

**The Center for Fostering Success**

**Best Practice, Best Fit**

**Webinar Series**

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**Discovery Driven Solutions Related  
to Educational Attainment for  
Students from Foster Care**



WESTERN MICHIGAN  
UNIVERSITY

 **Center for Fostering Success**

An initiative of WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY





# Writing My Success Story:

Young Adults' Experiences of the Pursuit of Higher Education

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Consultants:  
SC NYTD Youth Voice, state youth advisory panel for the  
National Youth in Transition Database  
Go Out and Learn Life (GOALL), South Carolina  
Department of Social Services State Youth Advisory Board



UNIVERSITY OF  
**SOUTH CAROLINA**  
College of Social Work  
Center for Child and Family Studies

# AGENDA

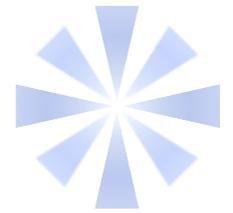


- *Voices and Visions* of Youth in Transition
- Outcomes of Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care in South Carolina
- Authors of Success (GOALL & SC NYTD Youth Voice)
- The Pursuit of Higher Education Continuum
- Young Adults' Experiences
- Supporting Success Stories

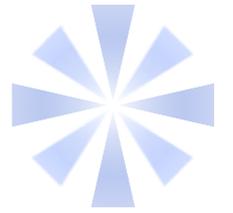


# Voices and Visions of Youth in Transition

- Longitudinal mixed-methods transformative research study
- Examines the outcomes and experiences of youth and young adults as they transition out of foster care
- Youth/young adults participate at 17, 19, and 21 years old
- Cohort 1: 294 at baseline, 223 at follow-up



# Outcomes of Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care in South Carolina



## At the age of 19:

- 1 in 4 experienced homelessness within two years of their 17<sup>th</sup> birthday
- Less than 50% of young adults were employed
- 43% of young adults had completed their GED or high school
- 20% of young adults were enrolled in an institution of higher education
- 81% of young adults had accomplished one or more of their personal goals within two years



# The Pursuit of *Higher Education*

# Go Out and Learn Life (GOALL)

- State youth advisory board, South Carolina Department of Social Services
- Youth and young adults (16 to 22 years old)
- Provide consultation, training, and curriculum development to enhance the programs and policies affecting youth in the South Carolina foster care system

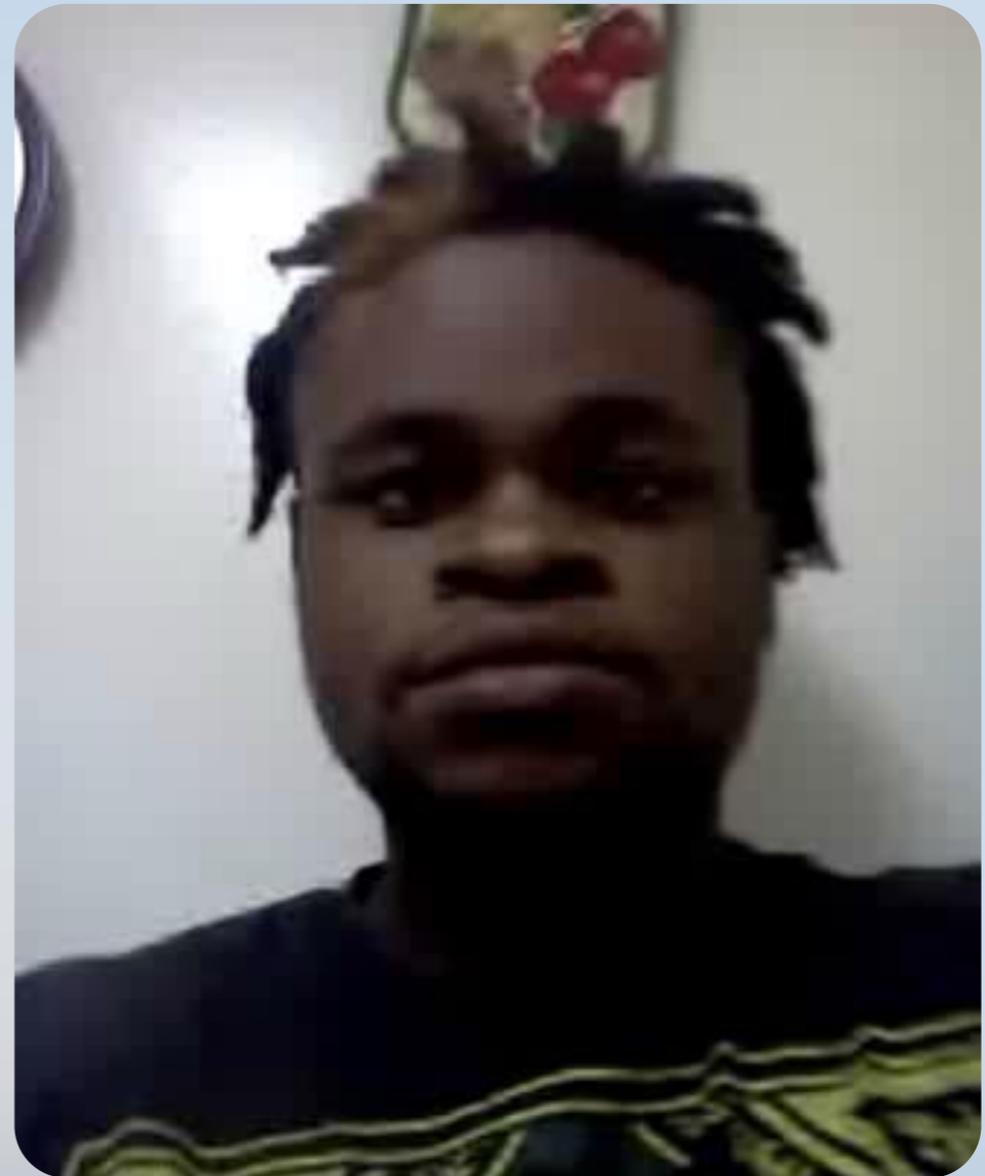


# SC NYTD Youth Voice

- State youth advisory panel, South Carolina National Youth in Transition Database
- Youth and young adults (17 to 23 years old)
- Provide consultation on research questions, methods, and findings related to the experiences and outcomes of youth transitioning out of the South Carolina foster care system
- Assist with resource development and the dissemination of findings to youth and adult audiences



# Authors of *SUCCESS*



# The Pursuit of Higher Education Continuum



Considering Higher Education

Commencing Higher Education

Continuing Higher Education

Completing Higher Education



# The Pursuit of Higher Education Continuum



The pursuit (i.e., considering, commencing, continuing, and completing) of higher education centered on four major themes:

- Needed supports
- Barriers and challenges
- Overcoming obstacles
- The importance of relational support



# The Pursuit of Higher Education Continuum



**Considering Higher Education**

Commencing Higher Education

Continuing Higher Education

Completing Higher Education



# Considering Higher-Education:



“ I always was told that college is the way to success. ”



# Considering Higher-Education: Needed Supports



- Financial support
- Relational support
  - Emotional support
  - Experiential support
  - Vocal support



# Considering Higher-Education: Emotional Support



“

I needed to tell someone my fears and anxieties about heading to a new place with new surroundings and new people.

”



# Considering Higher-Education: Experiential Support

“ I just needed someone to help me ensure my major and make sure my school choices have a good program for my major. ”



# Considering Higher-Education: Financial & Vocal Support



“ I've observed that every child needs some kind of support or support system to strive for a higher education. I myself needed financial and vocal support to embark on my own college career. I may have had the drive and the will to strive for a higher education but didn't exactly have all the means. That could be devastating or motivating to an individual in this predicament. I kept my head up, and searched for every possible resource available to me...The financial support was necessary to ensure that my education could be paid for. Although it was the vocal support that proved to become far more vital. Vocal support can be teachers, friends, or family members encouraging you along the way, essentially keeping you on the right track or by helping you discover resources that may be necessary. One thing is for certain: support will be necessary when striving for a higher education.



# Considering Higher-Education: Vocal Support



“ In school I was ALWAYS labeled a "problem child" from Pre K all the way up to my senior year in high school. Being that I was this problem child, no one really talked to me about secondary education until I brought it to their attention. They would stop what they were doing just to look me in my face to see if I was joking (administrator, caseworker, group home staff, etc.), then they would give me the "I see success in you " speech. I knew as they were trying to convince me they were also trying to convince themselves. Not everyone was like this, just the people who got paid to help me.



# Considering Higher Education: Barriers & Challenges



- Completing scholarship applications and essays
- Deciding which post-secondary institution to choose
- Time management
- Fear of failure
- Lack of belief in personal potential
- Financial barriers
- Transportation
- Lack of employment
- Housing during the summer months



# Considering Higher-Education: Housing Challenges



“ Another barrier that I encountered was not feeling like I had a place to stay during the breaks from school, when the campus dorms were closed. As I was about to age out of foster care, it wasn't like I could call my case manager and say, “Can you find me a temporary home to stay in for the holidays?” ”



# Considering Higher-Education: Vocal Challenges



“ Being that I was this problem child seeking secondary education who got suspended every year from 7 to the 11 grade and my GPA stood at 1.2, they said I should start at a tech school. My response was, " Would you tell your kids that?" My administrator was like "It is going to be really hard for you to get into a university." I said "If I don't get into a university, then college is not meant for me.



# Considering Higher-Education: Support with transportation & school applications



“

My caseworker and Urban League helped me by taking me to the places I needed to go and helped me get information I needed and even helped me fill out the paperwork for college.

”



# Considering Higher-Education: Support with school selection



“ A staff at my group home was helpful because she talked to me about the benefits of the schools I wanted to attend and she helped me choose my school. ”



# Considering Higher-Education: Support with application submission



“ Everyone supported the idea of me going to college but very few people helped. I was in my placement for about two years with people I consider as family but I got all my help from outsiders, which was teachers from my high school. My school sent off ALL my paper work for college. I was accepted to a university which ranks within the top 10 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the country. ”



# Considering Higher-Education: Support with self-confidence



“ My last foster parent was very supportive of me furthering my education. She encouraged me to maintain my GPA and always told me that with a degree all things are possible. Those are probably the best words that she could have told me, as those words stuck with me when I transferred from a technical school to a 4 year degree institution. She had faith that I would be able to make it and that if I believed in myself that I could achieve whatever my mind and heart was set on! ”



# The Pursuit of Higher Education Continuum



Considering Higher Education

**Commencing Higher Education**

Continuing Higher Education

Completing Higher Education



# *Commencing* Higher Education: Needed Supports



- Assistance with school work and assignments
- Assistance with getting school supplies and books
- Assistance with move-in day
- Financial assistance
- Social and emotional support
- Reliable transportation
- Orientation support



# Commencing Higher-Education: Needed Supports



“ I didn't really have the supports that I needed when I started college, not really. It seems like I was on my own going into my 1st year in college, but there was help if I desired. ”



# *Commencing* Higher-Education: Needed Supports



“ I needed monetary support, reliable transportation and emotional support. To be honest, I really did not have any of these supports once I moved away for school. I just aged out of care, and because my case manager rarely spoke to me, it was as if she didn't care. My foster parents, although they were a phone call away seems as if they never really answered the phone when I called. It was up to me to find ways to manage my time, find people who had vehicles and be able to support and search for scholarships on my own. ”



# *Commencing* Higher-Education: Needed Supports



“ When I started university, my caseworker had a transporter drop me off. Everyone was with their families. I moved everything I owned in my dorm by myself with no help. I didn't know how to take care of my financial aid. My financial aid counselor couldn't believe that my case worker did not come up there with me. She walked me through it. ”



# *Commencing* Higher Education: Readiness



- Young adults had differing views about their “readiness” for higher education.
- Some young adults believed they were prepared for higher education whereas others believed they would have appreciated more preparation skills (e.g. learning time management) prior to commencing higher education.



# Commencing Higher-Education: Readiness



“ Yes, I felt prepared for university a bit more than others since I had the experience of depending more on myself and knowing the pros and cons of my actions.”



# Commencing Higher-Education: Readiness



“ I was semi-prepared for college. I was ready to explore and discover another world I have never been. I wasn't prepared to see the difference in high school and college. ”



# Commencing Higher-Education: Readiness



“ Yes, I felt like I was prepared. I thought that I was independent and responsible enough for college. ”



# Commencing Higher-Education: Readiness



“ No, because I was on my own, and I would have to manage money and time all by myself, but it was something to get used to and it's part of the college transition. ”



# Commencing Higher-Education: Readiness



“ I felt that I had been “pushed out of the door.” When I say this I mean that I had just aged out of care and in order for me not to become a statistic of the homeless population I had to make a choice. Either be homeless or go to a university that allowed on-campus housing. I was not really prepared to live in a dorm with 5 other girls nor was I ready to have a large schoolwork load and still try to figure out how I was going to manage life on my own as an adult. ”



# The Pursuit of Higher Education Continuum



Considering Higher Education

Commencing Higher Education

**Continuing Higher Education**

Completing Higher Education



# Continuing Higher Education: Obstacles



- Surviving Finals
- Navigating Professional Relationships
- Staying Organized
- Time Management
- Work-School-Life Balance
- Financial Stress
- Course Materials
- Roommate Drama
- Transportation Dilemmas



# Continuing Higher-Education: Overcoming Obstacles



“ I had a very challenging English teacher who would always grade my papers no higher than a 65 and no lower than a 60. I didn't understand why I used to do so poorly in his class so I privately talked to him. Although I tried doing every detail he wanted on his papers, nothing satisfied him. So I put other classes off to try to do better in his. When finals came I needed a 75 on my paper to pass his class and I made a 70 (therefore I failed). He came to me and said, “It's not that I don't like you, it's that I see a lot in you. I just want you to be better. ”



# Continuing Higher-Education: Overcoming Obstacles



“ Working a fulltime job while being in school full time to pay bills. I was kind of in a panic because I didn't have time for schoolwork because I was at work too much; but I talked to management and they tried to work with my schedule. It had gotten better. ”



# Continuing Higher-Education: Overcoming Obstacles



“ I went through 11 courses without books or a computer because my caseload kept being switched. I was too ashamed to ask my peers to borrow their books. I actually just finished my whole freshman year without books. My high school teachers tried to help me but I felt like it was not their job to help. Hopefully my sophomore year I'll have textbooks.

”



# Continuing Higher-Education: Overcoming Obstacles



My first semester, I was living in a dorm room with 5 other females. They did not like me, and they were “party people.” I could not get any studying done nor could I focus on sleep when they were always coming in late at night, or early in the morning. My grades began to drop, and I was running out of money. I didn’t have a meal plan, as it was too expensive and I needed a job. The problem was that I didn’t have a car and I didn’t have any money. I was extremely stressed so I went to the wellness center on campus. They have counselors that can talk to you and try to help resolve the issues. Needless to say, talking to the counselor was the best thing that I could have done. I was able to talk to him about getting some sort of meal plan (one that was less expensive), and a staff member offered to help me find reliable transportation to and from work, if I got a job. I was less stressed after that. I was able to find a job, get a meal plan and was able to have friends take me to and from work when I needed it.”



# Continuing Higher Education: Relational Support



- Family members
- Friends
- Colleagues
- Guidance Counselors
- Student Housing Staff



# Continuing Higher-Education: Relational Support



“ My aunt, who just finished her bachelors and is who is working on her masters, helped out on study habits and tips. ”



# Continuing Higher-Education: Relational Support



“ The guidance counselors at the student wellness center were very helpful in my stressful transition from high school and into college. They were always there and were willing to be the person that I went to, or the person to which I turned to ask for advice. Another person was the student housing staff and my RA. They were always willing to listen and lend an ear.”



# Continuing Higher-Education: Relational Support



“ I go to people who are around me and know what they’re doing. I try to aim at the ones who are doing something for themselves or have had experience that affiliates with whatever.”



# Continuing Higher-Education: Relational Support



“ If I need advice or support about my education I can go to the GOALL liaison. She helps me if I need money for education or what I need to do to get other services besides for financial purposes. ”



# Continuing Higher-Education: Relational Support



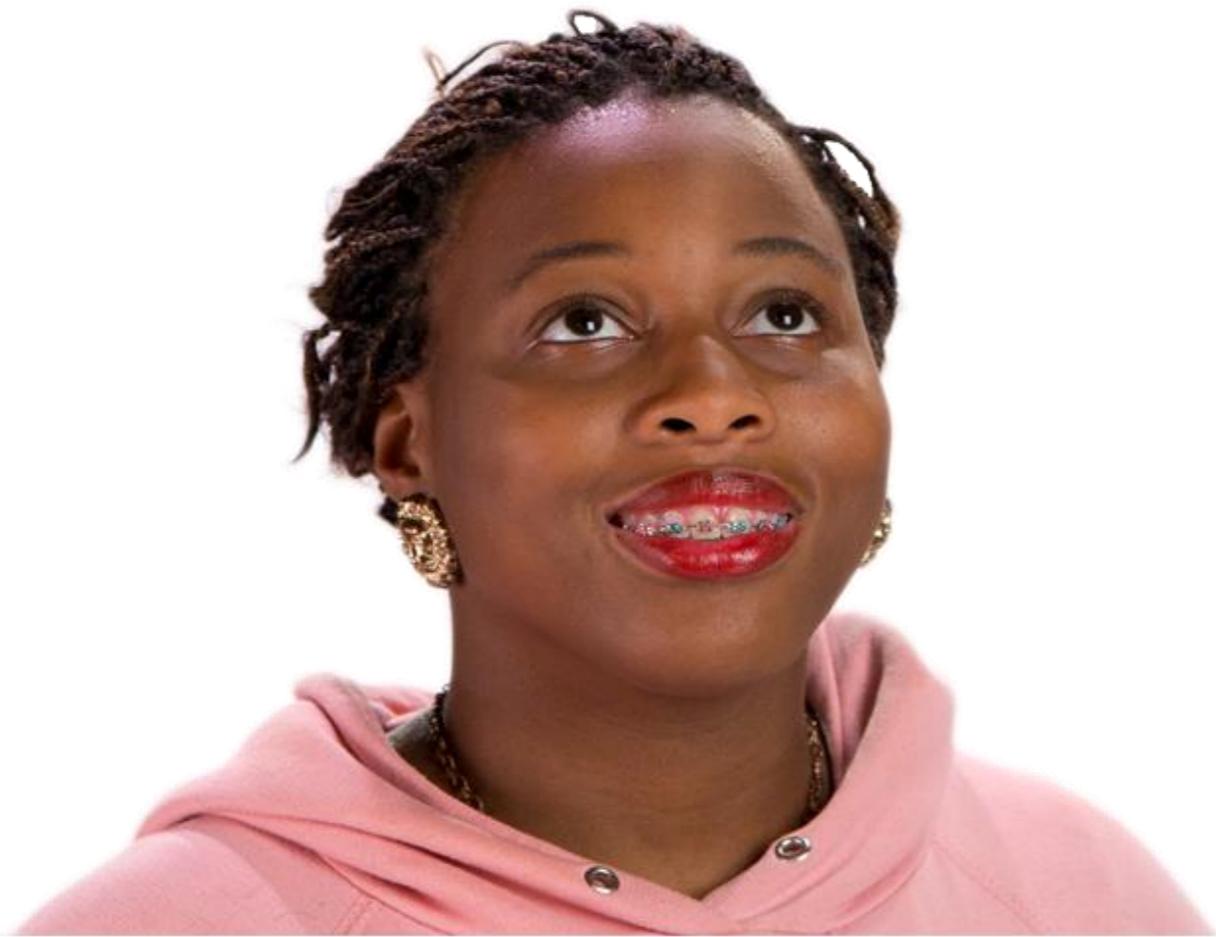
“ Actually, there were several people. I would feel really bad just to pin point one out of the whole bunch. My support team works like a team in an unknown way. ”



# Continuing Higher-Education: Relational Support



“ My high school administrator; she is always there to help when I need something. ”



# Continuing Higher-Education: Relational Support



I have many people in my life that I turn to for support: My parents, friends, family members, mentors and my scholarship team. I know that if I am worried about something I am able to pick up the phone and call any of them, and they will be more than happy to rationalize the situation and hopefully help me find a solution. One of my biggest concerns was finances, and one specific scholarship team has helped me out monetary-wise in more ways than I can count. I cannot say how much having them on my side and as a part of my team has helped and encouraged me to continue pushing through even in the hard times. Another support has been my parents. Having them to encourage and support me is amazing! I know that I can always call or send a text or email and they are there. No questions asked! It's a love that I couldn't do without!



# The Pursuit of Higher Education Continuum



Considering Higher Education

Commencing Higher Education

Continuing Higher Education

**Completing Higher Education**



# *Completing* Higher-Education



Relational support

Financial support



# *Completing* Higher-Education



“ I have more peers that work as hard as I do to keep my focus great and on point. ”



# Completing Higher-Education



“ I have no money to attend school. ”



# Completing Higher-Education



“ I know that emotional and financial support are my biggest challenges as I finish up with my degree. The biggest concern that I have with graduating is not being able to find a place to live when May rolls around. I am scared that I will be in the same boat as I was when I first started undergraduate school. If I was able to think of one thing that I would like to have that would be it...knowing that I have a place to live, a place to move to when I graduate, that is affordable and in a safe neighborhood. ”



Supporting *Success Stories* in  
South Carolina

# Supporting *Success Stories* in South Carolina



- Early Move-In Programs
- Academic Mentors
- Financial Mentors
- Holiday and Summer Residency
- Peer Support Programs
- Transition Coaches



# Supporting *Success Stories*



- Michigan (Western Michigan University; Michigan State University)
- Washington (Western Washington University)
- California (The California State University; UCLA)
- Colorado (Colorado State University)
- Arizona (Northern Arizona University)
- New Jersey (Montclair State University)
- Wisconsin (University of Wisconsin)
- North Carolina REACH
- Missouri REACH

# Supporting *Success Stories* in South Carolina



First Generation  
Student:

[http://www.firstgen  
erationstudent.com  
/plan/](http://www.firstgenerationstudent.com/plan/)

Fostering Success  
Michigan:

[http://fosteringsucc  
essmichigan.com/](http://fosteringSUCCESSmichigan.com/)

Foster Care to  
Success:

[http://www.fc2succ  
ess.org/](http://www.fc2success.org/)



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