

Supporting Foster Care Involved Youth

Recruitment and Retention Super Strategies

INTRODUCTION

Who Are Foster Care Involved Youth?

Foster care is the placement of a minor into an alternative living environment due to abuse or neglect by their legal guardian. The goal of the Department of Children and Family Services is to support these youth in either reunification with their families or adoption. If neither of the above goals can be achieved, youth in Illinois can “age-out” of foster care, also known as emancipation, at 21 years of age.

This document provides recommendations related to recruitment and retention of youth who are in, or have aged out of, the foster care system. Foster care involved youth face a multitude of barriers in relation to completing postsecondary education. Wraparound support services for this population are essential to their success and completion.

Did You Know?

In 2011 Illinois had the third largest number per capita of youths aging out of foster care in the country, also referred to as emancipation. Virginia had the highest followed by Washington, D.C. and Maryland. With such poor permanency rates, an average of 21 percent of foster youths in Illinois were forced to transition into adulthood without adequate family or adult support.³

Recruitment Super Strategies | RECOMMENDATIONS

Due in part to lack of familial support and school transience, foster care involved youth may not be aware of the opportunities available to them through the community college system. The admission and enrollment process may also be uncharted territory and a bit intimidating. Effective recruitment strategies leverage a variety of community resources to help these learners navigate CTE paths and processes.

- Engage community leaders, human service agencies, administrators, educational entities and organizations in the recruitment process.
 - ✓ Ask organizations to refer individuals who could benefit from your programs.
 - ✓ Build a community “resource book” for referral options when students require services that are not available in-house.
- Offer assistance with admission, registration, and financial aid for students who may have increased difficulty navigating the enrollment process.
 - ✓ Designate a single point of contact for students throughout this process to cultivate a positive relationship.
 - ✓ Ensure financial aid officers are informed on scholarship opportunities and financial assistance available to foster care involved youth.
- Emphasize potential earnings and time lines for completion when marketing specific career and technical education (CTE) programs.
- Post marketing materials across campus and throughout the community. Include agencies that foster care involved youth may utilize, such as:
 - ✓ community action agencies
 - ✓ food banks
 - ✓ transitional living programs
 - ✓ government benefit offices
 - ✓ housing departments
 - ✓ public health departments
 - ✓ faith-based organizations
- Market support services available to students in common areas across campus and the community. Include information pertaining to:
 - ✓ financial aid
 - ✓ child care
 - ✓ support groups
 - ✓ transportation
 - ✓ meal plan offerings



Retention Super Strategies | RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth who have aged out of the foster care system are at increased risk of experiencing homelessness, food insecurity, early parenthood, and dependence on public assistance compared to their peers. Effective retention strategies focus on available support services and help students build meaningful connections.

- Implement intensive and organized programs to deter potential dropout.
 - ✓ peer mentoring
 - ✓ student support groups
 - ✓ career mentoring
- Offer academic advising services several times per semester.
 - ✓ track student performance
 - ✓ assist in goal planning
 - ✓ provide academic intervention
- Invite foster care involved youth to workshops that will give them the skills they need to be successful. Provide incentives to boost attendance. Examples include courses on:
 - ✓ volunteering
 - ✓ job shadowing
 - ✓ school-based enterprises
 - ✓ youth apprenticeships
 - ✓ paid work experiences
- Issue invitations to seminars on issues that are important to foster care involved youth and provide incentives for attendance. Examples include courses on:
 - ✓ budgeting
 - ✓ time management
 - ✓ essential employability skills and interview skills

Did You Know?

Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, and Raap (2010) found that the main barriers for higher education access among foster youth were a lack of financial resources, the need to be in full-time employment, parenting responsibilities, and a lack of transportation.¹



Retention Super Strategies | RECOMMENDATIONS

- Connect with community organizations to provide students access to additional assistance. This could include:
 - ✓ mental health services
 - ✓ child care facilities
 - ✓ community action agencies
 - ✓ government benefit offices
 - ✓ housing departments
 - ✓ public health departments
- Establish a resource center to increase awareness of CTE programs and help students develop essential employability skills.
 - ✓ Allow for flexible hours.
 - ✓ Give students a chance to explore their interests and aptitudes using computerized career information software.
- Include local work values and work-appropriate behaviors in transition support and support services.
- Reduce program completion time by continually verifying coursework is relevant to the career pathway.
 - ✓ Allow for flexibility in course scheduling as students may be balancing classes, employment, and parenting responsibilities.
 - ✓ Create program maps that anticipate the needs of part-time students, as well.



Sources:

¹ Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., Lee, J., & Raap, M. (2010). Mid-west evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at ages 23 and 24. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

² Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act H.R.2353, 115th Cong., (2018) (enacted). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2353/text?r=2>.

³ Sutherland, P. (2014, October 20). Cut off and shut out: The reality of Illinois foster youths at 21. Retrieved February 4, 2020, from <http://www.permanencyenhancementproject.org/reality/>.