

Research Brief

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The mission of the Center is to address social, economic, and educational inequity by providing training about personal finance; analyzing the economics of education, especially post-secondary education; and conducting original research related to personal finance and the economics of education. Our chief goal is to promote social mobility through personal finance and educational attainment.

Campus Support Programs in Kentucky for Youth Formerly in Foster Care

Campus-support programs (CSPs) for youth formerly in foster care (YFFC) offer services--such as academic advising, mentoring, financial support, peer-mentoring, and more--to help retain and matriculate students who have experienced the foster care system (Geiger, 2018; Dworsky & Perez, 2010). These services are intended to help YFFC students overcome systemic barriers to earning a postsecondary credential. Although few formal evaluations of these programs have been done (Schelbe et al, 2019), existing evidence (Unrau et al, 2017) points to the importance of these programs for the participants they serve. An obstacle to research on and the development of effective programs is the lack of a current database of programs nationwide. In this research brief, we present findings on CSPs for YFFC across the state of Kentucky. We begin with a brief overview of the barriers youth who have experienced care may face in earning a degree.

Barriers to Educational Attainment for Youth Formerly in Foster Care

Each year, about 20,000 youth are emancipated (commonly referred to as aging out) from the foster care system in the United States without having been placed permanently with an adoptive family or biological family. Youth who have experienced foster care generally have high aspirations for their education attainment. For example, studies (Courtney et al., 2004; Jones, 2010; McMillen et al., 2003) have found that between 70-83% of youth in care want to attend college; yet those aspirations are not always fulfilled. Further studies (Barnow, Buck, O'Brien, Pecora, Ellis, & Steiner, 2015; Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 2001) have found that although interest levels are high, only about 8% of YFFC enroll in a postsecondary education program. Among those who do enroll, it is estimated that 26% graduate (Day, Dworsky, Fogarty, Damashek 2011). There are a number of barriers that contribute to this gap.

YFFC who aspire to attend and complete post-secondary education face barriers that are distinct from other groups. These barriers may include high levels of school mobility (Conger & Finkelstein, 2003; Pecora, Williams, et al., 2006) that may further exacerbate efforts to prepare academically for college; struggles with mental health, in part related to traumas they have experienced prior to and once in the foster care system (Bederian-Gardner et al., 2018; Geenen et al., 2015; Okpych & Courtney, 2018; Pears et al., 2012); lack of consistent mentors and supportive adults (Barth, 1990; Courtney, 2009; Lovitt & Emerson, 2008); inadequate academic and personal support once on campus (Tobolowsky et al., 2019; Watt et al., 2013); and the lack of financial resources to pay for college, including access to adequate housing (Hines et al., 2005; Jones, 2010; Lovitt & Emerson, 2008).

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Foster Care in Kentucky

Though foster care systems exist in each state in the US, the youth in care and YFFC have specific needs in Kentucky. As of August 1, 2021 there were 9,115 youth in foster care in Kentucky, 11% of this population reside in Jefferson County (Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, 2021). According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data reported in 2020, Kentucky has approximately 204 youth in foster care per every 100,000 Kentuckians; comparatively, Kentucky's neighboring state Ohio has 118 youth in foster care per 100,000 Ohioians. While there are many factors that contribute to Kentucky's growing population of youth in foster care, a focus of the Fostering Attainment Through Educational Support (FATES) Workshop is how we, as a state, can better serve this population while they are in care, and when they "age-out" of care.

There are approximately 3,200 youth in foster care who are "transition-age," which means they are between 16 and 21 years old and therefore on the verge of transitioning out of the foster care system (Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, 2021). Foster Care professionals, counselors, and Social Workers do their best to offer resources for these transition-age youth, but there are still prevalent indicators that YFFC are not receiving the support they need. For example, 86% of youth in foster care in Kentucky participate in state-run academic planning, but only 4% utilize the tuition assistance funding available (Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, 2021). Kentucky offers multiple tuition assistance options for YFFC, the most comprehensive is the Tuition Waiver for Foster and Adopted Children (KRS 164.2847) which waives the cost of tuition and mandatory fees at all of Kentucky's public universities and community colleges. Additionally, YFFC who are between 18 and 26 years old are able to apply for the Education Training Voucher (ETV) which is an award of up to \$5,000 to use toward any post-secondary education program. Current youth in foster care in Kentucky are eligible to take the ACT for free twice and have free access to the online Kaplan ACT prep program. These are all great forms of support for this population, but only if YFFC utilize them.

Methods

To document and describe CSPs in Kentucky, we conducted a search of institutional websites for all public and private, non-profit, two- and four-year institutions (n=49) across the state. The list of institutional websites was derived from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Following a protocol that included a list of key search terms (see Appendix), the research team looked for CSPs as well as points of contact (POC) at each institution. We defined a POC as an employee at the institution specifically designated as someone YFFC could contact with any questions or needs. The search was sequential, meaning we first looked for CSPs and if none were identified, we

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searched for POCs. When either a CSP or POC was identified, additional data were collected on the services (e.g., mentoring, advising, financial aid) provided specifically for YFFC, if any. Additional details regarding our search protocol are available upon request. Next, we highlight limitations of our work.

There are three limitations to our approach. First, we rely on campus websites to determine whether a CSP or POC exists at an institution. Naturally, this would overlook programs or positions that have no web presence. However, we argue that programs or positions with no web presence are distinct from those that have a web presence in that they may be ad hoc (i.e., no institutional infrastructure exists), they lack a campus presence, and their outreach to YFFC may be limited.

Second, there is no established definition or agreed upon terminology in higher education for students who are YFFC. For example, Kentucky Statute KRS 164.2847 which waives mandatory tuition and student fees for youth who have been in care includes youth who were in state care at age 18, youth who were in independent living services funded by the state, or youth who were adopted from foster care and whose families receive adoption assistance. This definition could include youth who were adopted from foster care as infants and whose families receive adoption assistance as well as youth who were in foster care at age 18. Arguably, these two examples--both defined as youth formerly in foster care--had vastly different experiences surrounding the foster care system.

Third, we do not include statewide coordinating bodies, also known as backbone organizations, to support youth who have experienced care in higher education. According to the Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide (FAAN) Network, a voluntary coordinating group for backbone organizations, there are 22 such organizations representing 18 states nationwide. One example of a backbone organization is Great Expectations in Virginia which coordinates efforts to support YFFC in community colleges across the state. Although these organizations play a role in supporting YFFC at institutions, we view them as different from campus-based support programs. Next we discuss our findings for Kentucky.

Findings

After reviewing websites for all public and private, non-profit, two- and four-year institutions (n=49) across Kentucky, we found three institutions providing dedicated services to YFFC*. Southcentral Kentucky Community and Technical College (SKYCTC) is the sole community college providing dedicated services for YFFC. The University of Kentucky (UK) and Western Kentucky University (WKU) are the only public four-year institutions offering services specifically for youth who have experienced care, albeit in different ways. SKYCTC and WKU have dedicated, stand-alone CSPs for YFFC students attending their schools. The UK offers services for YFFC through a private grant

*The University of Louisville established a pilot campus support program in Fall 2021, in collaboration with this research team.

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affiliated with their TRIO program. Per the table below, there are some similarities between the programs, for example, the UK and WKU programs have physical locations on campus. Additionally, SKYCTC and WKU both provide life skills training and list their specific eligibility requirements on their websites. However, there are differences between the eligibility specifics for these programs, for example, youth in foster care are eligible to enroll in the WKU program starting in high school.

There are also many differences between the programs and services they offer for their students. The WKU program provides opportunities for participants to get familiar with campus life and academic expectations through work experiences and campus visits and partners with community organizations to further their impact. The UK program focuses more on addressing campus-based needs, such as, year-round housing, food assistance, and mental health services. Lastly, SKYCTC highlights their professional development opportunities offered to their YFFC students.

Table. Features of Campus Support Programs

Institution	Southcentral Kentucky Community and Technical College (SKYCTC)	University of Kentucky (UK)	Western Kentucky University (WKU)
Program Name	<i>Transitioning you to SKYCTC</i>	<i>1st Generation Students: Meeting Their Needs</i>	<i>The Beacon Project</i>
Program Characteristics			
Life Skills Training	x		x
Professional Development	x		
Eligibility Requirements	x		x
Physical Location		x	x
Yearly Housing		x	
Food Assistance		x	
Mental Health Services		x	
Emergency Funds			x
Campus Employment			x
Cap on # of Students			x
Community Partnership			x
Recruitment			x
High School Outreach			x

Discussion

YFFC possess their own unique strengths, resilience, and maturity (Samuels & Pryce, 2008). However, students in this population also face challenges due to their experiences while in care. For example, 71% of female YFFC are pregnant by age 21; on average only half of YFFC who age out of the system have found full-time employment by age 26, and 24% have experienced homelessness by age 26, compared to 4% of the general population of 18-26 year olds in the US (Courtney, Dworsky, Brown, Cary, Love, & Vorhies, 2011; Piel, 2018; Salazar, Jones, Emerson, & Mucha, 2016). Adding a transition into college on top of trying to handle

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independent living requires a level of independence and maturity not generally expected from an 18-year-old student (Courtney, et al, 2011). Campus support programs can serve as a vehicle for overcoming barriers to educational attainment for college students who have experienced care.

Nationally, campus support programs and points of contact are relatively rare at institutions. Outside the efforts of this research to document and describe, the most current previous directory of programs nationally--developed by Fostering Success Michigan--listed 214 programs around 2014. This represents about 6% of non-profit, two- and four-year institutions nationally. The number of programs has almost certainly grown since then, as evidenced by the data collected from Kentucky. Of the four programs (including UofL's pilot) underway, three have been developed in the past 18 months.

Of the three established programs in Kentucky, we find that the newly developed Beacon Project at Western Kentucky appears to offer the greatest variety of services. The Beacon Project is also a partnership with the child welfare agency in Kentucky (Cabinet for Health and Family Services). A goal of the Beacon Project is to recruit more youth currently in care to higher education. The program at SKYCTC is notable because it is located at a community college, which is where students who have experienced foster care are more likely to enroll compared to a four-year institution (Gross, 2019). The program at the University of Kentucky is currently funded by a private grant and so it is unclear if the program will continue beyond the life of that grant, although private funding of such programs does not appear to be uncommon (Geiger et al, 2018).

The differences in each of the CSPs is not surprising, and is reflective of the known national landscape of CSPs. They may develop organically through the efforts of champions within particular colleges or areas of the administration and therefore reflect the unique aspects of the school along with the coalition of individuals who coalesced to develop the program. Common to the CSPs in Kentucky, is a publicized, formal structure to support students who have been in care in attaining a postsecondary credential. Assessing the efficacy of these programs is outside the scope of our efforts, however, research suggests that support services along with mentoring can be impactful in terms of educational outcomes for YFFC.



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In this sense, then, we conclude that any effort at providing a campus support program represents a step forward for closing the attainment gap between youth who have experienced care and those who have not. We are hopeful that continued efforts to document and describe these programs will serve efforts to evaluate what works and what improvements are needed, and additionally help those that run them continue to connect and learn from one another. Certainly, we hope that this can begin to happen for the programs in Kentucky.



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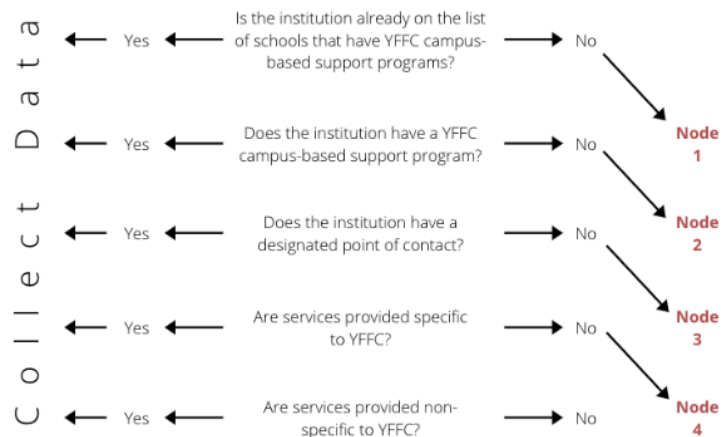
Appendix

Data Collection Protocol

Objective: To collect data about which campuses have campus-based support programs for Youth Formerly in Foster Care (YFFC) and among those that do, what services they provide. For institutions that do not have campus-based programs specifically for YFFC, we will discern the extent to which services for YFFC are offered.

Method: Through the use of search terms, systematic data collection, and a series of sequential decision points, we will create a database of the services and structures at institutions for YFFC, if any exist at the institutions.

Overview of Data Collection Process



Node 1: Does the institution have a campus-based support program? To determine yes or no, follow the following procedures.

Campus-based support program: A campus-based program states that part (or all) of its mission is to support YFFC in higher education. It may provide resources and staff support aimed at addressing the unique higher education needs of youth currently in, or formerly in foster care. The programs provide an array of support, which often include counseling/advising, workshops, school supplies, food, tutoring, and peer support.



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Procedure for determining Yes or No:

Step 1: On the main website for the institution (listed in the database), search for the following, in this order. Use all search terms in the search engine.

Foster Youth: A minor without parental support and protection, placed with a person or family to be cared for, usually by local welfare services or by court order for a variety of reasons, such as abuse or neglect by a parent or guardian.

Search Terms: foster youth, youth formerly in foster care, foster care alumni, former foster youth, youth transitioning out of care, transition aged youth

Step 2: Search results thoroughly to determine if anything meets the preceding definition of a campus-based support program.

If yes, collect the following data in the GoogleSheet.

- Program URL
- Program name
- Program director name
- Program director e-mail
- Program director phone number
- Services offered
 - YFFC Peer Mentors
 - YFFC Staff Mentors/Advisors
 - YFFC Department Coaches/Liaisons
 - Housing
 - Financial aid
 - Financial literacy
 - Emergency Fund
 - Professional Development
 - Cultural Identity Development
 - Life Skills Training
 - Social Events
 - Campus Employment/Work Study Options
 - Leadership Opportunities
 - Pre-Orientation
 - Care Closet (Professional attire available to students)
 - Highschool Outreach/Recruiting
 - Stipends
 - Care Packages / Giveaways



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- Organizational location (e.g., Student Affairs)
- Number of students in program
- Student eligibility
 - Foster care
 - Adopted
 - Guardianship
 - Juvenile justice
 - Homeless
 - Other
- Method of student recruitment
 - Financial aid department
 - Local/state child protection agency
 - Word of mouth
 - Other
- Partner with community agencies
 - Yes
 - No

If no, move to Node 2.