

NACADA Proposed Advising Community Students with Experience in the Foster Care System

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The Steering Committee members represent regions 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7 in NACADA.

The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) report for the 2017 year shows an overall increase in the numbers of youth in foster care of the last five years. In 2017 an estimated 442,995 youths were in care nationwide.

--U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, 2018

Rationale for Creating the AC

How would creating the AC address unique needs not already addressed by an existing AC?

- In the article “A Framework to Approach Postsecondary Educational Program Design for Students with Lived Experience in Foster Care,” the authors identifies seven “life domains” which an institution should focus on when supporting students with these experiences. Very specific to this population are elements in almost all of the domains; in “Academics and Education,” students are more likely to be at an academic deficit because they’ve moved from home to home; in “Housing,” students placed in foster care can “age out” at 18 and find themselves suddenly homeless; in “Physical and Mental Health,” they are a population more likely to experience PTSD symptoms than veteran students; in “Life Skills,” the article explains how students with experiences in foster care have a “pseudo-independence,” in that they can take care of common tasks like buying groceries but may be developmentally at-age or delayed.

All of this, in addition to the lack of family support, make advising students with experiences in foster care somewhat distinctive, as most states are beginning to recognize. NACADA as a national organization has a role to play in the conversation, because just becoming a voice, which speaks to the specialization of this group, will add credence to the thought that states should focus on retaining and graduating students with these experiences.

- The 2019 Helios Report 2018 “Promoting Degree Attainment Among Former Foster Youth” cites
 - Transition to adulthood is difficult for any adolescent; however, youth in the foster care system face additional challenges, especially related to postsecondary education. According to a recent report by the Education Commission on the States, only **46%** of youth from the foster care system **graduate from high school**, compared with 82% of students from the general population (Parker & Sarubbi, 2017). Unfortunately, this discrepancy in high school graduation translates to approximately **20%** percent of former youth from foster care **enrolling in college** as opposed to 66 percent in the general population (Current Population Survey, 2017). **Three percent** to 11 percent of alumni from foster care complete a degree from a four-year university, compared with 32 percent for students from the general population (National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, 2018). Not surprisingly, less education translates to lower wages and a higher likelihood of unemployment, compared to that of the general population. The Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study found that **more than a third of former foster care youth live below the poverty line as adults** (Pecora, 2005) (4).

From the NCSL the numbers they cite are more dire (9):

(<http://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/supports-older-youth.aspx>) :

- 1-in-5 was homeless.

- 36 percent of youth in one study had been homeless at least once by age 26; nearly half of those youth had been homeless more than once and nearly 75 percent had been homeless four or more times.
- A third lived in at least three different places; 20 percent had lived in four or more.
- One-fifth of 26-year-olds did not have a high school diploma or GED; only 8 percent of these young adults had earned a postsecondary degree.
- Only 46 percent of youth in the same study were employed.
- 1 in 4 were involved in the criminal justice system within 2 years of leaving care.
- 30 percent of 21-year-old former foster youth reported criminal justice system involvement.
- By age 26, the majority of young women and four-fifths of young men in the study had been arrested; nearly one-third of those young women and almost two-thirds of the young men had spent at least one night in jail since they were 18 years old.
- Nearly 80 percent of young women became pregnant by age 26 (compared with 55 percent of young women in the general population).

In looking at remedies for youth coming from these background circumstances there has been federal legislative mandates to try to improve these outcomes. Currently, three main federally funded programs support youth in foster care as they work toward postsecondary credentials: (a) the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for a Successful Transition to Adulthood “the Chafee Program”; (b) the Education and Training Voucher Program (ETV); and (c) the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008.

Unfortunately, getting to college is just the first hurdle these students face. The second, just as with non-former foster youth, is the transition. Not only are these students beginning their transition out of the foster care system, but they are also experiencing the traditional transition from high school to college expectations. This can make for an extremely challenging time for this population. During college, many face new challenges including cost of living and lack of finances, lower levels of academic preparedness and life skills needed to be successful with undergraduate courses, an inability to balance work and school, housing and transportation issues, health care and insurance issues, and motivation, self-esteem, and mental health issues. They also lack a strong support system to help them navigate this often overwhelming time. All of these issues, combined with the normal struggles of acclimating to college life, can sometimes be too much for these students, and instead of asking for help they drop out.

As previously mentioned, advising students who have experienced care require additional support and guidance for professionals to assist with their transition to college and adulthood. Several states have started providing funding to staff specific programs or advising offices to support/coach students who have experienced foster care or homelessness. These staff are often placed in advising or coaching roles to work specifically with this student population, serving as the single point of contact to assist with their transition and navigating the campus environment.

Inclusion and Engagement

How will the potential AC enhance and seek to expand the diversity of NACADA? This includes “involving members from diverse ethnicities, genders, gender identities, sexual

orientations, as well as from institutions with diverse sizes and types, in an effort to add the richness of diverse representation within all units of the Association.”

- According to Lorthridge et al., “a recent national study on youth in detention found that youth who are LGBQ youth were approximately seven times more likely to have been previously removed from their homes and placed in foster care than youth who are heterosexual” (2018). Professionals within the LGBTQIA community may be drawn to participate in this AC.
- Students are removed from their birth residence because of trauma experiences, which can be related to basic needs, mental, emotional, physical health, or a combination of these factors. Professionals who are interested in mental and physical health of students or who hope to assist students with basic needs may be drawn to this AC. Many of these concerns occur with higher frequency in socioeconomically desperate regions of the county and where ethnic identity is more diverse; professionals who serve within these areas might hope to be included in this AC.
- Men and women of color are at least three times as likely to have experiences in foster care (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2016). Professionals who serve at Minority Serving Institutions may be interested in participating.
- Professionals who are interested in equality in higher education may be drawn to this AC, as students with experience in the foster care system have decreased access to education.
- According to the advocacy group Children’s Rights, 2019 study found that 30.4% of youth in foster care identify as LGBTQ and 5 percent as transgender, compared to the 11.2% and 1.17 % of youth not in foster care. Foster youth who identify as LGBTQ also have a higher chance of experiencing homelessness (Baams et. al, 2019).

Advancement of NACADA's Mission and Goals in Terms of Research

Indicate how the potential AC will contribute to the advancement of research, literature or other resources in the field of academic advising.

- Research to study this population is relatively new, but on the rise. Advisors can hope to contribute to topics such as: successful transition to college; college preparation programs; successful first-year retention; support program models; mentor support; basic needs support; increased retention and graduation rates for students with experience in care from a community college setting; increased retention and graduation rates for students with experience in care from a four-year model college or university.
- By creating a nationwide resource and programming network, advisors can report best practices in identifying these students on their campuses, working with community partners, and communicating financial aid coverage and tuition waivers. They can assist new or struggling support programs with fresh perspectives and methodologies.
- Having an Advising Community will make it easier to identify schools which focus on this population, thus creating better access to participants of research. Advisors will be able to collaborate more freely than they currently do.
- Having an Advising Community will also provide a national platform for professionals working with this population to share best practices for supporting students who have experienced foster care.

Evidentiary Support of Activity and Membership

The Interim Chair must include results from the survey of interested members and a list of activities conducted with numbers of people that attended/participated.

Interest Survey:

- 49 participants responded to the AC Interest Survey
- 61% expressed interest in an AC to support students with experience in the foster care system.
- 6 respondents were interested in participating as a Steering Committee member.
- 23 respondents were interested in becoming an AC member.
- 3 respondents were interested in becoming a future Chair of the AC
- Only 8.9% were not willing to change one of their current AC Community selections to this AC.

Facebook Page:

- 45 Facebook users follow the Proposed AC for Students with Experience in Foster Care, NACADA Facebook page

Remind:

- 13 NACADA members are participating in the conversation about students with experience in foster care through *Remind*.

References

- Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2016). Racial disproportionality and disparity in child welfare. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau 5
- Day, M., Schmidt, L., and Unrau, Y. (Spring 2017). "A Framework to approach postsecondary educational program design for Students with lived experience in foster care." Office of Community College Research and Leadership. University of Illinois
- Lorthridge, J., Evans, M., Heaton, L., Stevens, A., & Phillips, L. (2018). Strengthening Family Connections and Support for Youth in Foster Care who Identify as LGBT: Findings from the PII-RISE Evaluation. *Child Welfare*, 96(1), 53-78.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. (2018, November 8). *AFCARS Report #25*. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb>
- Baams, L., Wilson, Bianca., and Russel, Stephen. (March 2019). "LGBTQ Youth in Unstable Housing in Foster Care." <https://www.childrensrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2019.02.12-LGBTQ-Youth-in-Unstable-Housing-and-Foster-Care.pdf>

Additional Resources:

- Helios Foundation "Promoting Degree Attainment Among Former Foster Youth" 2019
<https://www.helios.org/news-media/publications/promoting-degree-attainment-among-former-foster-youth>

Annie Casey Foundation “*Fostering Youth Transitions; Using Data to Drive Policy and Practice Decisions*” <https://www.aecf.org/resources/fostering-youth-transitions>

Adoption & Foster Care Statistics Report #25 <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/afcars>

State-level data for understanding child welfare in the United States <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/state-level-data-for-understanding-child-welfare-in-the-united-states>

National Conference of State Legislature Data <http://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/supports-older-youth.aspx>

Caps on Tuition Waivers. <https://www.ecs.org/state-level-tuition-assistance-programs-for-foster-youth-in-postsecondary-education/>