

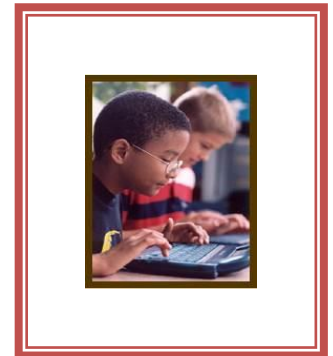


## ISSUES BRIEF

### Youth and Young Adults from Foster Care: Why Education Matters

#### Young adults from foster care are underrepresented among college students<sup>1</sup>

- **6.2 % of foster alumni** (Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin) ages 23-24 have an Associate's Degree or higher compared to **37.8% of the general population**<sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup>
- Nationally, **2-9 % of youth from foster care obtain a bachelor's degree**<sup>4</sup>
- 20% of youth from foster care enroll in a 2 or 4 year college compared to 60% of the general population <sup>5</sup>
- 50% of foster youth alumni have a high school diploma/(GED) compared to 70% of their peers<sup>6</sup>



#### A 2-4 year college degree is the lifeline for foster care alumni who lack family stability

- A college degree reduces poverty by increasing lifetime earning potential by more than \$480,000 on average<sup>7</sup>
- College students from foster care are more motivated to succeed compared to their peers and more resilient in the face of diversity <sup>8</sup>
- College access reduces likelihood of negative outcomes associated with long term foster care:
  - Homelessness (46.6%)
  - Multiple out-of-wedlock births (60%)
  - Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at 2x rate of military veterans<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., Cusick, G., Havicek, J., Perez, A., & Keller, T. (2007). Executive summary: Midwest evaluation of adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 21. Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

<sup>2</sup> U.S., Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Education Statistics (2014). Educational Attainment. [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe\\_caa.pdf](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe_caa.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Kim, W. (2011). Minorities in Higher Education, *American Council on Education*, Washington DC. Retrieved 11-30-14 from <http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/Minorities-in-Higher-Education-Twenty-Fourth-Status-Report-2011-Supplement.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> National Working Group on Foster Care and Education (2014). *Fostering Success in Education: National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care*. Retrieved 8-14-14 from <http://www.fostercareandeducation.org/NationalWorkGroup.aspx>.

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<sup>5</sup> National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, 2014; Unrau, Y., Font, S., & Rawls, G. (2012). Readiness for college engagement among students who have aged out of foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review* 34 (1), 76-83.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> Pecora, P. (2012). Maximizing educational achievement of youth in foster care and alumni: Factors associated with success. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34 (6), 1121-1129; Peters, C., Dworsky, A., Courtney, M., & Pollack, H. (2009). Extending Foster Care to Age 21: Weighing the Costs to Government against the Benefits to Youth. Chapin Hall.

<sup>8</sup> Merdinger, J., Hines, A., Lemon Osterling, K., & Wyatt, P. (2005). Pathways to College for Former Foster Youth: Understanding Factors That Contribute to Educational Success. *Child Welfare* 84 (6), 867-896.

<sup>9</sup> Casey Family Services. (2005). *The Casey Young Adult Survey: Findings over Three Years*. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Services.

## BARRIERS TO OVERCOME

- Illinois ranks 3rd to last in family stability for foster youth (Rollock, 2011). These youth are less likely to have family support for education
- Long-term foster youth lack college preparedness due to multiple school changes (Okpych, 2012; Unrau, Font, & Rawls, 2012)
- Foster youth may struggle with past emotional trauma which can hamper ability to thrive academically (Dwarsky & Perez, 2010; Houston & Kramer, 2008)
- Lack of consistent service coordination between child welfare agencies and higher ed institutions (Unrau, Font, & Rawls, 2012).
- Lack of higher ed infrastructure/training to serve students from foster care (Davis, 2006).
- \$5000.00 Education Training Voucher program (ETV) is insufficient for living expenses, housing when students lack parental safety net.
- Foster youth in college lack summer employment/income opportunities.
- Inconsistent access to health care/mental health services (Okpych, 2012)
- Transitional supports end at age 21-before college is completed (Wolanin, 2005)
- Illinois funds only 48 college scholarships for 4000+ high school/college age youth in care (NRCYD, 2014)

## Proposed Solutions:

### Reducing Educational Disparities Among Foster Youth

#### Solution Focused Research

- Statewide **needs and assets assessment** of current and former foster/adopted youth in college
- Statewide assessment of **higher education resources** and supports for current and former foster/adopted youth
- Outcomes tracking of foster youth **college admissions and retention**
- Educational outcomes **monitoring of high school aged youth** in residential facilities

#### Solution Focused Programs

- Summer “Bridge Program” for foster youth in high school
- Community college/university transitional support programs for youth in foster care
- College “reentry” programming to promote degree attainment for former college students who did not complete a degree
- “Academic Coaches” to support students’ degree attainment
- Corporate sponsored paid summer internships for students from foster care
- Training for foster/adoptive parents, residential staff, and child welfare staff related to college/vocational resources and application procedures
- Training for designated college/university academic staff on the social-emotional and academic needs of youth in care
- College tuition vouchers for ALL qualified foster/adopted students

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