



# 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

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# Welcome and Introduction

I am proud to share this third 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 24-27, 2019 at the upcoming Council on Social Work Education Conference at the Sheraton Denver Downtown Hotel in Denver, Colorado. Our members have been very productive. Several updates have been made to our website since it was officially launched last January at SSWR. Please visit the library for an up to date list of relevant peer reviewed publications and technical reports (<https://www.nrc-fahe.org/>). The library has been reorganized to make it easier to search for research by specific topics of interest. Per membership request, we are proud to include our inaugural youth, Amber, from Texas State University's interview in this newsletter. Youth voice should be central in our program planning and evaluation efforts, and we are so excited to share those thoughts with you. We encourage all our research members out there to not only take these insights in from our newsletters, but to also encourage you to make it a regular part of your research practice. Researchers have been given an awesome gift and responsibility in that our research is regularly consulted by practitioners and policymakers as our field continues to evolve. It is our duty to make sure that the lived experiences of the young people we serve through practice and research remains at the forefront of the stories we share. Although we were unable to secure a youth interview in time for the release of this current edition, we are committing to do that for all future newsletter publications.

After taking the summer off from our webinar series, we are excited to kick off the fall season with a presentation by Debbie Raucher from the John Burton

Foundation on August 27, 2019. Can't make it? No worries, all talks are being archived and are available for viewing through our Webinar Archive page (<https://www.nrc-fahe.org/archive-webinars>)! Our upcoming speakers program for the Fall season can also be found on our website and are also highlighted in this edition of the newsletter.

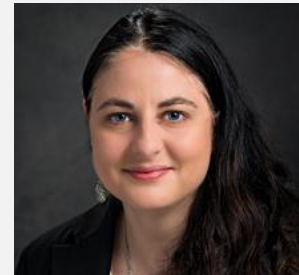
In this issue we highlight the Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice, and Research Foster care to Policy workgroup in PA which was responsible for spearheading the passage of PA's tuition fee waiver legislation. We're also highlighting the recent publication of Toni Watt that was published in *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*.

Also included in this issue is the latest policy developments occurring at the state and federal levels that impact our work. Legislation has been introduced in 116<sup>th</sup> congress (18-19 legislative session) 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. You can find information on these in the policy section of this newsletter. 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/>.

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](mailto:dayangel@uw.edu)

# Higher Education Column

KERRI KEARNEY, PHD



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](http://education.okstate.edu/risforthursday)

# Practice Highlights: Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice and Research Foster Care to College Work Group

For this issue, we decided to highlight the Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice, and Research.

SARAH WASCH, LCSW



Sarah Wasch, MSW, is the Program Manager at the Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice, and Research. Sarah provides support and coordination to multiple Field Center projects and initiatives, including facilitating the Foster Care to College work to improve higher education outcomes for youth from foster care. Sarah holds a Bachelor's Degree in Child Development and Sociology from Tufts University and a Master's of Social Work from the University of Pennsylvania.

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

Sarah Wasch: Since its inception in 1999, The Field Center has engaged in a number of projects touching three pillars: policy, practice, and research, to improve outcomes for youth whose lives have been touched by the child welfare system, as well as improving the working of the system itself. In 2013, we held a colloquium where we invited students with experience in foster care and national experts to discuss what befalls youth in the foster care system as it pertains to higher education. The Field

Center did a lot of research at that time and realized that youth with experience in the foster care system are not faring as well educationally as their peers who have never been in the foster care system. In 2014, we invited a few stakeholders to put their heads together to discuss what we're not doing, what we can do better, and how Pennsylvania and the nation as a whole is failing foster youth by not paying attention to their educational outcome. This led to the creation of the Field Center's Foster Care to College Workgroup.

The Foster Care to College Workgroup has grown over the last five years; including approximately 50 different organizations that represent local and national stakeholders, and the three pillars. Within the workgroup, there are child welfare practitioners, caseworkers, counselors, attorneys, financial aid officers, higher education professionals, foster parents, as well as national advocacy groups, such as the Juvenile Law Center, and the Education Law Center, among others. This workgroup exists to ensure that both Philadelphia and the national community are being responsive to the issues identified by interdisciplinary professionals. The ethos of the work group is that children in the foster care system and children in general aren't raised in silos, and so we don't believe that it's the work of any one discipline to fix this problem. We think that together we can solve problems more efficiently. The workgroup has really driven a lot of the work that has been happening here in Pennsylvania, spearheaded by the Field Center. The workgroup meets quarterly, and has done trainings, webinars, and advocated for legislation, in addition to helping individual schools with campus-based support programs.

*We've heard a bit about components of your initiative already, but can you*

*highlight what component(s) you feel are most successful?*

An example of a project we've been working on is raising awareness about funding for foster youth. We realized that in Pennsylvania, the information on foster youth funding for higher education wasn't really accessible, and youth in foster care weren't across the board applying for the same grants. There was a lot of misunderstanding about what they were eligible for, and so we put together a small committee to compile a document that would make paying for college simple and accessible. From that, [our fact sheet](#) was created. Another really exciting piece that the workgroup has been pushing forward is that we have a legislative committee that had been working for years to try to get tuition waivers passed in the state of Pennsylvania. We are thrilled to announce that Pennsylvania finally passed legislation enacting tuition waivers for foster youth to begin in the Fall of 2020.

In 2016, with support from the Philadelphia Foundation, we released a request for proposals for four schools to launch their own campus support program. All training, technical assistance, ongoing consultation, and information needed to launch the campus support program would be provided by the Field Center. The first round of schools selected included a large state-related institution, a community college, a large public university, as well as a small private university, which allows students to choose any type of school that fits them best. Each school is progressing at their own pace, and building a program responsive to their own needs. In 2018, a second request for proposals was launched; this time, the schools selected consisted of one community college, two small private universities, and one state-related institution.

*Do you have one or two specific challenges that you feel your initiative faces?*

Until about a year ago, there hadn't been many peer-reviewed publications on the effectiveness of campus support programs. While there's been an increase in programs launched, there isn't a lot of proof that it actually works. Preliminary research has told us that campus support programs hold great promise, and early research has been very promising that programs can make a difference. However, research is lacking; there haven't been robust controlled studies, longitudinal studies, or national studies. Similarly, with tuition waivers, each state's utilization rate is so different. Every stakeholder wants to know the number of students who would be projected to utilize such a waiver and the economic impact, but there isn't a reliable way to track foster youth in higher education or predict this number.

*Are there any specific things (new programs, better outreach, etc.) you would like to see your initiative achieve in the future?*

Ideally, this initiative wouldn't have to exist, because foster youth would have educational outcomes on par with other kids. From the Foster Care to College initiative, we would like to see the state of Pennsylvania have a robust and thriving network of campus support programs across the state. We'd also like practitioners within the child welfare system to be attuned to issues within the system, and national research that tells us that students with experience in foster care are falling behind. It is the responsibility of the child welfare system to see how we're failing these students. There are three main goals within the child welfare system - safety, well-being, and permanency. We don't do enough for the well-being of youth, and education falls under that category. Foster youth fare poorly on so many metrics. If we have the opportunity to do better, we should take that opportunity.

*Any closing comments?*

The Field Center believes that for effective child welfare change to occur, you need to have an interdisciplinary approach. What makes the Field Center unique is that we work across disciplines and have formal partnerships with the University of Pennsylvania's Schools of Social Policy & Practice, Law, Medicine and Nursing, and the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. This allows us to tackle complex problems, like improving higher education outcomes for foster youth, from a cross-disciplinary perspective.

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## Youth Voices - Texas State University

For this issue, we decided to highlight Texas State University.

AMBER ALSTON



Amber Alston is a Senior at Texas State University studying Communication Studies with a minor in Mass Communication. She wants to work with Social Media for any major business or she would like to go into Human Resources. The opportunities are endless as a Communication Studies major, so picking a career path is somewhat overwhelming! Amber is a part of a couple of different organizations on campus such as Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. and serves as Vice-President for Foster Care Alumni Creating Educational Success (FACES). She also works on campus at Texas State's Writing Center as a Lead Consultant. Amber loves partaking in community service projects and being a Social Justice activist in any way she can.

*Could you tell me a bit about your college application process? What did that look like? What barriers and supports did you have?*

Amber Alston: Sure! I had a pretty regular application process, aside from the financial aid aspect. With financial aid, there was a question asking, "At any time since you turned age 13, were both of your parents deceased, were you in

foster care or were you a dependent or ward of the court?" I checked the box and there were a few questions that I can't remember that pretty much asked who your parents are. I didn't necessarily have support during the application process, simply because I didn't have financial aid just yet. Texas State had an application fee, I think it was \$75, so my mom paid for it, and I went ahead and kept applying to colleges. When I applied to Texas State, it took a couple of weeks for them to get back to me and then I found out I was accepted. As far as any financial support that I had at the time being upon acceptance, I had my financial aid that kicked in, the Texas grant, and then I also had a Texas Public Educational Grant (TPEG) grant, which was what held me over for my freshman year. During the second semester of my freshman year, I found out that I was awarded Foster Angels of Central Texas' Bright Angels scholarship, which is funded by people who really do care about the foster care community. They gave me \$2500 each year, \$1000 each in the fall and spring, and then \$500 over the summer, which was constant support that way. I was also awarded two other scholarships. I used these funds to pay for things like my rent, my electricity bill, and I also have a steady income from working at my campus' writing center. I'm also involved with Foster-care Alumni Creating Educational Success (FACES), and they always have this book-lending program. The university allots a certain amount of money into the book-lending program, and each person is given a certain amount of money to help pay for their books. I have not yet had to pay for any books, except during my first semester of my freshman year, when I didn't know what FACES was. I've always had great financial help, and I've never really had to ask for anything. The Foster Care to College Workgroup has grown over the last five years; including approximately 50 different organizations that represent local and national stakeholders, and the three pillars. Within the workgroup, there are child welfare practitioners,

caseworkers, counselors, attorneys, financial aid officers, higher education professionals, foster parents, as well as national advocacy groups, such as the Juvenile Law Center, and the Education Law Center, among others. This workgroup exists to ensure that both Philadelphia and the national community are being responsive to the issues identified by interdisciplinary professionals. The ethos of the work group is that children in the foster care system and children in general aren't raised in silos, and so we don't believe that it's the work of any one discipline to fix this problem. We think that together we can solve problems more efficiently. The workgroup has really driven a lot of the work that has been happening here in Pennsylvania, spearheaded by the Field Center. The workgroup meets quarterly, and has done trainings, webinars, and advocated for legislation, in addition to helping individual schools with campus-based support programs.

*How did you find out about the book-lending program and FACES?*

I found out about FACES through my new student orientation. We had some dead time before a presentation started, and we were all talking about financials, and how to afford things. I had made a comment about how I couldn't hear about it right now, and afterwards, I had gone up with questions, because I'm adopted, and someone pulled me to the side. He told me that "we already have support and resources for you, we have a program called FACES, which is about a bunch of foster care alumni or people who have been adopted through the foster care system through the state of Texas". He also told me about the Texas tuition waiver, which would cover the cost of tuition, and about how FACES make sure that all foster care students are taken care of financially through books. Ever since then, I've gone to so

many meetings for FACES, and we're all very close knit.

*How has your college experience been so far? Would you be able to tell me about supports and barriers in this process?*

As far as any other organizations I'm in, I am in Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. I would say that my sorority has been extremely helpful and welcoming about who I am as a person, and just improving me as a woman, and a Sigma woman as well.

Housing is also probably something that could be improved at Texas State, simply because I don't want to go too far out of pocket, and it is harder to compete with the rising costs of living on campus to begin with. I feel like if you are a foster child, or a foster care alumnus, you should have first pick on where you'd want to live. Some people may have a disability and are in the foster care system. Also, Texas State isn't very inclusive in trying to help people with disabilities navigate. We want to make it easy access for them; anywhere like Central Campus, or anywhere that would make it easy for them to go from point a to point b, without having to worry about how to maneuver.

I believe what's been a challenge for me is trying to pay for parking. What Texas State does is that we have some parking passes, and I feel that, if you've been in foster care, lowering the cost of that. If you pay by the year, it's about \$125, but if you pay by the semester, it's \$77. I live off campus, I live in an apartment, it's been a struggle for me.

*What other recommendations do you have for researchers and practitioners?*

I would just say that more research needs to be done looking at foster care youth who would like to go to graduate school. I know students who are aiming higher, but they lose two really big grants when they go to graduate school. Another thing is to increase the rate of foster care alumni who don't go to college, since our percentages are already really low to begin with. My perception is that they kind of set themselves up to not go to college. In the state of Texas, tuition waivers must be used before the age of 25, and grades must be kept up, but if you turn 25, and you haven't used your tuition waiver yet, then it's pretty much invalid.

I would like to see more research about foster care alumni who really want to further their learning, whether that's going to graduate school or even getting their PHD. I think just trying to get our percentages up is really important; just going to college as a foster care alumnus is very beautiful. It symbolizes that even though you've gone through something doesn't define who you are as a person. It's a bold statement of how you've broken your cycle.

I'd also like to see more research on housing, whether that's on campus, or off. There are some things that probably could be waived in regard to housing, such as application fees. Also, more research should be done with foster care alumni and transportation. There are some foster care alumni who have the ability to drive and don't, as they don't have access to a car. Generally, I think more research should be done looking at how to make living for foster care alumni more comfortable.

*Do you have any closing comments?*

Thank you so much for taking the time to conduct this interview; it's very important for foster care alumni to have a voice socially, politically, and economically. I feel like we are a very underrepresented demographic. People don't really talk about adoption as an option. People don't understand that there are children out there who need homes, shelter, need a place to stay, food, supplies, nourishment and nurture.

Honestly, I don't know where I would be without the resources I have now. I don't know where I'd be without my loving parents. I just want to give a big thank you to my FACES community for this opportunity. Having that support system is something that is very, very critical. I definitely want to thank Texas State University for giving me the resources and tools to continue to succeed. Specifically, I want to thank my mentor Toni Watt, for this opportunity as well. I definitely want to give a big thank you to Foster Angels of Central Texas; they've been the biggest blessing that has yet to come. Overall, I'm just very humble and I try to give back in any way that I can. I love where I'm at right now, while being in college.

# 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 115<sup>th</sup> Congress that are waiting to be reintroduced in the 116<sup>th</sup>. 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

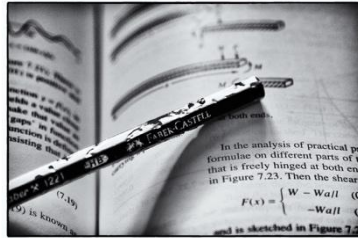
**H.R. 1724 - S. 789 (Sen. Murray, Patty [D-WA])/H.R. 3740 (Rep. Clark, Katherine M. [D-MA-5]) - Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act**

*This bill has been reintroduced in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress by Sen. Murray.*

This bill was originally introduced in the House and Senate on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The bill currently has a combined eight 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 the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress bill, go to:

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/3740?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22HR3740%22%5D%7D&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 23<sup>rd</sup>, 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 the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress bill, go to:  
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/2966?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22Fostering+Success+in+Higher+Education+Act%22%5D%7D&r=1&s=4>

**H.R. 2270 (Rep. Mitchell, Paul [R-MI-10]) - Removing Barriers to Foster Youth Success in College Act**

This bill was introduced in the House on April 10<sup>th</sup>, and has since been referred to the House Committee on Education and Labor.

This bill would require universities implementing Talent Search and Upward Bound Programs to revise policies and practices as needed to remove barriers to the participation and retention in the project of homeless children and youths, and mandates reporting requirements on the number of foster & homeless youth served.

To learn more and track the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress bill, go to:

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/2270>

## STATE EFFORT HIGHLIGHTS

**Pennsylvania: H.B. 1745 - The Fostering Independence Through Education Waiver**

On June 28<sup>th</sup>, Pennsylvania passed a law, which will create the Fostering Independence Through Education Waiver. This will create a tuition and fee waiver for youth who were in foster care.

In addition, this bill will create points-of-contact at covered institutions to help eligible students identify and apply for financial aid and scholarships, gather verification documents, and access campus and community resources and support services, and provide outreach to students to ensure that eligible students know about the waiver and all students supports, and apply for all available financial aid. The program will begin in the Fall semester of 2020, and the waiver can be used for up to five years until a young adult reaches age 26.

To learn more about this bill, go to:

<https://fieldcenteratpenn.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2018-05-22-Fostering-Independence-Through-Education-Act.pdf>

### Texas: Fostering Educational Success For Students with a History of Foster Care: A Bexar County Pilot Project

A \$3.5 Million pilot project has been approved as an appropriations rider to the University of Texas at San Antonio's base budget for a pilot project supporting improved college graduation rates for foster care alumni and to increase the number of children in foster care who are academically and emotionally ready to succeed in college.

Informed by current students with a history of foster care, community partners, and evidence of best practices on our campuses and across the country, this model of outreach and campus-based support will provide students on the UTSA, A&M-SA, and ACD campuses a comprehensive, strengths-based approach to educational success by addressing supportive relationships and community connections, physical and mental health, finances and employment, and housing. UTSA and A&M-SA will also serve as Supervised Independent Living (SIL) placements to provide housing, meals, and support services for currently enrolled students who elect to extend foster care to age 21.

To learn more information, visit:

<http://www.utsa.edu/govrel/docs/legislative-brief/Foster%20Care%20Support%20Program%20-%20leg%20brief%20v7.pdf>

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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](mailto:dayangel@uw.edu)

# Article Highlights

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.

TONI WATT, PHD



Toni Watt is a Professor of Sociology at Texas State University. Her research is both academic and applied and focuses on improving outcomes for children and youth who have experienced trauma and/or the foster care system. Dr. Watt is currently conducting evaluation research on FACES, the Texas State University support program for foster care alumni. She is also a member of the Education Reach for Texans Research Collaborative, a group of researchers investigating ways to improve higher education outcomes for youth who have experienced foster care.

If you would like to have your recent article highlighted, please send us an article summary in this same format and we will work on including it in the future.

Watt, T., Faulkner, M., Bustillos, S., & Madden, E. (2018). Foster Care Alumni and Higher Education: A Descriptive Study of Post-secondary Achievements of Foster Youth in Texas. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 1-10.

## Study Summary

A national movement is underway to improve higher education outcomes of youth who have experienced foster care. One particular strategy, adopted by 23 states, is to offer a tuition and fee waiver for foster care alumni (FCA). While this policy is intuitively appealing, we know

very little about whether tuition waivers have been effective and if so, to what extent.

In 1993, Texas became the second state (after Florida) to legislate a tuition and fee waiver for FCA. In addition, recent research (using 2014-2015 data) revealed that Texas distributes more waivers than any other state.<sup>1</sup> Finally, in 2016 the Texas state legislature mandated that the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) begin to track academic outcomes of former foster youth to better understand the impact of the state waiver program. Thus, Texas has become an interesting case study, one in which the policies, practices, and data sources are in place to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the post-secondary accomplishments of former foster youth in a state with a tuition and fee waiver?
2. What percentage of the youth who qualify for the waiver use it?
3. Does the waiver impact retention and graduation rates of the youth who use it?

## Key Findings

The most striking finding from these data was that only 3.5% of the former foster youth in our study obtained a post-secondary credential by the age of 24. Approximately 1.5% received a bachelor's degree and 2.0% received an Associate's degree or certificate. This is considerably lower than was hoped for, or expected. However, these data allow us to better understand why these figures might be so low.

The data reveal that a sizable percentage of former foster youth enrolled in higher education (32.8%). However, the vast majority saw their progress thwarted at some point along

the way. In our data set, not all youth were waiver eligible. However, we were able to examine a subgroup of youth who all qualify for the waiver (e.g. enrolled, emancipated youth). Of these youth, we found that 41% did not use the waiver. We can think of no reason why a youth, enrolled in higher education and waiver eligible, would not want to use the waiver. In addition, we found that the waiver was associated with improved outcomes for the youth who used them. Youth who used the waiver had higher rates of retention and graduation, and the size of the effect was quite large. For example, youth who used the waiver were 68% more likely to graduate than those who did not use the waiver. Finally, we learned that even though the youth who used the waiver had higher graduation rates, their graduation rates still fell far below those of non-foster youth in Texas.

## Implications

There is a need to inform legislators that waivers are a viable strategy for supporting foster youth in higher education and thus should be adopted or retained. However, once legislated, waiver utilization cannot be assumed. Practitioners and campuses need to identify waiver eligible youth and help them access the waiver. There is also a need to develop campus support programs that address additional well-documented needs of former foster youth in areas of housing, academics, mental health, and social support. The core insights gained from this descriptive study are that tuition waivers can improve higher education outcomes for former foster youth. However, policy makers, practitioners, and colleges should not stop there. There is a need to create comprehensive strategies for supporting these youth, attend to the execution of these policies and programs, and evaluate their effectiveness.

# 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

February 19-20, 2020 Washington D.C.

**National Conference on Foster Alumni and other traditionally hidden college populations**

The conference will be held February 19-20, 2020, in Washington D.C. and co-located with the 39th Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience.

General Conference Goals:

- To stimulate research-to-practice knowledge about foster alumni and other traditionally hidden populations who are college-bound, in college, or college graduates
- To create bridges among diverse areas of knowledge, researchers, and practitioners conducting research with or supporting foster alumni or other hidden populations

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.

RFPs for the 2020 conference may be submitted online, no later than 11:59 p.m. EST, September 19, 2019. Individuals will be notified of status by October 31, 2019.

To submit a research proposal, apply to be a proposal reviewer, or present research, please visit the Conference website: <https://education.okstate.edu/risforthursday/conference.html>.

## FUNDING

No current opportunities highlighted as of this publishing.

## EMPLOYMENT

No current opportunities highlighted as of this publishing.

## WEBINARS

Our next webinar will be held **Tuesday, August 27th, 2019, 11am-noon Pacific Time (2-3pm Eastern Time)**. The

presenter will be Debbie Raucher, Project Director for John Burton Advocates for Youth in California. Her presentation, entitled From Research to Policy: Lessons learned from California, will discuss how California's collective impact effort, known as California College Pathways, has strategically invested in programs, research, data and advocacy to motivate large scale systems change designed to improve post-secondary outcomes for foster youth. The conscious inclusion of coordinated investment in a research agenda from the project's inception has been key to its success. This webinar will highlight the results of the research work and share how this research has directly informed State policy and enabled the leverage of over \$80 million since 2015.

August Webinar Registration URL: <https://wsu-k20.zoom.us/j/17ab5b075cd26dc14ac87b605f06faf5>

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