



NRC-FAHE: National Research Collaborative for Foster Alumni and Higher Education

WELCOME!

The National Research Collaborative for Foster Alumni and Higher Education (NRC-FAHE) is a network of researchers and practitioners whose aim is to improve practice and influence policy related to foster care youth/alumni and higher education by creating and advancing a clear research agenda and facilitating communication and collaboration among interdisciplinary scholars and practitioners to promote postsecondary access and retention of youth in care and foster care alumni. The NRC-FAHE promotes innovative ways to use research and best practices to inform and influence policy making and values practice-informed research and the voice of youth in care and foster care alumni in improving access and outcomes in higher education.

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Angelique Day, PhD
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Welcome and Introduction

I am elated to share the 11th issue of the National Research Collaborative for Foster Alumni and Higher Education newsletter with you.

I want to take the time to express my heartfelt appreciation for Dr. Lisa Schelbe for supporting the NRC in participating in our 1st special issue journal in partnership with the *Child and Adolescence Social Work Journal* entitled, "Advancing Interdisciplinary Research on Foster Care and Higher Education". Thank you also to the guest editors, Drs. Jennifer Geiger and Royel Johnson. We are so grateful all of you who have completed submissions for the special issue and look forward to reading your work when it comes out in print Spring of 2023.

Many of the provisions of the [Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act \(H.R.7947\)](#) which was passed through the larger [Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 \(H.R. 133\)](#) expired on October 1, 2021. We were unable to get the bill included in the continuing resolution packages that passed December 3, 2021 and again in February 2022 that ensures that the government can remain operational. One of the many challenges that impeded our efforts was the inability of states to get money out to youth in their states in a timely way. It is hard to ask for additional resources when we were unable to spend the resources that were originally allocated. There is a great need to build infrastructure so that when environmental disasters, such as when a pandemic occurs, we can adequately respond. Campus support programs can provide a venue for child welfare agencies to identify and support foster care alumni in accessing time limited resources during times of crisis- especially in identifying older youth 23-26, a population that states were struggling to serve over the COVID 19 pandemic. Formalized partnerships are needed between HEA's and public child welfare agencies in creating plans for

future disaster relief. Additional relevant federal public policy opportunities have been introduced in congress since October 2021. These are highlighted in this newsletter, and we appreciate your advocacy to see these bills successfully move forward under the support of the current congress. Earlier this month, I offered a webinar where I outlined the transition age youth federal policy priorities. I want to strongly encourage you to listen to that recorded webinar and to share the research you have conducted that would assist advocates in moving this policy agenda forward.

If you are working with a campus-based program, we are interested in hearing about your model and want other campus-based programs to learn from you. In this issue we have a call for programs. Please reach out and share your stories with us. Inquiries for practice highlights are being collected by Jerry Savage, the newest member of our team, who like me, shares lived experience in foster care. I am very proud of the growing number of foster care alumni researchers who are members of the NRC and we are really excited to support you in lifting up your research and voices in this newsletter. Jerry can be reached at savagej@uw.edu

In this issue, we highlight an advocacy piece lead by our own Dr. Kerrie Kearney that questions the ethics of a recent decision made by the University of Pennsylvania to deny financial assistance and a diploma to an enrolled foster care youth. We encourage all of you to work with your financial aid offices on campus and help them understand how to work with students in ways that don't exacerbate existing trauma. Clearly there is a need for child welfare researchers and campus-based programs leads to provide training to student support personnel to ensure that this case is never repeated on another campus in the United States. Finally, we absolutely thrilled to highlight the recent work of Drs. Okpych and Gray which examines the efficacy of a new tool to

measure social capital among college enrolled foster care and who students are most likely to trust and turn to during their collegiate journeys.

We have a jam-packed speakers series planned for you over the several months. Please take advantage of all these webinar and conference opportunities. As a reminder, our speakers' program is organized by Dr. Amy Salazar; and information about past and future webinars can be found on our website at <https://www.nrc-fahe.org/archive-webinars>.

ANGELIQUE DAY, Ph.D., MSW



Angelique Day, PhD, MSW, is an Associate Professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Washington-Seattle. Much of her research focuses on foster care youth, including examining the differences in college retention rates between foster care youth and other low-income first-generation college students, and examining "youth voice" and its impact on child welfare, education and health policy reform. Dr. Day leads the Policy Review team for the NRC-FAHE. Questions about the policy section of this newsletter can be directed to her.

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Higher Education Highlight:

COLUMN AUTHORS



Kerri Kearney, M.B.A., Ed.D., is an associate professor in Higher Education & Student Affairs. Through her work, she prepares individuals to lead at institutions of higher education or function in related research or policy roles. She teaches and advises students almost exclusively at the doctoral level.



Jerry Savage is a Research Coordinator at Partners for Our Children in the School of Social Work at the University of Washington. He began conducting social science research in 1995 and has worked in academic, legal, and business settings conducting survey research and qualitative research. Jerry is also a foster care alumnus with a particular interest in research, programs, and legislation that help youth achieve academic success.

Primum non nocere (first, do no harm)!

If you have not read the articles [The Dredging](#) or [Penn's Treatment of Mackenzie Fierceton Has Been Shameful](#), it is probably time. Likely you will not pause to celebrate how far we have come in supporting college students with experience in foster care. However, there are key lessons that can be shared (perhaps by you!):

1. Consider the risk to a student served up to the media. The two articles in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* were not Fierceton's first media appearances. The University of Pennsylvania widely disseminated her personal story when she was named a Rhodes Scholar who seemingly represented the institution's support of low income, first generation students. However, Fierceton was soon back in the news when UPenn initiated an investigation of her background that led to her withdrawal from the Rhodes' program (although she still went on to attend Oxford University). Unfortunately, and regardless of the outcome of the now pending court case, the global record of media attacks on this young woman will remain for many years. And, just importantly, this cautionary tale was absorbed by many others with foster care experience who hoped higher education would be the start of a better future. Indeed, stories like Fierceton's could discourage youth with a foster history from applying to college as they are concerned childhood trauma will be scrutinized and put on display.

2. Re-evaluate what students are asked to reveal. Many college and scholarship applications encourage stories of overcoming some significant barrier. Presented with the options of keeping difficult personal situations private or sharing them to perhaps gain entrance or funds, some students may be willing to pay the "cost" of sharing to get to their larger educational goals. This is a risky and unfair entrance fee to higher education.

3. Check your assumptions. Encoded within the reports of UPenn's investigation seem to be the belief that abuse and trauma don't occur in White, educated families with addresses in wealthy areas. Abuse, neglect and trauma are not limited to conditions of poverty or people of color.

4. Right hand ... talk to the left hand. Large universities are mazes of bureaucracy with units of varying agendas. When one agenda (e.g., protecting the university brand) overrides the other (e.g., the wellbeing of students), significant problems can occur and even invite liability for the institution.

Unless absolutely necessary, avoid digging into traumatic backgrounds. Despite some questions posed, Fierceton was unquestionably eligible for the Pell Grant she received. Likewise, she was clearly an independent student who aged out of foster care making her, by definition, a low-income student. These are facts supported in university records. Was she a first generation student? According to the definitions used by two units at UPenn, she was.

If a student with a traumatic background must be questioned, do it right. Many campuses have support programs for students with foster care (and other traumatic) backgrounds. Campuses also typically have counselors, psychologists, and others trained for the delicacies of probing difficult backgrounds while reducing the likelihood of re-traumatization. Likewise, trained professionals won't be surprised when statements about trauma do not entirely match official records. There are so many easily explained, scientifically supported reasons this occurs.

5. Consult campus-based support programs. Students with foster care experience often have unique social histories that are not easily understood. These programs can provide support for students while also helping to educate professionals so that universities can avoid problems like those that occurred at Penn

Practice Highlight - Call for Contributors

Are you a Program Director for a campus-based support program?

NRC-FAHE is seeking submissions on programs that support college students with a history of foster care.



Call for Contributors!

Tell us about your campus-based support program & we'll highlight it in an upcoming issue.

Summer Issue submissions due
April 15th, 2022.

**CONTACT US AT
NRC.FAHE@GMAIL.COM**

Policy Updates

[The Fostering Success in Higher Education Act of 2022 \(FSHE\) \(S.3605\)](#)

The Fostering Success in Higher Education Act would **improve college access, retention, and completion rates for foster and homeless youth** by substantially improving state capacity to support these students as they transition to and attend college. Specifically, this bill would:

Invest \$150 million a year in States, tribes, & territories to establish or expand statewide initiatives to **assist foster and homeless youth** in enrolling in and graduating from institutions of higher education;

Establish formula grants to states based on a state's share of foster youth and homeless youth among all 50 states and the District of Columbia, with a **\$500,000 minimum grant**;

Dedicate **70 percent of state grants to develop Institutions of Excellence** committed to **servicing foster and homeless youth** via robust support services, in collaboration with organizations skilled at helping these populations, and substantial **financial assistance**, including covering the remaining cost of attendance beyond federal and state grants, providing comprehensive wraparound services, hiring at least one full-time case manager, and ensuring robust student health and mental services;

Direct **25 percent of state grants** to establish intensive, statewide transition initiatives and **increase college enrollment by foster and homeless youth**;

Provide 7 percent of funds for technical assistance and evaluation to inform best practices; and

Reserve **3 percent of funds to tribes**, tribal consortia, or tribal organizations and 2 percent for territories.

[The Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act \(HEASHFY\) \(S.789\)](#)

This bill revises provisions related to **financial aid and higher education programs for children and youths who are homeless or in foster care**. It requires institutions of higher education (IHEs) participating in financial aid programs to, among other things, **simplify the financial aid determinations process** for these students. It also requires IHEs to designate a staff liaison to **assist these students with support services**, programs, and community resources in a variety of areas, including financial aid and housing. The bill also requires these students to receive **in-state tuition rates at public IHEs**. Under current law, some states offer these students in-state tuition or **provide them with tuition waivers**.

[Helping Foster and Homeless Youth Achieve Act \(S.3350\)](#)

A bill to amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to condition an institution of higher education's receipt of Federal assistance on **waiving the application for enrollment fee for homeless children and youths and students who were in foster care** at any time when the students were 13 years of age or older.

[Samier Amer Foster Care Improvement Act of 2021 \(H.R.5690\)](#)

This bill requires state foster care programs to ensure children are **prioritized for placement with their relatives** and puts additional

requirements in place for a **fairer decision-making process** when an agency places a child.

[National Adoption and Foster Care Home Study Act \(H.R.4052\)](#)

This bill requires The Department of Health and Human Services to establish a methodology for **research-based home study** and to **award grants** for demonstration projects for states to adopt such methodology in the **evaluation of prospective foster and adoptive parents**. Such methodology must incorporate specified data-collection tools including, among others, (1) uniform, closed-ended questions; (2) a rating system to report findings; (3) a guidance document for practitioners; and (4) ongoing training for home-study personnel.

[Foster Care Stabilization Act \(H.R.4299\)](#)

This bill aims to direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to establish a demonstration grant program to **provide emergency relief to foster youth and improve pre-placement services** offered by foster care stabilization agencies, and for other purposes.

[Protecting Sibling Relationships in Foster Care Act \(H.R.4378\)](#)

This bill encourages the **development of specialized foster care programs** designed specifically for large **sibling groups**, sibling groups with a wide age range, and sibling groups with complex needs.

[Ensuring Medicaid Continuity for Children in Foster Care Act of 2021 \(S.2689\)](#)

This bill amends title XIX of the Social Security Act to **ensure that children in foster care** who are placed in a qualified

residential treatment program are **eligible for Medicaid**.

21st Century Children and Families Act (H.R. 5856)

This bill would preserve the aspects of child welfare laws that have proven effective, while **updating child welfare policy** so more children can safely and expeditiously **leave foster care to reside with a safe, stable, and permanent family**. The bill would **reduce the number of children in foster care** without legal family and **increase permanency options** so fewer youth age out of foster care.

Promoting Employment of Skilled Workers and Foster Youth Act of 2021 (H.R. 3986)

This bill expands the work opportunity tax credit to (1) allow the rehiring of certain construction industry employees participating in an apprenticeship program, and (2) include **qualified pre-apprenticeship graduates and foster care transition youth** as targeted group members for purposes of the credit.

Foster Youth Mentoring Act of 2021 (H.R. 3083)

This bill supports the establishment or expansion and operation of programs using a network of public and private community entities to **provide mentoring for children and youth with experience in foster care**.

Implementation of the Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Amendments

On January 24th, 2022, the Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD) published implementation guidance notice for the Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act (FSHO) in the Federal

Register. The FSHO amendments provide **extension of FUPY/ FYI assistance** for youth who participate in a Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program. Youth who are unable to enroll in an FSS program (due to PHAs not administering such program) are entitled to receive an extension of **up to two successive 12-month periods beyond the 36-month time limit** of assistance if they engage in at least one of the **education, workforce development, or employment activities** for 9 months of the 12-month period preceding each extension.

Additionally, FSHO also provides youth with extension of FUP/ FYI assistance they meet one of **three statutory exceptions** – being responsible for the **care of a dependent child under the age of 6 or an incapacitated person, regularly participating in a drug addiction or alcohol treatment and rehabilitation program, or being incapable of complying** with the requirement to participate in an FSS program or engaging in education, workforce development, or employment activities **due to a documented medical condition**. In addition, FSHO requires PHAs to **inform the youth of available supportive services** that are either provided by or has connection with the PHAs.

Currently, HUD is seeking public comments on certain provisions of FSHO but they welcome public comment on any of the notice's provisions. The comment due date is March 25, 2022 and comments can be submitted via mail or electronic submission at <http://www.regulations.gov/>. More information is available [here](#).

your state that you would like us to mention in the next newsletter, please email Angelique Day at dayangel@uw.edu.

We know that there may be legislation in your state that we have not listed here. If you know of a specific effort in

Article Highlight

PAPER AUTHORS



Nathanael Okpych Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor at the University of Connecticut's School of Social Work. He is also the Project Director for the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study. He is interested in understanding factors that influence college success for young people with foster care histories, and using this knowledge to inform intervention approaches to increase college entry, persistence, and completion rates.



Lori Gray Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor at Western Michigan University, a Licensed Doctoral Psychologist and a mindfulness teacher. Dr. Gray's research interests include the efficacy of mindfulness-based interventions, stress reduction, living well with chronic pain/illness, and the role of contemplative pedagogy in higher education.

Study Summary

Our study explores the social networks and social capital of a sample of 26 first-year college students with foster care histories participating in a campus-based support program (CSP) at a Midwestern university. We developed a novel instrument, FC-Connects, which is specifically designed for students with care histories. The tool gathers information about key people students would turn to for help succeeding in college in five social support areas. We used social capital theory to frame our study and distinguish between bridging capital that helps youth "get ahead" (i.e., college advice or academic support) and bonding capital that helps youth "get by" (i.e., emotional support, practical support, or personal advice).

Key Findings

On average, the 26 students named 8.5 different people they could turn to for support. People affiliated with the CSP (33%), biological family (19%) and friends/romantic partners (15%) were the types of relationships that were most commonly named. On average, youth had fewer people to turn to for college advice than the other types of bonding capital. In line with social capital theory, youth tended to rely on their biological families for bonding capital (especially tangible support). Students relied on their CSP peer mentors for college advice and academic help, and their CSP peers for academic support. CSP coaches played a particularly unique role, as they were important sources of college advice and academic support and emotional support and personal advice. When we looked at the connections that the 26 students had with each other, about 1-in-3 neither nominated any peers nor were nominated by peers. Four students were especially well-connected to their peers.

Implications

The results of this study support the case. Importantly, our survey was administered in October 2019, so this is a glimpse of students' social connections early in college. However, since some students do not make it past their first semester, these early connections are important to understand. Although information-related capital is instrumental in the college success for underrepresented students, study participants had about one fewer people for college advice than they did for other types of support. One actionable step is to ensure students are connected to at least one knowledgeable, resourceful adult soon after arriving on campus and throughout their first year. A second important finding is that CSP-affiliated staff, mentors, and peers were particularly important sources of information-related capital. If these connections were subtracted out, the total number of college advice and academic support relationships would each be cut in half. Third, CSP coaches provided kinds of support that helped youth to both "get by" and "get ahead", and these relationships formed relatively quickly. This underscores the importance of programs being staffed by professionals who are proactive and persistent with connecting with students, who have specialized knowledge of the needs of students with care histories, and who aim to be emotional supports as well as purveyors of information, technical assistance, and resources. Finally, if CSP staff can identify highly-connected students early on, they could be engaged as cohort leaders to help shape the cohort culture and engage less-connected students.

Okpych, N. J. & Gray, Lori. (2021). Ties that bond and bridge: Exploring social capital among college students with foster care histories using a novel social network instrument (FC-Connects). *Innovative Higher Education*, 46(6), 683-705.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-021-09553-x>

Announcements

Keep an eye out here for upcoming webinars, training sessions, or conferences that our collaborative members are hosting or attending. We will share any potential funding or employment opportunities that we think may be of interest. Please let us know if you would like a specific opportunity to be promoted in our next newsletter!

REPORT CALLS FOR GREATER INVESTMENTS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH FOSTER CARE BACKGROUNDS

Nathanael J. Okpych, Mark E. Courtney, Sunggeun (Ethan) Park have developed a new [memo](#) for CalYOUTH that highlights an analysis of 7,997 youth with a foster history that share the following characteristics: "(1) the youth was in care on their 18th birthday, (2) the youth's 18th birthday was after January 1, 2012 (that is, they were potentially eligible for extended foster care), (3) the youth enrolled in college sometime between their 17th and 21st birthdays, (4) the youth was at least 21 years old at the time of the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) data draw in May 2019, and (5) the youth was in child welfare-supervised foster care."

CONFERENCES

September 14th, 2022 National Conference for Engaged Scholarship on Hidden Student Populations

Location: Oklahoma State University, Stillwater. The conference seeks to bring together diverse researchers and practitioners, particularly in higher education and social work (but inclusive of other fields), to consider current research and to form interdisciplinary research teams for empirical research studies to be conducted in the 14-16 months after the conference.

[Conference Information Proposal Submission Guidelines & Updates](#)

WEBINARS

Tuesday, March 8, 2022, 11am-noon PST (2:00-3:00pm EST)

The Impact of COVID-19 on Campus-Based Support Programs Serving Students with Foster Care Experience: Focus Groups with Administrators and Students

The presenters will be Drs. Kizzy Lopez (Fresno Pacific University), Jennifer Geiger (University of Illinois at Chicago), Nathanael Okpych (University of Connecticut), and Sara Gamez (California State Polytechnic University - Pomona). This presentation will discuss findings from focus groups conducted with campus support program (CSP) administrators and CSP students from two- and four-year colleges in California during the Covid-19 pandemic. Presenters will describe challenges faced by both administrators/CSPs and students as well as some lessons learned for going forward.

Register [HERE](#)

Tuesday, March 22, 2022, noon – 1pm (3:00-4:00pm EST)

Historically Black Colleges and Universities Give Foster Youth an Edge.

The presenter will be Delrisha White, Founder and Principal Consultant of Equity Erudition: Anti-Racism Education. Historically Black Colleges and Universities were founded before the Civil War (1861-1865) with the express purpose of making higher education accessible to the Black community. Most Americans don't know that HBCUs have historically opened their doors to all people at the margins of the country, making higher education a possibility for folks who were previously denied an education. Today, HBCUs offer life changing benefits for young people in foster care. This workshop explores the impact of HBCUs in one former foster youth's experience.

Register [HERE](#)

Wednesday, April 6, 2022, noon – 1pm PST (3:00-4:00pm EST)

The presenters will be Dr. Judy Havlicek (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign), Dr. Amy Dworsky (Chapin Hall at University of Chicago), and Elissa Gitlow (Chapin Hall at University of Chicago). Presentation description: "We undertook a mixed-methods study to learn more about the experiences of Illinois community college students who are or were in foster care. Our findings suggest that despite significant federal and state investments in programs that aim to promote postsecondary educational attainment among this population, students who are or were in foster care are not receiving the supports they need to succeed in school from either child welfare or education systems."

Register [HERE](#)

Check out the [NRC-FAHE Webinar Archive](#) to see past webinar presentations.