



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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Introduction and Welcome

Happy new year and hope your semester/quarter is off to a good start! I am pleased to share with you our 17th edition of the NRC-FAHE newsletter. I also want to take the time to personally invite you to connect with us in person at the upcoming Society for Social Work Research Conference. We will be convening our special interest group on **Saturday, January 13, 2024, from 12:30 PM to 1:30 PM, EST at the Marriott Marquis Hotel in Washington DC in room Congress ML 4.** Please join us and your other foster care and higher education colleagues to network and learn about partnership opportunities and ways to showcase your work on the national stage. This edition of the newsletter includes many important policy and practice updates that are important for you to be aware of and we need your help to make sure that all of your students are benefiting from all these new resources they are eligible for. We also want to share best practices going on in the field. In this issue, we highlight the Augsburg Family Scholars Program, and hear directly from one of their students on how the program impacted his college-going journey. We encourage you to reach out to your colleagues at Augsburg

University to learn more. In this issue, we also feature fresh off the press an article published by Toni Watt and colleagues in Children and Youth Services Review. This paper provides a policy review and compressive landscape of the work on foster care and education occurring across the state of Texas. In addition to tracking federal policy efforts, we are also trying to keep you abreast of state policy initiatives that have the potential to positively impact college going young adults with lived experience in foster care that we could be working towards replicating across each of our respective states. This issue features a groundbreaking policy from Washington State. Finally, our newsletter concludes with information on community announcements. These include opportunities for participation in other networking events, such as the National Conference on Hidden Populations as well as hear more about the research landscape though our upcoming sponsored webinars. I greatly appreciate the NRC community and the support we give one another to move our collective work forward. Please don't hesitate to reach out and share your latest research to be featured in a future newsletter, or volunteer for a

future webinar. Help us help you get the most out of your membership with the NRC FAHE!

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, dayangel@uw.edu

Higher Education Highlight:

Transformative Partnerships: Addressing Basic Needs Insecurity and Fostering Success in Higher Education

COLUMN AUTHOR



Dr. Royel M. Johnson is an Associate Professor of Education and Social Work at the University of Southern California (USC). He is

also Chair of the Rossier School of Education's PhD program Director of the National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates. His research and scholarship address issues of access, equity, and student success in education, particularly for system-impacted populations. You can follow him on X (formerly know as Twitter) at @royeljohnson and contact him via email at royelmjo@usc.edu. Dr. Johnson is a nationally recognized scholar, whose interdisciplinary research addresses issues of educational access, racial equity, and student success. His work has an unapologetic focus on racially/ethnically minoritized and other institutionally marginalized populations including young people with foster care experience and justice-involved youth. Dr. Johnson maintains a highly active program of

research with over 40 academic publications, in addition to three forthcoming books/monographs. Moreover, he is principal investigator (PI), or Co-PI, on grants and contracts exceeding \$5.1 million. He has delivered over 100 talks, lectures, and workshops for various stakeholders, instantiating his commitment to connecting research to policy and practice to improve the material conditions of underserved populations. He holds a B.A. in Political Science and Ed.M. in Educational Policy Studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; and Ph.D. in Higher Education and Student Affairs, with a cognate in Race and Social Policy from Ohio State.

When I made the leap to Los Angeles, California nearly two years ago to join the faculty at the University of Southern California, I swiftly became acquainted with a local nonprofit organization, LA Room and Board (LARNB), that has since left an indelible mark on my journey. Founded by the visionary Sam Prater, a former student affairs practitioner within higher education, LARNB is on a resolute mission to tackle homelessness and increase degree completion among community college students.

At its core, LARNB addresses basic needs insecurity, but its ambition stretches far beyond. Recognizing that students often lack the financial, family, and social resources essential for their academic pursuits, LARNB offers a comprehensive, holistic support system, all under one roof, with live-in staff and a network of nonprofit partners. While their students are diverse across several social identity markers, a disproportionate number of them have experience in the foster care system.

This Christmas, instead of returning to my hometown of Chicago, I made a deliberate choice to remain in Los Angeles, where I dedicated the day to volunteer at LARNB. My day began early, contributing to the preparation and service of a Christmas brunch for the residents. The holiday spirit enveloped us as I stayed on, engaging in spirited games of Uno and Taboo with both staff and residents. Later that evening we took the students to see "The Color Purple" in the theater, a powerful film of triumph in the face of seemingly unsurmountable struggle and challenge. But before the curtains rose, we gathered to reflect on the past year, express gratitude, and manifest our hopes for 2024.

The stories shared by the residents resonated deeply with me. Each had weathered their own storms, overcoming adversity in remarkable ways. From tales of enduring chronic homelessness, to compounding traumas from life experiences, their narratives were a testament to their resilience and the lifelong work that so many of us are committed to addressing. They expressed profound gratitude for the newfound stability they now cherished—a haven that allowed them to refocus on their education, health, and future aspirations. Their heartfelt thanks were a testament to the life-changing impact of Sam Prater's vision.

I share this story because it serves as a poignant reminder of the boundless potential that emerges through cross-sector collaboration and authentic partnership. It's worth noting that LARNB has established a formal partnership with the LA Community

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College District, enabling them to support students struggling with basic needs insecurity—filling a crucial gap where most community colleges do not offer housing assistance.

The challenges faced by young people with foster care experience, especially those pursuing higher education, are truly extraordinary. They defy the capacity of any single sector, even higher education, to address alone. Imagine if more colleges and universities strategically partnered with mission-aligned organizations to provide crucial support for students with foster care backgrounds, akin to the model demonstrated by LACCD and LARNB. Undoubtedly, there may be other promising models elsewhere, perhaps even in the regions and states you reside.

To my fellow higher education practitioners reading this piece, I implore you to acquaint yourselves with local community organizations that can serve as strategic partners or connectors for students with foster care experience. Seek out organizations with specialized training and expertise in areas where your institution may be lacking.

For scholars and researchers, there is a clarion call to study and evaluate programs and initiatives like these. We have a dearth of knowledge about their potential as levers to enhance postsecondary success, especially for system-impacted groups like students with a foster care history.

The path forward lies in collaboration, research, and advocacy, and the stories of resilience and transformation at LARNB serve as just one example of what's possible when we work together to uplift and empower those who need it most.

Practice Highlight: Augsburg Family Scholars

COLUMN AUTHORS



Tim Pippert is the Joel Torstenson Professor of Sociology at Augsburg University. He holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Nebraska and has extensive research experience in fictive kin relationships, photographic representations of diversity in higher education, and the social impacts of the recent oil booms in North Dakota. He also designed, launched, and proudly serves as the Executive Director of Augsburg Family Scholars.

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

Each part of the program's name speaks to the program's background.

'Augsburg,' the University's name, we hope to be a temporary placeholder. At some point, it would be wonderful for 'Augsburg' to come out of there once I can secure a donor to support that program in the long term.

'Family'-- I'm a family sociologist, which is one of the reasons that this program started. As a family sociologist, you know the ins and outs of the family dynamics and the foster care system. I got tired of being the professor who would talk about how the system could be better but wasn't actively doing anything to improve the system and its outcomes. By no means are we trying to

replace or reconfigure a family, but building social networks and ties among folks is key to belonging on campus, and belonging on campus is key to graduation. Fostering those connections between folks in the program is super important.

The research in this area is mainly from a deficit model perspective rather than about all the things folks have overcome to make it to college. A strengths model is more appropriate when considering the students' paths to college and eventually to graduation. 'Scholars' is an essential aspect of the program name. There's a pretty intense focus on what scholars want to do once they graduate. Is that graduate school? If so, can we help you find a way to do that? Is it some career that you're interested in? Can we find somebody who can mentor you?

Those are the three elements of Augsburg Family Scholars (AFS) and why they're important.

How is your program funded?

I started working on the AFS program in 2021 with the idea that I would have to fundraise. I worked on developing the program in my Senior Seminar in sociology. Graduating undergraduate students, in their last semester, helped design this program. It was a problem-based learning course model to answer the question, "how could Augsburg better support students who had come out of foster care?" The model we started with was thinking about fundraising, and working parallel to that, the State of Minnesota developed the Fostering Independence Grant, FIG. FIG started in September 2022 for the first year. It pays the cost of attendance at the State University level for any student who was in foster care in Minnesota after the age of 13.

We are supported by two local foundations this year. The Sauer Family Foundation supported us last year and this year, and they're fantastic. They're a St. Paul family organization, and they've helped us get up and running. We just

got funded this year by the Constellation Fund, a fascinating organization with the goal of reducing poverty in the twin cities. The Constellation Fund is an excellent match for AFS. We're excited to have their support as well. Augsburg has also reconfigured my position and greatly supports my role in AFS.

What is your role in the program?

Augsburg Family Scholars is technically half of my job. I'm also a sociology professor. I'm still in the classroom and love teaching, but AFS is more than a half-time gig. I'm the executive director of Augsburg Family Scholars, an entity the University supports.

As the executive director, sometimes that means I'm running to Sam's Club, getting snacks, and stocking the fridge for the lounge we have. I do one-on-one intensive academic meetings and mentoring with the students.

I also have an Advisory board that oversees AFS, so I keep them updated. There's a group at Augsburg Family Scholars Council, which is four or five students who help plan events, I meet with them too. I manage the budget, the fundraising, everything. Sometimes, I'm just the guy at the end of the line with the credit card that swipes it. Suppose everybody wants a smoothie at a Timberwolves game. I'm just that guy who's like, 'Okay,' I'm the last in line and have the credit card, which is great.

It is only me. I am the executive director, van driver, academic coach, and mentor, and so far, that's fine. But it's not sustainable because we're growing.

Who does your program serve, and how many students does your program currently serve?

We have 25 students, and eight of them do not receive FIG. Of the 25, they are all supported, regardless of whether they have FIG or not, by Augsburg Family Scholars.

For anybody who is receiving FIG, I will find out about them, and they're all invited to join AFS automatically

through me. For those who don't receive FIG, a FAFSA question asks, 'Were you ever in foster care? Are both your parents deceased? And were you ever a ward of the State?' If they select one of those three categories, I'm made aware and send a letter to students who check those boxes. The letter says, 'If Foster care was a significant part of your life, contact Tim, and here's what we can do.' That's where those eight non-FIG students were engaged in AFS.

Which components of your program do you feel are especially unique or impactful?

The lounge space accommodates students who work nights; they can come in and sleep before class. Some students use the lounge to hang out between classes and study or grab a snack. I have an office in that space so students can come in for academic mentoring. That's impactful because several students from last year may not have stayed in college without that. It's helpful to have somebody saying you can do this, and here's how versus getting overwhelmed trying to manage alone.

I remember saying this to my senior seminar in sociology a couple of years ago, 'how could Augsburg better support students? What did the Sr. Sem students, or their peers receive from their families when starting college?' –We talked about the first thing parents do. They drop their kids off in the dorm room, and then you run to Target. Then you go to the bookstore and get yourself a sweatshirt. It's different for the AFS students. The first thing I do when I meet them is give them a \$300 gift card. I have about \$100 for each student to spend at the bookstore to purchase things like an Augsburg sweatshirt and a water bottle. Whatever they'd like. One student bought a fluffy blanket, which she sleeps with in the lounge. That's their welcome to campus.

If anybody wants to stay on campus over the summer, we can pay for that. If students are going to live on campus, they don't ever have to move until they

want to. Emergency aid is also important. Students who get FIG get cost of living funding, but it comes about four weeks into the semester. If you've just moved on campus, your food and housing are taken care of, but you don't have any spending money for around four weeks into the semester. If you live off campus, you don't have any extra support for four weeks, but still have to pay rent. To offset the delay in state support, we can provide gift cards to a local grocery store. That doesn't pay their rent, but they can shift funds other ways. I want to fundraise to help fill in that gap.

What impact has the program had on the students involved?

We are smashing the retention records for students in the AFS program. For this demographic, it's a hard hill to climb to stay in college and graduate. AFS is one year old, and we graduated a couple of people last year. In three or four years, we will be able to point directly and say that being in this program has increased the graduation rates.

I hear from the students all the time that they're not in any other groups at school, and they thank me for inviting them to AFS. The other day, a student told me, "'I'm starting to come to the lounge more because I realized I don't have many people to hang out with. So, I'm going to start trying to talk to more people in the lounge.'" When students are in that space, they know that they have some connection with one another.

What future goals do you have for the program?

We need another staff member in AFS at some point. So far, I've been relatively successful in earning the students' trust and developing good relationships with them, but I want to find an additional staff member. Maybe next year we can hire someone with lived experience. I want to ensure that students have other avenues of connection besides me. I also want to find support for the students who are not getting FIG. Just because

these students were in foster care in a different state or before they were 13 doesn't mean anything in terms of the path that they've had and the support they need. To better support these students, I'd like to give them backpacks, notebooks, an academic planner, and a padfolio. Students get so excited when they receive them.

What changes to law or policy would you like to see?

The FIG is not perfect. FIG's cutoff age is 27. If you're in college when you're 26 and you turn 27 in that academic year, you still qualify for FIG. But the following year, you no longer do. One of our students is about 45 years old. It's awesome, but FIG is not paying for a 45-year-old to go to college. That student meets all the other parameters and needs support but doesn't qualify for the grant. I would love for every State to have something like FIG. I'd like to see some of those rules lessened and more significant support for students who've been in foster care.

Do you have any advice for other campus-based support programs?

Yes, but honestly, you're going to make mistakes. We've gotten it mostly right because we always have students at the forefront of the decision-making. AFS is not everything I've envisioned because of the parameters, but we always keep students at the forefront because it's the best. The students tell us what they need and what they're interested in. The individuals I invited to join the Advisory Board include the Director of Admissions, Student Financial Services, and Academic Advising. This allows the students in the program to build a support group on campus. I talk directly to admissions. I have three contacts in our admissions department who are familiar with AFS.

Student Highlight: Augsburg Family Scholars

How did you get connected with the Augsburg Family Scholars Program?

Tim was my sociology professor my freshman year, so I have had Tim's connection for a while now. I received an email in the summer of 2022 about how Augsburg was starting a new Family Scholars (AFS) program, and I was eligible. So, I was like, 'Okay, this seems like a great opportunity. Reached out to Tim first, because I saw he was leading the program.

How has your experience with the Family Scholars Program been?

It has honestly been life changing. I say that just from the stance of being an upperclassman. This is the program's second year. Last year I was a junior, now I am a senior. Last year, we only had about 10-12 members, and now we are over 25. It's unfortunate that my time at Augsburg is coming to an end. To be part of this program at the start and see what has evolved in a short time—we have a nice lounge here on campus where we can relax and decompress from classes, where we can get some snacks, we can meet with other AFS students. The lounge is right under Tim's office, so that's nice. We can stop by, say hi—it's been great in that it feels like I have a second home here at Augsburg. I lived on campus last year, and now I don't, so knowing I have a place where I feel connected—it's been really great.

Tim mentioned that students also contribute to the programming, can you speak more to that?

We have an AFS student council to schedule events, which I got to be a part of last year. The council would meet to discuss what we want to do to help the program and to help us all feel connected. Last year, the AFS council coordinated for us to all go to a Twins game together at the end of the year. It was good to decompress students from finals, making sure we all feel relaxed and welcomed. We've also scheduled bowling events, going to sporting events, meeting

together on campus in the lounge, and game nights. Mainly we just want to see reconnect and see how everyone's doing.

What aspects of the program do you feel have been most impactful for you?

For me, it was kind of a different case. I already had things figured out for me with what I wanted to do. I had a great mindset on what I wanted to accomplish. I always see the best in things, so I didn't really need that much help from Tim in the standpoint of academic support or guidance. Tim asked me, 'hey, what can we offer to help?'. For me, it's been the financial aspect. I would also say from a networking standpoint getting to know the underclassmen and making them feel welcomed is a legacy I want to leave at Augsburg. I want them to get excited. The great thing about AFS is that we all come from different backgrounds and all have similarities with being in the foster care system and it's been great knowing we all have that connection.

What program would you like to see expanded or potentially replicated at other universities?

Last year, the program had just started, so we started to see what's working and what's not. Well into year two I feel like there's more set standards. We have our AFS student council and students have individual meetings set up with Tim. I want to see that continue to grow each year. This way students can feel connected and involved. Last year, in my experience, I didn't feel like much was going on. Everyone had busy schedules when we really started to take off with the program scheduling events was difficult. This year we have experience. We have established weekly meetings and have more students involved in the organization. Another thing that I would like to see continue with AFS is expansion of our resources available on campus. Tim has been doing a really great job with that, and I'm excited to see it keep growing each year.

COLUMN AUTHORS



Justin Tverberg a senior exercise science and physical education minor at Augsburg University. He is part of the football team at Augsburg and involved in the exercise science club as a student secretary. He helps plan student events to give Augsburg students opportunities for a more extraordinary Augsburg experience. He has been an athletic performance intern in strength and conditioning for the past 3 years. Interning at Augsburg, the University of Minnesota, and lastly the University of Georgia. Justin enjoys working out, exploring nature, and spending time with family.

What recommendations do you have for researchers, practitioners, and policy makers?

**FIG (Fostering Independence Grant) is available to Minnesota residents under age 27 that were in the Minnesota foster care system at any point after their thirteenth birthday. This grant may cover the cost of attendance at any eligible Minnesota public or participating private college and university.*

For policymakers: Some AFS students are FIG* eligible, but some are not. I believe there was some miscommunication going on throughout Augsburg with my FIG, so I wasn't eligible. I provided the required documentation and was given some false hope that I was eligible because I qualified previously, but in the end the grant did

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not go through. I hope this doesn't happen to future students. There needs to be more set definitions of who is FIG eligible and more transparency.

For researchers: reaching out to these programs and seeing what the underlying

PAPER AUTHORS



Toni Watt, lead author, is Chair and Professor of Sociology at Texas State University. Dr. Watt received her PhD in Sociology with an emphasis in Demography from the University of Texas at Austin. 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. Her recent research examines the impact of state tuition waivers and campus support services on higher education outcomes for former foster youth. 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.

issue is if the program is not working. If the problem is student retention: why are students dropping out of college? What is the student involved in? What will their involvement look like a year from now? I think this research would be beneficial from a retention standpoint with students involved in foster programs, specifically with AFS.

Article Highlight

Campus liaisons for students who have experienced foster care: Lessons learned from Texas

Study Summary:

The majority of youth in foster care report a desire to go to college, but less than a third of youth attend and even less graduate with a college degree. To address this,

many states are actively seeking to improve higher education outcomes for youth in foster care. The state of Texas has a tuition and fee waiver, extended foster care, and requires every college and university to identify a campus liaison for students experiencing foster care (SEFC). Campus support programs (CSP) for SEFC have continued to expand throughout the United States, and students have consistently identified CSPs as critical to their success. However, there is little clarity on how to structure CSPs in a way that is scalable, sustainable, and effective. In place of requiring or funding CSPs, Texas implemented liaison legislation to support SEFC and mandated that higher education outcomes for SEFC be tracked.

The implementation and impact of campus support programs have not been evaluated in many states. This study serves as a process evaluation to assess the implementation of Texas' liaison legislation and aims to spark dialogue around macro-level issues impacting SEFC. Data for this study comes from in-depth interviews with SEFC, content analysis of the websites of all Texas colleges and universities, and surveys administered to all designated campus liaisons. Authors partnered with Education Reach for Texans (Reach), who maintain a yearly updated list of all liaisons, to obtain contact information of school liaisons. SEFC interviewed for this study included students from schools with both high and low levels of support. High support programs were defined as institutions with an acting liaison, a campus support program, a student organization, a trained liaison in trauma-informed care and benefits available to students, and/or a group of caring individuals who identified SEFC on their campus. Low support schools were defined as those with liaisons who had not responded to Reach volunteers and had never been to a Reach conference.

The study also incorporated participatory action research by hiring three foster scholars who have both training in research and lived experience in the foster care system. One foster scholar was a co-author of this study, and the others provided input into the study design.

Key Findings:

Three themes emerged from interviews:

1. *Liaisons are highly valued by SEFC:* SEFC want a single point of contact to provide services or connect them to existing resources. Respondents emphasized that the liaison had to be "authentic" and truly care about students. Students from high support schools spoke positively about liaisons, benefits, and provided services, but students from low support schools who had not been contacted by a liaison were unaware of their benefits and did not know that every Texas campus was supposed to have liaisons to support them.
2. *Some campuses offer support, but more tailored resources are needed:* While respondents from high support schools valued support services provided on their campus (e.g. help accessing financial resources, life skills training, and academic support), many stated that these services were for the general student population, and they would prefer for support services to be tailored to meet needs specific to SEFC. All respondents reported that there were no mental health services in place to meet their specific needs. Respondents also specified that they want their liaison to connect them to other SEFC on campus in order to build a community of peer support and increase belonging.
3. *Liaisons/campus support programs have little institutional support:* Students broadly supported the liaison legislation, yet some felt as though their institution did not offer enough care and support to liaison programs, as identified by a lack of resources poured into support programs and little sense of importance or urgency. Some students felt as though providing and maintaining support programs was not a priority for their institution.

Researchers conducted a content analysis of all 113 Texas campus websites to find information on their SEFC liaison, as Texas

legislation requires all campuses to provide this on their website. However, this information was only found 51% of the time. Only 35% of campus websites indicated that the campus has a support program for SEFC, and very few campuses provided housing and mentoring services to SEFC. Although students communicated a strong desire to be connected to other SEFC, only 18% of campuses reported that they provide these opportunities, and only 13% have a student organization specifically for SEFC.

Finally, researchers surveyed campus liaisons. Liaisons were found to be much more likely to be female and white compared to the SEFC they were serving, and no respondent had lived experience in the foster care system. Most liaisons identified SEFC on their campus through tuition and fee waivers, however not all SEFC qualify for these waivers. Researchers recommend using information from the Apply Texas application, which asks if students have experienced foster care. 62% of campuses do not use this data despite it being the most comprehensive way to identify SEFC. Many liaisons emphasized the need for more support for their work, with 95.5% of respondents saying they would like more training to better serve as a foster care liaison.

Implications:

Campus support programs and relevant legislation could transform higher education outcomes for SEFC. Unfortunately, many programs fall short of their intended outcomes due to lack of support, training, and resources. Although the Texas liaison legislation was implemented successfully in some cases, the majority of Texas campus support programs were found to have no SEFC student organization, had no services to connect students with other SEFC, and none of the liaisons interviewed had lived experience in the foster care system. Authors recommend that state resources be allocated for staff training and resources for SEFC support systems. Future research should include outcome evaluations to assess program impact, delineate needed

course corrections, and ultimately identify

best practices in designing and implementing campus support for SEFC.

Watt, T., Lord, K., Bustillos, S., Gavin-Williams, R., Greeson, J., Hail, T., & Hoffman-Cooper, A. (2023). Campus liaisons for students who have experienced foster care: Lessons learned from Texas legislation. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 153, 107094-. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.10>

Looking for additional research related to Foster Care Alumni?

Check out our [publication resources](#). Here you can find recently published articles or research reports that focus on foster care youth/alumni and higher education. If you see that we have missed a publication, please let us know!



Policy Updates

FAFSA Updates

On December 31, 2023, the FAFSA for the 2024-2025 school year launched. The newly revamped FAFSA comes with several key changes that, according to government officials, should allow the FAFSA to be easier to complete than in previous years. The form is shorter than in previous cycles and is designed to expand eligibility for federal student aid, including Pell Grants. Information regarding support and where to find updates can be found [at this link](#). Students are advised to submit the form as soon as possible for the 2024-2025 school year and can use the new [Federal Student Aid Estimator](#) to calculate how much aid they will likely receive.

For further resources, training, and tools related to the FAFSA Simplification Act, visit [this link](#). Announcements and new updates can be found on [this page](#).

[The Substance Use Disorder prevention that Promotes Opioid Recovery and Treatment for Patients and Communities \(SUPPORT\) Act](#)

New SNAP Exceptions Benefit Homeless and Foster Youth

In line with the Fiscal Responsibility Act (FRA) of 2023, crucial updates have been made to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) that directly impact youth experiencing homelessness and those transitioning from foster care.

The FRA introduces exemptions from the Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents (ABAWD) time limits and work requirements for specific demographics, including homeless individuals, veterans, and those aged 24

or younger, as well as individuals in foster care on their 18th birthday. This exemption comes into effect for all eligible SNAP applications received on or after September 1, 2023.

Key Changes:

- **Expanded Homeless Exception:** Individuals no longer need to meet the criteria of chronic homelessness. The exemption now applies to those lacking a fixed and regular nighttime residence or with a temporary residence, broadening the scope to address the diverse situations faced by homeless youth.
- **Extended Foster Care Exception:** Youth in foster care at age 18, regardless of whether they remain in the State's extended foster care program, qualify for the exemption. This includes individuals up to 24 years old, ensuring continued support until their 25th birthday.

To receive SNAP benefits, applicants must meet state-specific eligibility criteria. Child welfare agencies, Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Programs, and Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (APP) Programs are encouraged to collaborate with local SNAP agencies to ensure streamlined access for eligible youth. The FRA outlines verification procedures without introducing new requirements. Examples include collateral contact with homeless shelters or foster care agencies, emphasizing flexibility in accepting documentary evidence.

The FRA's SNAP exceptions offer vital support for young individuals facing homelessness and those transitioning from foster care. Collaboration between SNAP programs, child welfare agencies, RHY programs, and APP programs is

crucial to ensuring these resources reach those in need.

You can find the Administration on Children, Youth and Families' letter regarding the new exceptions at this [link](#).

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On November 15, 2023, [H.R. 6423](#) was introduced in the House. Further information on this bill is yet to be released, but if passed, the bill will amend the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 to provide certain alternative eligibility requirements applicable to foster care youth, and homeless youth, who are enrolled at least half-time in an institution of higher education

HUD Awards \$10 Million to Help Vulnerable Families

On December 19, 2023, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) announced a significant policy update, allocating \$10 million to address homelessness risks among vulnerable families and youth with a history of foster care. This funding, provided through HUD's Family Unification Program (FUP), will distribute 625 vouchers to 13 public housing authorities nationwide. The initiative aims to identify and support homeless or at-risk youth with a foster care background and families whose inadequate housing is the primary reason for their children being in foster care.

HUD Secretary Marcia L. Fudge emphasized the importance of preventing homelessness among youth and families, highlighting the funding's role in facilitating access to more permanent and stable housing. The FUP program, implemented in collaboration with public child welfare agencies (PCWAs) and Continuums of Care (CoCs), offers Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs) to two specific groups: families

with housing-related challenges leading to imminent placement of children in out-of-home care and youth aged 18 to 24 at risk of homelessness after exiting foster care.

Under the FUP, there is no time limit on vouchers issued to families, while those issued to youth are initially limited to 36 months, with the possibility of a 24-month extension under the Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities (FSHO) amendments. In addition to rental assistance, FUP youth are mandated to receive supportive services for 36 months, addressing skills such as money management, job preparation, educational counseling, and nutrition. This policy update reflects HUD's commitment to ending homelessness and strengthening collaboration among public housing authorities, child welfare agencies, and Continuums of Care.

Additional information regarding the HUD vouchers can be found [here](#).

Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Voucher Program

On November 14, 2023, the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) voucher program was initiated. The FYI vouchers aim to offer dedicated rental assistance for two specific groups: youth exiting foster care at risk of homelessness, and youth who have become homeless (or are at risk) after being in foster care. The effective implementation of these vouchers involves collaboration among Public Housing Authorities (PHAs), child welfare agencies, and homeless service providers. PHAs work with child welfare agencies to administer the vouchers, while service providers play a crucial role in:

- identifying eligible youth;
- providing rich and tailored support;
- providing housing expertise; and
- improving program implementation.

The update emphasizes the importance of elevating the voices of those with lived experience and their allies to ensure effective utilization of these resources by PHAs and child welfare agencies. Communities are encouraged to explore the suite of materials provided to learn how to leverage this critical resource for the benefit of vulnerable youth.

National Foster Care Youth & Alumni Policy Council

In September 2023, the National Foster Youth & Alumni Policy Council proposed three priorities with the ultimate goal of decriminalizing foster care. According to the Council, decriminalizing the response to foster care involves reevaluating and reforming the way systems interact with families in need of support. The primary goal of this work should be to prioritize the well-being of youth in foster care while minimizing punitive measures. These priorities are created by those with lived experience in foster care and address long-term harmful effects of the current criminalization responses to foster care. Priorities such as these dictate whether those in foster care will have the opportunity to reach higher education and further life goals. To address this cycle of harm, the Council released the following priorities:

1. Those charged with our safety must remember that we are children and teenagers.
2. Our caregivers need to understand our personal trauma and how that influences our behaviors. We aren't bad children or teens. We lived through bad things.
3. We ask policymakers and Child Welfare leaders to disrupt the foster care-to-prison pipeline with intention and urgency.

A full report of these priorities can be found through [this link](#).

State Updates

In 2023, the state of Washington passed SB 5702, [Expanding the Students Experiencing Homelessness & Foster Youth Pilot Program](#). In 2019, the Legislature established pilot programs to provide assistance and accommodations to higher education students experiencing homelessness and to students who were in foster care when they graduated from high school. Assistance provided includes food security, case management, and housing assistance that continues through school breaks. The passage of SB 5702 removes the July 2024 expiration of the pilot program and ensures that all Washington higher education institutions are eligible to participate in the program.

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.

Announcements

National Conference for Hidden Student Populations

The National Conference for Hidden Student Populations (NCHP), an initiative by the R is for Thursday Collective, is a collaborative effort led by Fellows from five U.S. institutions. Dedicated to uncovering individual strengths and institutional barriers for hidden college student populations, NCHP focuses on diverse groups, including those with histories in foster care, survivors of sexual violence or trafficking, sex workers, individuals involved with the justice system, those in recovery from substance addiction,

those lacking shelter resources, Third Culture Individuals, and those seeking abortion care in states where it is illegal.

The 2024 Hybrid Conference will take place from **February 28 to March 1, 2024**, at The University of Texas—San Antonio. The in-person conference will feature research teamwork, virtual presentations, and a networking event, with additional virtual presentations on the afternoons of February 29 and March 1.

Call for Proposals is now open! Submit [here](#) your proposal for a research or practice presentation.

[Register now!](#)

Webinars

We are excited to announce our second annual **NRC-FAHE Lightning Rounds**, which will take place on **Monday March 4th, 2024, 11am-noon Pacific time (2-3pm Eastern time)**. A “lightning round” is a chance for an NRC-FAHE member to present a research, practice, or policy challenge they are grappling with and draw on the wisdom and expertise of other NRC-FAHE attendees. Presenters will receive instant feedback to their most pressing questions. We are recruiting two presenters for the March webinar: one researcher and one policy/practitioner. Please watch our [4-minute video](#) to learn more about Lightning Rounds. **Please complete the application by February 16th** if you are interested in presenting. The application can be found [HERE](#).

March Webinar Registration Link:
<https://wsu.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJMocu-urTgiHqKtMWT9ko3n8-ksOlyf5qbw>

Our April webinar will be held **Thursday April 11th, 2024, 1-2pm Pacific time (4-5pm Eastern time)**. The presenter will be Sheila Bustillos, Director of Assessment at University of North

Texas. She will be presenting findings related to a recently completed study entitled **“Foster Care Liaisons in Higher Education: A Conceptual Framework for Supporting Post-secondary Success Among College Students with Experience in Foster Care”**. More details will be shared soon.

April Webinar Registration Link:
<https://wsu.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJwtduGtqTlqEgz1iJZxRAHNEoU9ZW51cvdc>

Webinars will be available through Zoom. Once you register, you will be sent an email with details about joining the webinar. You can join either by phone or by computer.

*****Note: the webinars will be recorded and put on the NRC-FAHE website. All previous recordings can be found [here](https://www.youtube.com/@nrc-fahe5654/videos):**
<https://www.youtube.com/@nrc-fahe5654/videos> ***

If you are interested in being a presenter for a future webinar in our webinar series, please email Amy Salazar (amy.salazar@wsu.edu) and include a brief description of what you would like to present on.