

TEN TIPS TO HELP YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE PLAN FOR AND PURSUE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

*This tip sheet is part of the **Fostering Success for Students: Advocating and Uplifting Students in Foster Care Campaign** and provides 10 actions you can take to support young people in foster care to establish and achieve their plans for postsecondary education and training.*

TIP #1

Use the transition to adulthood planning process to do early and comprehensive planning for postsecondary education and training, to track goals and steps to those goals.

Make sure to use this planning process, which should at least begin at age 14, to support young people through high school and graduation and planning for the next steps.¹ This includes ensuring school stability, that the youth has an education decision maker, that any special education needs are identified and addressed through an Individualized Education Plan and/or accommodations, and that concrete steps are taken to help the youth explore postsecondary opportunities and pursue them.

¹ Beginning at age 14, the case plan must contain a written description of the programs and services which will help the youth prepare for the transition from foster care to a successful adulthood. 42 U.S.C.A. § 675(5)(C)(i).

TIP #2

Identify and help youth access any college preparatory programs or programs that help youth successfully complete high school.

TRIO and GEAR UP are programs that are federally funded and prepare young people for postsecondary education and training opportunities. These programs prioritize youth with experience in foster care. To find TRIO programs in your state, you can use this [map](#). [The Council for Opportunity in Education](#) is a great resource to find out more about TRIO programs. GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) begin serving students in seventh grade and follow them until graduation. [The National Council for Community and Education Partnerships](#) is a good resource for learning more about programs and where they are located. In addition to these federally funded programs, many states have college preparation programs and some are targeted at youth with experience in foster care. It is recommended that you research whether such programs exist in your state so you can help young people access them as early as possible.² Finally, dual enrollment programs provide an opportunity for youth to complete high school while also exploring college and gaining college credit. These programs have been shown to increase access and completion of postsecondary programs.

² You can find more information about these programs on page 37 of [Ensuring Educational Stability and Success for Students in Foster Care](#).

**TIP
#3****Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and identify the young person as a current or former foster youth.**

The [FAFSA](#) is the gateway to federal student financial aid. In addition, completion of the FAFSA is often a requirement for eligibility for state, local and private financial aid and scholarships. Students will be asked on the FAFSA whether they were in foster care at age 13 or older or whether they entered a guardianship arrangement through the courts. Students who meet these criteria will be considered “independent” students for the purposes of calculating their financial aid package. (Young people who are homeless are also considered “independent” students.) Only the income of the young person is needed and counted when determining the aid package of an “independent” student.³ The FAFSA for 2026-2027 will be available on October 1, 2025. Support youth in completing the FAFSA and obtaining the documentation they may need to secure independent status.⁴ To complete the FAFSA youth will need: FAFSA account and user name (FSA), date of birth and social security number, and income and asset information. You can find more information [here](#).

3 To learn more about how the FAFSA Simplification Act has expanded the documentation for an “independent” student see [FAFSA Simplification Act: The Impacts on Youth With Experience in Foster Care and Unaccompanied Homeless Youth](#).

4 For more tips on completing the FAFSA for youth with experience in foster care, see this [fact sheet](#) from SchoolHouse Connection.

**TIP
#4****Understand and help youth maximize federal grant aid.**

Federal financial aid is critical to helping young people cover the cost of post secondary education and training programs. This includes the Pell Grant, the Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG), and work study. Please see this [website](#) to learn more about the types of federal financial aid available. For the 2025-26 school year, the maximum Pell Grant was \$7,395 and the maximum FSEOG was \$4000. Students may be eligible for several thousand dollars through federal work study depending on their financial need.

**TIP
#5****Understand and help young people apply for the Education and Training Voucher (ETV).**

The Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) programs provides up to \$5000 per eligible young person per year for up to five years. These funds can cover the cost of attendance at postsecondary education and training institutions. Youth are eligible for ETV funds if they are Chafee eligible. While there is some variation in the states based on their prioritization, eligibility tends to include young people up until age 26 who were in foster care at age 14 or older and/or left foster care to adoption or kinship guardianship at age 16 or older.⁵ If you are having trouble finding out about the ETV program in your state, search for the state ETV Coordinator using this [search tool](#) and contact them.

5 Currently there is litigation related to the proposal that ETV is a federal public benefit that only “qualified” immigrants are eligible for. However, as of September 22nd, the rule is stayed—on pause—in the following states: New York, Washington, Rhode Island, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Vermont and Wisconsin. You can follow the case, *State of New York v. DOJ*, [here](#).

**TIP
#6****Help youth identify and apply for all state financial aid and programs like tuition waivers.**

Almost all states have state financial aid and usually it is accessed once a student completes their FAFSA. However, it is important to help youth identify the state application process and see if there are additional steps to take. In addition, many states have developed tuition waivers for low income students in the state for which youth with experience in foster care are likely eligible. Finally, more and more states are creating [tuition waiver](#) programs that are specifically targeted at youth with experience in foster care as well as targeted grant programs. You can find more information about tuition waivers in your state and campus-based support programs in this [Campus-Based College Support Program Guide for Youth with Foster Care Experience](#) and [here](#). Most colleges and universities have institutional aid that students can apply for. Students should contact the admissions offices of schools they are considering and ask about the institutional aid that is available. Once a student is accepted, they should reach out to the school's financial aid office, ask about their financial aid package and any additional opportunities for financial aid.

TIP
#7

Set youth up for success by identifying and helping them access all campus based student support services and programs.

Research clearly shows that campus based student support programs, especially those targeting youth with experience in foster care, are effective at improving retention rates and a young person's experience.⁶ Almost all postsecondary programs will have campus based student support programs that are important to identify and help youth access. For example, most states have laws that fund **campus based support programs for low income and first generation college students**. Because many youth with experience in foster care will be eligible for these programs, identifying and helping youth access and apply is important. All campuses will have **student support services programs** that provide counseling, tutoring, and other general support. In addition, all institutions must provide **support for students with disabilities**, including helping arrange for accommodations for eligible students when they request these support. If you are working with a youth who received special education services or had an accommodations plan in high school, it is important to help the youth find the disabilities services office and formally request accommodations. A growing number of institutions have developed **campus support programs for youth with experience in foster care**. [The National Postsecondary Support Map](#), which was developed by the Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide (FAAN), provides a list of campus based student support programs that focus on youth with foster care experience. Finally, many campuses have **Basic Needs Centers** that provide food and other concrete resources for students as well as helping identify eligibility for benefits. Help students identify these centers and programs as soon as they arrive on campus so they know where to go if the need arises.

6 Okpych N. J., Park S., Sayed S., Courtney M. E. (2020). The roles of campus-support programs (CSPs) and Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs) on college persistence for youth with foster care histories. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 111, Article 104891. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.104891>

**TIP
#8****Help youth explore and identify career and technical education (CTE) training opportunities.**

CTE programs provide students with academic and technical skills, knowledge, and training necessary to succeed in future careers. These programs exist at high schools, community colleges, technical schools, and four-year universities. These programs often include classroom instruction and work experiences and can lead to industry certifications and credentials as well as college credit. CTE programs are funded through an array of sources: the federal Perkins Act, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Department of Labor and Education Funds as well as state funds. In addition, all states have Vocational Rehabilitation Service agencies that provide training and support for individuals with disabilities to prepare for employment. These agencies can directly provide training and can fund training and education programs. Dual enrollment programs can also be a great way for students to explore CTE options.

**TIP
#9****Help youth leverage all available child welfare resources to support their pursuit of postsecondary education and training.**

There are an array of supports that young people are eligible for based on their experience in foster care that can be instrumental in helping a young person access and complete postsecondary programs. Staying in extended foster care between ages 18 and 21 can provide great support for young people attending postsecondary education and training because it provides continued support for housing, case management, and court oversight. Youth can be in extended foster care while attending postsecondary programs in their state or another state. Young people with experience in foster care are also eligible for these other critical benefits after leaving foster care: Medicaid until age 26 (even if they move to another state), Chafee aftercare services until age 21 or 23, the Education and Training Voucher until age 26, and the Foster Youth to Independence Voucher. As part of the transition process, support young people in identifying these valuable resources and how to apply and/or access them.

**TIP
#10****Help youth with immigration status challenges access all support available.**

There continues to be restrictions on federal financial aid for individuals who are not citizens, including those who are lawfully in the United States. For example, individuals who have the following immigration statuses are eligible for federal financial aid: refugees, asylees, lawful permanent residents, conditional resident, parolees, Cuban and Haitian Entrant, Victim of human trafficking (T-visa), Battered immigrants-qualified alien under the Violence Against Women's Act (VAWA); and American Indians born in Canada.

Many of these federal restrictions are replicated at the state financial aid level, however, a number of states have developed grants and other aid for young people who are not eligible for federal aid. Examples include [California](#), [Minnesota](#), and [New York](#), which have Dream Acts. [The Higher Education Immigration Portal](#) aims to document what is available in the states. Please also consult [this list](#) developed by the National Immigration Law Center that tracks states that provide in-state tuition and state financial aid for students with various immigration statuses.

Given these limitations, it is critical to begin planning for postsecondary programs as early as possible with young people in foster care who are non-citizens so that you have time to identify available funding and scholarships.⁷ Here are a few resources to start with:

[Scholarships for Undocumented Students | TheDream.US](#)

[Immigrants Rising – Transforming Lives Through Education \(CA Focus\)](#)

[Scholarships For Immigrants and Refugees | USAHello](#)

⁷ The restrictions related to financial aid also underline the great importance of ensuring that young people are connecting to immigration attorneys and are pursuing immigration relief as soon as possible to increase the odds that they have immigration statuses that make them eligible for critical federal financial aid and other benefits.

LAST EDITED: SEPTEMBER 30, 2025

Special thanks to Jessica Petrass, Maddy Day, and Carolyn Lipp for contributing to this fact sheet.