



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.

Our Leadership:

Angelique Day, PhD
School of Social Work
University of Washington

Lisa Schelbe, PhD
College of Social Work
Florida State University

Amy M. Salazar, LMSW, Ph.D.
Department of Human
Development
Washington State University
Vancouver

Kerri Kearney, PhD, MBA
Higher Education
& Student Affairs
Oklahoma State University

Thank you to those who contributed to the creation of this newsletter:

Cossette Woo, MSW
University of Washington

Sierra Wollen, MSWc
University of Washington

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Welcome and Introduction

I am proud to share this fourth issue of the National Research Collaborative for Foster Alumni and Higher Education with you. I am hoping many of you can join us at our special interest group session coming up in October 2019 at the upcoming Council on Social Work Education Conference at the Sheraton Denver Downtown Hotel in Denver, Colorado.

We are working hard to ensure this newsletter is equally amenable to both social work and education scholars, and we are so pleased to have Kerri Kearney as a regular contributor of this newsletter to bring the important voice of educators to this work. We look forward to showcasing scholars from the education community in future webinars and in the research highlights in future editions if this newsletter.

In this issue we highlight the Fostering Higher Education Program at Washington State University. We're also highlighting the recent publication of Lisa Schlebe that was published in the latest edition of the CWLA-sponsored *Child Welfare Journal*.

This year marks the 20-year anniversary of the John H Chafee Independence Act, which gives us a unique time in history to advocate to support young people who are aging out of foster care. As many of you know, the Chafee Act is up for reauthorization, and we are proud that our organization will be providing support to the U.S. Congress in the development of legislation that supports the continuation and strengthening of this important piece of landmark legislation. We hope to be able to count on many of you to provide your expertise and guidance in the coming months in preparation for this bill's introduction in May 2020. In addition to Chafee, we hope you will take some time to review the policy updates highlighted in this newsletter. Additional advocacy work is needed to get these bills taken up in committee. Please reach out to the original bill sponsors of these bills and thank them

for their leadership in support of foster care and higher education programming. Additionally, we are asking you to reach out to your congressional members and ask them to sign on as co-sponsors of these bills. Don't know who your elected officials are? Please visit <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials/>.

We will not be holding any webinars over the holiday break as we know many of you will need to be focusing on finals and preparing for holiday travel. Webinars will recommence in January 2020. We are currently looking for researchers who are interested in being featured in our webinar series over the winter and spring quarters. Remember, these count as invited talks for those of you working on tenure. Please contact Amy Salazar to register.

In solidarity,
Angelique Day

ANGELIQUE DAY, Ph.D.



Angelique Day received her Ph.D. in interdisciplinary health science in 2011 from Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo. She earned an MSW from Michigan State University in 2005 and a BS summa cum laude in sociology/psychology from Central Michigan University.

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.

From 2011-2016, she was an assistant professor of social work at Wayne State University, where she taught both undergraduate and graduate classes. She's been an evaluator, principal investigator or project coordinator on major studies funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and McGregor Fund, among others.

Day has received many awards and honors, including a year-long congressional fellowship awarded during the 2016-2017 academic year by the Society for Research on Child Development and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. She was assigned to the office of Congressman Danny K. Davis where she helped develop the congressman's child welfare and higher education legislative portfolios.

dayangel@uw.edu

Higher Education Column

KERRI KEARNEY, PH.D.



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. Her research, teaching, and service agendas focus on the broad areas of other mothering issues (fostering and adoption) with an emphasis on college students who are alumni of foster care, the role of emotions in human transition, issues related to organizational behavior, and visual or arts-based methodologies in qualitative research.

In my last column, I talked about social workers and numerous higher education professionals coming together through a shared concern for college students with histories of foster care and/or homelessness. While college students occupy important spaces away from campuses, all college students must successfully interact with higher education staff, faculty, and processes. Problems can occur for a multitude of reasons like old processes and staff/faculty who are not well educated about these unique students. So why doesn't higher education fix these things? The answers are incredibly complex but increased understanding allows us to work toward improved solutions.

Colleges and universities function within a decentralized system with no national governing agency. In addition, there are multiple types of institutions including research, metropolitan, private, land-grant, community and two-years, nonprofits, and for-profits. The sheer number of types of institutions, combined with the decentralized system, means it is very difficult to create consistent, nationwide change.

Several federal (and state) laws intended to help former foster and homeless youth have been enacted. However, there remains ignorance about higher education. For example, several years ago the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) began to ask applicants if they were in foster care at age 13 or after. While not perfect, it was systemic assistance in identifying students. Yay, right? However, the purpose of the question was to provide students with financial information, so most colleges and universities only use the data for this purpose – not for tracking the success of students, offering other assistance, or for research. Thus, the change is limited in its usefulness despite practice and research knowledge that support is a critical factor in students' success.

Higher education finances are another contextual factor. American higher education has been under recent pressure for the cost of college and, of course, there is space for improvement. However, there are other factors. Most public institutions have experienced significant decreases in financial support; for the first time in history, more than half in fiscal year 2017 relied on tuition dollars for more than 50% of their budgets. Changes in the expectations of students (such as on-campus apartments rather than dorm rooms) also impact higher education finances, and half of college students today are non-traditional – older students who haven't been in school in years, students from low incomes, first-generation students, students without strong high schools.

Given the additional supports needed for success, these students are more expensive to educate.

So why do higher education finances matter when considering students with backgrounds in foster care and homelessness? For one thing, these students are a part of the group who likely need additional care and concern. This is not to suggest that they are all academically challenged (a common misconception) but that they often need additional human support and guidance. The population of foster alumni in college is also (to the best of our knowledge) a very small part of the total student population. So, for institutions under financial pressure, how do we prioritize commitment to these students when they are both small in number and more costly?

Higher education professionals are well aware of our diversifying student populations, but may not see social workers as resources for the inherent challenges. A shared understanding of the context and pressures of higher education is a good first step toward positioning social workers as allies. By seeking out common spaces and understandings (rather than focusing on critique), we can proceed toward authentic discussions and collaborative research that leads to strong solutions.

For a call for proposals for the first interdisciplinary, national research conference on former foster youth in college (and other hidden populations), please go to education.okstate.edu/risforthursday

Program Highlight – Washington State University: Vancouver

As a special for this issue, we decided to highlight the Fostering Higher Education program at Washington State University – Vancouver.

SARA SPIERS, MPA



Sara Spiers, MPA is an Educational Advocate and Mentor Coordinator in the Department of Human Development at Washington State University Vancouver. She works closely with Dr. Amy Salazar on a program called Fostering Higher Education, a postsecondary access and support program for youth in foster care. As an educational advocate, she works one-on-one with youth in foster care to develop academic and career goals and help the youth build social supports as they transition from high school or a GED program into a postsecondary program. As a mentor coordinator, she recruits and trains community members to become mentors for youth enrolled in Fostering Higher Education. She can be reached through email at sara.spiers@wsu.edu.

Can you give us some background on your program and how it got started?

Sara Spiers: Fostering Higher Education was created by Dr. Amy Salazar at Washington State University Vancouver. In her research and many conversations with youth in foster care, she found a lot of students in foster care want to go to college, but often do not know how to navigate the pathways to a

postsecondary program; this could be due to lack of support or being discouraged when faced with a barrier. Dr. Salazar realized there was a lack of evidence-based programs that helped youth during the period of transition into postsecondary education. In response, Dr. Salazar created Fostering Higher Education with the aim of working with youth in foster to help them see how to reach their goals and graduate from a postsecondary institution.

How about some background on funding for your program?

The funding for Fostering Higher Education comes from many different grants. The funder for the development of this program was the National Institute on Drug Abuse. A funder for our current work is the Annie E Casey Foundation. Not funders, but major community partnerships include Washington State's Department of Children, Youth and Families and the many community mentors who are working with the youth.

How many youth would you say your program serves?

We serve about 15 youth.

What is your role within the program?

I have two roles within the program. I am an educational advocate and mentor coordinator. As an educational advocate, I meet with youth one-on-one about once a month to discuss a variety of educational based accomplishments, concerns, and next steps. These conversations are guided by two different pieces of curriculum. The first is called "My Education Goal Planning". During these conversations, the youth and I use a pre-designed "to-do" list that has listed out all the necessary steps a youth would need to take to apply to a postsecondary program. These to-dos include tasks such as "talk with your school counselor about sending transcripts to schools you applied to";

"ask up to three adults to write letters of recommendation"; "sign up for the SAT/ACT". The educational advocate also helps filling out FAFSA and other financial scholarship information, take youth on college tours, and connect youth with individuals in the community who are working in a potential career field the youth is interested in pursuing. For example, If there's a professor at Washington State University Vancouver that teaches in a department the youth may want to earn a degree in, I will try to schedule a time for the two of them to meet on campus or talk over the phone. If a youth is interested in nursing, I may ask a nurse in the community to meet with the youth and me to talk about what it is like being a nurse and how the nurse got to their current career.

Another thing the educational advocate works on with the youth is called the "Top 6 Potential Pitfalls for Higher Ed.", which are six identified challenges and barriers any student entering a postsecondary program may face. These six pitfalls include sleep, financial challenges, physical health, relationship challenges, mental health, and alcohol and drugs. Every three meetings I have with each youth, we go through one of the 6 challenges together. We talk about this potential challenge, how the youth in doing in relation to it, and if there are any steps we could take to make sure this potential pitfall doesn't become a challenge for them. If youth want more information on a topic, I engage in a conversation with them and share resources with them.

What are other main components of your program?

In addition to being an educational advocate, I'm also the mentor coordinator. When it comes to resiliency and helping youth, it takes one caring adult to change a youth's life. The mentors in this program are asked to be a caring adult in the youth's life and to support their mentee during their transition into a postsecondary program.

We ask that the mentors help the youth stay excited about continuing their education. Each mentor completes an initial 8 hours of training. Then, throughout their time as a mentor, they will participate in continuing mentor trainings about every three months. The initial training provides an overview of the child welfare system, the process of aging out of foster care, how to graduate from high school or a GED program, how to pay for postsecondary education, cultural humility, and strengths-based relationship building.

Of these, which do you feel are the most successful and which would you focus more resources on if you could?

The value of being an educational advocate is getting to go through graduation requirements and postsecondary application and enrollment steps with youth step by step, in a non-overwhelming fashion. Together we piece scholarship information together, demystify the college experience, and show youth their goals are possible. Mentors are so valuable in helping youth maintain engagement in education. I think finding ways to encourage more community members to be mentors would be a great use of resources.

Which parts of your program do you feel could be replicable to other programs like yours across the country (knowing that some states may not provide as much funding or support as your program may receive)?

The entirety of Fostering Higher Education could be replicated anywhere. It is important to establish a partnership with other organizations that work with youth in foster care, caseworkers in the community, as well as various postsecondary education institutions. Components of the "My Education and Goal Planning" may need to be revised based on graduation and GED requirements by state. Other components are standard for any youth applying to a postsecondary program which may the program replicable.

Do you have one or two specific challenges that you feel your program faces (e.g. recruitment and confidentiality limits on identifying potential participants, working with other departments on campus or in the community, helping students with adjustment to campus)?

We did a big enrollment push over the summer. I think between summer vacation, youth's summer employment schedules, and other unpredictable summer plans, recruitment slowed down. With school back in session, I have already seen a shift in being able to create more concrete plans with the youth. Ultimately, this is a new program and, for the youth who are enrolled, it takes a couple of months before it feels like it is now part of their monthly routine.

Any other information you would like readers of this newsletter to know about yourself or the program?

We might have already covered this, but I think why our program is working is because of the staff's passion. A youth will tell me, "I want to go to this postsecondary program" but there's a lot of hesitation in their voice. When I ask about that hesitation they list off reasons like money, housing, transportation, etc. What Fostering Higher Education does is breakdown these steps and provide additional supportive adults throughout the process.

Interested in having your program highlighted in a future edition of this newsletter? Contact us at nrc.fahe@gmail.com

Policy Updates

New updates from Congress are forthcoming as many of the bills from last year are waiting to be reintroduced. Here is the list of bills introduced in the 115th Congress that are waiting to be reintroduced in the 116th. Please reach out to the original bill sponsors of these bills and encourage them to re-introduce them!

If you're not sure who your elected officials are, visit <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials/>

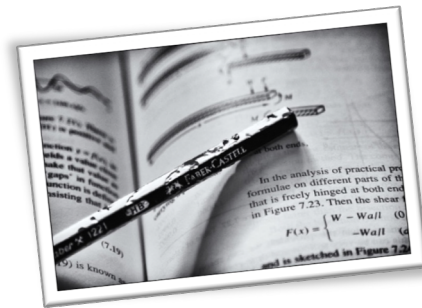
FEDERAL BILL HIGHLIGHTS

S. 789 (Sen. Murray, Patty [D-WA])/H.R. 1724 (Rep. Clark, Katherine M. [D-MA-5]) - Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act

This bill was originally introduced in the House and Senate on September 12th, 2017. It currently sits in the House Education and the Workforce Committee for review, and the Senate referred it to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. The bill currently has a combined eleven bi-partisan co-sponsors.

This bill clarifies the eligibility guidelines for determinations of homeless students who qualify for independent status, prioritizes foster and homeless youth for work study awards, forbids the inclusion of education training vouchers and independent living stipends in student cost of attendance formulas, and requires that foster and homeless students not pay more than in-state tuition and fees. It goes further to support homeless and foster youth in higher education institutions by requiring the creation of a staff position that is a "single point of contact" who will be responsible for connecting eligible students with support services, resources, and programs, as well as ensuring housing priority for these students "during school breaks or year-round" and developing plans to support access to housing "during and between academic years".

Included in this bill are updates to the TRIO and Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate programs. Changes to the TRIO program would require revisions and updates to policy



and practice in order to remove barriers to homeless and foster youth participation in Talent Search, Upward Bound, Student Support Services and Educational Opportunity Center programs. The Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness program requires that individual programs detail how they plan to facilitate participation of homeless and foster youth, remove barriers to participation and collaborate with outside agencies to identify eligible participants.

To learn more and track this bill, go to: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/1724?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22Higher+Education+Access+and+Success+for+Homeless+and+Foster+Youth+Act%22%5D%7D&s=1&r=1>

S. 1650 (Sen. Casey, Bob [D-MN])/H.R. 2966 (Rep. Davis, Danny. [D-IL-7]) - Fostering Success in Higher Education Act of 2019

This bill was introduced in the House and Senate on May 23rd, 2019. It currently sits in the House Education and the Workforce Committee for review, and the Senate referred it to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. The bill currently has two co-sponsors in the House, and three co-sponsors in the Senate.

This bill will amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to provide grants to states to improve higher education opportunities to homeless and foster youth. Under the measure, funding can be provided for programs that seem to recruit foster and homeless youth to pursue higher

education and provide supportive services for student who are enrolled.

To learn more and track this bill, please visit:

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/1650?r=16&s=1>

H.R. 4146 (Rep. Clark, Katherine M. [D-MA-5]) - Trauma-Informed Schools Act of 2019

This bill was introduced to the House on August 2nd, 2019, and referred to the House Committee on Education and Labor.

If enacted, this legislation would for the first time, define "trauma-informed practices" in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to include professional development; trauma-informed programs, supports and services; positive approaches to discipline that address underlying causes of behavior, including trauma; and a planning process to help all students feel safe and connected to the school community and promote a school-wide culture of acceptance. The legislation would also require state plans to include ways local education agencies will support efforts to increase the prevalence of trauma-informed practices, as well as require that a description of how the State education agency will use its funds to increase trauma-informed practices.

To learn more and track this bill, go to: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/4146?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22H.+R.+4146%22%5D%7D&s=1&r=5>

H.R. 4146 (Rep Scott, Robert C. "Bobby". [D-IL-7]) - College Affordability Act

This bill was introduced on October 15th, 2019, and referred to the House Committee on Education and Labor.

This bill would provide low-income students with greater financial support as it cuts tuition costs, and covers basic expenses that can interfere with their education through new federal-state partnership programs, increased Pell Grants, as well as more tools that connect students with federal safety net programs. In addition, this would also

give students more flexible college options, invests in providing more support to a more diverse generation of students, as well as strengthening Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities, as well as other Minority Serving Institutions.

We recognize that this list is, by no means, all inclusive. We know that there may be legislation in your state that we have not listed here. If you know of a specific effort in your state that you would like us to mention in the next newsletter, please email Angelique Day at dayangel@uw.edu

Article Highlight

We are always excited to share the work of our collaborative members. In this issue we highlight a recent article by one of our members. For a complete list of resources, please see the Library tab on our website. If you would like to have your recent article highlighted, contact us at nrc.fahe@gmail.com

About the Authors

Dr. Lisa Schelbe is an Associate Professor at Florida State University College of Social Work and a Faculty Affiliate at the Florida Institute for Child Welfare. She serves as a co-Editor-in-Chief of the *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*. Dr. Schelbe's primary research interest focuses on youth aging out of the child welfare system.

Dr. Angeliqe Day is an Associate Professor at the University of Washington School of Social Work. 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. Jennifer Geiger is an Assistant Professor at the Jane Addams College of Social Work at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Her research focuses on promoting access and success for youth in care and foster care alumni in higher education settings.

Dr. Megan Hayes Piel is an Assistant Professor at The University of Texas at San Antonio. Prior to that she was an Assistant Professor at Wayne State University School of Social Work. Her research focuses on the intersection of child welfare and behavioral health, with attention to foster youth and transitions to adulthood.

Schelbe, L., Day, A. G., Geiger, J. M., & Piel, M. H. (2019). The state of

evaluations of campus-based support programs serving foster care alumni in higher education. *Child Welfare* 97(2), 23-40.

Study Summary

Youth involved with the foster care system face many barriers to receiving an education and have lower rates of post-secondary enrollment, retention, and graduation. Campus-based support programs aim to help foster care youth overcome these barriers by providing some combination of financial, academic, housing, and social/emotional support. Despite the prevalence of these programs, their efficacy is unknown due to the lack of formal program evaluations. Program evaluations are necessary in order to make routine programmatic changes to meet the needs of foster care youth. Additionally, programs that do not conduct evaluations may be at a higher risk of losing their funding, as funders may require evidence that the program is tangibly impacting outcomes for foster youth. While there is general agreement that evaluations are necessary to strengthen and sustain campus-based support programs (Dworsky & Pere, 2010; Geiger et al., 2016; Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010), little is known about the current evaluation practices among these programs. This study assessed data from an exploratory survey of 81 program directors and staff, faculty, and researchers associated with campus-based support programs serving foster care youth in the United States. The researchers analyzed these data to explore the prevalence of evaluations among these programs, how evaluations were conducted, the capacity of programs to conduct evaluations, and differences across types of programs.

Key Findings

Over half of the respondents reported that evaluations were perceived as a programmatic challenge, while less than one-third of respondents reported that they did not consider evaluations to be a challenge for their program.

Approximately one-quarter of respondents indicated that their program had high capacity to conduct evaluations, and another quarter indicated low capacity for evaluations. Nearly two-thirds of program staff indicated that there was no formal evaluation being conducted for their program. Of those staff who did report that an evaluation was being conducted, 62% indicated that the evaluation was being done internally. Programs that had been established longer and programs that received public funding sources were more likely to conduct evaluations. One-third of respondents reported that they collected graduation, retention, and grade information from participants, and one-fifth collected data on student service use and program engagement. Only five respondents used standardized assessments in their evaluations.

Implications

This study shed light on campus-based foster youth support programs' capacity for evaluation. Survey responses indicated that there is not currently a standard for evaluating support programs. Programs, if they did conduct evaluations, collected many different types of data, and standardized assessments were rarely utilized. The authors recommend investments in evaluation infrastructure to support campus-based programs. Consistently collecting standardized assessments, graduation data, as well as information about service use and engagement could allow for evidence-based programmatic improvements and additional funding opportunities for foster youth support programs. In many cases, program enrollment is too small to run significant statistical analyses. Given this challenge, the authors recommend the creation of a national network of researchers and practitioners committed to foster care alumni pursuing post-secondary education. This network could develop a cohesive research agenda and implement shared data measures so that patterns and impact could be measured across campus-based support programs.

Highlighted Opportunities

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!

CONFERENCES

Save the date! The Foster care and higher education Special Interest Group will be convening at the Society for Social Work Research Conference in January 2020 at the Marriott Marquis Washington DC hotel, Washington, DC on **Saturday, January 18, 2020, from 7:00 AM to 8:00 AM**. We know it is an early meeting, but we promise it will be well worth your time!



FUNDING

No current opportunities highlighted as of this publishing.

EMPLOYMENT

No current opportunities highlighted as of this publishing.

WEBINARS

Check out the NRC-FAHE Webinar Archive to see the past Webinar presentations (<https://www.nrc-fahe.org/archive-webinars>).