



FOSTERING INDEPENDENCE

The Need for a Statewide Foster Youth College Success Initiative

**Community
Service
Society** | Fighting Poverty
Strengthening
New York

Report Commissioned by

YiCC
YOUTH IN CARE COALITION

May
2014

Table of Contents

Summary	2
The Need for This Work	6
Why So Few Foster Youth Attend College	9
What New York Can Learn from Other States	14
What New York's Foster Youth Need: Universal, Consistent Support	19



The Community Service Society of New York (CSS) is an informed, independent, and unwavering voice for positive action on behalf of more than 3 million low-income New Yorkers. CSS draws on a 170-year history of excellence in addressing the root causes of economic disparity. We respond to urgent, contemporary challenges through applied research, advocacy, litigation, and innovative program models that strengthen and benefit all New Yorkers.

www.cssny.org

About the Authors

Apurva Mehrotra is a Policy Analyst at the Community Service Society where he conducts research, analyzes data, and writes on issues that affect low-income residents of New York City. He has co-authored reports on the findings of CSS's annual Unheard Third survey of low-income New Yorkers as well as a report on enrollment trends at CUNY, the city's public university system. Apurva has a Masters Degree in Public Administration from Baruch College.

Lazar Treschan is the Director of Youth Policy at the Community Service Society, where he conducts research and advocacy to raise awareness about and develop policy solutions for young people struggling to succeed in New York City. His recent publications include studies of career and technical education (CTE), enrollment trends at the City University of New York, and New York's high school equivalency system. He is an adjunct faculty member at Brooklyn College and The New School. A native New Yorker, he has a Masters in Public Policy from Harvard University.

Acknowledgments

CSS would like to thank all the members of the Youth in Care Coalition for their input. Special thanks to Jessica Maxwell and Yolanda McBride at the Children's Aid Society for their leadership of the coalition, and Sarah Chiles of the Redlich Horwitz Foundation for her support of this cause. We also owe a debt of gratitude to Eileen McCaffrey at Foster Care to Success and Susan Magazine at New Yorkers for Children for providing us with data that informed the estimates in this report. At CSS, Nancy Rankin, Jeffrey Jones, and Alia Winters provided invaluable contributions to the production of this report.



“A lot of foster youth don’t know what is available to them until it is too late.”

Aretha is well aware of how foster youth can go from a college dorm to a homeless shelter in the blink of an eye. She has traveled that road herself.

Aretha was excited for her first year in college—living on campus and willing to put in the work. However, she couldn’t afford to pay for books, and with no assistance from her adoptive mother, Aretha did not know where to turn. So she struggled through two semesters with no textbooks, often heeding the directive of professors who told students without books to not bother showing up.

Feeling that it was pointless to continue, Aretha withdrew from college. Soon after, she faced the prospect of turning 21 years old and, no longer welcome to stay with her adoptive mother, having no place to go. For one and a half years, Aretha was homeless, going from one women’s shelter to the next.

Aretha now has her own apartment and is a participant in the Year Up program, which provides her with the opportunity to develop job skills and be placed in an internship. However, the disappointment over the lost opportunity to attend college stays with her.

Aretha feels that young people in foster care simply do not have the right information about college made available to them. “It’s there, but it’s like a secret,” she says.

FOSTERING INDEPENDENCE

The Need for a Statewide Foster Youth College Success Initiative

The Problem

► Low college success among foster youth

New York State is home to approximately 20,000 young people living in foster care. In 2012, just over 4,000 college-age youth either remained in care or exited the foster care system.

When compared to young people in the general population, individuals who have been in foster care have lower levels of employment and earnings, and are more likely to rely on public assistance, be incarcerated, and suffer from mental health problems.

The best way to ensure a successful, independent adulthood is a college education: New Yorkers with a Bachelor's degree are half as likely to be unemployed, and earn more than twice as much as those with just a high school diploma.

But very few young people who have been in foster care enroll and graduate from college. **We estimate that just 18 to 24 percent of college-aged foster youth are enrolled in college in New York.**

► What keeps foster youth from enrolling, staying, and succeeding in college?

Foster youth have difficulty accessing and navigating complex or conflicting information on financial aid. Even when receiving the major forms of public financial aid available to them, a significant gap between total expenses and total assistance remains for most foster youth in college.

There is a lack of on-campus support for foster youth. Programs that seek to improve outcomes for disadvantaged youth in college exist; however, the extent to which foster youth are aware of and participating in these programs is too often contingent on the quality of their agency and caseworker.

The Solution

► A coherent, cohesive college success program for foster youth

Foster youth should be eligible for a comprehensive financial aid package, including full funding to post-secondary institutions in New York. We recommend that the state create a simple, straightforward process for foster youth to learn about, apply for, and receive this aid.

New York should incorporate elements of promising programs from around the country and develop a targeted support program that helps foster youth apply, enroll, and be successful while in college.

► What this would mean for New York State

Success in college would offer a real pathway to independence to young people who are in the state's care.

The increases in employment and earnings that come with a college degree will reduce the likelihood that foster youth will be dependent on public systems once they age out of care.

Due to the relatively low numbers of youth in care, this initiative would require minimal investment to make a full-scale impact.

Our Call To Action

- ▶ **The Youth in Care Coalition** is a statewide group of organizations that serve, advocate for, and represent foster youth. The mission of the coalition is to improve the socioeconomic, health, housing, and educational outcomes for youth in care and aging out of care in New York State by collaboratively advocating for effective policies. Our first effort is to advocate for the establishment of a statewide college success initiative, so that foster youth who have worked hard and prepared themselves to attend college are supported both in enrolling and succeeding once they arrive on campus.

This document explains in detail the need for a statewide college success initiative. The report presents data on the low rates of enrollment and college success among foster youth; describes the unique challenges foster youth face as they think about and enroll in college; and identifies programs both within New York and across the country that show promising approaches to improving college outcomes for foster youth. The current college success of foster youth in New York depends largely on good fortune—finding the right support in navigating an exceedingly complex financial aid system and making the transition to college. The time has arrived for all young people in the state’s care to be offered an equal opportunity to put themselves on the most promising pathway to independent adulthood.



Youth in Care Coalition Steering Committee

Care Management Coalition of Western NY

Children’s Aid Society

COFCCA

Community Service Society of New York

Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies

FEGS

Good Shepherd Services

Hillside Family Agencies

Hope for Youth

New Yorkers for Children

Schuyler Center for Policy and Analysis

Youth In Progress

Youth Power

FOSTERING INDEPENDENCE

The Need for a Statewide Foster Youth College Success Initiative



New York State is home to approximately 20,000 young people living in foster care. In 2012, about 4,000 youth between the ages of 18 and 21 were either still in care or exited the system. While the educational outcomes for these college-age youth are not tracked closely, our best estimates suggest that their rate of completing college is far lower than for public high school graduates in the state overall, and considerably lower than for low-income youth who have not been in foster care. As a result, they are likely to face significant challenges over their lifetimes in obtaining good-paying jobs and escaping lives of poverty and dependency.

If New York is committed to preparing youth in its care to be successful, independent adults, it must provide them with the opportunity to take the most recognized step toward self-sufficiency: obtaining a college degree. Some resources are available to help foster care youth attend college, but a lack of information, fragmented service system, and insufficient and complex financial aid combine to prevent many foster youth from getting the higher education they will need to succeed.

This document presents the need for New York to develop and implement a comprehensive, statewide college success initiative for youth in and aging out of foster care. Such an effort would support youth who have been in care to reach and succeed in college, putting them firmly on the path to becoming self-sustaining adults. This report is organized as follows:

1. **The Need for This Work:** the challenges facing youth aging out of foster care and the crucial importance of college.
2. **Why So Few Foster Youth Attend College:** the barriers to college success for youth in care.
3. **What New York Can Learn from Other States:** promising financial aid and supportive programming models from around the nation.
4. **What New York's Foster Youth Need: Universal, Consistent Support:** why New York should create a college success initiative for its youth in care.



“The most difficult thing about being in care was that my caseworkers had no idea what was available.”

Sanaa’s road to completing her degree was incredibly challenging. Her guidance counselor and caseworker were not very supportive of her college goals and did not inform her of her options and opportunities. “The most difficult thing about being in care was that my caseworkers had no idea what was available,” she says. “I was the first one to go to college from that agency. They didn’t know anything. They gave mixed information.”

To make things more complicated, Sanaa was also moving between foster homes her senior year in high school, which made her doubt whether she should attend college at all. She chose her college based on the housing options and the affordable tuition. And though the money she received from Pell Grants, TAP, and academic scholarships covered her tuition, she still had to work multiple jobs to pay for other expenses. “At the time, Pell and TAP paid tuition and gave some money back. I was working two, three jobs at a time,” she says. “Going to school full time, going to work at night, home at midnight, going to school in the morning. It was very challenging. I can’t imagine having family to deal with. [Financial aid] is not enough in general.”

Sanaa’s path was much more difficult than it should have been. While she was in college, her caseworker visited once a semester, and there was no structured preparation for aging out. Now 23 years old, she was able to complete her Bachelor’s degree and has begun graduate studies. Her achievements are a testament to her resourcefulness, as she was given limited support in overcoming significant barriers.

1

The Need for This Work:

The challenges facing youth aging out of foster care and the crucial importance of college.

In many cases, young people enter the foster care system at an early age and are reunited with their parents or adopted after a relatively brief period of time. However, other young people remain in the state’s care until they turn 18—usually living with foster parents, relatives, or at group residences—at which point they “age out,” discharged from the system as independent adults. Several states, including New York, allow individuals to remain in foster care until they are 21 years old if they choose to do so.

Youth who age out of the foster care system must often make the transition to adulthood without the family support and security that others are able to rely on.¹ Several studies across the nation have examined the outcomes of youth who have aged out of the foster care system, all of which reveal poor outcomes. When compared to young people in the general population, individuals who age out of foster care have been found to be less likely to graduate from high school, have lower levels of employment and earnings, and are more likely to rely on public assistance, be incarcerated, and suffer from mental health problems.²

Aging out of Foster Care in New York: An Uncertain Future

Nearly two-thirds of youth who leave the foster care system in New York State return home and another 20 percent are adopted.³ This is especially the case for younger foster children. However, in 2012 there were 1,827 young people ages 18 and over who exited the foster care system, nearly three-quarters of whom were discharged to independent living. There were additionally 2,243 young people ages 18 or older who remained in care at the end of 2012, nearly two-thirds of whom had been in care for over three years. It is these subgroups of foster care youth who are at the greatest of risk of experiencing significant difficulties transitioning to adulthood. These older youth face an uncertain future, with limited support along a difficult path to economic self-sustainability.

Leading up to the day a young person ages out of care, agencies and foster youth come up with a plan for how that young person will transition to living independently. However, many of the young people we spoke with said they still felt extremely unprepared for the day they aged out of the foster care system. Suddenly lacking housing and support from foster parents or agency staff, young people who age out of care are forced to navigate life situations and figure their future out by themselves, at a relatively young age when many young people still rely on their parents for assistance.

New York Foster Youth 18+ Years Old by Time in Care

Time in Care	18+ years old discharged in 2012	18+ years old in care at end of 2012	Total
<1 year	157	168	325
1-2 years	194	249	443
2-3 years	194	357	551
>3 years	1,282	1,469	2,751
Total	1,827	2,243	4,070

The Best Pathway to Independence: Postsecondary Education

Higher education is the most proven pathway out of poverty and hardships and should be a goal for most foster children. However, according to the young people we spoke to, many foster youth are more focused on preparing to exit foster care by getting a job, saving money, and learning to live independently. For some, the idea of going to college seems overwhelming and beyond their reach.

THE VALUE OF AN EDUCATION

New Yorkers with only a high school degree are more than twice as likely to be unemployed than those with a Bachelor's degree or higher. And on average, those with a Bachelor's degree or higher earn more than double than those with just a high school diploma.

Chart 1: Unemployment Rate in New York State by Educational Attainment

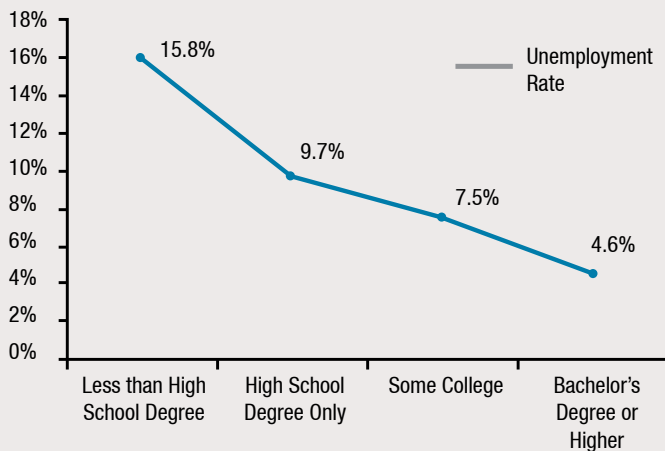
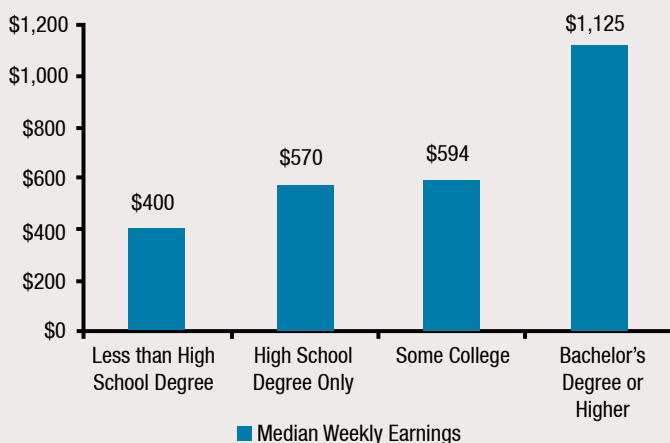


Chart 2: Average Weekly Earnings in New York State by Educational Attainment



(Source: 2013 Current Population Survey)

The value of obtaining a college degree continues to grow for all young people, as at least some post-secondary credential is usually required to compete for jobs that pay family sustaining wages. Experts project that by 2018, nearly two-thirds of all jobs in New York State will require at least some post-secondary training.⁴ Charts 1 and 2 show the value of increased levels of education related to employment and earnings.

The Low Levels of College Participation among Foster Youth

There is limited data available or collected by public agencies on post-secondary educational participation and outcomes for youth in or formerly in care in New York. Using data collected from various sources, we find that a very small share of foster youth in New York attend college (See Appendix A for methodology). We estimate that there are between 1,017 and 1,323 young people in or formerly in care in New York that are attending a post-secondary educational or training institution. If we define foster youth as those who were still in care at age 18 or older, and those who left care after their 16th birthday, then we estimate that between 18 and 24 percent of foster youth in New York are enrolled in college or a vocational training program. At public schools statewide, nearly 60 percent of all students enroll in post-secondary education the fall after they graduate.⁵

It is difficult to estimate rates of retention and graduation for New York foster youth who go to college; however, national estimates suggest that foster youth who enroll in college face difficulties completing their degree.⁶ The low levels of college enrollment, retention, and graduation among foster youth are troubling given the challenges they have faced early in their lives and the poor outcomes detailed in national studies. If outcomes for youth who age out of care are to improve, greater participation in post-secondary education is essential.



“I wish everyone had the experience—the family, the caseworker—I had.”

Katie finished her Associate’s Degree and was all set to attend a four-year college in Albany to get her Bachelor’s Degree. There was just one problem. After turning 21, her agency would no longer be paying for her living expenses, meaning she would be \$11,000 dollars short of being able to cover her housing costs. Even though she received the full TAP, Pell, and ETV awards, there was no way she could pay for room and board. So she moved back to Syracuse, found a job, and bounced around between her foster parents, grandmother, and boyfriend. All the while, she took online courses, completing her Bachelor’s degree in 2013.

Despite the challenges she faced, Katie says she is one of the lucky ones. “I wish everyone had the experience—the family, the caseworker—I had.” Katie says many young people in care she knows have faced even more barriers than she has. She thinks the biggest obstacle to young people attending college is the cost, and the concern over where they will live and how they will make money once they age out of care. She also acknowledges that for many young people in care, the very idea of going to college seems far-fetched, and that they don’t have the knowledge necessary to go through the application and enrollment process. Katie now spends time talking to groups of foster care children trying to encourage them to abandon the mindset that college is not for them.

2

Why So Few Foster Youth Attend College: The barriers to college success for youth in care.

Our interviews with young people in care confirmed that the unique barriers to college for foster youth revolve around the daunting financial aid process, as well as a lack of consistent information and support in applying to and enrolling in college. While these issues may make college difficult for many young people, foster youth experience these challenges even more acutely.

The Cost of College: High and Rising

The rising cost of college—including at public universities—is a growing problem for even middle-class kids whose parents can provide substantial financial support. For children who have been in foster care, who lack savings and are often unaware of financial aid options, the cost can prevent them from even considering going to college. Many of the youth in care we spoke with said that the cost of college has been an enormous obstacle, one they continually have to overcome by working extra jobs and receiving assistance from nonprofit organizations. At the state’s public universities—the City University of New York (CUNY) and the State University of New York (SUNY)—the cost of full time attendance ranges from nearly \$18,000 to over \$26,000 annually depending on the school and type of program. Since 2008, the cost of tuition at a CUNY senior college for a full-time student has increased 43 percent. At SUNY, tuition for a full-time student at a senior college has increased 35 percent. At the same time, the award amount granted by the state’s Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) has remained relatively stagnant—the maximum award had been unchanged at \$5,000 since 2000,⁷ until April 2014, when the Governor’s new budget included a \$165 increase to the maximum TAP award.

Financial Aid for Youth in Care: A Complex Maze

Youth in or formerly in care are eligible for various forms of financial aid; however they comprise a complex set of resources that can be difficult to piece together, and do not always add up to the costs young people face. The main forms of aid that foster care youth can use to help pay for college are Educational and Training Vouchers, a federal program administered by the State specifically for foster youth; Pell Grants, a federal program for low-income students; and the Tuition Assistance Program, a state program primarily for low-income students. For a detailed description of these programs, and policies regarding room and board payment for foster youth in college, see Appendix B.

“People in care are trying to find a place to go. You’re turning 21, you only have a few months to find an apartment. You’re not worried about college. You’re worried about getting a job.”

Malik, 18
High School Senior

WHERE ARE THE GAPS?

Financial aid programs can provide opportunities for low-income youth, both in and out of care, to access higher education while reducing some of the burden of taking out loans they will have to repay. However, these programs in most cases do not cover the entire expense of college. Youth in care, many of whom have no family support, are faced with tremendous challenges affording college even when exhausting the aid that is available to them.

Table 1:
Annual Cost of Attending SUNY/CUNY and Sources of Funding for Youth Still in Care

	SUNY – BA	SUNY - AA	CUNY – BA	CUNY - AA
Tuition	\$5,870	\$3,960	\$6,030	\$4,500
Fees	\$1,350	\$550	\$240	\$215
Housing	\$11,770	\$9,730	\$10,386	\$10,386
Books and Supplies	\$1,270	\$1,310	\$1,304	\$1,304
Transportation	\$990	\$1,280	\$1,020	\$1,020
Food	Included	Included	\$3,168	\$3,168
Personal Expenses	\$1,450	\$1,110	\$4,106	\$4,106
Total	\$22,700	\$17,940	\$26,254	\$24,699
Average ETV + TAP + Pell	\$10,715	\$8,781	\$11,004	\$9,091
Maximum State Room and Board Assistance	\$6,255	\$6,255	\$6,714	\$6,714
Total Assistance	\$16,970	\$15,036	\$17,718	\$15,805
THE GAP FACING FOSTER YOUTH	\$5,730	\$2,904	\$8,536	\$8,894

As Table 1 shows, the average student receives enough ETV, Pell, and TAP money to cover tuition and a portion of their other expenses at a CUNY or SUNY college; however, this still leaves a large gap in meeting the total cost of attendance. Even when assuming the maximum amount of state contribution toward room and board, a

significant gap between total expenses and total assistance remains. The cost of attending independent, private universities in the state varies, but many are significantly more expensive than public universities.

OCFS policy allowing agencies to pay for college room and board are helpful, but leave out those who have aged out of the foster care system. Additionally, the policy itself is complex, requiring an agency and college to work together to sort out payments and, in some cases, find appropriate living arrangements. The chart also assumes the maximum amount the state will pay toward room and board; however, local social service districts set their own rates, which are in some cases significantly lower than the state’s maximum. (See Appendix B for a more detailed description of state policy on paying for college room and board.)

In some cases—particularly when receiving the maximum grant awards—it is possible for a foster youth to access enough financial aid from existing public resources to pay for college. But to do so requires navigating an extremely complex system. Young people we spoke with also

expressed concerns over where they would stay during breaks in school, and receiving grant payments too late to make tuition and other payments on time. And perhaps most importantly, the degree to which young people are aware of their financial aid options, including payments for room and board, are often contingent on the quality of their agency and caseworker, which can vary drastically. Given the stakes, there should be consistent access to the information and resources available to all foster youth.

Programmatic Supports: Inconsistent Access

In addition to the issue of paying for college, foster youth face additional challenges in attending and succeeding in college associated with not having adequate family support. Parents can often be an invaluable resource for young people attending college, from helping navigate the application process to providing needed emotional and financial support once young people are enrolled.

The Unique Challenges of Foster Youth in College

Even the most well prepared individuals can have difficulty with the transition to college. For foster youth, who often don’t have the support of a family to guide them through the transition, there are unique challenges that they must overcome.

- ◆ Lack of parental support in the application process and decision making
- ◆ Lack of financial support for application fees, books, and daily expenses
- ◆ Lack of a place to go during school breaks
- ◆ Lack of emotional support from parents
- ◆ Lack of housing or financial “safety net”
- ◆ Lack of assistance paying back loans if necessary

New York is home to a limited set of programs that show what kind of impact supportive services can have on youth who are at risk of not completing college. One program that has been showing great success is the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) at CUNY community colleges in New York City. ASAP—which serves all students, not just foster youth—provides community college students with educational, social and financial support so that students can complete their degree in a timely manner. Key components of ASAP include block scheduling, small class sizes, required full-time study, and comprehensive advisement. Results of both internal and external evaluations have shown that ASAP has improved retention and graduation rates. The ASAP graduation rate is more than three times the national three-year graduation rate for urban community colleges, and ASAP students outperform non-ASAP comparison students by wide margins.

The Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) at public universities and the Higher Educational Opportunity Program (HEOP) at private universities across New York offer supportive services and financial aid to students who would not have been accepted under normal admissions standards. Students receive financial assistance, counseling,

and academic support to help them complete their degree. As with ASAP, HEOP and EOP do not target foster youth, nor is there data that shows the extent to which foster youth utilize these programs.

For foster youth specifically, the Guardian Scholars program run by the nonprofit New Yorkers for Children in New York City has had tremendous success in helping foster youth in college. The program offers financial and academic support to help young people succeed in college and transition to adulthood. Nearly 80 percent of the youth they serve are on track to graduate on time.

There are several other programs across the state that can be beneficial to foster students who aspire to get a college degree. However, there is no centralized system by which all foster youth are made aware of the resources available to them and directed to services that would be most beneficial for them. Foster care agencies do have educational specialists on staff, but the extent to which these workers are engaged and knowledgeable enough to direct foster youth to the right programs varies dramatically. And for youth who have left the foster care system, their ability to access beneficial programs is even more limited.





“My program was crucial—it helped throughout college.”

Anthony is a 21-year-old student at a community college in Manhattan who will be transferring to a four-year college in Fall 2014.

For Anthony, a program he found outside his foster care agency played a large role in helping him navigate the college going process. He worked at a youth communication magazine where he learned about a non-profit organization that helps youth apply for college. The program provides one-to-one counseling guiding young people through the steps of applying to and enrolling in college. “It was a pain,” he says. “After handing in a document, I would have to bring something else in. Proof of residency, transcript, figuring out how much financial aid was coming in. I knew of a place that helps to transition youth to college. They helped with the FAFSA. I had a counselor. My program was crucial—it helped throughout college.”

Anthony is aware that there are several organizations that provide helpful services for youth in care, but many young people simply do not know about them. He believes there should be more supportive programming specifically geared toward youth in and aging out of care.

3

What New York Can Learn from Other States:

Promising financial aid and supportive programming models from around the nation.

Several states across the country have acknowledged that the available resources for young people in care are not sufficient. Twenty-one states have policies ensuring that foster youth do not have to pay any tuition, and several others have allocated state funds to help foster youth pay for college.

Financial aid programs specifically for foster youth seeking to attend college are beneficial in a variety of ways. The extra source of funding can fill in the gap between what a young person receives in other forms of aid and the amount owed in tuition, fees, and in some cases, other expenses. Secondly, in certain states, where tuition and fees are waived by presenting the appropriate forms to the financial aid office, students are not forced to cobble together different forms of financial aid to meet tuition costs, and can use other forms of aid to pay for school-related expenses. As importantly, centralized scholarship programs for foster youth make the process of financial aid seem less daunting. With all of the other challenges they face, foster youth may feel more optimistic about their chances of attending college if they have a clearer knowledge that they won't be responsible for paying tuition or having to go through an uncertain and complex financial aid process.

Educational Support Models around the Country

According to John Emerson of Casey Family Programs, seven states are leading the way in addressing the college enrollment and success of foster youth: California, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, Virginia, and Washington.⁸ These states have all cultivated collaborative relationships between higher education and the child welfare system to improve post-secondary outcomes for foster care youth.

If New York is to join the list of states recognized as leaders in the area of improving educational outcomes for foster youth, it should consider institutionalizing and expanding the reach of existing programs to serve youth in care. A statewide initiative in which supportive programs are available to foster youth at colleges across the state will ensure that more of these young people are benefiting from the financial and academic supports they clearly need.

No, [the financial aid] is not enough. I started working at school. I have my own apartment and bills. Tap and Pell are not enough to cover living expenses.

Shaqueana, 24
Community College Freshman

Youth in care are dealing with more personal challenges—instability, worrying about where to live, communication with a broken family. These stressors are hard to deal with alone, in addition to education and a job.

Sanaa, 23
Graduate Student

Nationwide Efforts to Help Foster Youth in College

Many states and university systems are making sure every foster youth attending college is able to access beneficial services on campus. Below is a list of some of the key attributes of successful state and university policies and programs for foster youth.

- ◆ Pre-college preparation
- ◆ Additional funding/scholarships for youth in care
- ◆ Mentoring and counseling programs
- ◆ Increased coordination between child welfare agencies and university systems
- ◆ Internships and career coaching
- ◆ Academic tutoring
- ◆ Dedicated foster care liaisons on campus
- ◆ Help finding housing over breaks
- ◆ Websites with information on colleges/resources for foster youth



COLLEGE SUPPORT PROGRAMS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Across the country, states are taking proactive measures so that foster youth are given the opportunity to succeed in college. Twenty-one states ensure that foster youth will not have to pay tuition, with several others allocating state funds to help foster youth pay for college.

The examples of Texas and Florida are particularly useful in that they make the financial aid process simple, with funding that is not meant to supplement other forms of aid solely to cover tuition. This means that students can use other forms of aid for other college related expenses. Our conversations with youth support the idea that having aid for other expenses—aside from tuition—is the critical, missing piece in the financial aid packages they receive.

Financial Aid: Promising Models



In **Texas**, students who were in the foster care system after their 14th birthday qualify for a tuition and fee waiver at any public college or vocational school. Tuition

and fees are waived by presenting the appropriate forms to the financial aid office, so students are not forced to cobble together different forms of financial aid to meet tuition costs, and can use other forms of aid to pay for school related expenses.



In **Connecticut**, youth who were adopted after December 31, 2004 or were still in care at age 18 are eligible to have their post-secondary education

expenses covered. The state will pay for expenses equal to the cost of tuition, fees, and room and board at the University of Connecticut, though the student can attend the school of their choice and also use funds for books or health care as long as the total does not exceed the cost of attending the University of Connecticut.



In **Florida**, foster youth are exempt from paying tuition and fees at state universities and community colleges. Young people only need to obtain an

exemption letter from their caseworker and provide it to the financial aid office at their school. Foster youth attending college are also eligible for the state's Road to Independence program, in which they are awarded a stipend, in addition to any other forms of financial aid they may be receiving.



In **New Jersey**, the NJFC Scholars Program provides funding for youth who have experienced out-of-home placements, independent living arrangements,

or homelessness. If the student is eligible for the ETV, then the state waiver can be combined with the ETV to pay for tuition, fees, room and board, books, and other expenses. Youth must have resided in an out-of-home placement for 9 months after their 16th birthday.

States are also providing essential program supports to youth seeking to attend college. In addition to programs specifically for foster youth, these efforts aim to ensure that all foster youth in college are aware of campus resources that can help them succeed.

The data on how supportive programs are helping foster youth succeed in college is limited. Arizona, which recently implemented a financial support program for foster youth in college, will be conducting an evaluation of the program over the five-year pilot period.

Supportive Programming: Promising Models



After implementing a number of programs expanding educational supports for foster youth, researchers in **Washington** found that college enrollment during the first year after expected high school graduation among youth in foster care rose from 16 percent to 20 percent from 2006 to 2009. The state's Passport to College Promise Program was created to encourage foster youth to attend and succeed in college. Eligible applicants may qualify for scholarships, guidance from academic and financial aid counselors, and support finding housing over breaks. An evaluation of the program found that participants had retention and completion rates similar to non-foster students.



In **California**, the Guardian Scholars program was started in the late 1990s and has spread throughout the state. The model has been replicated throughout the nation. The program provides individual mentoring and referrals to campus resources for youth in care. In addition to the growing number of schools participating in the Guardian Scholars program, all of the state's 112 community and technical colleges have a dedicated foster care liaison as part of the California Community College Chancellor's Office Foster Youth Success Initiative. Foster youth scholars in California campus support programs are three times more likely to persist in college than foster youth nationwide.



In **North Carolina**, the North Carolina Reach program was developed in partnership with Foster Care to Success—the state's ETV administrator—to provide students from foster care with funding for college, mentorships, internships, care packages, and access to helpful information and resources. Individuals who aged out of the foster care system or those who were adopted after they were 12 years old are eligible for the NC Reach Scholarship Program.



In **Ohio**, the Reach program has received substantial funding from the State to promote and expand support services to foster youth in college. There is a focus on collaboration and networking between colleges and social service providers, and the website includes a list of campus liaisons at many Ohio colleges and universities.

“I tried to reach out to people on campus for help, but no one understood my situation of being in foster care.”

Alexis looks back and thinks that if she had the right supports, she would have graduated by now. As a foster youth at a community college near her hometown of Syracuse, she struggled to adjust and didn't feel she had the resources to help her succeed. “I tried to reach out to people on campus for help,” Alexis says, “but no one understood my situation of being in foster care.”

She withdrew from the college after two semesters and now, at age 21, is making the tough adjustment to independent living.

Alexis also says things could have been better had she been able to attend college outside her hometown, because she had too many distractions and too much turmoil to deal with. She feels if she could have attended a school where she could live on campus, she would have been able to focus better.

But without a guarantee of where she could stay during school breaks, and not enough financial aid to cover on-campus housing costs, she felt her only option was her local community college. She is now working toward her Associate's Degree at an online university and hopes to work in criminal justice or with kids in the foster care system.

4

What New York's Foster Youth Need: Universal, Consistent Support Why New York should create a college success initiative for its youth in care.

Young people who grow up and age out of the foster care system face tremendous challenges as they transition to life as independent young adults. Without a supportive family structure to rely on, or school and community networks to lead them in a positive direction, many young people who age out of care are not able to successfully make that transition. Instead, they wind up shifting from one public agency to the next. The data is clear that young people who attain a college degree will fare far better in employment and earnings outcomes than those who do not. However, with inadequate financial, social, and educational supports, the State of New York is not ensuring that its foster youth are being given the opportunity to succeed in college.

The current financial aid programs for foster care youth are usually not enough to cover their college related expenses. And even when they do, young people have to navigate high levels of administrative complexity. Streamlining the financial aid system and providing additional supports could go a long way toward helping foster youth succeed in college. These supports can take on various forms: mentorships, tutoring, advisement on classes and majors, career coaching, assistance with transportation and housing needs. And even before students enroll in college, prospective students should be provided with support ranging from test-preparation, application assistance, fee waivers, and college visits.

Speaking with young people who have been in foster care provides anecdotal evidence that given sufficient financial aid and the right guidance and support, young people aging out of the system can succeed in college. These success stories are examples of tremendously resourceful individuals who found a way to overcome obstacles in obtaining

a college education. But we also heard that many youth in care aren't aware of the resources available to them or are simply facing too much stress dealing with becoming independent adults with no family and financial support to rely on to think about college. Many simply find the proposition unrealistic. It is up to the state to correct this perception, by creating a college success initiative that makes college a realistic option that foster youth can aspire to and gives them the tools to succeed: early guidance starting in middle and high school, help navigating the college application process, financial aid to cover tuition and living costs, and on-going academic and social support. If we are to make better outcomes for youth in care a goal, then the system of supports and resources must be universal across the state and easily accessible to all of those who can benefit from them.

The time is now for a systematic, statewide initiative to support the college success of our foster youth. It is the goal of the Youth in Care Coalition to use this document in partnership with public and private sector stakeholders to create a foster youth college success initiative that is right for New York State.

Appendix A: Calculating the Number of Foster Youth in College in New York State

In order to estimate the number of foster youth in a post-secondary education and training program in New York, we utilized three pieces of information:

1. The number of Educational and Training Voucher recipients in the state.
2. The number of Back to School Program recipients in the state.
3. A nationally recognized study on the outcomes of foster youth conducted by the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

Educational and Training Vouchers

The Educational and Training Voucher (ETV) program is a federal program that provides financial support of up to \$5,000 per year for post-secondary education or training to young adults in or formerly in the foster care system. Financial assistance through the ETV is available in New York to foster youth and youth who left care after they were 16 years old. In New York (and eight other states), the nonprofit organization Foster Care to Success administers the ETV program. We were able to collect data from Foster Care to Success on the number of ETV recipients in New York State.

Over the last five years (2009/10 thru 2013/14), an average of 848 students were awarded ETV funding in New York. This includes an average of 375 new recipients and 473 returning students. Seventy percent of these students were awarded funds to attend a CUNY or SUNY school.

According to Eileen McCaffrey, the Executive Director of Foster Care to Success, and other experts in the field, only about two-thirds of eligible recipients apply to and receive ETV funding. If we assume that the average of 848 students who received funding over the last five years is only two-thirds of the students eligible, we would assume that each year there are 1,298 students in post-secondary education or training in the state of New York who are eligible for ETV funding.

Back to School Program Data

In New York City, New Yorkers for Children (NYFC) is a nonprofit organization that serves as a partner to New York City's Administration for Children's Services, the city agency that runs the foster care system. NYFC administers a range of programming supporting youth in and aging and out of care, several of which are aimed at helping young people attend and succeed in college. One such program is the Back to School Program, which provides college students with necessities such as backpacks, linens, school supplies, computers, and other items.

We were able to obtain data from NYFC on the number of back to school kits they send out each semester. NYFC collects the name of every foster child in NYC who is attending college from the education coordinators at the agencies working with foster children in New York City. While there is no way of ensuring that the list they receive includes every young person, they feel it does capture a high percentage of young people in care in New York City who are going to college.

The last four semesters (Fall 2012-Fall 2013), NYFC has sent out an average of 408 back to school kits, which suggests that there are on average 408 young people from the New York City foster care system who are enrolled in post-secondary education or training. However, NYFC does not send kits to those who have aged out of the foster care system. The 408 kits they send out represents nearly 24 percent of foster youth age 18 or over in New York City who are still in the foster care system. If 24 percent of youth who were discharged at age 18 or older in New York City are also in college—but did not receive back to school kits—that would be an additional 304 students for a total of 712 New York City students in or aged out of foster care attending a post-secondary institution. New York City represents 70 percent of the youth who either left care at 18 years of age or older or who remained in care at age 18 or older. If we assume that New York City also has 70 percent of the youth in care who are in college, then the total number of youth in college in the state is 1,017.

National Estimates

We can also use national figures to estimate the number of foster youth in post-secondary institutions in New York. A 2005 Chapin Hall study that is widely cited for its data on the outcomes of foster youth found that 32.5 percent of 19 year olds who were in or formerly in foster care reported being enrolled at a post-secondary educational or training program. If we assume that 32.5 percent of the 4,070 youth 18 years of age or older who are in care or left care after they turned 18 are in college or a training program, then we would assume that 1,323 young people in New York are in care and in a post-secondary institution.

Final Calculations

According to our calculations, there are between 1,017 and 1,323 young people in or formerly in care in New York that are attending a post-secondary educational or training institution. In addition to the 4,070 young people age 18 or older who were either in care or left care in 2012, we also want to include those who left care at age 16 or older to determine the percentage of in care and formerly in care youth who are in college. (This is because the ETV and most state-level programs around the country make awards available to those who left foster care at age 16 or later).

In 2012, 2,910 young people age 14-17 left care. If we assume that half of these young people were 16 or 17 years of age, then there are an additional 1,455 young people we want to include in our calculation. If we include the assumed 1,455 young people who left foster care at age 16 or 17 (half of 14-17 year old discharges), and the 4,070 who either left care or remained in care at age 18 or older (for a total of 5,525 young people), then we estimate that between 18 and 24 percent of foster youth in New York are enrolled in college or a vocational training program.

Appendix B: Sources of Funding for Foster Youth in College

The three major sources of funding for foster youth to attend post-secondary education or training are Education and Training Vouchers (ETV), Pell Grants and The New York State Tuition Assistance Program (TAP). ETVs are specifically for foster youth; Pell Grants and TAP funding are accessible to all students.

In order to calculate the average amount of funding foster youth currently receive, and the subsequent gap between that funding and the cost of attendance, we combined the averages for these sources of funding. For TAP and ETV funding, we were able to calculate average award by the institution and type of programming. For Pell Grants, we were only able to calculate average awards for all schools and programs in the State.

Education and Training Vouchers

The Educational and Training Voucher (ETV) program is a federal program that provides financial support of up to \$5,000 per year for post-secondary education or training to young adults in or formerly in the foster care system. Financial assistance through the ETV is available in New York to foster youth and youth who left care after they were 16 years old.

In 2012–2013, the average amount of ETV funding in New York was \$3,358.36 per student.

The average award for CUNY/SUNY schools by type of program is as follows:

SUNY 4 year: \$4,198
SUNY 2 year: \$2,719
CUNY 4 year: \$3,546
CUNY 2 year: \$2,505

Federal Pell Grants

The federal Pell Grant program provides need-based grants to low-income students. Award amounts are determined by the student's expected family contribution (which is calculated using income, family size, and other factors), cost of attendance, and enrollment status (full or part

time). The maximum Pell Grant amount in 2012–2013 was \$5,550.

The average Pell Grant award in New York in 2012–2013 was \$3,743. While this is the number we use for the purposes of our calculations, a 2006 report by the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators found that nationally, foster youth receive, on average, about 10 percent less in Pell Grants than non-foster youth.

Tuition Assistance Program (TAP)

The Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) is a New York State run program that offers financial assistance for youth attending college in the state. Effective 2014-2015, the maximum TAP award will be \$5,165.

In 2012–2013, the average TAP award was \$2,966 per full-time equivalent student across all colleges in the state, and \$2,873 at the CUNY/SUNY colleges. The average award for CUNY/SUNY schools by type of program is as follows:

SUNY 4 year: \$2,774
SUNY 2 year: \$2,319
CUNY 4 year: \$3,715
CUNY 2 year: \$2,843

OCFS Policy on Room and Board

According to policy of the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), youth in care who are in college may have their room and board paid for, as long as the cost does not exceed the amount that would be paid to a family if the young person were living in a family boarding home. They can also pay for off-campus housing if a student chooses to live off campus. In those cases, the college would assist the young person in finding a living arrangement and be responsible for transferring funds from the agency to the individual providing the room. Agencies are not allowed to provide payment directly to the student or the person providing room and board, unless it is certified for foster boarding home care.

In 2012–2013, the maximum foster boarding home payment was \$746 per month in New York City, Long Island, and Westchester (metro areas) and \$695 in the rest of the state (upstate). For our estimates, we use this maximum payment for nine months to calculate OCFS payment toward room and board for a young person in college. This amounts to \$6,714 in metro areas and \$6,255 upstate. It should be noted that our chart assumes the state’s maximum foster boarding rate; however, local social service districts set their own rates, which are in some cases significantly lower than the state’s maximum.

We assume that students attending a CUNY school are eligible for the metro rate and that students attending a SUNY school are eligible for the upstate rate. This may not always be the case. Also, foster boarding rates for group homes vary widely. Since a majority of young people in care are in foster homes or with relatives, as opposed to in group residences, we use the rates for foster parents in our chart.

OCFS policies on room and board do not provide for youth who have left or aged out of foster care. In localities across the state, foster care agencies are providing money to help with housing for college students who have aged out of care. Typically, after a young person turns 21 years old, their foster parent or group home will no longer receive payments for housing. Increasingly, exceptions to this policy have been granted, allowing payments to continue even after a young person turns 21 years old. In New York City, the Administration for Children’s Services allocates funding each year to cover housing expenses for college students up until they are 23 years old.

Funding for housing for youth who have aged out of care vary greatly from county to county and are not considered a part of typical funding for in care or formerly in care youth in college.

Endnotes

1. Casey Family Programs. “Improving Outcomes for Older Youth in Foster Care.” 2008.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Data on the number of youth in care in New York State and their discharge type come from the 2012 Monitoring and Analysis Profiles (MAPS) produced by the Office of Children and Family Services.
4. Carnevale, A.P., Smith, N., and Strohl, J. “Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2018.” June 2010. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.
5. CSS analysis of State Education Department data.
6. According to a 2010 Chapin Hall study, while 37.4 percent of the studies participants completed one year of college by age 23 or 24, only 6.2 percent attained an Associate’s or Bachelor’s degree. Other national statistics suggest only 2 percent of foster youth complete a Bachelor’s degree. And ETV data in New York suggests low rates of retention, as the number of returning ETV recipients is far lower than the number who obtained ETV funding the previous year.
7. The State University of New York. “An Analysis of the Tuition Assistance Program.”
8. Gonzalves, L. “Unleashing College Success for Youth from Foster Care, Nationwide Advances.” August 2013. The Chronicle of Social Change.

Community Service Society of New York

David R. Jones

President and Chief Executive Officer

Steven L. Krause

Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer

BOARD OF TRUSTEES, 2013–2014

Joseph R. Harbert, Ph.D.
Chairperson

Deborah M. Sale
Vice Chairperson

Ralph da Costa Nunez
Treasurer

Donald W. Savelson, Esq.
Secretary

Terry Agriss
Steven Brown
Judy Chambers
Melissa C. Curtin, Esq.
Sylvia E. DiPietro, Esq.
Florence H. Frucher
Hon. Betsy Gotbaum
Nicholas A. Gravante, Jr., Esq.
Joseph J. Haslip
Michael Horodniceanu, Ph.D.
Magda Jimenez Train, Esq.
Micah C. Lasher
Hon. Kelly O’Neill Levy, Esq.
Mark E. Lieberman
Leisle Lin
Riche T. McKnight, Esq.
Joyce L. Miller
Carol L. O’Neale
Regan Kelley Orillac
David Pollak
Margarita Rosa, Esq.
Marlene Sanders
Hon. Carol Sherman, Esq.
Marla Eisland Sprie, Esq.
Ken Sunshine
Barbara Nevins Taylor
Jeffery J. Weaver
Michelle Webb
Abby Wenzel, Esq.
Mark A. Willis

HONORARY LIFE TRUSTEES

Stephen R. Aiello, Ph.D.
David N. Dinkins
Marian S. Heiskell
Douglas Williams

CURRENT & FORMER FOSTER YOUTH:

Do you have **QUESTIONS** about college?

Wondering if you can afford it? Or if you even want to go?

Do you have **EXPERIENCE** applying or going to college?

What can you tell other youth who are thinking about it now?

Do you have **OPINIONS** about foster youth and college?

We want to hear them!

JOIN THE MOVEMENT, PARTICIPATE IN THE

F O S T E R

COLLEGE

SUCCESS

C A M P A I G N

Visit www.childrensaidnyc.org/yicc to get involved

**Community
Service
Society** | Fighting Poverty
Strengthening
New York

105 East 22nd Street
New York, NY 10010
PH 212.254.8900

www.cssny.org