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The Research & Planning Group  
for California Community Colleges

# Serving Former Foster Youth in California Community Colleges

Successes, Challenges, and Recommendations  
October 2008

Prepared by:

Center for Student Success  
Research & Planning Group for California Community Colleges

Research & Report Writing:

Darla M. Cooper, Ed.D.  
Pamela Mery  
Elisa Rassen



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Fullerton College	Santa Ana College
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MiraCosta College	Victor Valley College
Napa Valley College	West Valley College

## About the Authors

**Dr. Darla M. Cooper** is the Senior Director of Institutional Advancement, Research and Planning at Santa Barbara City College and has been a consultant with the Center for Student Success since 2000. She served as an at-large member on the Board of the Research and Planning Group for the California Community Colleges from 2001-2008, and as Vice President in 2002-2003. Previously, Dr. Cooper was Director of Institutional Research at Oxnard College, Director of Research and Planning at Ohlone College in Fremont, California, and Director of Student Research and Information for the Student Affairs Division at the University of Southern California. Before working in research, she was a student services counselor and ombudsperson, assisting college students achieve their educational goals. Dr. Cooper earned her Ed.D. in Higher Education and M.S.Ed. in College Student Personnel Services at the University of Southern California, and her B.A. in Psychology at the University of California, San Diego.

**Pamela Mery** has worked in Research & Planning at City College of San Francisco for nearly 15 years and has been a consultant with the Center for Student Success since 2006. Ms. Mery has received multiple Awards for Excellence from the Research and Planning Group for the California Community Colleges for her work. She earned her M.A. at Bryn Mawr College and her B.A. at Haverford College and is currently pursuing an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership at San Francisco State University.

**Elisa Rassen** is a consultant grant and research report writer and served as the primary author of this report. Previously, she was a grant writer at City College of San Francisco for four years where her work resulted in approximately \$10 million in grant support to the college from public and private sources. Her particular areas of expertise include support for at-risk students; workforce development; science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM); and health education. Ms. Rassen has a B.A. from Harvard University.

## The Research and Planning Group of California Community Colleges

The Research and Planning (RP) Group strives to build a community college culture that views planning, evidence-based decision making, and institutional effectiveness as integral strategies for student success. We pursue our mission by:

- Strengthening the skills of administrators, faculty, and staff through professional development and disseminating effective practices
- Providing high quality information about California community colleges through research and evaluation projects
- Developing strategic partnerships and providing leadership on statewide initiatives

The RP Group's Center for Student Success (CSS) conducts research and evaluation projects, utilizing the skills and unique perspectives of California community college institutional researchers, faculty, and administrators. Projects are designed to generate information that community college practitioners can use to make informed decisions that increase student success. These audience-specific products can be used to stimulate discussion, encourage reflection, and influence decision making.

Since 2000, CSS has led 15 system-level research and evaluation projects that have resulted in significant changes to the California community college system. Accomplishments include the statewide accountability system (ARCC), the modification of admission requirements for the registered nursing programs, and the publication, *Basic Skills as a Foundation for Success in the California Community Colleges*, which has become the framework for evaluating college-level basic skills programs throughout the state.

For more information about the RP Group's services and CSS projects, please visit [www.rpgroup.org](http://www.rpgroup.org)

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# Executive Summary

This report presents an overview of how community colleges in California are meeting the educational needs of current and former foster youth and seeks to:

- Provide for a better understanding of the needs of emancipated foster youth enrolled at community colleges;
- Examine successful responses to student needs from community colleges statewide;
- Identify challenges faced by community colleges in meeting student needs; and
- Make recommendations as to how programs can be enhanced, expanded, and improved.

The methodology for exploring these areas of concern included three key components: the design, implementation, and analysis of a survey sent to former foster youth currently enrolled in California community colleges; an analysis of a survey sent by the California Community Colleges to Foster Youth Liaisons at community colleges; and in-depth interviews/site visits with 12 diverse colleges throughout the state.

Based on these surveys and interviews, the report first constructs a profile of former foster youth enrolled in community colleges, looking at their course load, work schedules, and more. It also identifies student needs and the students themselves offer advice to colleges about how to improve services. The report then adds the college perspective to that of the students, using survey results to examine how colleges identify former foster youth and conduct outreach; what services are provided to them; and the accomplishments and challenges in attempting to help this vulnerable population. Finally, the report provides an in-depth analysis of a range of successful approaches to serving former foster youth, including hosting Independent Living Programs on campus; developing partnerships both within and outside of the college; and using a case management approach to meet student needs.

This multi-level analysis led to a number of key findings, including:

- Many schools are trying to address with existing resources the needs of a special population, stretching their staff thin and limiting the services and assistance that can be provided to former foster youth.
- Many programs serving former foster youth rely on the personal dedication and/or volunteer efforts of one or more staff members rather than on broad support from across the college.
- The critical needs of former foster youth revolve around housing, transportation, and the financial ability to cover these costs while attending college; staff members serving emancipated foster youth need to be well versed in assisting students in accessing available resources.
- A number of schools are successfully using a case management approach that responds to the need for in-depth, intensive assistance for former foster youth.
- Almost none of the colleges interviewed indicated that they successfully tracked student progress or had any measures for evaluating the success of their interventions.

This report concludes with recommendations on how programs for former foster youth can be strengthened and improved. These recommendations include:

- Partnerships between the public and private sectors should be developed in order to enhance resources available for programs serving former foster youth.
- A statewide data collection system should be developed and implemented in order to help colleges track students' short- and long-term outcomes, evaluate program successes and obstacles, and make improvements as needed.
- Staff serving former foster youth should be well informed about how to help students meet their key needs, with a particular focus on financial aid and housing.
- Programs serving former foster youth should develop a team approach to serving former foster youth that includes professional development activities that engage a wide range of departments/offices in serving this student population and educate college staff about resources available, eligibility requirements, and culturally sensitive responses to these students.
- A case management approach should be implemented to provide intensive service and attention to former foster youth to more adequately address the challenges these students face.

# Introduction

## Challenges Facing Former Foster Youth

Every year, approximately 4,000 youth “age out” of, or “emancipate” from California’s foster care system upon reaching the age of 18. While there are services that assist these youth in transitioning to independent living, most still face an uphill battle in securing housing, employment, and financial security.

In 2007, the Children’s Advocacy Institute at the University of San Diego School of Law reported, “Not surprisingly, the majority of former foster youth fail to achieve self-sufficiency.” The report further notes that 65% of foster youth do not have a place to live upon emancipating, 51% are unemployed, and “only 20% of those who complete high school even begin to pursue postsecondary education, compared with 60% of their peers. The percentage of all former foster youth who attain a college degree is even lower, at only 1– 3%.”<sup>1</sup>

Growing up in the foster care system poses a broad range of educational barriers unique to this cohort. The California Youth Connection (CYC) observes that foster youth, often moved from placement to placement, must cope with a lack of consistency in school curricula, difficulties in securing quality health care, and challenges in developing and maintaining positive and trusting relationships with adults. Moreover, the Institute for Higher Education Policy observes,

Many foster youth ... do not attend college because they cannot afford it. They are often low-income and lack the ability to pay for college. Compared to their peers, foster youth are much more likely to be poor before they enter the foster care system, while they are in foster care, and after they leave foster care.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, CYC cites securing housing as a major obstacle to success for emancipated foster youth, stating that upon emancipation,

Foster youth are expected to find housing, provide for their medical needs, secure transportation, and do all of the other things necessary for survival, usually without the benefit of a caring parent to guide the way... For this reason, many foster youth who emancipate from the system, end up homeless for some period of time.<sup>3</sup>

While the Transitional Housing Program-Plus (THP-Plus), established in 2001 and funded by the California Department of Social Services, provides subsidized housing for some emancipated foster youth, many of them are still unable to secure housing placements. Furthermore, the transition to a permanent housing arrangement, as opposed to the temporary THP-Plus housing, is an ongoing challenge.

## The Unique Role of the Community College in Educating Former Foster Youth

Although some former foster youth are able to, with support, move immediately into four-year colleges to pursue Bachelor’s degrees, community colleges play a critical role for the majority of

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<sup>1</sup> Children’s Advocacy Institute, “Expanding Transitional Services for Emancipated Foster Youth: An Investment in California’s Tomorrow,” January 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Institute for Higher Education Policy, “Higher Education Opportunities for Former Foster Youth: A Primer for Policymakers,” December 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Princess Scott, Reina Sanchez, Myeshia Grice, *A Summary of Foster Youth Recommendations from California Youth Connection Conferences*, California Youth Connection.

emancipated youth pursuing higher education. Tuition at California's community colleges costs only \$20 per unit, giving students an extremely affordable educational option. For former foster youth with limited financial resources, the affordability of community college is essential.

Community colleges also can play a key role in providing a wide range of educational opportunities for emancipated foster youth, many of whom struggle with basic reading, writing, and mathematics competency. Students, including foster youth, who frequently change schools, are often underprepared for college-level coursework even upon high school graduation. At a community college, former foster youth can pursue academic studies according to their skill level, ultimately achieving an Associate's degree and/or transferring to a four-year institution for a Bachelor's degree. Students at community colleges also can look to career and technical education for certificate programs that will quickly qualify them for employment in rewarding fields. The ability to move rapidly into careers can be extremely important for students who struggle financially and seek to become self-sufficient. According to the Center for an Urban Future,

One factor contributing to the problem of disconnected youth is that the traditional educational approach neither engages at-risk youth to continue their studies nor prepares them for the world of work. [Many employment] sectors are open to young people who achieve a baseline of educational attainment and skill sets valued by employers. Within a relatively short period, disconnected city youth can acquire the competencies they will need for remunerative jobs in automobile maintenance, information technology, aviation and other fields.<sup>4</sup>

Even with the affordable tuition and open access that community colleges provide, former foster youth must still tackle housing, transportation, books, food, and many more needs. The need for student support on all levels is crucial because community colleges often serve students who have fewer financial resources and less academic preparation compared with those who move directly into a four-year college.

### **Private and Public Responses to Former Foster Youth Needs**

**Private Foundations.** The College Pathways program, formerly Guardian Scholars, is one of California's premier programs, designed to help former foster youth in succeeding both academically and personally. College Pathways is supported by the Stuart Foundation, the Walter S. Johnson Foundation, and a collection of other private funders. The program in turn provides funding to community college, California State University (CSU), and University of California (UC) campuses for the provision of comprehensive assistance to emancipated foster youth. The program is currently in place at 20 colleges, universities, and technical schools in Orange County, the San Francisco Bay Area, and the state of Washington. At this time, the College Pathways program coordinator is located in the CSU Office of the Chancellor. This coordinator recruits and identifies college campus interested in increasing the retention and graduation of former foster youth; works with campuses to implement self-assessment protocols; helps facilitate a peer-to-peer network of college and university programs; and more.

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<sup>4</sup> Center for an Urban Future, "Chance of a Lifetime," May 2006.

The College Pathways programs support the following types of intervention:

- Priority for campus housing, and availability of year-round housing, either on- or off-campus;
- Financial aid;
- Access to student support services, such as mental health services, the Federal TRIO program, and Educational Opportunity Program and Services (EOPS);
- Frequent monitoring of student academic progress and follow-up advising to ensure student access to academic support services;
- A formal relationship with local social services and Independent Living Programs to ensure that students receive the full range of supportive services;
- Linkages between two- and four-year schools to facilitate student transfer; and
- Long-term sustainability planning.

Many schools use the name “Guardian Scholars” for their programs that support former foster youth; however, it is worth noting that there appears to be little consistency in how the term is used. At City College of San Francisco, the Guardian Scholars program is an initiative funded by the Walter S. Johnson Foundation. At Napa Valley College, however, “Guardian Scholars” is used to designate an unfunded project for emancipated foster youth. A third interpretation can be found at MiraCosta College, which signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Child Abuse Prevention Foundation to become a Guardian Scholars program and receive funds for MiraCosta students. With each school interpreting “Guardian Scholars” differently, it is difficult to assign any particular meaning to the term, except to say that it refers to programs for former foster youth.

**State Support for Former Foster Youth.** While many private funders have focused on serving emancipated foster youth at four-year colleges, the California Community College system has created its own initiative to mobilize efforts to help this population at colleges around the state. In 2006, the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO) launched the Foster Youth Success Initiative (FYSI) to engage former foster youth in higher education. The FYSI has no designated funding; rather, its leaders have made use of other existing funds allocated for Financial Aid outreach to specific populations.

Through the FYSI, the CCCCCO created a training program and related materials, such as the comprehensive *Foster Youth Success Initiative Manual: A Guide for Financial Aid Administrators*,<sup>5</sup> and asked each college to designate at least one staff person as a Foster Youth Liaison.<sup>6</sup> The Liaison’s task is to understand issues facing former foster youth and undergo training from the Chancellor’s Office to learn how to better serve these students. After the Liaisons were identified, a training session was held in February 2007, with 87 campuses represented and 115 individuals attending. During this training, the Liaisons met with youth as well as representatives from social service agencies and the K-12 educational system. The

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<sup>5</sup> This manual and other resources can be found here:

<http://www.cccco.edu/SystemOffice/Divisions/StudentServices/StudentFinancialAssistancePrograms/FosterYouthSuccessInitiativeFYSI/tabid/997/Default.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> Responses to the CCCCCO College Staff Survey indicate that 80% of survey participants use the FYSI Manual at least sometimes; however, only 37% of respondents report using the Handouts for Youth.

CCCCO also set up regional groups that help the CCCCCO coordinate with individual colleges. The Chancellor's Office has created a Web site that lists available resources and posts research papers. Finally, the CCCCCO began hosting regional meetings in 2008, bringing together educators and social service providers across nearby counties to help build relationships that would enhance services for foster youth.

While much has been accomplished, the FYSI program continues to receive no dedicated funding to support these efforts. Moreover, with the budget crisis now facing the state of California, the financial aid funds being used to support the FYSI could be substantially reduced, threatening the program's success and efficacy.

**Public/Private Partnerships.** Other programs supporting former foster youth combine public and private efforts. For example, California Youth Connection (CYC) is a non-profit youth leadership/advocacy organization that builds the capacity of current and former foster youth to speak out about their experiences in care and work collaboratively with policymakers to improve the child welfare system. CYC youth members identify policy issues that are important to them and the issue of higher education has, historically, been one that is very important to CYC members and one that they have addressed at many of their Leadership and Policy Conferences over the years. The California Department of Social Services, San Francisco State University/Bay Area Academy, the Santa Clara Social Service Agency and San Diego Office of Education all have contracts with CYC to provide leadership training and support to foster youth, especially those transitioning from foster care and involved in higher education pursuits. In addition, several local CYC chapters work in collaboration with their local community colleges and universities in pursuit of better services for former foster youth in higher education.

In another example of private and public partnerships, the Foundation for California Community Colleges administers the Youth Empowerment Strategies for Success (YESS) initiative in partnership with the California Department of Social Services. Community colleges throughout California have received funds to implement the YESS program on their campuses, offering services such as tutoring, mentoring, and life skills training to emancipating foster youth.

## **Results from Current Research in Serving At-Risk Youth**

Much work has already been done in examining successful interventions for both former foster youth in particular and at-risk youth in general. This report presents an important context for the approaches taken and scope of services provided by the colleges profiled in this report. Specifically, research has demonstrated the success of the following practices in serving vulnerable populations in higher education:

- Many at-risk youth, including former foster youth, must enroll in “basic skills” educational courses that teach remedial/foundation skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. Outcomes for students who enroll in college at this level improve when colleges require assessment and placement into appropriate course levels; provide substantial and accessible counseling support; offer financial assistance to students; and provide opportunities for comprehensive academic support, such as tutoring.<sup>7</sup>
- “Student success” courses focusing on teaching underprepared students skills such as note-taking, test-taking, time management, and developing educational and career plans

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<sup>7</sup> The Center for Student Success, “Basic Skills as a Foundation for Student Success in California Community Colleges.” The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges, July 2007.

have been shown to positively affect students' ability to earn a community college credential and transfer to a four-year college.<sup>8</sup>

- “Career pathway” programs provide a series of connected education and training courses that help students advance to a career in a specific industry or occupational sector. Students who enter college at a remedial level are better able to progress to and succeed in college-level programs when they participate in a career pathway that gives them the opportunity to train and eventually advance in a particular field.<sup>9</sup>

### **Goals of the Current Project**

Despite the extraordinary, but primarily unfunded efforts of individuals at the community college and state levels to improve services for former foster youth, much coordination, knowledge-sharing, and resource-building still needs to be done. The Walter S. Johnson Foundation in March 2008 commissioned the Research and Planning Group of the California Community Colleges to examine programs and services for emancipated foster youth at community colleges throughout California. The goals of this project were to:

- Better understand the needs of emancipated foster youth enrolled at community colleges;
- Examine successful responses to student needs by community colleges statewide;
- Identify challenges community colleges face in meeting student needs; and
- Recommend ways to enhance, expand, and improve existing programs.

### **More Information**

A glossary of terms is available in Appendix A, describing the federal, state, county, and college programs referenced in this report.

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<sup>8</sup> Zeidenberg, M., Jenkins, D., & Calcagno, J.C., “Do Student Success Courses Actually Help Community College Students Succeed?” Community College Research Center, *CCRC Brief* (36), June 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Jenkins, D. & Spence, C., “The Career Pathways How-To Guide.” Workforce Strategy Center, October 2006.

# Methodology

The overall methodology for this research project is sequential and cumulative, building one method on top of another to delve into the issues with increasing depth; advancing from quantitative to qualitative research and analysis. This choice of methodology attempts to present both a broad overview and a detailed description of how colleges are serving foster youth on their campuses.

The methodology included the following key components:

- To better understand the experiences and needs of former foster youth attending community college, a student survey was developed and administered online. In-depth interviews also were conducted with two students who had completed the survey and indicated an interest in being interviewed.
- To identify both the challenges faced and successful responses by community colleges in serving former foster youth, this research analyzed results from a previous survey of Foster Youth Liaisons and other staff that work with this population conducted by the Foster Youth Success Initiative at the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO).
- To recognize best practices as well as obstacles in serving this vulnerable population, the researchers interviewed faculty and staff members from 12 community colleges around the state and conducted site visits at two of these colleges. The 12 colleges were:
  - City College of San Francisco
  - Cuyamaca College
  - Fullerton College
  - Lassen Community College
  - MiraCosta College
  - Napa Valley College (site visit)
  - Orange Coast College
  - Riverside Community College
  - Santa Ana College
  - Santa Rosa Junior College
  - Victor Valley College (site visit)
  - West Valley College

For a more detailed description of the methodology, please see Appendix B.

# Understanding the Former Foster Youth Student Experience

The student survey conducted for this report, in addition to a survey completed in 2007 by Tracy L. Fried & Associates, revealed key information about the challenges faced by former foster youth in community colleges; which resources are helping these students succeed; and how these students themselves believe community colleges can better serve the emancipated foster youth population. The information gathered from the survey and the two student interviews is discussed below.

## Who Are the Former Foster Youth Enrolled at Community Colleges?

Of the 74 respondents to the student survey conducted for this research, representing 36 different community colleges across California, 96% described themselves as not currently in foster care. Almost all respondents, 96%, had earned a high school diploma, GED, or other high school graduation equivalency.

The time students had spent at their respective community colleges varied widely, with 26% enrolled in their first semester and 34% having taken five or more semesters of courses (Table 1). Over half of the respondents were enrolled full-time (12 or more units), and an additional 30% reported taking at least six units of instruction (Table 2). Despite this substantial course load, 69% of respondents worked a minimum of 20 hours per week in addition to attending school; including 22% of respondents who reported working 40 hours or more on top of their academic pursuits (Table 3).

**Table 1**

How many semesters have students enrolled at this college?	Responses	Percent
1st semester	19	26%
2 semesters	11	15%
3 or 4 semesters	17	23%
5 or more semesters	24	34%
No Response	2	3%

**Table 2**

How many units are students taking?	Responses	Percent
12 or more units	38	53%
6.0 - 11.5 units	22	30%
1.0 - 5.5 units	8	11%
0 units	4	5%
No Response	1	1%

**Table 3**

How many hours per week are students working?	Responses	Percent
None, no job	10	14%
Less than 10 hours	4	5%
10 - 19 hours	9	12%
20 - 29 hours	23	31%
30 - 39 hours	12	16%
40 hours or more	16	22%

Particularly interesting results emerged when examining full-time students (enrolled in 12 or more units) and the work responsibilities they managed in addition to their schoolwork. Of these 38 full-time community college students, 74% worked at least 20 hours per week, including 21% who maintained a 40-hour-per-week work schedule (Table 4).

**Table 4**

How many hours per week do full-time students work?	Responses	Percent
None, no job	6	16%
Less than 10 hours	1	3%
10 - 19 hours	3	8%
20 - 29 hours	13	34%
30 - 39 hours	7	18%
40 hours or more	8	21%

The most popular goal among these students was to transfer to a four-year institution (69%), followed by the pursuit of an Associate’s degree (36%). Particularly encouraging is that 12% specifically cited a goal of going to graduate school. Approximately 10% of survey respondents indicated that their goal in attending community college was to get a good job. Several students expressed a desire to ultimately enter a field where they could help people, with several specifically stating they wanted to help foster youth. Students’ choice of majors also indicated a desire to work helping others: social work, law enforcement/criminal justice, sociology, psychology, education, and nursing. One student, noting that only 3% of former foster youth in California complete college, pledged, “I feel it is my duty to beat those odds.”

In addition to describing their educational and career goals, several students also noted a personal goal of simply having a better life, specifically one that is better than their parents’. In discussing their goals, many also noted the wide range of hardships that have made success in college a substantial challenge for them, such as academic under-preparedness and a work schedule of 30 hours a week or more.

### **How Do Former Foster Youth Use Available Resources?**

When asked how likely they were to ask someone at their college for help if they needed it, almost half of all respondents said they were “very likely” to ask for help, while an additional 16% were “somewhat likely” to do so. Twenty percent of respondents reported that they would be either “somewhat” or “very” *unlikely* to pursue assistance at their college.

When asked to report on their use of specific resources at their college, most students indicated that the services they had used and found helpful were financial aid, Chafee grants, and EOPS counseling. Other academic counseling and EOPS counseling were the two services where students were the most likely to indicate they had used the services, but did not find them helpful. In noting which services they had not yet used, but would like to pursue, popular selections included housing or housing referrals; vouchers for food, transportation and books; and student clubs or peer mentoring. When asked to identify available services that they did *not* need, responses included child care, physical and mental health, and housing or housing referrals. Please see Table 5 below for the detailed data.

**Table 5**

How useful are the services provided at community colleges?	Used it and it was helpful	Used it, but it was not helpful	Have not used, but would like to	Do not need this service
Chafee grants	66%	3%	24%	0%
Other financial aid (such as Pell Grants or work-study funds)	82%	4%	9%	3%
EOPS counseling	54%	14%	18%	8%
Other academic counseling	41%	17%	23%	13%
Employment	42%	8%	25%	18%
Physical and mental health	27%	1%	20%	38%
Student clubs or peer mentoring	24%	4%	30%	29%
Housing or housing referrals	17%	4%	35%	30%
Independent Living Program	51%	6%	16%	20%
Tutoring services/Study skills	45%	6%	27%	20%
Child care	16%	0%	19%	57%
Vouchers (books, food, transit)	52%	3%	30%	7%
Other (such as priority registration or advice from instructors)	45%	0%	23%	18%

The varied responses to this set of survey questions suggest a former foster youth population with a wide range of needs, which is particularly evident in relation to housing assistance, with approximately the same number of students stating it was something they needed as those stating they did not. However, a slightly more consistent picture emerged as survey respondents elaborated on their use of services, when asked to identify the resources that have been the most helpful to them. An overwhelming number of students identified either Chafee grants or other financial aid as the most helpful resource. They explained:

The Chafee grant has truly helped me stay in school. I cannot afford to pay my rent with the hours that I work while being in school half time.

Chafee grants and financial aid were very helpful because it was money for school and food that I did not have to take time out of my study time to earn. It is hard to work to support myself and maintain good grades when going to school more than half time.

The Chaffee Grant has been, in my opinion, the best resource because it arrives untouched by the school's financial aid office. Since the Pell Grant, and likely many other grants, are disbursed in portions, it would have happened this year that my dormitory fees and registration fees would have left me penniless until the second Pell Grant distribution in the middle of the semester. The fact that the school left the check untouched and to use at my own discretion allowed me to escape certain hunger.

Many students expressed profound relief in not having to worry as much about rent, bills, food, and books because the financial assistance provided by their college allowed them to focus on their academic success. The Tracy L. Fried & Associates survey of current and former foster youth in community college, which received 52 responses, reflects a similar emphasis on the need for financial resources. Respondents to that survey listed “having enough money to pay for school and living expenses” as their top concern, stating that having “money for school, housing, [and] transportation” was what they needed most to succeed in college.

In the survey conducted for this report, 16% of students identified both EOPS and Independent Living Programs (ILPs) as resources that were the most helpful to them. Some students described their experiences as follows:

EOPS counseling was helpful because it was good to talk to someone about what my education goals [were] and ask them how I can go about [reaching] my career goals.

EOPS helped me through the college experience.

Independent Living Skills program has helped in numerous ways: tutoring, filling out financial aid forms, medicine reimbursements. They have been the MOST helpful.

ILP has helped VERY much. Because of that program I have a job that I'm so thankful for.

Many students specifically cited the financial support EOPS offered, such as helping students pay for textbooks, as extremely useful. Financial assistance appeared as a theme in comments related to ILP as well, with many students discussing the important role ILP played in helping them find and maintain housing and secure employment. As one student summed up, "I think that the Chafee Grant, Financial Aid, and EOPS are very helpful. I honestly do not know where I would be without these services. I am thankful that I am given ... help by the programs on campus."

### **What Advice Do Former Foster Youth Have for Community Colleges?**

At the conclusion of the survey conducted for this report, students were asked for their advice on how colleges can better serve the emancipated foster youth population. Many students responded with positive feedback about the efforts already underway at their respective colleges; however, they also offered the following key suggestions:

- Improve the methods for identifying former foster youth. For example, adding a question about foster care status to the admissions application form (*most frequent response*).
- Increase outreach to improve former foster youth's awareness of services and resources available to them. Suggested strategies included posters, signs, or flyers around campus; mailings to former foster youth; expressly designed activities for former foster youth, such as clubs or events; and/or coordination with local high schools and social service agencies.
- Create designated programs and/or college staff members to serve the unique needs of this population.
- Improve college staff members' understanding of the foster youth experience and the appropriate methods for assisting former foster youth. One student, noting that she was "not looking for sympathy" but rather practical assistance, described her Foster Youth Liaison as "clueless" and "insensitive." Another student stated, "Instructors need to understand that not every college student has had [a strong] academic foundation prior to coming to college."
- Provide assistance and services at night and online, since students who work full-time often attend college in the evening and/or online and cannot take advantage of the resources and support programs offered only during the day on campus.
- Offer services and/or opportunities for financial assistance to those who are over the age of 21. One student observed that a lot of former foster youth are not ready to pursue their

education at the age of 18 and, in fact, do not “get it” until they are 21 or 22 years old. By that time, many are ineligible for key services and support.

- Provide financial assistance to those students who earn incomes that are deemed outside the limited requirements for demonstrated financial need. Students who work full-time may be ineligible for most financial aid programs, but still need assistance to survive and thrive.

While emphasizing the need for improved identification of foster youth and more effective education about the resources and services available, students also noted that some former foster youth might feel stigmatized by being singled out. Other students further encouraged discretion, highlighting the need for former foster youth to feel comfortable and build trusting relationships with the college staff members assigned to help them. One student described a less than positive experience with a counselor:

Often times I would walk in to speak with counselor and feel as though I have not achieved anything with the counselor because he/she fails to realize my “specific” educational goals as a foster child. They tell me to do this and that as if I am some ordinary student who knows what everything is, but truthfully speaking I am not. Because I was in foster care I ... know very little. I wish there were counselors who worked closely and specifically with former foster youth so that we as foster kids can have a smooth road to transferring. Most of us go into colleges/schools without the educational preparation and feel lost and ultimately give up in the process. We need counselors who can help make the process easier and help direct us in the path.

Or, as another student put it, “Just listen. And really try and help when we need it most.”

### **More Information**

To view the detailed data from the student survey, please see Appendix B.

# Community College Responses to Former Foster Youth Needs

The following section focuses on the CCCCCO survey of community college Foster Youth Liaisons, which revealed important information about how colleges are currently addressing the needs of former foster youth, and some of the obstacles they have encountered in their efforts.

## Identification and Outreach

The majority of responding colleges stated that their designated Foster Youth Liaison worked in the Financial Aid Office (72%). An additional 15% stated that the Liaison was situated in EOPS. When asked how the college approached identifying former foster youth, 46% said they used Financial Aid channels (such as FAFSA question #53). Other common approaches to identifying former foster youth included referrals (39%) and outreach activities (30%). Only 13% of schools responded that former foster youth were identified through the college’s admissions application.

In addition, colleges reported using a wide range of outreach strategies to inform students of services available to them. Many respondents use Financial Aid workshops as a primary outreach method (46%). Other popular approaches included:

- Mail or email (30%);
- Personal phone calls (28%);
- Flyers (24%); and
- Websites (such as MySpace) (20%).

Colleges reported utilizing both internal and external referrals to reach and serve former foster youth. Primary referral relationships between Financial Aid and EOPS existed within all or nearly all of the colleges that responded. Some schools also received referrals from career guidance offices, CalWORKS, other counselors, the community college Transfer Center, and Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS). Furthermore, many survey respondents indicated a referral relationship with key external agencies, such as ILP, the Department of Social Services/County Welfare, and non-profit agencies. Some colleges have relationships with their County Office of Education and Foster Youth Services Coordinators. Fewer schools reported referral relationships with other colleges (such as four-year schools in the area) and transitional housing programs. Please see Table 6 for more information.

**Table 6**

Do colleges have relationships with off-campus service providers?	Responses	Percent
Independent Living Programs (ILP)	28	61%
Department of Social Services/County Welfare	15	33%
Non-Profits	14	30%
County Office of Education and FYS Coordinators	12	26%
Other colleges	11	24%
Transitional Housing program	9	20%

It is difficult to determine from the survey responses the exact size of the former foster youth population served by most colleges. While approximately 75% of schools reported serving a population of 50 students or fewer, there seemed to be a range of interpretations of what it meant

to be “serving” these youth. Some schools responded with the number of students receiving Chafee awards, while others reported the number of those students enrolled in ILP courses or EOPS. Moreover, some colleges that offer ILP classes on campus apparently provided a combined total of current and former foster youth served through ILP and the college itself. Nonetheless, the data suggest that many colleges reach an *emancipated* foster youth population of approximately 20 to 50 students. A small number of schools are serving substantially larger populations, ranging from 130 to 160 students.

## Services Provided

The most frequent service provided to former foster youth by community college respondents was help in completing financial assistance applications, such as the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and Chafee grant (74%). In addition, 50% of colleges reported providing referrals to other student support programs and 41% provided referrals to academic support programs. Approximately 30% of programs also provided referrals to health care providers, assistance in locating housing, and DSS or ILP classes. While 50% of schools reported that they do *not* currently have a campus club for former foster youth, 37% would like information on initiating such a club.

When asked what additional services Foster Youth Liaisons would like to provide, some survey respondents identified the following areas for expansion or improvement:

- Mentorship
- Assistance in securing housing, finding jobs, and accessing resources such as mental health services
- Creation of a club for former foster youth
- Development of a case management approach that includes referrals and follow-up
- Linkages to other community colleges and four-year institutions
- Creation of a separate program exclusively for former foster youth, on a par with EOPS

Survey respondents further identified their colleges’ priorities for improving services to emancipated foster youth. Forty-one percent of respondents indicated that “outreach to better inform students of all the support services available to them” was of the highest priority; 35% identified assistance in completing the FAFSA and other financial aid or college applications as the top concern. In addition, 30% prioritized one-on-one counseling and guidance to on-campus support services.

Only 27% of responding colleges cited community partners that helped them cover the costs of serving the former foster youth population. Some schools were funded by the Youth Empowerment Strategies for Success (YESS), administered by the Foundation for California Community Colleges, while others had developed partnerships with the county ILP/ILSP and/or local corporations, private funders, and foundations.

## How Do Colleges Rate Their Own Success in Serving Former Foster Youth?

Overall, 29% of respondents rated their services for emancipated foster youth as “excellent” or “good;” 35% rated their current services as “average;” and 35% rated their efforts as “fair” or “poor.” These ratings suggest that most colleges perceive a lot of room for growth and improvement. This result is not surprising given the relative newness of the FYSI initiative, and

the limited resources currently focused on serving these youth. Almost half of all respondents described their current process for identifying and serving this population as, “Has been initiated but we would appreciate support and assistance in understanding the needs of these youth and in designing a model that serves them well.” Reporting top program goals, 83% of schools named as their highest priority increasing the number of foster youth who complete their community college education, with 70% seeking to increase enrollment, and 57% aiming to increase transfers to four-year institutions.

Finally, when asked to describe their most significant accomplishments to date in serving former foster youth, 10 colleges indicated they were just getting started and have been focused on activities such as building campus awareness and identifying staff members to work with foster youth. Other schools described an emphasis on identifying foster youth and providing on-campus services such as Financial Aid and EOPS. Still others reported developing linkages with external service providers.

Accomplishments listed by individual colleges included:

- Offering employment;
- Providing dormitory housing;
- Increasing “hits” on Web pages; and
- Compiling a Foster Youth Resource Guide.

### **More Information**

For all the detailed data from the staff survey, please see Appendix C.

# Successful Approaches to Serving Current and Former Foster Youth

Twelve schools were selected for interviews to represent the following: Northern and Southern California; small and large former foster youth populations; and rural, suburban, and urban locations. While the colleges interviewed do not constitute a complete listing of schools with successful service models for emancipated foster youth, they are a representative sampling of approaches from which best practices can be culled.

Each school has developed a unique approach to serving emancipated foster youth, depending on the size of their former foster youth population, support from the college administration, relationships with community and county programs, and several other factors. Nonetheless, key themes emerged from these interviews that identify useful strategies and techniques for improving the personal and educational outcomes of former foster youth at community colleges. Most colleges used one or more approaches to serve current and/or former foster youth. Along with a list of colleges that serve as good examples, these approaches and themes are listed below and subsequently discussed in detail. Please note that these descriptions do not encompass the entirety of each college's strategy, but only offer key examples of successful approaches.

1. Housing the Independent Living Program (ILP) or Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP) on the college campus

*Santa Rosa Junior College, Lassen College, Riverside City College, and MiraCosta College*

2. Developing partnerships within the college with a range of departments, offices, and service programs

*Victor Valley College, Napa Valley College, Cuyamaca College, Santa Ana College, and Fullerton College*

3. Developing partnerships with external agencies, such as local corporations, private foundations, and county government

*City College of San Francisco, Santa Ana College, and Santa Rosa Junior College*

4. Engaging in extensive personal contact with students to build trust and ensure access to services and resources (i.e., case management)

*MiraCosta College, West Valley College, Orange Coast College, and Victor Valley College*

## **Housing the Independent Living Program or Independent Living Skills Program on Campus**

*Santa Rosa Junior College, Lassen College, Riverside City College, and MiraCosta College*

Four of the interviewed colleges house the county-funded Independent Living Program (ILP) on campus. ILP serves youth ages 16–21, thus providing services to both current and former foster youth to assist in skills development for self-sufficiency. Colleges offering ILP on campus serve current and former foster youth across the county and often supplement county funds with in-kind contributions in the form of class and office space.

**Santa Rosa Junior College (SRJC)** offers two semester-long courses for youth: a “basic” course for students between 16 and 18 years of age and an “advanced” course for students over 18. These courses are structured as open-entry/open-exit, meaning that students can begin or leave the class at any time. However, those students who attend a minimum number of class sessions are eligible to receive college credit for these courses. SRJC enrolls just under 100 students per semester. Incentives are given to students by the county per class attended (\$15/class) if they make it through more than five classes.

Topics in the basic and advanced ILP classes include:

- Financial literacy: Representatives from a local bank give presentations to the class, provide checks for practice bookkeeping, and discuss overdrafts and other topics.
- Housing/job search: The local newspaper helps students with job searches and housing searches.
- Soft skills: Various guest speakers, such as the Foster Youth Liaison at the Sonoma County Board of Education, visit the class to discuss daily living, conflict resolution, safe choices, safe sex, and more.
- Hard skills: Students learn about financial planning, finding a job, doing their taxes, and more.
- Financial aid: The SRJC Financial Aid Office makes presentations on filling out the FAFSA, completing Chafee applications, and joining CalWORKS.
- Campus tour: Students are taken around campus to locations such as Admissions and Records and vocational programs. Older students participate in a “scavenger hunt” by which they find various places on campus and talk to the faculty/staff members at those locations.
- Job resources: Students attend job and career fairs, complete interest surveys, and conduct job searches during visits to the SRJC Career Center.

Each class has a teacher of record, a volunteer, and the Foster Youth Liaison or her designee. If a student is having trouble, one of these people will walk the student to the appropriate office for help. Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) and group-home staff members also sometimes transport the youth to class and provide additional assistance. There is also an hour of check-in time prior to each class session, when county social workers can meet with the students and help them with issues they are facing. SRJC provides in-kind support for the credit ILP classes (\$10,000); guest presenters in the classes (approximately \$50/person); room rental for classes; and ILP offices.

**Lassen College** has housed the county’s ILP on campus for the past two years and the current Foster Youth Liaison also serves as the ILP Coordinator. The county provides the primary funding for the program, and the college provides support in the form of classroom space and course supplies.

The Liaison spends considerable ILP class time encouraging students to explore career and academic interests. Once a week, students visit various departments on campus and are exposed to occupations such as welding, library science, gunsmithing, child development, auto shop, and more. Each semester, the Liaison identifies two foster youth students enrolled in the ILP classes—one male and one female—to meet with her informally on a weekly basis to discuss their

experiences in the class (e.g., what is working, what they would like to get out of the class). According to the Liaison, the purpose of these meetings is for the students to provide her with direct and immediate feedback about the class that allow her to make responsive and timely improvements to the class.

The county also contracts with the Liaison to provide case management to ILP students, where individual attention is given to each youth. When students show an interest in college, the Liaison personally introduces them to the necessary service providers. For example, the Liaison may personally bring a student to the counseling department, introduce him/her to a particular counselor, and provide the counselor with essential information about the student's needs. It is important to note that while Lassen College is one of the few community colleges in California that offer students dormitory housing, most of Lassen's ILP students, unfortunately, do not transition to college immediately after emancipation and thus still need to find a place to live.

Overall, approximately 130 students are served through this program, with the college maintaining regular contact with about 50 students.

**Riverside City College** also provides ILP courses on campus, focusing on transitioning students to independent living, with some emphasis on encouraging college enrollment. Before the program was located at Riverside City College, only a handful of foster youth enrolled in higher education. Since the transition to Riverside City College three years ago, 200 foster youth have enrolled at the college. The program resides within college's workforce preparation division. What makes this program unique is that it has its own financial aid department and conducts its own counseling and outreach activities.

Riverside's ILP serves foster youth from across the county. Students interested in attending college are provided individual assistance with the admissions process and have continuous contact with an "emancipation coach," to whom they are assigned at age 16. Overall, the program seeks to provide foster youth with a safety net as they transition out of foster care. The program is funded entirely by the county at a yearly budget of approximately \$1.3 million, which includes support for two staff positions (not including the emancipation coaches).

Through Riverside's ILP, students are taught soft skills and life skills training, such as learning to budget, understanding time management, and opening a bank account. In addition, the college organizes annual events on how to complete the FAFSA, how to apply to the California State University (CSU) system, and a celebration of emancipation. There is also a weekend computer camp that awards a laptop computer to every participating foster youth to help "level the playing field" for these students.

At **MiraCosta College**, the local YMCA teaches the Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP) on the college campus, through a contract with the county Health and Human Services program. MiraCosta provides an office, with 15 hours per week of drop-in time, as well as classroom space. Enrollment in this non-credit course ranges from 15 to 30 students at a time. Topics include setting goals, financial literacy, understanding the law, sexuality, and the risk of identity theft. MiraCosta also recently developed a follow-up course called "Excel," in which students who have completed the ILSP course are instructed on topics related to employment and careers, such as job searches and resume-building.

## Partnerships Within the College

*Victor Valley College, Napa Valley College, Cuyamaca College, Santa Ana College, and Fullerton College*

Many strong programs at the interviewed colleges thrive on successful partnerships among departments within the college. Collaboration between Financial Aid and EOPS emerged as a particular theme when colleges described the strengths of their programs. The approaches taken by the following five colleges illustrate how these partnerships serve former foster youth.

The Foster Youth Liaison for **Victor Valley College** is located in its Financial Aid Department; but a “planning committee,” whose members come from the college’s EOPS, DSPP, TRIO, and Title V programs, provide support for the services for former foster youth. The Admissions and Records office and the Counseling department are also involved in serving this population.

Victor Valley’s Foster Youth Liaison was initially hired as a financial aid outreach specialist. Only later were the responsibilities of looking after the former foster youth population added to the job, with no additional funding allocated and no existing duties displaced. The Liaison conducts outreach at high schools, probation agencies, and rehabilitation facilities to reach both youth and parents who may have children in foster care. While the Liaison has primary responsibility for activities and services for former foster youth students, other offices/departments at Victor Valley College have contributed with efforts that include the following:

- Both EOPS and TRIO have changed their application forms to better identify former foster youth and to be more sensitive to their needs and experiences.
- Admissions and Records added a question on foster youth status to the application form for easier identification and referral to the Liaison.
- Admissions and Records altered the steps to enrollment so that students receive an orientation before they are assessed; this particularly helps former foster youth who are likely to be new to the entire college admission and registration process.
- An EOPS counselor is designated to assist this population and has worked with the Liaison on outreach activities.
- The coordinator of the college’s SSPIRE program actively seeks to engage former foster youth in the program so they can benefit from the case management approach that is central to the SSPIRE structure.
- The planning committee has organized numerous events for former foster youth, such as specialized orientations and a Foster Youth Awareness Day.

**Napa Valley College** also uses a strong partnership among departments to strengthen its ability to serve emancipated foster youth. In particular, the Foster Youth Liaison in Financial Aid works closely with two EOPS staff members to jointly assist these students. The dean of both Financial Aid and EOPS, recognizing the importance of collaboration between the two departments, has authorized the partnership. As EOPS and Financial Aid are located next to one another, the physical proximity supports the partnership and helps students easily receive assistance from both departments.

Through ongoing community outreach and work with the local ILP, the primary EOPS contact

person often makes the first connection with former foster youth and brings them into Napa Valley College. He assists them with their application for aid and introduces them to the Liaison, who works with the EOPS counselor to address any and all student needs and manage crises -- from mental health issues to housing assistance to academic support. For example, the Liaison worked closely with one temporarily homeless student to secure lodging and food.

When neither the Liaison nor the primary EOPS counselor is available, a second EOPS counselor is available to work with students. In addition, the primary counselor and the Liaison teach courses on personal success and managing the college experience expressly designed for students from special populations such as former foster youth. The courses focus on topics such as identifying personal strengths, connecting with others on campus, study skills, critical thinking, and include visits to local four-year colleges.

**Cuyamaca College** also features a strong partnership between Financial Aid and EOPS that supports for former foster youth. The Financial Aid Director, who was also in charge of EOPS when the program was initiated, determined that former foster youth needed to be connected to both of these key services. As a result, Cuyamaca has created two part-time positions to work with former foster youth: a 20-hour-per-week Foster Youth Liaison position in Financial Aid and a 15-hour-per-week position in EOPS. While both of these individuals have other responsibilities, they are expected to assist former foster youth as needs arise. By combining the efforts of Financial Aid and EOPS, Cuyamaca is able to provide former foster youth with intensive assistance and undivided attention to support students' financial and academic counseling needs. With two staff members dedicated to this task, one or the other is typically on hand when a former foster youth needs help.

**Santa Ana College's** Guardian Scholars program recently launched a self-described "team" approach. The Foster Youth Liaison coordinates the Service Learning Center to deliver services for former foster youth. In addition, the Liaison has handpicked individuals from other offices, such as EOPS, DSPS, Financial Aid, and Health Services, to be on the team. These individuals were selected not only for their professional experience, but also because they have demonstrated how they sincerely care for students. With designated personnel in key departments, students are able to develop personal relationships in the offices to which they are referred.

Santa Ana College's administration also participates in this "team" approach, making allowances for the special needs of these vulnerable students. For example, while most students are limited to six psychological services sessions, this limit has been waived for former foster youth. The college's student government contributes as well, providing \$1,000 for food that is available through the Student Learning Center. These contributions not only make a difference in meeting student needs, but also send a strong message that the college cares about this population.

**Fullerton College** has built a strong interdepartmental Guardian Scholars program that leverages existing resources to provide intensive support to former foster youth. Fullerton situates its Foster Youth Liaison in the college's multi-purpose transfer, diversity, and student development center: the Cadena/Transfer Center. With three staff members, this Center works closely with EOPS, Financial Aid, the Health Center, and the Academic Skills Center. Of these programs, the closest relationships are with EOPS and Financial Aid, but Center staff members also connect students to programs such as the Puente Project, the Transfer Achievement Program, and the Honors Program.

Fullerton staff members encourage former foster youth to enroll in EOPS. Given the

Cadena/Transfer Center's limited time and financial resources, the staff concluded that the most effective way for former foster youth to receive intensive help was to be enrolled in EOPS. Students who are enrolled in EOPS are required to meet the following program requirements: two counseling appointments each semester; two appointments with an advisor each semester; tutoring; and participation in one college-related workshop.

Fullerton's campus-wide discussion on serving former foster youth includes not only staff from the Cadena/Transfer Center, but also staff from EOPS, Financial Aid, the Health Center, and the Academic Skills Center.

## **Partnerships with External Agencies**

*City College of San Francisco, Santa Ana College, and Santa Rosa Junior College*

A number of the interviewed colleges reported close collaboration with external partners, including both community-based organizations and county agencies to secure funding, referrals, and program support. Three colleges offer prime examples of this approach.

**City College of San Francisco (CCSF)** has pursued partnerships with both private agencies and county service providers to enhance its emancipated foster youth program. In 2007, the college secured funding from the Walter S. Johnson Foundation to support a Guardian Scholars program for emancipated foster youth over three years. With approximately \$100,000 awarded annually, these funds support meal and transportation passes and book vouchers for students; administrative staff; transportation to recruitment events; travel to conferences; website and brochure development; and project evaluation. As an institutional match to the project, CCSF designated a project coordinator as well as part-time staff in Financial Aid and EOPS.

Leveraging the support from the Walter S. Johnson Foundation, CCSF has further pursued funding from both the Pottruck Foundation to support an emergency fund for student housing and health care needs, and the San Francisco Foundation, to support a part-time case manager to work exclusively with the college's 150+ former foster youth. In the current climate of budget cuts, these external funds have been particularly important in both sustaining and expanding services for former foster youth at the college. CCSF has also developed strong partnerships with local transitional housing providers and county agencies. In 2007-2008, approximately 36 students in the college's Guardian Scholars program resided in transitional housing in the Bay Area.

In addition to working directly with Transitional Housing Placement Plus (THP-Plus) providers, CCSF has strongly advocated for those housing providers to recognize and support college attendance. Local THP-Plus provider Larkin Street Youth Services, in response, has proposed a "college track" pathway in their contract with the San Francisco Human Services Agency, the THP-Plus funder. With this effort, Larkin Street Youth Services residents who participate in the college track would be required to work 10 fewer hours per week than is typically mandated in order to give them time to attend school. Furthermore, the required financial contribution of transitional housing residents (refunded upon exit to support the move into permanent housing) will be calculated based on the financial aid students receive each semester from their respective colleges. CCSF's role in this proposed college track program would be to provide academic progress and financial aid eligibility data to Larkin Street Youth Services. This information would enable the transitional housing provider to calculate the students' contribution to the cost of their housing and confirm their academic progress. If successful, this approach could be used

as a standard for the other THP-Plus housing providers funded by San Francisco's Human Services Agency.

**Santa Ana College** has also developed strong community partnerships to support their program. Santa Ana works with the Orangewood Children's Foundation to identify former foster youth and refer them to the college. This now formalized relationship began serendipitously through an outreach person not officially associated with the college's services for former foster youth. The staff person noticed a group of friends during one of her outreach presentations and realized that they were all foster youth. Since the Foster Youth Liaison actively encourages current students who were foster youth to recommend the college to their friends, the number of students coming from Orangewood has rapidly increased. Once the informal connection was established, the Liaison worked with Orangewood to adjust the requirements for its transitional living program, which previously required residents to work 40 hours per week. By collaborating with the Orangewood Children's Foundation staff, the Liaison was able to develop a new understanding that allows youth to continue receiving Orangewood services, but reduces their work requirements and enables them to enroll in college with enough units to be eligible for EOPS support.

Santa Ana also recently developed a "Task Force," which includes various members of its "team" (described in an earlier section of the report) as well as representatives from local high schools and Orangewood. The Task Force meets monthly during the school year to develop strategies to best serve former foster youth. Santa Ana has tried mailers and other means of reaching students, but ultimately found in-person outreach, in addition to referrals by youth, to be most effective. Santa Ana also works with Nova Academy, a high school catering to foster students. Moreover, the Liaison attends resource fairs hosted by the county because "We just want them to know we're here."

The program at **Santa Rosa Junior College (SRJC)** also relies on community connections and partnerships to serve both current and former foster youth at the college. Collaboration with the county Department of Social Services has been particularly crucial in identifying and recruiting foster youth to ILP courses. SRJC provides the county with letters addressed to foster youth and schedules of classes. These letters and schedules are then mailed to group homes, drug programs, transitional housing programs, and anywhere else current or former foster youth might be. Students are also referred directly by the county social workers to SRJC's program and some group homes take the initiative to bring foster youth who have not been pre-identified by the county directly to SRJC's program.

SRJC also has a relationship with a local bank that has provided tuition waivers to more than 100,000 SRJC students. Exchange Bank further sponsors an event, "Independent City," for ILP students. At this event, a mock city is set up at the bank's conference center. Booths staffed by SRJC faculty/staff, county social workers, and bank volunteers represent different aspects of independent living. Students must go around to the different booths and complete activities such as picking roommates, setting house rules, opening a bank account, finding an apartment, turning on the utilities at that apartment, and finding a job. Many community-based service providers come to this event and set up these booths. The bank gives \$2,500 worth of gift certificates each year to students who open checking accounts at Independent City and puts \$20 into each student's checking account. A raffle at the end of the day offers prizes to participating students.

Furthermore, SRJC has secured support from local funders for a pilot project that addresses the timing of financial assistance. When students enroll for the first time, their scholarship money is not available until after the semester starts, making it difficult for them to purchase books and supplies at the start of classes. To help these students, SRJC has obtained \$5,000 from the Junior League and another \$5,000 from a private donor to “front” students their scholarship money before the semester starts. With these funds, students can enroll and get book vouchers right away. All the advanced money is later “repaid” when the actual scholarship/aid becomes available.

## **Personal Contact with Students**

*MiraCosta College, West Valley College, Orange Coast College, and Victor Valley College*

At almost all the interviewed colleges, the Foster Youth Liaisons and other staff stressed the need for personal contact with former foster youth students in order to develop trusting relationships and encourage student follow-through. A number of schools have implemented a “case management” approach that involves ongoing contact with students to help them address personal and academic issues, to follow up on referrals, and, at times, to walk students personally to the resources they need. The case management approach taken by four of these colleges are presented here.

**MiraCosta College** engaged an adjunct counselor to conduct comprehensive outreach activities and work with approximately 30 former foster youth. This counselor’s time is shared among several community colleges in the area. At MiraCosta, funds from the Board Financial Assistance Program (BFAP, designated for Financial Aid programs) are used to support 40-50 hours a month of the counselor’s time. As a former foster youth himself, the counselor is well positioned to make strong personal connections with youth and to fully understand the challenges they face. Moreover, he is an active participant in regional activities regarding foster youth and education.

One of the counselor’s main responsibilities is outreach to local high schools. In particular, he reaches out to San Pasqual Academy, which provides a dorm-like setting where foster youth can live while attending high school. After high school, the youth are able to move to other transitional housing in the area for one year while attending college. The counselor works with students at the Academy to recruit them to MiraCosta and other regional community colleges. He helps them complete paperwork and develop educational plans. Once the former foster youth begin attending MiraCosta, the counselor continues to work with them, providing academic, personal, and life skills counseling. This continuity plays a key role in the students’ trust in the counselor to assist them with their needs.

**West Valley College** also emphasizes a personal connection in their efforts to assist students in accessing services. Although the financial aid counselor is the college’s designated Foster Youth Liaison, it is an EOPS counselor who works most closely with these students throughout each semester. This EOPS counselor, who conducts general outreach as well as EOPS recruitment activities, believes strongly that former foster youth need to connect with an individual they can trust. The counselor personally walks students to resource and service providers and notes the importance of going “above and beyond” for this particular population: “I have the time to do it, and even if I don’t, I just take the time.” This EOPS counselor also checks in regularly with students about their academic progress; helps them get to know their instructors; and provides personal counseling and tutoring. She meets with some students every two weeks to ensure that

they are on track to success.

West Valley, when appropriate, also uses the skills and knowledge of employees who are foster parents or former foster youth to help establish trusting relationships with students. These employees are also helpful in building better understanding among other staff members serving former foster youth. Their personal stories help raise visibility within the college of the challenges former foster youth face, without putting the youth themselves "on the spot."

At **Orange Coast College**, former foster youth also receive a high level of personalized services and attention. The Orange Coast Guardian Scholars program enrolls 15 to 20 students each year. Students must complete an application as well as provide recommendations, an essay, and transcripts in order to become part of the Guardian Scholars program.

The Orange Coast College Foundation operates the program, but the Foster Youth Liaison is situated in the Financial Aid Office. The Liaison works with the Foundation to help former foster youth access financial resources. Specifically, Foundation staff members work with Guardian Scholars students to ensure they apply for the financial aid to which they are entitled. The staff also strongly encourages these students to apply for EOPS where they can receive mentoring and tutoring services. The staff also helps students make appointments with other college service providers and personally walks the students to departments or offices on campus where resources are available, such as the Student Success Center. Foundation staff members at times confer with individual students' instructors to be updated on how a struggling student is doing in a particular class. The staff also follows up with students to ensure they kept their scheduled appointments and review their grades at the end of the semester. The Orange Coast Guardian Scholars program generally sees its role as "mothering [students] through the system."

At **Victor Valley College**, arriving former foster youth are directed to the Foster Youth Liaison, who works with them personally to complete financial aid and admissions applications and register for classes. The Liaison then determines if a student qualifies for the services provided by EOPS, DSPS, and/or other college programs. She personally walks each student to each of these offices and introduces them to the designated foster youth contact in each office. The Liaison also ensures that students have the information they need to understand both their rights and the resources available by providing them with *Rights and Resources: A Guidebook for Youth in Foster Care*, a manual produced by the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools.

# Common Challenges in Serving Former Foster Youth

Although the schools interviewed and visited for this report have robust programs serving former foster youth that employ a variety of approaches, these programs also face challenges in helping former foster students succeed. The key obstacle cited is limited financial and other resources.

## **Lack of Financial and Other Resources**

Almost all the interviewed colleges cited the need for more financial resources dedicated to serving emancipated foster youth. A number of schools operate their programs on an entirely volunteer basis, with responsibilities simply added to existing positions. Not only does this limit colleges' ability to provide adequate and appropriate service, but it often leaves programs vulnerable as they are run mainly on the goodwill of particular individuals. Below are examples from some of the colleges on how limited funding impacts these students.

- West Valley College's district has not designated any additional funding for services to former foster youth. While the school would like to better promote the program within the community, without additional funds it cannot expand these efforts.
- At Victor Valley College, the Foster Youth Liaison role was added to the responsibilities of an existing outreach Financial Aid Specialist, with no further funds allocated.
- MiraCosta College's funding for instruction often takes priority over student services, reducing the district's ability to support services for former foster youth.
- Napa Valley College's Financial Aid and EOPS staff members have created a "Guardian Scholars Project" within EOPS that identifies former foster youth and provides them with intensive case management. Unfortunately, this effort is entirely unfunded and relies solely on the dedication and volunteer work of the staff members.
- Santa Ana College receives no additional funding for salaries to offset the work done with foster youth and former foster youth by staff members.
- Santa Rosa Junior College's program is run on a volunteer basis by the head of the Foster Kinship Care and Education Program. All activities for former foster youth are above and beyond this staff member's full-time job.
- At Fullerton College, due to a lack of funding and staffing the program is unable to perform targeted outreach or track students' outcomes at the college.

## **How Would Additional Resources Help Colleges Serve Former Foster Youth?**

Many colleges highlighted the need for additional resources to support dedicated staff time, emphasizing the time-intensive nature of working with the former foster youth population as well as the need for ongoing communication, follow-up, and relationship-building. In addition, colleges stressed the need to increase student awareness of available programs and services; educate staff about the needs of the foster youth population and appropriate ways to assist these students; and track students' progress and outcomes.

Specifically, colleges cited the following needs:

- MiraCosta College needs a designated staff person who focuses exclusively on former foster youth in order to work closely with them on an ongoing basis and track their

progress and outcomes. MiraCosta also said it needs to create a stronger bond with the county housing authority to better assist former foster youth in securing stable housing. Without dedicated staff time this need cannot be met.

- Victor Valley College staff members in a wide range of departments need training to understand the unique backgrounds and experiences of former foster youth. Staff members must be able to understand why these students need extra time and attention and why these students can be more vulnerable to negative interactions with college staff. More dedicated staff time is needed to follow up with students, develop critical trust, and ensure that students are able to access the resources they need. Victor Valley staff members underscore the need for students themselves to be more aware of available services at the college.
- West Valley College needs a full-time staff person to enhance outreach and recruitment efforts. West Valley also sees a need for funding to increase student awareness of programs and resources.
- Santa Rosa Junior College needs additional outreach to children's homes and group homes in the area, as well as expanded ILP classes at its second campus.
- Lassen College needs additional resources to provide a summer "bridge" program that would prepare former foster youth for college success. Lassen also sees a need for distance-learning ILP courses to better serve the foster youth in its extremely large county.
- Santa Ana College needs additional resources to increase awareness among former foster youth about the services available to them to address the discrepancy between the number of identified emancipated foster youth and the number served by the college. Santa Ana also would like to add ancillary activities, perhaps off-campus, to promote a deeper trust of college staff among students as well as broaden their horizons. For example, student clubs were deemed too structured and required too much commitment (e.g., for officers and weekly meetings); but an annual retreat would not present the same challenges.
- Cuyamaca College calls for additional resources to support staff time to reach out to students individually and encourage them to make use of available services.
- Riverside College needs resources to track foster youth's success and outcomes at the college.
- Fullerton College needs funding to help address the discrepancy between the number of former foster youth identified and those being served at the school, and to create an individualized program at the college for these students.

# Key Findings

## **The Need for Increased Resources**

Many colleges are trying to address with existing resources the needs of this special population, stretching staff thin and limiting the services that can be provided. Often, the designated Foster Youth Liaison is a Financial Aid representative who receives no additional pay or release time for activities related to emancipated foster youth, which leads to an increase in responsibilities without a corresponding increase in the time available to address those responsibilities.

However, since the work with these students tends to be time-intensive and often requires ongoing follow-up with students, the Liaisons' ability to serve these students is severely limited by the lack of time and resources. Unfortunately, this type of arrangement is commonly found at community colleges throughout the state,

Limited funds for staff time and other resources also restrict colleges' capacity to engage in outreach and identification activities that could engage more former foster youth in higher education. Many former foster youth, especially those who are now too old to qualify for resources such as the Chafee grant, said they wished they had known about the services available to them earlier. Early outreach, especially when youth are most accessible (while they are still in foster care), is a critical part of successful intervention. Without resources to target both current and former foster youth more comprehensively, many emancipated youth will not receive the services and assistance they need to both enroll and succeed in community college.

## **Assistance with Financial Aid and Housing**

The CCCCO staff survey, the student survey, and interviews with college staff statewide all indicate that the most critical needs of former foster youth revolve around housing and securing enough money to cover their costs while attending college. The data in this report show that the vast majority of former foster youth work at least 20 hours per week to maintain minimal financial stability; many work far more hours in addition to attending school full-time. This struggle for financial security puts a substantial strain on students. In addition, many colleges cited securing housing as one of the most challenging elements of former foster youths' lives.

Many of the schools surveyed and interviewed were well versed in assisting former foster youth with their financial need, particularly because many programs were located in the Financial Aid Office. Individuals staffing these programs typically appear to be extremely knowledgeable about the financial resources available to emancipated foster youth. Few colleges, however, had successful strategies to address students' housing needs, due mostly to lack of time/resources, limited relationships with housing providers, or other issues.

## **The Need to Build a Broad Network of Support within the College**

Many of the colleges' programs are dependent upon the commitment and efforts of the individual Foster Youth Liaison or a limited number of key staff members. These individuals often donate their time, above and beyond their job requirements, because of their own personal passion for helping former foster youth. While many programs are being run successfully because of the dedication of these individuals, any change in one or more key positions is likely to lead to instability in the services available to these students. One example of how this circumstance may already be occurring can be seen in the survey respondents who were

unfamiliar with key resources such as the *Foster Youth Success Initiative Manual: A Guide for Financial Aid Administrators*. This lack of familiarity may be a result of turnover in the Foster Youth Liaison position.

### **Using a Case Management Approach**

Various schools are using a case management approach to great effect. Faculty and staff members are developing intimate, ongoing relationships with students and supporting them as they seek access to services and resources. The data in this report indicate that former foster youth need intensive, long-term assistance, and benefit from a case management approach. However, much of the assistance provided by Foster Youth Liaisons relates to applying for financial aid and making referrals. Students' needs extend far beyond simply applying for financial aid; students need help in securing housing, finding transportation to and from classes, managing their course load with work responsibilities, and much more. In many cases, students are being personally walked to various departments such as Financial Aid, EOPS, or counseling, but ongoing follow-up is needed to ensure that students are indeed accessing these resources.

The data also indicate that building trust with former foster youth is key to developing successful relationships between college staff and students. Students who have a lifetime of experience in "the system" must be approached in a sensitive manner and can benefit from long-term relationships with caring individuals at the college.

### **The Need for Data Collection and Program Evaluation**

None of the colleges interviewed indicated that they tracked the progress of this student population as a whole or had any measures for evaluating the success of their interventions. The limited tracking that is occurring is labor-intensive and not necessarily systematic. Thus, colleges have no way of knowing how well students are succeeding in their academics, personal life, or careers. Without this knowledge, colleges can neither evaluate the success of their programs nor identify where improvements are needed.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn from the key findings. The vast majority of programs surveyed and studied face a critical shortage of resources, therefore, the implementation of these recommendations will likely require a public/private partnership that combines resources from community colleges, college districts, county agencies, state funding sources, and private funders/foundations. More about this public/private partnership is discussed in the recommendations below.

### Resource Development

Programs that are running on existing resources clearly face a number of vulnerabilities: the programs are dependent on the goodwill and/or volunteer time of a handful of individuals; former foster youth cannot receive the time-intensive, case management-type of care they need; and faculty and staff members are stretched to their limits trying to do more than one job. **Thus, it is strongly recommended that a partnership between public and private agencies, organizations, and funders be developed in order to increase the available resources for these programs.** Increased resources will enable colleges to offer students access to dedicated, well-informed staff members who have the time to provide a wide range of much-needed services. Partnerships also will create additional opportunities for sharing information, best practices, and strategies for support services and resource development.

These public/private partnerships may include one or more of the following groups:

- The top administration at an individual college;
- Leadership at the community college district level;
- The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office;
- California legislators;
- County agencies, such as the Department of Social Services
- Local businesses seeking to invest in their community;
- Individual donors, such as alumni or area philanthropists; and
- Local, state, or national private foundations interested in areas such as current or former foster youth, at-risk youth in general, underserved/underrepresented populations, or basic skills (developmental) education.

**It is particularly recommended that colleges pursue partnerships with county agencies that have specifically allocated funds for foster youth.** For example, a partnership with the county Department of Social Services is essential in helping students access available transitional housing. **It is also recommended that colleges pursue additional partnerships with county services to both enhance their existing program and extend outreach efforts to those youth still in foster care.** While it can be difficult to locate and identify emancipated foster youth, those still in the foster care system are much more easily reached and encouraged to participate in college-related activities. Specifically, a partnership with the local ILP offers colleges an excellent opportunity to reach out to foster youth before they emancipate, laying the foundation for youth to transition into higher education. Colleges working with ILP can bring current foster youth to the college campus for tours and events, and schools seeking a greater partnership can

explore offering ILP classes on campus. These classes, especially if they offer students college credit, could create a pathway to higher education by engaging students at an early age.

### **Data Collection and Program Evaluation**

**It is strongly recommended that a data collection system is implemented statewide in order to track student progress and success.** It is impossible to assess program achievements without knowing how well the target students are performing academically; how successfully they are accessing and benefiting from resources available; and how the academic and personal success of students receiving intervention/support compares with that of students who are not. In turn, without an evaluation process, colleges are limited in their ability to improve services. It is also critical that colleges across the state are able to collect and share these data broadly and systematically.

Preliminary efforts are already underway to link two statewide databases. The first is a database developed by the California Partnership for Achieving Student Success (Cal-PASS). This initiative collects, analyzes, and shares student data in the K-16 educational system. The vast majority of the California community colleges are now participating in Cal-PASS, with the remaining few soon to join due to changes in Perkins requirements. The second data collection system is the Child Welfare Services Case Management System, California's database application for all child welfare records. Linking these two statewide databases would allow colleges and other stakeholders to examine the educational outcomes of former foster youth in community colleges. **It is further recommended that the creation of this data-sharing system continue to be pursued and examined for any opportunities to integrate data that track personal as well as academic outcomes.**

### **Assisting Youth with Financial Aid and Housing**

To help emancipated foster youth meet their basic needs while also laying a foundation for their academic success, community colleges must continue to focus on providing adequate financial resources by taking additional steps to improve financial assistance and further address students' housing and other basic needs. **It is strongly recommended that colleges and districts seek financial resources from a wide range of sources, including Chafee grants, federal and state financial aid, work-study funding, existing college support programs (such as EOPS), and scholarship opportunities in order to improve the financial assistance available for former foster youth.** Staff serving former foster youth should be well versed in the eligibility requirements for each type of financial assistance and able to take a hands-on approach in assisting students to access those funds. Staff should be encouraged to access technical assistance resources, such as the FYSI Manual, and regional meetings convened by the CCCCCO Foster Youth Success Initiative, to ensure they are knowledgeable about these and other issues.

Besides helping students with direct financial assistance, **it is further recommended that colleges focus on collaborating with their county Department of Social Services to develop partnerships with transitional housing providers in their area.** Colleges can seek to secure dedicated slots in transitional housing for their students, as well as work with housing providers to reduce work requirements for former foster youth attending college. While the development of the appropriate relationships may be time-consuming and require the attention of a dedicated staff person, the ability to connect students to housing resources will play a critical role in enhancing their ability to succeed in their educational pursuits.

## Building a Broad Network of Support within the College

**It is recommended that Foster Youth Liaisons and other staff members serving emancipated foster youth work with all departments/offices to build a “team” approach that will strengthen support and reduce dependency on a single individual.** Liaisons and related staff members can develop professional development activities for staff in departments such as EOPS, Counseling, Financial Aid, and Admissions and Records. These professional development activities should focus on how to identify former foster youth; determine eligibility for services and resources; connect students to resources in their area; and understand these students’ perspectives/experiences and respond appropriately.

Professional development activities also can be used to create or strengthen partnerships among the departments and offices that most frequently serve former foster youth. **It is recommended that professional development activities and inter-departmental partnerships focus particularly on Financial Aid, EOPS, and Counseling.** Increased interaction among these entities, comprising efforts to educate staff about the unique needs of former foster youth and strategies for meeting those needs, will strongly impact the success of these students.

Some of the successful professional development approaches identified by some of the interviewed colleges included utilizing current administrator/manager meetings to educate key personnel about former foster youth and individual consultations with identified staff members in a range of departments/offices to discuss how to appropriately serve emancipated foster youth.

## Implementing a Case Management Approach

Data from this research clearly demonstrate the depth of the challenges faced by former foster youth, including extremely limited financial resources, difficulty in securing housing, demanding work/school schedules, difficulty in developing trusting relationships with adults, limited academic skills, and many more. **To address these needs, it is recommended that schools pursue a case management model in serving former foster youth.**

Since a large number of former foster youth are identified via the FAFSA and are in dire need of financial assistance, Financial Aid might appear to be a logical location for these programs, however, it is not clear, that Financial Aid offices are equipped to provide the depth of services required for this population. In contrast, EOPS exclusively serves at-risk students, who share many challenges similar to those of emancipated foster youth. The intensive services provided by EOPS, as well as the resources given to students, such as book vouchers and transportation passes, make it a well-suited home for former foster youth programs. With the identification and education of dedicated staff, along with a close partnership with Financial Aid, EOPS can best approximate the ideal case management approach. Therefore, to successfully implement this case management approach, **it is further recommended that programs for former foster youth be housed in EOPS rather than Financial Aid wherever possible.** Many former foster youth are already enrolled in EOPS, which would allow colleges to relocate services without overwhelming EOPS with a substantial number of new students.

Finally, as noted in the key findings, it is critical that college staff members are able to build trust with former foster youth, many of whom have a history of being let down by the adults in their lives. This trust between student and staff member is best built in the context of an ongoing, consistent relationship that is more easily developed within the case management model.

## Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

**Board Financial Assistance Program (BFAP):** Funding redirected from within the California Community College system budget and given to college districts for the specific intent of expanding their local financial aid outreach and administrative capacity.

**Chafee Grant:** Funding of up to \$5,000 per student per year for former foster youth enrolled in college. Funds are only available to youth up to age 22.

**Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS):** A community college program funded by the State of California that provides support services, specialized instruction, and educational accommodations to students with disabilities.

**Emancipated/Former Foster Youth:** Youth whose dependency status is relinquished by the state at age 18 when they age out of the foster care system and become legally independent.

**Extended Opportunities Programs and Services (EOPS):** A community college program funded by the State of California that offers support services to low-income and educationally disadvantaged students. Most students must be enrolled full time (12 units) to be eligible for EOPS. Students enrolled in the program receive counseling services, financial support, book vouchers, instructional support services, transfer assistance, and more.

**Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA):** An application that all students seeking federal financial assistance must complete. By completing the FAFSA, eligible students are able to access funds such as Pell Grants, Federal Work-Study, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, and more.

**Foster and Kinship Care Education (FKCE):** A community college program funded by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office that provides quality education and support opportunities to caregivers of youth in out-of-home care.

**Foster Youth Success Initiative (FYSI):** An initiative within the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office to create an outreach and retention program throughout the state to improve the educational success of current and former foster youth.

**Independent Living Program (ILP) and Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP):** Federally funded, county-run programs that help eligible foster youth between the ages of 14 and 21 prepare for the transition to independence. Services to youth through ILP typically include independent life skills classes; education and career planning; and assistance in applying for financial aid, securing employment, and/or finding an apartment.

**Student Support Partnership Integrating Resources and Education (SSPIRE):** An initiative funded by the James Irvine Foundation to improve the persistence, retention, and completion rates of low-income and academically underprepared students between the ages of 16 and 24.

**Title V:** A program funded by the U.S. Department of Education that provides funding to institutions of higher education to improve academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal capabilities with a focus on Latino and low-income students.

**TRIO:** A group of federal programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education. Six outreach programs are designed to assist low-income students, first-generation college students, and students with disabilities in moving up the educational ladder from middle school through higher education.

## Appendix B: Methodology

Below is a detailed description of the methodology used in this report.

### Student Survey

**Survey Subjects.** The survey was designed for current community college students who are former foster youth. These youth were contacted through their college's Foster Youth Liaison, who themselves had been contacted by the State Chancellor's Office using the email listserv previously described. It is impossible to know how many youth received the email solicitation; however 74 responded, representing 38 individual colleges.

**Survey Instrument.** To develop a unique survey instrument, the researchers first reviewed results from a recent foster youth survey completed in 2007 by Tracy L. Fried & Associates. This survey of foster youth and former foster youth provided some basic information on which this subsequent project could build.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the researchers thoroughly reviewed the FYSI Manual to cull important topics and issues concerning students.

**Survey Administration.** The survey was administered via the Web in an online format where respondents were able to both select from multiple-choice options as well as enter free-form text responses. To enlist participation, an email was sent to the Foster Youth Success Initiative Liaison Listserv outlining the survey's purpose and requesting that recipients forward the message to students with whom they were in contact. To encourage participation, two prizes (an iPod and a PC Laptop computer) were awarded to randomly selected respondents.

**Survey Analysis.** While most of the analyses were limited to simple descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies and means), the open-ended comments made in the survey were analyzed in depth. Upon reviewing the comments, common themes were identified and responses categorized accordingly. The researchers then reviewed the results from this survey to identify key findings for inclusion in the report.

### CCCCO College Staff Survey

**Survey Subjects.** As part of the FYSI, an email listserv was created that includes all Foster Youth Liaisons at community colleges. These Foster Youth Liaisons were the targeted population for the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) survey. Out of 147 college staff on the listserv (with some schools represented by more than one individual), 60 responses were received. These 60 responses represented 46 individual colleges.

**Survey Instrument.** The CCCCCO staff designed the survey instrument. Detailed information about the survey design was not made available to the researchers for inclusion in this report.

**Survey Administration.** The survey was administered via the Web in an online format where respondents were able to select from multiple-choice options as well as enter free-form text responses. To enlist participation, an email was sent to the Foster Youth Success Initiative Liaison Listserv outlining the survey's purpose and directing recipients to a link to the website containing the survey.

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<sup>10</sup> Of the Fried respondents, 50% had college experience, and another 25% indicated they intended to enroll in the fall.

**Survey Analysis.** The CCCCO staff made available the results of their survey to the current researchers for analysis. While most of the analyses were limited to simple descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies and means), an in-depth analysis of the open-ended comments made in the CCCCO survey was performed. Upon reviewing the comments, common themes were identified and responses categorized accordingly. The current researchers then reviewed the results to identify key findings for inclusion in this report.

## **College Interviews**

**Interview Subjects.** The interviewed community colleges were chosen based on their responses to the CCCCO survey described above. Respondents who indicated having well-developed programs were chosen for in-depth interviews, with a focus on identifying colleges with diverse approaches to serving current and former foster youth populations. The researchers selected a group of nine schools that would be representative of community colleges in the state. The following factors were considered: geographic range (northern and southern California); service area density/economy (urban, suburban, and rural); college size (small, medium and large); program size (number of current/former foster youth served); and where the program is situated in the college (e.g., in Financial Aid or EOPS). The original nine colleges were:

- City College of San Francisco
- Cuyamaca College
- Lassen Community College
- MiraCosta College
- Napa Valley College
- Riverside Community College
- Santa Rosa Junior College
- Victor Valley College
- West Valley College

After the interviews with these nine colleges, the preliminary results were shared with the Assistant Director of Foster Youth Programs at the California State University Office of the Chancellor, and three additional colleges were added based on their longstanding history of serving former foster youth. The three colleges were Santa Ana College, Fullerton College, and Orange Coast College. Staff members from these three colleges were interviewed using the same instrument, and these results were added to those from the original nine colleges.

**Interview Instruments.** To develop the interview questions, the researchers first studied the results from the CCCCO survey to determine what interview information could build on the data from the survey. While the CCCCO survey gathered good information on the “what” and the “how” of serving former foster youth, the interviews sought to understand the “why” behind the decisions the colleges made in the development of their programs. Another goal of the interviews was to obtain more detailed information about each program: the services provided to students; the relationships between the program and other internal and external entities; the program staff’s assessment of how well the program is serving former foster youth; and what the program needs to provide better service to these students.

**Interview Administration.** The identified Foster Youth Liaison at each selected college was contacted to participate in the interviews; the interviewer then asked the Liaison for referrals to other staff members who worked with the former foster youth population at the college. Those interviewed included staff from Financial Aid, Extended Opportunities Programs and Services (EOPS), Counseling, Admissions and Records, and other college departments/offices. The three researchers served as the interviewers for this project.

Staff members from each college were interviewed by telephone, except the staff at the two colleges that were visited, where the interviews were conducted in-person. Prior to the visits, the researchers scheduled individual and group appointments with the staff members identified by the Foster Youth Liaison. Two researchers visited Napa Valley College and the third researcher visited Victor Valley College.

**Interview Analysis.** Each interviewer documented the results of the interviews, and then one of the researchers synthesized these results to identify key findings. All three researchers then reviewed these findings to determine the data to be included in the report.

## Appendix C: Student Survey

### 1. Are you currently in foster care?

	n	%
No, Emancipated	56	75.7%
No, Other	15	20.3%
Yes	3	4.1%
Total	74	

### 2. Do you have a high school diploma?

	n	%
No, still in high school	2	2.7%
GED	7	9.5%
High school equivalency	2	2.7%
High school diploma	62	83.8%
No diploma	1	1.4%
Total	74	

### 3. At what college are you currently enrolled (or most recently enrolled)?

	n	%
City College of San Francisco	7	9.5%
Los Angeles Harbor College	6	8.1%
Evergreen Valley College	5	6.8%
MiraCosta College	4	5.4%
Reedley College	4	5.4%
San Joaquin Delta College	4	5.4%
Fresno City College	3	4.1%
Reedley College - Madera Center	3	4.1%
Pasadena City College	3	4.1%
San Diego Miramar College	3	4.1%
Oxnard College	2	2.7%
Saddleback College	2	2.7%
Solano College	2	2.7%
Reedley College - Willow International Center	2	2.7%
Other	24	32.4%
Total	74	

#### 4. How many semesters have you enrolled at this college?

	n	%
First semester	19	25.7%
Two semesters	11	14.9%
Three semesters	8	10.8%
Four semesters	9	12.2%
Five or more semesters	25	33.8%
No Response	2	2.7%
Total	74	

#### 5. How many units are you taking?

	n	%
Zero units	4	5.4%
1.0 - 5.5 units	8	10.8%
6.0 - 11.5 units	22	29.7%
12 or more units	39	52.7%
No Response	1	1.4%
Total	74	

#### 6. How many hours a week do you work?

	n	%
None, no job	10	13.5%
Less than 10 hours	4	5.4%
10 - 19 hours	9	12.2%
20 - 29 hours	23	31.1%
30 - 39 hours	12	16.2%
40 hours or more	16	21.6%
Total	74	

#### 7. Please describe your plans for the next one to three years in terms of your educational, career and personal goals?

- Transfer was a goal of 51 of the 74 students (69%)
- Twenty seven students indicated an intent to earn an associate degree (36%)
- Several students expressed a desire to enter into a field to help people, with a few specifically mentioning wanting to work with foster youth
- Popular majors include social work, law enforcement/criminal justice, sociology/psychology, education, and nursing
- About 10 percent indicated their goal was to get a good job
- About 12 percent specifically indicated an intent to go to graduate school
- Many students mentioned the hardships and obstacles they have had to endure and still face today
- A few students mentioned that they want a better life, specifically one better than their parents'
- Several students mentioned how difficult it is to go to school when they have to work 30 or more hours per week
- A few students mentioned how they were underprepared academically and in life in general, which has made it difficult to succeed in college

**8. How likely are you to ask someone at the college for help if you need it?**

	n	%
Very Likely	36	48.6%
Somewhat Likely	12	16.2%
Somewhat Unlikely	6	8.1%
Very Unlikely	9	12.2%
Unsure	7	9.5%
No Response	4	5.4%
Total	74	

**9. Please tell us your experiences with the following services at the college:**

	Used it and it was helpful		Used it, but it was not helpful		Have not used, but would like to		Do not need this service		Don't know what this service is		Total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
a. Chafee grants	47	66.2%	2	2.8%	17	23.9%	0	0.0%	5	7.0%	71
b. Other financial aid	59	81.9%	3	4.2%	6	8.3%	2	2.8%	2	2.8%	72
c. EOPS counseling	39	53.4%	10	13.7%	14	19.2%	6	8.2%	4	5.5%	73
d. Other academic counseling	29	40.3%	12	16.7%	17	23.6%	9	12.5%	5	6.9%	72
e. Employment	29	42.6%	5	7.4%	17	25.0%	12	17.6%	5	7.4%	68
f. Physical and mental health	19	26.4%	1	1.4%	15	20.8%	27	37.5%	10	13.9%	72
g. Student clubs or peer mentoring	18	25.4%	3	4.2%	21	29.6%	20	28.2%	9	12.7%	71
h. Housing or housing referrals	13	18.6%	3	4.3%	24	34.3%	21	30.0%	9	12.9%	70
i. Independent Living Program (ILP)	37	51.4%	4	5.6%	11	15.3%	14	19.4%	6	8.3%	72
j. Tutoring services/Study skills	33	45.8%	4	5.6%	19	26.4%	14	19.4%	2	2.8%	72
k. Child care	11	15.5%	0	0.0%	13	18.3%	41	57.7%	6	8.5%	71
l. Vouchers (for books, food or transportation)	36	51.4%	2	2.9%	22	31.4%	5	7.1%	5	7.1%	70
m. Other	10	45.5%	0	0.0%	5	22.7%	4	18.2%	3	13.6%	22

Other specified:

- Advice from instructors on life
- Employment with the ILP program
- Gas cards for transportation
- IVROP
- Priority registration
- Transitional Housing Program Plus (THP-P)
- TRIO

#### **10. Which services (from Question 9) have been the most helpful and why?**

- The most helpful service was financial aid; 30 of 74 students (41%); with the Chafee grant coming in a close second with 25 students (34%).
- Next most popular services were ILP and EOPS (approximately 16% each).
- Others services mentioned include tutoring, employment (especially on campus), vouchers, priority registration, child care and housing.
- Students citing financial aid indicated what a relief it was not to have to worry about paying rent, bills, books etc. because of the aid.
- These students also mentioned how they cannot really work enough hours to make enough money to support themselves and still attend school.
- Not having to worry about money allows students to focus on performing well in school.
- Students mentioning ILP specifically cited how helpful the life skills classes were in preparing them.

#### **11. What advice do you have for colleges that are trying to reach out to and identify current and emancipated foster youth?**

- The number one suggestion was for the college to simply ask. Specifically, they suggested that there be a question on the admissions application.
- A close second was that there be designated programs/counselors for foster youth to cater to their unique needs.
- Other popular suggestions included:
  - putting posters, signs and flyers around the campus to alert FY to what is available to them;
  - sending letters/emails to foster youth to inform them of the services available to them;
  - more outreach activities for foster youth specifically; and
  - working more with county services to identify FY (e.g., social services).
- Many students emphasized the importance of reaching out to FY before they are emancipated or at least when they first arrive at college.
- A few students suggested that colleges should get feedback directly from FY themselves about what they needed.
- Some students expressed a concern about stigmatizing FY by singling them out.
- They encouraged discretion and emphasized the need to make FY feel comfortable in order to build trust.

#### **12. What can your college do to better serve current and emancipated foster youth?**

- The most popular response was the need to improve awareness among foster youth of what services are available and the need for FY to be identified.
- The second most popular response was that their college was already doing a great job.
- A few students mentioned that they did not find FY help until years later, and how if they had received it earlier they would not still be trying to earn an AA.
- Another popular response was that there should be more events/clubs/a place to bring foster youth together so they can build networks with each other.
- Quite a few students mentioned the need for more financial assistance in the form of scholarships and vouchers.
- Other suggestions included the need for specialized help for FY and help with housing, including college housing for FY.
- Students mentioned the need for counselors to have greater understanding of the experiences of FY and how to help these students effectively.
- A few students felt that the age limits on help for FY should be eliminated, citing the difficulties they had a result of being too old.
- A few students mentioned the need for access to affordable, preferably free, personal counseling.

## Appendix D: CCCCCO College Staff Survey

**Name of the unit the designated FYSI Liaison works in:**

	n	%
Financial Aid	33	72%
EOPS	7	15%
FKCE	1	2%
Student Services	1	2%
Other	4	9%
<b>Total Colleges Responding</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>100%</b>

**How do you currently identify foster youth?**

*(Note, more than one response was allowed\*)*

	n	%
FAFSA question # 53 (and also "financial aid office," "financial aid application")	21	46%
Referral	18	39%
Outreach activities (targeted)	14	30%
Interview/Screening	9	20%
Your college's application	6	13%
Business cards (you identified yourself as a Foster Youth Liaison)	6	13%
County ILSP / ILP / ILP Coordinator and county task force	6	13%
Fliers and/or posters	4	9%
EOPS and/or Bridge Program, Summer Academy	3	7%

*Write-in responses included:*

- High schools
- Networking
- Self identification
- YESS Program
- Website

**Please identify all services that you currently provide to identified foster youth:**

*(Note, more than one response was allowed\*)*

	n	%
Financial Aid Application Assistance, including Chafee	34	74%
Referrals to other student service support programs	23	50%
Referrals to other academic support programs	19	41%
Health Care referral	14	30%
Assistance in locating housing	14	30%
DSS/ILP	13	28%

*Write-in responses included:*

- EOPS
- College and Transition Support Team

\* The multiple-response feature was not working for this question. The write-in responses reflected this and were incorporated as accurately as possible given the survey structure. Most errors will be on the side of over-inclusion. In other words, the percentages above may be slightly generous.

**If you feel FYSI Liaisons should offer other services; other than those listed above; please list them in order of priority in the space provided below.**

Ten respondents (22%) had one or more additions:

- Built-in mentoring program designed to offer field trips activities, etc.
- Closely monitor SAP, inform them of priority registration, job placement, budgeting workshops
- Connect them with housing, Medi-Cal assistance, transportation and mental health services.
- Housing "foster club"
- Life skills and housing resources
- Mentoring, job search, link with ILS/P, transfer assistance
- Needs to be a separate program like Trio or EOPS
- We need to offer a case management approach where we are looking at all of the issues and attempting to make appropriate referrals with follow-up.
- Learn about the Public Social Services such as General Relief and Food Stamp Programs. At a minimum have the applications and address/phone numbers available for the student.
- Link students with other community colleges, CSU and UC support services, and work with referrals from other campuses.

**Please rank how well you feel your college is currently serving youth from foster care.**

	n	%
Excellent	4	9%
Good	9	20%
Average	16	35%
Fair	11	24%
Poor	5	11%
No Response / Blank	1	2%
Total	46	100%

**Our college's current process for identifying and serving youth from foster care is best described as:**

	n	%
Has been initiated but we would appreciate support and assistance in understanding the needs of these youth and in designing a model that serves them well.	21	46%
Has been developed and is effective in identifying and providing assistance to these youth but would benefit from understanding better the needs of these youth and in designing a model that serves them best.	12	26%
We currently have better or best practices for serving the needs of foster youth/former foster youth but want to expand our network of on campus/ off campus resources to best serve them.	7	15%
Does not currently exist and we need to learn as much as we can about support and assistance in understanding the needs of these youth and in designing a model that serves them well.	3	7%
Other / No Response	3	7%
Total	46	100%

*Written Comments include:*

- To do the best job, we need a staff person dedicated to only this program.
- Trouble getting "buy-in" from administration with budget cuts.

**What do you feel should be the highest priority for FYSI Liaisons in providing better service to foster youth?**

*(Note, more than one response was allowed)*

	n	%
Outreach to inform students of all the support services available to them	19	41%
Assist in completing the FAFSA and other financial aid and school applications	16	35%
Guide students to on-campus support services	14	30%
One-on-one counseling	14	30%
Provide Financial Aid awareness	9	20%
Discuss with students how the number of classes/credits affects financial aid	7	15%
Career Guidance and Skill Assessment	4	9%
Link students of off-campus support services	4	9%

**Please select from the list below the TOP 3 outcomes that we should capture to reflect the success of this effort?**

*(Note, more than one response was allowed)*

	n	%
Increase the number of foster youth who complete their education at a community college	38	83%
Increase the number of foster youth enrolled in community college	32	70%
Increase the number of foster youth that transfer to a 4-year institution	26	57%
Increase the number of students who participate in the FYSI program	21	46%
Increase the number of foster youth who self identify on the FAFSA	9	20%

**Do you have a campus club for Foster Youth?**

	n	%
No	23	50%
We would like more information on starting one up	17	37%
Yes	5	11%
No Response / Blank	1	2%
Total	46	100%

**What types of communication do you utilize on your campus to inform FY of available services?**

*(Note, more than one response was allowed)*

	n	%
Financial Aid workshops	21	46%
Mail/post cards	14	30%
Personal phone calls	13	28%
Flyers	11	24%
Staff meetings to arrange outreach	11	24%
Website	9	20%
Internal meetings	5	11%
Posters	5	11%
ILP / ILSP Contacts	4	9%
High school counselors and/or high school outreach	2	4%

*Write-in responses included:*

- Student Orientation
- Student Clubs
- Mentor Program
- EOPS

**Do you have a referral relationship established with the other services on your campus?**

- Most respondents work in either Financial Aid or EOPS (87% combined).
- When the respondents from these offices are added to those who have referral relationships with these offices, it becomes clear that 100% of the colleges include referral relationships with and/or direct services from Financial Aid, and nearly the same can be said of EOPS.
- Referrals relationships with other services\* exist at approximately 40% of the colleges, indicated by comments such as "All of the above," "Most of the above," "Once we are able to identify a Foster Youth we do everything we can to connect students with any service that would be of benefit to them." \*Including CalWorks, Career Guidance, Counseling, DSPS, Transfer Center, and possibly others (such as RISE).
- Relationships with Admissions & Records were also mentioned, but it appears that these relationships may be less frequent than others.

**Do you have relationships with off- campus service providers?**

*(Note, more than one response was allowed)*

	n	%
Independent Living programs	28	61%
Department of Social Services/County Welfare	15	33%
Non-Profits	14	30%
County Office of Education and FYS Coordinators	12	26%
Other colleges	11	24%
Transitional Housing program	9	20%

*Write-in responses included:*

- WIA
- Department of Health.

**Do you have community supporters/sponsors to help cover the costs of other offerings to Foster Youth (social gatherings/pizza night/book fairs, regional meetings, etc.)?**

	n	%
No Response / Blank	20	43%
No / Not at this time	14	30%
Not yet. We have been using the Financial aid outreach funds but will be raising money through our campus club starting this spring.	1	2%
F/A has helped with the cost of a conference and the college's foundation is paying room and board for a youth. Limited to direct services to students from the Lassen College Foundation.	1	2%
This would be a question for our YESS Program Coordinator.	1	2%
We have the YES Center (Youth Empowerment Services) and Career Institute	1	2%
AmeriCorps	1	2%
Yes. County ILSP Exchange Bank -- a major supporter, Junior League of Napa & Sonoma.	1	2%
Yes, NVCSS and ILP	1	2%
VOICES Independent Living Program	1	2%
The committee has submitted an AI proposal for \$5,000 for staff development for this coming year in order to educate the campus community about the needs of this special population.	1	2%
FYSI Campus Liaisons, Pepsi, Starbucks, Chipotle Grill, Citibank, ALL Student Loan, Save Mart, Silicon Valley Children's Fund	1	2%
Child Abuse Prevention Foundation, College foundation, but we could use more.	1	2%
Casey Center Linkage for Education	1	2%
Total	46	100%

**Do you use the FYSI Manual as a resource?**

	n	%
Yes	22	48%
Sometimes	15	33%
No	6	13%
No Response / Blank	3	7%
Total	46	100%

**Describe how you have been able to utilize the Handouts for Youth section of the FYSI Manual.**

	n	%
No response / Blank	24	52%
Haven't done this yet. / Just getting started	5	11%
Don't know what the FYSI Manual is / Not in my binder? / I'm not sure I have seen this manual please send a copy.	3	7%
Not able to	1	2%
For referral services	1	2%
Reference. Copy and hand out.	1	2%
Making copies and distributing them	1	2%
We have used sections to hand out with other materials.	1	2%
Staff training, student information	1	2%
Provided the information included to the students.	1	2%
I've used handouts when doing on/off workshops for foster youth.	1	2%
It gave ideas on how to reach out to them.	1	2%
Used these as examples when planning events with the youth.	1	2%
I have used these to show other departments including marketing what kind of flyers or poster we could come up with.	1	2%
We copy the pages or tweak them. We provide flyers at all our outreach for FA and we send to all agencies that might help.	1	2%
RCC Financial Aid has developed its own brochure for the FYSI.	1	2%
The primary and frequent use on the manual has been to connect Foster Youth to FYSI Liaisons on other campuses -- a major contribution.	1	2%
Total	46	100%

**Do you believe Foster Youth would use a resource manual; if one was provided?**

	n	%
Yes	35	76%
No	9	20%
No Response / Blank	2	4%
Total	46	100%

**Does your college website identify services for Foster Youth?**

	n	%
No	35	76%
Yes	10	22%
No Response / Blank	1	2%
Total	46	100%

**Please provide the web address for your site that is designated to Foster Youth Services.**

	n	%
No Response / Blank	36	78%
We are currently working on adding the services to our website.	3	7%
<a href="http://cms.cerritos.edu/FKCE/Welcome">http://cms.cerritos.edu/FKCE/Welcome</a>	1	2%
<a href="http://www.mendocino.edu/tc/pg/4701/foster_youth_success_initiative.html">http://www.mendocino.edu/tc/pg/4701/foster_youth_success_initiative.html</a>	1	2%
<a href="http://www.piercecollege.edu/community/fkce/index.html">http://www.piercecollege.edu/community/fkce/index.html</a>	1	2%
We have just added the website info. <a href="http://www.cuyamaca.edu/eops">cuyamaca.edu/eops</a>	1	2%
<a href="http://www.academic.rcc.edu/workforce_preparation">www.academic.rcc.edu/workforce preparation</a>	1	2%
<a href="http://www.avc.edu/Financial_Aid_TV">www.avc.edu/Financial Aid TV</a>	1	2%
Your site is frustrating, you can't answer the questions if your dot disappears as soon as you check another even when the question indicates you should	1	2%
Total	46	100%

**What is your most significant accomplishment to date in establishing and implementing a foster youth service model on your campus? -- 80% (37) wrote a comment or response.**

- 10 colleges indicated they were just getting started and have been focused on activities such as building campus awareness and determining their FYSI and other staff to work with foster youth.
  - 10 colleges indicated they have been focused on identifying foster youth and providing on-campus services such as Financial Aid and EOPS.
  - 10 colleges indicated they have been focused on developing linkages with external services.
- A few highlights as well as other selected comments from the remaining seven colleges include:*
- Offering employment
  - Made it possible for a youth to live in the dormitory
  - We have a counter on our web site pages. Since we put up a simple page for Foster Youth we have had more hits to that page than our Spanish language FA page and we have 16% Latino student population.
  - Connecting with them and personally assisting them and connecting them with all the programs we have available on campus
  - I have seen students grow and become more confident in themselves and what they can accomplish; when they first come in, they often lack the confidence and are not able to communicate their needs; they don't trust (at first) that I truly care about them and their success.
  - Inviting students to a foster youth workshop -- lunch provided.
  - Compiling a FY Resource Guide that provides students with specific contacts for resources on campus as well as off campus.
  - Developed a College Transition Support Team, which includes professional community members and ... Faculty and Staff to assist Identified Former FY succeed... Developed the "Graduates of Tomorrow" club on campus; 95% of the participants are former FY students.
  - Invited community partners to our campus, so we can get a better understanding on how to serve Foster Youth at our campus. Each partner gave a brief description of their services and then we gave them a summary on what services we offer at our campus. We are now in the process of creating a plan.
  - The increase in the level of involvement in the campus community experience and the increase in the college going culture of our foster youth. FY on our campus have participated in summer bridge programs that have helped to increase the retention rates of the youth from semester to semester. Most importantly we have been able to establish a successful and effective relationship with our local ILP coordinator and have been able to coordinate book purchasing assistance.

- The convening of campus services -- Financial Aid, EOPS, CalWorks, Admissions & Records, Counseling, Disabilities Resources, Student assessment and GED testing services, Job Link, and campus career center, & County ILSP. Identifying one or more point persons in each area mentioned above, who understands the needs of this population. Referral services to other campuses. We have established a foundation to purchase books & supplies for FY-- bookstore vouchers are provided to youth after they enroll by the financial aid staff; and when the grant/scholarship monies arrive, these vouchers are paid out of those funds. This ensures that students have necessary books and supplies at the beginning of classes, and are not waiting until funds arrive. We received \$5,000 at the beginning of this semester, and expect another \$5,000 donation later this spring, and perhaps more!
- ILP classes are college & high school credited, and on campus. Tours, scavenger hunts, and guest speakers are involved -- providing students with awareness of college resources, encouragement to use these resources, and help students become comfortable on the campus. It is also the forum for students to connect with Job Link, housing options, and other resources.

**What are the greatest obstacles to implementing a successful foster youth service model on your campus?**

*89% (41) wrote a comment or response:*

- 15 colleges spoke primarily about lack of buy-in, administrative support, staffing, and funding for FYSI positions. In a few cases the college respondent indicated a desire for a dedicated position in order to allow for a case-management and/or mentoring approach. Sample comments included:
  - Having a dedicated staff person full-time to stay in constant contact
  - The greatest obstacle will be to make sure that ... the responsibility doesn't fall on only a few departments. We want the whole campus to take ownership of this initiative.
  - All the work I do for the FYSI program is not even a part of my job description.
- 15 colleges spoke about their identifying foster youth, reaching out to and energizing foster youth, and in some cases the difficulty in coordinating with external partners. Sample comments included:
  - Finding all of the students we could serve ... helping those who are not at college embrace the possibility.
  - How to reach out to them without offending them or making them shy away from help.
  - The students ... have been ground up by the system and have a difficult time carrying through.
- 11 colleges spoke primarily about the lack of resources they had to provide to students, including items such as housing and mental health services. Also included here are colleges which spoke about resource needs on a broad level. Sample comments included:
  - The greatest obstacle is, clearly, funding. We could do so much more hands-on mentoring, short courses, on-campus events, and tie-ins with other resources, with more funding. \$15,000 is not enough to meet the needs of this population.
  - The many layers of need, and limited individuals on campus to lend support
  - Tremendous lack of resources coupled with an overwhelming mandate
  - Housing is the most critical need outside the campus.