***TURNING DREAMS INTO DEGREES:***

***Supporting Foster Youth through Higher Education Pathways***

**A Facilitator’s Guide**



***Produced by the Foster Youth College Advancement Project***

**Acknowledgments**

An initiative within the L.A. Opportunity Youth Collaborative, the Foster Youth College Advancement Project seeks to increase foster youth postsecondary attainment in L.A. County in order to help youth transition to sustainable careers and achieve self-sufficiency. The project is jointly convened by John Burton Advocates for Youth and UNITE-LA, and brings together key stakeholders and partners from K-12 education, higher education, child welfare, government, and the nonprofit sector to advance this goal.

The project partners recognize the important role that caregivers play in supporting foster youth in their college journeys and designed these training materials to empower caregivers with comprehensive information about the college planning and matriculation processes. We hope that these materials also equip child welfare professionals with a strong foundation in college planning so that they may provide consistent service delivery to caregivers, whether they work across the California Community Colleges Foster Care and Kinship Education Program, the L.A. County Department of Children and Families Kinship Care Services, or within a contracted community-based organization.

For their leadership in designing these training materials, the project partners would like to acknowledge Jessica Petrass of John Burton Advocates for Youth and Juana Hernandez of UNITE-LA. The partners would like to thank the Foster and Kinship Care Education Programs at Citrus College, El Camino College, L.A. Mission College, and Pasadena City College for reviewing and providing feedback on the these materials. We would also like to acknowledge the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation for their generous funding in support of the Foster Youth College Advancement Project.

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**Introduction**

Thank you for your work to empower caregivers with the information they need to support foster youth in their college planning. Together with the accompanying presentation “Turning Dreams into Degrees: Supporting Foster Youth through Higher Education Pathways,” this facilitator’s guide will prepare you and other child welfare professionals to train and advise caregivers as they navigate the college planning process with their youth. It will also provide you with helpful background information, general facilitation tips, and additional resources for further reference.

It is worth noting that the college matriculation process is a complex and multifaceted process. It includes early college and career exploration, college application (a process that necessitates different steps or components depending on the college or university), financial aid application, advisement and course registration, and successful transition to college life. As such, caregivers and foster youth should begin preparing for this process early on. It is not uncommon for foster youth to postpone college planning until they reach the end of their senior year of high school, or even after high school graduation. This type of delayed planning can greatly reduce the likelihood that a foster youth will complete college, as well as limit foster youth’s college enrollment options and financial aid resources.

As such, we recommend engaging caregivers in early and sustained conversations about college planning. This particular training was designed as a comprehensive introduction to college planning and is suitable for caregivers who have middle and high school aged youth. It is also tailored for our California context, taking into account our unique systems of higher education, available state financial aid programs, and local campus programs and services.

The presentation is divided into the following sections:

* Section I: Why College?
* Section II: How Can You Make a Difference?
* Section III: Choosing a College Pathway
* Section IV: Applying to College
* Section V: Paying for College
* Section VI: After the FAFSA
* Section VII: Succeeding in College

Each section of this guide will summarize the key learning objectives for each section, provide additional context, and clarify complex information with illustrative examples. Some sections also include an “Interaction Opportunity,” or ideas for audience engagement.

The guide concludes with additional resources and a list of suggested readings for those looking to further deepen their knowledge on this topic.

**General Facilitation Tips**

These materials are intended for public use, to be distributed widely and at no cost, providing that proper citation is noted.

The target audience for this presentation are foster parents and caregivers with youth ages 13 or older in their care, including youth who are currently enrolled in middle or high school.

The training presentation was intended to be delivered over a 2-hour timeframe to allow for sufficient time to review the technical information contained in each section. We have formatted the presentation into sections to more easily enable facilitators to modify the presentation length when needed.

Each slide also contains notes that further explain the slide content. As the text on a particular slide may have been greatly reduced to make it more visually accessible, the notes section will provide key information for the facilitator. There are a large volume of slides that contain dense policy and protocol guidance. As such, facilitators may wish to print a copy of the slide notes to review in advance and to have on hand during a presentation.

This guide is intended to complement, rather than duplicate, the slide notes. The guide thus provides an overview of each section, focusing more on setting the context, connecting across sections, and highlighting learning outcomes than on summarizing content slide by slide. It is strongly recommended that facilitators take the time to review this guide in advance.

To ensure a successful presentation, it is also recommended that facilitators have the following resources available:

* Laptop or desktop computer
* LCD projection screen
* PowerPoint presentation
* Printed slide notes and Facilitator’s Guide
* Printed copies of the PowerPoint slides (for audience)
* Post-It notes and pens (for suggested Interaction Opportunity activities)
* Copies of the [***Foster Youth Educational Planning Guide***](http://www.cacollegepathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Ed-Planning-Guide-Final.pdf). Printed copies can be ordered by sending your request to [jessica@jbaforyouth.org](mailto:jessica@jbaforyouth.org). Availability is limited and not all requests may be able to be filled.
* Internet access (if needed for Interaction Opportunity activities)

**Sample Session Format**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Presentation Section** | **Slides #s** | **Time Length** |
| Welcome & Introduction | 1 - 2 | 5 minutes |
| Section I: Why College? | 3 - 9 | 10 minutes |
| Section II: How Can You Make a Difference? | 10 - 15 | 20 minutes |
| Section III: Choosing a College Pathway | 16 - 20 | 10 minutes |
| Section IV: Applying to College | 21 - 31 | 15 minutes |
| Section V: Paying for College | 32 - 48 | 20 minutes |
| Section VI: After the FAFSA | 49 - 57 | 15 minutes |
| Section VII: Succeeding in College | 58 - 65 | 15 minutes |
| Thank you and Q&A | 66 - 67 | 10 minutes |

**Section I: Why College?**

Caregivers assume responsibility for many aspects of a youth’s life, including responsibility for physical safety and holistic health and wellbeing. Compared to many of the day to day responsibilities that caregivers must juggle, college can seem like a remote concern that lacks the urgency of other matters. For caregivers with middle school youth, the prospect of college can also seem so far in the future that it can take secondary importance to more immediate matters. Importantly, a caregiver’s own familiarity with and firsthand experience in higher education also shapes their perceptions of college planning and their level of comfort with this topic. For example, a caregiver who has no previous experience with college may view college as the great unknown, while a caregiver who went to college many years ago may find that today’s college landscape is very different from what they experienced as a student.

Section I aims to orient all caregivers, irrespective of previous college exposure, to the urgency of college. It connects postsecondary education attainment to the greater goal of self-sufficiency for foster youth by laying out the economic returns to a college degree. Slide 4 highlights the higher rates of employment and higher weekly earnings that college graduates enjoy, relative to adults who only have a high school diploma. Section I then builds off of this economic argument to demonstrate the many other ways that earning a college degree or credential can benefit individuals. There is good reason to believe that foster youth are hearing the message that a college education pays; as shown in Slide 6, 91% of foster youth in California say they want to go to college1. However, the reality is that only 43% of youth end up enrolling in college2 and just 8% succeed in completing a 2- or 4-year degree by the age of 263.

Section I goes on to lay out some of the reasons why this pronounced gap exists between foster youth’s self-expressed college aspirations and their actual college attainment rates. Slides 7-9 point to the many barriers that impede foster youth in achieving their college dreams; from starting out with lower levels of academic preparation (which is attributable to both disruptions in placement and to school instability), to having less access to financial resources, to having less information or misinformation about college and college matriculation processes. These realities are why it is so important that caregivers be thoughtful and proactive in how they approach supporting foster youth with college planning.

**Learning Objectives**:

* Understand the economic returns to a college education, including increases in employment rates and in earnings, and how this connects to the goal of self-sufficiency;
* Link college to other non-monetary benefits, including better health outcomes and increased civic participation, that relate to foster youth’s holistic well-being;
* Acknowledge the gap that exists nationally between foster youth’s college aspirations and their current rates of college attainment; and
* Identify key barriers that impede foster youth’s progress to a college degree, including lower rates of academic preparation, lack of financial resources, and misinformation.

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1 Courtney, M., et al (2016).

2 California College Pathways (2013).

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**Section II: How Can You Make a Difference?**

While numerous barriers keep foster youth from completing college, the research shows that a consistent, caring adult can make all the difference. Section II aims to empower caregivers to see themselves in that critical role and to provide tips on how they can build a college-going culture at home. Even if caregivers have not attended college themselves, they have all of the necessary skills to support foster youth in attaining their educational goals. Importantly, caregivers can motivate and encourage youth to set high expectations of themselves and to see themselves as future college students. Slides 14 and 15 provide some suggestions for how to send affirming and encouraging messages to foster youth about college goal setting.

**Interaction Opportunity**:

Our perceptions of college are informed by the many external messages that we receive. We can receive these messages from family and friends, teachers and counselors, peers, the media, and other sources. Slide 13 provides an opportunity to facilitate interaction amongst audience members. Depending on the size of the group and the amount of time available, facilitators might consider the following interactive activities:

* ***Pair and Share***: Ask caregivers to introduce themselves to one person seated next to them. As a pair, caregivers will ask each other 1 or more questions listed on the slide. Once the facilitator calls participants back into one large group, volunteers will share back what responses their partner provided. Facilitator will then guide the discussion to identify common themes and experiences.
* ***Post-It Collage***: Before the presentation, facilitator can place 1-3 Post-It notes at each seat. At Slide 13, the facilitator can ask audience members to jot down a message that they received about college on each Post-It. Caregivers can then stick their notes up on a wall, clustering common messages together. The facilitator will then read aloud the messages that were most common and guide group discussion.
* ***Poll the Audience***: Before the presentation, facilitator can place a red note card and a green note card at every seat. At Slide 13, the facilitator can read aloud several statements and ask caregivers to hold up a green card if they agree with the statement (or if the statement applies to them) or to hold up a red card if they disagree with the statement (or if the statement does not apply to them). For example, the facilitator might read aloud the statement “Growing up, I knew many people who went to college and who encouraged me to go to college” or “In high school, my teachers and counselors believed in my ability, encouraging me to dream big and pursue college.” Facilitator can then call on 1-2 volunteers to elaborate on why they agreed/disagreed with the statement and facilitate a group discussion.

**Learning Objectives**:

* Understand that the educational and life trajectories of foster youth can be positively shaped by their relationship with a consistent and caring adult; and
* Learn why high expectations matter and how to create a college-going culture in the home through everyday actions and interactions with foster youth.

**Section III: Choosing a College Pathway**

The term “college” can mean a lot of things. While the common college experience portrayed in the media is that of a first-time college freshmen enrolling directly at a four-year university, there are in fact many more paths available. Foster youth should be empowered with information about these various paths so that they can make the choice that is best for them at this point in time. For some foster youth, that will mean enrolling directly at a four-year university while others will choose to enroll in a community college in order to pursue a certificate or associate degree. Some foster youth may decide to start at a community college with the goal of transferring to a four-year university while others may set a goal to complete a job training certificate or career and technical education program.

Regardless of what your student’s ultimate goal is and where they want to begin their college journey, one thing is consistent: they will be best set up for success if they get started right away. Students who enroll in college directly after high school are 40% more likely to persist in college than are students who take a year or more off[[1]](#footnote-1). As such, it is important for caregivers to understand the different options available and to help students transition directly into the program that is the best fit for them.

While the accompanying presentation does not try to imply that any one path is inherently better than another, it does hope to convey that there are reasons to be cautious when selecting a proprietary or for-profit institution. In recent years, there have been several high-profile cases of proprietary and for-profit institutions offering credentials that do not lead to favorable employment outcomes, wage gains, or expanded career opportunities. This is of particular concern when students are expending their financial aid funds and taking out student loans to cover high tuition costs. As such, government agencies have moved to more closely monitor these institutions. For example, the California Student Aid Commission currently restricts use of state Cal Grant dollars at for-profit institutions that do not demonstrate favorable student outcomes. Foster youth can confirm that an institution is approved by the Student Aid Commission as one indicator of an institution’s quality before they decide to enroll.

Lastly, Section III recommends some websites that caregivers can use to guide foster youth in exploring career paths. Some of these tools enable foster youth to take self-assessments to determine what types of careers align with their interests and identified strengths. Other tools enable youth to see what types of jobs are hiring, and what median earnings are in a given profession. These tools can help caregivers learn about professions and fields that are beyond their own frames of reference so as to better support foster youth in their career exploration.

**Learning Objectives**:

* Understand the postsecondary education options available, including the California Community Colleges, the California State University, the University of California, non-profit private institutions, out-of-state institutions, and proprietary institutions;
* Discern between multiple options available at the community college level, including certificates, associate degrees, and transfer curricula; and
* Learn to navigate options for career and technical education and what red flags to watch for when selecting a proprietary or for-profit institution.

**Section IV: Applying to College**

Just as there are numerous college options available, there are different considerations that foster youth should be aware of when it comes to the college application process. Different types of higher education institutions have different eligibility requirements, application components, and application timelines. Section IV highlights key aspects of the application and enrollment processes for the California Community Colleges and for the California State University and the University of California systems. This section also highlights benefits that these institutions provide to foster youth at the time of application and enrollment.

**California Community Colleges**

In recent years, the California state legislature moved to create new enrollment processes that better set up community college students for success. Under these changes, students who apply to any California Community College campus can complete three steps to receive priority registration. Many community colleges in Los Angeles County have high enrollments and limited course offerings so priority registration can be key for students to gain access to the courses they need for graduation or transfer. While state law stipulates that all foster youth under the age of 26 who were in care on or after their 16th birthday are eligible to receive priority registration, entering students can easily miss out on this benefit because of its timing.

It is a common misconception that students can arrive at a community college campus the day before classes begin to complete the application and course registration process. Because of the competition for limited course offerings, many class seats become filled well before the start of the term. Entering students are thus competing against continuing students who typically select their courses for a given term in the preceding term. For example, continuing students determine their schedules and enroll in Fall 2017 classes during the Spring 2017 term. It is thus essential that graduating high school seniors plan ahead.

Caregivers should be prepared to assist youth with the steps required for community college application and registration, which are outlined on Slides 22-25. Facilitators should emphasize that there is no fee to apply for community college and foster youth have the opportunity to apply for a college’s Extended Opportunity Programs & Services (EOPS) simultaneously. (Section VII: Succeeding in College provides more information on the benefits of participating in EOPS). If foster youth check the box on the CCCApply.org online application indicating their foster care status colleges might also follow up with them about additional financial resources and student support services for which they may qualify.

After applying, foster youth will receive information about completing three steps to receive priority registration: orientation, assessment, and education planning. Caregivers should pay particular attention to campus’ assessment policies, as these can be confusing for many students. Most community colleges use an exam like Accuplacer or CCCAssess to determine a student’s readiness for college-level math and English. Students who do not meet established cut-off scores will be required to take one or more remedial courses before they can take college-level math or English.

Sometimes called basic skills or developmental education courses, remedial courses can lead foster youth down a rabbit hole. Many students who begin in remediation never make it to college-level math or English and struggle to get to the end goal of transfer or degree completion (see Slide 26). Students can end up spending valuable time and money—including financial aid dollars—on remedial courses that do not earn them credit toward graduation. There are some community colleges experimenting with innovative remediation models that help students get through remediation more efficiently. These models include accelerated courses that enable students to take multiple levels of remediation simultaneously and co-requisite courses that enable a student to enroll directly in a college-level course while co-enrolling in a supplemental course that provides targeted academic support.

While remediation redesign is promising, many students may be able to bypass remediation altogether by paying attention to the assessment practices in place at a college. Slide 27 offers some tips for how to avoid remediation. For example, some colleges may consider other factors beyond an exam score to determine course placement. Facilitators should stress the importance of knowing a campus’ policies regarding the use of multiple measures like high school course grades or high school GPA. Caregivers can also assist youth in seeking out study guides and practice exams, finding out what cut-score they should aim for, and inquiring about exam retake policies. Youth who place into remediation may choose to delay a remediation course sequence until they can retest as they may place at a higher level.

Many campuses do not have such detailed assessment policy information readily available on their websites so caregivers may need to encourage youth to reach out to campus staff directly via phone or in-person. Youth will also need to meet with an academic advisor or counselor to complete their education plan before they can register. Entering foster youth may be directed to Student Success counselors, but they should also inquire about counseling that is tailored for foster youth and that is often available through programs like EOPS or Guardian Scholars (see Section VII). Facilitators should emphasize the importance of forming an early relationship with a counselor who can guide foster youth in exploring academic programs and clarifying their educational goals, such as whether they wish to transfer onto a baccalaureate program.

**California State University and University of California**

While there are several paths for community college students to transfer to a baccalaureate program at a California State University or University of California campus, students who wish to enroll at a CSU or UC campus directly from high school should begin their college planning much earlier. While CSU and UC campuses will look closely at coursework and academic performance in grades 9 through 12, caregivers should begin conversations with youth about college in the middle school years. Slide 28 summarizes some of the key milestones that caregivers should know.

Foster youth should build strong relationships with their high school teachers and counselors to get support in reaching these milestones, particularly when it comes to ensuring that their coursework aligns with CSU and UC admissions requirements. The CSU and UC systems require that students complete subject area requirements, which are known as the “A-G” requirements. The “A-G” requirements stipulate certain levels and years of study in subject areas like social science, English, math, science, foreign language, visual and performing arts, and approved electives. As these requirements may change slightly from year to year, facilitators should emphasize the importance of building and maintaining a strong relationship with a high school counselor.

Beyond completing a college preparatory curriculum in high school, foster youth must also take the ACT or SAT exam for CSU and UC admissions. Youth can begin preparing in the 10th grade by registering for the PSAT practice exam. Caregivers can find study guides for the PSAT, ACT, and SAT at their local public library, as well as online. Facilitators can also direct caregivers to the [***Foster Youth Educational Planning Guide***](http://www.cacollegepathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Ed-Planning-Guide-Final.pdf), which is referenced on Slide 30 and listed under the “Additional Resources” section of this guide.

Like the community college system, the CSU and UC systems offer several benefits to foster youth which they should know to look for at the time of application. Slide 29 touches on these benefits, including application fee waivers, priority consideration for campus housing, and access to priority registration. Facilitators should again emphasize, however, that these benefits are only available if students self-identify as foster youth.

It is also important to note that private colleges and universities may offer similar benefits, though each institution has discretion in what policies, programs, and services they implement for foster youth. Given the wide variance across private institutions, this presentation focused only on California’s public higher education systems as they have greater consistency.

**Interaction Opportunity**:

The [***Foster Youth Educational Planning Guide***](http://www.cacollegepathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Ed-Planning-Guide-Final.pdf) is pictured on Slide 30. Facilitators may wish to use this as an opportunity to distribute hard copies of the guide (which can be ordered in advance from California College Pathways), or to pull up the PDF version of the guide on the internet. Facilitators can walk caregivers through the guide and highlight some college planning milestones by grade level.

Throughout the college planning process, caregivers can lean on various groups for support. First, they can connect with the grade level counselor or college counselor at their youth’s high school. Second, caregivers can connect with the foster care liaison at their school district. The Los Angeles County Office of Education maintains an online list of all foster care liaisons across L.A. County school districts, the link to which is included in the “Additional Resources” section of this guide. In addition, some K-12 school districts like LAUSD have a specialized program for foster youth. LAUSD’s Foster Youth Achievement Program employs foster youth counselors who can work with caregivers, birth parents, and education rights holders to assist youth with college planning.

Finally, caregivers can turn to local community-based organizations that specialize in supporting foster youth to college. One example is United Friends of the Children, which provides intensive support to foster youth as they transition from middle school to high school and from high school to college. United Friends of the Children and other community-based programs are also listed in “Additional Resources” section of this guide. Facilitators may print this section separately as a handout for caregivers.

**Learning Objectives**:

* Understand key aspects of the California Community College application and enrollment process, including where to apply and the importance of self-identifying as a foster youth at the time of application;
* Recognize the importance of priority registration to community college success and understand the steps of orientation, assessment, and education planning that new students must complete in order to receive priority registration;
* Learn to better navigate remediation by understanding assessment process, key questions to ask, and resources to seek out;
* Build introductory knowledge of the college preparatory curricular requirements used by the California State University and University of California systems;
* Know where to access the CSU and UC admissions applications and what benefits students can receive by self-identifying as foster youth; and
* Become familiar with resources like the Foster Youth Educational Planning Guide to reference grade-appropriate ways to assist foster youth with college planning.

**Section V: Paying for College**

Another barrier that deters foster youth from realizing their college dreams is perceptions of cost. Indeed, many students assume that college will require an upfront investment that they simply cannot afford. Foster youth may believe that, because of their own lack of financial resources or familial financial support, they will not be able to self-finance a college education.

The reality is that foster youth can qualify for many state, federal, and institutional financial aid programs that can help them finance college through a combination of tuition waivers, grants, work-study awards, scholarships, and even student loans. Slide 36 provides a breakdown of the types and sources of financial aid programs. It is important for caregivers to understand the basic difference between gift aid like grants and scholarships and other types of aid that must be earned or repaid. Facilitators should emphasize that, unlike student loans, gift aid really is free money that does not need to be repaid, so long as students successfully complete their coursework and make satisfactory progress toward completion.

Some types of gift aid that caregivers should be particularly aware of are federal Pell grants, state Cal Grants, and state Chafee grants. The latter is exclusively available to foster youth who were in foster care or Kin-GAP between the ages of 16 and 18 and who are 21 years of age or younger. Chafee grants provide up to $5,000 of annual funding for foster youth who pursue college or career and technical education at a California institution. Caregivers should know that these grants can be packaged together so that students are able to cover a greater portion of their cost of attendance, which includes both tuition expenses and non-tuition expenses like books, transportation, and housing.

While plenty of financial aid resources exist, foster youth may lack accurate information about how to apply for aid or lack support in completing key steps along the way. Slide 35 highlights some of these challenges, such as difficulty in meeting the state priority deadline of March 2nd, which is key for accessing certain Cal Grants. Foster youth and caregivers may both have misperceptions about what type of information students need to include when filing financial aid applications. For example, many assume that a foster youth must include parent tax information which can deter a youth from even beginning an application. It is important that foster youth get connected to support to successfully navigate this process.

Slides 36-42 thus orient caregivers to financial aid terminology, eligibility requirements, and general application timelines. Within these processes there are unique considerations for foster youth. Slides 46-47 review these items, such as how to indicate independent status on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Because caregivers may not be familiar with the current FAFSA questions or may have not navigated the online version of the application, screenshots of key questions are included in the presentation. This information can help caregivers feel more at ease when assisting youth with submitting their application forms.

**Learning Objectives**:

* Know what type of financial aid is available, and be able to discern between gift aid programs like Pell Grant and other types of aid;
* Understand general steps and timelines for submitting government financial aid applications, including the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the California Dream Act Application; and
* Know where to direct youth to complete a financial aid application and be able to assist youth in trouble-shooting through difficulties on key questions.

**Section VI: After the FAFSA**

While application submission is a critical first step, caregivers need to understand what comes next in the financial aid process. Each year, many students miss out on thousands of financial aid dollars simply because they do not complete all of the necessary follow-up steps. This information is often communicated via email and can be easy to miss if a student does not know that they should be attentive to requests for additional information or documentation. Section VI provides caregivers with general information about the FAFSA verification process, as well as steps for verifying foster youth status with a college’s financial aid office.

While cumbersome, being responsive to these parts of the financial aid application process is essential for a student to be able to access all of the aid programs for which they are eligible. Upon successfully submitting FAFSA, students will receive a Student Aid Report that states their expected family contribution. This information is used by a college or university to determine how much aid they qualify for, after factoring the costs of attendance at that particular institution. Upon completing FAFSA, foster youth in California should complete a short supplemental Chafee grant application.

Facilitators should note that undocumented youth in California should complete the California Dream Act Application (CADAA) instead of the FAFSA. The CADAA mirrors the questions on the FAFSA but does not require the youth to enter a social security number. Completing a CADAA will help undocumented students access Cal Grants; they should also complete a Chafee grant application and, if enrolling at a community college, a Board of Governors (BOG) fee waiver in order to maximize their aid. Facilitators should emphasize that the California Student Aid Commission protects the privacy of student information and does not share CADAA applicant data with the federal government or with immigration enforcement agencies.

Colleges and universities may request additional documentation to verify foster care status, particularly when a student has qualified for Independent Status on the FAFSA. Slides 51 and 52 describe how youth can obtain this type of documentation from the L.A. County Department of Children and Family Services, or from the California Department of Social Services. Facilitators should emphasize the importance of keeping copies of ward of the court letters, along with copies of tax documents and other records used in the financial aid and course enrollment processes. Delays in obtaining such documentation can adversely affect a student’s ability to enroll on time and to access aid to cover tuition expenses. In some cases, foster youth may need to take out emergency student loans to cover any unmet financial need they may have.

Caregivers and foster youth may both have justified concerns about taking on student loan. Slide 54 provides some tips for smart student debt management. To reduce student debt levels, foster youth should proactively seek out additional resources beyond state and federal financial aid. For example, many high schools, banks, community centers, religious organizations, employers, and nonprofit organizations offer private scholarships that foster youth can apply to. Applying to scholarships can be time-intensive so we strongly suggest that foster youth target their search to include scholarship programs that are specific to foster youth and/or that have a narrow geographic focus. A link to scholarship resources for L.A. County foster youth is included in the “Additional Resources” section of this guide.

Outside of these private scholarship programs, youth can also leverage scholarships, cash grants, and other benefits from the L.A. County Department of Children and Family Services’ Independent Living Program (ILP). ILP is a voluntary program that youth who have been in care between the ages of 16 and 18 can request, up until the age of 21. Facilitators should emphasize that ILP funds can be used to fill financial aid gaps and cover costs like textbooks, transportation, and other school-related expenses. Caregivers may also contact their youth’s social worker or ILP Coordinator to learn more about the Individualized Transition Skills Program (ITSP). Through ITSP, foster youth can receive two years of personalized coaching that can help them navigate their transition to college and to adulthood by building such critical life skills as smart money management.

**Learning Objectives**:

* Be able to anticipate next steps after successfully submitting the FAFSA, including receiving the Student Aid Report;
* Know who to contact to obtain a ward of the court letter or other documentation that a college or university may require to verify a student’s foster youth status;
* Understand the supplemental Chafee grant application form that foster youth must complete in order to access additional state grant aid;
* Have a basic understanding of what private scholarships are and where to find scholarship opportunities, including local programs that are specific to foster youth; and
* Understand the financial benefits and other resources available to foster youth through the L.A. County Department of Children and Family Services’ Independent Living Program.

**Section VII: Succeeding in College**

Despite all the unique challenges that foster youth may face in college, there are a vast array of services and supports available to help them successfully reach their higher educational goals. A continuum of resources are available at both the community colleges and at the 4-year public universities throughout California to help foster youth succeed. While it is not addressed explicitly in this presentation, many private colleges are beginning to offer similar support services. It is important that caregivers recognize that college is possible for foster youth.

In the past 10 years, the number of campus-based resources for foster youth has drastically increased to better meet youth’s holistic needs. In 2006, the California Community College Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO) recognized a statewide need for support of foster youth students at community colleges and formed the Foster Youth Success Initiative, in partnership with the Foundation for California Community Colleges. Due to these efforts, a Foster Youth Liaison can now be found at every California community college to provide foster youth with additional support and advocacy (Slide 59).

In addition to this support, most community colleges, CSU and UC campuses also have support programs specifically designed to meet the needs of foster youth (Slide 60). Many foster youth lack a support system in their lives and can feel alone at college. In addition to the tangible resources these programs may provide, such as transportation assistance or food, these programs also help to create a community that feels safe and supportive to foster youth. Because these programs are typically funded by private foundations and by local campus budgets, they can vary widely in name, availability of student support services, and eligibility criteria. Many of these programs go by the name of “Guardian Scholars,” but not all. Foster youth may need assistance in learning about these various programs and their unique names, such as REACH, STARS, LINC, Resilient Scholars, RISE, and so on. A comprehensive list of campus programs and contact information is available on the California College Pathways website, a link to which is included in the “Additional Resources” section of this guide.

Slides 61-62 describe some of the state funded programs that are also available to foster youth, such as the Extended Opportunity Programs & Services Programs (EOPS) found at community colleges and Extended Opportunity Programs (EOP) often found at CSU and UC campuses. Most foster youth qualify for these programs, which are designed to assist disadvantaged students in reaching their educational goals. In 2014, Senate Bill 1023 was passed to create a state funded program specifically for foster youth called the Cooperating Agencies Foster Youth Educational Support (CAFYES). This program is in the process of transitioning to the new name NextUp, and is currently available at 26 community colleges, including 10 colleges that are within Los Angeles County. CAFYES/NextUp is often housed within EOPS and provides services that go above and beyond those that are typically offered to EOPS students who are not foster youth.

In addition to these programs, there are also a range of support services at community colleges that foster youth can benefit from. Slide 63 provides an overview of these resources, which include: CalWorks & CARE for parenting students; counseling and psychological services; food assistance programs; student disability services; and tutoring support. Students may associate a negative stigma with these services and may be hesitant to ask for help, especially when it comes to requesting mental health counseling and disability services. Foster youth may have an even harder time asking for help due to their past experiences of trauma, neglect and abandonment. Facilitators should emphasis that caregivers can play a tremendous role in normalizing these services, in explaining the benefits, and in reducing any negative stigma. It is helpful to proactively inform foster youth of the services available to them so that they can get connected to support early on. Starting college with the rights supports can help ensure that foster youth have a positive experience and succeed in reaching their educational goals.

**Learning Outcomes**:

* Understand the campus resources available specifically for foster youth;
* Learn about the range of all campus support services that foster youth can access;
* Help caregivers understand that support is available to help foster youth achieve their educational goals; and
* Familiarize caregivers with the CA College Pathways website and the resources and tools found within that website to connect foster youth to support.

**Further Reading**

California College Pathways (2013). At Greater Risk - California Foster Youth and the Path from High School to College. Available online at:

<http://www.cacollegepathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/at_greater_risk.pdf>.

California College Pathways (2015). Charting the Course: Using Data to Support Foster Youth College Success. Available online at: <http://www.cacollegepathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/charting_the_course_final.pdf>.

Courtney, M. et al (2011). Midwest Evaluation of Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 26. Available online at: <http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Midwest%20Evaluation_Report_4_10_12.pdf>

Courtney, M., et al (2016). Findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CalYOUTH): Conditions of Youth at Age 19. Available online at: <http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/CY_YT_RE0516_1.pdf>.

Gross, J. (2016). Challenges and Experiences of Former Foster Youth in Postsecondary Education. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin Center for the Advancement of Postsecondary Education (WISCAPE). Available online at: <http://www.cacollegepathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/FFE-in-PSE.pdf>.

Lopez, K. and B. T. Duran (2016). Transition Age Foster Youth: Getting Them Into and Through College. Fresno, CA: Central Valley Higher Education Consortium. Available online at: <http://www.cacollegepathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Foster-Youth_CVHEC_report_final_2-1.pdf>.

National Working Group on Foster Care and Education (2014). Fostering Success in Education: National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care. Available online at: <http://www.cacollegepathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/datasheet_jan_2014_update.pdf>.

Wiegmann, W., et al. (2014). The Invisible Achievement Gap Part 2: How the Foster Care Experiences of California Public School Students Are Associated with Their Education Outcomes. Available online at: <http://www.cacollegepathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/the-invisible-achievement-gap-part-2.pdf>.

**Additional Resources**

Alliance for Children’s Rights - “Know Before You Go” Portal

<http://kids-alliance.org/knowbeforeyougo/>

Bruin Guardian Scholars Academy - An Initiative of First Star, DCFS, and UCLA

[www.bgsa.ucla.edu](http://www.bgsa.ucla.edu)

California College Pathways

[www.cacollegepathways.org/](http://www.cacollegepathways.org/)

California College Pathways- Student Version

[www.student.cacollegepathways.org](http://www.student.cacollegepathways.org)

California Community Colleges

<https://home.cccapply.org/colleges>

California Community Colleges Foster Youth Success Initiative

<http://extranet.cccco.edu/Divisions/StudentServices/FosterYouthSuccessInitiatives.aspx>

California Dream Act

<https://dream.csac.ca.gov/>

California Fostering Connections

[www.cafosteringconnections.org](http://www.cafosteringconnections.org)

California State University

[www2.calstate.edu/apply](https://www2.calstate.edu/apply)

California Student Aid Commission

[www.csac.ca.gov](http://www.csac.ca.gov/)

Chafee Grant

[www.chafee.csac.ca.gov](http://www.chafee.csac.ca.gov)

Foster Youth Educational Planning Guide

[www.cacollegepathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Ed-Planning-Guide-Final.pdf](http://www.cacollegepathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Ed-Planning-Guide-Final.pdf)

icanaffordcollege.com - An Initiative of the California Community Colleges

[www.icanaffordcollege.com/](http://www.icanaffordcollege.com/)

L.A. Cash for College

[www.lacashforcollege.org](http://www.lacashforcollege.org)

L.A. County Department of Children and Family Services - Independent Living Program (ILP)

<http://ilponline.org/>

L.A. County Office of Education - Foster Youth Services

[www.lacoe.edu/StudentServices/HomelessFosterYouth/FosterYouth.aspx](https://www.lacoe.edu/StudentServices/HomelessFosterYouth/FosterYouth.aspx)

LAUSD Foster Youth Achievement Program

<https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/1497>

Scholarship Resources for L.A. County Foster Youth

[www.cacollegepathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Scholarship-Resources-for-Foster-Youth-LA-County.pdf](http://www.cacollegepathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Scholarship-Resources-for-Foster-Youth-LA-County.pdf)

Scholars Rising - Guardian Scholars High School Program

[www.lacitycollege.edu/services/guardianscholars/ScholarsRisingFlyerEdited.pdf](http://www.lacitycollege.edu/services/guardianscholars/ScholarsRisingFlyerEdited.pdf)

Step: Forward

<http://stepforward.cccco.edu/>

United Friends of the Children - College Readiness Program

[www.unitedfriends.org/youth-access/](https://www.unitedfriends.org/youth-access/)

University of California

<http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/>

1. Frerer, K., et al (2013), as cited in California College Pathways (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)