Starting a Campus Support Program for Foster Youth

**Five ways to build and grow your program:**

**1. Nurture Leadership.** Most successful programs have blossomed under the leadership of one or two individuals. Leaders can emerge from campus or the community, but are usually dynamic individuals with decision-making power and strong connections. Programs have had leadership from administrators and deans, financial aid and student affairs officers, alumni, philanthropic organizations, and community providers.

**2. Deepen Relationships with College Administrators**. It is critical to identify and gain the support and commitment of at least one senior administrator on campus from the get go. In addition, the student affairs department generally oversees the resources that campus support programs access the most, so having their buy-in also extremely important.

**3. Meet and Plan**. Bring together staff from key departments on campus to discuss the unique needs of foster youth at your college and strategize on what can be done to support their educational goals, connect them to services they need, and improve outcomes.

**4. Implement a Proven Model of Success**. There are a number of successful campus support programs across California, providing excellent models for replication. Visit www.cacollegepathways.org to learn more about these programs, program resources and tools, and for program contact information.

**5. Address the Three Most Basic Needs of Foster Youth Scholars First**. In the initial first phase of the program, it is critical to direct resources to where they have the greatest impact. Housing, financial aid, and academic advising are essential components for improving education outcomes for foster youth scholars.

\* Note: The steps are adapted from *Supporting Success: Improving Higher Education Outcomes for Students from Foster Care*, Casey Family Programs.

“Getting buy-in from the college president, vice president or chief financial officer and having the people that oversee housing, financial aid, and student services support your program is critical. They can really direct policy and create campus change.”

**Sonja Lenz-Rashid, Professor and Guardian Scholars Program Research Evaluator, San Francisco State University**

**Promising Strategies**

**1. Create Bridge Programs.** Community college bridge programs allow students to attain vocational certificates that support their career goals, while fulfilling requirements an associate’s degree or transfer to a four-year college. Bridge programs can help keep foster youth scholars engaged and positive about their educational goals.

**2. Engage Faculty with Data.** By offering data for academic research, program staff can engage faculty to champion a campus support program, assist in data collection, and evaluate program outcomes.

**3. Combine Statistics with Stories.** Documenting student outcomes and the results of your program can make a persuasive case for continued and increased investment. Encouraging students to share their stories will provide you with quotes for your website, and for use with media, potential funders, administrators, and policymakers to help garner more support for your program.

**Key Elements for Campus Support Programs**

* Dedicated office space and staff time for youth
* Full financial aid package
* Housing resources
* Academic counseling, support, and tutoring
* Access to health and mental health services
* Student outreach and engagement activities
* Partnerships with campus departments
* Connections to off-campus agencies/providers
* Career counseling and opportunities
* Data collection and evaluation
* Cultivation of program champions
* Plan for program sustainability
* Connecting students to mentors
* Student leadership opportunities