



JOURNEY TO SUCCESS

SPOTLIGHT ON SUCCESS

The [Journey to Success Campaign](#) advocates for federal policy change to achieve better outcomes for youth who have experienced foster care. We seek to promote healing, family permanence and economic security for all youth and young adults who experience foster care. Our federal policy recommendations are grounded in data and insights from those with relevant life experiences. They also are grounded in lessons learned from best practice, including youth-centered programs and practices being implemented in states and communities across the country.

Our **Spotlight on Success** series highlights programs and policies that exemplify the recommendations in the **Journey to Success policy framework**:

PRIORITIZE
HEALTH,
HEALING, AND
WELL-BEING

NURTURE
FAMILY TIES
AND FAMILY
PERMANENCE

RETOOL FOSTER
CARE TO
BETTER SERVE
ADOLESCENTS AND
YOUNG ADULTS

INCREASE
ACCOUNTABILITY,
FOSTER FAIRNESS,
AND FOCUS
ON RESULTS

ENSURE YOUTH
ARE PLUGGED IN
TO SUPPORTIVE
SERVICES,
INCLUDING
IN HEALTH,
EDUCATION, AND
HOUSING

PROMOTE
ECONOMIC
SECURITY

JOURNEY TO SUCCESS

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MICHIGAN:

PROVIDING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT ON CAMPUS TO STUDENTS WITH EXPERIENCE IN FOSTER CARE IN MICHIGAN

Young people with foster care experience face unique challenges attaining a college degree compared to their peers who didn't experience systems involvement. Research confirms that while young people may be highly motivated to attend college, the lack of supportive guidance and trauma histories may make transitioning out of foster care while navigating a college system daunting, all of which can negatively impact academic performance. Without a network of supportive adults, challenges include financial barriers, lack of preparedness for the rigors of a college environment, and lack of stable housing during times when campus is normally closed. Since the late 1990s, there has been a growing movement to make campuses more supportive of young people transitioning from the foster care system, and a growing network of colleges and universities that are learning from each other about what works to help young people make it to college graduation.

Western Michigan University's (WMU) Center for Fostering Success' [Seita Scholars](#) Program is a great example of how a campus can create a welcoming environment for young people with foster care experience. **The Seita Scholars Program services WMU students ages 17-25 who have spent time in foster care as a teen, and meet other eligibility requirements. In addition to the \$5,000 scholarship provided each semester, Seita Scholars can access a variety of specially designed services and supports that are uniquely focused on meeting the needs of youth who have experienced foster care,** such as:

- The ability to remain in campus housing and receive meals during the school's winter and summer breaks (with additional social activities and after-hours emergency support provided during the winter break);
- Trained and certified Campus Coaches who meet regularly with students, provide holistic coaching on educational and other areas (e.g., jobs, housing), and offer 24-hour support as needed;
- Graduation planning and preparation support (including additional incentives for higher levels of participation in this optional benefit);
- Identity groups (e.g., scholars who are parenting, LGBTQ+ scholars)
- Academic assessments and support; and
- Assistance with emergency funding needs.

Scholars are expected to be enrolled full-time and maintain a 2.0 GPA, but the program does make exceptions because they [recognize](#) "that a Seita Scholar's academic performance can be impacted by many factors, including the student's trauma history." Recognizing the obstacles that students with experience in foster care have to overcome, Michigan DHHS provides funding for one Campus Coach and a DHHS Liaison who, among other responsibilities, helps Seita Scholars connect to state and federal supports such as Education and Training Vouchers, Medicaid, and SNAP. The program is also supported financially

and through in-kind support by multiple University departments, private foundations, and individual and organizational donors. Program results are impressive: nearly 50% of the [Seita Scholars](#) receive their undergraduate degree within six years, compared to [2-9%](#) of the broader population of young people who have had foster care experience.

Campus support programs are active at colleges in universities in many states. Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide (FAAN) and Fostering Success Michigan, with support from Casey Family Programs, maintain a directory of these programs at faannetwork.com/national-map. Several states also have backbone organizations, similar to Fostering Success Michigan, that provide resources, support, and connections to groups across the state in support of improving educational and career outcomes for students who have experienced foster care. FAAN's [membership](#) includes a number of these backbone organizations. Additionally, many other groups have [received training](#) on and are working to implement the coaching model that is so central to Seita Scholar Program's success.

THE SEITA SCHOLARS PROGRAM IS A SHINING EXAMPLE OF THESE JOURNEY TO SUCCESS PRIORITIES:

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OHIO:

PRESERVING FAMILIES IN OHIO THROUGH RESPITE CARE

Many parents, young people, and child welfare staff share the belief that parents don't receive the right services – or in some cases any services at all – to help them keep their families together. In too many cases, parents just need a break from the challenges of caregiving and lack the social or family networks that most families rely on when the stress of parenting becomes too much.

Ohio's largest Medicaid plan, CareSource, provides a respite care program through which parents can receive in- or out-of-home support, including having their children stay with another family for a day, night, or weekend. The program can also help with other needs, such as in-home supervision and meal preparation, hourly or by the day, for up to 13 consecutive days. These services are intended to reduce parental stress and keep families together. While the program has no formal ties to the state's child welfare agency, referrals are received by local child welfare agencies for families that are system involved but who retain legal custody of their children. The program is not available to children in state child protective custody, though it is available to parents whose children were previously in foster care as well as adoptive families.

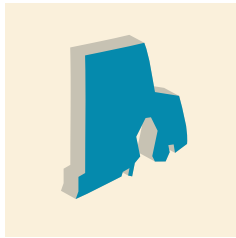
[Research](#) on the program has shown decreased emergency room visits and inpatient behavioral health service usage among clients who received respite services, and the program is now expanding to serve families beyond CareSource. The second Medicaid plan to feature the program is Aetna Better Health of Ohio, which is now the top payor in Ohio for children's respite care through the Medicaid program.

Mark Mecum of Ohio Children's Alliance shared that in addition to demonstrating incredible outcomes and exceeding expectations, the program has also confirmed that providing access to respite care can be a viable alternative to even the most intensive and restrictive behavioral health services, including inpatient hospitalization and placement into residential treatment centers.

CARESOURCE IS A SHINING EXAMPLE OF THESE JOURNEY TO SUCCESS PRIORITIES:

NURTURE FAMILY
TIES AND FAMILY
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RHODE ISLAND:

**HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE
FIND MEANINGFUL CAREERS IN
RHODE ISLAND**

Works Wonders® is a career readiness program designed specifically for young people ages 16-26 who are in or have experienced foster care, housing instability/homelessness, or involvement in the juvenile justice system. Participants receive skills training, one-on-one career coaching, and paid work-related experiences. The program was co-created by young people in foster care and Foster Forward, a community-based non-profit organization in Rhode Island, leveraging a five-year grant from the federal Children’s Bureau.

In 2018, Works Wonders® and its state partners were unanimously awarded an Innovations in American Government Award from the Ash Center at Harvard University for their success in helping young people access skills training and job opportunities. An [independent evaluation found that Works Wonders®](#) effectively prepared participants for careers/education, reduced barriers to their workforce participation, and increased their employment from 38.3% to 52%. Today, Works Wonders® continues as a public-private partnership in Rhode Island, with other jurisdictions, including [Indiana](#) and [Nashville](#), implementing the model with similar success.

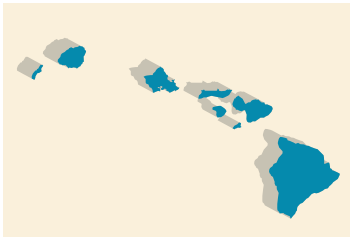
Works Wonders® participants receive a combination of services designed to help them build skills, explore career pathways, and access career networks. Services include a minimum of 12 weeks of 1:1 career coaching, 12-16 hours of career readiness skills training with a stipend, and paid internships, including job shadowing and other work-based learning opportunities. Foster Forward develops relationships with employers who are interested in having interns that are paid by the organization, providing a space for work-based learning, and supporting the local community. Some young people are hired directly by internship employers, while others use the skills they have learned as a building block to their next step along their career/educational pathway.

All Works Wonders® participants are eligible for Foster Forward’s ASPIRE program, which includes financial education and financial coaching, together with a \$100 initial contribution to seed a bank account. Young people can use their savings – together with a dollar-for-dollar match from Foster Forward, to purchase an asset that helps them with work, school, housing, or other goals. This may include a computer, car, down payment on an apartment, and more. Foster Forward also offers mentoring, Rapid Rehousing, onsite clinical support, access to basic needs through a drop-in center, and other programming.

THE WORKS WONDERS[®] PROGRAM IS A SHINING EXAMPLE OF THESE JOURNEY TO SUCCESS PRIORITIES:

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HAWAII:

**PROMOTING SELF-ADVOCACY
AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN HAWAII**

Too often, young people in foster care who feel their rights have been violated feel there is no safe place to turn to file a complaint. Those who do speak up often feel that no one believes them, or that it is held against them by staff, administrators, and others who may not feel the young person is being treated unjustly. As a result, young people in foster care may not trust anyone enough to share serious concerns about how they are being treated and having their needs met.

In Hawaii, advocacy from young people with lived experience in foster care and efforts by state legislators and community groups led to the passage of a Foster Youth Bill of Rights. Codified in a 2018 law, the statute clearly establishes the rights they have, such as ensuring having a voice in their own cases and decisions, rights around sibling connections, and allowing young people to participate in extracurricular activities. Although the state had articulated “guiding principles” before the enactment of the law, the legislation named additional supports and protections for young people and created accountability for respecting their rights. The law was informed by testimony and legislative meetings with members of Hawaii’s HI H.O.P.E.S. (Helping Our People Envision Success), a group of young people currently or formerly in care. HI H.O.P.E.S is facilitated by EPIC ‘Ohana, the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative site in Hawaii.

While the passage of the law was a huge victory for youth advocates, young people felt strongly that there should be a grievance process they can access if they feel their rights are not being respected. Young people from HI H.O.P.E.S. spent the next 18 months helping to design a new grievance process that they call the Pono Process. While young people are always encouraged to work with their care team to have their needs met and resolve issues, in cases where additional outside support is needed, they can submit a grievance using the [Pono Process](#).

As a first step in the process, a specially trained Pono Navigator with lived experience in foster care speaks to the young person and gathers information that is then sent to their team members. Team members work together to reach a resolution to the complaint. Each grievance is also sent to child welfare administration, including the branch administrator, deputy administrator, section administrator, and supervisor. This helps move the process along and provides oversight to ensure accountability. The young person, at any time, can explore and access legal options, including an attorney and audience with the presiding judge in their case.

EPIC ‘Ohana provides training to young people throughout the state to educate them about self-advocacy so they can try to work with their team to have their needs met. In the rare cases where self-advocacy is not enough to have their rights respected, however, young people can access support from those who have also experienced foster care, and, if needed, more senior professionals who can help them through the Pono Process.

Hawaii’s Foster Youth Bill of Rights is part of its compliance with requirements in the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 (H.R. 4980). The National Conference of State Legislatures maintains a listing of [similar legislation from other states](#).

HAWAII'S FOSTER YOUTH BILL OF RIGHTS IS A SHINING EXAMPLE OF THESE JOURNEY TO SUCCESS PRIORITIES:

RETOOL
FOSTER CARE TO
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CALIFORNIA:

BOOSTING ECONOMIC SECURITY BY HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE ACCESS TAX REFUNDS AND CREDITS IN CALIFORNIA

When young people transition from the foster care system, they often don't have the safety net needed to meet everyday expenses such as housing, food, clothes, transportation, or insurance. Many young people also have very little cushion to withstand a financial crisis, and are often not taught about finances and provided skills to budget, save, and file taxes. For many young people, this is their first time being on their own and having to manage money, and the learning curve can be daunting. Youth with foster care experience may be eligible for significant tax refunds and credits, but may not be aware of these opportunities or know how to access them.

The [California Foster Youth Tax Project](#), a partnership between **John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY)** and **22 California counties**, works to raise awareness and provide targeted tax assistance to young people who were in foster care or homeless. Youth across [California counties](#) can receive in person or virtual assistance filing their taxes, and JBAY has also created tax filing guides for youth in [California](#). The goal is to ensure that these young people receive tax refunds available to them, and also claim the Earned Income Tax Credit, child tax credit, and other tax benefits to which they may be entitled.

The project started in 2020 as a pilot in Santa Clara county, in which 45 young people received assistance, leading to \$145,000 in refunds. It is supported by numerous funders including Conrad Hilton Foundation, Golden State Opportunity, Pritzker Foster Care Initiative, Tipping Point Community, Walter S. Johnson Foundation, United Way Bay Area, and United Ways of California.

California, spurred by advocacy led by JBAY, the CalEITC coalition and others, also recently established a [Foster Youth Tax Credit](#), which is a \$1,000 refundable tax credit available to young adults ages 18 through 25 who are or were in foster care on or after their 13th birthday.

THE CALIFORNIA FOSTER YOUTH TAX PROJECT AND TAX CREDIT ARE SHINING EXAMPLES OF THIS JOURNEY TO SUCCESS PRIORITY:





NEW YORK:

**ACHIEVING EDUCATIONAL
SUCCESS THROUGH FAIR FUTURES
IN NEW YORK CITY**

[Fair Futures](#) is a youth-led advocacy movement and coalition of over 100 organizations in New York City that was successful in securing and baselining \$30.7 million in public funding for young people in foster care to have access to the Fair Futures model from 6th grade through age 26. **The Fair Futures model provides 1:1 coaching, tutoring, and a range of academic, career, housing, and independent living supports so young people can reach their potential and transition successfully to adulthood.** Two New York foster care agencies implemented an early version of Fair Futures that resulted in *more than 90% of participants receiving a high school diploma or equivalent* compared to only 22% of youth who've experienced foster care in NYC. Based upon this early success and strong cross-sector collaboration, the Fair Future coalition was able to successfully advocate for funding to support expansion of the model. The model was also expanded to the NYC juvenile justice sector with City funding and is piloted with private philanthropy in Buffalo, NY.

The Fair Futures [model](#) provides young people in foster care with comprehensive and long-term support from middle school through age 26. In middle school, the model includes a Middle School Education Specialist who monitors the academic performance of participants and advocates for educational resources tailored to the needs of each student. Specialists also help students access weekly, 1:1, trauma-informed tutoring sessions in their homes and connect students to extracurricular and summer activities. Another critical part of the Specialist's role is to provide 1:1 support to all 8th graders with NYC's complex high school selection process to ensure they enter a quality, best-fit school. Before Fair Futures, students in foster care entered high schools with graduation rates significantly below the system average and were overrepresented in the bottom 25% quartile of schools. Since Fair Futures launched, for the first time in history, 8th graders in foster care are attending high schools with an *average graduation rate at/above the NYC system average*.

For youth in high school and older, the model includes a professionally trained coach who builds a trusting relationship with the young person. The Coach provides social-emotional support, helps young people explore their options and develop goals, connects them to schools, programs, and opportunities in line with their interests/goals, and helps them persist in these settings and plan/prepare for the next step on their journey. Coaches celebrate young people's success each step of the way and are there for them, no matter what. High school students also receive weekly tutoring, and older youth are supported in obtaining and maintaining housing and developing independent living skills. The Coach also works collaboratively with College, Career, and Housing Specialists and connects youth to facilitated peer groups.

Private philanthropy and a robust public-private partnership between the Foster Care Excellence Fund and the Administration for Children's Services has enabled the model to successfully scale across the NYC foster care system to serve over 3,000 young people. The FCEF foundations pooled funding to launch the Center for Fair Futures ("the Center"), which provides model implementation and professional development supports to all 26 foster care agencies and 450+ Fair Futures staff. This includes a suite of trainings, 1:1

technical assistance, learning communities, materials/tools, an online resource directory called One Degree, and an online platform that tracks young people’s goals/progress. As a result of these supports, a strong systemwide Fair Futures community has been built across the NYC foster care system.

Early results are strong, despite Fair Futures having been launched during the COVID-19 pandemic. In FY22:

- Over 3100 young people were served and over 1500 coached.
- 81% of young people who were coached engaged with their coach for 90+ days.

Of these, 90% achieved at least one academic, career development, and/or housing goal and an average of 3.8 goals each.¹

Chapin Hall is conducting a 5-year evaluation on Fair Futures outcomes and recently released an implementation study, which highlighted the quality and speed of implementation at such a large scale, particularly during the pandemic.

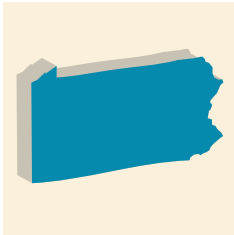
In addition to supporting Fair Futures implementation, the Center for Fair Futures also serves as a home for youth-led advocacy for the model, as well as a new youth-informed Innovation Arm. The Fair Futures Youth Advisory Board leads an advocacy coalition, which is now focused on expanding housing options for young people exiting foster care. They also support the Center to continuously improve the model and innovate, which led to the launch of the Center’s Innovation arm. All initiatives under the Innovation Arm are youth-informed and the Innovation team will collaboratively design, pilot, and (if successful) scale new programs/initiatives that address key gaps in the sector that young people say are critical to their well-being and success.

¹ Each “goal” represents a positive outcome, such as grade promotion, graduation, engagement in a career experience, applying to or persisting in a post-secondary setting, applying to or obtaining housing, etc.

FAIR FUTURES IS A SHINING EXAMPLE OF THESE JOURNEY TO SUCCESS PRIORITIES:

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PENNSYLVANIA:

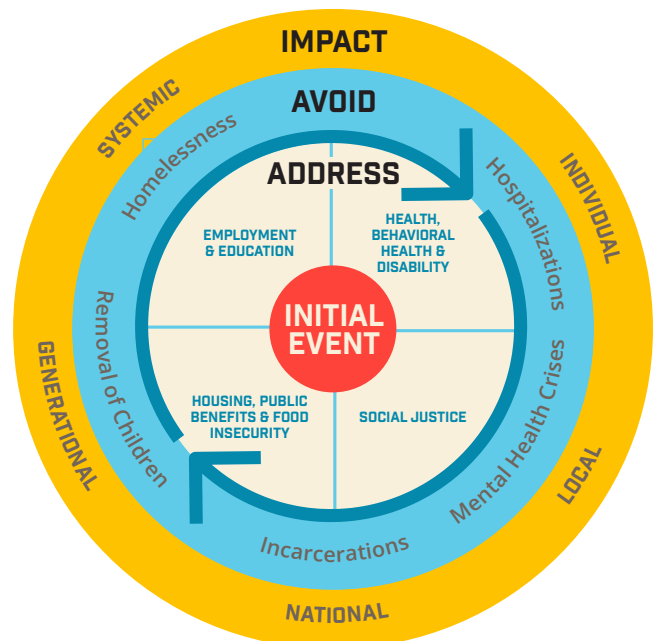
PROVIDING LEGAL REPRESENTATION AND ADVOCACY FOR TRANSITION-AGE YOUTH IN PENNSYLVANIA

Youth aging out of foster care face stiff challenges when transitioning to independent living. Youth of color are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system and can experience “[foster care bias](#),” a term researchers use to describe youth in foster care being more likely to be sent to juvenile detention after being arrested and less likely to be [kept at home while awaiting trial](#) than other youth charged with similar offenses. For youth who age out of care, a minor criminal record can complicate employment and housing applications. With no safety net, one in four former foster youth [experiences homelessness](#).

To help address these challenges and remove roadblocks to stable life after foster care, [KidsVoice in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, provides legal representation and broader advocacy services to current and former foster youth through age 24, up to 7 years after aging out of foster care.](#) A specialized team of attorneys and social services experts advocate for youth in areas such as housing, education, employment, and health. Youth often initially request help for a single issue. The KidsVoice team then works with each youth to identify other areas where they may benefit from legal representation or advocacy, such as helping with credit repair or disability benefits.

Criminal records and unpayable fines can result from a magistrate hearing for a citation—a low-level offense that does not qualify for representation from a public defender. The KidsVoice Clean Slate Program makes sure that older youth receive legal representative in those cases to ensure that current and former foster youth receive a fair outcome compared to youth with permanent homes who appear at magistrate hearings with parental support. Since 2015, youth represented by KidsVoice in these hearings have a 79% success rate, compared to 38% of other dependent youth, and 46% of youth who were never dependent. KidsVoice advocacy outside of the courtroom further helps those youth find stability, and they have lower re-arrest rates than other former foster youth. These positive results led to replication in other offices and counties. KidsVoice also helps clients expunge juvenile records to remove criminal-record barriers to accessing jobs, housing, or other needs later in life.

The Clean Slate program is an important complement to the organization’s larger service continuum designed to help young people access



KidsVoice Logic Model, reprinted with permission from <https://kidsvoice.org/kidsvoice-logic-model>

child care, housing, social security disability, and other public benefits. In 2019, KidsVoice launched a Two-Generation Advocacy project to provide specialized services to former foster youth who have children of their own. These efforts helped keep more than 100 young families together and stable, with none of the participating children entering the dependency court system.

During the pandemic, access to health and behavioral health resources shrunk even as the needs have grown. KidsVoice's expanded representation helps young people make uninterrupted transitions from the youth to the adult mental health system, so that treatment and medications are not disrupted. They support young people in advocating for other health needs, such as insurance appeals. Special partnerships with UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh and Western Psychiatric Hospital also allow their clients to access additional or prioritized health care.

KidsVoice initially obtained foundation and private donor support to launch these innovative programs for older youth. After demonstrating the impact and outcomes, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) provided ongoing funding, along with data analysis as well as referring eligible youth and raising awareness of KidsVoice services.

KIDSVoice IS A SHINING EXAMPLE OF THESE JOURNEY TO SUCCESS PRIORITIES:

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To learn more about any of the programs described,
or to connect with the Journey to Success campaign,
please contact us at info@journeytosuccess.org.



JOURNEY TO SUCCESS

POLICY SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR ALL YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS WHO EXPERIENCE FOSTER CARE

WE THANK THE ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR STAFF WHO SHARED INFORMATION WITH JOURNEY TO SUCCESS.