



Honoring Emancipated Youth: Essential Elements of On-Campus Support Programs for Former Foster Youth

Throughout California, a number of colleges and universities are making special efforts to support former foster youth on campus. Many of these programs are modeled after the Guardian Scholars Program launched at Cal State Fullerton, which offers a comprehensive scholarship package and supportive services. Many campuses have adopted the term “Guardian Scholars” to signal the presence of a support program for former foster youth; other program names include Renaissance Scholars (UC Santa Cruz, Cal Poly Pomona), and the Connect Motivate Educate (CME) Society at San Jose State. While it is important for each campus program to meet the specific needs of its student body, there is growing consensus about the importance of providing certain services to support former foster youth students. According to California Youth Connection (CYC), “When foster youth hear that a campus offers a ‘Guardian Scholars’ type program, they often expect that the campus offers a key combination of comprehensive services.”ⁱ

This document seeks to outline this key combination of “essential elements” with demonstrated effectiveness at serving former foster youth students at campuses throughout the state. These elements are drawn from four primary sources based on recommendations made by former foster youth, current students, school administrators and faculty, and foster youth advocates:

- *California Youth Connection: What Youth Need From a Guardian Scholars Program*
- CSU Fullerton Guardian Scholars Program Description
- Northern California Council of Colleges – quarterly meetings convened by HEY for Northern California 2- and 4- year schools and the organizations that support them
- National Convening of Postsecondary Education Support Programs for Former Foster Youth – annual national conference organized by Orangewood Children’s Foundation for higher education schools supporting foster youth and the organizations that support them

The document is divided into two sections: Recommended Elements for Program Support and Recommended Elements for Student Support. The two sections are mutually exclusive and should be referred to as a comprehensive package. This document should be considered a working paper that will benefit from continued input and discussion.

Recommended Elements for Youth Support

- (1) Dedicated Campus Support Staff:** A caring staff person whose primary responsibility is the program and students. This individual is a counselor, coach, disciplinarian, and friend, providing care and support to the students. In addition, he/she arranges and coordinates extracurricular programs and events where students can gain important life and social skills.
- (2) One-Stop Shopping:** A program structure offering former foster youth (FFY) students access to all campus supports through one person at one site.
- (3) Housing:** Priority for campus housing, and availability of year-round housing, either on- or off-campus. Housing should begin directly after emancipation, and continue until graduation. For schools without on-campus dormitories, off-campus partnerships can provide subsidized housing. Examples of off-campus partnerships include: apartments with guaranteed first and last month’s rent; host homes; local former foster youth inviting students to stay with them during holidays;



subsidized housing (i.e. Rising Tides); and roommate and mentor housing arrangements, in which roommates are selected and given support for their mentoring roles for FFY students.

(4) Full Financial Aid Package: A grant and scholarship package covering tuition and living expenses. At CSU Fullerton, for example, a specialist from the Financial Aid Department becomes a liaison to Guardian Scholars students to assist each youth in: completing the necessary forms and applications, maximizing all available public and private aid and avoiding, to the extent possible, student loans. This individualized attention is imperative to the success of the student. The specialist should be aware of all benefits available to foster youth, including Medi-Cal, food stamps, welfare, and outside scholarships. In addition, it is critical that the specialist have the compassion and patience to explain all options. The specialist should offer the information, because the youth may not ask all the necessary questions.

(5) Planned Transition to College: There is a housing gap for many former foster youth in the period between emancipation and the fall semester. It is important to assist students with summer housing by extending current foster care placements, including them in Summerbridge, etc. It is important for to set up a system to assist with the transition from foster care to college.

(6) Academic and Career Counseling and Support: Regular contact with a consistent counselor to develop and monitor an individualized education plan and tutoring to support students' academic progress. Academic support should also include an early alert system to identify students at risk of failing or dropping out through attendance records and progress reports. Ideally students receive priority registration. Students should also receive job placement, shadowing and advising opportunities. This element includes extensive advice, a pre- and post- interview debriefing, encouragement, and often connections to jobs.

(7) Personal Guidance, Counseling, & Supplemental Supports: Personal guidance and counseling may include connections to on-campus mental health services or off-campus partnership including crisis response. Students also benefit from connections with mentors who have committed to providing unconditional support. Students will also benefit from the provision of support services like child care, transportation help and book and supply vouchers.

(8) Opportunities for Student Community and Leadership: Program should provide regular opportunities for FFY students to experience inclusion and connection with campus and peers including social, volunteer, and recognition events. It is also important to provide opportunities for FFY students to develop as leaders by advising and giving feedback on and supporting the program.

Recommended Elements for Program Support

(9) Data: Programs should collect information on how program participants are faring, including persistence and graduation rates and internal and external services accessed.

(10) Internal & External Champion: Establishing and maintaining a successful program depends on the support of champions that are both internal and external to the university or college. An internal champion may be a President, Chancellor, or similar person with the authority to create a culture of support and cultivate advocates throughout the campus. External champions may



include alumni, donors, service providers, and/or advocacy groups who can assist with program and fund development and connections with community services.

(11) Connections with Social Services & ILP: Support programs should have explicit connections with local social services and Independent Living Programs to ensure that students receive the full range of supportive services available in their county of residence.

(12) Transfer agreements with local community colleges: Many former foster youth start their college career at a local community college. By formalizing relationships between two- and four-year schools, programs can facilitate student transfer to 4-year schools.

(13) External support network: New and established programs all benefit from a network of peers and other colleagues who support foster youth. There should be internal as well as external networks of support to serve as a resource for program staff.

(14) Sustainability: Successful programs usually rely on a variety of funding sources. Foundations may be interested in providing planning or start-up funding, but co-investment from the campus is necessary to ensure program sustainability. Programs should work with the school's development department to create a long-term sustainability plan.

ⁱ *California Youth Connection: What Youth Need From a Guardian Scholars Program*