Serving Foster Youth in California Community Colleges:

Successes, Challenges and Recommendations

Darla M. Cooper, EdD

Director, Research and Evaluation

ASCCC Academy

March 18, 2016

theRPgroup

Agenda

- Overview of the Study

- Understanding Foster Youth Experience

- Community Colleges' Response to the Needs of Foster Youth

- Successful Approaches and Challenges to Serving Foster Youth

- Key Findings and Recommendations

- What Faculty Can Do to Support Foster Youth Students' Success

Outcomes

- Increased understanding of FY's needs

- Greater familiarity with how colleges serve FY

- Awareness of approaches that have been successful and what challenges colleges have faced in serving FY

- Ideas about what is needed to better serve FY and potentially increase their success

Getting to Know You

- How many of you work directly with foster youth through a program at your college?

- What do you currently know, think, or believe about foster youth in general or those on your campus?

- What would you like to know more about foster youth?

Overview of the Study

Goals for the Study

- Provide for a better understanding of the needs of emancipated foster youth (FY) enrolled at community colleges

- Examine successful responses to FY students' needs from CCCs statewide

- Identify challenges faced by community colleges in meeting FY students' needs

- Make recommendations as to how FY programs can be enhanced, expanded, and improved

Methodology

1. New online survey of FY students

2. Previous survey of FY Liaisons conducted by the Foster Youth Success Initiative (FYSI) at the Chancellor's Office

3. Interviews with faculty and staff members from 12 community colleges around the state and site visits at two of these colleges

Understanding Foster Youth Experience

Foster Youth Demographics

- Survey: 74 respondents from 36 colleges
  - 96% had high school diploma or equivalent
  - 69% working 20 or more hours per week
    - 22% working 40+ hours per week
  - 53% attending full time
    - 74% of full-time students working 20+ hours/week
    - 21% of full-time students working 40+ hours/week
  - 69% intended to transfer
  - Most wanted to enter "helping" careers/majors

Foster Youth
Use of College Services

- **Most commonly used services:**

  - Chafee grants, financial aid, EOPS, counseling

- **Most helpful services:**

  - Chafee grants, other financial aid (Pell, BOG), EOPS, Independent Living Programs (ILPs)

- **Missing services:**

  - Housing and housing referrals; food vouchers; transportation; books; clubs; mentoring

Foster Youth
Suggested Improvements

- Improved methods for identifying FY

- Increased outreach to improve FY's awareness of help available

- Programs dedicated to serving FY specifically

- Improved understanding among faculty and staff of FY experience and how they can help

- Online and evening assistance for FY working full time

- Financial assistance for first-time students over 21 and those working full time

Foster Youth's Experience in Their Own Words

- Because I was in foster care I ... know very little. I wish there were counselors who worked closely and specifically with former foster youth so that we as foster kids can have a smooth road to transferring. Most of us go into colleges/schools without the educational preparation and feel lost and ultimately give up in the process. We need counselors who can help make the process easier and help direct us in the path.

- Just listen. And really try and help when we need it most.

Your Reactions

Was there anything in the data that surprised you?

What do you know now that you didn't know before about FY?

Community Colleges' Response to the Needs of Foster Youth

Foster Youth Liaisons Descriptors

- 60 respondents from 46 colleges

- 72% of foster youth programs/staff housed in financial aid office

- 46% used FAFSA to identify FY

  - 39% use referrals

  - 30% rely on outreach efforts

  - 13% have a question on admission application

- 75% reported serving 50 or fewer FY students

- Most commonly helped with FAFSA and referring to other services on and off campus

Foster Youth Liaisons
What They Wanted to Provide

- Mentoring

- FY club

- Help FY with finding employment and housing

- Case management approach

- Separate program for foster youth modeled after EOPS

Foster Youth Liaisons Self-Rating and Top Goals

- Self Ratings of Own Success Serving FY

  - 29% - Excellent or Good

  - 35% - Average

  - 35% - Fair or Poor

- Top Goals

  - Improve FY degree and transfer completion

  - Increase FY enrolling at the college

Your Awareness

Do you know if your college has a program for FY students?

Have you referred FY students to this program?

Successful Approaches and Challenges to Serving Foster Youth

Foster Youth Programs Successful Approaches

- FY programs at 12 colleges interviewed

- Four successful approaches:

  1. Independent Living Programs (ILP)

  2. Partnerships within the college

  3. Partnerships with external agencies

  4. Personal contact with students

Foster Youth Programs Successful Approaches

1. ## Independent Living Programs (ILP)

   - Serve 16-21 year olds

   - Designed to help FY develop self-sufficiency

   - Engage participants in classes on financial literacy, soft skills, housing and job searches, financial aid, career/education goal setting

   - Provide case management – "emancipation coach" at Riverside

Foster Youth Programs Successful Approaches

2. Partnerships within the college

- FY team: Members in key areas

- Planning committee: Reps from FY, EOPS, DSPS, TRIO, Title V, Financial Aid

- Physical proximity: FY staff located in EOPS or Financial Aid Office

- Dedicated staff for FY within EOPS or Financial Aid Office

Foster Youth Programs Successful Approaches

3. Partnerships with external agencies

- Private foundation support of FY programs and of FY students for housing, health care

- Housing programs that encouraged and supported college enrollment

- Community-based organizations and county programs that referred FY to the college

- Task force that included on and off campus programs

- Local businesses that provided tuition waivers, gift cards, emergency funds, scholarships

Foster Youth Programs Successful Approaches

4. Personal contact with students

- Case management

  - Provided ongoing contact through regular meetings

  - Followed up on referrals, walk students to offices

  - Tracked students' progress and completion

  - Facilitated handoffs from high school to college

  - Employed former FY

  - Offered handbook of rights and resources

Foster Youth Programs Challenges

- Lack of resources (funding and staff)

  - Added responsibility for FY to existing position

  - No dedicated space for FY staff or students

  - Heavy reliance on volunteers

  - No designated funding, efforts are unfunded

Foster Youth Programs Needed Resources

- Designated staff person focused exclusively or primarily on serving FY

- Stronger relationship with county programs serving FY

- Training for FY program staff as well as faculty and staff

- Increased outreach to identify FY and inform them of services available

- Summer bridge for FY students

- Better ways to identify FY already at college to close gap between served and unserved

- Ability to track FY students' success, progress, and completion

IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Key Findings and Recommendations

Key Findings

1. FY programs need increased and dedicated resources.

2. Foster youth need assistance with securing financial aid and housing.

3. Colleges need to build broad networks of support that include entities from both on and off campus.

4. Foster youth are best served through a case management approach.

5. Colleges need to track FY students' progress and completion outcomes and use that information as part of efforts to evaluate the success of their FY programs.

Recommendations

1. Develop partnerships with outside public and private agencies to increase available resources for FY programs.

2. Develop statewide data collection systems designed to specifically track FY students in the CCCs.

3. Develop partnerships to help FY students access maximum financial aid available and secure affordable housing.

4. Employ a team approach to serving FY students instead of relying on a single individual.

5. Implement a case management model within FY programs.
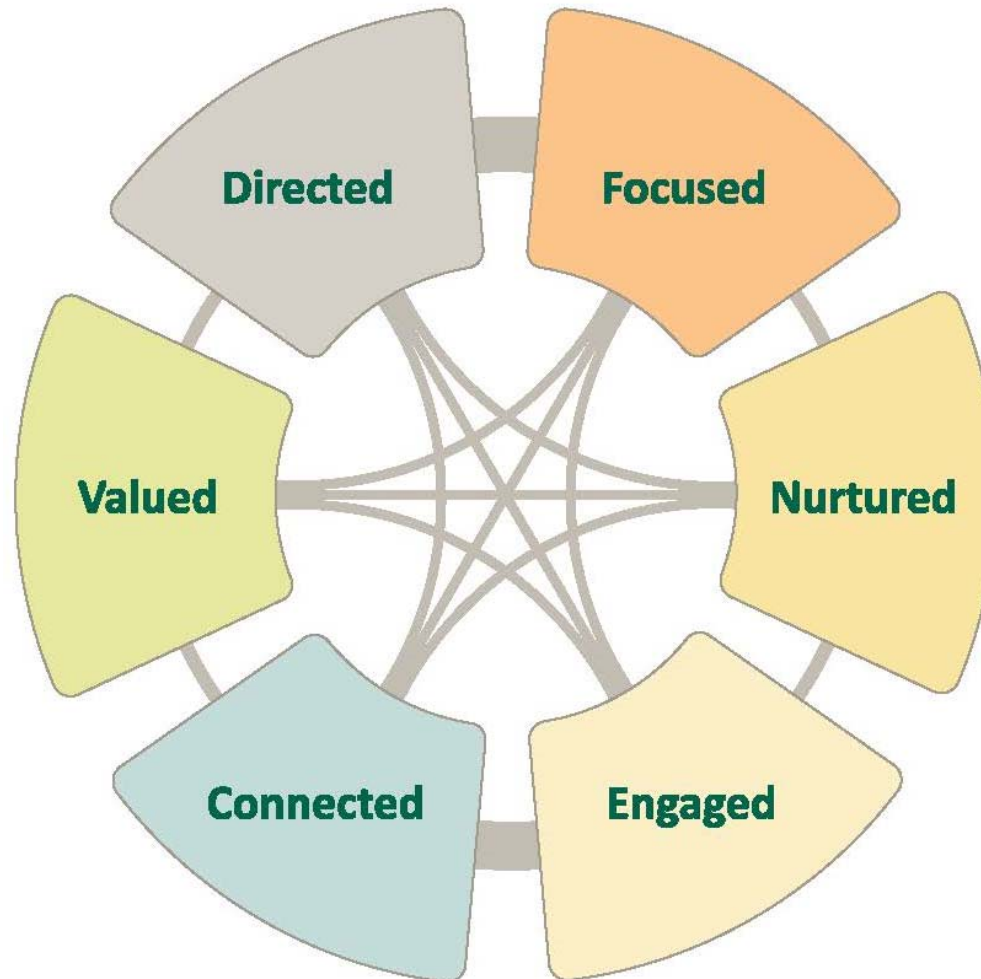
Key Developments Since the Study

- Foster youth is a group colleges must consider in equity planning

- CCCCO Foster Youth Success Initiative (FYSI)
  http://extranet.cccco.edu/Divisions/StudentServices/FosterYouthSuccessInitiatives.aspx

- Foundation for CCCs Foster Youth Services
  https://foundationccc.org/What-We-Do/Student-Services/Foster-Youth-Services

- Cooperating Agencies Foster Youth Educational Support (CAFYES)
  http://extranet.cccco.edu/Divisions/StudentServices/EOPSCARE.aspx

- California College Pathways
  http://www.cacollegepathways.org/about/what-we-do/

- I Can Afford College Foster Youth brochure
  http://www.icanaffordcollege.com/Portals/0/Foster%20Youth%20Brochure-print%20ready_April%202015.pdf

What Faculty Can Do to Support Foster Youth Students' Success

Student Support (Re)defined
Six Success Factors

10 Ways Faculty Can Help

- Learn your students' names and ask them how they are doing (*nurtured, connected*)

- Provide opportunities for and encourage students to connect with and support each other (*connected, nurtured, engaged*)

- Incorporate opportunities for students to share their personal and family history and culture in class assignments (*valued, engaged*)

Final Questions

What are your key takeaways?

What is one thing you will do with the information you heard today when you return to your campus?

Q & A

For more information

http://rpgroup.org/projects/serving-foster-youth-california-community-colleges

Dr. Darla Cooper, Project Director
dcooper@rpgroup.org

theRPgroup

Thank you!

the**RP**group