

Who We Are:

The National Research Collaborative for Foster Alumni and Higher Education (NRC-FAHE) connects researchers, those with lived experience in foster care, and practitioners dedicated to improving college access, persistence, and success for students with foster care experience. Guided by a focused research agenda, the Collaborative promotes innovation, amplifies youth voices, and informs policy to create lasting change in higher education.



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A back to school welcome to all with this 21st Edition of the NRC FAHE newsletter!

I am back from Sabbatical and returned to academe with many lessons learned. I have witnessed both the strengths and challenges federal service has to offer, including learning how to work across different administrations with their priorities. Many student support programs which provide support to college going foster youth are navigating the mandates to remove diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs. One thing to remember is an executive order does not override federal law, and the administration is must follow statute unless Congress or the U.S. Supreme Court rescind those laws. Media has reported that grants related to DEI have been cancelled; however, recently, grants have been reinstated when a grantee articulated how their programs support the implementation of statutory mandates.

Leadership in colleges and universities have signed a statement concerned about the Trump administration's "unprecedented government overreach and political interference" with higher education. It is also important to know that Congress has not agreed with the cuts to higher education, including the funding of critical student support service programs. Remember, the Fiscal Year 2026 Education budget is still under debate. More information is [available here](#).

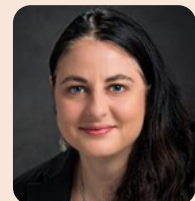
Settlement agreements between the White House and various universities accused of antisemitism and fined are resulting in universities are either paying the federal government or investing settlement dollars into career and technical education programs in their states. Most universities are electing to support investments in career and technical education. It is expected that these state-administered programs will need guidance from experts in their states (like yourselves) on how to use these resources. The state of Washington has set precedence for building apprenticeship programs for foster care youth. There may be an opportunity for you to expand the use of apprenticeship programs in your state.

In perfect timing, I want to call out and encourage attendance at our upcoming webinar being presented by Dr. Mary Collins, Professor and Department Chair at Boston University School of Social Work on September 24, 2025. Her presentation is entitled Post-Secondary Educational Aspirations Among Young Adults With Foster Care Experience: Highlighting the Interest in Vocational-Focused Education. With all that is happening in higher education, there is a need for the NRC FAHE research community to look at enrollment rates and support of foster youth who elect to enroll in vocational education programs rather being solely focused on traditional four-year schools in pursuit of higher education.

In the last newsletter, I discussed groundbreaking legislation that was passed in December 2024 related to Title IV-B re-authorization. The Children's Bureau has until October 2025 to develop a plan for implementation. To support these efforts a Federal Registrar Notice (FRN) has been issued that allows experts, like all of you, to provide valuable input on how best to implement the provisions of the new law. You can provide feedback and comments [here](#). You will see that the FRN does not offer public input on the whole law, but just a piece of it. You may to offer full feedback despite the fact that the FRN only partially discusses the law. For a summary of the law in full, please [download and read](#) the recently published Information Memorandum published by the Children's Bureau.

This edition of the newsletter is a bit longer than our typical newsletter as my sabbatical responsibilities inhibited my ability to get out last spring's newsletter and so much has happened between last January 2025 and now.

I promise it is worth the read!



Angelique Day, PhD, MSW is a 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.

Program Highlight

Impact Scholars- Boise State University

Interview with Program Coordinator:

Anna Moreshead, LMSW



With a background in community mental health and child welfare, **Anna** currently works at Boise State University, serving as the Associate Dean of Students in the Office of the Dean of Students. It was the development of the Impact Scholars Program over ten years ago that initially connected her to working in higher education, and the program is the biggest reason she has stayed!

She serves as program coordinator for Impact Scholars through outreach to eligible students and direct support for Impact Scholars; managing program scholarships and donor relations; and organizing outreach opportunities for Impact Scholars to share their experience with others from hidden populations and the broader Boise community.

Originally from Utah, she earned her BSW from George Fox University, followed by her MSW from Boise State University. She is a licensed master social worker who enjoys doing jigsaw puzzles, hiking, and both talking about and eating vegetables.

NRC-FAHE: Please tell us a little bit about yourself.

Anna Moreshead: I got my undergrad and graduate degree in social work. During undergrad and postgrad I worked in community mental health with youth and then also working with unhoused populations and systems involved young people, including those with foster care experience. When I went to grad school, I didn't know what I wanted to do, but I just knew that youth and systems involved youth were the population that I wanted to do it with. I was really interested in doing something proactive versus getting an internship at the department. I was able to use my grad year to develop a needs assessment for Boise State, where I was for grad school. By the end of that year, I pitched the program that is now [Impact Scholars](#) and told them "You need somebody to do this- So pick me!" And that's what led me here.

NRC-FAHE: When did the program officially launch?

Anna Moreshead: The program officially launched in 2013 and it has evolved over time as I learned more about program development, and especially as students came through the program. They consistently gave me feedback about what's helpful and what's important. It's been really a natural process that has centered student voices, which I am really grateful for.

NRC-FAHE: What are the goals of the program? What are you hoping the students 'get' from being involved with Impact Scholars?

Anna Moreshead: When I meet with brand new Impact Scholars, what I communicate that I hope they get out of it is connection to scholarships- because we have some program specific scholarships, connection to individualized support- so that there is no barrier too big or small and

that there's at least somewhere to go for questions and to get help navigating those. And then, thirdly, opportunities for outreach to younger people who are currently experiencing foster care or homelessness- that opportunity to share their story and wisdom with the youth that are behind them.

NRC-FAHE: What services are available to assist students with housing, food, and other basic needs?

Anna Moreshead: Most of the services are just big campus programs like food assistance and others are just more broadly financial assistance. We also manage some student emergency funds and offer free legal assistance. Then there are the services that not every student needs, but what I often am listening for when meeting with students. I am making sure we are working with our on campus partners to get some students housed if needed, as well as access to counseling services and medical care. While those services may not be specific to our program, I really try to ensure access and smooth the way for students.

NRC-FAHE: What are the biggest challenges students face when transitioning into higher education?

Anna Moreshead: I actually get a 50-50 mix of first time students who are coming right out of high school and then the other half of my students are transfers, or non trads, coming from community college, the military, or are first generation. I would say those two groups definitely have generally different sets of barriers.

I think for my traditional students the challenges that come with transition are finding balance, finding their voice that perhaps they haven't been able to use a lot, and then finding their identity as a former foster youth. In sum, I would say

that there's more emotional challenges in general versus my transfer and non-traditional students. I honestly see them having more financial barriers because they're not getting the other first time student stuff or other financial benefits like Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) or Extended Foster Care (EFC). Also, most of them are trying to work, either full time or mostly full time, so it's more the balancing of the rest of life or kids, you name it. I think basic needs and time management tend to be the biggest needs for the non-traditional students in the Impact Scholars Program.

NRC-FAHE: How do you help students who are trying to find their identity on campus?

Anna Moreshead: Generally, I'm trying to help students find connections to resources, clubs, and on campus organizations. There is already such great programming on campus with our partners. I meet with them and gauge their interest to help them identify what else they want to do. Sometimes, it's just academics. There's already such good programming that happens, you know, with campus partners.

The other thing is our [Student Leadership and Involvement Center](#) here has alternative break trips, and leadership camps, for lack of a better terminology, that you have to be nominated for. I always tell my students: "I'm going to nominate you for something, so you can either pick or I will pick one for you." I try to get them in those high impact programs and we can help pay for those if needed. I just try to plug them into things that they often wouldn't either know about or identify themselves as belonging there. So I love pitching my students for those.

NRC-FAHE: How is the program funded?

Anna Moreshead: Our scholarships specific to the Impact Scholars program are run through our foundation and the program budget is, honestly, funded by donors. The only funds the Dean of Students Office supplies to the program is to provide my salary. Each year I do get to take on an intern, but they are usually unpaid. The majority of things I'm able to do for the students in the program happens because of our donors, who I'm grateful for. The program donations get dumped into a small pot of money that I use to help get students involved in opportunities both on and off campus.

When we have a graduate, we always pay for their regalia, and then usually a diploma frame, if they're into that.

If not, we try to find something else meaningful for them. If we do get together, we use that for food costs and we'll get a pizza and talk about how an event went or the semester went.

I made the decision early on that I don't want to spend a bunch of money on programming. I kept hearing from students that they needed money for tuition and housing. So I put all my energy into working with our foundation to get some scholarships set up. That has really paid off because we have three Impact Scholar Program specific scholarships. Although we only have three, the amounts are pretty big at this point. So usually we're able to award, depending on the year, 6 to 7 awards every year. Our program is usually 15 to 20 students big. So I tell students: "listen, you might not get a scholarship every year, but I can almost guarantee you can get a scholarship for some of your time here". So I'm really proud of that.

NRC-FAHE: Can you explain the Intercollegiate Knights Endowed Scholarship and its connection to the program?

Anna Moreshead: The biggest scholarship specific for our program is the Intercollegiate Knights Scholarship, coming from a Boise State alumni chapter, and they've made Impact Scholars one of their capital campaigns over the last few years. They do a golf tournament every year to fundraise for it and they are really involved. I should mention that scholarship specifically is not just the cash assistance, but it also comes with a mentorship. It's pretty cool, because it's provided an opportunity for me to build in some intentional mentorship pieces.

The alumni chapter also has the opportunity to anonymously select recipients through the students' applications and essays and then we work together to identify an alumni that shares similar career interests with our students. We've gotten really great results from pairing students and alumni. And not every student obviously gets the opportunity but we do try to work with two to three students per year.

If not, we try to find something else meaningful for them. If we do get together, we use that for food costs and we'll get a pizza and talk about how an event went or the semester went.

NRC-FAHE: Is there anything about the program that I haven't asked about?

Anna Moreshead: A recent exciting thing is a colleague down in Texas who's doing her PhD and she chose this idea of professional mentorship to focus her whole dissertation on-specifically professional mentorship for students with lived experience in foster care. She is using the Impact Scholars program and our students that have experienced our mentorship in her study. She's hopeful that other schools can learn and try to replicate a similar program.

Program Highlight

Impact Scholars- Boise State University

Interview with student:

Ben Sharafi

**Ben was unable to provide headshot and bio*

NRC-FAHE: Please tell me a bit about yourself and how you got involved with Impact Scholars.

Ben Sharafi: My mom is Moroccan and my dad is from Afghanistan and we moved to the United States in 2003. When I was about 10 years old I went into the foster care system and during my duration I actually aged out. During that time I was in 11 different foster homes, two of which were group homes. It was a pretty difficult upbringing, a lot of instability and essentially growing up with no parenting. My senior year I actually ended up dropping out of high school just as I aged out.

Fast forward two years later and I actually met somebody who worked for a community college here in Idaho. She told me “Ben, you know the one thing that nobody can take away from you is your education” and it just stuck with me. The reason it stuck with me is because growing up in the foster care system I had a lot of things taken from me, whether it was my family or other things, and it was really difficult.

So I got my GED and I decided to go to community college. I really didn’t know what I wanted to do, but after a few semesters I found out my passion, which is fashion. I went to a fashion school in Miami, but faced some difficulties, so ended up switching my degree to finance at Boise State. At the time I was registering I met some people networking and they told me about Impact Scholars and what they do for our community. I then met Anna Moreshed, she’s an amazing person, and we went through the stages of getting accepted into the program.

NRC-FAHE: How has Impact Scholars helped you adjust to life as a college student?

Ben Sharafi: It makes you feel involved, like you’re a part of something. As a foster kid, sometimes you can feel alone and wonder what group you belong to and where you can have an impact. To be a part of the program gives you life and more meaning on campus- you’re a part of something, you’re doing something.

They also provide some assistance with finances, which does play a huge role. It relieves a lot of burdens from the things financial aid can’t cover. I work full time and go to school, so having that little bit of extra push can help you make it through the next month.

NRC-FAHE: What has been the most helpful aspect of the program so far?

Ben Sharafi: One of the most helpful things about Impact Scholars is just if you have any questions, they usually have answers. So whenever I have questions about things like “how do I get a tutor for this class?” or “how can I get a laptop for this test?” Anna and Impact Scholars are always there to answer and if they don’t know, they’re going to know somebody who knows it. You have that support. My family has never been to college, I’m actually the first to attend.

Honestly, what brings me the most happiness about Impact Scholars and being able to give back. When I was a foster kid I don’t ever remember having other foster kids who are going to college come out and talk to me and say “Hey, you know, even though you’ve been dealt some pretty bad cards, you can still pursue your education and still make something out of your life”. I never had that. I wish I had somebody like that when I was a kid. Being able to go out into the community and being able to talk to these kids, to see them smile and give them hope, it’s such a blessing to be able to give back.



Lauren Padgett currently serves as Director of Kennesaw State University CARE Services. Lauren joined the CARE Services team in May 2022, as Assistant Director of CARE Services. Prior to KSU, Lauren served for 3 years at the Kansas Attorney General's Office as the Batterer Intervention Program Unit Coordinator, where she certified and monitored program compliance with the Batterer Intervention Certification Act.

Prior to that role, she served as a case manager for families in the child welfare system and was a Site Manager for a Harvard University study on the long-term impact of legal debt on indigent clients and their families. Lauren holds Juris Doctorate and Master of Social Work degrees from the University of Oklahoma.

We want to be sure the students have the resources and supports available to navigate getting here and being here. We then want to prepare them for life after college. We have supports on campus, but we also have a mentoring program where we're able to connect them with off campus mentors who can help them get jobs and do that "what comes next" planning. We help navigate getting off campus housing and all the post-college world stuff.

We also collaborate with our community. One example is that we work with Marietta City Schools, a nearby public school system, to offer access to driver's education to our students through their program. A lot of our students didn't have the opportunity to take driver's ed in high school and that's huge: If you didn't take driver's ed, you can't get a driver's license. We actually have a lot of these creative community partnerships to help our students meet the needs that most people don't traditionally think of.

NRC-FAHE: How is the program funded?

Lauren Padgett: We receive institutional funding for our staff positions. All the rest of our programs and everything else is donor funded. We work closely with our [Division of University Advancement](#) and the [Kennesaw State University Foundation](#) to talk to donors and community supporters. We have great support from the community, and not just the alumni, but also just people who really believe in our mission and are supportive of helping students achieve their goals.

Bonus Resource:

ASCEND Center

CARE Services at Kennesaw State created the [ASCEND Center](#), a national program evaluation and training center, focused on increasing the capacity of college personnel to identify and connect students who are homeless, need assistance meeting basic needs, and/or are foster care youth or foster care alumni to resources on and off campus.

"Designed for people doing the work to make a difference in the lives of students belonging to special populations. The ASCEND Center provides access to tools, network, and ideas to improve programmatic efficacy and efficiency."

See the [ASCEND Center website](#) or email the CARE Team at careservices@kennesaw.edu for more information.

Program Highlight:

ASCEND, Kennesaw State University

Interview with Program Director:
Lauren Padgett, JD, MSW

NRC-FAHE: What inspired the creation of this program? How has it evolved?

Lauren Padgett: All of [CARE Services](#) started in a desk drawer, with an official launch in 2013. Our founding Director was out of our [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) department on campus and was seeing a significant population of students with food insecurity needs. So, it really started as a food pantry and then grew. Currently, CARE largely works with students who need assistance meeting basic needs across both of our campuses.

The food pantry, now resource pantries on both campuses, are open to all Kennesaw State students. These pantries are stocked with food, school supplies, hygiene items, and other items. There is even a section for student parents with things like baby food, gifts for holidays, and diapers.

[ASCEND](#), specifically, started in 2020 during the pandemic under the umbrella of CARE Services. I say 2020, because that is when we moved the first students into our ASCEND on-campus housing and learning community. The learning community started with one house, but is now three houses on campus, each with 12 beds, so we have space for the students to live together. We adapted the program to

fit student needs and now are in our fourth year of the current model where we intentionally brought together first year students into the program.

NRC-FAHE: What services or programs exist to help with housing, food, and other basic needs?

Lauren Padgett: We have emergency financial assistance for students who are facing an unexpected financial crisis, like an eviction notice or the brakes went out on their car. More relevant to the ASCEND population, if a student had been unhoused or in care, their FAFSA documentation might not have been processed in time and they might miss out on the funding they should be eligible for.

We can step in and help cover tuition or fees or some of those costs so they can stay enrolled in housing as well as access their education. That program is really broad in scope in terms of the ways that it can assist students. We are really lucky to have a lot of donor support for that program, so we're able to help a lot of students.

We also have case management where students who are unhoused can access emergency housing on campus. It's not permanent housing, like the learning communities, but it's a stepping-stone and a bed while we help them find more permanent housing.

We also help students with technology access through laptops that were donated and given to students. We have a partnership with our dining services where meal swipes get donated and we give those to the students in the ASCEND Program so they can access dining on campus. Repeatedly students will say that what is most important to them in terms of

programming is 'connection'. They want that feeling of belonging and connection- to each other and to the program. So, we try to facilitate that in any way we can and we try to meet the different needs of different students. Some students love game night, some students want a more structured workshop, some just want to eat dinner and just have hangout time after

As the students move through the program, the idea is that the first and second years are a lot about bonding and community building. We do what we call a family vacation and during the summer we take a fun trip. In the past we've gone to Disney and Washington, D.C.

Then, in the final years we're really looking at that transition time and we're looking to provide those learning opportunities that their peers have. We actually have funding available for study abroad opportunities. We also help with internships in their senior years. We help them identify placements and attempt to help them plan around barriers, like transportation.

NRC-FAHE: What are the core goals of the program?

Lauren Padgett: Ultimately, it's helping students achieve their academic goals. When we think about ASCEND specifically, it's really about transition. The transition into college as well as transition out of college. We want to be sure they know college is available and accessible to them and it is something they can do if they want to.

[Continued]

Program Highlight

ASCEND,
Kennesaw State
University

Interview with
student:

Ashley Singh



My name is **Ashley Singh** my pronouns are She/Her! I am a senior at Kennesaw State University, and my major is Human Services! Some past accomplishments would be I somehow was able to balance three jobs last year! I worked at Youth Empowerment using Leading Learning and Service (YELLS), I was an undergraduate researcher, and I did a community project for Silence the Shame University, where I basically connected with students, primarily middle and high school, about mental health and better ways to cope and make time for yourself! I also got accepted into the Dual Masters Program: a Masters in Business Administration and a Masters in Social Work!!!

I love going to on-campus events or dance classes or the annual 5K!!! But I haven't had a chance because I was so busy with senior year! But!!! I am making progress!!! Slowly but surely! What I want to do is be a school social worker or school counselor! That's what I am doing at my current internship (I am shadowing!), and so far, I love it! What I love most is getting the seniors and Juniors interested in college and exploring what they want to do in the future, and telling them about my experience with college!

NRC-FAHE: What motivated you to get into the program?

Ashley Singh: When I first learned about the ASCEND program, I was a senior in high school and I got an email from them. When I first saw it, I was suspicious. The email was about the [CARE](#) (Campus Awareness, Resource & Empowerment) Services [ASCEND](#) Bridge Week program and said how they will take students who were either homeless or were in foster care and they would bridge the gap and help them out. They would provide resources. I was like "this honestly sounds way too suspicious", because the way I grew up, you never expect anything for free- there's always a catch. But I went and did the interview process and thought it sounded really promising.

NRC-FAHE: What has been the most helpful aspect of ASCEND so far?

Ashley Singh: The bridge program was one of the most helpful things. It taught us how to communicate with our professors, how to write a proper email, how to time manage, and how to read a syllabus. Just how to do a whole bunch of things that I wouldn't think of going into college. Having that little week with instructions and being able to get to know the campus and all the food options, was something I loved.

I actually still love it and help each year with Bridge Week. It's a lot of fun, tiresome, but fun. I love giving the incoming freshmen tips and tricks that I learned along the way.

Another big thing we did was have the opportunity to build connections and meet with donors who support the program. We want them to know us on a personal level. Instead of just the financial piece, we have that personal bond, that mentorship. I have a mentor right now. We're both very busy, but I tell her what's going on and she's always there to offer support. She even gives me tips and tricks to help with work and work experiences.

NRC-FAHE: How does the program help with practical matters, like housing, food, or financial stability?

Ashley Singh: The program can offer summer housing when a student is homeless and food. Food is a big thing, because groceries are expensive. I like going to the on-campus food pantry a lot and because I am an ASCEND student, I'm able to go almost everyday. I will say, Kennesaw State is doing a very good job with taking care of our independent student population.

We also have workshops, mostly during our freshman and sophomore years, that were really helpful. They were about things I didn't even realized I needed to learn how to do, what are red and green flags, or how I could be being taken advantage of.

We have scholarship week where we spend the whole week making sure our applications are filled out and our letters of recommendation are ready. Usually the juniors and seniors step in and offer their advice.

NRC-FAHE: What would you say to someone who was considering joining the program?

Ashley Singh: I didn't realize that I would enjoy the community part of it. Sure we might butt heads, we might have different backgrounds, but we have a similar experience.

I appreciate knowing people who, sure were in unfortunate situations, but we didn't let that stop us. We keep fighting, we keep pushing. If we need help, we got each other's backs. I do appreciate the community and it's another one of the things I love the most.

Study Summary

Current educational policies for children involved with the Child Protective Services (CPS) system focus largely on the minority of children currently in or aging out of foster care, and target school stability and college access. Yet, the number of children in foster care have declined substantially and few children spend all or most of their school years in foster care. It is unclear whether these narrowly targeted policies are consistent with the needs of children who experience or are at risk for child maltreatment.

The present study investigates the nature of secondary (high school) education performance and attainment and post-secondary (college) enrollment among youth with prior or current CPS contact and their low-income, but not CPS-contacted, peers. Following a cohort of over 63,000 high school students in Wisconsin, we use CPS investigation and placement records and public school records to evaluate associations between CPS involvement and educational attainment.

We consider six categories of CPS involvement:

- (1) CPS-only (investigation(s) of maltreatment with no foster care placement);
- (2) FC-Reunified (foster care to reunification);
- (3) FC-Adoption (foster care to adoption);
- (4) FC-Guardianship (foster care to guardianship or permanent placement with a relative);
- (5) Aging out (remaining in foster care until at least age 18); and
- (6) FC-Other (foster care to other forms of non-permanency; primarily youth who transferred to juvenile justice or went absent without leave).

The study shows that CPS-contacted youth have lower educational performance and greater academic challenges, such as higher rates of disability and school district changes, than their low-income peers. Youth aging out of care are uniquely disadvantaged with regard to on-time high school completion but complete high school and enroll in college at equal or higher rates than reunified youth.

Across all groups, 55–75 % of those who graduated on time with “basic” or above English and math skills enrolled in college. Foster care experiences, such as time in care and placement instability, were not consistently associated with educational outcomes. Efforts to improve secondary education experiences are needed to bolster college and career pathways for

disadvantaged youth.

Key Findings and Implications

Finding 1. Over 40% of youth with foster care histories performed “below basic” skill level in reading and more than 55% performed below basic in math, according to their standardized test scores. An additional 10-20% did not take the tests at all.

Meaning: Efforts to promote college enrollment are unlikely to meaningfully improve opportunities for disadvantaged students, particularly those with CPS or foster care histories, unless their educational skills are substantially improved.

Implication: Basic literacy and numeracy skills are essential for most occupations and strongly linked to an array of health and wellbeing outcomes throughout the life course. Broader policies that provide opportunities for youth to “catch up” academically, such as intensive tutoring or summer school, may be needed to enhance intergenerational mobility.

Finding 2. Compared with youth who reunified from foster care, youth who

age out of foster care graduated high school (72%) and enrolled in college (31%) at similar rates.

Meaning: Youth who age out of care, despite having some unique circumstances, belong to a larger population of youth who collectively face serious barriers to learning and educational attainment.

Implication: Policies that narrowly target youth who are currently in foster care or aging out of care leave behind a much larger population with similar barriers to success. Moreover, policies for youth aging out largely target financial barriers to college enrollment and thus fail to meet the needs of the nearly 20% of youth aging out who drop out of high school or the nearly 40 leave high school with limited academic skills.

Finding 3. Youth who age out of foster care are less likely to graduate high school on time than youth with other foster care histories, such as reunification, adoption, or guardianship.

Meaning: Most youth who aged out of foster care entered foster care during high school (which often involves a school change), the overwhelming majorities of youth in reunification, adoption, or guardianship exited foster care before high school began. Challenges related to credit transfers, differences in course offerings between schools, or other bureaucratic barriers may delay youth from accumulating the required credits for graduation.

Implication: It may be advantageous for schools to offer opportunities for transfer students – such as online courses that can be completed over the summer – to catch up on missed credits to facilitate on-time graduation.



Sarah Font is an Associate Professor of Sociology and Public Policy at Penn State.

Her research is focused on the experiences and outcomes of children and families involved with the child welfare system, criminal legal system, or juvenile legal system.

She holds a PhD from the University of Wisconsin - Madison.



Lindsey Palmer is an Assistant Professor at the University of Utah College of Social Work. Her work investigates the characteristics and context of allegations of neglect, adolescent mental health and behavioral crises, and the strengths and limitations of administrative data in capturing the experiences and outcomes of children impacted by CPS.

Lindsey graduated from the University of Southern California with an MSW and PhD in Social Work. She previously completed a postdoctoral fellowship at Penn State's Child Maltreatment Solutions Network.

Citation:

Font, S., & Palmer, L. (2024). Left behind? Educational disadvantage, child protection, and foster care. Child Abuse & Neglect. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2024.106680>

Article Highlight:

Improving educational outcomes for youth in foster care: An evaluation of UGrad Academy

Amanda Purington Drake,
Victoria Baum,
Brian Maley,
& Margaret A. Shideler

Study Summary

This study evaluated the effectiveness of UGrad Academy, a holistic case management program designed to support students in foster care as they navigate high school, college, and early career. The program aims to improve educational outcomes by providing academic support and fostering relationships with trusted adults.

A quasi-experimental outcome evaluation found that UGrad participants were more likely to graduate or advance to the next grade level, had fewer absences, and achieved significantly higher core subject grades than their non-participating peers.

Qualitative findings highlight program consistency, flexibility, and strong participant-staff relationships as key success factors. Overall, UGrad has a significant positive impact on foster youth's academic success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of UGrad Academy's program on educational outcomes and to explore important

components of its case management strategies from the perspective of student participants and UGrad Education Advocates.

Findings:

This study found that participation in the UGrad Academy program had significant positive effects on educational outcomes. Participants were more likely to advance in school, graduate on time, and achieve higher core subject grades. They also had significantly fewer absences than non-participants.

Interviews with UGrad participants and Education Advocates found four key themes contributing to the program's success that included: a genuinely caring environment, building a strong support system, relieving burdens in participants' lives, and consistent but flexible support to meet unique participant needs.

Future Implications:

Findings from this study support the success of UGrad Academy's programming and can be used to strengthen and expand their current programming. Future research can replicate and extend the evidence of

UGrad influence on participant outcomes found in this study. Additional research can explore the influence of demographics on outcomes or the impact of the programming on younger participants.

Citation:

Drake, A. P., Baum, V. L., Maley, B., & Shideler, M. A. (2025). Improving educational outcomes for youth in foster care: An evaluation of UGrad Academy. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 169, 108103-.

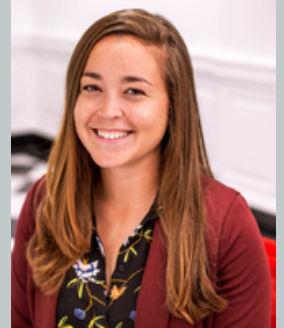
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2024.108103>

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Amanda Purington Drake, PhD, is the Principal Investigator of Cornell University’s ACT for Youth, leading the Center for Community Action and the New York State Center of Excellence for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs. Passionate about using research and evaluation to promote the health and well-being of children and youth, she is also a research collaborator with the Social Media Lab at Cornell University.

Victoria Baum, MPH, MSW, has been a member of ACT for Youth’s evaluation team since 2019 and is currently serving as the program’s Continuous Quality Improvement Coordinator. With a person-centered and trauma-informed approach, she collaborates in the planning, data collection, analysis, and dissemination of research and evaluation projects. She is currently a doctoral student in human development at Cornell University with an interest in mixed methods, identity development and social support.



Brian Maley has worked on program evaluation at ACT for Youth since 2013 and is currently serving as ACT’s Coordinator of Program Evaluation. Brian received his Master’s of Public Health from Cornell University in 2024. He has worked on projects that study and support high-risk youth populations for teen pregnancy and STI prevention, intimate partner violence, program engagement, and educational attainment. His interests include qualitative research methods, positive youth development programming, and adolescent and environmental health.



Maggie Shideler was a research assistant and PRYDE scholar with ACT for Youth from 2022 to 2024. She graduated from Cornell University in May 2024 with a B.S. in Global and Public Health Sciences and a minor in Statistics. She is currently a research coordinator at Georgetown University, working on an NSF-funded collaborative grant that examines the impacts of a high school STEM spatial reasoning curriculum on behavioral and neural outcomes. Her research interests focus on increasing educational attainment for historically marginalized populations and promoting educational equity in college STEM programs.



Policy Dive

Lexi West, MSW

The “Big Beautiful Bill” & Educational Equality

The Supporting America’s Children and Families Act ([PL 118-258](#)), promoted as the “One Big Beautiful Bill,” falls short of advancing meaningful support for foster and unhoused youth pursuing higher education. Despite increased Title IV-B funding and youth consultation mandates, the legislation largely delivers symbolic reforms without addressing systemic barriers these students face.

Limited Policy Advances and Persistent Barriers

While the Act [increases Title IV-B funding](#) and encourages youth participation in policy design, research underscores persistent educational disruptions, housing instability, and low graduation rates among foster youth. The superficial nature of crisis supports and kinship care measures fails to resolve deep-set challenges. Furthermore, mandatory youth voice provisions risk tokenistic involvement without structural influence, as [prior similar initiatives](#) have demonstrated minimal impact.

Medicaid Cuts and Impact on Academic Persistence

Crucially, the bill enacts sweeping Medicaid reductions—[projected at up to \\$880 billion over ten years](#)—

jeopardizing access to health services vital for foster and unhoused youth. Given the [well-documented](#) link between health needs, trauma, and academic attrition, these cuts threaten college retention and completion for vulnerable students.

Reduction in Economic Support

Changes to the Child Tax Credit and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program exacerbate financial insecurity and food insecurity, compounding the difficulties faced by students navigating child welfare and housing crises.

Failure to Address Housing Instability

The Act neglects directly tackling housing insecurity, a primary determinant of academic success for foster alumni and unhoused students. Without investing in affordable housing and targeted supports, [cycles of instability](#) & academic disruption remain unbroken. Higher education leaders are extremely aware that stable housing is [foundational to student success](#); the bill’s neglect of this reality is indefensible.

Implication for Higher Education

This legislation signals the necessity for higher education leaders and researchers to advocate for comprehensive, evidence-based policies that restore and enhance healthcare, housing, and financial aid supports. Protecting these resources is critical to promoting equity, inclusion, and success for system-involved youth in postsecondary education.

Service Coordinators: A Critical Step to Support Foster Alumni in Higher Education

When young people leave foster care, the challenges they encounter in adulthood can be daunting. Pursuing higher education is one of the most promising pathways to financial security and independence, yet foster youth face disproportionate barriers to enrollment and completion. Limited resources, navigating bureaucratic systems without family support, and fragmented student services too often lead to college attrition or the loss of opportunity altogether. The introduction of [H.R. 5057—the Expanding Service Coordinators Act of 2025](#)—marks an important federal step toward bridging these gaps by prioritizing system-wide investment in tailored support for vulnerable young people.

The Role

Service coordinators are professionals dedicated to helping foster youth and other at-risk populations transition to adulthood successfully. Their responsibilities range from guiding students through complex [financial aid](#) processes to connecting them with [housing](#), healthcare, and mental health resources. In higher education contexts, coordinators also provide critical mentoring and emotional support to students who often lack traditional safety nets. While some universities and nonprofit organizations currently

offer these roles, availability remains inconsistent and limited in scope due to chronic underfunding.

Decades of child welfare research consistently highlight the benefits of structured, relationship-based support. Studies show that youth who work with service coordinators are more likely to enroll in higher education, persist in their studies, and attain degrees. By expanding funding for these positions nationwide, the proposed legislation would establish a strong foundation to address disparities in college access and outcomes for foster alumni.

Policy Significance and Long-Term Benefits

Critics of H.R. 5057 may question the cost of expanding service coordinators, but the long-term benefits are substantial. When foster youth achieve educational stability, public expenditures on homelessness services, unemployment benefits, and criminal justice involvement decrease significantly. Beyond economics, the bill advances a moral imperative: ensuring that young people who have already faced systemic disadvantages are provided equitable opportunities for success.

Importantly, H.R. 5057 also complements existing reforms such as the Family First Prevention Services Act, which emphasizes stability and prevention within child welfare.

Expanding service coordinators extends this framework into higher education, reinforcing education as a key element of permanence and long-term well-being.

A Call to Action

The promise of H.R. 5057 will only be realized if professionals, advocates, and community members rally to demand its passage. Action steps include:

- Contacting members of Congress to express support for the bill.
- Sharing information through professional networks and community forums.
- Centering lived experience voices of foster alumni to highlight the bill's real-world impact.
- Building partnerships between child welfare agencies, colleges, and nonprofits to strengthen implementation.

Investing in service coordinators is not just a new line item in the federal budget; it is a strategic step toward addressing inequities that foster youth have long endured. Congress has a responsibility to ensure that young people who age out of care can move toward adulthood with the tools, guidance, and opportunities they deserve. Supporting H.R. 5057 is more than policy—it is a commitment to building futures where every foster youth has a genuine chance to thrive.

"FY26 Appropriations: A Mixed Bag for Foster Youth Higher Education"

On September 9, 2025, the House Appropriations Committee approved the Fiscal Year 2026 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act by a vote of 35 to 28. This legislation marks a critical moment for educational equity, particularly for foster youth transitioning to higher education. The bill preserves essential funding for key programs such as TRIO, GEAR UP, and Pell Grants, which serve as vital supports for foster alumni facing significant barriers to accessing and completing postsecondary education.

TRIO programs remain supported, continuing to offer mentorship, academic advising, and tutoring tailored to disadvantaged students. Such services are especially crucial for foster youth, who often lack traditional family support and encounter unique academic and social challenges. Additionally, maintaining Pell Grant funding ensures that financial obstacles do not halt the educational ambitions of these vulnerable populations.

However, the bill also proposes significant overall budget cuts, including a \$12 billion (15%) reduction in Department of Education funding and a \$1.4 billion (6%) decrease for the Office of Federal Student Aid. These cuts

raise concerns about the accessibility of financial aid and comprehensive support services critical to foster alumni's success in higher education.

Despite fiscal constraints and reductions in public health and workforce programs, the prioritization of education access programs highlights policymakers' recognition of the systemic hurdles youth with experience in foster care face. Yet, the absence of increased or targeted funding for unhoused or former foster youth-specific services such as counseling and mentoring may limit the necessary wraparound support these young adults need.

While the FY26 appropriations bill safeguards several pivotal education initiatives, the overall funding cuts and lack of dedicated foster youth resources present challenges. Sustained federal investment remains essential to support foster alumni in overcoming systemic barriers and achieving long-term educational and socioeconomic success.

Endorse the Housing for Homeless Students Act (HHSA)

(From School House Connection)

A bipartisan, bicameral introduction of Housing for Homeless Students Act (HHSA) is planned for this month and we welcome your support. HHSA is a narrow, no-cost fix to the Low-

Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program that amends current law prohibiting youth who are or have experienced homelessness from living in LIHTC housing while attending school full-time. This "student rule" has the unintended effect of excluding young people who need stable housing the most:

- Youth who have experienced homelessness prior to the age of 26, and
- Veterans who have experienced homelessness and are pursuing full-time education.

HHSA adds both homeless youth and homeless veterans that are full-time students to the list of eligibility for LIHTC housing.

[Here is draft legislative text.](#)
[Sign on here!](#)

The House bill will be led by U.S. Representatives Danny Davis (D-IL) and Michael Carey (R-OH). The Senate bill will be led by Senator Angus King (I-ME).

If you have any questions, please reach out to TJ Lucas at tj@schoolhouseconnection.org.

Congress Must Take Immediate Action to Reverse Harmful SNAP Cuts

(From the FRAC Action Network)

Congress must take immediate action to address the devastating cuts and harmful impacts on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the recently passed budget law.

It is imperative that Congress does not move forward with a Farm Bill — or any legislation — until the crushing impacts of this law are fully addressed.

The SNAP cuts contained in this law are a direct assault on the health, well-being, and dignity of those struggling to put food on the table. Independent analysis released in August by the [Congressional Budget Office \(CBO\)](#) confirms the dire predictions that this legislation will inflict widespread harm on millions of Americans, particularly children, older adults, veterans, people with disabilities, and working families — translating into empty cupboards, missed meals, and impossible choices between food, rent, and medicine. In addition to the human toll, the law will also have dire economic impacts on farmers, food retailers, local communities, and the overall national economy.

Use the [FRAC Action Network to easily send a pre-populated email](#), or craft your own, to communicate directly with your Members of Congress.

For more information on engaging with your Members, contact Tim Klipp-Lockhart, tklipp-lockhart@frac.org, or Ellen Teller, eteller@frac.org. For information on SNAP, contact Gina Plata-Nino, gplata-nino@frac.org.

Policy Updates

Syeda Aliza Sajjad, MSW

119th Congress

Jan 3, 2023– Jan 3, 2025

Recruiting Families Using Data Act of 2025

This bill (H.R. 579) requires state plans for child welfare services to provide for the development and implementation of a family partnership plan to improve foster care placement stability, increase rates of kinship placements, and align the composition of foster and adoptive families with the needs of children in or entering foster care.

The Children's Bureau of the Administration for Children and Families also must include in its annual report information from states about the number, demographics, and characteristics of foster and adoptive families as well as a summary of the challenges related to recruiting and being foster or adoptive parents.

The Recruiting Families Using Data Act of 2025 is a key step toward strengthening foster and adoptive family recruitment, retention, and support. You can help ensure every child in foster care has a stable, loving home.

- Call your Senators and urge them to support H.R. 579.
- Share your story or help raise awareness about the need for better support for foster families.
- Foster/adoptive parents and youth: provide feedback to agencies and join advisory boards.
- Advocacy organizations: educate your communities and encourage state agencies to begin planning now.
- Push for data transparency and efforts to recruit families that reflect the diversity of children in care.
- Get involved locally to support families and advocate for long-term, permanent solutions for kids.

- Get involved locally to support families and advocate for long-term, permanent solutions for kids.

[Link to Bill.](#)

For more Info:

Joe Bock
Children's Bureau
(202)205-8618.
cbcomments@acf.hhs.gov

People CARE Act

The People CARE Act (H.R.150) proposes a bipartisan commission to review and recommend reforms to federal means-tested programs such as Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF. The goal: streamline services, reduce overlap, and improve how low-income families access support.

Key provisions of the bill:

- Evaluates possible consolidation, state-level delegation, and income-based benefit adjustments.
- Explores tools to help caseworkers connect families to all eligible programs.
- Launches a public-facing website to gather feedback and reform ideas.
- Requires a final report and proposed legislation, which Congress must review under fast-track procedures.

The commission would include eight bipartisan members, ensuring balanced perspectives on any proposed changes.

Why it matters: This bill could shape the future of how millions of families receive critical services. Community input and transparency will be essential.

What you can do:

- Monitor developments to submit public comments once the commission is formed.
- Talk with your networks and elected officials about the importance of protecting access while improving efficiency.

[Link to Bill](#)

Higher Education Reform and Opportunity Act

The Higher Education Reform and Opportunity Act (S. 801/ H.R.1739) seeks to amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to promote transparency, accountability, and student success in higher education.

The bill focuses on:

- Fiscal accountability measures for institutions receiving federal funds, requirements for colleges and universities to publicly share student outcome data, such as graduation rates, job placement, and average earnings,
- Accountability for student loan performance, including how well institutions prepare students to repay their loans,
- Flexibility for states to develop their own accreditation systems, opening the door for more innovative education models and alternative providers.

Why it matters: This bill aims to give students and families clearer, more actionable information when choosing colleges, while holding institutions responsible for outcomes and debt burdens.

What you can do:

- Talk to students, parents, and educators about the need for better data and real accountability in higher education.
- Reach out to your Senators to share your thoughts on how these changes could impact your community.

[Link to Bill.](#)

Conferences & Webinars

Title:

Post-Secondary Educational Aspirations Among Young Adults With Foster Care Experience: Highlighting the Interest in Vocational-Focused Education

Date:

Wednesday, Sep 24, 2025

Time:

11am-Noon PST/ 2pm-3pm EST

Location:

[Zoom](#)

Presenter:

Dr. Mary Collins, Professor and Department Chair at Boston University School of Social Work

About:

This webinar will present findings from a study that examined post-secondary aspirations, plans and goals among a sample of young adults with previous child welfare involvement. The study focused specifically on vocational education which has not received significant research attention but which is an important educational option. Implications for practice and policy are discussed.

Information link:

[Register Here!](#)

Title:

Expanding College Access with the Common App

Date:

Tuesday, Sep 30, 2025

Time:

10am-11am PST/ 1pm-2pm EST

Presenter:

SchoolHouse Connection

About:

The Common App is an online application platform used by over 1,000 colleges and universities worldwide. It allows students to complete a single application that can be submitted to multiple participating institutions. By streamlining the college application process, the Common App helps make higher education more accessible for all students, especially those experiencing homelessness.

This webinar will explore how high school counselors and liaisons can use the Common App to support students applying to college, including unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness, and address frequently asked questions.

Information link:

[Register Here!](#)

Title:

FAFSA 2026–2027: Strategies to Support Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

Date:

Thursday, Nov 13, 2025

Time:

12pm-1pm PST/ 3pm-4pm EST

Presenter:

SchoolHouse Connection

About:

This webinar will equip participants to:

- Identify who qualifies as a homeless youth on the FAFSA and what documentation supports independent student status.
- Navigate the FAFSA process for unaccompanied homeless youth.
- Implement strategies that help students complete the FAFSA and pursue postsecondary education, like Colorado State University's Independent Student Day

Information link:

[Register Here!](#)

Conferences & Webinars

Title:

Pathways to Success: A Systematic Review of Pre-college Programs for Foster Youth

Date:

Monday, Nov 17, 2025

Time:

Noon-1pm PST/ 3pm-4pm EST

Presenter:

Terrell Richardson, Ph.D.
Candidate in the University of Alabama School of Social Work

About:

Presentation will be on Terrell Richardson, Ph.D. Candidate in the University of Alabama School of Social Work's recent publication "Pathways to Success: A Systematic Review of Pre-college Programs for Foster Youth." More information about this webinar will be available soon!

Information link:

[Register Here!](#)

Title:

National Conference for Hidden Student Populations

Date:

Feb 25-27, 2026

Location:

Athens, OK

About:

NCHP Conference: NCHP is a collaborative effort led by Fellows of five institutions in the US to uncover the individual strengths and institutional barriers for hidden populations. [Calls for contributions!](#)

Title:

NASPA Annual Conference

Date:

March 7-11, 2026

Location:

Kansas City, MO

About:

NASPA is dedicated to advancing student affairs in higher education. Our programs and services empower professionals to foster student success. We hope to see you to connect with colleagues and participate in critical professional development that will inspire and support you in the work you do on campus.

Presented by:

NASPA

Information link:

[Info Here!](#)

Have an event you would like featured?

Let us know!

nrc.fahe@gmail.com

Thank you!

Thank you to our leadership team:

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