

TOPIC:

Foster to College: Preparing Foster Youth to Dream Big!

May 2019

Micro Training Course Developed

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INSTRUCTIONS FOR FOSTER PARENT TRAINING CREDIT:

**Read through this self-study*

**Fill out the "CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING" Questionnaire*

**Return to ACRF for 1.0 hour of training credit.*

Graduating high schools students face so many mixed emotions. They are relieved to be finishing a chapter of their lives and nervous about the unknown before them. Youth who age-out of foster care while graduating high school face an even greater sense of anxiety and uncertainty. Many foster youth have experienced trauma, instability, and lack financial and emotional support. Their experience developing goals and future-orientation tends to be limited to solving immediate problems and survival. Some have never been told that they can go to college.

According to Federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS), in 2015 only 5% of 21-year-old youth that transitioned out of foster care in Alaska were attending college; whereas, in that same group, 29% were incarcerated within the two prior years. Foster youth face significant disadvantages in getting a higher education, and removing the obstacles that stand in their way should be the focus of attention.

As foster youth transition out of care, they have opportunities to transition into post-secondary education. In an effort to improve outcomes for foster youth, federal and state agencies, universities, and non-profit organizations have developed programs and resources to assist youth in taking charge of their future. Critical to success is the knowledge that there is assistance and support.

"All kids need is a little help, a little hope and somebody who believes in them."

Magic Johnson (Basketball)

Affirmation of Support. Letting the youth know that he/she is believed in and supported will have lasting effects on their own beliefs about what they are capable of. This support will increase the educational aspirations of the youth. A foster parent can help develop educational aspirations and expectations by giving youth the opportunity to discover their strengths and passions and formulate obtainable goals. Present them with realistic options including certificate programs, degree programs and job training. Teach them the true relationship between education and a career. Foster youth don't just need help choosing a good career path, getting into a college or training program, or making their first visit to the financial aid office.

In order to succeed in all of these endeavors and more, they need the same consistent, long-term caring support as any other young adult. Ensure that the foster youth knows that you will support and champion for them all the way through their education endeavors. Celebrate their successes with them. Let them know you see their progress and that success is achievable to them.

Transition Plan. Traditional college planning begins when youth are in middle school. The academic choices the youth make in their formative years impact options available to them when they are considering college paths, and because many youth aging-out of foster care were not able to plan for college during their formative years, it is important to evaluate the youths strengths, preferences, and interests as early as possible. Things that should be considered when creating a transition to college plan are the following:

1. Education history;
2. Dreams and aspirations;

3. Finances and money management;
4. Job supports and employment services;
5. Housing options;
6. Financial and scholarship availability.

In helping the youth prepare for college, you must not set youth up for failure by encouraging them to take classes and enter programs for which they do not have the background for. If the youth has aspirations that don't meet his/her background, help the youth by taking additional classes or understanding the prerequisites for their desired path. Many who do enroll in college are required to take remedial courses before they can take courses that count towards their degree. This increases the amount of time needed to graduate and the cost of earning their degree. This needs to be accounted for when designing a transition plan so that the youth does not become disenchanted with what may seem like a setback.



Paper Work. It is often said that one of the greatest barriers to enrolling into college is youth struggling with the initial application process to get into college. Understanding who needs to fill out what paperwork and interpreting some of the questions on the forms can be very complicated depending on the status of the youth. Many youth haven't completed taxes, and this becomes a barrier to FAFSA. Many youth in foster care perceive the cost of college as unaffordable, and they often are unaware of the different financial assistance programs that are available to them. There are many unique financial aid options for foster youth options; however, accessing them can be confusing.

Foster youth need more help in accessing and filling out all of the paperwork that is required to enter and pay for college. It is common for youth to become overwhelmed by the financial aid process that they make poor financial choices. These choices can make it difficult for them to achieve their dream of completing college. Teach the youth learn how to fill forms out, introduce them to financial aid counselors, and teaching them what resources are available that can adequately pay for college. By giving them knowledge tools, they can take control of their success.

Follow-through and Continued Support. Successful completion of the application process is the first step to achieving success in college for foster youth. Many college-directed foster youth have never had anyone in their lives expect them to attend and complete college, this may leave them with more prone to give up and dropout of college before completion. The feeling of a lack of safety net may engender fear in them that prevent the youth from taking big leaps of faith. Continued support through college gives the youth the knowledge someone believes in them and that they have a cheerleader. Support the student's involvement in college life. A foster parent can fill in for or augment family support by participating in parent or family weekends or other campus events, parent interest groups, and volunteer opportunities. These become natural ways to show interest in the student by on-campus visits and learning about school activities and services. This involvement might help the foster parent spot signs of struggle that the youth might not see, and in such cases, the foster parent can help find external supports.

Transitioning out of care can be a frightening time for youth in care. They are losing many resources that were available to them. These resources include individuals that were helping the youth. The care system is no longer at their disposal and they might feel alone and alienated. A foster parent can take an active role in the youths future, and in doing so, help the youth beat the odds. Giving the youth the knowledge that they can go to college and how, can be the piece of the story that transforms their experience from surviving to succeeding.

See a list of helpful Alaska resources on the next page.

To Earn 1.0 Hour Foster Parent Training Credit (Alaska Foster Parents Only) COMPLETE [QUESTIONNAIRE](#)

RESOURCES FOR FOSTER YOUTH INTERESTED IN ATTENDING COLLEGE

Presidential Foster Youth Tuition Waiver (PTW)



The University of Alaska offers 15 Presidential Foster Youth Tuition Waivers each year to eligible current and former foster youth. Presidential Foster Youth Tuition Waivers can be used toward the cost of tuition at any University of Alaska Campus for up to 144 undergraduate credits within 6 years, not to exceed 10 semesters.

Education and Training Voucher



ETV offers financial assistance to eligible current and former foster youth to attend an accredited college, university, vocational or technical college. The maximum ETV award is \$5,000.

The Nsoro Scholarship



“Nsoro scholarship” opportunity for foster care students. The scholarship program is opened for high school graduate or equivalent. The Awards range from \$1,000 – \$10,000 for the scholarship.