

What you should know

The numbers

- There are approximately 1,500 Iowa youth ages 16 to 18 in foster care at any given time.
- About 450 young people age-out of foster care each year in Iowa, including about 70 young people in Polk County alone.
- In 2011, 5,070 students dropped out of school in Iowa. Of those, 1,724 (34%) were in foster care prior to dropping out.
- Youth who have spent time in foster care are far behind the general population in educational attainment, especially when it comes to post-secondary education.
 - A majority of youth in foster care do hold aspirations for higher education – over 70% of these youth express an interest in going to college.
 - Only 3 – 11% of foster care alumni successfully complete a bachelor’s degree compared with 28% of adults in the general population.

The challenges for foster care alumni

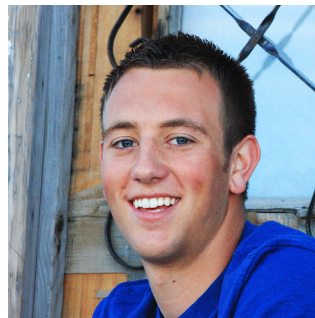
Many factors that are significant barriers to college success for foster care alumni are similar to those for first-generation college students and other traditionally under-represented groups (e.g. ethnic minorities, low-income). Other factors pose unique or more significant challenges.

Academic Readiness

- Lack of college-level academic preparation, often exacerbated by frequent school changes and absences due to placement in foster care.
- Frequent need for remedial courses in college. A recent study found that enrollment in developmental courses was one of the strongest factors negatively correlated with student persistence.

Academic behaviors, skills, and goals

- Lack of motivation and academic discipline
- Insufficient support with academic skills, deciding college major and career/college counseling
- Lack of time management, study skills, and problem-solving skills



Non-Academic Issues

- Lack of supportive family environment and encouragement to succeed in college
- History of trauma, maltreatment and mental health diagnosis /unmet MH needs
- Life situations (the need to work while in college and/or have family responsibilities)
- Financial concerns
- Insufficient support with housing and transportation

The challenges for programs that would like to help them

- Identifying eligible students (Programs don't know who the students are)
- Recruitment and outreach (Students lack awareness of the programs)
- Summer Melt (Students don't make it through the front door)
 - Less than half of foster care alumni intending to enroll (i.e., approved for a financial aid package) actually enter college in the fall. (YPII analysis of ETV and All Iowa Foster Care Grant applicants in the 2012-13 academic year)
- Understanding mental health and other unique needs of students who have been in foster care and awareness of available community resources

What works

Factors related to students being more likely to stay engaged and be successful in college or career preparation programs:

- College fit factors, including satisfaction with college, involvement in extracurricular activities, college social events and college connectedness
- Support factors, including social support (caring adult while in college) and validation (processes and actions that communicate to students, either directly or symbolically, that they have the capacity and competence to complete college successfully)
- Financial aid (and assistance in securing and understanding a financial aid package)
- Approaches that go beyond simple logistical or financial support to address relational and integrative aspects of college life
- Prefreshman-year academic and social preparation, significant assistance/involvement in students' initial course selection, and a structured freshman year
- Academic support services that bolster the courses in which students are enrolled
- Early career exploration and career plans that are the result of active self-exploration activities

For more information

Rachel Lewis
OPT-in Coordinator
Central City Development Corporation (CCDC)
Optiniowa@outlook.com

