



Introducing  
**Making College Success a Reality for New York's Youth in Foster Care**

**RESOURCE GUIDE**

Congratulations on taking the first step to learning more about how you can help students from foster care succeed in college and graduate with pride and better possibilities for their futures.

Presented in partnership with



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## Chapter 1 - Guide Introduction



**MEET TRENAE**

Greetings!

My name is Trenae Ka and I represent students with a foster care background who are attending colleges and universities across New York State. I'm also a passionate advocate for the thousands of children currently in care who hope to follow in my footsteps one day.

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“Like many youth in foster care, I wasn't encouraged to go to college... people tend to write us off as not being 'college material'.”

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Unfortunately, statistics show very few foster youth make it into college and, those that do, rarely graduate on time or earn a degree. Without an education, we face severe obstacles that compromise our ability to become independent, stable young adults ready to contribute to society.

This Resource Guide offers information, best practices, and recommendations to help bridge the gap from foster care to success for young people like me. Like many youth in foster care, I wasn't encouraged to go to college. It's easy to fall behind in class when you are dealing with trauma, moving from home to home, and frequently changing schools. When our grades slip, people tend to write us off as not being “college material” – even though we are smart, ambitious, and have the same hopes and dreams as other kids.

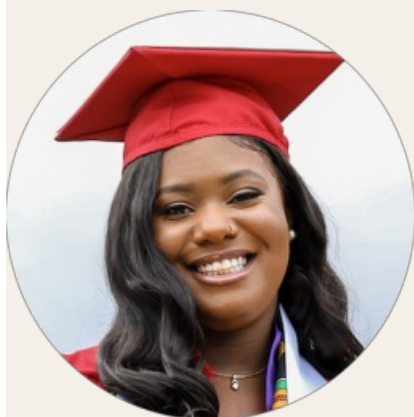
Youth in foster care typically lack the emotional support of caring adults. Because we were neglected or abused as children, we usually have to catch up to our peers academically, socially, and emotionally. We endure many setbacks and often try to cope with disappointment by lowering our expectations. Still, I fought hard to pursue my dream of higher education because I knew it would open new doors for me.

I remember feeling a mixture of anticipation, excitement, and doubt during the college application process. *Would I be good enough to make it at highly ranked, four-year university?* Then, I heard about the [Education Opportunity Program \(EOP\)](#), and the [Foster Youth College Success Initiative \(FYCSI\)](#). Both programs support low-income and historically disadvantaged students like me. As I anxiously awaited my college decision letters, I started to feel more hopeful. As it turned out, my participation in these college assistance programs yielded great results. I was accepted into every school I applied to! The day I enrolled at Stony Brook University was a big turning point in my life.

That was four years ago. Now, as a college graduate, I am grateful for the financial aid, tutoring, and other support that has kept me on track at school. My counselors treat me like family. They understand that students from foster care have specific needs. This is exactly why EOP and FYCSI exist! Both programs advocate on our behalf and connect us to the essential child welfare and community resources we are entitled to receive as wards of the state.

As you use this Resource Guide, I hope you realize the powerful role you play in shaping a young person's future. I was lucky to find people who recognized my potential and did their part to make sure I had a positive college experience. I wish every post-secondary school across New York would assign staff to assist their students that come from foster care. We need help to apply for, enroll in, and persist in college. Financial aid is incredibly important, but we also benefit when campus staff, professors, school administrators, and academic advisors take the time to understand what's going on in our lives.

**Education enriches and prepares young people for life. Don't foster youth deserve every chance to make college success a reality?**



**Trenae Ka**, graduated from Stony Brook University with a bachelor's degree in Political Science. She was in foster care from the time she was eight years old until she aged out of the system in 2019. As an advocate for the *Fostering Youth Success Alliance*, she believes young people need to be heard, understood, and supported. She was a legislative intern with the New York City Council and Family Court and Legal Services. Trenae plans to attend law school and become a child advocacy attorney to ensure all youth in the system have a voice. She was a campus leader serving as president of the Student African American Sisterhood National Organization and treasurer for the Pi Delta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Trenae currently works as a paralegal at an immigration law firm, and is pursuing a master's degree in Public Policy at Stony Brook University.

## OVERVIEW



***Making College Success a Reality for New York's Youth in Foster Care*** aims to help higher education administrators, academic advisors, financial aid officers, and other professionals at colleges and universities understand and address the unique, complex needs of youth with a foster care background in order to support their academic success.

New York State has initiated critical work to reform systems and develop collaborative strategies that support educational achievement for students in foster care. This includes a commitment to interagency approaches for service provision and data sharing at the K-12 level. These efforts are designed to strengthen and expand the pipeline from secondary to higher education for foster youth to reverse historically low college enrollment and graduation rates among this population.

This Guide features a variety of resources and information including:

- ✓ Background and context about the child welfare system;
- ✓ Data demonstrating the long-term, adverse outcomes for system-involved youth, especially those who do not receive an appropriate education;
- ✓ The personal reflections of student advocates that illustrate the authentic college experiences of foster youth;

- ✓ An overview of the current laws, policies, and resources available to support and improve collegiate experiences for youth currently or previously in foster care; and,
- ✓ Recommendations to help higher education administrations minimize the systemic, administrative, and financial barriers that often block foster youth from college matriculation and graduation.

We hope this Guide inspires you and other campus officials to carefully consider what you can do to facilitate greater college success for young people with a foster care background.

## EDUCATION IS THE LADDER TO SUCCESS

When youth “age out” of foster care at age 21, they rarely have the appropriate life skills, financial resources, or family support that every young person needs to make a successful transition to adulthood. Unfortunately, former foster youth continue to face significant hardships as they navigate independent living and try to cope with the uncertainty and instability that faces young adults out alone in the world.

The statistics paint a bleak picture<sup>1</sup>:

- ✓ By age 26, only 48.3% of former foster youth are employed (compared to 79.9% of youth in the general population).
- ✓ Of those that are employed, former foster youth earn an average of \$13,989 a year (compared to the \$32,312 annual income earned by youth in the general population).
- ✓ 45.1% of former foster youth experience economic hardships (compared to 18.4% of youth in general population).

Education allows for positive intellectual, social, and physical development in a young person's life while also building a strong base for future economic success. It is predicted that approximately two-thirds of all jobs in New York will require some post-secondary education by 2018.<sup>2</sup> In fact, New Yorkers with a bachelor's degree are half as likely to be unemployed and earn more than twice as much as those with only a high school diploma.

Based on the enhanced earning power of a college degree, policies and programs that promote higher education attainment for foster youth are highly likely to reduce their future dependence on public systems and benefits once they age out of care. As a result, programs that support higher education achievement for foster youth also have the potential to create a significant fiscal savings for New York State.



“Foster care saved my life.  
Education saved my future.”

Student Reflections

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND FOSTER YOUTH

Unfortunately, a college education is often out of reach for youth in care due to a variety of factors including:

- ✓ inconsistent access to information about available educational opportunities;
- ✓ the absence of supportive adults to assist with the college application and decision-making processes;
- ✓ complex financial aid forms;
- ✓ limited access to supplemental financial resources; and,
- ✓ a lack of a financial safety net once youth are in school.

Currently, only 31% - 45% of foster youth who graduate from high school go on to higher education, even though 70% - 84% of these youth express an interest in attending college.<sup>3</sup> For those that do enroll, research suggests that former foster youth lag behind their college peers in academic performance and that persistence to graduation is less likely. Many of these students struggle to focus on their studies as they face financial difficulties, juggle part-time work, care for dependents, or deal with housing instability. Under these circumstances, it is easy to see why among all youth that enter college, students with a foster care background are less likely to obtain all the necessary credits to successfully graduate.<sup>4</sup>

Another challenge is the lack of financial resources available to current and former foster youth who are interested in pursuing higher education. When aid is available, foster youth often have difficulty accessing and navigating the complex application processes required to receive funding. For those that do receive public financial assistance, they still face a significant gap between the amount of money awarded and the full expense of attending college. With no familial support to bridge this financial gap, students in foster care can't cover the costs of housing, books, school supplies, transportation, food, and personal expenses.

In addition to financial issues, there is insufficient on-campus social support for foster youth. College is a stressful time of transition and growth for most young people. All students benefit from having a responsible, stable adult figure in their lives to reach out to for emotional support, academic advisement, and general life guidance. While some programs and services do target disadvantaged college students, youth in foster care aren't always made aware of these opportunities, or they find out last minute without ample time to submit required enrollment forms. The level of information sharing about educational opportunities varies widely among foster care agencies. Access to available resources is often dependent on whether or not caseworkers were diligent and comprehensive with their research, and if they encouraged foster youth to submit applications.

## SPOTLIGHT ON SUCCESSFUL STATE PROGRAMS

As of 2019, 23 states support the higher educational achievement of youth with a foster care background by providing tuition and fee waivers. Additionally, there are eight states that also offer scholarships, housing options, and supportive services to help college students in foster care graduate. Below is information highlighting higher education programs for foster youth in four states.

### CALIFORNIA

**California College Pathways** provides resources and guidance to college campuses in order to support foster youth pursuing their degrees. This statewide program provides training and technical assistance for emerging and established campus programs designed to 1) increase support for youth in care; 2) advocate for policies and regulations that improve higher education outcomes for youth in care; and, 3) expand collaboration with local educational entities to create a pipeline to college for K-12 youth in foster care.<sup>5</sup> Several communities in California established formal mechanisms to bring together the local child welfare agency, local college and university representatives, and the Foster Youth Services program (housed within the County Offices of Education) to implement services. This collaborative, community-based effort led to significant achievements within participating counties including improving foster youth retention from 25% to 70% at Sierra College; forming a foster youth committee at Chico State University to promote inter-departmental coordination; and, creating a Standing Court Order, which allows all major agencies in Humboldt County to communicate with each other about higher education issues involving foster youth without requiring individual Releases of Information in an effort to expedite and improve collaboration.

### WASHINGTON STATE

The **Passport to College Promise Scholarship Program**,<sup>6</sup> administered by the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB), was created in 2007 to increase the number of youth in care who achieve higher education success. The Passport Program aims to: 1) provide former youth in care with financial assistance beyond the state, federal, private, and institutional financial aid for which they are eligible; 2) provide incentive funding to encourage post-secondary institutions to designate campus support staff to assist students in care; and, 3) establish student intervention and retention services to increase graduation rates of youth in care. Since its formation, the Passport Program has served over 850 students. After three years of implementation, the program has provided services to one-third of eligible students and an additional 19% of youth in care have enrolled in non-state-aid participating campuses. In addition, about two-thirds of each student cohort has re-enrolled for another year of school.

## TEXAS

Students under the conservatorship of the state's Department of Family and Protective Services are exempt from paying tuition and fees charged by any Texas public college or university.<sup>7</sup> Once a student is deemed eligible for the program, the benefits continue indefinitely. Additionally, the Texas Education Code was amended in 2015 to require all public institutions of higher education to have a **foster care liaison** available to bridge the gaps youth in care face while trying to achieve success in post-secondary education.<sup>8</sup> These liaisons connect foster care alumni to information, resources, and available support services on campus and across the institution. Liaisons play a critical part in facilitating educational success for youth in care by being a consistent point of contact for addressing their social and emotional needs.

## NEW YORK

New York State modified the **Tuition Assistance Program (TAP)** as a first step toward expanding financial support for foster youth pursuing college. Previously, TAP had disproportionately limited access to financial aid for foster youth, in comparison to students living at home with their parents. This disparity occurred primarily because foster youth were considered "independent" for purposes of financial aid eligibility, and therefore had access to a smaller pool of available financial aid dollars than dependent students. In 2014, New York modified the TAP law and moved foster youth from the independent to the dependent schedule. This change increased the annual amount of financial aid available to foster youth by nearly \$3,000.

In 2015, the state continued to expand access to educational funding and resources by establishing the **Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI)**, the first comprehensive financial aid and academic support program for current and former foster youth attending public or private colleges in the state. Initially FYCSI, allowed eligible college-enrolled students in an opportunity program to receive wraparound academic and social support services. The FY2020 state fiscal budget allowed FYCSI to expand access and create equity for all eligible foster youth. Moving forward, students will now be able to receive support through the traditional opportunity program route, or choose to receive financial aid only. As of 2019, the state has invested \$21 million in FYCSI, which has served nearly 600 foster youth attending 73 public and private colleges across the state during the 2015/16, 2016/17, and 2017/18 academic years.<sup>9</sup>

## Chapter 2 - About Child Welfare in New York



### THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM: CENSUS AND GOALS

According to the most recent available data, there were an estimated 443,000 children and youth in America's foster care system in 2017, which represents a nearly a 10% increase from 2013.<sup>1</sup> New York State has the third largest foster care population in the United States, with approximately 16,000 children and youth in the foster care system every year.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to the national trend, New York's foster care population has steadily decreased over the last 20 years – in large part due to a greater investment in preventive services. However, consistent with national child welfare data, children of color continue to be disproportionately represented in the state's foster care system.

Throughout history, the nation's child welfare system has shifted priorities several times from focusing on family preservation, to child safety, and most recently, on promoting child wellbeing. In addition to addressing disproportionality, today's child welfare leaders are particularly concentrating on the importance of:

- improving outcomes for older youth who remain in foster care for lengthy periods, and
- ensuring young people leave the system with permanent connections to loving families (i.e., via reunification with their birth parents, adoption, or legal guardianship).

For example, in 2012, about 25% of New York's foster youth were between the ages of 18 and 21. Of that population, 1,827 youth exited the system that year, with nearly 75% of them discharged to independent living. That same year, 2,243 foster youth age 18 or older remained in the system, with two-thirds of this population having been in care for over 3 years.<sup>3</sup>

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“New York's foster care population has steadily decreased over the last 20 years.”

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## MAKING PERMANENCY A PRIORITY

In 2008, Congress passed the [Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act](#) with unanimous, bipartisan support. This legislation was designed to improve outcomes for youth in foster care by expediting [permanency](#). *Why is permanency considered the gold standard in child welfare?* Evidence suggests that youth who have been in foster care at any point in their lives, especially those that age out of care without achieving permanency, struggle to become successful, independent adults.

For most young people in the general population, the transition to adulthood is a gradual experience that is supported by the caring adults in their lives. For foster youth who age out of care, the transition is more abrupt, as they don't have the same parental safety net to fall back on. Also, because they experienced trauma, neglect, and, instability as children, these young people typically lack the necessary resources and life skills to effectively live on their own.

Without permanency, former foster youth are far more likely than their peers in the general population to end up poor, unemployed, homeless, or incarcerated. For example, research shows 57% of the nation's former foster youth have been in prison (compared to 13% of youth in the general population).<sup>4</sup> They also have less access to health insurance, experience higher rates of mental health issues, and are more likely to engage in substance abuse. These alarming statistics underscore the threats to the safety and futures of foster youth if they don't achieve permanency, and also affect taxpayers. The average lifetime expense per youth is estimated to be \$300,000 in social costs, public assistance, and incarceration funding.<sup>5</sup>

## UNDERSTANDING PLACEMENTS, OVERSIGHT, AND SUPPORT

The federal government passed the [Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018](#) to address the many adverse outcomes affecting youth in foster care. This legislation shifts the focus of child welfare back to family preservation and dedicates more attention and financial resources to supporting children and youth in the home. Additionally, this legislation reforms the financing of the child welfare system by creating incentives for states to access more federal dollars for family preservation services.

New York State has a locally administered, state-supervised child welfare system. Foster care services are provided either directly by county governments, or through privately contracted non-profit organizations. Depending on the needs of young people, once children enter the foster care system, they can be placed into a number of different types of settings:

- Kinship foster care home (with relatives or fictive kin);
- Family foster home;
- Group home;
- Group residential care; or,
- Residential treatment program.

Under Family First, family foster care placements are preferred for children and youth over group placement settings. Each county (Local Department of Social Services) provides case management services, while the family court system monitors permanency planning for young people in out of home care. Foster youth have a myriad of people that are assigned to ensure their wellbeing, which typically includes: caretakers or foster parents, a social worker, a case planner, a law guardian, and a family court judge. Additionally, others may be involved to support the youth's best interests, such as: educational liaisons, therapists/mental health professionals, biological parents, and court appointed special advocates (CASAs).

In New York, young people are allowed to remain in foster care until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, at which point they may request to remain under the care of the family court until their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. Additionally, young people that were previously discharged from foster care prior to their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday may petition the county to reenter foster care if their permanency plans are broken.

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“Without permanency, former foster youth are far more likely to end up poor, unemployed, homeless, or incarcerated.”

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### PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

It is important to note that New York has demonstrated a firm commitment to bolstering the educational attainment of foster youth by ensuring these young people have access to the resources and support they need to be successful in school. The state has prioritized data and information sharing between child welfare and education agencies over the last decade. In partnership, the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and the State Department of Education (SED) developed an agreement that allows the two agencies to share and promote the use of educational data in case planning.

For example, under the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* (the reauthorization to the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, which passed in 2015), education departments are now required to track and report on foster youth as a sub-population in the state's accountability system. With better access to real-time, longitudinal data, New York can now analyze student achievement, identify areas for growth, and develop timely interventions.

In addition to K-12 education interventions and data accountability, the state has begun to make key investments focused on improving access to higher education for foster youth. This includes offering foster care board maintenance payments to support the cost of room and board, expanding access to Medicaid until age 26, and providing funding for the **Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI)**. Through this child welfare and education collaborative approach, New York is supporting foster youth by promoting K-12 achievement and encouraging greater college enrollment. These interventions put more students with a foster care background on a path to fulfilling their academic potential, which in turn prepares them for futures with more possibilities.



“Foster youth have a disadvantage when it comes to the college application process. The reality is many youth in foster don't have parents to turn to for information about college.”

Student Reflections

# GLOSSARY OF COMMON CHILD WELFARE TERMS

## **ADOPTION**

The social, emotional, and legal process through which children who will not be raised by their birth parents become full and permanent legal members of another family while maintaining genetic and psychological connections to their birth family.

## **COLLEGE ROOM AND BOARD EXCEPTIONAL PAYMENTS (CRB-EP)**

*Applicable in New York City Only*

A type of financial support available to young adults still in foster care when they turn 21, if they are: 1) under the care of the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS); 2) enrolled in college; 3) living on a college campus; and, 4) not living in an approved or licensed foster care placement. Eligible students may receive continued financial support on an as-needed basis and are not required to complete a CCS21+ to access support.

## **CONTINUATION OF CARE AND SUPPORT BEYOND AGE 21 (CCS21+)**

*Applicable in New York City Only*

A type of financial support that applies only to young adults under the care of the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS). Agencies may request a CCS21+ from ACS to allow the placement resources of young adults age 21 years or older to receive ongoing financial support while the young adults remain in their care. The CCS21+ also enables these young adults to receive ongoing case planning services from their agencies.

## **COURT-APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE (CASA)**

A person (usually a volunteer appointed by the court) who advocates for the best interests of abused or neglected children and ensures their rights are fully protected during child welfare judicial proceedings.

([www.casaforchildren.org](http://www.casaforchildren.org))

## **DUAL-SYSTEM SERVED/CROSSOVER YOUTH**

Youth who are involved in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Sometimes referred to as crossover, joint cases, dual-system served, or multisystem-involved youth.

## **EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT**

Involves the failure of a parent or caregiver to enroll a child of mandatory school age in school or provide appropriate homeschooling or needed special education training, thus allowing the child or youth to engage in chronic truancy.

## **EDUCATION AND TRAINING VOUCHER (ETV)**

A federally-funded, state-administered initiative that provides funding and support for post-secondary education to help youth aging out of foster care make the transition to self-sufficiency by ensuring they receive the education, training, and services necessary to obtain employment. This program is designed to help youth who are currently or were previously in foster care pay for post-secondary education or training. ETV gives students up to \$5,000 a year to cover qualified school-related expenses. Funding is limited, and available on a first-come, first-served basis to eligible students. Students must complete the ETV application, which includes documentation that schools send directly to ETV each semester to confirm enrollment, the cost of attendance (COA), and unmet need.<sup>6</sup>

## **EMOTIONAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL NEGLECT**

A pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth. This may include constant criticism, threats, or rejection, as well as withholding love, support, or guidance.

## **FOSTER CARE**

A 24-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians, and for whom the State agency has placement and care responsibility. This includes, but is not limited to, placements in foster family homes, foster homes of relatives, group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, child care institutions, and pre-adoptive homes.

## **FOSTER CARE BOARD RATE**

The amount paid to foster parent(s) or to prospective adoptive parent(s) to reimburse for the care and maintenance of child(ren) in the guardianship and custody of a social services official or a voluntary authorized agency. The foster care board rate is determined based on the needs of the child and is established as either:

1. Regular/Normal (aka Basic)
2. Special
3. Exceptional, as defined in regulations.

## **FOSTER HOME/FOSTER BOARDING HOME**

A Foster Boarding Home is defined as a residence owned, leased, or otherwise under the control of a single person or family who has been certified or approved by an authorized agency to care for not more than six children.

## **GROUP HOME**

A residence, typically for 5 to 12 children, that is intended to serve as an alternative to a family foster home. These placement settings offer the potential for the full use of community resources, including employment, health care, education, and recreational opportunities. Group home programs are designed to fully integrate the child into the community, return the child to their family (or other permanent family), and/or provide the child with the necessary skills to live independently as a young adult.

## **GUARDIANSHIP**

A judicially created relationship between a child and caretaker that is intended to be permanent and self-sustaining as evidenced by the transfer to the caretaker of the following parental rights with respect to the child:

- ✓ protection
- ✓ education
- ✓ care and control of the person
- ✓ custody of the person
- ✓ decision-making

## **INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES (ILS)**

A program created to help youth in out-of-home care develop basic life skills (e.g., money management, finding housing) and obtain the education/vocational training needed to make a successful transition from foster care to responsible adulthood by taking an active role in planning for their futures.

## **KINSHIP ADOPTION**

Adoption of a child by someone related by family ties or through a prior relationship.

## **KINSHIP FOSTER CARE**

Arrangements that occur when child welfare agencies take custody of a child after an investigation of abuse and/or neglect, and place the child with a kinship caregiver (someone related by family ties or through a prior relationship).

## **LAW GUARDIAN (GUARDIAN AD LITEM)**

In New York, all children who are under age 18 and are subject to family court proceedings have the right to be represented by a Law Guardian. The Law Guardian is appointed by the Court to represent the child's interests.

## **LEGAL GUARDIAN/CUSTODIAN**

A court-appointed guardian or custodian following the death of a child's adoptive parent(s).

## **NATIONAL YOUTH IN TRANSITION DATABASE (NYTD)**

This national initiative seeks to capture the experiences and insights of youth with a foster care background to guide future policy decisions. Participating youth share basic information about the services they received while in care, and have the opportunity to leave a lasting legacy that influences positive change for future generations of children who enter the foster care system.<sup>7</sup>

## **ORPHAN**

A child is considered an orphan under several circumstances including:

- ✓ the death or disappearance of both parents;
- ✓ the abandonment or desertion by both parents;
- ✓ the separation from, or loss of both parents; and,

- ✓ if a surviving parent or unwed mother is unable to care for the child properly, as specified by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services for inter-country adoption.

## PERMANENCY

Every child deserves a legally permanent, nurturing family (aka forever family). As defined in the Child and Family Services Reviews, a child in foster care is determined to have achieved permanency when any of the following occurs:

- ✓ the child is discharged from foster care to reunification with their family, either with a parent or other relative;
- ✓ the child is discharged from foster care to a legally finalized adoption; or,
- ✓ the child is discharged from foster care to the care of a legal guardian.

## PERMANENCY HEARING

A periodic court review held for the purpose of reviewing the permanency plan developed by the foster care agency or social services district on behalf of the child. The hearing reviews the foster care status, the appropriateness of the permanency planning goal, and the well-being of the child.

## PERMANENCY PLANNING GOAL (PPG)

A goal established for children and youth placed in out-of-home care to facilitate permanent placements with caring adults thereby enabling them to develop stable, lifetime relationships. There are five possible permanency goals:

- ✓ **Return to Parent (Reunification)** A reunification goal focuses on having the child or youth safely return home to their parents/family members. Reunification is the preferred permanency option, if possible.
- ✓ **Adoption** Following the termination of parental rights, a legal process establishes a parent-child relationship between persons who are not related by birth and confers the same mutual rights and obligations that previously existed between children and their birth parents.
- ✓ **Guardianship** This is a permanent, legal commitment to be responsible for and support a child until they reach adulthood (age 18). In some cases, with the youth's consent, guardianship may continue until the youth is age 21. A guardian has the right and responsibility to make decisions that affect the life and development of the child. After a guardianship is established, child welfare authorities will no longer be involved in the care, supervision, or legal custody of the child.
- ✓ **Kinship** Permanency is achieved through out-of-home care provided by relatives, members of the child's tribe or clan, or other adults who have a familial relationship with a child.
- ✓ **Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA)** This goal may be assigned only to foster care youth age 16 and over. APPLA means the youth will age out of foster care and enter into a stable, secure living arrangement on their own. New York requires that all youth with an APPLA goal (age out) to have at least one permanent relationship with an adult who agrees to guide and support them, equip them with life skills, and link them to any community resources they may need after their discharge from foster care.

## **PLACEMENT IN FOSTER CARE/OUT-OF-HOME CARE**

When children in New York are removed from home, the family court places them into the care and custody of a Local County Department of Social Services (LDSS), or in New York City, into the care and custody of the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). NOTE: LDSS and ACS often have contracts with private, not-for-profit agencies (authorized agencies) that provide foster care services. Therefore, youth in care may be living with a foster family, in a residential setting, in a group home operated by an agency other than the LDSS or ACS, or living with their relatives through a kinship care arrangement.

## **PHYSICAL ABUSE**

Generally defined as "any non-accidental physical injury to the child" and may include striking, kicking, burning, or biting the child, or any action that results in a physical impairment of the child. In approximately 38 states and certain territories, the definition of abuse also includes acts or circumstances that threaten the child with harm, or create a substantial risk of harm to the child's health or welfare.

## **PHYSICAL NEGLECT**

Defined as the failure to provide for a child's basic survival needs, such as nutrition, clothing, shelter, hygiene, and medical care. Physical neglect also may involve inadequate supervision of a child and other forms of reckless disregard of the child's safety and welfare.

## **POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)**

Post-traumatic stress disorder is an anxiety disorder that develops following frightening, stressful, or distressing life events. Characterized by intense fear, helplessness, and stress, PTSD affects the normal life and functioning of the patient.

## **RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT FACILITY**

A licensed or approved child care facility operated by a public or private agency and providing 24-hour care and/or treatment typically for 12 or more children who require separation from their own homes or who would benefit from a group living experience. These settings may include child care institutions, residential treatment facilities, or maternity homes.

## **SUPERVISED INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM (SILP)**

One or more of a type of agency boarding home operated and certified by an authorized child care agency in accordance with the regulations of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services. SILPs are intended to provide a transitional experience for older youth for whom the plan of care is to discharge to their own responsibility. Eligibility for this type of program is determined based on each youth's individual situation, and the appropriate level of care and supervision they require to make a successful transition from foster care to self-sufficiency.

## **TRANSITION PLAN**

A youth-driven planning document that must be developed within six months of a youth aging out of foster care. The plan covers important topics that youth need to address to help them make a successful transition from foster care to self-sufficiency.

## **TRAUMA**

A deeply distressing or disturbing experience. Traumatic stress occurs when children and adolescents are exposed to events or situations that overwhelm their ability to cope and interfere with their daily life and ability to function and interact with others.

## **WARD OF THE COURT**

A governmental agency may take temporary custody of a minor for their protection and care if the child is suffering from parental neglect or abuse, or has been in trouble with the law. The Ward is the person for whom an appointed Guardian makes decisions. The Ward may not have the cognitive or communicative capacity to make decisions for themselves or be able to give informed consent for personal, medical, or financial affairs. Sometimes the Ward is called the Guardianee.

## Chapter 3 - Maximizing Financial Aid for Foster Youth



**MEET MARIAMA**

I come from an area in Staten Island, New York that is consumed by crime, drugs, and violence. Growing up, I knew more people in my neighborhood that had been to jail than people who had a high school diploma, let alone a college degree.

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“These financial roadblocks brought me to tears. I figured I had gone as far as I could with my education.”

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Most of my family members never finished high school. I wanted something different for myself. I wanted an education because I knew it would bring me closer to my dreams. This meant going against the “norm” and what was “expected” of me. My family didn’t understand or believe in me, but I had a vision of a better life. I knew it would be a struggle, because for the most part, I would be going it alone.

Some days I couldn’t see a clear path to achieving my goals. As a youth in foster care, I knew the odds were against me. No one encouraged me to attend college or even to finish high school. My foster parents saw me as just another statistic. They told me I would end up a single, teen mom with no future. But I kept pushing myself forward. When I was 20 years old, I

enrolled in Job Corps, which is an alternative school where I earned a high school diploma. My next goal was to get into college. In New York, fewer than 24% of youth in foster care who graduate high school go on to college.

I have to admit that when I first enrolled in college I had no clue what I was doing. I didn’t understand financial aid and there was no one to explain the various resources available to students in foster care. As a result, I ended up \$25,000 in debt after graduating community college with my associate’s degree.

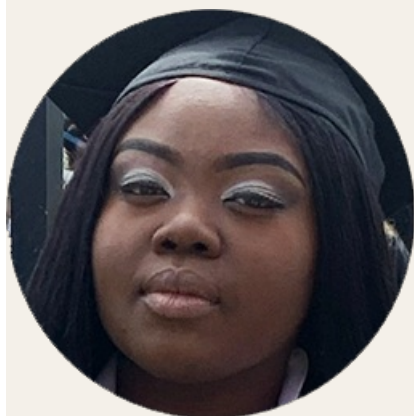
Next, I started to look into programs at 4-year schools to pursue a bachelor’s degree. Although I was accepted at Clark Atlanta University, I later realized that I couldn’t afford to go there. I didn’t qualify for more student loans because I maxed out my eligibility for government subsidized loans, and I didn’t have a parent or someone else to be the guarantor. People are reluctant to cosign a loan because it carries risk. That’s when I knew going to school out of state wouldn’t be an option for me.

I applied to SUNY- Buffalo State, which is where I found out about the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP). While I was encouraged, I still had a huge balance on my previous loans and I couldn’t take on any new expenses. These financial roadblocks brought me to tears. I figured I had gone as far as I could with my education.

Then something amazing happened. I was talking to a close friend about how I was ready to give up on college. She offered to help by making some phone calls, and ended up connecting me to the [Foster Youth College Success Initiative \(FYCSI\)](#). Little did I know that a second chance at success was about to come my way! FYCSI was my saving grace. After I was accepted into this wonderful program, I received a grant that paid for my housing, meal plan, and books. Now, I could attend Buffalo State! This made me more determined than ever to achieve my academic goals.

For the first time in my life, I felt that the system was rooting for me. I was so relieved to have SUNY in my corner! I wouldn't have to worry about where I would stay during school breaks because my year-round housing was covered. I didn't have to stress out about where my next meal was coming from. I could finally buy textbooks and no longer fall behind in class.

FYCSI was a game changer for me, and for so many other students with a foster care background. This chapter includes a section that provides background and information about how FYCSI keeps dreams alive for young people like me.



**Mariama Toe** graduated from Buffalo State College in May 2019, where she studied Childhood and Adolescent Counseling in Human Services and Political Science. She engages and supports other young people by sharing her experiences as a NYC teen in foster care. In addition to her advocacy work with the *Fostering Youth Success Alliance*, she has facilitated youth support groups for the Mental Health Association Resource Center and served as an advisory board member for Youth Power, a statewide, peer-to-peer support network dedicated to youth empowerment and institutional reforms. Mariama is currently working at Girls Inc. in Atlanta, Georgia.

## OVERVIEW



A college degree provides people with better career options and a viable pathway out of poverty. Higher education also supports youth in making a more successful transition to life as independent young adults. For many young people in foster care, school is one of the few places where they feel a sense of normalcy.

**< 24% of NY's  
foster youth  
enroll in  
college**

Unfortunately, nationally it is estimated that only 65% of foster youth will achieve a high school diploma or equivalency by the time they turn 21.<sup>1</sup> In New York, among those that do earn a high school diploma, an estimated 18% to 24% enroll in college as compared to the nearly 60% of all students that start post-secondary education during the fall semester following high school graduation.<sup>2</sup> Research also shows that only 3% to 10.8% of America's foster youth complete a two- or four-year college degree.<sup>3</sup>

**< 11%  
complete a  
college degree**

A lack of awareness and access to financial aid contribute to these poor enrollment and matriculation outcomes. The application process itself is difficult to navigate for many prospective college students. Youth with a foster care background face additional challenges because they typically lack supportive adults in their lives to guide them through confusing forms, or to help them make important decisions about how to finance their education. Even generous financial aid packages don't always cover the

full cost of attending college. Students from foster care may find it harder to afford higher education because they can't rely on their parents to be a safety net as their peers so often do.

New York continues to make meaningful investments in programs that promote equal access to higher education by alleviating the financial burden of attending college for youth with a foster care background. The [Tuition Assistance Program \(TAP\)](#), [Foster Youth College Success Initiative](#), and financial aid provisions included in the [2019 Senator José Peralta New York State DREAM Act](#), are a few examples of how the state is building on other educational funding available at the federal level.

### [Overview of Scholarships and Grant Opportunities for Foster Youth](#)

# FINANCIAL AID PACKAGING STRATEGIES

As detailed in [Chapter 6, \(Campus Policy Recommendations\)](#), it is essential for campuses to identify a *Foster Youth Campus Liaison* who can work with financial aid advisors to meet the needs of students from foster care. Please consider these additional best practice strategies that will help maximize financial aid packages for foster youth to address the full cost of attendance.

## 1. **Claiming Financial Independence from Parents**

Students are eligible to claim independence from their parents if they have spent any time in foster care after their 13<sup>th</sup> birthday.

When a student claims orphan status, it may be more difficult to prove their financial independence. The Federal Student Aid Office encourages Financial Aid Administrators to use their professional judgment in determining if it is appropriate to override a student's dependency status after evaluating the student's specific situation. Examples of situations where students may claim orphan status include having one deceased parent, and having been abandoned by the other parent.



[Student Eligibility Scenarios](#)

## 2. **Follow-up Communication to Student Applicants**

As students from foster care enroll in school and self-identify, campus administrators should consider sending follow-up emails, texts, letters and other communication to confirm receipt of their status. Remind students to begin collecting the necessary documentation that will demonstrate they meet financial aid eligibility requirements. Share a checklist that details the acceptable forms of documentation.

## 3. **Financial Documentation**

IRS tax records are among the essential documents requested of students when they apply for financial aid. However, many students are exempt from filing federal tax returns because their annual income falls below the minimum threshold required for reporting. Financial aid advisors should explain to students what to do in lieu of providing tax forms to avoid unnecessary application delays. For example, students may request an [IRS Verification of Non-filing Letter](#).

Foster youth, orphans, and other independent students are considered financially independent from their parents, and are not required to provide any parental income verification. In fact, foster youth are not required to include any parent information on financial aid applications. However, students may be unaware of this exemption, and often submit their parents' names when filling out the FAFSA. This error may trigger verification requests by the financial aid office and delay processing. Financial aid officers should encourage students to amend their financial aid applications to remove parental information from the biography section.



“Please don’t assume I know this process. I need your help.”

Student Reflections

# COST OF ATTENDANCE GUIDANCE

Financial aid packaging is meant to identify funding streams to help students meet the cost of attendance at their school. Because foster youth have limited access to monetary resources, they require special consideration when assessing cost of attendance expense categories. Financial aid officers are encouraged to ask students from foster care about their particular economic situations in order to identify potential gaps in funding. Administrators can use their discretion when considering a cost of attendance amendment for students.

## Cost of Attendance Adjustment Request Form

Additionally, cost of attendance is usually calculated based on students who either live on campus, or commute from a family home. Foster youth that live off campus often live alone and do not have financial support from parents. Institutions should consider publishing a cost of attendance for students that live off campus without relatives (reflecting market rates for housing and utilities). Below are other items for consideration when developing financial aid packages for foster youth.

## TUITION

Many first-time college students from foster care will be eligible to receive full TAP awards, however, foster youth who are undocumented, or who have lost financial aid eligibility due to academic probation, should receive special consideration for other available institutional need-based aid.

## FEE WAIVERS

Campus fees often prevent students from registering or dropping classes, requesting transcripts, and engaging in school activities. These fees may be imposed as a standard protocol for all students or they may be charged due to late or missed payments. Schools should consider waiving the following fees to alleviate an undue financial burden on students from foster care:

- Special fees associated with classes, such as technology fees for software
- Class enrollment fees or housing deposits
- Student orientation fees, such as for campus lodging and travel to orientation
- Late fees and collections fees. Campuses can use a foster youth indicator in the system to automatically waive these fees or to avoid account holds that prevent students from completing enrollment and un-enrollment processes
- Graduation/commencement fees
- Official transcript fees
- Diploma fees



“Be kind enough to wait for my check to clear.”

Student Reflections

## BOOKS AND SUPPLIES

Students need timely access to textbooks, computers, and other relevant technology to prepare for class and fully participate in their studies. Too often, foster youth experience delays with financial aid, and end up not being able to purchase books and supplies until long after classes begin. These delays put students at risk of falling behind academically. Schools should consider offering alternate means for covering these types of expenses, such as grants, stipends, or “bridge” loans to ensure students are properly equipped before each semester begins.

## PERSONAL EXPENSES

Foster youth have limited access to flexible funding to help cover the wide variety of expenses associated with attending college and their basic everyday needs. Higher education institutions can make FYCSI financial aid refundable in order to provide students with support for personal expenses (e.g., toiletries, dorm furnishings, laundry supplies, school supplies, etc.). Other expense categories to factor in include:

- Medical expenses to cover emergencies, such as replacing contact lenses or eyeglasses
- Clothing allowances to replace worn and lost items, and to purchase athletic or seasonal attire
- Dependent expenses including, child care coverage during class time, study hours, and required internships

## ROOM AND BOARD/HOUSING

Schools should consider housing expenses for students from foster care that are living on campus, as well as for those on their own off-campus. Additionally, it would be helpful to ask students if they will need housing only for the fall and spring semesters, or if year-round housing is required. Many students that are still in foster care are eligible for room and board assistance from their foster care agencies. Room and board allocations vary based on a number of factors. Students must provide documentation to their agencies to receive payments. Foster youth sometimes experience delays in receiving their room and board payments. It would be helpful for schools to provide these students with a template form to help them document proof of pending room and board payments to avoid late fees and other processing issues that might disrupt their education.

 [Room and Board Payment Verification Letter](#)

## **FOOD/MEAL PLANS**

Because foster youth are unlikely to receive food support from family or other outside sources, campuses should consider packaging students with the most extensive meal plan options, or adjust their food allowances so they can purchase food off campus.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

When estimating transportation expenses, schools should consider including the cost for students to travel to and from their hometowns (for those living in campus housing or attending school outside their countries of origin) as well as travel expenses incurred during the move in/move out processes.

## **EMERGENCY FUNDS**

It is recommended that all institutions establish a pool of funds to meet the urgent needs of students experiencing housing disruption, food insecurity, or emergency medical conditions.



I didn't receive much advice about college financial aid when I was a high school senior in foster care. It's not that I expected people to hold my hand, but it would have been nice for someone to check in with me from time to time and point me in the right direction. As a first generation college student, I found the financial aid process extremely confusing. People would tell me different things and I didn't know who to listen to.

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“Youth in care may be more reluctant to share personal details than most financial aid applicants. We feel the harsh stigma of being in care, so we tend to protect our privacy.”

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I wanted to go to a private institution, but had no idea how to prepare a proper payment plan. As a youth in care, I didn't have my social security number, birth certificate, or New York State identification. In fact, without these documents, I couldn't get a job until I turned 19. As part of the financial aid verification process, the private college I wanted to attend requested a certain tax form. However, my financial aid advisor wasn't sure how to help me, or how to process my eligibility and financial documentation, because I was a foster youth. I didn't have the correct form, and as a result, I wasn't awarded enough financial aid to go to the university of my choice. Although I knew I could transfer later, my dream had been to go away to college and have a more typical freshman year experience.

Financial aid can be a tricky process to navigate. I attended a FAFSA workshop during high school, but it wasn't until I actually started filling out the forms that I realized how difficult it was to complete the application. I was somewhat relieved to see a checkbox where I could easily click “Ward of the State” and skip the awkward questions about my parents and annual household income. However, the next set of questions was much harder. It was frustrating and embarrassing to not know the things most kids could just ask their parents and be done with it.

After I made a mistake that messed up my FAFSA, I knew I had to find help or risk jeopardizing my enrollment at LaGuardia Community College. I reached out to the educational support staff at my foster care agency and the student assistants at my school's FAFSA office. The main problem I continued to encounter was that no one seemed to know how to process my financial aid application or resolve issues that are very specific to students in foster care.

Youth in care may be more reluctant to share personal details than most financial aid applicants. We feel the harsh stigma of being in care, so we tend to protect our privacy. We fear being judged by people who don't fully understand our situations. This is why it is especially important for campus staff to be patient and respectful as they work with students who have experienced foster care.

Financial aid is available, but it can be hard to find. I wish schools would do more to promote all campus services available to students with a foster care background. I missed out on several opportunities early on that would have improved my college experience sooner. I mostly found out about programs from other foster youth on campus, or through my academic advisor. It would have been much more helpful to have a centralized place on campus to pick up essential financial aid information. Even when you discover a resource, the application process is still challenging. Campus staff can support students by helping with financial aid forms and by providing reminders about upcoming application and renewal deadlines.

As I look back, I'm grateful for how everything turned out for me. Although it was my backup plan, I saved money by attending community college, where I earned my associate degree. I felt more prepared and also secured several scholarships before transferring to SUNY New Paltz. Still, I often wonder what would have happened if I had started college as a freshman at the 4-year school of my choice. For example, living in a dorm is a great way to bond with other students. Did I miss opportunities to make close lifelong friendships? College is first and foremost about getting an education, but it's also a time to connect with new people and develop important social skills youth in care typically lack.

Financial aid is crucial for achieving our educational and life goals. I hope this chapter provides insight and information for how you can help young people like me access available resources to have a more fulfilling college journey.



**Ericka Francois** is a senior at SUNY New Paltz, where she is studying Journalism and Psychology. An accomplished student, she has received numerous scholarships in recognition of her academic achievements. Ericka is a passionate writer and advocate who uses her talents to connect with her peers, serve as a role model, and promote positive systemic change for youth in foster care. She has shared her reflections on growing up in foster care at advocacy events for the *Fostering Youth Success Alliance*. She applied her interviewing and writing skills as an intern for the NYC Administration for Children's Services and the Redlich Horwitz Foundation. Ericka also was a youth journalist for Youth Communications, and has presented at several child welfare events, conferences, panels, and luncheons. She is a Brian Donovan Fellow and hopes to pursue a career in broadcast or print journalism after graduation.

# FOSTER YOUTH COLLEGE SUCCESS INITIATIVE

Created in 2015, the Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI) provides assistance to address gaps in financial support for youth currently in foster care and alumni as they pursue college degrees. This program was incorporated into New York state law in Title 7: Article 130 - (6451 - 6456) ARTHUR O. EVE OPPORTUNITY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION; §6456 Foster Youth College Success Initiative.

FYCSI expands access to resources for students attending either public (i.e., CUNY or SUNY) or private independent universities in New York. To qualify for FYCSI benefits, students must be attending a public or private school that operates an educational opportunity program

✱ NOTE: students are no longer required to enroll in an opportunity program to qualify for FYCSI funds.

## ELIGIBILITY

### Statutory Language:

For the purpose of this section, "foster youth" shall mean any student who meets ONE of the following descriptions:

- ✓ Student is an orphan.
- ✓ Student is or has been a child or youth in foster care as such term is defined [here](#) OR, in section §3244 of this chapter (*Education of Children in Foster Care*): Student is or was a ward of the court at any time after his or her 13th birthday.

### Key Interpretation Points:

- Any time spent in foster care after age 13 qualifies a student to claim independent status, even if the student was at a later time reunified with their parent(s) or adopted.
- An eligible student includes any student (including undocumented youth) who is: 1) currently a resident of New York State; and, 2) either an orphan, OR spent time in foster care at any time after their 13th birthday.

## APPROPRIATION OF FUNDS

### Statutory Language:

Funds for all programs under this section shall be awarded in equal amounts per foster youth to each institution that applies for funding allocated to its sector distribution as provided in subdivision three of this section and has an application that is approved by the commissioner; provided, however, funds shall be awarded to a foster youth based on his or her need as determined by the institution of higher education where such foster youth is in attendance. Each sector will receive an equal amount of funding per eligible "foster youth" identified. Each institution must award students based on the financial need to cover expenses of the cost of attendance.

### Key Interpretation Points:

Each sector (CUNY, SUNY, and independent private colleges with HEOPs) must submit an annual application to the New York State Department of Education to be a recipient of FYCSI funds. Applications must identify the number of students the institution intends to serve in the coming academic year. Once funds are distributed to each eligible institution, schools are responsible for distributing funding to students based on demonstrated need.

## USE OF FUNDS

### Statutory Language:

Moneys made available to institutions under this section shall be spent for the following purposes:

- ✓ to provide additional services and expenses to expand opportunities through existing post-secondary opportunity programs at the State University of New York, the City University of New York, and other degree-granting higher education institutions for foster youth;
- ✓ to provide any necessary supplemental financial aid for foster youth, which may include the cost of tuition and fees, books, transportation, housing and other expenses as determined by commissioner to be necessary for such foster youth to attend college;
- ✓ summer college preparation programs to help foster youth transition to college, prepare them to navigate on-campus systems, and provide preparation in reading, writing, and mathematics for foster youth who need it;
- ✓ advisement, tutoring, and academic assistance for foster youth; OR,
- ✓ to provide supplemental housing and meals for foster youth.

### Key Interpretation Points:

Please see the [Cost of Attendance Guidance](#) section for key considerations when making cost of attendance determinations for foster youth.

## SENATOR JOSÉ PERALTA NYS DREAM ACT

**The New York State DREAM Act**, which was established as a priority in the 2019/2020 budget, opened the door to New York State administered financial aid and scholarship programs for eligible students who are undocumented and maintain residence in the Empire State. This funding allows “Dreamers” to access TAP, Excelsior, or scholarships administered by HESC.

### Overview of Scholarships and Grant Opportunities for Foster Youth

Applicants must first meet all of the eligibility requirements set forth by each grant or scholarship, ***with the exception of U.S. Citizenship or lawful residency (Green Card holder)***. To streamline the process, HESC has established a separate application for students who qualify as Dreamers. This one application is used for all New York State administered grants and scholarships. Undocumented students will not be asked for home addresses and will not be required to upload financial or tax information. Information submitted in the application is considered confidential, and will only be used by HESC and colleges to determine a student's eligibility for grant and scholarship awards.

## ELIGIBILITY

Students must meet the following requirements to be eligible for New York State administered grants and scholarships under the DREAM Act:

### SCENARIO 1: STUDENT'S PERMANENT STATE OF RESIDENCY IS NY

#### Student's Documentation Status (Must meet at least 1 below)

- a) **U-Visa** – For noncitizen victims of physical or mental abuses (and their immediate family members) or assisting in prosecuting crimes.
- b) **T-Visa** – For noncitizen victims of human trafficking (and their immediate family members) or assisting in prosecuting trafficking cases.
- c) **Temporary Protected Status (TPS)**, pursuant to the Federal Immigration Act of 1990.
- d) **Undocumented Immigration Status** (including DACA) – Lawful status either never existed or has ended.

#### Additional Application Criteria (Must meet at least 1 below)

- a) Student attended a NYS high school for 2 or more years; graduated from a NYS high school; AND is applying for an award for undergraduate study at a NYS college within 5 years of receiving a NYS high school diploma.
- b) Student attended a NYS high school for 2 or more years; graduated from a NYS high school; AND is applying for an award for graduate study at a NYS college within 10 years of receiving a NYS high school diploma.
- c) Student received a NYS high school equivalency diploma AND is applying for an award for undergraduate study at a NYS college within 5 years of receiving a NYS high school equivalency diploma.
- d) Student received a NYS high school equivalency diploma, AND is applying for an award for graduate study at a NYS college within 10 years of receiving a NYS high school equivalency diploma.
- e) Student did NOT attend or graduate from a NYS high school; did NOT receive a NYS high school equivalency diploma; but is being charged the NYS in-state tuition rate at a SUNY or CUNY college for any reason.

## SCENARIO 2: STUDENT'S PERMANENT HOME IS OUTSIDE OF NYS

### Student's Documentation Status (Must meet at least 1 below)

- a) **U.S. Citizen.**
- b) **Permanent, Lawful Resident** (Green Card holder).
- c) **A class of refugees paroled by the attorney general** under his or her parole authority pertaining to the admission of aliens to the U.S.
- d) **U-Visa** – For noncitizen victims of physical or mental abuses (and their immediate family members) or assisting in prosecuting crimes.
- e) **T-Visa** – For noncitizen victims of human trafficking (and their immediate family members) or assisting in prosecuting trafficking cases.
- f) **Temporary Protected Status (TPS)**, pursuant to the Federal Immigration Act of 1990.
- g) **Undocumented Immigration Status** (including DACA) – Lawful status either never existed or has ended.

### Additional Application Criteria (Must meet at least 1 below)

- a) Student attended a NYS high school for 2 or more years; graduated from a NYS high school, AND is applying for an award for undergraduate study at a NYS college within 5 years of receiving a NYS high school diploma.
- b) Student attended a NYS high school for 2 or more years; graduated from a NYS high school, AND is applying for an award for graduate study at a NYS college within 10 years of receiving a NYS high school diploma.
- c) Student received a NYS high school equivalency diploma, AND is applying for an award for undergraduate study at a NYS college within 5 years of receiving a NYS high school equivalency diploma.
- d) Student received a NYS high school equivalency diploma, AND is applying for an award for graduate study at a NYS college within 10 years of receiving a NYS high school equivalency diploma.
- e) Student did NOT attend or graduate from a NYS high school, did NOT receive a NYS high school equivalency diploma; but is being charged the NYS in-state tuition rate at a SUNY or CUNY college for any reason.

## KNOW THE DIFFERENCES: FYCSI VS. ETV

New York has two designated funding streams that are available to eligible foster youth pursuing post-secondary education.

- **The Education and Training Voucher (ETV)** program is mandated by the federal government and administered in New York State by the Office of Children and Family Services.
- **The Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI)** is a state-funded financial aid program administered by the New York State Education Department.

The table on the next page explains the major differences between these programs.







“Educate me on the resources I need to succeed in college and later in life.”



Student Reflections



	FYCSI	ETV
<b>Age Requirements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ No age requirements to access funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Apply before 21st birthday</li> <li>✓ Receive funds until year they reach age 23</li> </ul>
<b>Foster Care Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Spent time in foster care after 13th birthday</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Left foster care after 14th birthday</li> </ul>
<b>Adoption Status</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Adopted after 13<sup>th</sup> birthday from foster care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Adopted after 16th birthday</li> </ul>
<b>Citizenship Status</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ U.S. Citizen, Green Card or Undocumented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ U.S. Citizen or Green Card</li> </ul>
<b>Participating Institutions and Eligible Programs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Students enrolled at CUNY, SUNY, and Independent, Private Colleges with Higher Education Opportunity Programs (HEOPs)</li> <li>✓ Students pursuing associate or bachelor's degrees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Students pursuing degrees, enrolled in a post-secondary certificate or other accredited program at a college, university, or technical vocational school</li> </ul>
<b>Funding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Award amount is based on student's financial need as determined by the cost of attendance at the eligible higher education institution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Up to \$5,000 awarded per student annually</li> <li>✓ Students are eligible to receive funding for up to 5 years</li> <li>✓ Awards are determined by students' financial need as determined by cost of attendance</li> <li>✓ Awards are paid directly to students or institution of attendance</li> </ul>
<b>Administration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ New York State Education Department (SED)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and Welfare Research, Inc. (WRI)</li> </ul>
<b>Application</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Students are not required to complete an application, but must submit an eligibility consent form to the college</li> <li>✓ Access funds through financial aid officers at eligible schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Students must submit an annual application, which includes certification from institutions of attendance for each semester the student is enrolled</li> </ul>


## OVERVIEW OF SCHOLARSHIPS AND GRANT OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOSTER YOUTH

Grant/Scholarship	Allowable Use	Award Amounts	Income Qualifications	Maintenance Requirements
<p><b>Tuition Assistance Program (TAP)</b></p> <p>One of the nation's largest educational grant programs, TAP helps eligible New York residents attending in-state post-secondary institutions pay for tuition. TAP grants are based on the applicant's and his/her family's New York State taxable income.</p> <p> <a href="#">Click to confirm current program information</a></p>	<p>Pay tuition at a public or private college or university in New York State.</p>	<p>For Independent Students: \$500 to \$3,025</p> <p>For Dependent Students: \$500 to \$5,165</p>	<p>For Single, Independent Students: Annual Taxable Income &lt; \$10,000</p> <p>For Dependent Students: Annual Taxable Income &lt; \$80,000</p> <p>Although Foster Youth under age 24 are considered independent, they are funded on the dependent student schedule for TAP.</p> <p>NOTE: if a student's 24<sup>th</sup> birthday occurs <b>prior to Dec. 31 of the academic year</b>, they will be considered independent as of the start of the current semester, <b>and will no longer qualify under the foster youth definition.</b></p>	<p>Students must be matriculated in an approved program of study and maintain full-time status (at least 12 credits per semester).</p> <p>Students must be in good academic standing with at least a "C" average as of the 4th semester payment.</p>

Grant/Scholarship	Allowable Use	Award Amounts	Income Qualifications	Maintenance Requirements
<b>Excelsior Scholarship</b>  When combined with other financial aid programs, this NYS scholarship program allows students to attend a SUNY or CUNY college <b>tuition-free</b> .   <a href="#">Click to confirm current scholarship information</a>	Pay tuition at a SUNY or CUNY school.  NOTE: This funding does not support any other cost of attending college.	Up to \$5,000	Annual Adjusted Gross Income < \$125,000  NOTE: Students who already receive full TAP and Pell financial aid will not qualify for additional funding through Excelsior.	Students must be enrolled in at least 12 credits per term AND complete 30 credits towards their major each year (successively).
<b>Enhanced Tuition Award (ETA)</b>  ETA enables students attending private colleges to receive financial assistance to complete their college degree. The program requires private colleges to 1) provide a funding match, and 2) freeze a student's tuition for the duration of the award -- thereby maximizing the financial benefit to the student.   <a href="#">Click to confirm current program information</a>	Pay tuition at a private, non-profit college or university in New York State.	Up to \$6,000 ( <i>when combined with TAP</i> )	Annual Adjusted Gross Income < \$125,000	Students must be enrolled in at least 12 credits per term AND complete 30 credits toward their major each year (successively).
<b>NYS Aid for Part-time Study (APTS)</b>  Provides grant assistance for eligible, part-time students enrolled in approved undergraduate studies.   <a href="#">Click to confirm current program information</a>	Pay tuition for an approved undergraduate program at a public or private college or university in New York State.	Up to \$2,000 per year	For Single, Independent Students: Annual Taxable Income $\leq$ \$34,250  For Dependent Students: Annual Taxable Income < \$50,550	Students must maintain part-time status (at least 3 credits, but < 12 credits per semester).

Grant/Scholarship	Allowable Use	Award Amounts	Income Qualifications	Maintenance Requirements
<b>NYS Aid for Part-time Scholarship Award (PTS)</b>  Provides tuition awards to students enrolled in community college.   <a href="#">Click to confirm current program information</a>	Pay tuition at a CUNY or SUNY community college	Up to \$1,500 per year	Must meet TAP eligibility requirements (see above).  Recipients selected/prioritized based on financial need.	Students must maintain part-time status (at least 6 credits, but < 12 credits per semester).
<b>NYS Scholarship for Academic Excellence</b>  Awarded to outstanding graduates of registered NYS high schools. Awards are based on student grades for certain Regents Exams and cover up to 5 years of undergraduate study in New York State.  NOTE: Participating high schools select award recipients. Students do not directly apply for this award.   <a href="#">Click to confirm current scholarship information</a>	Pay tuition for an approved undergraduate program at a public or private college or university in New York State.	Up to \$1,500 per year <i>(8,000 available scholarships)</i>  Up to \$500 per year <i>(6,000 available scholarships)</i>	No income restrictions.	Students must maintain full-time status (at least 12 credits per semester).

Grant/Scholarship	Allowable Use	Award Amounts	Income Qualifications	Maintenance Requirements
<p><b>Federal Pell Grant</b></p> <p>Federal subsidy program that provides need-based grants to low-income undergraduate and certain post-baccalaureate students to access post-secondary education. Students may use these grants at any one of the 5,400 participating post-secondary institutions.</p> <p> <a href="#">Click to confirm current program information</a></p>	<p>Pay tuition, room and board, fees, and other student expenses at public or private two- and four-year colleges and universities; OR career and technical education programs at community colleges. Applicable at New York State and out-of-state schools.</p>	<p>Amounts vary each year.</p> <p><u>For 2018/19 academic year:</u> Up to \$6,095</p> <p><u>For 2019/20 academic year:</u> Up to \$6,195</p> <p>Additional award of up to \$2,000 for students enrolled during summer/ winter terms (based on financial need and other factors).</p>	<p>Students whose total annual family income is <math>\leq</math> \$50,000 qualify, but most Pell grant money goes to students with a total annual family income <math>&lt;</math> \$20,000.</p>	<p>To maintain full financial aid, students must be enrolled full time (12 credits per semester).</p> <p>Nearly all recipients receive some aid, even as part-time students.</p>
<p><b>Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI)</b></p> <p>NYS-funded program established specifically for youth in foster care either already in college or about to enter college. FYCSI provides students with necessary financial, academic, and social support services. Students that were in foster care at any time after their 13<sup>th</sup> birthday are eligible to receive funding.</p> <p> <a href="#">Click to confirm current program information</a></p>	<p>Funding for a variety of support services provided to students at New York State public or private colleges and universities.</p>	<p>Awards determined on a case-by-case basis based on each student's need and available program funding.</p>	<p>No income restrictions.</p>	<p>No credit requirements.</p>

Grant/Scholarship	Allowable Use	Award Amounts	Income Qualifications	Maintenance Requirements
<p><b>Education and Training Voucher (ETV)</b></p> <p>This program is designed to help youth who were in foster care pay for post-secondary education or training.</p> <p>Eligible foster care youth, including persons in need of supervision (PINS); a juvenile justice youth who has aftercare status and is 14 years of age or older; and, individuals who were in foster care or entered kinship guardianship at some time after their 14th birthday or were adopted after their 16th birthday.</p> <p> <a href="#">Click to confirm current program information</a></p>	<p>Qualified school-related expenses such as housing, meals, books, transportation, etc.</p>	<p>Up to \$5,000 per year</p> <p>Funding is limited and available on a first-come, first-served basis to eligible students.</p>	<p>No income restrictions.</p>	<p>To remain eligible for ETV funding, students must show progress toward a degree or certificate.</p>

## ADDRESSING STUDENT ELIGIBILITY

The following information will help you determine whether or not students meet the definition of *foster youth* (as defined by Federal/New York State statutes and policies) to verify their eligibility for financial aid programs. Typically, there are additional requirements that may affect student eligibility for financial assistance programs (i.e., PELL, TAP, FYCSI, ETV). The New York State [Foster Youth College Success Initiative](#) is a specific resource designed to support Foster Youth and Orphans attending college within the state.

### DEFINITIONS

#### **"Foster Youth/Wards of the State or Court"**

Students qualify to claim independent status if they spent any time in foster care after age 13 -- even if the students were subsequently reunified with their birth families or adopted after their 13<sup>th</sup> birthdays.

✱ NOTE: Foster Youth are sometimes referred to as *Wards of the State or Court* in federal guidance or statutory language.

The definition below, while not in the statutory language, is offered to help guide you in determining the financial aid eligibility for students designated as orphans:

#### **"Orphans"**

Students age 13 or older, who are or were orphans (meaning both parents are deceased) are considered independent for the purposes of Title IV financial aid, even if the students were subsequently adopted. According to the Office of Federal Student Aid, professional judgment can be used when determining eligibility if students can document unusual circumstances (i.e., students can document the prolonged absence and/or abandonment by one or both parents) are warranted for a dependency override.

### ALLOWABLE DOCUMENTATION FOR FINANCIAL AID ELIGIBILITY

#### **To Qualify as an Orphan:**

- An example of proof that parents are deceased, such as death certificates or other certified documentation;  
OR
- Financial Aid Administrators may use their professional judgment to dependency override in unusual circumstances for students claiming orphan status. Examples of these situations include:
  - An example of proof of absence or abandonment by a parent such as a birth certificate without a father's name listed; OR,

**To Qualify as a Foster Youth/Ward of the State:**

- Family Court documentation; OR,
- Documentation from a certified foster care agency/provider; OR,
- Documentation from a guardian ad-litem (Law Guardian), or Court-Appointed Special Advocate; OR,
- Direct verification from NYS OCFS, NYC ACS, or a NYS County Department of Social Services.



“Please educate yourself about the required documents you asked me to bring in.”

Student Reflections

# COMMON ELIGIBILITY SCENARIOS AND EXAMPLES

## SCENARIO 1: FOSTER CARE/WARD OF THE STATE

### *Example A:*

Scott lived with foster parents from age 8 until he was 18. He was kicked out of his foster home after he graduated from high school and went to live with his birth mother. Scott is **ELIGIBLE**, as he was still in foster care at age 13.

### *Example B:*

Tammy was abused by her father and placed in foster care. She lived in a group home from age 10 to 15, and then went to live with her aunt and uncle. Tammy is **ELIGIBLE**, as she was still in foster care at age 13.

### *Example C:*

Carrie was in foster care from age 10 to 12. She reunified with her birth mother before turning 13 years old, and has lived with her ever since. Carrie is **NOT ELIGIBLE**.

### *Example D:*

Brad was in foster care from the time of his birth. His foster parents adopted him at age 12. Brad is **NOT ELIGIBLE** because he achieved permanency through adoption prior to reaching age 13.

## SCENARIO 2: ORPHAN/DECEASED PARENT

### *Example A:*

Caylee's parents died in a car accident when she was 9 years old. She went to live with her aunt, who was granted guardianship of Caylee. Caylee is **ELIGIBLE** because both of her parents are deceased and she has not been adopted.

### *Example B:*

Jon's parents died when he was 11. His grandparents adopted him at age 12. John is **NOT ELIGIBLE**. Although his birth parents died, John was adopted before age 13, and therefore is a dependent of his adoptive parents.

### *Example C:*

Siesha's father died from an overdose when she was 2 years old. She was 16 when her mother passed away, and was subsequently adopted by her aunt. Siesha is **ELIGIBLE** because both of her parents are deceased, and she was adopted after age 13.

### SCENARIO 3: GUARDIANSHIP

Students living with another family member, or friend under a documented guardianship agreement or informal guardianship agreement (this does not include court/state wardship) are **NOT ELIGIBLE**, *unless they have a foster care history or documented orphan status* after their 13th birthdays.

### SCENARIO 4: KINSHIP GUARDIANSHIP

When youth are removed from their homes and placed into foster care with a relative (or kin as defined by NYS law) this is known as a *kinship placement*. The families become certified foster care providers, and will be under supervision by a local child welfare agency.

Kinship care families also may apply to become legal guardians of the youth in their care. If legal guardianship status is pending, students are still considered to be foster youth/wards of the court, and therefore are **ELIGIBLE**. If guardianship is approved *before youth turn 13 years old*, the students lose their foster youth status, and are **NOT ELIGIBLE**.

### SCENARIO 5: TIME IN FOSTER CARE OUTSIDE NEW YORK STATE

Students who are currently in foster care in a state other than New York, or were previously in foster care in an outside jurisdiction after the age of 13, may be **ELIGIBLE**. Students must: (1) show they have been a New York State resident for 12 months prior to college enrollment; and, (2) provide documentation of their foster care eligibility status from the state where they were in foster care.

### SCENARIO 6: NYS RESIDENCY AND OUT-OF-STATE PLACEMENTS

In some circumstances, young people may be placed in foster care in another state (outside NYS) and still maintain New York State Residency.

#### EXAMPLE:

Michelle is originally from New York City and was placed in a foster home in Brooklyn. Her foster parent subsequently moves to New Jersey during Michelle's senior year in high school. After Michelle graduates from a New Jersey high school, she applies to colleges located in New York State. Michelle is still under care of New York, and meets the NYS residency requirements, and is **ELIGIBLE**.

### SCENARIO 7: ADOPTION

Students who have been adopted are **ELIGIBLE** if they spent any time in foster care or were orphaned (both parents deceased) after the age of 13.

### SCENARIO 8: UNDOCUMENTED STATUS

If undocumented students have spent time in foster care after their 13th birthdays, they are **ELIGIBLE** for participation in the *Foster Youth College Success Initiative* (FYCSI), and may be eligible for participation in the *NYS DREAM Act*. Due to their involvement with the child welfare system, these students also are typically eligible to apply for *Special Immigrant Juvenile Status* (SIJS), which is a pathway to a green card.

## SCENARIO 9: HOMELESS STUDENT/UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

If students are experiencing or have experienced homelessness, they are **NOT ELIGIBLE** for the foster youth, orphan, or ward of the court definitions on the basis of homelessness alone. These students must also demonstrate experiences in the foster care system or status as orphans to qualify for eligibility. However, these students would be considered financially independent from their parents (and therefore have “independent” status) when applying for aid. Financial Aid Administrators may use professional judgment to a dependency override.

See citation.

## Chapter 4 - Child Welfare Resources



**MEET MELANIE**

## Being a college student while in foster care is an uphill battle for many reasons. Housing instability is one of our major challenges.

For example, it's not uncommon for youth in care to be asked to leave a foster home with very little notice. Sometimes placements just don't work out. When that happens, we have to quickly reset our priorities and devote most of our attention and time to finding and adjusting to a new placement. It can take several days – even weeks – to resolve housing issues. It's incredibly stressful! How are you supposed to focus on studying when you have no idea where you are going to live? We also don't have much say in where we end up. Our new foster home might be located really far from school. For students who live off-campus, sometimes a longer commute is why we are late to class or absent.

School breaks are another housing anxiety trigger for students in foster care. Unlike our peers, we don't always have a safe and comfortable place to go during the holidays, for spring break, or over the summer. So while other students relax during break at home with family and friends, many former foster youth are stuck in housing limbo or become homeless for stretches of time.

Students in care tend to struggle with change and transitions. When you move from home to home as a child, you never fully settle in because nothing is permanent. In addition to uncertain housing and the usual pressures of schoolwork and exams, many of us are coping with depression and other mental health issues that arise due to the trauma of child abuse and neglect. Although we are smart, capable, and motivated young people, sometimes life gets overwhelming. That is what happened to me. I fell too far behind and had to withdraw from school.

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“Unlike our peers, we don't always have a safe and comfortable place to go during the holidays, for spring break, or over the summer.”

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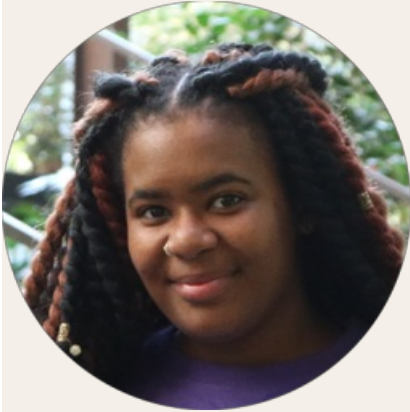
This is why students in foster care need understanding, access to resources, and extra support to keep them on track for graduation. What made the difference for me? I was fortunate to have an excellent educational coordinator at my foster care agency. She alerted me to several opportunities designed to support the success of students in care including the [Education and Training Voucher Program \(ETV\)](#), the [ACS/CUNY Dorm Project](#), and [New Yorkers for Children \(NYFC\)](#).

Each of these resources made it possible for me to return to school and continue my studies. ETV helped me cover college expenses beyond tuition. The Dorm Project gave me a place to live when I had no foster family, an allowance, and the chance to experience social life in a college dorm. NYFC assisted me academically with tutoring, scholarships, and a back-to-school package featuring gift cards, transit checks, and a free

laptop! They also referred me to therapy and introduced me to caring college and career mentors.

As a student in foster care, I believe it is imperative for staff at colleges and universities to know about and continually promote available child welfare resources. Don't assume young people like me know what is out there to support our college success. Host information sessions on campus, distribute pamphlets, share articles, and provide hands-on help to complete applications.

This chapter will tell you more about programs and services that make it easier for youth in care to stay in school and graduate on time.



**Melanie Thompson** is a 22-year old student who recently transferred to Hunter College/CUNY to major in Social Work. During her nine years in foster care, she has remained focused on her education despite the daunting challenge of living in multiple foster homes, residential treatment facilities, and mental hospitals. In addition to her involvement with the *Fostering Youth Success Alliance*, Melanie draws on her personal experiences serving as a tireless advocate working to educate legislators and the public about the plight of commercially and sexually exploited children. Her career goal is to open a non-profit organization to help youth in foster care and survivors of human trafficking reclaim their lives.

## OVERVIEW



The ultimate goal of foster care is to either reunify young people with their biological families, or find permanent, loving families and homes for all youth placed in the care of the state due to abuse or neglect. Unfortunately, 17,107 young people across the country did not achieve permanency before they aged out of the foster care system in 2018.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly troubling as youth traditionally learn and develop the essential life skills they need to thrive and live independently with the guidance and support of family.

The transition to college and adulthood is far more difficult for those in foster care because they have experienced frequent disruptions and often lack the benefits of growing up in a nurturing, stable home setting. The challenges are even greater for foster youth placed in group homes, institutions, and residential treatment facilities rather than with foster families.

The following child welfare resources are available to young people with a foster care background to help them succeed as young adults. College administrations can enhance educational outcomes for these youth by improving access to available resources and providing opportunities for them to form supportive, meaningful connections within the campus community.

## CHAFEE FOSTER CARE INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES AND AFTERCARE

All states are required to provide Independent Living Services (ILS) to youth and young adults in the child welfare system under the [John Chafee Foster Care Independence Act](#). These services help young people acquire the practical and essential skills they need to make a successful transition to adulthood. The broad array of ILS supports includes, but is not limited to:

- Budgeting and financial management;
- Life skills training;
- Academic tutoring;
- Employment assistance;
- Career planning;
- Securing appropriate housing; and,
- Navigating the college application process.

## COLLEGE ROOM AND BOARD PAYMENTS

Agencies determine the amount of room and board payments to students based on a number of factors including: their county of residence, type of foster care placement, and the state's approved foster care rate for the agency. Although the process for requesting room and board benefits varies across counties and foster care agencies, all requests require documentation of the student's cost of the room and board for each semester in which they are enrolled in college. Additional documentation may be needed for students that are required to live in off-campus housing.

Below are additional resources that offer room and board subsidies **only to New York City-based** college students in foster care.

### **Continuation of Care and Support Beyond Age 21, (CCS21+)**

Under this program, young adults that are still in college at age 21 may be eligible for assistance with room and board until they reach age 23. Room and board assistance is provided to eligible students during all school semesters when they are enrolled in classes. The program also features a monthly check-in with students to assist them in identifying additional resources and to discuss any other issues they may be experiencing.

 [NYC Administration for Children Services Memo, Exceptional Payment Requests](#)  
- College Room and Board, [acs.sm.fps.ETP@acs.nyc.gov](mailto:acs.sm.fps.ETP@acs.nyc.gov)

 [College Room and Board – Exceptional Payment \(CRB EP\), CRBExceptionalPayment@acs.nyc.gov](mailto:CollegeRoomandBoard-ExceptionalPayment(CRBEP),CRBExceptionalPayment@acs.nyc.gov)

## NYC ACS Fostering College Success Initiatives

### CUNY Dorm Project

This program, a partnership between CUNY schools and NYC ACS, offers year-round housing to foster youth between the ages of 16-24. To be eligible, youth must either be currently enrolled full-time in a CUNY college, or be current high school seniors that have applied to a CUNY college. Participants in the Dorm Project also may access residential advising, tutoring, advocacy skills training, financial aid navigation, and weekly stipends.

 [Program application](#)

### College Stipend Program

To provide further support for students, ACS rolled out the Fostering College Success College Stipend Program in FY 2017. This investment offers foster youth in college a daily stipend to pay for essentials such as personal items, phone service, transportation, clothing, food, and books that are not covered by financial aid or scholarship funding. With this critical financial assistance, students are able to further enrich their college experience by engaging in on-campus activities and study abroad travel opportunities. Additionally, students in the program gain financial literacy skills through tools designed to help them organize and track their spending.

 [Office of College Bound and Support Program, OCBSP@acs.nyc.gov](mailto:OCBSP@acs.nyc.gov)

## EXTENDED FOSTER CARE (FOR YOUTH AGES 18 -21)

Extended foster care is an option for youth in the child welfare system when they turn age 18 if they have not yet achieved permanency. In these situations, youth are allowed to remain in the care of their child welfare agencies until at least age 21. They will continue to have assigned caseworkers and attorneys, as well as ongoing case plan and court reviews to ensure they are receiving the services and support they need. Youth in extended care also continue to be eligible for Medicaid, which provides insurance coverage to ensure their health and behavioral services will not be interrupted.

Housing is often a critical factor for students making college enrollment decisions. Students in foster care have the option to continue living in their current foster care placement (which may be supervised independent living placements, foster homes, or kinship care), or they can choose to live in a dorm or in off-campus housing. If a student in care decides to live in a college dorm or off-campus housing, they are eligible to receive financial support to help cover the some of the cost of room and board. Room and board payments will be made directly to the school (or to a housing provider that is certified for foster boarding home care, and if the youth is 21 or older). The amount of support will vary based on a number of factors.

Due to limits on available child welfare funding for room and board, it is highly recommended that schools offer students from foster care access to the most affordable housing options on campus. The provision of placement and room and board is especially crucial for students seeking living arrangements during their summer and holiday school breaks.

Students pursuing higher education significantly benefit from the financial aid and social supports provided through extended foster care. While a program can never be a substitute for the permanent families these young people lack, extended care does offer them a safety net as they pursue higher education and transition to adulthood.

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING VOUCHERS (ETV)

Funding available to foster youth via **Education and Training Vouchers** may be used to pay for expenses related to post-secondary education and training programs. **Welfare Research, Inc.** (WRI) administers this federally-funded program, with oversight from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). ETVs provide foster youth with flexible funds to help cover their unmet higher education and training costs and needs.

Students may use vouchers to pay tuition, student fees, room and board, books, and supplies. Additionally, ETV funds can be applied to rent, food, child care, transportation, or other living expenses. Eligible students may receive up to \$5,000 per year for up to five years, which need not be consecutive.

Youth may apply for education and training vouchers if they were in foster care on or after their 14<sup>th</sup> birthdays. This includes: 1) youth in extended foster care; 2) youth who left care at ages 18, 19 or 20; 3) youth that were adopted or entered guardianship arrangements at age 16 or older; and, 4) youth who are at least 14 years of age, in the custody of OCFS, and living in non-secure detention facilities operated by approved child welfare providers.

First time applicants must apply for a voucher prior to their 21<sup>st</sup> birthdays, and then may apply annually until their 23<sup>rd</sup> birthdays. In addition to the age requirement, applicants must be U.S. citizens or qualified non-citizens and be enrolled in or attending an approved institution of higher education. OCFS reviews all ETV applications. If youth are declared ineligible for the program, they have the right to appeal the decision, except in cases where the pool of available ETV funds has been depleted.



NYS Office of Children and Family Services ADM on ETVs



NYS ETV Coordinator ADMIN@ETV-NYS.com



<https://etv-nys.smapply.org>

## RE-ENTRY INTO FOSTER CARE

As young adults, former foster youth don't always recognize the value of extended care until they have experienced life on their own for a period of time. With guidance and support, these young people often learn how to advocate for themselves, and sometimes come to realize that returning to the system is one way to access vital services and supports they need to achieve greater stability. Colleges and universities are encouraged to explore this option with former foster youth on their campuses as a way to strengthen their safety net, and offer assistance with the re-entry process.

Young people who previously opted out of extended foster care are eligible to re-enter the system until age 21. Youth may petition to re-enter care any time after their discharge, or within 24 months of discharge if they are age 18 or older. Eligible youth may re-enter foster care up to two times.



NYS Office of Children and Family Services ADM on Re-Entry into Foster Care

## SPECIAL JUVENILE IMMIGRANT STATUS (SJIS)

This status offers young people a federal government pathway to a green card and potentially U.S. citizenship. Undocumented youth that are wards of the family court (in foster care) may be eligible to apply for SJIS if they are under age 21 and in foster care due to separation from their parents because of abuse, neglect, or abandonment. To achieve this status, it must first be determined that it is not in the young person's best interest to return to their country of origin. Once SJIS status is achieved, foster youth become eligible for financial aid and other benefits.



“Youth in care are capable of success when we are equipped with the proper resources that specifically address our needs. Don't count us out, count us in!”

Student Reflections

## Chapter 5 - Community Resources



**MEET KING**

After my father died, I went from being a 10-year old boy growing up in a loving household, to a child in foster care without a place to call home. From that point on, I bounced around group homes and lived with a string of different foster families. With every move, I lost hope. I couldn't find the motivation and means to chase my dreams and accomplish my goals.

When I came of age I did everything in my power to sign myself out of foster care because I didn't want to be another lost black kid in a system that nobody cares about. Unfortunately, I didn't realize what I was trading away to escape the stigma of being a foster youth. No one told me that I would lose access to a variety of resources intended to help young people like me get an education.

At the time, I didn't know anyone who had even attempted to go to college. Instead of raising my expectations, I got caught up in street life, which led to multiple incarcerations. Many of my friends died or were sentenced to decades in prison. Today, I understand the connection between self-destructive choices and being an unloved, unwanted, neglected child. Ultimately, my experiences made me determined to do better, be better, and want more for myself.

I needed a fresh start, so I decided to try college even though I had no idea what I wanted to study, how to apply, or where to get financial aid. Because of my past, I didn't think I had many options. My sister encouraged me to enroll in school and connected me to [New Yorker's For Children](#) (NYFC). They became my support system and comforted me when I found out I didn't qualify for some benefits because I was too old and no longer in foster care. When NYFC awarded me a scholarship, it made me recognize that I deserved a second chance.

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“Thanks to the unconditional support of caring people and responsive community programs I was able to stay in school.”

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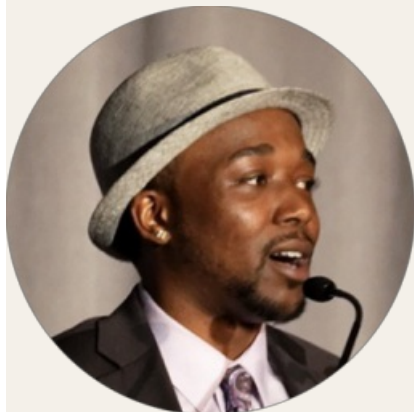
I was proud to be a student at Kingsborough Community College and relieved to finally be on a better path. After a while things got rocky again. I was kicked out of my sister's apartment, and for five months, I couch surfed at the homes of different friends and acquaintances. I felt ashamed and embarrassed to be homeless, like I was some sort of bum. I was trying to build a better life only to be slapped in the face with more misfortune.

I came to the conclusion that I had to drop out of college. Why was I wasting time sitting in classrooms, when I could be working and making money to provide shelter for myself? I needed to end the daily stress of figuring out where I was going to sleep at night. When I shared this decision with my NYFC advisor, she strongly encouraged me to stick to my academic plan. She reminded me of how far I had come, and said I

shouldn't let my current situation defeat me. She referred me to the [Good Shepherd Services Chelsea Foyer](#), which is a transitional housing unit in New York City for former foster youth who become homeless. Thanks to the unconditional support of caring people and responsive community programs I was able to stay in school.

Now that my graduation goal is within reach, I'm glad I didn't allow a temporary circumstance to rob me of a college education. I'll never forget what it was like to be in foster care, in prison, or to be homeless. As an advocate, I help other young people understand they can choose to stay buried inside systems, or they can pick themselves up and keep pushing forward toward success.

This chapter offers information about several types of community-based resources that allow students from foster care to restore stability, emerge from crisis, and attain a college degree.



**King David Tolen, III** was placed in foster care at age 10 following the tragic death of his dad at the hands of police brutality. Although the road hasn't been easy, he looks forward to earning his bachelor's degree from The City College of New York where he is majoring in English. King is proud to be the first male college graduate in his family after achieving an associate degree from Kingsborough Community College in 2017. He is a New Yorkers For Children "Nick's Scholar," which has greatly enhanced his educational journey and professional development. King loves empowering others, especially youth, to strive for success. As a rapper, singer, and songwriter, he uses his versatile talents and life experiences to create educational Hip-Hop music for Flocabulary, an online learning platform that reaches millions of students in more than 20,000 schools worldwide. King's passion for creative writing fuels his aspiration to one day become a New York Times best selling author.

## OVERVIEW



The profile of the typical American college student has changed dramatically over the past two decades. According to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, nearly 28% of full-time college students today have children; nearly 62% work at least part-time; and, only 39% receive federal financial aid.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the current economy continues to professionalize the workplace by requiring a higher level of credential for people seeking quality employment opportunities. This means that “nontraditional” students will need to attain college degrees to remain competitive for jobs that pay livable wages.

Students with experiences in the foster care system are underrepresented on the nation’s college campuses. Those that do enroll in higher education programs often need extra attention, more information, as well as financial, emotional, and academic support to meet the rigorous standards of degree programs and persist to graduation.

While the following community resources specifically target youth with a foster care background, many of these same supports are equally beneficial to all students by helping eliminate financial, health, and other barriers to college success. College administrations can enhance educational outcomes by ensuring all students are aware of the vast resources available to them. For example, campuses can either provide informational materials to all enrolling first year students, or designate a resource center on campus to host this critical information.

28% of FT college students today have children

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62% work at least part-time

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39% receive federal financial aid

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## ASSISTANCE FOR PARENTING STUDENTS

- **Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK)**

UPK is available for all eligible 4-year old children in New York State. There are full-day and half-day programs offered in both elementary schools and at community-based agencies.

 [NYS Pre-K Program Directory](#)

 [In NYC only, call 311](#)

- **New York City Child Care Subsidy**

In New York City, young parents in out of home care may be eligible for this child care subsidy if they are employed or attending an approved educational activity. A referral from a case planner is not required. Parents may apply directly for the subsidy through any of the NYC Administration for Children's Services' (ACS) contracted child care providers.

 [Guide to Working with Young Parents in Out of Home Care](#)

 [NYC ACS Child Care Options](#)

## BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

- **A Home Within**

A Home Within is the only national organization dedicated solely to meeting the emotional needs of current and former foster youth. This program matches and connects young people to psychotherapists in their area for in person or virtual therapeutic services. Young people in New York City and the Hudson Valley can request a volunteer psychotherapist by visiting the organization's website.

 [A Home Within](#)

## CRISIS FUNDING

When young adults age out of foster care, they often do not have access to family-based financial resources to help them get through life emergencies. Crisis funds are available through community-based organizations to assist young people experiencing economic distress. It is recommended that all colleges also set aside funding to help students from foster care resolve unforeseen financial issues that otherwise might prevent them from continuing their education without interruption.

- **Charles Evans Emergency Educational Fund (*New York City ONLY*)**

This fund, administered through a partnership between New Yorkers For Children (NYFC) and NYC ACS, addresses the emergency financial needs of students who have aged out of the foster care system. To be eligible students must have aged out of foster care in New York City; be no older than 27 years of age; be enrolled in an accredited 2-or 4-year college; and, have a GPA of 2.0 or higher. Requests must be urgent in nature, for example to meet the student's vital housing, tuition, or other academic expenses. ACS staff complete an initial application review and then make recommendations to NYFC.



Kimberly Weaver (646) 257-2930 or [kweaver@newyorkersforchildren.org](mailto:kweaver@newyorkersforchildren.org)



**Guidelines and Application.** Submit completed applications to Phyllis Brodsky via Fax: (917) 551-7374 or [Phyllis.Brodsky@acs.nyc.gov](mailto:Phyllis.Brodsky@acs.nyc.gov)

- **New Yorkers For Children Emergency Fund (*New York City ONLY*)**

This crisis fund specifically helps college students currently in the New York City foster care system resolve financial issues that threaten to jeopardize the completion of their studies. Emergency funds are granted to students to pay for expenses that their foster care agencies will not cover. Agency staff must submit applications on behalf of students in order to verify their foster care status. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis and require adequate documentation of the emergency leading to the student's urgent financial need.



**Guidelines and Application.** Submit completed applications to [program@newyorkersforchildren.org](mailto:program@newyorkersforchildren.org)

- **New York Times Neediest Cases Fund (*New York City Only*)**

This emergency fund, established in 1911 by publisher Adolph S. Ochs, is an annual charitable appeal that encourages *New York Times* readers to respond to New Yorkers and others experiencing severe financial distress. Applicants can request support to assist with a number of personal needs, for example, to pay for rent arrears, food, transportation, health, or other issues. Funds are distributed through selected beneficiary organizations that have their own eligibility requirements.



**New York Times Neediest Cases Fund**

People in need should contact the beneficiary organizations that distribute funding directly.

## PUBLIC BENEFITS - CASH ASSISTANCE

While eligibility requirements might limit access to cash assistance for college students, the following public benefits may be available for some young people pursuing higher education.

- **Family Assistance (FA)/TANF and Safety Net Assistance (SNA)**

Family Assistance (FA) provides cash assistance to eligible families that have a minor child living with a parent. To qualify, families must meet income thresholds and recipients must meet work requirements, or be attending either college or a vocational training program. In most cases, there is a maximum lifetime limit of five years (need not be consecutive) for this benefit. Safety Net Assistance (SNA) provides cash benefits to single, non-parenting adults that meet the income eligibility requirements. This benefit has a maximum lifetime limit of two years.

FA and SNA programs require work and/or study participation to maintain benefits. College-enrolled students may count hours dedicated to work study, internships, and externships toward required work activity hours. Additionally, hours spent in classes, labs, doing homework, and engaging in supervised tutoring can count as work activity for up to 12 months. A student's academic schedule must be taken into account before a caseworker can assign any other additional work activities.

 [Directory of NYS Local Departments of Social Services](#), or call the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance at (800) 342-3009.

- **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)**

SSI is a federal income supplement program funded by general tax revenues to provide recipients with the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. Cash benefits are available for very low-income individuals with a disability that prevents them from working. Any youth in foster care that is eligible for SSI will have SSI payments routed to their Local Department of Social Services (LDSS) while they are in foster care. Upon aging out of the child welfare system, young people can apply to receive their SSI payments directly, and the LDSS or foster care agency is responsible for completing the paperwork to transition the SSI payment to the young person. After discharge, former foster youth who continue receiving SSI benefits must manage the annual recertification process on their own.

 [Directory of NYS Social Security Offices](#)

## EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT (EITC)

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a tax benefit for working people and families. Single and married people are eligible if they worked full or part time at some point during the calendar year and earned less than \$15,010 (*for single persons with no dependents*) or \$49,194 (*for families with 3 or more children*).

 [IRS Earned Income Tax Credit Eligibility](#)

## FOOD ASSISTANCE

- **Food Banks**

New York State supports food bank programs that distribute groceries to young adults and families who are unable to access or purchase them on their own

 [Directory of NYC Food Banks](#)

 [Directory of NYS Regional Food Banks Outside NYC](#)

- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) issues electronic benefits that can be used like cash to purchase food. An individual may be eligible for SNAP if they are making less than \$15,684 per year. A family of two may be eligible if they make less than \$21,120 per year.

Most adults are not eligible for SNAP while they attend programs of higher education, but there are some exceptions. Young adults enrolled in college or a training program may be eligible for SNAP if any of the following criteria apply:

- They receive public assistance through the TANF program;
- They take part in a state or federal work study program;
- They work at least 20 hours a week;
- They are taking care of child who is under age 6; or,
- They are taking care of a child who is age 5-12 and do not have child care, which would allow them to attend school, work 20 hours a week, or take part in a work study program.

 [Directory of NYS SNAP Outreach Providers \(Assistance with Applications\)](#)

- **Women, Infants and Children (WIC)**

WIC is a special supplemental food program for women, infants, and children up to the age of 5. It provides funds for families to purchase food, such as milk, eggs, peanut butter, infant formula, and some fruits and vegetables. A two-person household is eligible to receive WIC benefits if they make less than \$29,637 per year.

 [Directory of NYS WIC Providers](#)

## HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (HEAP)

HEAP helps low-income people pay the cost of heating their homes or apartments. Eligible individuals will receive funds during each program year cycle, and also may be able to access emergency assistance if they are at risk of losing their home heating. Eligibility criteria and income requirements for HEAP are similar to those for SNAP, TANF, and SSI.



“Please do not assume I have stable housing, or food at home. Sometimes I don’t.”

Student Reflections

## HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE

The majority of youth currently in the foster care system are eligible for and enrolled in Medicaid. This coverage continues while youth in care attend college. As of January 2014, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) has provided this pathway to Medicaid coverage for youth who exited foster care at age 18 or older, and were enrolled in Medicaid at the time of discharge. Medicaid coverage under this category lasts until the young person becomes 26 years old. Youth are eligible for this coverage regardless of their income.

Health insurance through the Medicaid program can be a great cost saver for college students already struggling to make ends meet. Eligible youth also avoid the time consuming, often stressful process of shopping for insurance and gain the peace of mind of having reliable coverage while they attend school. In most cases, individuals eligible for Medicaid receive care through a Health Management Organization (HMO), which contracts with service providers at the county level. Because some HMOs may only serve certain areas of the state, and youth may travel outside their home county to attend college, **determining the right HMO for a youth is an essential college preparation task.** Below is additional information to help you assist students with a foster care background in securing the appropriate coverage.

### MEDICAID COVERAGE

#### **For Students Currently in Foster Care (under 21 years of age)**

Students in foster care may either have straight Medicaid or be enrolled in Medicaid via a managed care plan. Students with straight Medicaid, can typically access health care services anywhere within the state. Students who have managed care plans should check with their HMO prior to moving out of county for college. If the HMO provider does not provide services in the county where the student will be attending school, the student should call the **NYS Medicaid Enrollment Hotline (800) 505-5678** and request information regarding available HMOs in the county where their college is located. Going away to college is considered a “qualifying event” and therefore young people are eligible to change their managed care plan. Please note that Medicaid is not subject to an open enrolment period.

Dental, Vision, and Behavioral Health services are covered under Medicaid, but students need to check with their health plans to confirm how to access services. Behavioral health treatment includes counseling and other therapeutic services that address mental health issues and substance abuse. All students should verify coverage and options with their insurance provider before seeking health care outside of their counties of origin.

### **For Students No Longer in Foster Care (discharged on or after 18th birthday, or aged out of care)**

Students who were in foster care at age 18 or older and were enrolled in Medicaid at the point of discharge from the system should be eligible for and enrolled in Medicaid under the "Former Foster Care" category. If a youth was not enrolled in Medicaid at the time of aging out, or lost coverage due to an error, they should apply at their local county assistance office as soon as possible – as they may be eligible for Medicaid. Former foster youth in New York may enroll in Medicaid without providing documentation of their previous foster care status to the county. Counties will conduct the status verification work and inform youth when their eligibility has been determined.

### **For Students No Longer in Foster Care (discharged prior to 18th birthday)**

Students without health insurance who left foster care before turning age 18 may be eligible for Medicaid or coverage through the state's health insurance exchange. Students can find more information and apply for insurance by visiting the [NY State of Health Marketplace](#). Students that do not qualify for Medicaid may be eligible to purchase an insurance plan through the marketplace, and will be directed to the list of eligible plans based on income and county of residence.

### **HMO Selection for Students Enrolled in Medicaid**

Students who are enrolled in Medicaid in NYS need to determine how they prefer to access health care services while they are in college. This is important because HMOs authorized to serve Medicaid patients may only cover certain geographic areas (sometimes it is organized by county or region). The following information will guide you in advising youth seeking to enroll in an HMO that matches their eligibility, desired location of services, and specific needs.

- Students planning to attend college where they currently live (aka their "home" county) can keep their existing HMOs and health care providers.
- Students planning to attend college in a part of NYS other than their "home" county, and who choose to return to home to receive services, can keep their existing HMOs and health care providers.
- Students planning to attend college in a part of NYS other than their "home" county, and who choose to receive services close to campus (rather than at home), may need to switch HMOs to access health providers in this location.

 [Directory of NYS Managed Care Organizations Providing Medicaid \(by county\)](#)

 [NYS Medicaid Choice Hotline \(800\) 505-5678](#)

 [Directory of NYS Local Departments of Social Services](#)

## RESIDENCY CONSIDERATIONS

- NYS youth who are attending out-of-state schools, but wish to continue accessing health and behavioral care in their “home” state, should maintain their New York-based Medicaid coverage. However, it is important these students understand that they will only be able to access care (other than in emergency medical situations) from Medicaid providers in New York State.
- Students who go out of state to attend college have the option to officially change their “home or state of residency.” In this scenario, these students will need to seek coverage options through their school, or through the health insurance marketplace in their new state of residency.
- Currently, 10 states provide Medicaid coverage under the “*Former Foster Youth*” category to young adults who were previously in foster care, but in a different state’s child welfare system. In 2023, pursuant to the **SUPPORT Act** (P.L. 115-271), all states will have to provide this coverage regardless of the student’s home state and current residency. Until this new law goes into effect, only youth with a foster care background attending colleges in the following states will be eligible for Medicaid outside of their states of origin:

- ✓ California
- ✓ Delaware
- ✓ Kentucky
- ✓ Massachusetts
- ✓ New Mexico
- ✓ Pennsylvania
- ✓ South Dakota
- ✓ Utah
- ✓ Virginia
- ✓ Wisconsin

If you are assisting youth with a foster care background who are planning to leave NYS to attend a college located outside the 10 states listed above, they will need to consider how they will access medical coverage, which can be through their school, place of employment, or they may be eligible to obtain coverage through the state-based health marketplace.

 [Overview of Medicaid Programs by State](#)

# HOUSING RESOURCES FOR YOUTH AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

When young people age out of foster care without achieving permanency, the child welfare system is expected to ensure they have stable, safe places to live. The state is not permitted to discharge young people to homeless shelters. Foster care providers also are required to document that the person leaving care has at least one permanent, caring adult resource in their life. A young person aging out of the child welfare system may request a temporary extension to remain in foster care, until a suitable housing resource is identified. Housing options include:

## HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER (SECTION 8)

Young people aging out of foster care are granted priority status to receive Section 8 housing vouchers. These vouchers can be used to find market rate apartments and allow applicants to contribute up to 30% of their income towards housing. Eligibility and maintenance requirements for this program (including employment) vary by county. It is important to note that some counties in New York do not have a current and active Section 8 program. Former foster youth must contact their local housing authority office to verify voucher availability and to complete an application.

 [Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program](#)

## CHILD WELFARE HOUSING SUBSIDY

For foster youth that exit care with a goal of either expedited family reunification or APPLA (independent living), New York State offers child welfare housing subsidies of up to \$10,800 over three years (\$300 per month). The purpose of these subsidies is to help youth 18 and older secure market rate housing. Subsidies are available to youth from foster care until they reach their 21st birthdays.

## NYC ACS HOUSING ACADEMY COLLABORATIVE

*(Students from New York City ONLY)*

Assistance is available to NYC foster youth 16-21 years old to help them get and keep their housing after they leave foster care. Housing Specialists are available to assist youth with landlord and tenant rights, negotiating with creditors, resume preparation, educational goal setting, career planning, financial literacy, as well as job and internship referrals

 [NYC ACS Housing Academy Collaborative](#)

 [Call the Hotline: \(212\) 442-4273](#)

## **NEW YORK/NEW YORK III**


*(Students from New York City ONLY)*

This program provides housing support to youth ages 18-25 that are at risk for homelessness, with 200 units specifically designated to population IV (former foster youth). To be eligible, young people must be in the process of leaving or have recently left foster care, or have been placed in foster care for more than one year after their 16th birthdays. Housing providers may require youth to fulfill additional eligibility requirements such as, having a job, attending school, or enrollment in counseling or behavioral health programs.

## **NYCHA PUBLIC HOUSING VOUCHERS**

*(New York City ONLY)*

Youth over age 18 who are transitioning from foster care with a goal of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) may be eligible to receive NYCHA housing vouchers. Foster youth who complete applications before turning 21, or before leaving care, are given priority status for NYCHA housing.

Apply via a walk-in appointment at 150 William Street, 8th Floor, New York, NY 10038 (weekdays 9:00 am – 5:00 pm) or call the NYC ACS Housing Support Services (HSS) Hotline at  (212) 442-4273.

## Chapter 6 - Campus Policy Recommendations



**MEET DYLAN**

I was making the transition from foster care to independent living as I started my freshman year at LaGuardia Community College. Honestly, it was exhausting and stressful to be a 19-year old trying to figure out how to be both a successful commuter-student and an adult out on my own.

It was a time of great uncertainty. I often felt isolated in my apartment and was struggling with depression following the death of my grandmother. Some days I didn't know how I would make it to class, or if I would be able to buy the required textbooks, or even eat at home.

What you may not know is that students from foster care are usually petrified to self-identify, which was the case for me. We hide our status because we are trying to move beyond the painful experiences of our childhood. We don't always know about the beneficial campus services and programs that will open up to us if we disclose our background. Eventually, I came forward and applied for food support through LaGuardia, which kept me afloat during my first year of college. Once I became more informed, I tapped into every resource I could find at my community college, including tutoring, job placement, scholarship search services, and student loan opportunities. All of these supports made a huge difference.

As my personal situation improved, I decided to step out of my comfort zone and do more than just focus on getting good grades. I signed up to be a *Student Success Mentor* (SSM), where I work with incoming freshmen and transfer students to help them make a smoother transition into college life. As an SSM, I facilitate the First Year Seminar, which introduces students to campus resources. I also serve as a bridge between students and faculty, and assist in the creation of each student's e-Portfolio (necessary to complete assignments), and provide ongoing support.

During my college journey, and through my work as a peer mentor, I've gained valuable insight into the priority needs of college students, especially those who come from non-traditional backgrounds. Frankly, there is room for improvement if higher education institutions expect to help young people like me access a college education and make it to graduation. This chapter features several important recommendations for your consideration. Here are my personal suggestions to help current and former foster youth minimize common financial barriers to college success:

- Provide weekly food vouchers to supplement regular meal plan offerings.
- Offer reimbursements for textbooks and tuition based on individual needs.
- Prioritize on-campus job opportunities for youth in care.
- Host a seminar (particularly for freshmen) that addresses the unique needs of college students from foster care, highlights available opportunities, and presents positive road maps for higher education success.
- Establish Foster Care Awareness Clubs on campus to welcome and support current and former foster youth.

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“We don't always know about the beneficial campus services and programs that will open up to us if we disclose our background.”

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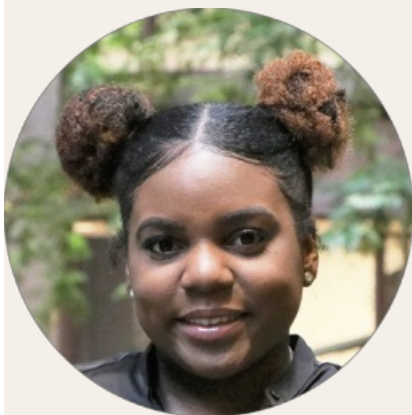
In my experience, schools don't always acknowledge or understand the unique obstacles faced by youth in care. For example, I am frequently asked to provide a document only to discover that the financial aid advisor doesn't know how to interpret it to reflect my situation and needs, which is extremely frustrating. Please remember being in foster care wasn't my choice, but I have to live with it. Focus on how you can make each overwhelming process easier and more understandable -- otherwise you will create new problems, more instability, and greater insecurity that pushes students like me further away from achieving our educational goals.

I hope staff on college campuses will see youth in care for the bright, motivated, and resilient people we are instead of as lost causes. The truth is, most of us weren't properly prepared for college because people tend

to underestimate our potential, and we don't have the same kind of support from our parents that other students are fortunate to receive.

Despite the hardships I've endured, I know that I will make my mark in the future because of my drive and my education. I have learned that when the road gets rocky I must keep rocking, and that success is more likely to happen when preparation meets opportunity. I am determined to be a strong voice that inspires and encourages other young people who face similar challenges.

With more support from campus leadership and staff, students from foster care will be able to view themselves in a better light and become outstanding scholars and achievers ready to contribute something greater to the world than they ever imagined.



**Dominique 'Dylan' Tatom** is a senior at John Jay College of Criminal Justice where she is majoring in Criminal Justice and Sociology. When Dylan entered the foster care system at age 13, attending college was a dream she felt was beyond her reach. Today, she is a campus leader, youth advocate, and a peer mentor with New Yorkers For Children. Dylan firmly believes that every youth deserves a fair chance at success, which she feels is best achieved through inclusion. She plans to go to law school and pursue a career working on behalf of people who are voiceless, defenseless, and ignored by society.

## OVERVIEW



Since 2015, New York State has made a concerted effort to ensure that young people who have experienced the foster care system have an equal opportunity to achieve independence and thrive in their futures. The state initiated an important first step by helping alleviate the financial barriers that often impede entry into college for youth with a foster care background. However, college success for these students is more likely if schools commit to offering welcoming campus environments focused on supporting their academic success and overall well-being.

To achieve this type of nurturing environment, school administrators and other campus staff need to familiarize themselves with the child welfare system and the authentic experiences of youth within the system. This chapter sets forth several campus policy recommendations for higher education institutions to consider as a next step for making college success a reality for current and former foster youth. These recommendations are based on student focus group feedback, as well as best practice research compiled by Casey Family Programs as part of the [Supporting Success: A Framework for Program Enhancement](#).



“I want you to know that YOU indeed can make a difference in the lives of students in foster care. No job title or position is too small to make a positive change in our lives. Every hand helps. When you acknowledge our daily struggles, you are making a difference.”

Student Reflections

## DORM LIVING AND HOUSING POLICIES

Students who are currently in or have recently exited foster care may experience housing instability or lack a place to stay to during school breaks and holidays. For these students, the associated stress, anxiety, and high risk of homelessness often undermine their ability to focus on their studies. Colleges and universities can support students from foster care by understanding and addressing their unique needs and housing challenges. The following policy recommendations promote more stable, consistent living arrangements for youth from foster care to minimize disruption and help them concentrate on achieving their higher education goals.

### PREFERRED STATUS FOR CAMPUS HOUSING

Offer current and former foster youth a priority assignment designation for on-campus or campus provided housing. Some states, such as California, have made this a provision by law<sup>1</sup>, however colleges and universities can implement this policy on their own to meet the special housing needs of youth in foster care.

### PROVISION OF YEAR-ROUND DORM LIVING

For young people who may not have family or a home to return to during semester breaks and holidays, the provision of year-round stable housing supports student success. For example, the [CUNY/ACS Fostering Success Initiative](#) allows young people in the New York City foster care system to live in a CUNY dorm year-round until they graduate. Additionally, participating students receive comprehensive wraparound supports from college success advisors and tutors to help them achieve academic success.

### STUDENT HOUSING PLANS AND COMMUNITY RESOURCE DIRECTORIES

Develop customized housing plans and resource directories to connect students to more stable living arrangements. This support is especially important for schools that do not provide on-campus housing. Priority recommendations include:

- ✓ Institute a campus-wide policy that requires the development of student housing plans to ensure youth with a foster care background have appropriate living arrangements during and between academic terms.
- ✓ Assign campus staff to help connect students to institutionally owned or operated housing during school breaks, or to identify and refer students in need to available community-based, short-term housing options.
- ✓ Consistently promote campus housing assistance and opportunities through social media and other outreach strategies to ensure students are aware of how to access available resources and supports.
- ✓ Allocate a pool of funds to cover emergency housing arrangements for students when there are no available on-campus or community-based options.

## STAFF TRAINING POLICIES

Colleges and universities are encouraged to offer staff training that provides a basic understanding of the child welfare system and explains the common challenges that may affect the academic success of students who have experienced foster care. Core training curriculum can be adapted to reflect the different roles and duties of campus professionals who come into contact with students from foster care (i.e., financial aid officers, academic advisors, professors, guidance counselors, resident advisors, and support program staff).

At a minimum, all staff should receive training that provides information in the following areas:

- ✓ A contextual overview of the New York State child welfare system.
- ✓ The needs and issues facing older youth in foster care, in particular their experiences as they transition from the system, (aka "age out").
- ✓ How trauma impacts youth in the child welfare system, particularly how it adversely affects their adjustment to college and pursuing academic success.
- ✓ How to create a space that supports students who have been in foster care, including how to respect their confidentiality regarding disclosing private information.
- ✓ Awareness of available on-campus resources and/or campus liaisons assigned to provide information and navigational support to connect foster youth to specific resources.
- ✓ Knowledge of all campus policies and programs that serve current or former foster youth.

To be most effective, training curricula should be developed in collaboration with child welfare professionals as well as current and former youth in foster care. Consider inviting student advocates to kick-off the training (or incorporate a video) by briefly sharing their real-life experiences to inspire staff commitment to making positive changes on campus.

## DATA COLLECTION AND TRACKING POLICIES

Data collection and tracking policies allow colleges and universities to identify and better serve students who are in or have been in foster care. School policies and procedures should protect privacy, while still recognizing the importance of student identification in connecting youth with a foster care history to the information and supports they need to keep pace with their college peers in the general population.

Data analysis also affords schools the ability to fine tune programs and supports for this special population including focusing on their retention and successful academic completion. It is recommended that schools implement data collection and tracking policies that do the following:

- ✓ Track data on the number of students with a foster care experience.
- ✓ Provide opportunities for youth to voluntarily identify as having a foster care history and explain to them why the information is being requested.
- ✓ Once a student self-identifies as having experienced the foster care system, capture and analyze the following data:
  - College retention and academic progress to evaluate and inform program improvements;
  - Academic progress metrics including: GPA, credit accumulation, progress towards graduation, persistence, and enrollment in remedial classes;
  - Student use and evaluation of campus support programs and resources; and,
  - Financial aid utilization (state and federal).
- ✓ Self-identification also should be used to trigger consideration for specialized programs that support students on non-traditional tracks, or provide additional academic assistance, such as opportunity programs and CUNY ASAP.
- ✓ Conduct an annual online survey of enrolled students with a foster care background to collect qualitative data that assesses their campus experiences and ongoing needs.

Schools are encouraged to develop data collection and tracking policies in collaboration with students in foster care and alumni. Inclusion is a best practice to surface potentially sensitive issues related to student confidentiality and disclosure choices. Some students may not wish to reveal their foster care history due to a fear of being stigmatized, or because they don't fully understand what data will be used, for what purpose, or how it will be shared. To support data collection policies and plans, it is recommended that schools develop a companion communication strategy that is informed by student and alumni feedback. Consider including FAQs and messages that address common student concerns and issues with self-identification. Highlight the value of data-driven program development and how it ultimately benefits young people served.

# STUDENT IDENTIFICATION POLICIES

It is often challenging for colleges and universities to identify students with a foster care background on their campuses. Without proper identification, many students will miss opportunities to access the available resources and supports set aside to help foster youth and alumni thrive in school.

Schools typically rely on FAFSA information (*Free Application for Federal Student Aid*) to identify eligible students. FAFSA includes questions regarding time spent in foster care to determine if students are financially independent from their parents. Unfortunately, the FAFSA language is often confusing for youth applicants. Because the admissions process represents the earliest point of engagement between schools and students, it is recommended that all public and private colleges and universities in New York include a **standardized foster youth identification question** on their admission applications. This policy has been effective in California and Washington State<sup>2</sup>, where public universities experienced a significant increase in foster youth identification after changing their admission applications.

Pre-admission identification also gives schools the opportunity to conduct earlier and more targeted outreach to prospective students from foster care. Once youth self-identify, schools will be better equipped to help students navigate the college admission and enrollment processes, and efficiently connect them to campus opportunity programs, for which all foster youth automatically meet the financial qualifications.

Below are two examples of foster youth identification questions that are recommended for inclusion on New York State college admissions applications. This language is intended to minimize confusion for students and is similar to what is on the New York State Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) application and the State University of New York's Central Admissions Application.

## Recommended Language:

1. **Are you currently in foster care, an orphan, OR were you in foster care or orphaned at any time after age 13?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

*If YES, are you interested in receiving academic support or financial aid designated for foster youth and orphans?*

☐ Yes ☐ No

2. **I am a current or former foster youth OR an orphan and would be interested in receiving financial aid and/or other benefits and services available for foster youth.**

☐ Yes ☐ No

## ESTABLISHING FOSTER YOUTH CAMPUS LIAISONS

Higher education institutions can encourage the college success of foster youth by addressing the following question: *Who on campus will be responsible for providing leadership and support to this specific student population?* To promote accountability, enhance matriculation, and improve educational outcomes, schools should consider designating a *Foster Youth Campus Liaison* to assume this important role on every campus.

Staff assigned to this liaison position will provide expertise and service coordination to ensure that students with a foster care background are supported by each department they encounter on campus. Similar to a concierge, the liaison works to ensure that students are interacting with knowledgeable staff in each department to ease and encourage successful navigation of various tasks.

It is recommended that liaisons be mid-to-high level administrators focused on working collaboratively across campus departments to support students whenever administrative barriers arise. Ideally, the liaison would identify and work closely with other staff within each of the institution's departments that regularly interact with youth in care (i.e., financial aid, enrollment, housing, opportunity programs). This teaming approach is a best practice as it creates a valuable network of deeply knowledgeable and supportive professionals ready to address the diverse needs of current and former foster youth. The liaison is not expected to provide individualized academic advisement, but instead connects students to the appropriate department leads, who in turn, offer direct support and interventions for students.

Finally, the *Foster Youth Campus Liaison* is well positioned to oversee data management and reporting to keep campus leadership updated on the number of students with foster care experience enrolled at any given time, and potentially sharing their academic outcomes.

## ENHANCING STUDENT ORIENTATION

The first year of college is a time of significant transition and adjustment for all young people. This experience can be even more daunting for youth coming from foster care, especially if they are the first in their families to pursue higher education. Some institutions and specialized educational programs offer summer immersion programs as an enhanced orientation for first year students to help them adapt to college life and provide opportunities for academic remediation or early credit accumulation.

Many colleges require a more intensive orientation as a condition for admission for some student groups, such as the required summer seminars in the opportunity programs, or the Options Center at [Goddard Riverside Community Center](#). This program provides low-income and first-generation students with training, advisement, and transition support as they enter their first year of college. This same protocol would benefit college students with a foster care background by putting them on a path to success starting at orientation.

Foster youth typically don't receive as much college advisement prior to beginning school as compared with their peers in the general population. Without this guidance, students often enter college with unrealistic expectations and are less equipped to deal with issues related to course overload, loss of financial aid, and course completion. [The Washington State Passport to Success](#) program, which aims to increase the college enrollment and completion rate among foster youth, saw between a 40% - 88% retention increase for students that accessed passport services.<sup>3</sup>

To help students address these common challenges, institutions can offer enhanced student orientations that cover topics such as:

- **Financial Aid**

Maintaining Financial Aid • Course Enrollment Requirements • Financial Aid Loss Appeals.

- **Course Enrollment**

Add/Drop Periods • Preserving GPA (including Incompletes, Credit/ No Credit Options).

- **Student Support Services**

Mapping Campus Resources (e.g., medical, mental health, student clubs, study abroad, etc.).

- **Leave of Absence Requests**

Medical • Partial Unenrollment.

# ENROLLMENT AND COST OF ATTENDANCE POLICIES

The rising cost of attending higher education is often a deterrent for young people in foster care aspiring to achieve a college degree. Fortunately, New York State has made the pathway to a college degree more obtainable with the establishment of the [Foster Youth College Success Initiative \(FYCSI\)](#). Since 2015, funding available through this program has been alleviating the cost of attendance for college students with a foster care background. In fact, awareness of FYCSI has contributed to a 46% increase in the number of New York students attending college from foster care<sup>4</sup>.

In addition to FYCSI, foster youth and alumni would benefit greatly from early access policies that connect them to courses and supportive campus resources. The following recommendations are designed to promote more equitable opportunities for foster youth:

## PRIORITY CLASS REGISTRATION

Priority registration should be granted to foster youth to ensure they can access the classes they need to satisfy financial aid and other funding requirements. Expedited registration would give these students the ability to coordinate other necessary supports in a timely fashion, such as health insurance porting and requests for child welfare room and board payments.

## FEE WAIVERS

Schools should consider limiting or waiving enrollment and other fees for foster youth to accommodate for financial challenges that are beyond their control. For example, these students frequently are charged excessive late payment fees because their child welfare room and board payments are delayed. Without the usual family safety net, they simply don't have the means to cover these expenses in the interim and may have to drop out of school as a result. To support college persistence, campuses should consider avoiding late fee policies that automatically trigger holds on student accounts for outstanding semester balances.

# RESOURCE LINKS

## CHAPTER 1

 California College Pathways

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

 Passport to College Promise Scholarship Program

<https://www.collegesuccessfoundation.org/wa/supports-and-scholarships/passport>

 Tuition Assistance Program (TAP)

<https://www.hesc.ny.gov/pay-for-college/apply-for-financial-aid/nys-tap.html>

## CHAPTER 2

 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

<http://www.nysed.gov/essa>

 Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018

<https://www.cwla.org/family-first-prevention-services-act/>

 Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/federal/fosteringconnections/>

## CHAPTER 3

 IRS Verification of Non-filing Letter

<https://www.irs.gov/individuals/tax-return-transcript-types-and-ways-to-order-them>

## CHAPTER 4

 Education and Training Vouchers

<https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/ddps/adolescent/etv.asp>

 [John Chafee Foster Care Independence Act](#)

<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/IF11070.pdf>

 [NYS Office of Children and Family Services ADM on Re-Entry into Foster Care](#)

<https://tinyurl.com/NYS-OCFS-FosterCare-Re-entry>

 [Welfare Research, Inc.](#)

<https://etv-nys.smapply.org/>

## CHAPTER 5

 [A Home Within](#)

<https://www.ahomewithin.org/>

 [Directory of NYC Food Banks](#)

<https://www.foodbanknyc.org/get-help/>

 [Directory of NYS Local Departments of Social Services](#)

<http://otda.ny.gov/workingfamilies/dss.asp>

 [Directory of NYS Local HEAP Programs](#)

<http://otda.ny.gov/programs/heap/contacts/>

 [Directory of NYS Managed Care Organizations Providing Medicaid \(by county\)](#)

[https://www.health.ny.gov/health\\_care/managed\\_care/plans/mcp\\_dir\\_by\\_plan.htm](https://www.health.ny.gov/health_care/managed_care/plans/mcp_dir_by_plan.htm)

 [Directory of NYS Regional Food Banks Outside NYC](#)

[https://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/nutrition/hpnap/regional\\_foodbank\\_map.htm](https://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/nutrition/hpnap/regional_foodbank_map.htm)

 [Directory of NYS SNAP Outreach Providers \(Assistance with Applications\)](#)

<http://otda.ny.gov/programs/snap/providers/>

 [Directory of NYS Social Security Offices](#)

<https://secure.ssa.gov/ICON/main.jsp>

 [Directory of NYS WIC Providers](#)

[https://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/nutrition/wic/local\\_agencies.htm](https://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/nutrition/wic/local_agencies.htm)

 [Good Shepherd Services Chelsea Foyer](#)

<https://goodshepherds.org/program/chelsea-foyer/>

 [Guide to Working with Young Parents in Out of Home Care](#)

<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/youth/2018/homecare.pdf>

 [IRS Earned Income Tax Credit Eligibility](#)

<https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p5334.pdf>

 **New York Times Neediest Cases Fund**

<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/ref/giving/neediesthistory.html>

 **New Yorkers For Children**

<https://www.newyorkersforchildren.org/youth-resources/>

 **NYC ACS Child Care Options**

<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/acs/early-care/acs-child-care-options.page>

 **NYC ACS Housing Academy Collaborative**

<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/acs/youth/housing.page>

 **NYS Pre-K Program Directory**

<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/earlylearning/documents/2018-2019NYSPreKProgramDirectory.pdf>

 **Overview of Medicaid Programs by State**

<https://www.medicaid.gov/state-overviews/index.html>

 **Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program**

<https://hcr.ny.gov/section-8-housing-choice-voucher-hcv-program>

## CHAPTER 6

 **CUNY/ACS Fostering Success Initiative**

<http://www.cuny.edu/academics/academic-programs/seek-college-discovery/youth-matter/foster-care-collaborative/program-and-initiatives/>

 **Goddard Riverside Community Center**

<https://www.goddard.org/grcc/programs/ChildrenYouth/options/>

 **Supporting Success: A Framework for Program Enhancement**

<https://www.casey.org/media/SupportingSuccess.pdf>

 **The Washington State Passport to Success**

<https://www.washingtonpassportnetwork.org/>

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

 **iFoster**

# SOURCE CITATIONS

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8. Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2017), Texas Higher Education Foster Care Liaisons Information & Reference Guide, Retrieved from <https://txicfw.socialwork.utexas.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/HE-Liaisons-Guide-FINAL.pdf>.
9. Please see Chapter 3 for more information about FYCSI.

## CHAPTER 2

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, (2018), Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS) FY2017 data. (AFCARS Report, August 2018), Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport25.pdf>.
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## CHAPTER 6

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4. This TAP data from 2014 to 2017 was retrieved through a FOIL request to the Higher Education Services Corporation in 2018, which shows an increase in the number of students from foster care attending college each year after the launch of FYCSI awareness and outreach campaigns.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This Resource Guide is the culmination of intentional collaboration and advocacy efforts to create a stronger post-secondary pathway for current and former foster youth. In 2014, Children's Aid launched the **Fostering Youth Success Alliance** (more affectionately known as FYSA), a New York State coalition that promotes responsive policies and programs to offer young people with a foster care background every opportunity to set higher expectations and achieve their goals. FYSA is dedicated to data-driven system reform, raising public awareness, and securing stabilizing supports that empower youth across the state to overcome barriers and excel in life.

FYSA's first campaign – the **Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI)** – advocated for the state to create a support system for youth in foster care and alumni to help them access resources designed to boost higher education enrollment and improve graduation rates. At the time, 22 states across the country had statewide tuition waivers, or other scholarships programs designed specifically for youth in care. The New York State Assembly responded quickly and became true champions for these youth by allocating 1.5 million in the 2015/16 state budget to establish FYCSI in the New York State educational code. As of 2019, New York has contributed a total of \$21 million to support over 600 college students from foster care.

While a lack of financial aid is the primary reason youth with a foster care background do not enroll in college, it is not the reason they don't graduate. Many of these students cite complications navigating and acclimating to college life, a lack of housing, and not having the benefit of supportive adults in their lives as why they don't persist.

This Guide aims to provide people like you who work on college campuses and at child welfare agencies with tools and information to help you assist students striving to persist and achieve in school. Think of the Guide as part tool kit and part reference book, with a hefty dose of "truth serum" courtesy of the students who have graciously contributed their real-life experiences as a way to eliminate unnecessary obstacles for future generations.

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“While a lack of financial aid is the primary reason youth with a foster care background do not enroll in college, it is not the reason they don’t graduate.”

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We hope the information, templates, and materials inside this Guide ultimately make your job a little easier, and result in smoother, more positive college experiences for the students you encounter every day. While it is hard to fully understand what has shaped a young person’s life upon first meeting, we encourage you to take the time to ask the right questions and listen carefully to each student who comes to you for help. Finally, we hope you will share these resources with leadership at your institution to inspire thoughtful discussions about how your campus can adopt some of the recommendations outlined in [Chapter 6](#) focused on making tangible improvements.

Our deepest gratitude to the brave, resilient students who shared their personal stories to help us understand what it is really like to attend college after being in foster care. We are so proud of your accomplishments and have no doubt that your hard work and dedication will lead you to brighter futures filled with endless possibilities.

*Student Essay Writers and Reflection Quote Contributors*

- Angelina Cremins, St. John Fisher College, Class of 2019
- Ericka Francois, SUNY New Paltz, Class of 2020
- Trenae Ka, Stony Brook University - SUNY, Class of 2019
- Shaqueana Peoples, Hunter College - CUNY, Class of 2018
- Gabbie Rodriguez, City College of New York - CUNY, Class of 2021
- Dylan Tatom, John Jay College of Criminal Justice - CUNY, Class of 2019
- Melanie Thompson, Hunter College - CUNY, Class of 2021
- Mariama Toe, Buffalo State College - SUNY, Class of 2019
- King Tolen, III, City College of New York - CUNY, Class of 2019
- New York State OCFS Youth Advisory Board
- New Yorkers for Children Youth Advisory Board

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- Sonia Gonzalez, New York City Administration for Children's Services
- Candi Griffin-Jenkins, State University of New York
- Cheryl Hamilton, State University of New York
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- New York State Office of Children and Family Services
- State University of New York

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CREDITS:

- Vision, Content Development, and Research: Jessica Maxwell
- Content Editing and Project Management: Maria Puglisi, Right Tree Consulting
- Creative Design: Behavior Design
- Website Development: Ryan Choi



“The uninformed miss opportunity. Informers change lives.”

Student Reflections