meets with him/her individually to build independent living skills and to provide a support system.

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¹¹ Kids in School Rule!, <https://www.hcjfs.org/kids-in-school-rule-makes-a-difference-for-foster-children/>

¹² https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/youth_transition.pdf; Child Welfare Information Gateway, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/management/funding/funding-sources/federal-funding/cb-funding/cbreports/edcollaborations/kisr/#tab=summary>

¹³ Application Verification Guide for Federal Student Aid, <https://ifap.ed.gov/fsahandbook/attachments/1617AVGCh4.pdf>

¹⁴ Fostering Academics, Mentoring Excellence, Michigan State University School of Social Work, Accessed November 16, 2016, http://socialwork.msu.edu/outreach/foster_youth_alumni_svcs.php. A list of MSU resources for FAME students can be found here: <http://socialwork.msu.edu/outreach/docs/FAMEResources.pdf>

Example: Cincinnati, Ohio

The Lighthouse Independent Living Program (ILP) provides supervised apartment living for youth who are aging out of foster care or group home services and who lack suitable living arrangements. Youth are placed in their own apartments, offering them the opportunity to experience life just as they will as adults. Lighthouse ILP offers shared living arrangements for participants who, in turn, are expected to continue their education, work, or carry out active community service, and master essential life skills. Youth have the opportunity to take over the lease at discharge from the foster care system if they have a stable source of income and the landlord's approval. Those who cannot afford market rate apartments are assisted in obtaining subsidized housing.

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Example: Los Angeles, California & New York, New York

The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and its partners have initiatives in three areas to improve outcomes for youth who transition out of foster care. The Foster Youth Program impacts the lives of foster youth by:

- Increasing transition-age youth's self-sufficiency through improved college and career readiness, stronger caregivers, and special services for the most vulnerable youth;
- Strengthening collaboration and alignment across the systems that influence foster youth outcomes; and
- Developing and disseminating knowledge for the field.

This directly addresses the challenges foster youth face as they age out of the system by supporting programs that meet the needs of particularly vulnerable foster youth as well as programs that give all foster youth the skills and support they need to succeed. The Foundation also supports collaboration and coordination across systems and organizations that influence outcomes for transition-age youth.

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Additional Information

The U.S. Department of Education, in partnership with the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, and Labor, has developed a new toolkit to inspire and support current and former foster youth pursuing college and career opportunities. The [Foster Care Transition Toolkit](#) includes tips and resources intended to help foster youth access and navigate social, emotional, educational, and skills barriers as they transition into adulthood. While the toolkit is written specifically for foster youth, it is also intended to be a resource for caseworkers, care givers, teachers, and mentors of foster youth to assist them in leading successful lives, thereby ensuring quality of life.

¹⁵ [The California Evidence-based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare, Accessed November 16, 2016, http://www.cebc4cw.org/program/independent-living-program-lighthouse/detailed](http://www.cebc4cw.org/program/independent-living-program-lighthouse/detailed)

¹⁶ <http://www.hiltonfoundation.org/foster-youth>

DOL and ED are working diligently to ensure that states, local areas, other grantees, and stakeholders are prepared for the implementation of WIOA. If you have questions regarding this WIOA guidance, please contact the Departments by emailing DOL at DOL.WIOA@dol.gov and ED at AskAEFLA@ed.gov.