HELPING FOSTER-CARE AND HOMELESS STUDENTS SUCCEED IN EDUCATION AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

Cyekela Lee, National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
Corinne Nilsen, Kansas Kids @ GEAR UP
Ginny Donohue, On Point for College
When reinforced by strong practices, positive school experiences can offset the negative effects of neglect, separation, and lack of permanency experienced by youth that are homeless, undocumented or in foster care. By allowing students to reach their full potential, the provision of a high-quality education represents perhaps the single greatest possibility for the expansion of opportunity.

In the U.S. today, approximately 400,000 children and youth are in foster care at any given time and each year about 20,000 of these students emancipate (i.e., age out) of foster care. A positive PK-12 education experience has the potential to be a powerful counterweight to the abuse, neglect, separation, impermanence and other barriers these vulnerable students experience. Additionally, participation in and persistence to a postsecondary credential can enhance their well-being, help them make more successful transitions to adulthood, and increase their chances for personal fulfillment and economic self-sufficiency.

National research shows that children in foster care are at high-risk of dropping out of school and are unlikely to attend or graduate from college. A coordinated effort by education agencies and child welfare agencies is necessary to improve the educational outcomes for students in foster care. Fortunately, the last few years have seen important policy, practice, and advocacy advances that address the education barriers and supports needed for these vulnerable students.
How Many Children and Youth Experience Homelessness?
National Statistics 2013-2014

- 1,301,239 homeless in public preK-12
- 7% increase from 2012-2013
- 100% increase since 2006-2007
- 13% of all low-income children and youth
- 30% of all extremely low-income children and youth
- Over 90,000 unaccompanied
### Characteristics of children and youth in foster care on September 30, 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young children (age 0-4)</td>
<td>141,828</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>School age children and youth (age 6-17)</td>
<td>258,100</td>
<td>62</td>
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<tr>
<td>Young adults (age 18-20)</td>
<td>15,192</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>174,477</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>97,540</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic (any race)</td>
<td>90,299</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other children and youth of color, race/ethnicity was unknown</td>
<td>52,243</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>216,645</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>198,426</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Causes of Homelessness

- Lack of affordable housing
  - Foreclosures
- Poverty
  - Economic recession
  - Unemployment
- Health problems
  - Lack of health insurance
  - Addiction disorders, Mental health
- Domestic violence
- Natural and other disasters
- Abuse/neglect/family dysfunction (unaccompanied youth)
Possible Reasons Children/Youth are in Foster Care

- Parental abuse - physical and sexual
- Abandoned or neglected, Runaway
- Kicked out due to sexual orientation or pregnancy
- Returned from foster care to unstable/unsafe arrangements
- Adopted from foster care, but kicked out after age 18
- Exited from foster care without adequate housing and/or supports
- Immigrant parent returned to homeland – child left behind
- Kicked out of living arrangements
- Jobless (either parent or child after age of 18)
- Parents are alcoholics or drug abusers, arrested or in prison
- Parents are unable to control behavior or discipline child
- Parents become disabled

Students in foster care – many stories
- Taken from biological parents/most recent guardian (Story of Jimmy, age 12)
- Found walking the street late at night (Story of Mandy, age 16)
- Picked up by police multiple times, hanging out with older kids (Story of Isiah, age 14)
The Impact of Foster Care on Academic Achievement

Lack of educational and career advocacy
School dropout, truancy and disciplinary actions – lower graduation rates
Absenteeism/enrollment interruptions - instability
Few engaged in college prep courses or programs (TRIO, GEAR UP, AVID)
Records transfer and confidentiality issues
Long terms educational impacts of abuse, neglect and trauma
Frequent changing of foster or residential homes
Lack of basic clothing and hygiene needs
Childcare/Child custody

Impact on Postsecondary Education
Lack of housing during holiday and summer breaks, deposits for housing
Lack of access to medical, dental and mental health services
A permanent address where they can receive mail
Textbooks, housing basics (towels, sheets, pillows, dishes, etc...)
Lack of financial literacy and budgeting skills
Childcare
Lack of role models, college advocates, mentors/coaches
Lack of information about available support systems
Struggle to balance school and other responsibilities
Lack of good college/program fit
Low test scores (reading, math, science)
Lack of basic clothing and hygiene needs
Poor social skills
• Family conflict: blended family issues, pregnancy, sexual activity or orientation, school problems, substance abuse
• Abuse and/or neglect within the home
• Parental incarceration, illness, hospitalization, or death
• Lack of space in temporary situations or shelter policies that prohibit adolescent boys
• Child welfare issues
  - Running away from a placement
  - Aging out of the system
  - Significant correlation between involvement with the child welfare system and experiencing homelessness as an adult
Eligibility: Children or youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including:

Sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason

Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, camping grounds due to the lack of adequate alternative accommodations

Living in emergency or transitional shelters

Awaiting foster care placement (until December 10, 2016)

Living in a public or private place not designed for humans to live

Living in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or a similar setting

Migratory children living in the above circumstances

Unaccompanied youth living in the above circumstances

Why the Broad Definition?

Shelters are often full and turn away youth

No shelters in many suburban and rural areas

Eligibility rules of often exclude unaccompanied minors

Youth may fear adult shelters

Shelters often have time limits

Youth may be unaware of alternatives, fleeing in crisis, living in over-crowded, temporary, and sometimes unsafe environments

Shelters often are a last resort after all other possibilities are exhausted

For more info, see NCHE’s Determining Eligibility brief at www.serve.org/nche/briefs.php

http://center.serve.org/nche/states/state_resources.php#map
Barriers to Higher Education Access

- Lack of access to parental financial information and support
- Lack of financial means to live independently and safely
- Inability to be financially self-sufficient once enrolled in college
- Limited housing options, especially in small towns or rural areas
- Failure to meet state residency requirements
- Struggling to balance school and other responsibilities
- Lack of adult guidance and support

- Lack of information about available support systems
- Getting a determination of homeless status
- Community Referrals (shelter, food, clothing, and social services)
- Obtaining ACT/SAT and admissions fee waivers
- Access to higher education housing (on/near campus, year round, in between breaks)
- FAFSA Completion Assistance (accompanied & unaccompanied
- Assistance with finding scholarships
THE APPLICATION PROCESS AND PAYING FOR COLLEGE
**College and Career Counseling and Advising:**  
*What should I do for students in Foster Care?*

**Don’t**
- Treat them differently
- Assume Foster parents provide support
- Assume they have the information needed
- Give up on them

**Do**
- Understand
- Assist
- Assess
- Prioritize needs
- Develop a care/action plan
- Coordinate care
- Refer students to resources

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**Don’t**
- Treat them differently – even though they may only be there for a short time  
- Assume Foster parents provide educational guidance and support  
- Believe they have all the information about available support systems  
- Give up on them  

**Do**
- Understand that they are struggling to balance school and other responsibilities like keeping their siblings together, therapist or court appointments  
- Be the person who aids in *putting all the pieces together*  
- Assess students’ capacity to cope with their current situation/crisis  
- Prioritize needs and develop an care/action plan  
- Coordinate care with both formal and informal supports  
- Refer students to school and community resources
Talk to students as early as possible about their plans for the future.

Do not get discouraged if they do not have any plans or do not engage in long term planning. Many times their plans have been interrupted or changed without their consent.

Use strengths and/or career assessment tests to help them narrow down a career.

Do not let snide comments make you feel like you are wasting your time. This is a defense mechanism. (“I am going to sell drugs and make lots of money”)

Include Social Workers, Independent Living Coordinators and Foster Parents in the conversation. Keep copies of everything in their school record and make sure these materials get transferred to their next school.

Focus on their future – not what happened in their past.
Challenges:
- Student may not understand the process of filling out an application and all the documentation that is needed. They may not have all of the information or even a permanent address to complete the application.
- They may not understand who to talk to, where to go or what the timeline is to apply.

How you can help:
- Keep a list of admissions contacts for local colleges
- Arrange for students to visit local colleges and universities
- Connect students with TRIO/GEAR UP and other college access programs

Resource: Almost 700 college and universities use CommonApp.org/ready
Students in foster care often face a range of challenges in the college choice process that prevent them from attending colleges and universities that are a good fit and match for their needs. As a result, such students are less likely to persist and graduate after enrolling in college.

Not only does a good College Match and Fit comparison help narrow down the colleges that offer their intended field of study, but it helps on choosing an ideal campus setting. If a small town student is not ready to wake up to the sounds of city traffic or deal with public transportation that may influence their choice of schools.

Annual tuition and fees also may be a deciding factor in College choice – or if the school offers a tuition waiver for students in foster care.

Compare College results once choices have been narrowed down. Include student population, student-to-faculty ratio, student body make-up, and school location.

Sometimes students make wrong choices just to get out of the situation they are current in – they want to leave the state believing things will be better somewhere else.
Paying for College

Student may not have access to:
- Parental financial information
- Parental support
- Financial means to live independently once enrolled in college
- Limited housing options (affordability, on-campus closures during semester breaks)

How you can help:
- Keep a list of financial aid contacts for local colleges
- Help complete the FAFSA and know the regulations for students in foster care
- Work with Financial Aid to determine if student is connected to all available resources at the college
- Assist students in applying for university and community-based grants and/or scholarships for students in foster care – keep reminders of deadlines for submission.
Unaccompanied Homeless Youth and Higher Education Act

2-step process
Is the student homeless?
Is the student unaccompanied?

2-step process to determine eligibility

1) Does the student’s living arrangement meet the McKinney-Vento Act’s definition of homeless?

2) Once homelessness is determined, is the student unaccompanied?

Unaccompanied

“not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian”

Note: The Higher Education Act includes the McKinney-Vento Act’s definition of homeless and unaccompanied
Independent student status for unaccompanied homeless youth and self-supporting youth at risk of homelessness

Can apply for financial aid without parental signature or consideration of parental income

Must be determined by:

- Local liaison
- RHYA-funded shelter director or designee
- HUD-funded shelter director or designee
- College financial aid administrator
Updated Application and Verification Guide released in 2015

▪ Borrows language from NCHE’s *Determining Eligibility* brief
▪ Student can use the following addresses to complete the FAFSA
  ▪ Address of a reliable friend or relative
  ▪ The college’s administrative address as his/her mailing address, with permission
▪ UHY may be 24 or younger or still enrolled in high school on the date he/she signs the FAFSA
There are three specific questions on the paper FAFSA that ask students to self-identify homeless status. These are 56, 57, and 58.

53. At any time since you turned age 13, were both your parents deceased, were you in foster care or were you a dependent or ward of the court?

54. As determined by a court in your state of legal residence, are you or were you an emancipated minor?

55. As determined by a court in your state of legal residence, are you or were you in legal guardianship?

56. At any time on or after July 1, 2014, did your high school or school district homeless liaison determine that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless or were self-supporting and at risk of being homeless?

57. At any time on or after July 1, 2014, did the director of an emergency shelter or transitional housing program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development determine that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless or were self-supporting and at risk of being homeless?
58. At any time on or after July 1, 2014, did the director of a runaway or homeless youth basic center or transitional living program determine that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless or were self-supporting and at risk of being homeless?
Online FAFSA Application

Homeless Circumstances

You indicated that you were homeless or at risk of being homeless and you answered "no" to all of the specific homeless questions.

However, your financial aid administrator could make a determination that you are a homeless youth, and do not need to provide parental information, if you meet both of the following conditions:

- You are homeless, which means you are lacking fixed, regular and adequate housing, which includes living in shelters, parks, motels or cars, or temporarily living with other people because you had nowhere else to go. Also, if you are living in any of these situations and sleeping on the floor of an abandoned building you may be considered homeless even if your parent would provide support and a place to live.
- You are unaccompanied, which means you are not living in the physical custody of your parent or guardian.

Help and Hints

Homeless Circumstances

Select I will provide parental information to continue to Parent Demographics.

I am homeless or at risk of being homeless to get additional information.

I will provide parental information

I am homeless or at risk of being homeless
Scholarships and Tuition Waivers for Homeless Students

- National Scholarships for students that have experienced homelessness:
  - Horatio Alger Scholarship: [https://scholars.horatioalger.org/scholarships/](https://scholars.horatioalger.org/scholarships/)

- State Tuition Waiver/Fee Exemption
  - Florida
  - Maryland
    [http://www.mhec.state.md.us//financialAid/ProgramDescriptions/prog_homelessyouth.asp](http://www.mhec.state.md.us//financialAid/ProgramDescriptions/prog_homelessyouth.asp)

- Check with your state to see if there are any state level scholarships
- Provide homeless students with same applicable scholarships search tools and waivers as any other student
Focus on FAFSA completion!

FAFSA Week – see www.naehcy.org

Inform unaccompanied youth of college options as soon as they are identified as homeless

Make sure high school counselors know about the FAFSA policies for UHY

Arrange for students to visit local colleges and universities

Use a template for when making determinations – www.naehcy.org

Connect UHY to GEAR UP, Upward Bound, other TRIO programs

http://www.coenet.us/coe_prod_imis/COE/TRIO/TRIO_Programs/Programs_at_a_Glance/COE/NAV_TRIO/TRIO_Programs_at_a_Glance.aspx?hkey=76fb02cd-137d-4552-b745-c0cda2e641e3

Connect students to campus SPOC’s

Connect students with federal and community resources that they may be eligible for

- State Health Insurance
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF)
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Runaway and Homeless Youth Act Funded Shelters (RHYA)
- Administration for Children and Families

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/grants/fysb-grantees
SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS / SUPPORTS ONCE ON CAMPUS
• **Single Point of Contact (SPOC)** - is a supportive college administrator on each campus who is committed to helping homeless youth (and often foster youth) successfully navigate the college-going process on campuses.

• SPOCs can be found in the Financial Aid, Counseling, Dean of Students, and Student Support Services offices.

SPOC’s can come from any office on campus

• Assist students with the following
  ▪ Admissions
  ▪ Financial Aid
  ▪ Academic Advising
  ▪ Remediation, Tutoring
  ▪ Student Life
  ▪ Housing, Counseling Center, Health Center, TRIO Programs (Talent Search, Upward Bound, EOC, GEAR-UP), Learning Disabilities Services, Life Skills, Financial Literacy, Mentoring Programs

Best Practices: Transitions and Supports

- Connect students with federal and community resources that they may be eligible for
  - State Health Insurance
  - Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
  - Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF)
  - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
  - Runaway and Homeless Youth Act Funded Shelters (RHYA)
  - Administration for Children and Families

- Over 400 campuses have created a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) - a supportive college administrator on each campus who is committed to helping homeless and foster youth successfully navigate the college going process on campus. (mentioned by Cyekeia)

- Connect students to Admission’s, Academic Advising, Financial Aid, Housing, Student Involvement, and other pertinent offices on campus.
- Find job opportunities both on and off campus
- Locate organizations to offer services students may not be able to afford. (i.e. childcare, car maintenance, etc.)
- Assist students in applying for university and community-based grants and/or scholarships
- Work with Financial Aid to determine if student is connected to all available resources
Birth Certificate – showing date of birth and citizenship
Social Security Card
High school diploma/GED certificate – showing date of completion
Medical and Dental card
Insurance (health, disability, life...)
Immunization records
List of current prescriptions – and prescribing doctor
Proof of residency (high school transcript with address?)
Tax Returns – Federal and State (if required)
Naturalization/Immigration/Citizenship paperwork
Passport
Will
Resume
Automobile Title/Registration and Insurance
Driver’s license
• **Housing at college:** **Solutions:** Housing deposits provided by college access programs, deposits waived by college, use of agency emergency fund, or students live off-campus year round.

• **Housing on breaks or summer vacation:** **Solutions:** Colleges provide housing during breaks for extra cost. Organizations or volunteers provide free housing to young college students.

• **Need for a Permanent Address:** **Solutions:** Non-profit agencies designated as address (may provide free student mailboxes inside their agency). No cost or low cost of Post office mailboxes.

• **Transportation to Doctor/Therapy appointments:** **Solutions:** Work with Independent Living Social Workers to arrange transportation while in college. Bus Passes. If available, transfer to student health or college counseling center.

• **Food:** **Solutions:** Financial aid, food bank, some Financial Aid offices at college have food pantries.

• **Medical Problems:** **Solutions:** Community Center assistance for health insurance applications, pro-bono physicals, free eye glasses and eye exams, pro-bono dentistry (combined with mentor rides or bus tickets), DSS assistance for young adults on Medicaid and heading off to college.

• **College Supplies:** **Solutions:** Provided by non-profit, service organizations or churches: bedding, backpacks, clothing, notebook, alarm clock, dictionary, flash drive, highlighters, pens, toothbrush and toothpaste, shampoo, towels and washcloths.

• **Transportation:** **Solutions:** mentor drivers and bus tickets for official appointments, medical emergencies, court dates.

• **Legal aid:** **Solutions:** Pro-bono help for criminal justice issues and foster care issues (i.e. no name on birth certificate, etc.)

• **Help with childcare:** **Solutions:** Family housing/day care/public school on campus. Shared childcare with another student. Childcare vouchers.
Federal law requires child welfare agencies to ensure that youth ages 16 and older in foster care receive a copy of any consumer report, commonly called a "credit report," annually until discharged from care, and to assist youth in interpreting the report and addressing any inaccuracies. The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014, signed into law on September 29, 2014, will extend the protections of this provision to all youth ages 14 and older in foster care. In a letter to child welfare directors, the Children’s Bureau urges agencies to consider taking additional steps to protect children and youth from identity theft and to explore how to implement the provision to empower youth by deepening their understanding of credit, money management, and other financial issues.

Yes, people steal the identities of youth in foster care and they start their new life in debt!
FINAL THOUGHTS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND RESOURCES
Information can be released without parental consent to:

• “an agency caseworker or other representative of a State or local child welfare agency, or tribal organization... who has the right to access a student's case plan
• when such agency or organization is legally responsible, in accordance with State or tribal law, for the care and protection of the student
• provided that the education records, or the personally identifiable information contained in such records, of the student will not be disclosed ... except to an individual or entity engaged in addressing the student's education needs....

Here are five ways Youth in Foster Care benefit from the ESSA:

• Youth in Foster Care will be able to remain in their original school even if they change placements. Schools will work together with child welfare agencies to ensure that Youth in Foster Care have school transportation.
• Youth in Foster Care will not face as much bullying. The new law requires schools to reduce bullying, which would mean a significant improvement in school environments for Youth in Foster Care who are often bullied.
• Youth in Foster Care will have more access to Charter schools. Sometimes, a Charter school is a better environment for students with diverse backgrounds.
• Youth in Foster Care and families involved with the foster care system will have access to services through Family Engagement Centers. To receive funding, the centers must prove that the services offered are helpful and useful for Youth in Foster Care and families involved in foster care.
• Youth in Foster Care will continue to see improvements in their educational experiences as more information is collected and tracked. Right now, there is not enough information about the educational experiences of Youth in Foster Care. The law requires reports to policymakers about the status of foster youth in education.

Federal, State Legislation and Foster Care Youth

Federal:
• Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act
• Uninterrupted Scholars Act (FERPA Amendment)
• Every Student Succeeds Act
• Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA)
• College Cost Reduction and Access Act (Pell Grant increases, etc...)
• Chafee Foster Care Independence Act/ETV – 16 or older
• Extended Medicaid coverage - ACA
• Carl D. Perkins Career And Technical Education Act

State (just a few):
• College tuition waivers (22 states)
• Passport to College Promise Scholarship (WA)
• California AB 194 – priority college registration
• California AB 12 – extend beyond age 18 up to age 21
Convene a meeting with local stakeholders from the McKinney-Vento K-12, Foster Care, Higher Education, and RHYA/HUD shelter communities as well as other local service providers and advocates.

Allow each to share knowledge about their area of expertise:
- UHY and independent student definitions
- Financial aid
- Campus and community resources

Build an action plan for serving UHY that makes sense for your community.
NAEHCY Resources

- Higher Education Helpline: 855-446-2673 or
- Text “NAEHCY” to 335577

- Statewide Higher Education Networks

- Podcast Series
  http://naehcy.org/educational-resources/podcasts

- Scholarship http://naehcy.org/ietendre-scholarship-fund/about-the-fund

- College Access and Success Toolkit
  http://naehcy.org/educational-resources/he-toolkit
Resources: Foster Care

- **Education and Training**
  - Casey Family Programs, Education - [http://www.casey.org/resources](http://www.casey.org/resources)
  - Center for Children and the Law - [www.fostercareandeducation.org](http://www.fostercareandeducation.org)

- **School-based liaisons**
  - McKinney-Vento
  - State law liaisons (Texas, Colorado, Missouri)

- **Trauma-Informed Practices**
  - Compassionate Schools Initiative (Washington)
  - Trauma Sensitive Schools (Massachusetts)

### Education Curriculum and Training
Casey Family Programs: Endless Dreams

A national technical assistance resource and information clearinghouse on legal and policy matters affecting the education of children and youth in foster care.

- [www.fostercareandeducation.org](http://www.fostercareandeducation.org)
- [http://www.casey.org/resources/publications/directory/subject/Education_k12.htm](http://www.casey.org/resources/publications/directory/subject/Education_k12.htm)

### School-based liaisons

McKinney-Vento

State law created education liaisons (Texas, Colorado, Missouri)

### Trauma-Informed Practices

Compassionate Schools Initiative (Washington)

Provides training, guidance, referral, and technical assistance. Not a program, but a process to cultivate a climate that benefits all students.

Trauma Sensitive Schools (Massachusetts)

Resources: Postsecondary Education and Foster Care

- Foster Care and Student Success (2013)
- Foster Youth Campus Support Programs: A Leadership Guide (2013)
- Foster Youth: Supporting Educational Success
- Providing Effective Financial Aid Assistance to Students from Foster Care and Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (2009)
- Supporting success: Improving higher education outcomes for students from foster care (2010)

Contact

- Cyekea Lee, NAEHCY, clee@naehcy.org
- Corrine Nilsen, corinne.nilsen@wichita.edu
- Ginny Donohue, onpointforcollege@msn.com