**Tips for Maximizing Support for Students with Experience**

**in Foster Care in Higher Education During the Pandemic:**

**Ending the Spring Semester and Gearing up for Summer and Fall**

1. **Help youth understand the COVID-specific financial aid available to them through their colleges and universities.**

Federal law passed during the pandemic has provided significant funds for higher education institutions through the Consolidated Appropriations Act and the American Rescue Plan. A good portion of these funds, referred to as **Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF I, II, & III),** have been dedicated for relief to students, but these funds are distributed through the schools. Schools are to prioritize the highest needs students. In addition, some of these funds may be available to youth without immigration documentation.

1. **Help youth request or apply for pandemic funds through their college or university.**

If the school does not have an application on its website for assistance-which they may be calling HEERF, pandemic assistance or emergency assistance-ask the financial aid office. Support the youth in making a request for funds by helping them identify their specific needs and putting requests in writing. Specific requests are likely to be more successful. For example: “I am requesting emergency funds in the amount of $2500 to meet my needs during the pandemic. I need $1500 to help pay my rent, $500 for food, $300 for child care, and $200 for transportation.”

1. **Help youth manage their money, including any additional assistance they may receive.**

Youth may be getting aid from various sources during the pandemic. For example, some schools may decide to provide emergency aid automatically to certain groups of students, like all Pell eligible students. Encourage youth to keep an eye on their financial aid/student account and to be aware of funds coming in so they can decide the best way to use them. Youth may get funds on their account even if they owe an outstanding balance, so it is important to keep track.

1. **Help youth ask for assistance from their college or university.**

In addition to financial assistance, many schools are providing other aid to students that students may not be aware of. Here are a few examples of help that schools may be able to provide:

* Laptop and technology lending to ensure youth have the up-to-date equipment they need;
* Providing hot spots to help with consistent internet access;
* Food assistance in the form of goods, stipends, or gift cards;
* Housing assistance;
* Mental health supports; and
* Tutoring supports.

1. **Help youth access the Chafee and Education and Training Grant(ETG) funds they may be eligible for through the Consolidated Appropriations Act.**

Pennsylvania received 12.5 million in Chafee funds and 1.8 million in additional ETG as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021. Youth are eligible for these funds until they reach age 27. These funds will be distributed through the counties and should be used to meet the needs of young people during the pandemic, including those related to education, housing, food, and other supports. Help youth make requests for assistance through their Independent Living Program and child welfare agency.

1. **Help youth plan for the summer session.**

The summer session can be a time to get ahead and make up for a challenging year. Talk with youth about the credit hours they took this year, their financial aid package, and their plans for the fall so they can make an informed decision about the summer session. Ask for help from the financial aid and counseling office if you need help in having these discussions. Because the summer sessions are shorter, make sure youth are aware of the withdraw deadlines so that they do not get penalized if the decide to withdraw past a deadline.

1. **Make sure youth meet the May 1st deadline for the PA State Grant.**

To apply for the PA State Grant, youth must first complete the FAFSA, which can be found here:  <https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa>. When they complete the FAFSA they will arrive at a confirmation page that has a link to begin the State Grant Application.

1. **Help students arrange their housing for the next semester.**

If a youth needs housing for the summer or fall semester help them make that request from the school right now if there is on-campus housing. If there is not have on-campus housing, make sure the youth has housing through extended foster care, a housing program like FYI or Chafee room and board.

1. **Remind youth to check their college or university emails over the summer so they do not miss important deadlines and information.**

Youth will get emails from their schools over the summer with important information like: whether the school will be open, closed, or a hybrid; whether vaccination will be required for attendance; and whether they will receive any pandemic or additional aid. They will miss this important information, may miss deadlines and opportunities if they do not read these emails.

1. **Help youth get connected with student support programs and foster care points of contacts.**

As a result of the Fostering Independence Through Education Tuition Waiver law all schools in PA must have a foster care Point of Contact (POC). Their role is to assist young people with experience in foster care apply for the waiver, navigate financial aid, access campus and community resources, as well as provide general support. Use this link to search for POCs by school: https://directory.center-school.org/fostercare/highereducation/search

The following schools in PA have foster care specific campus support programs that can provide an array of excellent financial and other support to youth with experience in foster care:

* Bloomsburg University
* Cabrini University
* California University
* Chestnut Hill College
* Community College of Allegheny County
* Community College of Philadelphia
* East Stroudsburg University
* Keystone College
* Kutztown University
* Lackawanna College
* Manor College
* Montgomery County Community College
* Penn State Abingdon
* Penn State Greater Allegheny
* Penn State University Park
* Temple University
* West Chester University
* Westmoreland Community College

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