

2015 Louisiana Family Impact Seminar

BRIEFING REPORT

YOUTH AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE: ELIMINATING BARRIERS TO COLLEGE SUCCESS



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OVERVIEW

Family Impact Seminars (FIS) are a series of presentations, discussion sessions, and briefing reports that provide state policymakers with nonpartisan, solution-oriented research on a wide-range of family issues including those affecting children and young adults. The overarching goals of the seminars are to provide legislators with unbiased research and information in a nonpartisan setting, encouraging the use of evidence-based solutions in policymaking. The Seminar network of 29 states, now based at Purdue University and formerly at the Policy Institute at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, has partnered researchers and policymakers for the benefit of children and families for over 30 years.

The Louisiana Family Impact Seminars are made possible by financial support from private philanthropic foundations such as the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The traditional format of the two-hour seminars consist of two or three presentations given by a panel of premier researchers, program directors, and policy analysts. Each Seminar is accompanied by a briefing report that summarizes high-quality research on the topic and draws implications for policy. This year's 7th Annual Family Impact Seminar consisted of presentations on the topic, *Youth Aging out of Foster Care: Eliminating Barriers to College Success*. This briefing report will provide substantive literature and research regarding this topic in addition to potential solutions such as evidence-based programs and federal policies implemented to target this critical societal issue.

For more information about the Louisiana Family Impact Seminars, please contact:

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INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

The United States Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS] (2009) documented that as of September 2008, there were 463,000 children and youths in the nation's foster care system. Older foster youths between the ages of 13 and 18 are the largest subpopulation, representing between 30 and 40 % of the children in the system (U.S. DHHS, 2009). Many of these foster care youths are considered the most academically vulnerable youths in our nation (Ferrell, 2004; Morris, 2007). The United States Department of Education [DOE] (2000) reported that foster care youths drop out of high school at rates more than twice the rates of youths from the general population. More specifically, national statistics revealed that between 37 and 64% of foster care youths do not complete high school (Cook, 1990, 1992; Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 2001). Other studies also noted that foster care youths are at high risk for not succeeding in their secondary and postsecondary education (Pecora et al., 2006; Sullivan, Jones, & Mathiesen, 2010). Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study indicated that only 56 % of former foster care youth completed high school as compared to 82 % of youth from the general population (Pecora et al., 2006). Foster care youths are also likely to have low academic achievement scores, lower grade point averages, and lower reading and math skills than their peers from the general population. Emerson and Lovett (2003) found that foster care youths had lower grade point averages and obtained significantly lower scores on standardized achievement tests in the subject areas of reading and mathematics than did their peers. Parrish et al. (2001), in their study of foster youths, revealed other areas of educational deficits such as higher rates of absenteeism and disciplinary referrals. They also found that 75% of foster youths in their sample performed below grade level and that more than 50% were behind at least one grade level in school (Parrish et al., 2001). Yet despite their low levels of educational attainment including high rates of high school dropout, a large majority of these youths age out of the foster care system at age 18. Every year, more than 20,000 youth age out of the foster care system in our nation (U.S. DHHS, 2009).

In Louisiana, youth are mandated to exit the foster care system at age 18. Research consistently documents that youth who age out of the foster care system often have not obtained their high school diploma, lack permanent connections, and lack a place to call home (Ferrell, 2004; Orthner et al., 2010). They are also less likely to enroll and succeed in college or vocational training programs. Courtney et al. (2001) documented that fewer than 10% of foster care youths or young adults who exit the system actually go on to attend college. Other studies note that between 1% and 5% of youth who age out of the foster care system enroll in college or postsecondary educational programs. Research further indicated that even when these young adults do attend college, they are far less likely than their peers to earn a degree (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010). For example, findings from the Midwest Study of young adults who aged out of foster care revealed that only 6% earned a two or four year degree compared to 30% of the nationally representative sample (Osgood et al., 2010). Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study, using a sample of 659 former foster care youths, indicated that only 1.8 % received a bachelors' degree from a post-secondary institution (Pecora et al., 2006).

Risks Factors Associated with Low Educational Attainment

Researchers have documented that higher educational attainment and success in postsecondary education is positively correlated to higher salaries, better employee benefits, and gainful employment (Greiner, 2007). Day and Newburger (2002) explored the relationship between educational attainment and employment earnings and found that earnings increased with educational level, with average annual earnings ranging from \$18,900 for high school dropouts, \$25,900 for high school graduates, \$45,400 for college graduates, and \$99,300 for workers with professional degrees. Students who do not complete high school or obtain a GED equivalent have lower earnings and often pose substantial costs to our society (Rouse, 2005). For example, Rouse (2005) noted that youth who drop out of high school earn approximately \$260,000 less than youths with high school diplomas over the course of a lifetime. Furthermore, it is estimated that individuals who drop out of high school eventually use billions of taxpayer dollars through governmental assistance programs and high costs of incarceration (Rouse, 2005).

It is of extreme importance that barriers to foster care youth and young adults' who age out of foster care educational attainment are identified and eradicated.

BARRIERS TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS

To date, researchers, policymakers, and even young adults who age out of foster care have identified several barriers to applying and enrolling in college and successfully obtaining a college degree. These barriers include but are not limited to the following:

- Housing instability
- Homelessness
- Limited or lack of income
- Unemployment
- Ongoing trauma

- Lack of permanent connection/mentor
- Lack of emotional support
- Academic limitations
- Lack of academic support
- Mental and behavioral health issues

Housing Instability and Homelessness

College students who have aged out of the foster care system experience homelessness at increasingly higher rates than college students from the general population (Ferrell, 2004; Morris, 2007; Orthner et al., 2010). Morris (2007) estimated that 45% of foster care youth who aged out became homeless within a year. College students who age out of foster care often face precarious housing situations when dorms close for holiday and summer breaks. Often, they return to negative living situations with family members or beg to live with a relative or former foster parent during school breaks. These college students have noted the importance of housing (Dworsky & Perez, 2009). In one study of 98 college students who aged out of foster care, a student stated,

“I think that for me feeling secure about where I’m going to live is always in the back of my head... I don’t know if I’ll have a roof over my head. And that is very scary to think about (Dworsky & Perez, 2009).”

Limited or Lack of Income

College students who have aged out of foster care have often left the system unprepared for the real world and with limited employment skills. Consequently, a large majority of these students have limited or even no income to pay for their basic necessities. These students report the expenses associated with daily living such as food, toiletries, hygiene items, bedding, and school supplies. As a result, college students who have aged out of foster care are often plagued with thoughts of dropping out of college to work one or two minimum wage jobs to meet their basic needs.

Ongoing Trauma

Young adults who age out of foster care and enter into a college or postsecondary institution often continue to be at risk for further physical abuse, human trafficking, criminal activity, and even incarceration. These risk factors are usually prevalent as a result of the vulnerabilities of the young adults due to their limited physical, emotional, and financial resources. Stott (2012) found that 13% of young adults who aged out of the system had been a victim of domestic violence since turning 18 and 7% had been sexually assaulted since turning 18.

Academic Limitations

Foster care youth change high schools twice as often as non-foster youth and as a result are often behind in main subjects such as English, math and science. Furthermore, the trauma they may have experienced in their childhood often impacts their ability to pay attention in class, thus interfering with learning. Consequently, as noted earlier, foster care youth are twice as less likely to graduate high school than their peers (Day, Dworsky, Fogarty, & Damashek, 2011). For those youth who do graduate, a large majority are still not very prepared for the rigor associated with obtaining a college education. Lack of preparation for postsecondary education has been identified as another reason students who have aged out of foster care fail to obtain a college degree (Sheehy et al., 2001). This population of students are often placed in remedial courses, extending the length of time it takes to graduate and increasing the amount of funding required to complete their college education (Brock, 2010).

Lack of Permanent Connection/Mentor

Mentors are instrumental in providing young adults who age out of foster care with both academic and emotional support (Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010). However, Kleinberg and Moore (2011) noted in their conceptual paper that foster care youth are unlikely to have a mentor or any long-term adult connection, and as a result, they often lack a safety net, financial support, and emotional support. For most foster care youth, growing up in foster is an isolating experience. When many of these youth age out of foster care, they often attempt to reconnect with biological families to fulfill inward desires to belong to their own family. However, a large majority of these young adults are never able to reestablish ties and connections to their biological family. Researchers examined the well-being of 603 young adults who aged out of the foster care system and found that these young adults had few social supports as poor relationships with their previous foster parents or group home caregivers (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006). It is documented that college students who have aged out of foster care perform better in their college career and are more likely to graduate and obtain a college degree (Day et al., 2011).

Mental and Behavioral Health Issues

Several studies reveal that children in foster care as well as young adults who age out of the system are at greater risks of experiencing higher rates of physical and mental diseases (Mech, 1994). In addition, they are at increased risks for eating disorders and obesity (U.S. DHHS, 2009). Researchers have also linked children in foster care with high levels of the stress hormone, cortisol, which may impair cognitive performance (Fisher, Gunnar, Dozier, Bruce, & Pears, 2006). The Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study of young adults formerly in foster care in states such as Oregon and Washington found 10% higher incidences of depression and 21% greater incidences of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among their sample than young adults from the general population (Pecora et al., 2006). In another study, a researcher found that 25% of foster care youth had used substances or been intoxicated in the past 30 days and 35% had used substances or been intoxicated once a month or more in the past 5 months (Stott,

2012). It is evident that college students with a history of foster care who experience these mental and physical limitations are at increased risk of college dropout.

POLICY INTERVENTIONS

Over the last several decades, four critical federal policies have been implemented in an effort to better prepare young adults who age out of foster care for their transition to independence. These four policies are described below.

The Independent Living Initiative

- In 1986, Congress passed the Independent Living Initiative (Public Law 99-272).
- It provided all 50 states more financial support and flexibility in implementing programs to help foster children transition into adulthood.
- P.L. 99-272 enabled foster care youths to receive the following opportunities:
 - (a) To seek a high school diploma or its equivalent
 - (b) To take part in appropriate vocational training
 - (c) Obtain training in daily living skills, budgeting, locating and maintaining housing, and career planning
 - (d) Obtain individual and group counseling
 - (e) To provide each participant a written transitional independent-living plan based on an assessment of his/her needs and incorporated into his/her case plan.
- In 1990, this legislation was amended to extend services to foster care youth after they exit the system until they reach age 21.

The Foster Care Independence Act

- In 1999, Congress passed the Foster Care Independence Act (FCIA) to provide an additional \$140 million to states for additional independent living programs.
- As a direct result of the FCIA, the John H. Chafee Care Independence Program (P.L. 106-169), commonly known as the Chafee Act, was launched to improve outcomes of youth that age out of foster care by helping them become self-sufficient in their adult lives (Morris, 2007).

Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendment

- In 2001, Congress passed the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendment (P.L. 107-133) that added the Educational and Training Voucher (ETV) program to the Foster Care Independence Act.
- Presently, states can use their ETV funds to provide current and former foster care youth with up to \$5,000 per year of post secondary training and education.
- Young adults remain eligible for the annual ETV funds until age 23.

Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act

- In 2008, Congress passed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (P.L. 110-351) which amended Sections B and E of Title IV of the Social Security Act of 1935.
- This federal legislation is noted as being the most important contributing factor to child welfare reform.
- This legislation provides states with the option to extend foster care and adoption assistance programs to any child up to age 21 if the individual meets one of the following five credentials:
 - (a) Completing secondary education or earning an equivalent credential
 - (b) Enrolled in an institution that provides post-secondary or vocational education
 - (c) Participating in a program to promote or remove barriers to employment
 - (d) Employed for at least 80 hours per month
 - (e) Incapable of doing these activities due to a medical condition

EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAM INTERVENTIONS

There are both federal and state level programs that have been implemented to help foster care youth obtain a college degree, but these programs are few and far between. Below are six evidence-based and evidence-informed programs implemented to help young adults who aged out of the foster care system enroll in college and

successfully obtain a college degree. A few of the programs listed below are Guardian Scholars Programs (GSP). The goal of this comprehensive style program is to support college students who age out of the foster system in their efforts to obtain a college education or trade school education. All GSPs provide students with a host of resources for postsecondary success such as the following:



- A full financial aid package that includes grants and scholarship packages that cover tuition and living expenses.
- Priority registration for housing on and off campus and available all year-round.
- Academic advisors who will assist in registration, class selection, and academic guidance.
- Mentoring and career counseling that puts the former foster care youth in contact with employment services as well as advises the youth on future employment decisions.
- Any other supplemental support service needed such as transportation, vouchers for text-books and supplies, and child care.

The Seita Scholars Program

- The Seita Scholars Program (SSP) was designed in 2008 to provide supportive services and opportunities for former foster youth to succeed in their postsecondary education (Unrau, 2011).
- Named after Dr. John Seita, a graduate of the University of Michigan and former ward of Michigan’s foster care system.
- Students receive scholarships and are called Seita Scholars.

- They are assigned a Master's degree level campus coach with foster care experience who is available 24 hours a day to text, email, and have face-to-face meetings with students to keep them encouraged.
- Seita Scholars are assigned a Department of Human Service (DHS) coach to help them apply for food stamps, mental health, and other needed services.
- The aim of the program is to provide former foster youths with the tools and support needed to successfully complete their postsecondary education.
- Presently serves 160 students annually and has 80% retention rate.



In December 2014, SIX Seita Scholars walked across the stage at the Miller Auditorium at Western Michigan University located in Kalamazoo, MI.

Fostering Academics Mentoring Excellence (FAME) program

- Serves 135 former foster care youths annually
- Key Activities
 - Hosts an annual four-day summer camp for 30 high school-age youth who have been in foster care from across the state of Michigan
 - Exposes the participants to college life (e.g., attend classes, stay in dorms, and participate in recreational activities);

- MSU students who are foster care alumni are the camp counselors.
- Provides students with Coaches, Mentors, Champions
 - Match supportive adults to students depending on needs and interests; coaches focus on life skills; mentors focus on professional/career development; champions help navigate and link youth to on-campus resources.
- Student Activities Board
 - Provides leadership opportunities to FAME students who plan events, give input on services and engage in advocacy, public speaking and outreach on campus and in the community to increase awareness of the program.
- FAME Care Packages
 - Collects donated new items (e.g., snacks, MSU gear, gift cards, supplies) and give to FAME students during final exam week to support them during a stressful time.

California State University, Fullerton Guardian Scholars Program

- California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) has created a Guardian Scholars Program to assist former foster youth between the ages of 17 and 23 in their efforts to gain a college education.
- The program provides eligible foster care youths who enroll at the institution with a full scholarship.
- Serves approximately 40 students annually
- In addition to financial assistance, the Guardian Scholars Program in collaboration with on-campus programs offers:
 - Year-Round On-Campus Housing
 - Priority Registration
 - Summer Bridge (First-time Freshmen Only)
 - Individual Counseling / Life Coaching
 - Life Skills Workshops
 - Educational and Community Enrichment Activities

- Student Drop-In Center
- Student Lounge
- Computer Lab
- Digital Stories

Independence Bound Program

- The Independence Bound (IB) program located at Erie Community College (ECC) in New York provides financial assistance and supportive services to college students who aged out of foster care through the Educational Training Voucher (ETV) Program.
- Provides scholarships for both full-time and part-time students through state funding.
- Has a high school outreach program to encourage current foster youth to obtain a high school diploma and apply to college.
- Students in the IB program also have the options to participate in a career programs and peer activities.

City College Guardian Scholars Program

- The Guardian Scholars Program at City College of San Francisco in California provides financial assistance to current or former foster youth through the Education Training Voucher until age 25.
- Program serves as a resource center
 - Assist students with their development of educational skills such as achieving an associate degree, completing a certificate program, or transferring to a university
 - Assist students in developing interpersonal skills to help them become self-sufficient role-models and individuals in their community.
 - Provide direct services, such as book vouchers and transportation as well as referrals to community-based resources as needed and available.

- Summer Academy
 - 6-week program that prepares current or former foster youth in their junior or senior year of high school or entering college freshmen for a smooth transition from high school to college.
 - The program provides free tuition, books, supplies, and career exploration.
 - Students are also provided a meal and transportation allowance.
 - Participants gain high school and college credit as well as valuable tools for success.

Connect, Motivate, Educate Guardian Scholars Program

- San Jose State University has a Connect, Motivate, Educate Guardian Scholars Program that provides financial assistance to students who age out of the foster care system, are wards of the court, are under legal guardianship or are considered unaccompanied homeless youth.
- The program receives university and private funding for sustainability.
- Works in collaboration with other student support programs on campus and community services off campus and provides the following:
 - Priority registration at the university
 - Assistance in developing university level time management skills
 - Deepen connections with other Guardian Scholars through purposeful learning/social activities
 - Personal counseling and stress management strategies
 - Housing
 - Explore alternative housing options in the surrounding area
 - Year round on-campus housing options
- Book vouchers to offset textbook cost
- Emergency financial funding

7th Annual Louisiana Family Impact Seminar**Summary**

On May 6, 2015, the LSU School of Social Work partnered with the LSU Office of Diversity to host the 7th Annual Family Impact Seminar entitled, “Youth Aging Out Of Foster Care: Eliminating Barriers to College Success. This year’s Family Impact Seminar was made possible by financial support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The purpose of the seminar was to provide nonpartisan education on the barriers to college success including homelessness and housing instability among youth who age out of foster care. The seminar included two national speakers with expertise in child welfare programs and a panel of administrative experts who participated in a discussion of the barriers that former foster care young people face in their postsecondary education. The panel also described strategies and solutions to eradicate these barriers including national evidence-based programs and policies.

This seminar featured oral presentations by the following speakers: Dr. Angelique Day, Assistant Professor in the College of Social Work at Wayne State University and Mr. Christopher Harris, Director of the Seita Scholars Program at Western Michigan University. The speakers shared specific components of their college retention and support programs for young adults who have aged out of foster care. The presentations of the speakers are integrated into this briefing report following this FIS summary.

After both speaker presentations, the seminar included a young adult panel that consisted of three current college students and one college graduate each of whom aged out of the foster care system. One of the panelists was currently a Seita Scholar. The panelists shared real life stories and testimonies of services they received that they believed contributed to their college success. The panelists also described supports and programs that were not received while in foster care or during their matriculation in college that could have enhanced their college experience. A major theme that emerged from the young adult panelists regarding promotive factors for college success was having a mentor or support system. One panelist noted that her success was largely due to her adoptive family who she considers mentors, while another panelist mentioned the

support of extended family such as uncles and aunts who stepped in to assist during holidays and summer breaks. One panelist stated that support from teachers and mentors made all the difference in enabling him to graduate from college. Several of the student panelists noted that support from professors and faculty members was instrumental in pushing them to stay focused and obtain their college degree. Lastly, one panelist credited her success in college to the support and guidance received from peer mentors through the Seita Scholars program.

The last portion of the Family Impact Seminar featured an administrative panel that included a Department of Children and Family Services program manager, a Louisiana State University higher education administrator, as well as both of the guest speakers, Dr. Day and Mr. Harris. The purpose of the panel was to discuss removal of barriers to college success and strategies to increase the college graduation rates among youth who age out of the foster care system in Louisiana. Some of the key recommendations for removing barriers to college enrollment and strategies to increase success included:

1. Waiving admissions application fees
2. Working with DCFS to access ETV funds, if the young person is eligible
3. Identifying the young person as a youth who aged out of the system and providing support services such as tutoring, mentors, and campus coaches to assist with navigating the university system if needed
4. Addressing housing needs for homeless foster youth/students during school breaks
5. Hosting pre-college activities during campus tours to begin building network of support for foster youth

Attached are the biographies of the speakers along with their presentation handouts.

BIOGRAPHIES AND HANDOUTS

Chris Harris, MA

Mr. William C. Harris, better known as Chris, is the Director of the Western Michigan University (WMU) Seita Scholars Program. Prior to that, he has a distinguished corporate career that included work with Vanguard Mutual Fund Company, Pfizer, and Stryker Medical, all fortune 500 companies. He also had a highly successful nine-year stint in the U.S. Air Force. During his military career, he earned a master's degree in human resource development from Webster (MO) University.

Chris was a youth who aged out of the foster care system and like a majority of such youths, had to overcome many odds to achieve his accomplishments. His personal background includes experiences that deliver credibility in his work with foster youth. A native of Raleigh, N.C., he recalls only seeing his biological father once since the age of six. His mother was an alcoholic and struggled to protect him which left him vulnerable to numerous instances of sexual abuse during his formative years.

Today, Chris uses knowledge and experiences from his past to provide evidence-informed programs and practices to bolster outcomes for young people who age out of the foster care system.



Overview, Goals and Program Composition

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rUwaqE9a77A>

wmich.edu/fosteringSUCCESS

About the Seita Scholars Program

- **The Seita Scholars Program is:**
 - A full tuition scholarship for foster care students and alumni of care.
 - Note: The scholarship does not cover books, fees and housing expenses.
 - A comprehensive support program serving 160 youth (each of the past 3 years) who experienced foster care.
 - Designed to increase the success of students who experienced foster care and enrolled in higher education at Western Michigan University.
 - Provides opportunity for year-round housing



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Program Goals

- Create **Transitions**
 - that lead to success in college and career for WMU students from foster care ages 18 to 25 years old.
- Develop a **Community of Scholars**
 - among WMU students who have aged out of foster care, and create a safe community to deconstruct and reconstruct identity.
- **Educate**
 - WMU students from foster care and their support network to enhance their professional skill set.
- **Transform**
 - WMU students from foster care by integrating experiences from students' past to build opportunities for their future.



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Seita Scholars vs. FTIAC

Fall GP	Seita Scholars	FTIAC	Seita Scholar Cohort	ACT Variance	GPA Variance
2008-09	1.44	2.84	2008-09	3.38	.25
2009-10	2.29	2.87	2009-10	3.17	.11
2010-11	2.37	2.86	2010-11	3.09	.20
2011-12	2.30	2.89	2011-12	3.12	.24
2012-13	2.39	2.92	2012-13	3.13	.19
2013-14	2.51	2.97	2013-14	4.0	.17
2014-15	2.49	2.98	2014-15	3.71	.27



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Support

- **Student Leadership and Employment Opportunities**
 - Leadership retreats, paid internship opportunities, scholarships, Peer Leader and Undergraduate Assistant to the Director positions
- **Identity Programing**
 - Women's group (Lady Butterflies), Emerging Men Initiative (EMI), Seita Scholars Pride (supporting LGBTQIA scholars), Parent's group (Parents' Future), Registered Student Organization (RSO)
- **Career Mentors**
- **Academic Support**
 - First year seminar course, specialized courses (HOL 4970, UNIV 1030, GPS), midterm grade reporting



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Support

Campus Coaches (6)

- Every student has a coach
- 24 hour on call support
- Assist with connecting with resources and navigating campus
- Full-time professional staff
- Foster care experience
- Student-centered philosophy
- Focus on strengths of student
- Relationship Centered
- System Support & Advocacy
- Collaborative Approach
- Accessibility

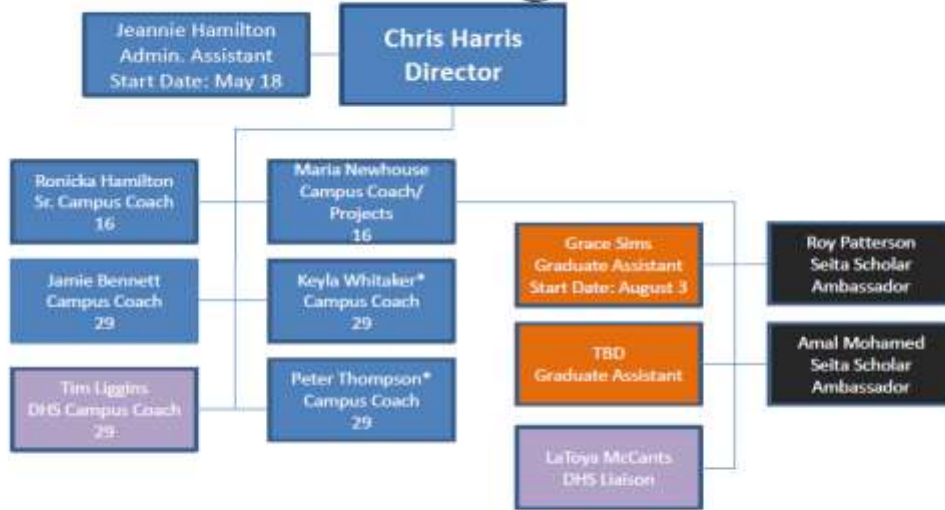
DHS Liaison (1)

- Secondary worker
- YIT (Youth in Transition)
- ETV (Education Training Voucher)
- Medicaid
- Bridge Card
- Direct access to the Department of Health & Human Services



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Seita Scholars Organization Chart



Dist Staff
WMU Staff
Graduate Asst.
Student Workers
Research Staff
*Terminal Staff



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Eligibility, Application Process and Transition to WMU

PROGRAM ADMISSIONS

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Eligibility Guidelines

- ETV or MET Eligible
- High school diploma or GED
- Students age 17-25
- Enrolled at WMU



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Center for Fostering Success
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Financial Aid

Typical Seita Scholar Award Package

\$5,550 Pell Grant

\$1,000 SEOG

\$11,000 WMU Seita Scholarship

\$4,000 Education Training Voucher

\$2,000 WMU Work-Study

\$23,550

(With careful financial management, it's possible to graduate loan free!)

Note: This only covers 8 months of a students year, it does not cover winter and summer breaks.

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Achievement Benchmarks, Graduation Rates and Outcomes

OUTCOMES

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Achievement Benchmarks

	Foster Youth	General Populations
Graduate High School	46%	70%
Attend College	7-13%	42%
Earn Degree in 6 Years	2-4%	24%

¹ National Association of Counties. (2008). Youth aging out of foster care: Identifying strategies and best practices. Retrieved from <http://www.dshs.wa.gov/pdf/ca/YouthAgingoutofFoster.pdf>



Seita Scholars Graduation Rates

Seita Scholar Cohort	Number in Cohort	Number of WMU Graduates	% Graduated from WMU	Number on Track to Graduate	% on Track to Graduate from WMU*
2008-09	53	19	36%	1	38%
2009-10	50	18	36%	4	44%
2010-11	55	7	13%	13	36%
2011-12	57	6	11%	27	58%
2012-13	47	1	2%	27	60%
2013-14	42	-	-	31	74%
2014-15	41	-	-	37	90%

- * Number includes WMU graduates (column D) as of the beginning of **Spring 2015**
- 21 Seita Scholars are on track to graduate by the end of Summer II session

Only 2%-4% of Foster Care Alumni graduate from a post-secondary institution nationally.**

**Source: Casey Family Programs. (2010). Supporting success: Improving higher education outcomes for students from foster care. Retrieved from: <http://www.casey.org/resources/publications/supportingsuccess.htm>



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Outcomes

- **Increased graduation rates among alumni of foster care**
 - By the end of summer, the Seita Scholars Program will have more than 70 graduates!
- **Seita Scholars have:**
 - Made the Dean's List (26 in fall 2014)
 - Been selected as Presidential Scholars
 - Studied abroad in a variety of countries including Italy, Spain, Australia, and Argentina.
 - Served as assistants in the Residence Halls on campus.
 - Served on local and state foster care review boards
 - Participated in a variety of club and varsity sports.
 - Held leadership positions in student organizations across campus.
 - Spoken at conferences across the nation and advocated for youth in foster care!
 - Spoken with state and national legislators



GO WEST.



CONTACT US

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For information about the volunteer program or donating to the Seita Scholars Program:

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wmich.edu/fosteringssuccess

Dr. Angelique Day

Dr. Angelique Day is an Assistant Professor and founding Director of the Transition to Independence Program (TIP Wayne State) in the School of Social Work at Wayne State University (WSU). Prior to her appointment at WSU, she worked as the founder and coordinator of Michigan State University's Fostering Academics, Mentoring Success Program (FAME), a college access and retention program for students who have aged out of foster care who were interested in obtaining a post-secondary credential. Dr. Day has published 22 papers and book chapters on the topic, and has given countless national, state and local presentations. She has also provided consultation on the issue of college success of youth who age out of the foster care system with several states and the Children's Bureau. Dr. Day's professional experience in research, policy development, child welfare practice (as a child protective services worker) and her personal experiences as a former ward of the court makes her uniquely qualified to continue to provide leadership in training, research, and consultation in the field of child welfare.

Youth Aging Out: Eliminating Barriers to College Success

LSU Family Impact Seminar Spring 2015



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Statement of Problem

- ❖ More than 26,000 youth aged out of foster care in 2011
- ❖ In 2000, the percentage of exits due to aging out was 7 percent. In 2011, **11 percent** of the children who exited foster care aged out.
- ❖ Only 50% of foster care youth graduate from high school within 5 years
- ❖ Foster youth are less likely to perform at grade level, twice as likely to repeat a grade as their non-foster peers, and
- ❖ 2-3 times more likely to be enrolled in special education classes



Statement of Problem

- ❖ FCY are absent from school at 2 times the rate of non-FCY
- ❖ FCY are far more likely to be suspended or expelled than their non-foster counterparts
- ❖ These youth are at high risk for unemployment, homelessness, incarceration, and dependence on public assistance -in part, because of their low level of educational attainment



Review of Research on Postsecondary Educational Attainment

	Foster Care	Non-Foster Care
19-year olds pursuing a 4 year degree	18%	62%
25-year olds with a bachelor's degree	3%	24%
College students who have earned a degree within 6 years	26%	56%

25-34 year olds who had a least a bachelor's degree earned, on average, 61% more than those with only a high school diploma or GED



Significance of the Research

- ❖ Gaps in both high school & higher education achievement between former foster youth and their non-foster care peers
- ❖ Student service personnel at many post-secondary institutions are not prepared to address the unique needs of this population
- ❖ Inherent conflicts between societal values and child welfare policy and practice with respect to foster youth who have reached the age of majority



KidSpeak ®

- ❖ Youth public forum developed by Michigan's Children
- ❖ Empowers young people to advocate on their own behalf
- ❖ Designed to bring young people before listening panels comprised of legislators & other public officials, including state department leaders, to talk about issues of concern to them



KidSpeak ®

- ❖ Two KidSpeak events held as part of pre-college programs for foster care youth at two Michigan universities (WMU and MSU) in the summer of 2010
- ❖ Participatory Action Research (N=68, 43 provided oral testimony)
- ❖ Youth asked to address two questions:
 1. What do you believe are barriers foster youth face in high school completion and college access?
 2. What suggestions do you have for policymakers to eliminate these barriers?



Results Education Related Themes

- ❖ Lack basic school-related needs (i.e. school clothes, school supplies, books, transportation) (4)
 - ❖ "...I am wearing clothes that are three years old, and I have holes in my shoes, and kids make fun of me because we don't have any money to pay for anything. School begins in a month and I want to get ready for school, but I can't."
 - ❖ "...I don't have a way to get to school. There should be transportation to get the kids to school. Without transportation, students miss a lot of days of school. How do we promote them [foster youth] to graduate if we don't give them the resources they need to get here [to school]..."



Results Education Related Themes

❖ Lack of Independent living programs (6)

“Where am I going to go until college starts? What am I going to do when I turn 18 in January and graduate in May? College doesn’t start until September. What am I going to do all summer long? I don’t like sleeping in cardboard boxes. It doesn’t sound fun to me. Who is going to show me how to own a house or pay my taxes, how to fill out my bills and my paperwork? I don’t know any of that stuff. Where am I going to go for that help? Who am I going to turn to when I graduate to help me out? When I turn 18 the court says, ‘goodbye, see you later, have fun, you’re an adult, figure it out yourself.’ What it should say is, ‘you need help? Come talk to us’ ”.



MSU Study Research Question

1. Are foster care alumni enrolled in a 4-year college more likely to drop out of college than low-income, first generation students who had not been in foster care?

http://www.tipwaynestate.org/uploads/1/3/8/9/13898085/an_examination_of_post-secondary_retention_and_graduation_among_foster_care_youth.pdf

Fostering Academics Mentoring Excellence:

http://socialwork.msu.edu/outreach/foster_youth_alumni_svcs.php



Study Design

❖ Longitudinal cohort study using data from the MSU Student Information Systems Database

❖ Sample

❖ Target Group: 444 foster care alumni enrolled as MSU undergraduates between 2000 and 2009

❖ Comparison Group: stratified random sample of 378 non-foster care MSU undergraduates



Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Foster Youth and Non-Foster Youth Samples

	Foster Care		Non-Foster Care	
	N	%	N	%
Total	444	100	378	100
Race				
White	199	45	175	46
African American	186	42	134	35
Other	59	13	69	18
Gender				
Male	184	41	143	38
Female	260	59	235	62

Race $\chi^2= 5.51$ (2), P = .06
 Gender $\chi^2= 1.11$ (1), P= .29



Results Summary

Descriptive Analysis

- ❖ Foster care alumni are more likely to drop out before the end of their first year (21% vs. 13%, $P < .001$) and prior to degree completion (34% vs. 18%, $P < .001$) as compared to their non-foster peers

Multivariate Analysis

- ❖ Compared to their non-foster peers:
 - Foster care alumni are significantly more likely to drop out before the end of their first year
 - Foster care alumni are more than twice as likely to drop out prior to degree completion
- ❖ Gender and race/ethnicity do not affect these results



Implications for Policy and Practice

- ❖ Increase clothing allowances/add school allowance for foster parents caring for FY
- ❖ Reorganize and improve coordination of independent living programs and re-evaluate age restrictions on program participation



Implications for Policy and Practice

cont.

- ❖ Foster care students' needs may differ from those of their non-foster peers (i.e. informal support)
- ❖ Need campus support programs that specifically target foster care youth to increase their retention and graduation rates
- ❖ Federal and state higher education and human service budgets should include appropriations to support sustainability and expansion of these targeted pre-college and college retention programs



Recommendations to Improve the Transition from High School to Higher Education

- ❖ School stability and seamless transitions
- ❖ Exposure to post-secondary opportunities
- ❖ Assistance in obtaining financial aid, tutoring, and exam preparation
- ❖ Financial support for tuition fee waivers until age 26
- ❖ Access to housing during school year and vacations
- ❖ Permit youth to remain in care or re-enter care with court emphasis on post-secondary support
- ❖ Access to targeted services (academic, financial, mental health, social and emotional).
- ❖ Post-secondary support for students with disabilities
- ❖ Work Collaboratively to ensure achievement of these goals



What has MI Done? State Level Policy Reactions

- ❖ In July of 2011, the state's consent decree was revised to prioritize the educational needs of children in foster care.
- ❖ September 2012 1st annual Fostering Futures fundraiser sponsored by MI Depts. Human Services & Treasury. Raised \$187,000 for private scholarships for foster youth. Administered through MET program (not age specific)
- ❖ Chafee resources (\$1.8 million) were appropriated in the state FY 2012 budget to provide contracts for 7 Michigan colleges and universities to adopt college access and retention programs. (These programs have been in operation since Oct. 2012)
- ❖ \$750,000 appropriation TANF \$ to support post-secondary scholarships for FCY in FY 2014 budget (those in care on or after age 13)



Transition to Independent Program (TIP)

at Wayne State University

<http://tipwaynestate.org>



WSU's TIP Program: What do we offer?

- 24 hour crisis support
- Peer to peer mentoring
- Career based mentoring
- Tutoring services
- Academic Advising
- Scholarships/Financial Aid assistance
- Counseling (group/individual)
- Housing assistance
- Assistance with navigating community supports from agencies like the Michigan Department of Human Services programs
- Employment assistance
- Student Disability Services
- Health care services
- Community activities
- Financial literacy
- Life Skills course
- Leadership opportunities



WSU Budget

- \$113,000 DHS Grant per year (campus coach , ER fund + career mentoring contract)
- \$100,000 WSU OFA
- \$25,000 WSU Office Provost Retention Fund
- \$7800 WSU LC Grant
- \$28,000 WSU SSW College (1 GRA)
- \$9780 WSU SSW (12.5% course buy out) Director
- Inkind: WSU SSW: 2 interns 16 hours/wk), 2 work study students (10 hrs/wk)
- \$25,000 community donations (food pantry, care packages, dress for success, other)



\$308,580 Annual Budget
\$4060/per student

Results TIP Program

- Year 1 (n=104) retention: 45.5%
 - 51% CAN vs. 30% unsub CAN ($p < .02$)
 - Permanency status (guardianship, adoption, vs. long-term fc) ($P > .05$)
- Year 2 (n=76) retention: 69.7%
- 1st year retention rates WSU as a whole: 70%
- WSU has HBC status



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