

2016-2017

FSM Life Domain Series

Key Takeaways & Recommendations



Education Domain

A major takeaway from our focus on the Education Domain was the interconnection of all life domains. Professionals and students agreed that success or challenges in one domain strongly impacts others and that often those working with youth with experience in foster care must "wear many hats" while working on issues in multiple domains. This emphasizes the importance of identifying and supporting strengths in each domain, facilitating collaboration, and expanding networks! Some of the challenges associated with this domain include:

- Not knowing how to apply for college
- Difficulty filling out the FAFSA
- Difficulty buying books or supplies
- Lack of transportation to get to and from class
- Not knowing who or how to ask for help on campus

Recommendations for Students

- Identify people and places that are supportive and helpful—going to college is a huge adjustment!
- Ask questions—chances are, there are many others who have the same questions and concerns
- Find an older student who has had experience in foster care to act as a role model or guide

Recommendations for Professionals

- Invest in students so that they invest in themselves
- Be a point of stability in students' lives
- Help policymakers understand the impact of foster care on education access and success
- Build trust with young people so they know they have a safe place to ask for help



Finances & Employment Domain

A major takeaway from our focus on the Finances & Employment Domain was the importance of finding creative solutions to help students navigate within this domain. Students agreed that potential financial barriers are a large concern in considering postsecondary access and success. This domain is easy to get stuck on and can be very stressful. Some of the challenges associated with this domain include:

- Financial difficulties while in college to pay for housing, books, food, and essentials
- Finding a job that will work around a school schedule
- Being too busy to attend to both a job and school

Recommendations for Students

- Understand that work and school is a balancing act that can feel overwhelming at times, but it is essential to build skills and resources in this domain
- Know how, when, and who to ask for help
- Develop a strong, supportive network of professionals, adults, and peers that will help find and navigate resources
- Reach out to as many organizations as possible to gain access to resources and help

Recommendations for Professionals

- Provide opportunities for skill-building in balancing work and school life
- Allow students to identify what is important to them
- Break the big picture down into small, digestible pieces

Life Skills Domain

A major takeaway from our focus on the Life Skills Domain was the idea that “students don’t know what they don’t know.” Life skills are the abilities we need to effectively navigate through every day living. Students need opportunities to learn and practice life skills. Professionals can support students by taking time to notice the skills that each student has and naming and describing these skills so that students can learn to generalize them to all areas of life. Some of the challenges in this domain include:

- Lack of opportunity to “try out” new skills or to “fail safely”
- Difficulty naming or identifying skills students need to learn
- Lack of resources or people to help students learn new skills

Recommendations for Students

- Understand that learning information doesn't equal skill, practicing a new skills is important
- Ask for information and resources, but also numerous and varied opportunities to try out and practice life skills
- Practice problem-solving skills as often as possible, but know that no one has all the “right” answers
- Remember: You don’t know what you don’t know!

Recommendations for Professionals

- Give students opportunities to practice new skills
- Do with, not for
- Name skills students have already developed so that they can transfer and adapt them to other developing areas
- Ensure that information is accessible to students (for example, distribution on social media versus email or other less student friendly formats)
- Help students prioritize when multiple problems occur at once
- Utilize the Seven Life Domains framework to identify areas of thriving and struggle
- Remember: Providing opportunities to activate skills are essential elements of the life skills domain

Identity Domain

A major takeaway from our focus on the Identity Domain was the idea that an individual's personal, social, and cultural identities are uniquely interconnected and multi-faceted and are different for everyone! The Identity Life Domain can be very complex as it involves identification and definition of the self. Often youth move out of or through spaces that can help people define and construct their sense of self. Some of the challenges associated with the Identity domain include:

- Not having a well-defined family unit
- Lack of long term friendships from childhood
- Lack of opportunity to explore cultural or personal history
- The overall "culture" of foster care
- Difficulty finding a sense of belonging

Recommendations for Students

- Understand that resilience and perseverance are significant traits students with experience in foster care have already developed
- Past experiences help to inform identity and drawing on past experiences is a great skill
- Understand the vulnerability that comes with identity; it is a constantly evolving work in progress
- Give yourself permission to be you!

Recommendations for Professionals

- Help create space for students to explore identity issues
- Recognize that youth with experience in foster care may not have had opportunity to explore cultural and personal history
- Talk with students and facilitate discussions among peers to help students create a sense of belonging and of who they are
- Address how the "culture" or the experience of foster care has impacted students
- Allow students to speak as experts in their own lived experiences



Supportive Relationships & Community Connections Domain

A major takeaway from our focus on the Supportive Relationships and Community Connections Domain was the importance of healthy connections as instrumental in helping individuals succeed in all aspects of life. We all need a community to support us and make us feel like we belong; these are the people we feel like we can turn to or fall back on when we are struggling. Taking risks to make connections is key to future success! Some of the challenges associated with this domain include:

- Not knowing who to ask for help
- Not knowing where to find resources or support
- Not knowing how to navigate personal or professional boundaries

Recommendations for Students

- Develop resource connections and support networks as both are critical in being independent and part of a community
- Ask for help! The experience of foster care sometimes has the unintended effect of creating dependency, which can lead to young people being confused about who to ask for help, where to find resources and supports, and not fully understanding professional and personal boundaries. Above all, don't be afraid to ask. Even if you aren't asking the "right person" they can often direct you to someone in the network who can help

Recommendations for Professionals

- Stay educated and up to date on the variety of resources available. Professionals should actively encourage young people to get involved with the right resources
- Help students become aware of what is available to them before they begin thinking about higher education
- Remember: Supportive relationships are in-between friends and family for many young people, and are integral in helping them deal with concerns, questions, and helping to figure out the world around them.

Housing Domain

A major takeaway from our focus on the Housing Domain was the idea that professionals can best support students through advocating for better housing options and ensuring that students understand their housing rights and responsibilities. The Housing Domain is multi-faceted, complex, and presents many frustrations and challenges to students. Some of these challenges include:

- Resources and funding are not aligned throughout counties
- Youth do not have control over circumstances that can lead to ineligibility for funding/stipends
- Housing during school breaks may not be available
- Vulnerability in relationships with landlords
- Unexpected evictions

Recommendations for Students

- Understand the importance of networking and social capital related to housing. Don't be afraid to use your connections and ask questions if you need support
- Try to get comfortable disclosing personal history to other people, when appropriate and necessary
- Know how, when, and who to ask for help: if you don't ask, you won't get any support!

Recommendations for Professionals

- Help students navigate housing resources and services
- Guide students through the basics of finding and paying for safe and affordable housing (i.e. having a co-signer, paying a security deposit, knowing how to read a leasing agreement, etc.)
- Advocate for changes to policies that create barriers to housing for students with experience in foster care



Physical & Mental Health Domain

A major takeaway from our focus on the Physical and Mental Health Domain was the complexity of this domain as it is a foundation for success in all other Life Domains. This holistic domain impacts and is impacted by all the other life domains. Physical and Mental Health are very closely intertwined and well-being in each must be assessed and addressed. Some of the challenges associated with the Physical and Mental Health Domain include:

- Stigma towards mental health
- Not knowing how to ask, who to ask, or where to go for help--and being afraid to ask!
- Accessing and navigating available resources
- Building trust

Recommendations for Students

- Develop a support system—understand that this takes time
- Identify someone stable who can be trusted and who can understand your experiences
- Find a healthy stress-reliever such as journaling, exercising, or crafting
- Remember: a person's physical and mental health interconnect and it is hard to have stability in one without the other!

Recommendations for Professionals

- Talk with students and strive to understand their struggles and non-struggles in mental health
- Know that just because a young person was in foster care doesn't mean that they need to be in therapy as this can cause harm and will lead to trust issues of adults in therapeutic roles
- Help students navigate the complexity of the health care system. Professionals are an important link between young people and physical and mental health care



Resources

Interested in learning more about each domain and ways to support students with experience in foster care? Visit our website at www.FosteringSuccessMichigan.com for resources, webinars, podcasts, student stories, and more!

During the 2016-2017 school year, FSM focused each month on one of the 7 life domains identified by Casey Family Programs as a way to organize and address the needs of students with experience in foster care. Each month featured a webinar, podcast, and an FSM Community Collaborative event held in communities across the state. We've gathered resources, recordings of panel discussions, minutes from each FSM Community Collaborative, and lots of other information in each of the toolkits featured below.

We hope to see you next year at FSM Community Collaboratives where we will be taking an even deeper dive into the 7 life domains to learn more about best practices in increasing postsecondary access and success for youth with experience in foster care!

<http://fosteringsuccessmichigan.com/library/education-life-domain-toolkit>

<http://fosteringsuccessmichigan.com/library/fsm-community-collaboratives-finance-employment-life-domain-toolkit>

<http://fosteringsuccessmichigan.com/library/fsm-community-collaboratives-life-skills-domain-toolkit>

<http://fosteringsuccessmichigan.com/library/fsm-community-collaboratives-cultural-personal-identity-domain-toolkit>

<http://fosteringsuccessmichigan.com/library/fsm-community-collaboratives-community-connections-supportive-relationships>

<http://fosteringsuccessmichigan.com/library/fsm-community-collaboratives-the-housing-domain>

<http://fosteringsuccessmichigan.com/library/fsm-community-collaboratives-health-mental-health-domain>