



**ACHIEVING SUCCESS:**  
**Guidance for Colleges to Better  
Support Foster Youth**





***Youth Fostering Change is a youth engagement program of Juvenile Law Center. This program offers youth who are currently or formerly involved in the child welfare system the opportunity to evaluate the system and develop and implement a campaign that works to make the system better for other youth.***

***2015-2016 Youth Fostering Change Youth Advocates:***

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**For more information about Youth Fostering Change and our projects visit us online at [www.jlc.org/yfc](http://www.jlc.org/yfc).**

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*This document highlights recommendations of actions that colleges can take to improve access to higher education for foster youth nationwide, pledges that colleges can make to create tangible change on their campuses, and information about tuition waiver options for foster youth. The information in this guidance is informed by the youth's personal experiences and feedback from youth at Philadelphia's Achieving Independence Center.*

*Foster youth have a more difficult path toward higher education, and our goal is to make it easier for these young people to be prepared to attend college and graduate successfully. As young adults applying to college, we know that implementing changes like these will contribute to our long term success, making it easier for us to graduate, find jobs, be financially stable and give back to the community. Right now, less than 3% of former foster youth have a degree by the age of 25. We believe that we should have an equal chance at an education to become more independent, stable young adults.*



- Youth Fostering Change

## QUICK FACTS

As Youth Advocates in Youth Fostering Change, we are committed to making college campuses more foster youth-friendly spaces. Our project includes the following four elements to help make higher education a reality for foster youth:

### *Recommendations*

We have made recommendations to improve the college experience for foster youth. These recommendations include providing housing during school and breaks, emergency funding and financial assistance, summer bridge programs, academic advising and making sure foster youth have access to healthcare and insurance.

### *Personal Experience*

From our personal experience in the foster care system, we know that sometimes it can be hard trying to make it on your own. College can be an experience that might seem scary. Youth are often focused on how they will pay for college and how they will be able to find affordable housing. Also, as foster youth, we've moved from school to school and home to home, and therefore often don't feel academically prepared for rigorous college work. The recommendations we've made will help colleges make their campuses more foster youth friendly, and help to ease our worries.

### *Pledges*

We've created sample pledges colleges can commit to completing in order to help foster youth. These pledges are easy to make and don't cost much. Some don't cost anything! With housing over breaks, colleges can help by giving foster youth a place to stay during vacation. To provide emergency financial assistance, colleges can have a stock of donated food and clothes available. For money management, colleges can offer classes on financial advising to foster youth. Through a summer bridge program, schools can offer classes and programs over the summer for foster youth to catch up. Finally, schools can implement a liaison that foster youth can seek out for guidance and support.

### *Costs of College*

While foster youth are eligible for some grants to cover the cost of college, it's not nearly enough. The average Chafee Grant is \$3,771, and the average Pell Grant is \$3,673. The average cost of a public state school is \$24,061. That leaves \$16,617 in uncovered costs. How do you pay the difference? Tuition waivers are one way colleges can help foster youth pursue their higher education goals.

## Foster Youth Liaison

**Our recommendation is to establish a foster youth liaison position to support students who have been in the child welfare system.**

The foster youth liaison position would be filled by at least one person in college administration who knows the available resources for foster youth and can help answer questions that the youth may have.

Most foster youth have to balance schoolwork with finding housing, going to court, and meeting with their caseworkers. They also often experience a lack of support from family or outside resources. Foster youth would benefit from having just one place – and one person – to give them information they need and access resources that other students may not need, like housing and trauma support.

*I plan to go to college and currently attend the Achieving Independence Center, which has a one-stop shop and they have helped me with all of my needs for higher education. If I need help applying for local colleges or even out-of-state schools, I can go there and get help right away. Because of this experience, I know that it would help foster youth out if a one-stop center was in place as a part of the supportive resources offered by colleges.*

**-Russell**



# Housing During Breaks

**Our recommendation is to offer year-round housing for holiday breaks and summer breaks.**

It is important to offer year-round housing for youth because some foster youth might not have a home to go to over holidays or summer breaks or might not be able to pay for year-round housing. Because youth fear that they will not have stable housing year-round during school, the stress associated with finding housing can discourage youth from applying or completing a semester.

**Field Findings:** A foster youth from the Achieving Independence Center, speaking about her experiences in college, explained that she didn't want to leave school for breaks because the child welfare system put her in different group homes each time.



*How can you pay attention in class if you're worried about where you're going to live? The stress of college and the problems outside of school would be overwhelming.*

**-Kiani**

*I am not completely sure where I'll be residing when I start college, therefore I can't be sure where or if I will even have a place to go for breaks. If my school offered housing for breaks, there would be no uncertainty and I'd know for sure that I'd have a guaranteed place to stay.*

**-Brittany**



## Emergency Financial Assistance

**Our recommendation is to offer foster youth emergency financial assistance.**

Emergency financial assistance is important because spending money on one expense could mean giving up another necessity like living expenses, clothes or food. Often, foster youth do not have a support system that can help when they cannot make ends meet. Unstable living and lack of a bank account can cause people to keep money on their persons, which may lead to spending money or getting money stolen. This is important for foster youth because foster youth might not have anyone that can help them financially. This emergency assistance may prevent youth from dropping out of school in order to meet temporary financial needs.

*Life emergencies do come up which are harder to deal with as a foster youth because I don't have family support. For example, if housing becomes unavailable, I would most likely be homeless instead of having a relative to rely on. For this reason, emergency financial assistance would be a great help to me and would help to eliminate some of the stress that can come from an emergency situation.*

**-Brittany**



# Financial Advising & Money Management

**Our recommendation is to establish a financial advising and money management course.**

Many youth enter college without ever having a bank account, without knowing the importance of having one, and without the knowledge of how to manage their own finances. This is a recurring problem in the life of a foster youth. For this reason, financial and money management advising is something that is particularly necessary for foster youth. Often, foster youth are faced with the task of managing large amounts of money from grants and financial assistance for the first time when they enter college. Having a financial management course would be an important addition to your institution so that foster youth learn how to responsibly spend and save their money, a lesson many of these students may be learning for the first time.

*I personally was never taught how to save money or budget, and to this day I still don't know how. As soon as I earn money, I immediately want to spend it. I don't have a bank account or know how to hold one. When I did have one in the past, my guardian had complete control over it. I didn't know I needed a certain amount of money to keep my account. I eventually want to be able to manage my own money and hold my own bank account.*

**-Selena**



*My adoptive mom taught me how to use a bank account and budget money, which was very helpful. I believe that everyone should have someone who can teach them these skills.*

*Managing money isn't easy, and it's even harder when you're a foster youth and have to spend your money taking care of necessities.*

**-Kiani**

*I have personal experience with not knowing how to manage my money and spending it on things that are unnecessary so I don't have money for things I really do need. I've never been taught how to manage my money and no one in my family or around me has ever showed me how. This has always been a problem because I've never had that much money, so when I do earn more money, I don't know what to do with it.*

**-Shanice**



# Summer Bridge Program

**Our recommendation is to create more summer bridge programs targeted to foster youth.**

Foster youth face many obstacles entering higher education and could benefit from extra support prior to beginning college. Many foster youth's educational paths tend to be inconsistent due to constant transfers between schools, which often lead to students missing important lessons or needing to retake classes or even an entire grade level. Foster youth may not have the time or resources to reach out for help to address these concerns. And when help is offered, foster youth often have to go to multiple places or spend money to access supportive services. Such a program could also help students keep up their grades and attendance while in college because it would provide a space for students to grow socially and academically and be around other students with similar backgrounds.

*A summer bridge program is important to me because I feel that I am not fully prepared for college classes. I missed important lessons because of moving from school to school and being pulled out early to see my social worker or to go to a court date or see my therapist. Because of this I was always behind in school.*

**-Tiani**



**-Tay**

*I've changed schools so many times that I don't believe I'll be prepared for college. A bridge program would benefit me by introducing me to what college will be like and teaching me how to succeed in a new place and access support from professors and counselors.*



**-Selena**

*I've taken summer classes and they really helped me. I was going to be held back a grade, so I signed up for summer school. It has changed my life ever since. I'm now at the proper reading level, my grades went up, my mindset changed. These classes over the summer got me prepared for the next school year, improved my critical thinking and kept my mind stimulated.*



**-Shanice**

*I have personal experience with not knowing if I am going to be prepared for the work in a more rigorous school, or in college. I got involved in a bridge program to help prepare me for the upcoming school year and all the new work it would bring. This program helped me learn the information I couldn't get due to transferring to other schools, as the foster system keeps moving me to different places.*

## Health Care & Health Insurance

**Our recommendation is to help connect students with health care and health insurance.**

Access to health care and health insurance is especially important because, as many college-bound foster youth are financially independent, they need support finding inexpensive and accessible health care. Foster youth are eligible for Medicaid until they are 26. However, many universities and college health centers do not accept Medicaid. Foster youth also have specific health care benefits that they might not be aware of; they may need help applying for these funds because the process can be complicated. Foster youth may be forced to find out how to undertake the application process for these insurance benefits on their own as they may not have a parent or family member to help them.

*Not having health insurance can hinder students from getting the medical attention they need, or cause them to become overwhelmed with medical bills. When I was in placement, my insurance was cut off for six months. Because of this, I missed important dental and doctor visits, which led to a decline in my overall health. From this experience, I know that connecting students with healthcare and health insurance is important to keep them healthy and able to focus on school.*

**-Brittany**



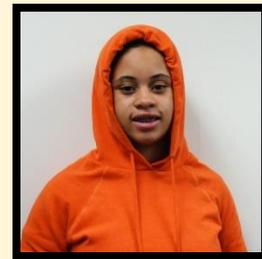
# Academic Advising

**Our recommendation is to implement an individualized academic advising program.**

Many foster youth have not learned about higher education opportunities or been exposed to individuals who had gone to college growing up, so they may be unaware of the academic opportunities available upon entering college and struggle to decide on a path of their own. In addition, some foster youth may need extra support because they are preoccupied with additional duties like working to pay their bills or meeting with their caseworker, responsibilities which, without support and encouragement from college staff, can become prioritized over higher education. Academic advising could provide youth with assistance choosing their classes, major, and identifying activities around campus that they can join.

*I would love if there was an advisor or support team who could help me when I go to college and offer support and guidance. As a foster youth, no one has explained anything about college to me, so I would like it if there was an adviser that could be there when I need them. I will especially need help choosing my classes because I plan to be a double major, so having an academic advising program would be really helpful for me when I enter college.*

**-Tay**



**Field Findings:** Foster youth from the Achieving Independence Center reported that they had not received assistance in choosing their classes or their major, which made staying on track and completing their studies more difficult.

# Pledges for Colleges to Improve Access to Higher Education for

Youth Fostering Change, a project of Juvenile Law Center, has developed a list of pledges colleges can make in order to enact our recommendations for improving access to higher education. The purpose of these pledges is to ensure colleges have a variety of options to make their campuses more foster youth-friendly. We hope that you pledge to implement as many of these supports as possible at your institution.

## **Foster Youth Liaison Pledges:**

- Pledge 1: Assign an administrator or professor the role of serving as a liaison for foster youth
- Pledge 2: Hire on a professional with experience working with foster youth to serve as a liaison
- Pledge 3: Create a school-specific resource guide for foster youth to be printed out and posted online
- Pledge 4: Train all academic advisors in foster youth specific resources/needs

## **Housing over Breaks Pledges:**

- Pledge 1: Put aside a certain number of dorm rooms for foster youth to utilize over holiday and summer breaks
- Pledge 2: Pair foster youth with a fellow student, staff or community member who would be willing to house them over breaks
- Pledge 3: Assign a staff member to offer support in finding foster youth alternative, off campus housing options
- Pledge 4: Provide a stipend to pay for foster youth housing during breaks

## **Emergency Financial Assistance Pledges:**

- Pledge 1: Have a supply of donated clothes and food available for use by foster youth
- Pledge 2: Provide an emergency fund for each student to use for emergency situations (\$50 per semester)
- Pledge 3: Partner with the institution's food service provider to donate unused meals to foster youth

### **Financial Advising and Money Management Pledges:**

- Pledge 1: Recruit volunteer staff or faculty to offer free money management advice to students
- Pledge 2: Employ students to provide financial literacy tutoring to fellow students
- Pledge 3: Offer money management classes as a credit-bearing elective course
- Pledge 4: Train financial aid officers to be knowledgeable of foster youth-specific financial aid resources
- Pledge 5: Assist students in creating bank accounts during orientation

### **Summer Bridge Program Pledges:**

- Pledge 1: Offer accelerated, remedial or catch up classes for youth to become familiar with the rigor of academic work in college
- Pledge 2: Recruit volunteer faculty or employ faculty to teach these courses over the summer
- Pledge 3: Employ older students with experience in the child welfare system to help staff the summer bridge program
- Pledge 4: Offer stipends for youth in attendance to cover income lost due to their participation

### **Health Care and Health Insurance Pledges:**

- Pledge 1: Ensure that personnel at the campus health center can advise foster youth in finding and applying for affordable health insurance, and provide assistance in how to navigate the insurance system.
- Pledge 2: Establish school-wide policy to accept Medicaid insurance at the on-campus health provider
- Pledge 3: Offer yearly clinics to assist students in filling out their applications for health insurance
- Pledge 4: Provide transportation to foster youth when they need to visit off-campus medical providers

### **Academic Advising Pledges:**

- Pledge 1: Assign individual academic advisers to foster youth to assist with transitioning into college, choosing classes, and maintaining progress
- Pledge 2: Schedule monthly check-ins between advisors and students
- Pledge 3: Conduct group academic advising sessions with foster youth cohort
- Pledge 4: Offer a special orientation for foster youth to tour the college, attend a class and meet staff, faculty and other students after admittance

## DID YOU KNOW?

Approximately 3% of foster youth have earned a bachelor's degree by the time they turn 25.

Young people in foster care are often low-income and often lack the financial and emotional support from parents and other family members.



## WHAT ABOUT US?

Our state offers no grants or aid specifically for foster youth.

Pennsylvania needs to step up.

**Your foster youth need you!**



## COULD YOUR SCHOOL OFFER WAIVERS?

Tuition waivers are state programs that increase access to higher education for young people currently and formerly in foster care by “waiving” their tuition and fees at colleges and vocational schools under certain conditions.

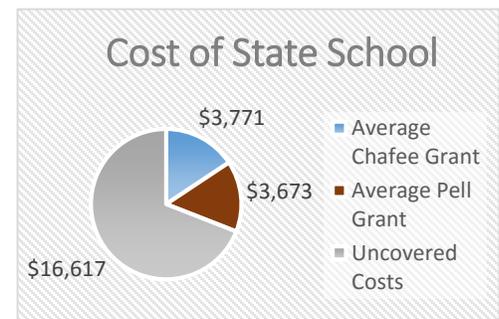


## COULD YOUR SCHOOL PROVIDE WAIVERS?!

### ARE GRANTS REALLY ENOUGH?



There are grants available for foster youth and low-income youth: The Chafee Education Voucher (average award is \$3,771) and the Pell Grant (average award is \$3,673).



### WHAT DO OTHER SCHOOLS DO?

Nearly three dozen states have already taken action to make college more affordable for foster youth.

Since 2008, Alaska, Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, North Carolina, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Oregon and South Carolina have implemented some type of post-secondary education tuition waiver policy for students in foster care.

