

## Know the Lingo...

Here's a little more information on some terminology you may hear when working with youth and alumni of foster care.

**TIP (Tuition Incentive Program):** TIP is an incentive program that encourages eligible students to complete high school by providing tuition assistance for the first 2 years of college and beyond. To meet the financial eligibility requirement, a student must have (or have had) Medicaid coverage for 24 months within a 36-consecutive-month period as identified by the Michigan Department of Human Services. For more information, visit [www.michigan.gov/osg](http://www.michigan.gov/osg) or call 1-888-4-GRANTS.

**Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative (MYOI):** MYOI is a partnership between the Michigan Department of Human Services, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, and the Oakland Livingston Human Services Agency. MYOI serves current and former foster care youth in Michigan, ages 14-24, who are transitioning out of the system by developing leadership, advocacy, and financial skills to ensure long term success. Find out more at [www.myoifund.org](http://www.myoifund.org)

**Independent Living Services (ILS):** Also referred to as Independent Living Program (ILP). This range of services is offered through the Department of Human Services, and are available to anyone that needs assistance maintaining capacity in their own home. These services include referrals, protection, money management, and housing resources. Contact Adult Services at your local Department of Human Resources.

**Foster Youth in Transition (FYIT):** Over 100 members from public and private organizations that care about improving services to foster youth offer a wide range of assistance and information. More information at [www.michigan.gov/fyit](http://www.michigan.gov/fyit)

## About Fostering Success Michigan

Through generous support from the Kresge Foundation, Western Michigan University and others, Fostering Success Michigan is building a statewide collective-impact strategy that strives to prepare young people in foster care between the ages of 12 to 25 across the state of Michigan. Fostering Success Michigan will increase awareness, access and success in higher education and post-college careers for youth and alumni of foster care.



WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY  
Center for Fostering Success

We offer networking opportunities and valuable resources. Find out more at [www.fosteringmichigan.com](http://www.fosteringmichigan.com)



## Getting to know....

# Youth and Alumni of Foster Care

### Who should use this guide:

This guide can be used by anyone who is interested in learning more about the unique challenges and needs of youth and alumni of foster care. This includes educators, social workers, health care providers, community members, and educational administrators and staff.

### How to use this guide:

Use this guide for your own education or pass on to someone who may interact with youth. When looking for resources for youth, check this guide for valuable information.



**3%** of alumni of foster care complete a Bachelor's degree by the age of 26 compared to **24%** of the general population.

(Source: Courtney et al. 2011)

# Youth and Alumni of Foster Care

## Straight Talk From a Youth in Foster Care

My name is Nichole Jenks. I'm a sophomore at Western Michigan University, and alumni of foster care. Seven years in foster care and seven different placements later, I am happy to say that I am well on my way to success. However, I did not get this far alone.

When I was looking into going to college, it was important that I apply for as many scholarships as I could. I asked for help from my case worker, my parents, and even my academic advisor. Everyone I spoke to knew next to nothing about scholarships, and the ones they did know about were not substantial. After being involved with Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative (MYOI) I was told about the Seita Scholars program. Through MYOI I learned about organizations and opportunities that were specific to youth and alumni of foster care.

Since then, I've been a very active member on the MYOI board. I've also been published in the MYOI magazine, completed the FosterClub All-Star Internship, and professionally presented at many speaking events. The leaders of MYOI reached out to me and were consistent, they helped me get to where I am today, and for that I am truly grateful.



Sometimes I wish adults would be less judgmental and more helpful. I don't like being looked at as the poor foster kid. Instead, I wish everyone would look at youth and alumni of foster care as youth and encourage them to be all that they can be. Yes, we may have been in foster care, but that does not define us. It just means that there are a few things to know about us -- stuff like what's in this booklet.

You can show a youth or alumni of foster care they are worth it by spending a few minutes with them or by giving them at least one great resource (and then helping them navigate that resource). If adults do this, maybe someone in my similar situation will have the opportunity to attend a University or college. Thank you for taking the time to learn more about youth and alumni of care, and for giving us a hand up, not a hand out. *Nichole Jenks*

## Assisting a youth in transitioning out of foster care

When a youth goes through the process of transitioning out of foster care, they will need to present a variety of documents to care providers, school officials, and case workers. Carlos Daniels, 23, is an alumni of foster care and currently in college from Detroit, Michigan. He uses this reference list and accordion file to keep the documents organized and easy to find.

- Social Security Card
- Birth Certificate
- State/Driver's ID
- Medical insurance card
- All medical records, including current immunization records
- Official State Department letter (DHS, Education, CPS, Criminal)
- Official letter of current status of parents or ward of court
- All educational transcripts
- Letter of college admission
- Receipts for tuition payment
- Registrar documents
- Titles to all major Assets (i.e. car)
- Receipts of all major purchases
- Auto Insurance documents
- Auto work records from mechanic
- Utility bills and receipts
- Phone bills (up to 6 months)
- All taxes (7 years if possible)
- All signed contracts of any kind
- Credit report

# Youth and Alumni of Foster Care

## Physical & Mental Health

Adverse childhood events such as abuse and neglect and other circumstances leading up to a youth going into foster care have a direct correlation to negative physical and mental health outcomes.

### What we know about youth and alumni of foster care:

- At age 26, 80% of female alumni of care report having been pregnant as compared to 55% of non-foster care females of the same age. <sup>5</sup>
- The rates of post-traumatic stress syndrome among alumni of the foster care system were **higher** than among war veterans. <sup>6</sup>
- 50% of children in foster care have chronic medical problems. <sup>7</sup>
- Alumni experience over **seven times** the rate of drug dependence and nearly **two times** the rate of alcohol dependence experienced by the general population. <sup>8</sup>

### DID YOU KNOW?

In Michigan, when an alumni of foster care turns 21, they no longer qualify for Medicaid.

### How you can support

If a youth is in need of physical or mental health care, help them find a provider who has worked with youth in care.

Take time to explore all treatment options available to youth in care – they may not be aware of all of their options.

## Employment & Finances

Youth and alumni of foster care need guidance on navigating the complex world of finances and employment. By taking time to teach about financial and employment know-how (including how to open a checking account, or how to write a thank-you note after an interview), you are increasing the possibility of financial and employment independence.

### What we know about youth and alumni of foster care:

- The mean income for alumni of foster care is \$13,989 compared to a mean income of \$32,312 for the general population. <sup>20</sup>
- 48% of alumni of foster care are employed, compared to 80% of the general population. <sup>21</sup>
- 57% of alumni of foster care indicated that they lacked individuals to loan them money in the event of an emergency. <sup>22</sup>
- Fewer than **half** of alumni of care have bank accounts, making them vulnerable to predatory lending practices and paycheck cashing shops. <sup>23</sup>



### How you can support

Help connect youth to a financial professional who can give them advice on basic money management.

Assist in creating resumes, practice job interviews, discuss professional behavior.

Talk with youth and alumni of care about how getting and keeping a job will provide them with greater stability.

# Youth and Alumni of Foster Care

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**About the 7 life domains:** "In 2001 Casey Family Programs - working with young people in foster care, alumni of care, families, and other stakeholders - published *It's My Life*, a framework to develop services for young people preparing to make the transition from foster care to successful adulthood. *It's My Life* promotes a holistic approach to transition services. It is based on the belief that the domains of our lives are interconnected" - from "It's My Life" series, Casey Family Programs

## Identity

When a child feels safe and receives consistent care, they are able to develop a strong identity, which helps them to have strong self-esteem and a sense of self. A strong support system also teaches children important skills about how to be successful in life.

### What we know about youth and alumni of foster care:

- As many as 30% of foster children might be victims of identity theft, based on reviews of the credit reports of foster children. <sup>1</sup>
- Alumni of care often take on a parentified role within their families, providing a range of support to their younger siblings, grandparents, and even their own parents. <sup>2</sup>
- 90.5% of youth in care strongly agreed or agreed that children in foster care worry a lot about their own future. <sup>3</sup>
- In Michigan, 52% of adoptable caucasian children are adopted, while only 30% of African American adoptable children are adopted. <sup>4</sup>

How you can support

Help youth express their experience in foster care creatively: check out the Post Card Project sponsored by Foster Care Alumni of America:  
[www.fostercarealumni.org/postcard\\_project.htm](http://www.fostercarealumni.org/postcard_project.htm)

While the experience of foster care can be negative, youth and alumni of care often develop strong characteristics such as resiliency, loyalty, and caring for others.

# Youth and Alumni of Foster Care

## Housing

Finding and keeping a reliable housing option is a major task. Youth and alumni of foster care may not have the resources or have been taught how to find an apartment.

### What we know about youth and alumni of foster care:

- At age 26, 5% of alumni of care report that they are incarcerated versus 0.5% of non-care youth.<sup>12</sup>
- Those who left foster care at 18 were **twice** as likely to be unable to pay their rent and **four times** as likely to be evicted.<sup>13</sup>
- 22% of alumni of foster care became homeless for one day or more after aging out of foster care.<sup>14</sup>

### DID YOU KNOW?

Youth and alumni of foster care cope with homelessness in a variety of ways; “couch surfing” (staying for a few nights with various friends), staying in homeless shelters, and even sleeping on the street.

Not having stable housing directly affects one’s ability to hold a job or even go to school.

### How you can support

Take time to make sure youth understand details like rental deposits, utility bills, and rental insurance.

Work with youth to explore permanent housing options. [www.michiganhousinglocator.com](http://www.michiganhousinglocator.com) is a free searchable database of affordable housing options offered by Michigan State Housing Development Authority.

Help to find housing options for periods when dorms are closed (like over winter or summer break).

## Social Relationships & Community Connections

Professionals can help youth and alumni of foster care establish secure connections within their communities. These relationships enable youth to access resources and build relationships.

### What we know about youth and alumni of foster care:

- Approximately 70% of children in foster care in the United States have another sibling also in care.<sup>15</sup>
- Alumni who volunteered in the community in the past year: 42% (2006).<sup>16</sup>
- The current average length of stay for children in foster care in Michigan is **774 days (that’s over 2 years)**.<sup>17</sup>
- Youth in care interact with as many as **11 different people** when entering care: CPS worker, foster care worker, judge, prosecutor, lawyer-guardian ad litem, Foster parents, court appointed special advocate, permanency planning conference facilitator, MYOI coordinator, education planner, and youth advocate.<sup>18</sup>



### How you can support

When developing a relationship with a youth or alumni of care, have fun! Be inspired! But most importantly, be authentic.

After working with numerous social service staff, youth want to connect with you as a person – share your stories and make a real connection.

Tell youth about the Michigan chapter of Foster Care Alumni of America: [www.fostercarealumni.org](http://www.fostercarealumni.org)

# Youth and Alumni of Foster Care

## Life Skills

Many children learn important life skills from their greater support systems. When a child's environment is unstable or unpredictable, they may miss out on learning basic skills that are assumed to be common knowledge.

### What we know about youth and alumni of foster care:

- Youth in foster care receive classes to learn life skills, yet 33% of youth in foster care report a lack of preparedness in several skills. <sup>19</sup>
- When youth leave foster care between the ages of 18 - 21, they are expected to function as an independent adult.
- Before youth leave foster care, they are expected to make a transition plan. See page 9 for a helpful check list of documents.

### DID YOU KNOW?

In Michigan, youth in care can voluntarily remain in foster care after turning 18. This provides an extension of foster care payments, continued oversight by a caseworker and counseling, continued health care coverage, and more time to finish school.

Learn more at:

[www.michigan.gov/  
FosterCare1821](http://www.michigan.gov/FosterCare1821)

### How you can support

Make youth aware of 211. Dialing 211 is a free phone call to a state sponsored database for assistance resources (housing, food, healthcare).

Share every day skills such as cooking, transportation, and time management.

Encourage youth and alumni of foster care to ask for help.

## Academics

A desire to attend college is not enough for most youth in foster care to succeed in going to and graduating from college. There are many barriers they face - and ones that can be removed by professionals in many different fields.

### What we know about youth and alumni of foster care:

- Compared to youth in the general population, youth in foster care are **less** likely to perform at grade level, and are **twice** as likely to repeat a grade. <sup>9</sup>
- Just over 33% of youth from foster care dropped out prior to college degree completion compared with only 18% of their non-foster care peers. <sup>10</sup>
- Over 33% of youth in foster care experience **five** or more different school placements. <sup>11</sup>

### DID YOU KNOW?

Many youth and alumni of foster care are eligible to receive financial assistance to attend college or technical school. The Education and Training Voucher Program (ETV) is administered at a state level. [www.statevoucher.org](http://www.statevoucher.org)

### How you can support

Talk to students from foster care in college about where they can receive academic help, for instance, the campus writing center.

Provide a continuous educational experience by doing all you can to help prevent the switching of schools. The McKinney-Vento Act is a federal law that gives schools funds to make sure that students can continue attending their school of origin.

Share information (like this booklet!) with educators so they are aware of the unique challenges faced by youth and alumni of care.