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Challenges Foster Youth Face in Pursuing Higher Education

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Challenges Foster Youth Face in Pursuing Higher Education

Hailey D'Elia

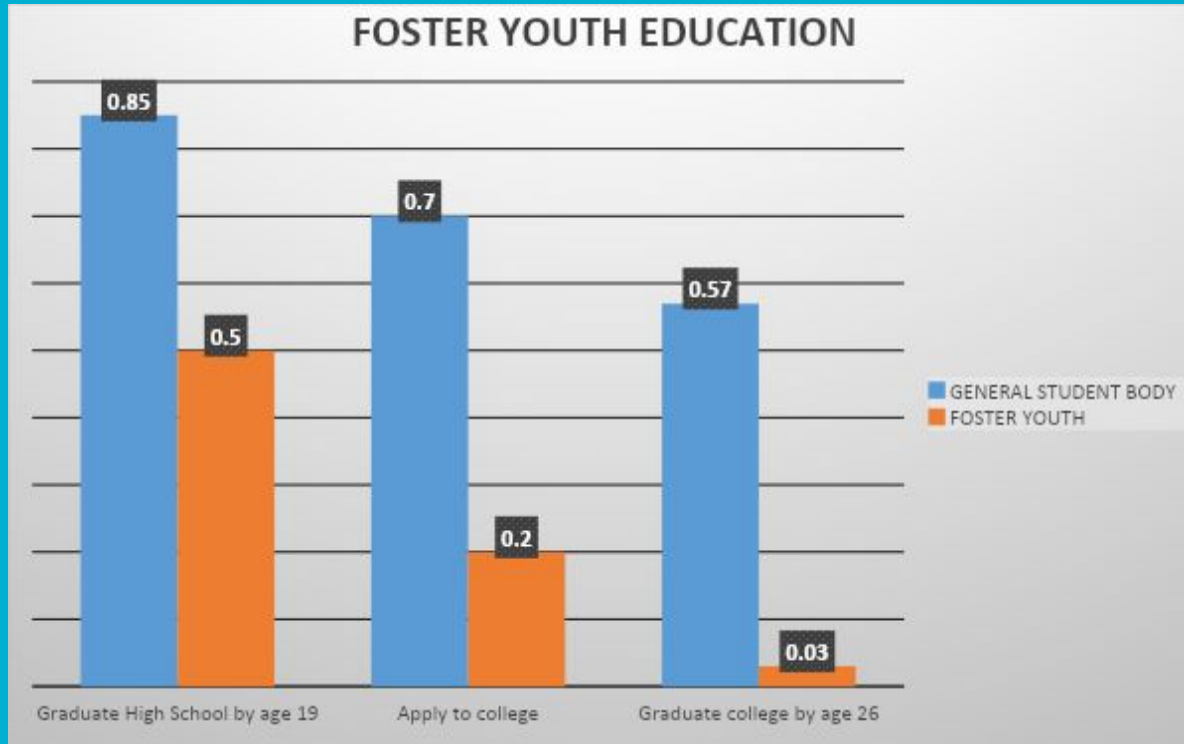
What is the first word that pops into your mind when you hear the words *foster youth*?
(be honest)

- answer garden.ch/1118181



Story Time:

Foster Youth Education Statistics:



Additional Facts:

More than **23,000 kids**
age out of U.S. foster care every year.

70%

of foster kids would like to go to college.

Only

3%

of kids who age out will earn a college degree

and

1 in 4

won't graduate from high school or get a GED.

60%

of boys who age out or are legally emancipated have been convicted of a crime.

7 in 10

girls who age out will become pregnant before age 21.

1 in 2

kids who age out will develop a substance dependence.

32%

of children who reached 18 in foster care were waiting in the system for more than

3 years

**You can change their future.
Adopt teens from foster care.**

chls.org/fostercareadoption



Children's
Home Society
of Wisconsin



FosterCare
Social Service
of Wisconsin

*Data from National Foster Youth Institute

-
- If the average person takes five years to complete a bachelor's degree, how can we expect foster youth to graduate in the same time frame when we have a lack of support and systems opposing us?
 - Why don't our policies reflect this?

Educational Supports and Limitations:

- There are currently two main supports that help foster youth with education expenses the first being John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (Chafee) and the second is Educational Training Voucher (ETV). In the state of New Jersey these funds **cease on your 23rd birthday**. On top of that in the majority of states **youth age out** of the system on their **21st birthday**. That means that any assistance from the Division of Child Protection and Permanency **ends**.
- There are also rules in place for who can get assistance and access Chafee and ETV funds on the federal and state level. The eligibility for NJFC Scholars which is now called Embrella is: if selected students are eligible for the ETV a total of \$5000 per academic year or a tuition waiver (not both).

Eligibility for Embrella formerly NJFC Scholars:

New applicants must meet all of the following general requirements:

- Be between the ages of 16 and 23. *Only youth 21 or older who have been continuously enrolled in post-secondary education since their 21st birthday and meet a required placement history eligibility below will be eligible for the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) or State Option (SO) funding.*
- Be in possession of a high school diploma or certificate of high school equivalency (GED) High school seniors may apply before receiving their diploma, but scholarship award is contingent upon graduation.
- Have a **working e-mail** address. New students will be emailed as part of the application process.
- All applicants attending a participating NJ school are required to submit an application to the **Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program**, and the **Tuition Aid Grant Application**.
- The EOF Application can be obtained through the EOF Office at the school you plan to attend.
- The TAG application is submitted upon completion of the FAFSA, with NJ Additional State Questions.

Eligibility for Embrella formerly NJFC Scholars

Continued:

In addition, all applicants must meet at least ONE of the following placement history requirements:

Out-of-Home Placements	Adoption
<p>·Are or were you in the care and custody of CP&P, in an out-of-home placement, for a total of 9 months or more after your 16th birthday? <i>If yes, both Federal Education and Training Voucher and State Tuition Waiver eligible.</i></p>	<p>·Were you adopted through the New Jersey CP&P after your 12th birthday? <i>If yes, Federal Education and Training Voucher or State Option eligible.</i></p>
<p>·Are or were you in the care and custody of CP&P, in an out-of-home placement for a total of 18 months or more after your 14th birthday? <i>If yes, Federal Education and Training Voucher eligible.</i></p>	<p>Kinship Legal Guardianship (KLG)*</p>
<p>Do you reside in, or have you resided in, a Transitional Living Program for youth or independent living arrangement approved by CP&P? <i>If yes, State Tuition Waiver eligible only. The facility or program must receive payment pursuant to the New Jersey Homeless Youth Act or the Federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. State Tuition Waiver funding is limited to unpaid tuition and fees after grants and scholarships have been applied (does not include room and board) for full-time enrollment at a NJ public institution.</i></p>	<p>·Did you leave an out-of-home paid placement through the New Jersey CP&P to enter Kinship Legal Guardianship after your 16th birthday? <i>If yes, Federal Education and Training Voucher eligible. *KLG occurs when the court grants the caregiver legal responsibility for the youth, and the caregiver has the rights of care, custody and supervision of the youth. Youth entering KLG solely through the court system <u>without</u> CP&P placement do <u>NOT</u> qualify.</i></p>

Financial Aid Process for Foster Youth:

- Fill out the FAFSA and make sure to check off question #52
 - Parents Deceased?/Student Ward of Court?/In Foster Care?
- Submit additional questions to the New Jersey Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA) and proof of ward of state
- Submit additional questions to your school
- Submit proof of ward of state
- Submit taxes or tax transcripts

Budget Cuts to Embrella:

- Funding is now only available for Fall and Spring semesters.
- Last year, the non-profit **ran out of funding** because they did not anticipate as many people applying and qualifying for the scholarship.
 - This left students who needed to take summer courses in a tough place because they needed to find funding elsewhere.
- Orders have become much slower.

Access to Vital Records:

- Most youth do not have access to **vital records** like their birth certificates and social security card.
- Foster youth are more likely to become **victims of identity theft**, sometimes from close family relatives.
 - Youth may not find out that their identity has been stolen until years later, which can affect them when applying for loans and housing.

Which prevents us from getting:

- Drivers License
- Car insurance
- Health insurance
- Bank accounts

Homelessness and Access to Mental Health Services:

- Foster youth are at risk of homelessness during breaks.
 - Have to apply to GAP Housing
- Many youth do not have a place to go for the holidays or break.

Access to Mental Health Services Are Scarce:

- Most places are a walk in, first come, first serve basis.
- Some have you call at the beginning of the month to schedule an appointment if there is room.

Financial Literacy and Self Sufficiency:

- Who is providing the financial literacy and self sufficiency training that youth in care need?

We have extremely unrealistic expectations of youth in care.

- How many people do you know that are fully independent by the age of 21 and do not receive help from parents, government assistance, or anything else besides their own income?
 - If we do not have these expectations from the general population, how do we have them of foster youth?

Taking Challenges into Higher Education Space:

- Your education can easily take a backseat with everything else going on.
- Challenges may become more severe.
- They have to learn how to adjust to college, learn time management, adjust to a new level of difficulty.
- They may be coming into direct contact with triggers like drugs and alcohol.
- Learn healthy corrective measures, healing, and coping skills
- Many youth are not keen on talking about their experiences in care because it brings up traumatic memories.
 - 1 in 4 foster youth experience the direct effects of PTSD.
 - Foster youth are twice as likely to experience PTSD than U.S. war veterans.

For most people college is marked by some of your best memories

- For foster youth, it is one of survival
 - age out at 21
 - ETV ends at 23
 - Struggle to become financially independent
 - Hours a week spent on self advocacy

How to time manage when you are **running** **out of time**

- Constantly on someone else's time
- Undoubtedly aware of the space you take up
- Easy to feel like a burden among others

Systemic Oppression of Foster Youth:

- Instead of looking at foster youth as bad adolescents, perhaps we should look at the systems that have failed to prepare us for success
- We have endured more than you know
- Foster youth are some of the most resilient people I know

Systems and Cohorts: How can schools help?

- Foster Youth Cohort through Residence Life University Housing
 - Builds a community that foster youth on campus can confide in
 - Surround youth with people who understand and have faced similar challenges
 - Open to anyone that has experienced time in care regardless of how long
- Sun Scholars Chapter
 - Provides peer mentorship to foster youth pursuing higher education from former foster youth who have graduated college and started their professional careers.

Keys to Success: My Personal Experience

- The most profound thing you can do to support any foster youth is believe in them.
- Want to feel safe, wanted, valued, and supported
 - More likely to open up about experiences if they feel safe
- You are not alone on this journey
- Need people and a system that believes we are capable of success

I didn't get here...

- I had the help and support of:
 - Friends
 - LRC Family
 - Teachers and Professors
 - Mentors
 - Caseworker
 - Therapist
 - Family

Opportunities and Helping Others:

- National Foster Youth Institute: Shadow Day
- Foster Youth Ambassador
- Camp To Belong
- Department of Children and Families Youth Council
- National Foster Youth Institute New Jersey Chapter
- Regional Coordinator for this years Shadow Day
- Applied to the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute: Foster Youth Internship Program

Opening the door for others:

- I recognize that I would not be here without the help of others
- My success means nothing if I am not opening the doors for those behind me
- It's about improving the system for others



What word pops into your mind when you hear *foster youth* now?

- answer garden.ch/1118195



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