



**FINAL REPORT OF THE
VIRGINIA COMMISSION ON YOUTH**

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**

**Study on Workforce Development
for Foster Care Youth**

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
RICHMOND
2022**

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I. Authority for the Study

Section 30-174 of the *Code of Virginia* establishes the Commission on Youth and directs it to “study and provide recommendations addressing the needs of and services to the Commonwealth’s youth and their families.” This section also directs the Commission to “encourage the development of uniform policies and services to youth across the Commonwealth and provide a forum for continuing review and study of such services.” Section 30-175 of the *Code of Virginia* outlines the powers and duties of the Commission on Youth and directs it to “undertake studies and to gather information and data ... and to formulate and report its recommendations to the General Assembly and the Governor.”

In response to Virginia’s increasing focus on the foster care system, and to facilitate the work of Virginia lawmakers in addressing issues affecting foster care, the Virginia Commission on Youth hosted a seminar titled, “Foster Care for Legislators” at its May 6, 2019, meeting. The purpose of this seminar was to inform lawmakers about the complexities of the foster care system and to develop recommendations to improve Virginia’s foster care system.

During the 2019 study year, the Commission on Youth investigated issues and developed recommendations related to the following topics concerning Virginia’s foster care system:

- Child welfare and foster care workforce caseloads (later expanded to encompass workforce recruitment and retention);
- Legislative action and resources needed to implement the Family First Prevention Services Act (later modified to focus on kinship care);
- Recruiting and retaining foster families; and
- Supporting youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood (Fostering Futures).

The Commission on Youth recognizes that youth aging out of foster care face significant challenges in finding a career path to sustainable and meaningful employment. Consequently, a study plan was developed to address this challenge. The plan was shared and adopted at its May 3, 2021, meeting. The Virginia Commission on Youth approved the plan and study activities as listed below:

- The Virginia Commission on Youth shall convene an Advisory Group to review current policies, practices, and programs in Virginia that support youth aging out of foster care and make recommendations to improve workforce opportunities for youth in foster care.

Activities include the following:

- Identify state and national employment programs that support young people transitioning out of foster care and determine best practices.

- Review and analyze other policies, practices, and programs that support youth aging out of foster care.
- Explore the various programs under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) that assist youth and young adult job seekers up to age 24, with disabilities.
- Research laws on obtaining employment.
- Obtain and analyze employment outcomes for youth aging out of foster care.
- Conduct background and literature reviews:
 - Annie E. Casey
 - Fostering Futures
 - Great Expectations
 - Reconnecting Youth Project
 - U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
 - Other national studies conducted on the topic
- Convene an Advisory Group of impacted stakeholders to include:
 - Department of Aging and Rehabilitation Services
 - Department of Education
 - Department of Labor and Industry
 - Department of Social Services
 - Foster Care Youth
 - Local Departments of Social Services
 - Local Workforce Investment Boards
 - One Stop Centers
 - Virginia Community College System
 - Virginia Employment Commission
 - Youth Advocacy Groups
- Conduct Roundtable discussions with foster care youth.
- Present findings and recommendations to the Commission on Youth.
- Receive public comment.
- Prepare final report.

II. Members Appointed to Serve

The Commission on Youth is a standing legislative commission of the Virginia General Assembly. It is comprised of twelve members: three Senators, six Delegates, and three citizens appointed by the Governor.

2021 membership of the Virginia Commission on Youth is listed below.

Senator David W. “Dave” Marsden, Burke, Chair
Delegate Emily M. Brewer, Smithfield, Vice-Chair
Delegate Rob B. Bell, Albemarle
Delegate Joshua G. Cole, Fredericksburg
Delegate Karrie K. Delaney, Fairfax
Senator Barbara A. Favola, Arlington
Deirdre S. “Dede” Goldsmith, Abingdon
Delegate Elizabeth R. Guzman, Woodbridge
Avi D. Hopkins, Chesterfield
Delegate Jerrauld C. “Jay” Jones, Norfolk
Christian “Chris” Rehak, Radford
Senator David R. Suetterlein, Roanoke County

III. Executive Summary

In February of 2018, the federal Family First Prevention Services Act was enacted. Family First made major changes to federal funding for foster care and supports family permanency by providing funding for services to families who have children who are at risk of entering the child welfare system. Virginia implemented the law in advance of the July 1, 2020, effective date for most of its provisions.

During December of 2018, the Joint Legislative Audit & Review Commission (JLARC) released a report titled, *Improving Virginia’s Foster Care System*. The report generated 34 recommendations, some of which were addressed during the 2019 General Assembly Session. However, the report indicates that many improvements to our current foster care system are still needed.

To facilitate the work of Virginia’s lawmakers in response to JLARC’s recommendations and the requirements of implementing the Family First Prevention Act, the Commission on Youth hosted an informational seminar on Virginia’s foster care system titled “Foster Care for Legislators” at its May 6, 2019, meeting. The purpose of this seminar was to inform lawmakers about the complexities of the foster care system. Presentations were made by state and local stakeholders on a variety of topics, which included the following:

- Overview of Virginia’s Foster Care System from a State and Local Perspective
- Funding of Virginia’s Foster Care System
- Foster Care Prevention and Family First
- Virginia’s Foster Care System, Bedford Department of Social Services’ Team
- Foster Families Panel
- Foster Youth Transition to Adulthood Panel

- Plan of Action

Over 200 people attended the seminar. Legislators also had an opportunity to talk with invited foster and kinship families, foster youth, and former foster youth at a luncheon held immediately after the seminar. To supplement information provided at the seminar, Commission staff prepared a resource binder titled, “Foster Care 101: A Resource for Virginia’s Legislators,” which is available on the Commission’s webpage.

At its May 6, 2019, meeting, the Commission approved a study plan to investigate issues and develop recommendations related to topics concerning Virginia’s foster care system, including “Supporting youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood (Fostering Futures).” After additional research from the original foster care study, the Commission on Youth recognized that youth aging out of foster care face significant challenges in finding a career path to sustainable and meaningful employment. Consequently, a study plan was developed to make improvements in this area. The plan was shared and adopted at its May 3, 2021 meeting. The study mandate directed the Virginia Commission on Youth to do the following:

- The Virginia Commission on Youth shall convene an Advisory Group to include representatives from the Department of Social Services, Department of Education, Department of Labor and Industry, Department of Aging and Rehabilitation Services, the Virginia Employment Commission, One Stop Centers, local Workforce Investment Boards, the Virginia Community College System, local Departments of Social Services, advocacy groups, foster care youths, and other relevant stakeholders. The Advisory Group shall review current policies, practices, and programs in Virginia that support youths aging out of foster care and make recommendations to improve workforce opportunities for youths in foster care

In the spring of 2021, Commission staff formed an Advisory Group with stakeholders from a variety of organizations to learn more about workforce development for foster care youth (for a membership list, see Appendix A). Presentations were provided about state and national workforce development options for foster care youth, the Virginia Community College System’s Great Expectations Program, and the iFoster portal at two meetings on June 21, 2021, and October 5, 2021. Six roundtable discussions with foster care youth, foster care alumni, and foster care professionals were held throughout the state. Staff conducted research about foster care workforce development and transition outcomes, employment laws, requirements for public education guidance counselors, foster care transition programs, and other states’ successes. Minutes and presentations from the meetings, and a summary of the roundtable discussions, are included in the Appendices.

A presentation and draft recommendations were presented at the October 19, 2021, Commission on Youth meeting. Following the receipt of public comment, the following recommendations were adopted at the December 15, 2021, meeting of the Commission on Youth.

Recommendation 1 – iFoster Portal

Direct the Virginia Department of Social Services, in cooperation with the Virginia Commission on Youth, Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, Department of Education, Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of Medical Assistance Services, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, the Department of Labor, the Virginia Community College System, including the Great Expectations Program, local workforce development boards, the League of Social Services Executives, private providers, and advocacy groups to develop the iFoster Portal or an App with similar functionality to include Virginia- and locality-specific resources that are available for individuals who are currently being served or have been served in the foster care system, as well as for professionals serving the foster care population. Resources include workforce development assistance, educational opportunities, housing and living stipends or discounts, financial supports, internship and employment opportunities, and other resources that are available in Virginia for those involved in the foster care system. Update the App regularly with additional resources that are available to assist in the development of becoming a successful and independent adult. Ensure that all state and local agency employees working with foster care children join and use the iFoster App with their foster care clients, assist foster care youth in subscribing to the App themselves, and remain current with newly added or updated resources.

Recommendation 2 – Add Local Resources to the iFoster App

Request the Virginia Social Services System (state and local departments of social services), through its regional and local offices, to identify workforce development organizations (such as Goodwill, Virginia Department of Labor and Industry’s Apprenticeship Program, Great Expectations, etc.) and other foster care transition support resources in each locality, add them to the iFoster App, and communicate those opportunities to the local agencies on at least an annual basis.

Recommendation 3 – Recruit Employers

Request that local workforce development boards recruit and engage potential employers who hire foster care young adults and alumni in training that includes the effects of trauma, related child care issues for parenting youth, and gradual accountability strategies for employment success. Encourage employers to work through challenges on work attendance and productivity with external job coaches to support workers in finding success.

Recommendation 4 – Entrepreneurship Assistance

Request the Workforce Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center to provide support for foster care young adults and alumni who need business assistance. Those working with young adults in the foster care system who are interested in starting their own businesses should connect the young adults to VWIEC.

Recommendation 5 – Budget for Great Expectations

Introduce a budget amendment to develop a state-funded grant program for the Great Expectations Program. The Virginia Community College System (VCCS) shall develop the grant program to provide a range of funding for Community Colleges in the following areas: the hiring of college coaches or mentors; housing stipends; child care; and transportation needs. VCCS shall report to the Commission on Youth the outcomes of the grant program by November 30 of each year.

Recommendation 6 – Foster Care POC at Each College

Introduce a budget amendment to direct the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) to examine the feasibility of having a point of contact at each state and/or private college and university for those who have been involved in the foster care system. SCHEV shall investigate the possibility of using federal dollars (such as the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) for this purpose and report their findings to the Commission on Youth by November 30, 2022.

Recommendation 7 – Training for School Counselors

Request that the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) provide virtual training for school counselors that includes trauma informed strategies for those working with students experiencing foster care, resources available with the iFoster App, and the importance of knowing these students and providing consistent checks and support. The Commission also requests that the VDOE partner with the Virginia Alliance for School Counseling (VASC) and the Virginia Department of Social Services to develop this training.

Recommendation 8 – Guidance on Career Planning for Schools

Request that the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) issue a memorandum that provides guidance to local school divisions regarding resources for school counselors on providing supports for students experiencing foster care, including the requirements of completing an interest inventory, the Career Connections course, and the Academic and Career Plan, as well as the updated guidance for the *Profile of a Virginia Graduate* (which establishes multiple paths toward college and career readiness for students to follow in the later years of high school, which could include opportunities for internships, externships,

and credentialing). This guidance will also include resources on leveraging existing data and information on various career fields, job trends and salaries, and resources available to local school divisions from the Weldon Cooper Center and how to specifically support foster care youth and link to specific resources (such as the iFoster App, Fostering Futures, Great Expectations, successful independent living programs, etc.).

Recommendation 9 – Require Standards of Completion for Independent Living Programs

Request that the Virginia Social Services System (VDSS and LDSS) review their requirements for foster care Independent Living programs in Virginia and include a gradual independence plan that includes these Standards of Completion. Quality Independent Living programs ensure that the youth are knowledgeable and have practical application experience with budgeting, housing solutions, job expectations, emotional regulation and management skills, transportation and health care options, communication skills, and problem-solving in the real world. Ensure each LDSS has a workforce development plan.

Recommendation 10 – Prioritize Foster Care Alumni for WIOA Funding

Request that Virginia Career Works, through the local workforce boards, prioritize and promote serving the foster care population with WIOA funding and other workforce development opportunities.

Recommendation 11 – Add Flexibility to the VDSS Foster Care Payment Assessment Tool

Direct the Virginia Department of Social Services to convene a stakeholder group to determine the feasibility of adopting a new uniform assessment tool in determining the enhanced payments for children in foster care with additional needs. The stakeholder group shall consist of representatives from the Department of Social Services, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, Office of the Children’s Services Act, Office of the Children’s Ombudsman, private providers, licensed child placing agencies, local departments of social services, foster parents, and advocacy groups. The stakeholder group shall investigate ways to provide more flexibility regarding the foster care payment to address a wide variety of needs for hard to place children, including financial incentives for serving these children, and develop ways to ensure accurate documentation. Consideration should be given to current assessment tools used in determining a child’s needs such as the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) tool.

Recommendation 12 – Budget for Driver’s License Assistance

Introduce a budget amendment to support the development and implementation of a statewide driver’s licensing program to support foster care youth in obtaining a driver’s license. Funding shall be made available to local departments of social services to

reimburse foster care providers for increases to their existing motor vehicle insurance premiums that occur because a foster care youth in their care has been added to their insurance policy. The program may also reimburse foster care providers for additional coverage (i.e., an umbrella policy or the equivalent) that provides liability protection should a foster care youth get into or cause a catastrophic accident. Additionally, funding shall be made available to foster care youth in Virginia’s Fostering Futures Program to assist in covering the cost of obtaining motor vehicle insurance. The Department of Social Services shall develop reimbursement policies for foster care providers and foster care youths. The Department shall coordinate and administer the driver’s licensing program based on best practices from similar programs in other states, to include developing educational or training materials that educate foster parents, private providers, and foster youths about (1) liability issues, insurance laws, and common insurance practices (to include laws about renewal and cancellation, how long an accident can affect premiums, how to establish that a foster youth is no longer living in the residence, and other applicable topics); (2) DMV requirements to obtain a learner’s permit and driver’s license; (3) what funding and resources are available to assist in this process, to include paying school lab fees for “Behind the Wheel” or paying a private driver education company; and (4) why getting a driver’s license on time is important for normalcy and a successful transition to adulthood. The Department shall provide information on how many foster care youths were supported by this program and any recommendations to improve the program to the Governor and Chairs of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees by November 30 each fiscal year.

Recommendation 13 – Child Care Resources for Parenting Foster Care Youths

Request foster care workers and others working with youths experiencing foster care to identify child care resources for their parenting youths. Ensure that youths aging out of foster care are placed on the local child care assistance program waiting list prior to aging out of care.

IV. Study Goals and Objectives

Youth aging out of foster care face significant challenges in navigating the labor market to obtain meaningful employment. The Study Mandate directed the Virginia Commission on Youth to do the following:

- The Virginia Commission on Youth shall convene an Advisory Group to include representatives from the Department of Social Services, Department of Education, Department of Labor and Industry, Department of Aging and Rehabilitation Services, the Virginia Employment Commission, One Stop Centers, local Workforce Investment Boards, the Virginia Community College System, local

Departments of Social Services, advocacy groups, foster care youths, and other relevant stakeholders. The Advisory Group shall review current policies, practices, and programs in Virginia that support youths aging out of foster care and make recommendations to improve workforce opportunities for youths in foster care.

A. IDENTIFIED ISSUES

- Foster care provides services, substitute care, and supervision for children on a 24-hour basis, until a child or adolescent can either return to their family or become a permanent member of another family. Because foster care is intended to be a temporary response to address family concerns, caseworkers establish a permanency goal for each child to ensure that the child will have a safe and stable family with which to live.
- Youth who “age out” of the foster care system reach the age of 18 without achieving a permanent home environment. The difficulties facing youth who age out of care are well established in research literature. These youth often face lifetime challenges, including homelessness, incarceration, low educational attainment, and barriers to obtaining meaningful employment.
- Virginia’s Fostering Futures Program is designed to support youth in the transition from foster care to adulthood. The program enables the extension of foster care financial and social support and services up to age 21 for youth who are in foster care when they reach age 18 and for youth who were in foster care at the time of commitment to the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Virginia has received federal funds to allow youth currently enrolled in the program, who have turned 21, to remain in until September 2021.
- Youth who age out of foster care face many barriers to employment, including identifying employment opportunities, completing job applications, learning soft skills, and obtaining needed identification for employment. In addition, they may face other life obstacles, including unstable housing, lack of transportation, and lack of child care.

B. STUDY ACTIVITIES

The Commission’s approved study plan includes the following activities:

- Identify state and national employment programs that support young people transitioning out of foster care and determine best practices.
- Review and analyze other policies, practices, and programs that support youth aging out of foster care.
- Explore the various programs under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) that assist youth and young adult job seekers up to age 24, with disabilities.

- Research laws on obtaining employment.
- Obtain and analyze employment outcomes for youth aging out of foster care.
- Conduct background and literature reviews:
 - Annie E. Casey
 - Fostering Futures
 - Great Expectations
 - Reconnecting Youth Project
 - U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
 - Other national studies conducted on the topic
- Convene an Advisory Group of impacted stakeholders:
 - Department of Aging and Rehabilitation Services
 - Department of Education
 - Department of Labor and Industry
 - Department of Social Services
 - Foster Care Youth
 - Local Departments of Social Services
 - Local Workforce Investment Boards
 - One Stop Centers
 - Virginia Community College System
 - Virginia Employment Commission
 - Youth Advocacy Groups
- Conduct roundtable discussions with foster care youth.
- Present findings and recommendations to the Commission on Youth.
- Receive public comment.
- Prepare final report.

V. Methodology

The findings and recommendations of this study are based on a number of distinct activities conducted by the Commission on Youth.

A. ADVISORY GROUP

In order to accomplish the work of this study, the Commission on Youth was directed to form an advisory group to make recommendations on improving workforce preparation for foster care youth. The Advisory Group was chaired by Senator Barbara Favola and Delegate Emily Brewer. The Advisory Group met on the following dates:

- June 21, 2021
- October 5, 2021

The Advisory Group consisted of representatives from the following groups and organizations:

- Adoptive Parent
- Children’s Home Society
- Foster Care Parent
- Fostering Acadia
- Local Departments of Social Services (Harrisonburg-Rockingham, Richmond City)
- Medworks
- Senate of Virginia
- The Success Foundation of Virginia
- Virginia Career Works – Piedmont Region
- Virginia Commission on Youth
- Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)
- Virginia Community College System
- Virginia Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services
- Virginia Department of Education
- Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice
- Virginia Department of Labor and Industry
- Virginia Department of Social Services
- Virginia Employment Commission
- Virginia Foster Care Youth
- Virginia House of Delegates
- Virginia Kids Belong
- Virginia Poverty Law Center
- Voices for Virginia’s Children

A list of the Advisory Group members can be found in Appendix A at the end of this report. Due to the declared state of emergency related to the Covid-19 pandemic, this work group met electronically pursuant to Item 4-0.01 of the 2020 Appropriation Act and pursuant to the seventeenth enactment of Chapter 1 of the Acts of Assembly of 2021, Special Session II. As such, all of these meetings remain accessible to the public in archive form on the Virginia Commission on Youth’s website.

The first Advisory Group meeting in June 2021 featured a foster care panel with a foster care support group and foster care alumni, as well as presentations about the Virginia Community College System’s Great Expectations Program, foster care trends by the Youth Law Center (a national advocacy organization), and the iFoster foster care resource portal.

The second meeting in October 2021 provided highlights of the six foster care roundtable discussion meetings held statewide with foster care youth, young adults, and alumni, in addition to foster care professionals. The roundtable discussions took place in Harrisonburg (July 20, 2021), Richmond City (July 21, 2021), Charlottesville (July 22, 2021), Williamsburg (September 23, 2021), Abingdon (September 27, 2021), and a virtual roundtable organized by VCU (October 4, 2021). These presentations and meeting minutes may be found in the Appendices at the end of this report. More details are provided below, as the roundtable discussions were a major part of the study.

B. FOSTER CARE YOUTH AND ALUMNI ROUNDTABLE MEETINGS

The Commission on Youth wanted to hear directly from foster care youth, young adults, and alumni about what worked in their transition to the workforce and what needed improvement. Six roundtable discussions took place with these individuals and local foster care professionals and advocates, following all Covid-19 protocols. The Virginia meetings were held in Harrisonburg (July 20, 2021), Richmond City (July 21, 2021), Charlottesville (July 22, 2021), Williamsburg (September 23, 2021), Abingdon (September 27, 2021), and a virtual roundtable organized by VCU (October 4, 2021). Two more roundtables were planned—for Northern Virginia and Smithfield; however, these were not held due to Covid-19 concerns (Northern Virginia) and a lack of foster care youth participants (Smithfield). Staff listened to feedback from 18 foster care youths, young adults, and alumni; one legislator; two Local Department of Social Services' (LDSS) directors; seven LDSS foster care supervisors and staff; nine non-profit organizations from Fostering Acadia, Goodwill, Impact Living Services, Virginia Career Works, Virginia Commonwealth University, and Voices for Virginia's Children; five community college Great Expectations' representatives; and one higher education advocate. The information gleaned was enlightening and provided great feedback for improvements needed with state and local processes for transitioning youth who have experienced foster care to the world of work and making a sustainable living.

C. RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

To gain an understanding of the issues and resources available for foster care youth transitioning into the workforce, Virginia Commission on Youth staff requested a summary of programs and foster care workforce connections from each Advisory Group member organization. This "Summary of Programs" is included in the Appendix. The summary provided a starting point for discussion, with all Advisory Group members learning about how the other organizations were connected to the issue. Staff also reviewed literature related to foster care youth workforce preparation, foster care transitioning strategies by other states, impacts of extended care after foster care has ended, the Annie E. Casey foster care grants, Fostering Futures, Great Expectations, the Reconnecting Youth Project, foster care policies with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, as well as outcome statistics, employment requirements, Department of Education school

requirements for career preparation, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funding, and successful independent living programs. Additionally, staff interviewed a public middle school guidance counselor about the requirements for guiding youth in their careers, contacted state and local foster care social workers about their obligations to assist foster care youths with workforce planning, spoke with the iFoster portal East Coast Director and CEO, and talked with representatives from Goodwill about their workforce development training.

VI. Background, Research Results, and Analysis

A. BACKGROUND

JLARC Foster Care Study

In December of 2018, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) released a report titled *Improving Virginia's Foster Care System*. The report generated 34 recommendations related to improving foster care in Virginia. Among other topics, recommendation areas included a delay in termination of parental rights and youth at-risk of aging out. Most of the recommendations have been addressed legislatively (Foster Care Omnibus Bill and Appropriation Act) and by VDSS administrative action; however, the report indicates that many improvements to our current foster care system are still needed.

Foster Care Caucus

During the 2019 General Assembly Session, the first Foster Care Caucus was formed.

- The bipartisan Foster Care Caucus was co-chaired by Delegate Emily Brewer (R-Suffolk) and Senator Monty Mason (D-Williamsburg).
- The Foster Care Caucus met several times, heard presentations from the Virginia Department of Social Services and the Secretary of Health and Human Resources office, and held discussions with child advocacy groups.

2019 Foster Care Legislation Related to Workforce Development for Foster Care Youth

- HB 2350 (Miyares) Four-year College Tuition and Fees for Foster Care Youth
- HB 1883 (Keam) Motor Vehicle Insurance Policies for Foster Parents and Children

Foster Care Seminar – Commission on Youth

To facilitate the work of Virginia's lawmakers in response to JLARC's recommendations and the requirements of implementing the Family First Prevention Act, the Commission on Youth hosted an informational seminar on Virginia's foster care system titled, "Foster Care for Legislators" at its May 6, 2019, meeting. The purpose of this seminar was to inform lawmakers about the

complexities of the foster care system. Presentations were made by state and local stakeholders on a variety of topics. Legislators also had an opportunity to talk with invited foster and kinship families, foster youth, and former foster youth at a luncheon held immediately after the seminar. Additionally, Commission staff prepared a resource binder titled, “Foster Care 101: A Resource for Virginia’s Legislators.” This resource includes an overview of Virginia’s foster care system, descriptions provided by Virginia agencies and groups about how they interact with the foster care system, and selected articles and reports. A hard copy was distributed to Commission members and other legislators in attendance. An electronic copy of this resource is posted on the Commission on Youth’s website.

At the Commission on Youth’s May 6, 2019, meeting, the Commission approved a study plan to investigate issues and develop recommendations related to child welfare and foster care worker caseloads, legislative action and resources needed to implement the Family First Prevention Services Act (and kinship care), recruiting and retaining foster families, and lastly, supporting youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood (Fostering Futures).

B. RESEARCH RESULTS

Advisory Group on Workforce Development for Foster Care Youth

At its May 3, 2021, meeting, Commission members approved the Study Plan on workforce development for foster care youth and young adults, which established the Advisory Group on Workforce Development for Foster Care Youth. Twenty-four Advisory Group members attended the first meeting, held virtually on June 21, 2021. Twenty-one Advisory Group members attended the second meeting on October 5, 2021. The minutes of both meetings are included in the Appendices.

The following programs were presented and discussed at the Advisory Group meetings.

Foster Care Panel

Fostering Acadia is an independent living organization that currently works with 50 foster youths, ages 17-21, to help them become self-sustainable and successful. Fostering Acadia has seen very good results using individual coaches and mentors for each youth, and the organization facilitates sustained positive relationships with mentors well beyond the age of 21. Youths who come into the program in their late teens or early twenties may enter the Acadia Homes Program beyond age 21.

A current foster care youth in the Fostering Acadia Independent Living (IL) Program was introduced at the first Advisory Group meeting and was asked questions about her foster care experiences. The youth described how she came to be in foster care at the age of 16. She had earned her GED certificate and was assigned a social worker through the Richmond Department of Social Services. At age 17, the youth joined Fostering Acadia’s Independent

Living Program. With her savings and financial help from Fostering Acadia and her local department of social services, the youth was able to find a job and buy a reliable car. She spoke about how she has turned her life around and would like to help improve the Virginia process for transitioning from foster care to employment and independent living.

The challenges that this youth mentioned include the following:

- Finding affordable child care at age 18 for her young daughter (some LDSS will only cover part of the child care costs)
- Difficulty obtaining a driver's license
- Obtaining assistance with health care for herself and her child
- Finding sustainable employment during and after her pregnancy
- Knowing how to get and keep a steady job
- Finding affordable transportation that is reliable
- Finding a concerned and invested caseworker who will advocate for youths and find available resources that will help, especially moving from home to a group home
- Having a good mentor that will stick with the youth no matter what
- Knowing how to keep a budget, save money, and write a resume
- Having a support system/sustainable positive relationships through and after age 21

The above interview was moderated by Brent Rolsten, Fostering Acadia, at the June 21, 2021, Advisory Group meeting, and more information can be found as Appendix D at the end of this report.

iFoster Portal

The iFoster Portal is a website that serves transition-age foster, kinship, and probation youth (ages 16-26); children in foster care; and caregivers and organizations that support these youth. The portal or application provides concrete resources and contact information; assistance with a digital locker for birth, health, citizenship, etc. records of transition-age youth; job listings and support; resource tracking mechanisms; notifications and surveys; program ratings and feedback options; discounted products and services; and a search feature for housing, transportation, child care, education, training, and employment.

National supports and information are currently provided on the portal. States may customize the site for their use and provide local resources, connections to employment opportunities, and more. Established partnerships work to join the development of career pathways and professional development options. With a single entry, youth have access to one location for listings of job skills training, work experience, internships, and employment. Resources and all things job-related are aligned and tracked across programs and agencies. Braided funding

sources for the iFoster portal include WIOA, SNAP Employment and Training (in California), workforce investment boards, Chafee/ETV, AmeriCorps, and local funds. Virginia youth can currently access the information on a national level, but with some state and local additions, they could have local career, health, housing, and all daily living options at their fingertips on their cell phone.

“iFoster Jobs Program” was presented by Serita Cox, Co-Founder and CEO, iFoster, at the June 21, 2021, Advisory Group meeting.

Great Expectations Program

Great Expectations (GE) is a Virginia Community College System (VCCS) program for young adults who have experienced foster care. The program began in 2008 and is funded solely with private dollars at 21 of Virginia’s 23 community colleges. The last two community colleges are in the process of starting a Great Expectations program at their locations. Great Expectations provides foster care youth, young adults, and alumni with the following types of assistance: career exploration and coaching; access to college degree and certification options; individual tutoring as needed; help with applications for college admission and financial aid; help with applying for jobs and keeping a job; life skills training, including financial management; personal counseling; help with finding affordable housing and mental health services; and coordinating student mentors. Each Great Expectations student has a coach who offers one-on-one support and guidance. This program improves the college graduation rate for students who have lived in foster care from 8 percent nationally for non-participants to 23 percent for Virginia students who have lived in foster care and participate in Great Expectations. Services are limited by the private donations for each college.

Students who received a \$250-\$400 monthly housing stipend were able to stay in college longer and graduate from a credit degree program, earn an industry credential, or transfer to a four-year institution at a much higher rate than Great Expectations students who did not receive a housing stipend. A FastForward pilot is currently in progress for two GE students at each college to receive a \$750/month stipend while each student earns a shorter-term, non-credit workforce credential. More funding would allow GE students to receive stipends for housing or concrete supports while they work on their degree or credential, nearly ensuring degree or credential completion. Great Expectations has been shown to be a successful program. Dedicated funding is needed for continued program success.

“Great Expectations: Recent Initiatives” was presented by Rachel Mayes Strawn, Ph.D., Great Expectations Program Coordinator and Director, Virginia Community College System, at the June 21, 2021, Advisory Group meeting.

Youth Law Center: A National Perspective

Overall, there are best practices for smoothing the transition of youth experiencing foster care into adulthood. First, case planning must include assisting youths with career awareness, exploration, planning, and knowledge of available options for their interests. Young people need to be exposed to a variety of jobs, and they need assistance with determining which of their strengths and skills could lead to sustainable employment. Secondly, all youths should experience internships, part-time jobs in high school or employment after high school, earning a driver's license, and so forth. In addition, there should be a foster care and juvenile justice liaison in each state's workforce system and a workforce liaison in the local department of social services.

A holistic program across agencies prevents youths from falling through the cracks and going down a path toward poverty, homelessness, or crime. Connecting young people to relevant programs and supports is a critical step. Access to education, low-income housing, health services, financial assistance, and employment supports must be made easy with little "red tape." Other best practices include teaching youth the value of work and providing a way to maintain the official documents needed for employment. It is critical to provide concrete funding supports, such as child care, car repair, bus passes, uniforms, equipment, food, housing stipends, emergency funds, etc. Another best practice is to include foster care alumni on a Youth Board to provide guidance on developing and implementing workforce programs for youth who have experienced foster care to help make improvements to these programs.

Potential employers need to be included in the transition plan. It is important to provide recognition, tax credits, training, and support for employers so they feel confident to hire and mentor youth in the foster care system. These are all best practices for creating a successful transition for youth experiencing foster care.

"Building Effective Workforce Supports for Youth with Experience in Foster Care: A National Perspective" was presented by Jenny Pokempner, Youth Law Center, at the June 21, 2021, Advisory Group meeting.

Roundtable Highlights

The Commission on Youth wanted to hear directly from foster care youth, young adults, and alumni about what worked in their transition to the workforce and what needed improvement. Six roundtable discussions took place with these individuals, local foster care professionals, and advocates. The Virginia meetings were held in Harrisonburg (July 20, 2021), Richmond City (July 21, 2021), Charlottesville (July 22, 2021) Williamsburg (September 23, 2021), Abingdon (September 27, 2021), and a virtual roundtable organized by VCU (October 4, 2021). Staff listened to feedback from 18 foster care youths, young adults, and alumni; one legislator; two Local Department of Social Services' (LDSS) directors; seven LDSS foster care

supervisors and staff; nine non-profit organizations from Fostering Acadia, Goodwill, Impact Living Services, Virginia Career Works, Virginia Commonwealth University, and Voices for Virginia's Children; five community college Great Expectations' representatives; and one higher education advocate. The information gleaned was enlightening and provided great feedback for improvements needed with state and local processes for transitioning youth who have experienced foster care to the world of work and making a sustainable living.

The salient themes that emerged included the following:

- Foster care youth and young adults need a way to learn about and connect with financial, emotional, educational, and other support programs, coaches, and/or mentors in their community.
- Funding is needed to increase flexible support for Great Expectations, decrease foster care caseloads, and improve access to community resources.
- Better communication and data sharing across state agencies, schools, and organizations for foster care youth is warranted.
- Accountability standards for foster families and Independent Living organizations must be developed and enforced.
- Consistent mentors and life coaches create stability and a safety net for each youth and young adult who has experienced foster care.
- Virginia school guidance counselors, public and private, need to provide standard career exploration, exposure to a variety of career fields, and interest assessments for every student.
- Each Institution of Higher Education (IHE) needs to have a dedicated and reliable support coordinator for young adults who have experienced foster care.
- Life skills classes need to be timely, relevant, engaging, and emulate real-life situations.
- Meaningful and gradual Independent Living (IL) experience is needed that prepares youth for independence.
- Local workforce development boards should prioritize the foster care population.
- Child care and transportation challenges are barriers to employment.

Research and Literature Review

Additional research and literature reviews were completed by staff on following topics and programs.

Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) helps strengthen families by assisting children and young people with their educational, economic, and social and health outcomes. The foundation raises funding to eliminate barriers for at-risk youth and educates stakeholders

about effective and evidence-based strategies to improve outcomes for these youth. AECF is based in Baltimore but works nationwide providing grants to help federal agencies, states, counties, cities, and communities develop creative, cost-effective solutions to poverty, separation from family, and limited opportunities. Foundation grants help transform children/youth, families, and neighborhoods to break the cycle of poverty and nurture successful outcomes for children. Awarded grants focus on making sure children have supportive families, that economic opportunity is increasing for these families, that assistance is provided to communities that are struggling, and that support is available for dedicated social sector leaders who are working to improve the lives of these youth. Efforts are focused on foster care; community development; employment, education and training; and juvenile justice.

In November of 2017, the Annie E. Casey Foundation issued an Education Brief titled, “The Economic Well-Being of Youth Transitioning From Foster Care.” This brief explains that nationally, only 10 percent of young adults between 16 and 24 years old are unemployed, yet for youth aging out of foster care, between 47 and 69 percent are unemployed, depending on the age and gender group. The Foundation found that youth who had more placements in foster care by age 19 were less likely to experience employment gains or wages by the time they were 21 years old. Sixty percent of youth who had fewer than three placements realized solid gains in employment while only 40 percent of those with 20 or more placements in foster care experienced employment gains. Furthermore, researchers have estimated that 71 percent of youth transitioning out of foster care earn less than \$25,000 annually and 22 percent do not earn a sustainable income to rise out of poverty. This brief highlights the true need for better career preparation with education, training, and strong support for youth transitioning out of foster care.

Fostering Futures

Created in 2016, the Fostering Futures program amended the definition of “child” to be “any person who has reached the age of 18 years but has not reached the age of 21.” This program is voluntary and extends foster care services and support payments for youth from age 18-21 to support their successful transition to adulthood. Payments are over \$700 per month for housing, education, job training, and child care or other supports. Youths may receive other services through the Comprehensive Services Act. They must demonstrate a commitment to school, vocational training, or work, and must willingly participate with their caseworker to develop a transition plan and meet their goals. Enrolled youths must complete a contract (Voluntary Continuing Services and Support Agreement), attend any court hearings, complete administrative reviews, and attend case planning meetings.

Reconnecting Youth Project

The Reconnecting Youth (RY) Project is a research-validated program to help at-risk youth build resilience and competence. The main goal of the program is to improve resilience in youth who are at-risk of dropping out of high school and is geared for students in grades 6-12. Topics covered in the program include enhancing self-esteem, making positive decisions, personal control, interpersonal communication, suicide prevention, social and recreational activities, and curricular options.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – Federal Workforce Development Supports for Foster Care

- **McKinney-Vento Act**

The McKinney-Vento Act ensures educational stability for both homeless and foster youth.

- **John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program**

The Chafee Foster Care Independence Program offers grants to states to implement services/activities that will lead to self-sufficiency for current or former foster youth.

- **Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act**

This Act allows states to extend foster care and benefits up to age 21 with federal funding to states and counties.

- **Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Youth Program**

The WIOA Title I Youth Program provides workforce development skills to qualified youth between the ages of 16-24 who are out of school, authorized to work in the U.S., and have barriers to employment or education. Work Experience and Training assistance include the following:

- Occupational Skills Training
- On-the-Job Training
- Summer Employment Opportunities
- Work Experience Placements
- Pre-Apprenticeship Opportunities

Supportive Services are provided and include the following:

- Transportation Assistance

- Payment of Credentialing/Licensing Fees
- Child Care Assistance
- Books and Training Materials
- Required Uniforms and Work-Related Expenses

Laws on Obtaining Employment

In Virginia, there are some work limits for children under 16. However, with an Employment Certificate (*Code of Virginia* §40.1-84), youth ages 14 and 15 years old can work outside of the home for payment. These jobs include office jobs, doing kitchen duties or room/hallway cleaning in hospitals or nursing homes, working as a cashier for a dry cleaner (no processing may be done on the premises), cleaning dishes or waiting on tables at a food service establishment (not serving alcoholic beverages), working as a cashier or kitchen helper at a restaurant, working in customer service at a bowling alley, working as a gatekeeper or concession helper at a swimming pool, or handling beach equipment on a beach. Youths 16 years old and older are permitted to work without an Employment Certificate, but may not work in hazardous jobs or in areas that are capable of causing serious physical harm or death (*Code of Virginia* § 40.1-100 (B)), even including such jobs as hotel room service, construction, funeral home, usher in a theater, warehouse or lumber yard, etc. Sixteen-year-old beach lifeguards must have an Employment Certificate, as well as Red Cross or similar certifications.

For those who are 14 or 15 years old, youths may work between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. for 3 hours per day on a school day (18 hours per week for a school week), but may not work during school hours, and can start work as early as 4:00 a.m. for a newspaper route. On non-school days, youth may work up to 8 hours per day (up to 40 hours per week for a non-school week). During summer breaks, youth may work from 7:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m., or if delivering newspapers, may start work at 4:00 a.m. (*Code of Virginia* § 40.1-109, § 40.1-80.1)

Virginia Policies, Practices, and Programs that Support Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

Virginia Social Services System

The Virginia Department of Social Services' (VDSS) Division of Family Services supervises the 120 Local Departments of Social Services' foster care units as part of the Virginia Social Services System. The Division of Family Services provides the John H. Chafee Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood and the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program. The Chafee Program serves youth who experience foster care at age 14 or older and can go up until age 23 under certain criteria. Services are determined from a formal life skills assessment to identify strengths and needs. Funding can be used for academic support, career preparation, employment and vocational training, housing

education, home management training, financial management training, substance abuse prevention, and preventative health activities.

The ETV Program provides financial assistance to cover post-secondary education and vocational training programs for youth who hold a high school diploma or GED and meet the specific foster care criteria. Typically, this includes foster care youth, ages 14-21; youth aging out of Fostering Futures and foster care, ages 18-25; and youth who are at least 16 who are entering Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGap). The ETV Program extends the age limit up to the 26th birthday while having a five year limit on the funding duration. Vouchers may be available for up to \$5,000 per year, or the total cost of attendance—whichever is less—per eligible student. Students must earn a minimum 2.0 GPA, complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and apply annually. ETV funds may be used for tuition, fees, room and board, rental or purchase of required educational materials or supplies, books, transportation, special study project requirements, child care, and other related needs.

Virginia Department of Education – Public School Guidance Counseling

The goal of the Virginia Department of Education is to help all students, including those who have experienced foster care, “investigate the world of work in order to make informed career decisions.”¹ Public school guidance counselors for grades 6-12 are required to assist students with becoming aware of the variety of professional and technical careers available. Counselors must work with their students to help determine their strengths, skills, interests, and passions for career options and lifelong success. This must include the possibility of entrepreneurship for the student. Students are taught how their choices will impact their lifestyle and quality of life in the future. Counselors are also required to teach how to be successful in a job by being on-time for work, using respectful language, demonstrating courtesy and hard work, as well as dressing appropriately for the job. Counselors help students with knowing how to demonstrate initiative and teamwork. Students learn problem-solving, organization, and communication skills for successful employment. It is required for the students to research career and educational information in order to evaluate the prerequisites and skills needed for a specific career in relation to each student’s strengths and interests. Middle and high school counselors play a critical role in sparking career interests, educating students about realistic options, and motivating them for success. Students who earn a college preparation diploma will have more options available to them when it’s time to choose a career or college program.

¹ “Standards for School Counseling Programs in Virginia Public Schools,” January 2004, Board of Education, Virginia Department of Education.

Virginia Career Works (Virginia Employment Commission)

The Virginia Employment Commission's Virginia Career Works program prepares and connects people with employers through its network of professionals and trainers. Several agencies collaborate on the workforce needs of Virginians. These agencies include the Virginia Departments of Social Services, Aging and Rehabilitative Services, Blind and Vision Impaired, Labor and Industry, and Education, as well as the Economic Development Partnership, the Virginia Employment Commission, and the Virginia Community College System. Talent is recruited, assistance is provided to job seekers to find jobs, and policymakers receive the data they need to make good community decisions through Virginia Career Works.

Virginia Department of Labor and Industry

The Virginia Department of Labor and Industry uses a Registered Apprenticeship (RA) model in which adults can earn a paycheck while they learn a skill or trade. The program is tailored to each occupation and provides mentorship, a paycheck, and inclusion in the business culture. Employers must initiate the process by registering as an Employer/Sponsor, and then selecting the occupation from the U.S. Department of Labor's apprenticeship occupation list. Once the business is registered, employers may recruit for the apprentice. Interested applicants may apply, and if selected, will then need to register themselves as an apprentice. The goal is to connect young adults with apprenticeship options before they age out of the foster care system. Registered apprenticeship is a viable option for those who need to learn a skill and support themselves at the same time.

National Perspective on the Topic

Many states are in the process of building effective supports for youth in foster care. These youth have the same ambitions for fulfilling work and sustainable income as youth who have not experienced foster care, but they usually have fewer supports and face more barriers. Some common barriers include: a lack of focus within the foster care system on education and careers; little access to volunteering and formal work experiences; and lack of support for work challenges, transportation, uniforms, child care, and placement changes. Young adults who have experienced foster care need access to high quality and consistent education, work opportunity connections, mentorship and support for the work being done, as well as access to foundational supports that promote job success (child care, transportation, appropriate clothing, etc.). Young adults don't want just any job; they want a job that is tailored to their interests and one that is relevant for them, so designing their own training or education program is essential. Several funding streams may assist students in their career pursuits; however, many youth are not aware of these programs and funding supports. The funding streams are varied and some come with service requirements.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was enacted in 2014 for eligible youth aged 14-24 who face challenges with education, employment, and training. Funding for this program is determined by a federal formula. Out-of-School youth are the primary recipients of these funds, with 75 percent of the WIOA funds being spent on the youth. WIOA enforces a 20 percent minimum expenditure rate to be spent on work experience programs that require youth access to 14 program elements. Local programs provide these services in conjunction with American Job Centers, with supervision from local Workforce Development Boards.

Registered Apprenticeship Program

Apprenticeship Programs may be available within each state depending on the occupational interests and willingness of employers to participate. These programs are initiated by employers and are typically for specific occupations registered with the state. As discussed previously, the Virginia Department of Labor and Industry has a Registered Apprenticeship Program and is willing to work with any youth, especially those who have experienced foster care. See Appendix G for the WIOA funding amounts for different regions across Virginia.

Job Corps

Another funder is Job Corps, which has been in operation for more than 50 years as the largest, residential, career training program available nationwide. This program is for youth aged 16-24 and helps them complete their high school education, provides career training and job attainment, and helps with transitional supports such as child care, transportation, and housing. Youth who graduate from Job Corps are either gainfully employed, in an apprenticeship program, attending college, or in the military.

Transition Age Youth (TAY) Americorps (California Only)

Transition Age Youth (TAY) Americorps is located in the Los Angeles, California, area and works with youth, aged 14-23 years. Their goal is to help youth who have experienced foster care achieve academic persistence, employment, and the attainment of life skills for self-sufficiency. It is currently a partnership among the LA Department of Children and Family Services, Youth Services Division, LA Opportunity Youth Network, the Bay Area TAY AmeriCorps Collaborative of TAY-serving organizations, iFoster, and California Volunteers. Americorps typically provides a small stipend and room and board with a one-to three-year commitment of service.

YouthBuild

YouthBuild programs provide at-risk youth (ages 16-24 years old) a second chance to earn their high school diploma or equivalent, learn leadership skills through community service, and prepare for college or job training. Their programs include occupational skills training in high-demand industries (e.g., construction) and focus on improving low-income housing options in localities.

Youth with Disabilities and Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Individuals with Disabilities are available nationwide. Youth with physical or mental impairments may be eligible for services that will help them prepare for, earn and keep a job. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is funded by the U.S. Department of Education. This program is available in every state, territory, and many Indian Nations. VR serves those in all disability groups, while some states have separate services for people with legal blindness. Those who receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) are VR-eligible. Services provided include diagnosis, custom employment program, guidance and counseling, training, job placement and support for job retention. Candidates may apply directly for services or may be referred by a school, hospital, or other organization.

Other States

There are a number of other states that are making improvements in their foster care transition to adulthood with workforce preparedness. Mississippi, Oregon, Arizona, Tennessee, and Rhode Island are all on the path to making improvements with their workforce development programs for foster care youth. Some highlights are discussed below.

Mississippi is in the process of identifying and adding their own state and local resources to the iFoster portal. They plan to train employers on trauma through the portal as well. Using the iFoster App, they are able to scaffold foster care youth into jobs through mentorship, job training, and career “cruising” and assessments. This helps determine the training that a youth needs for a particular job. Mississippi is also sharing documents in a centralized location on the App.

Oregon passed the Former Foster Youth Tuition and Fee Waiver (HB 3471-A) that allows youth who have spent 12 or more years in foster care to waive tuition at a state university or community college. The waiver is applied after all other financial aid is exhausted. Oregon also developed Youth Villages, which are transitional living programs. Youth work with specialists to find stable housing and employment, and continue their education or training. Eighty-four percent of youth are living independently or with family two years after completion of the program. Eighty-three percent of these youth are either in school,

graduated or employed two years after program completion and 77 percent have remained jail-free.²

Arizona has two programs: Bridging Success Early Start and Arizona Foster Youth Award. Bridging Success Early Start is available at Arizona State University for entering freshmen and transfer students with foster care backgrounds. These students move into the university early to learn about campus resources, personal success strategies, and academic expectations. Dedicated staff are assigned to each student to provide assistance throughout their college career. The Arizona Foster Youth Award is a tuition waiver program that covers the cost of undergraduate tuition and fees with a combination of federal grants, scholarships, and university aid.³

Tennessee has the Hope Foster Child Tuition Grant program. Youth who have experienced foster care are eligible to attend a 2-year or 4-year public institution without tuition as long as they have a high school diploma or equivalent. Students may attend a private institution but must pay the costs above the average cost of public institutions.⁴

Rhode Island partnered with local businesses to help foster care youth experience success with workforce development. Their “Wonder Works” Research Program took place from 2011-2016 from a Workforce Investment Act Funding grant to give foster care youth training skills and coaching for workplace success. Fifty-two percent of youth with backgrounds in foster care maintained their employment after program completion. This was a positive change from 38.3 percent of youth who maintained stable employment before the intervention.⁵

C. ANALYSIS

The statistics underscore why Virginia needs to do more to help our foster care youth transition to adulthood. We know that youth who leave foster care are 40 percent more likely to become homeless (within 18 months after leaving foster care). Twenty percent will drop out of high school, and 62 percent will become unemployed. Less than five percent will complete a college degree. Sixty percent of youth with foster care backgrounds earn incomes below the poverty line, 25 percent are in jail within two years of leaving foster care, 81 percent of males are arrested, and 80 percent of women become mothers before they are ready. These youth are also much more likely to have physical and mental health problems, lack health insurance, abuse drugs, become teen

² <https://Oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/SpecialEducation/SecondaryTransition/Documents/tuitionwaiverquickfacts.pdf>.
<https://www.Oregon.gov/dhs/children/fostercare/ILP/Pages/Index.aspx>.

³ <https://Fosteryouth.asu.edu/early-start>.

⁴ <https://tn.gov/collegepays/money-for-college/grant-programs/tn-hope-foster-child-tuition-grant.html>.

⁵ <https://www.fosterforward.net/works-wonders-research>.

parents, live in poverty, and commit crimes. Foster youth are six times more likely than the general population and twice as likely as veterans coming back from war to be diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).⁶

From our partners at the Virginia Department of Social Services, we know that in 2020 about 20 percent of foster care youth entered foster care at age 0-12 years old and about 80 percent entered foster care between the ages of 12-17 years old. The majority of these youth are older and in the process of transitioning to adulthood. Youth ages 12-17 are at the best ages to start career exploration and learn about job readiness skills, and this is when the majority of our foster youth are entering foster care. It is in Virginia's best interest to be proactive and support the youth in foster care so that they can become self-sufficient, productive citizens.

The presentations, roundtable discussions, and research all point to improvements needed in several areas. The main theme throughout this study was that youth who have experienced the trauma of foster care need to have strong and consistent supports in place (financial, emotional, life coaching, program navigation, etc.). These are supports that all youth need, with or without a foster care background; however, youth with foster care backgrounds need these supports even more so.⁷ Consistent and positive moral support and trust must be established with children so that they may learn to trust others and respond positively to future job demands and expectations. In other words, youth who experience stability and have positive role models to guide them in making good decisions as they grow up will be able to meet the expectations of a future job and do well. The data tell us that youth who leave foster care without these supports are more likely than their peers to have a life of struggle.

Pockets of supports and resources are available nationally and on the state and local level, yet youth with a foster care background most likely lack the advocates and guidance to assist them in connecting with these resources. Social workers and other foster care professionals may have a difficult time keeping up with new programs and shifting needs. In today's world of technology, the iFoster App makes a lot of sense. This free App is already loaded with national resources and contacts. It will be up to each state to add their state and local resources to the App to make iFoster helpful for all youth transitioning out of foster care. With some effort, Virginia can include resources and direct contact information to ease the transition from foster care to adulthood. The iFoster App will solve the problem of lack of communication and coordination of resources among state and local partners, both public and private. The App also will help users track their requests for assistance, store their official documents, track employment, and allow for specialized searches for information. Virginia will need to maintain the accuracy of information with regular updates,

⁶ <http://www.fostercare2.org/ask-the-pros-2>.

⁷ "The Economic Well-Being of Youth Transitioning from Foster Care," Annie E. Casey Foundation, November 1, 2017.

but this can be easily organized and structured with the help from state and local partners, who can benefit from the App as well.

Virginia already has some wonderful education programs for youth transitioning out of foster care. Great Expectations is a terrific program that offers 360-degree support for their students, all while gently pushing students to successfully complete their education or training programs. The Virginia Community College System (VCCS) does so much with the generous donations of private organizations and citizens. Consistent funding would allow for even more students with foster care backgrounds to be assisted and supported. Great Expectations levels the playing field for youth who have experienced foster care by facilitating supportive and caring relationships with adults who have the youths' backs and can support them in their education and career goals. Research has proven that youth with advanced education will be able to earn more than their peers without college education or training. Success for foster care youth can be realized through the Great Expectations program because of the additional and necessary supports. Additional funding for Great Expectations would expand access to and benefits of a well-proven.

Having a dedicated point of contact at each community college to assist students who have lived in foster care is one critical aspect of the Great Expectations program that makes the program so successful. Great Expectations only operates in Virginia's community colleges. However, it could be expanded to serve middle schools, high schools, and four-year colleges and universities. Each year, school counselors in middle and high schools need to be aware of which students have experienced, or are currently in, foster care. Sharing this information with a program like Great Expectations could facilitate frequent check-ins with students to make sure they are getting enough support in the areas of career awareness, identification of interests and skill strengths, job opportunities and income potential, emotional issues, education and training options available, financial assistance and resource programs, and so forth. In addition, school counselors should all be made aware of how important it is to support these youths, what to expect when working with these youths, how trauma impacts behavior, and what resources available on the iFoster App. Training on these topics, especially in trauma, will encourage more compassion and understanding when working with students who have experienced foster care. The Virginia Department of Education may be able to promote and provide this training in order to promote stronger success with these students.

Virginia's colleges and universities also need to have dedicated staff to assist with additional support when needed for their students who have a foster care background. The State Council of Higher Education may be able to use existing funds to study this possibility and determine how these support needs might be implemented. The stress of college in general is sometimes a trigger for PTSD. Having a support system in place for foster care youth alumni would be a proactive solution. College or university staff would be trained in the effects of trauma, learn about the resources needed to assist former foster care youth, and be knowledgeable about the iFoster App

and the resources included. Being proactive with support options just may prevent a youth from dropping out of college, or worse.

Quality Independent Living Programs do offer a great deal of support for youth transitioning out of foster care. These programs need to include a benchmark for success. Transitioning out of foster care requires a gradual process of mastering life skills and completing basic achievements, such as graduating from high school or earning an equivalency diploma and having a driver's license. Life skills need to be taught and supervised before the youth is on his/her own completely. These include managing personal finances (budgeting, saving, and owning a secured credit card); finding and maintaining stable housing; holding down a steady job while working to improve employment skills; ownership of vital records; permanency; emotional regulation and communication; finding affordable health care; and finding and maintaining reliable transportation. These best practice components can be included as standard metrics for all Independent Living programs in the state. The Virginia Social Services System could require standard metrics within a workforce development plan, partnering with their Independent Living colleagues. Standardizing and requiring these basic skills and accomplishments would go a long way to ensure long-term success for youth with a foster care background.

Youth in foster care or foster care alumni need to be a prioritized population with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds. These funds can help pay for work experience opportunities, occupational skills training, on-the-job training, GED and high school completion, tutoring and basic skills education, leadership development, financial literacy, career counseling and exploration services, preparation for post-secondary education, entrepreneurial skills training, apprenticeship opportunities, and supportive services. Virginia Career Works may be the best organization to lead this effort through the local workforce investment boards.

Foster care families receive a maintenance payment to provide for the basic needs for the foster child in their care. The Virginia Enhanced Maintenance Assessment Tool (VEMAT) is used to determine the need for, and amount of, enhanced maintenance when a child has a clearly-defined need that requires the parent to provide increased support and supervision due to the child's behavioral, emotional, or physical/personal care requirements. Children who enter foster care may have more needs due to the circumstances that led to their removal and the trauma associated with the removal. Over time, and with stable support in a foster care setting, it is expected that the child's support needs would decrease and the foster parent payments would decrease based on the improved VEMAT score. This is often viewed by foster parents as being penalized for a child's success. There may be a different way to assess progress. A stakeholder group of professionals would be the best group to study the assessment options. The stakeholder group could investigate ways to provide more flexibility regarding the foster care payment to address a wide variety of needs for hard-to-place children, including financial incentives for serving these children, and develop ways to ensure accurate documentation. Consideration should be given to current

assessment tools used in determining a child's needs such as the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) tool.

Transportation and child care are often huge barriers for many to maintain employment or attend educational programs. Youth with foster care experience are less likely to have access to reliable transportation and need assistance with maintaining a vehicle or finding rides to work or school. Research tells us that youth who leave foster care without their driver's license are less likely to make a successful transition to adulthood. Lack of transportation limits their housing, employment, and education options. This makes it difficult to establish work history or finish a degree or certificate program. Foster care youth need support in obtaining a driver's license. Foster care parents need financial assistance with insurance premium increases for a new driver in the family and driver's education, and education about what is required for a driver's license, as well as information about liability insurance. Funding may be available from Virginia's Fostering Futures Program to help with the cost of motor vehicle insurance. Transportation issues need to be discussed and solved so the youths can continue their education and job.

Child care is essential for parenting youth to hold down a job. Finding affordable and quality child care is always a challenge, but even more so with parenting youth who may not be able to pay as much for quality care. Currently, local departments of social services will assist parenting youth in foster care with child care costs either through IV-E funding or the Children's Services Act. When the youth is no longer in foster care these funding sources are no longer available. Parenting youth need assistance with navigating the child care options and any financial resources available for them. Without consistent child care, parents will not be able to work or go to school.

There are many ways to improve the current way Virginia transitions foster youth into the world of work. Support and preparation are key to success. There is no one magic solution, as every youth has unique strengths and needs. With the current findings and recommendations, Virginia will be well on its way to improving outcomes for young adults who have experienced foster care. The Virginia Commission on Youth supports youth having the resources and support that these youth need to earn a sustainable living and rise above any past hardships.

VII. Findings and Recommendations

After presenting findings and recommendations at the Commission on Youth's October 19, 2021, meeting and receipt of public comment by November 30, 2021, the Commission approved the following recommendations at its December 15, 2021, meeting:

Finding: There is a lack of communication and coordination of resources with state, local, and private agencies that offer services to those who are currently being served or have been served in the foster care system.

Recommendation 1: Direct the Virginia Department of Social Services, in cooperation with the Virginia Commission on Youth, Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, Department of Education, Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of Medical Assistance Services, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, the Department of Labor, the Virginia Community College System, including the Great Expectations Program, local workforce development boards, the League of Social Services Executives, private providers and advocacy groups to develop the iFoster Portal or an App with similar functionality to include Virginia- and locality-specific resources that are available for individuals who are currently being served or have been served in the foster care system, as well as for professionals serving the foster care population. Resources include workforce development assistance, educational opportunities, housing and living stipends or discounts, financial supports, internship and employment opportunities, and other resources that are available in Virginia for those involved in the foster care system. Update the App regularly with additional resources that are available to assist in the development of becoming a successful and independent adult. Ensure that all state and local agency employees working with foster care children, join and use the iFoster App with their foster care clients, assist foster care youth in subscribing to the App themselves, and remain current with newly added or updated resources.

Recommendation 2: Request the Virginia Social Services System (state and local departments of social services), through its regional and local offices, to identify workforce development organizations (such as Goodwill, Virginia Department of Labor and Industry’s Apprenticeship Program, Great Expectations, etc.) and other foster care transition support resources in each locality, add them to the iFoster App, and communicate those opportunities to the local agencies on at least an annual basis.

Finding: Private companies and non-profit agencies are willing to hire those who have been in foster care. These organizations need to better understand the challenges of youth who have experienced foster care by becoming trauma informed. This awareness training will facilitate a smooth transition into the work world for both parties and encourage the development of a graduated training structure and mentoring plan to ensure success. Many times employers do not understand trauma consequences that could impact the work habits and attitude of an employee. Employment or entrepreneurship support are critical to help foster care youth and young adults and alumni to be successful in their workplace. The Virginia Workforce Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center (VWIEC), an entity of Hampton University, in partnership with Old Dominion University, provides free services such as mentorship, education, networking, pitch competitions and assistance with financing strategies for adults who wish to become entrepreneurs. In addition, VWIEC provides supports for participants by removing barriers that restrict them, including child care, transportation, certification costs and business licensure fees.

Recommendation 3: Request that local workforce development boards recruit and engage potential employers who hire foster care young adults and alumni in training that includes the effects of trauma, related child care issues for parenting youth, and gradual accountability strategies for employment success. Encourage employers to work through challenges on work attendance and productivity with external job coaches to support workers in finding success.

Recommendation 4: Request the Workforce Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center to provide support for foster care young adults and alumni who need business assistance. Those working with young adults in the foster care system who are interested in starting their own business should connect the young adults to VWIEC.

Finding: Great Expectations is a nationally recognized program that helps Virginia’s foster youth earn the postsecondary credentials they need to achieve an independent and successful life. Currently, Great Expectations is available in 21 of the 23 Virginia Community Colleges and will be in all of the Community Colleges by the end of the year. Through the program, foster youth gain financial and additional supports needed to ensure their successful completion of the degree/credential sought. Currently, Virginia’s program is funded solely through private funding.

Recommendation 5: Introduce a budget amendment to develop a state-funded grant program for the Great Expectations Program. The Virginia Community College System (VCCS) shall develop the grant program to provide a range of funding for Community Colleges in the following areas: the hiring of college coaches or mentors; housing stipends; child care; and transportation needs. VCCS shall report to the Commission on Youth the outcomes of the grant program by November 30 each year.

Finding: A point of contact is needed in Virginia colleges and universities to assist those who have been in the foster care system. Students with a history of a traumatic childhood living in a variety of foster care situations often suffer from post-traumatic stress and need extra support while becoming independent and learning how to face life’s challenges while attending college, working, and sometimes taking care of a family.

Recommendation 6: Introduce a budget amendment to direct the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) to examine the feasibility of having a point of contact at each state and/or private college and university for those who have been involved in the foster care system. SCHEV shall investigate the possibility of using federal dollars (such as the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) for this purpose and report their findings to the Commission on Youth by November 30, 2022.

Finding: The Fostering Connections to Success Act and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 and Title I, Part A provisions in the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) is intended to ensure school stability for students in foster care, requiring child welfare agencies to

coordinate with school divisions. School counselors provide a critical link in assisting foster youth's educational and sustainable employment success.

Recommendation 7: Request that the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) provide virtual training for school counselors that includes trauma informed strategies for those working with students experiencing foster care, resources available with the iFoster App, and the importance of knowing these students and providing consistent checks and support. The Commission also requests that the VDOE partner with the Virginia Alliance for School Counseling (VASC) and the Virginia Department of Social Services to develop this training.

Recommendation 8: Request that the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) issue a memorandum that provides guidance to local school divisions regarding resources for school counselors on providing supports for students experiencing foster care, including the requirements of completing an interest inventory, the Career Connections course, and the Academic and Career Plan, as well as the updated guidance for the Profile of a Virginia Graduate (which establishes multiple paths toward college and career readiness for students to follow in the later years of high school, which could include opportunities for internships, externships, and credentialing). This guidance will also include resources on leveraging existing data and information on various career fields, job trends and salaries, and resources available to local school divisions from the Weldon Cooper Center and how to specifically support foster care youth and link to specific resources (such as the iFoster App, Fostering Futures, Great Expectations, successful independent living programs, etc.).

Finding: Quality Independent Living programs are beneficial to the youth and young adults who have experienced foster care by providing a gradual independence plan. These programs include standards of completion with requirements for a high school/GED diploma, driver's license and stable transportation, savings account, possession of a secured credit card, stable housing and employment, ownership of and access to vital records, and permanency.

Recommendation 9: Request that the Virginia Social Services System (VDSS and LDSS) review their requirements for foster care Independent Living programs in Virginia and include a gradual independence plan that includes these Standards of Completion. Quality Independent Living programs ensure that the youth are knowledgeable and have practical application experience with budgeting, housing solutions, job expectations, emotional regulation and management skills, transportation and health care options, communication skills, and problem-solving in the real world. Ensure each LDSS has a workforce development plan.

Finding: The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Youth Program is designed to serve low-income youth who face barriers to continued education and employment which includes those youth either in, or aged out of, the foster care system. Services provided through WIOA may include, but are not limited to, the following elements:

work experience opportunities; occupational skills training; on-the-job training; GED and high school completion options assistance; tutoring and basic skills education; leadership development opportunities; financial literacy; career counseling and exploration services; assistance with navigating child care options for parenting youth; post-secondary education preparation; entrepreneurial skills training; apprenticeship opportunities; and supportive services.

Recommendation 10: Request that Virginia Career Works, through the local workforce boards, prioritize and promote serving the foster care population with WIOA funding and other workforce development opportunities. **Finding:** Foster care families receive a maintenance payment to provide for the basic needs for the foster child in their care. The Virginia Enhanced Maintenance Assessment Tool (VEMAT) is used to determine the need for, and amount of, enhanced maintenance when a child has a clearly-defined need that requires the parent to provide increased support and supervision due to the child's behavioral, emotional, or physical/personal care requirements. When children first enter foster care, it is expected that their needs may be higher due to the circumstances that led to the child's removal and the impact of the removal itself. However, as the child stabilizes in the foster home and the child's needs are met consistently over time, it is expected that the child's ongoing need for support and supervision would decrease, and therefore the VEMAT score would decrease with subsequent reassessments. As a result, it may be viewed that foster families are financially penalized for a child's success.

Recommendation 11: Direct the Virginia Department of Social Services to convene a stakeholder group to determine the feasibility of adopting a new uniform assessment tool in determining the enhanced payments for children in foster care with additional needs. The stakeholder group shall consist of representatives from the Department of Social Services, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, Office of the Children's Services Act, Office of the Children's Ombudsman, private providers, licensed child placing agencies, local departments of social services, foster parents, and advocacy groups. The stakeholder group shall investigate ways to provide more flexibility regarding the foster care payment to address a wide variety of needs for hard to place children, including financial incentives for serving these children, and develop ways to ensure accurate documentation. Consideration should be given to current assessment tools used in determining a child's needs such as the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) tool.

Finding: Lack of transportation options provide a barrier for foster youth in trying to obtain an educational degree or employment. Evidence reveals that youth who leave foster care without their driver's license are less likely to make a successful transition to adulthood. These young adults are more likely to have limited housing, employment, and education choices. Without transportation it is difficult for those involved in the foster care system to get a job and establish a work history.

Recommendation 12: Introduce a budget amendment to support the development and implementation of a statewide driver’s licensing program to support foster care youth in obtaining a driver’s license. Funding shall be made available to local departments of social services to reimburse foster care providers for increases to their existing motor vehicle insurance premiums that occur because a foster care youth in their care has been added to their insurance policy. The program may also reimburse foster care providers for additional coverage (i.e., an umbrella policy or the equivalent) that provides liability protection should a foster care youth get into or cause a catastrophic accident. Additionally, funding shall be made available to foster care youth in Virginia’s Fostering Futures Program to assist in covering the cost of obtaining motor vehicle insurance. The Department of Social Services shall develop reimbursement policies for foster care providers and foster care youth. The Department shall coordinate and administer the driver’s licensing program based on best practices from similar programs in other states, to include developing educational or training materials that educate foster parents, private providers, and foster youth about 1) liability issues, insurance laws, and common insurance practices (to include laws about renewal and cancellation, how long an accident can affect premiums, how to establish that a foster youth is no longer living in the residence, and other applicable topics); 2) DMV requirements to obtain a learner’s permit and driver’s license; 3) what funding and resources are available to assist in this process, to include paying school lab fees for “Behind the Wheel” or paying a private driving education company; and 4) why getting a driver’s license on time is important for normalcy and a successful transition to adulthood. The Department shall provide information on how many foster care youth were supported by this program and any recommendations to improve the program to the Governor and Chairs of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees by November 30 each fiscal year.

Finding: Lack of access to child care is a barrier to successful employment for parenting youth/young adults. Finding and paying for quality child care is a barrier to holding a steady job or completing an education program. Currently, local departments of social services will assist parenting youth in foster care with child care costs either through IV-E funding or the Children’s Services Act. However, when the youth is no longer in foster care these funding sources are no longer available.

Recommendation 13: Request foster care workers and others working with youth experiencing foster care to identify child care resources for their parenting youth. Ensure that youth aging out of foster care are placed on the local child care assistance program waiting list prior to aging out of care.

VIII. Acknowledgments

The Virginia Commission on Youth extends appreciation to the members of the Advisory Group and those who were interviewed for their assistance on this study.

We also extend a special thank you to those who presented at Advisory Group meetings:

Fostering Acadia

Foster Youth Alumni

Great Expectations

iFoster

Youth Law Center

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Senate of Virginia

The Honorable Emily Brewer, Delegate, Co-chair
Virginia House of Delegates

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WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FOR FOSTER CARE YOUTH

SUMMARY OF PROGRAMS

Children’s Home Society of Virginia (CHSVA) **(<https://chsva.org/adopt-children/program-overview/>)**

Summary of workforce development services provided by CHSVA (My Path Forward Program):

- Obtaining employment – job searching, assistance with applications/resume preparation, preparations for interviews, identifying appropriate attire, connections with potential employers (partnership with The Success Foundation) etc.
- Life skills – understanding the importance of consistently being on time for work
- Financial management skills – building a savings, understanding and improving credit scores
- Long-term career planning – assist youth in identifying their own career goals, assistance obtaining certifications/education or appropriate experience through internships, apprenticeships, etc. to achieve long-term career goal

Fostering Acadia (<https://www.fosteringacadia.org/>)

Fostering Acadia opened in 2017 as a child placing agency for foster care youth ages 17-21. It is one of the largest Independent Living programs in Virginia. They serve older youth in foster care, providing supports, while focusing on permanency for them.

Harrisonburg-Rockingham Department of Social Services **(<https://www.rockinghamcountyva.gov/206/Social-Services>)**

In 1995, the jurisdictions of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County consolidated their social services departments, changing the name to Harrisonburg-Rockingham Social Services District. Their programs are locally administered and supervised by the Virginia Department of Social Services. Their mission is the promotion of self-reliance and protection of citizens through community-based services. Foster care services are provided for children in need. Services provided to children and their families may include counseling and treatment, day care, medical, education, employment, family planning, independent living, housing, respite care, legal, socialization and recreation services. Independent living services are services provided to older foster children (14 and older) to prepare them for transition into adulthood.

Juvenile Law Center – Philadelphia (<https://jlc.org/>)

The Juvenile Law Center recommends and supports policies that reunite youth with their families or, when needed, with other permanent healthy relationships. They advocate for age-appropriate and individualized youth support, services and rights in education, homelessness prevention, permanent “families” and reducing institutionalization for youth with disabilities.

Medworks (<https://www.medworkssurgical.com/company>)

Background: Medworks is a Surgical Sales and Laser Services Provider. The company hires highly skilled individuals that give support to surgeons in the Operating Room. The Admin department is also staffed with people possessing high level skills. Desiring to support the foster community, Medworks has been involved in several wrap-around initiatives. They have worked with Fostering Acadia, Fostering Hope, The Henrico Faith Partners, The Success Foundation, Virginia’s Kids Belong, Henrico DSS, and others.

Medworks created an entry level position to offer to a young person in an Independent Living (IL) program. The hope is to provide employment training, mentoring, and an opportunity for youths to excel with the possibilities of transitioning toward bigger goals and higher education. The first hire was from Fostering Acadia, and Medworks learned a great deal from the experience. The biggest takeaway was that the candidate was not ready for employment, not really understanding what it meant to hold down a job. While they became emotionally attached to this individual (and even now have established “permanency” so as to extend our personal relationship on into the future), the job situation did not go well, even though they worked with this individual for over a year. In hindsight, Medworks realized that they made false assumptions from the start and a lot of mistakes.

Medworks began working with Gary Powers (Executive Director of The Success Foundation) to create better pre-employment training, assessment, and preparedness for these potential hires. As a part of that work, the team created a document listing observations concerning the first hire. Medworks currently has an open employment position, and while it has been offered to multiple candidates, there has not yet been a hire, largely due to available candidates not being “job ready.” Job readiness is an important factor for both hiring and a successful outcome. Medworks has a great desire to seek solutions to minimize problems and maximize better outcomes. Medworks recognizes the role that trauma plays in each of these individuals and is willing to work with youths to address their issues as they arise on the job. In addition to providing employment within Medworks, the company is willing to promote hiring from this population outwardly to the business community as a regular practice. First, Medworks needs to improve pre-employment readiness in order to produce successful stories for presenting to potential employers.

A final thought about hiring from the IL population:

Among other “on the job” issues, a recurring theme resonated from Medworks’ first hire regarding the need for a job. In this person’s thinking, the job was not necessary. This would come up whenever there were training issues that required correction, i.e., being late, improper cell phone use, not following through with job duties, leaving early, etc., basic job expectations. The honest observation was that this person was correct: the job was not needed as a means for providing necessary income, as everything was provided in abundance for the individual. Additionally, the employee was not able to see the job as an opportunity to gain skill, experience, and achievement. There was a clear disconnect between this thinking and the real world that Medworks had hoped to be preparing the individual to enter. For “employment ready candidates” there needs to be some requirement, consequence (both positive and negative), acknowledgment, and reinforcement regarding the importance and necessity of holding a job successfully.

Richmond City Department of Social Services (<https://www.rva.gov/>)

Richmond City Independent Living (IL) Services assist youth ages 14 – 26 through the Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood. The following services are offered through the grant:

The Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood was established to provide youth ages 14 – 26 years of age with opportunities to learn needed skills and increase the likelihood of successful transition from foster care to independence. Youth can be best prepared by learning about both the challenges and the opportunities in the following areas and service evaluation opportunities:

- Coordinating workforce development trainings facilitated by VA Project LIFE
- Serving as a conduit for resources and employment opportunities

- Employment search navigation, resume building, and business dress attire support
- Transportation (assisting with workplace commute via contracted transportation or car purchases/insurance)
- Post-Secondary Education supports
- Establishment of Social Supports and Community Connections
- Administering the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) is a federally mandated survey program that examines outcomes for teens and young adults in foster care.
- Administering the Youth Exit Survey to learn about the relationships, resources, activities, and overall experiences of youth who have been in foster care.

Resources for Independent Living Services:

- <https://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/fc/independent.cgi>
- <https://dss.virginia.gov/fmf/>
- <https://www.casey.org/casey-life-skills-resources/>
- <https://www.vaprojectlife.org/>
- <https://greatexpectations.vccs.edu/>

[The Success Foundation \(TSF\) of Virginia \(https://www.successva.org/\)](https://www.successva.org/)

The Success Foundation of Virginia is a 501(c)3 organization that works with young adults who have come through the foster care system. TSF meets with young adults to review previous education and employment experiences, identify their strengths and skills (using the YouScience Assessment), discuss job and career goals, and assist them with learning how to build a foundation to succeed. An individualized plan using available community resources is created. The plan provides the steps for the young adult to earn a certification or associate degree with the goal of earning a sustainable living to be independent. Mentors are essential to the young adults’ success. TSF provides training and support services in soft skills, finance, and resume-writing, as well as connects the young adults to RVA employers. TSF partners with Fostering Acadia (providing mentoring) and the Children’s Home Society of Virginia (mentoring participants in My Path Forward). All supports and services are provided pro bono.

[Virginia Commonwealth University, School of Social Work \(https://socialwork.vcu.edu/\)](https://socialwork.vcu.edu/)

With more than 500 community partners throughout Richmond, the state and beyond, VCU’s School of Social Work exposes students to a wide range of social work perspectives, environments and communities that can sharpen their skills as practitioners and help them find the right fit for those skills. Partners include organizations that work with foster care children and youth, such as United Methodist Family Services (serves emotionally and behaviorally challenged children with 24-hour intensive treatment, treatment foster care, adoption, in-home family services, school based services and a variety of support services for at-risk children and families) and Commonwealth Catholic Charities (includes therapeutic foster care, home care, mental health counseling, domestic violence services, homeless services, refugee assistance, and emergency services).

**[Virginia Community College System \(https://www.vccs.edu/\)](https://www.vccs.edu/)
Workforce Programs Limited to Youth with Foster Care Experience:**

**[Joe and Linda Daniel Success Fund FastForward Pilot \(https://www.fastforwardva.org/\), and](https://www.fastforwardva.org/)
<https://greatexpectations.vccs.edu/>**

The purpose of this grant is to support a cohort of at least 40 Great Expectations students over two years with a strong commitment to completing a FastForward workforce credential. Each of 21 participating colleges is to nominate 2 students with the potential to be successful in FastForward programs knowing that student support services, the coach, and additional funds will be available to support them while they attend college. Students will receive an estimated \$750 per month for up to 14 months (with declining support in the final three months) to support living expenses in addition to educational expenses not covered by other financial aid. Students will work individually with their coach to develop a budget and determine support needs for the length of their FastForward program.

Virginia Tuition Grant for Former Foster Youth

(http://greatexpectations.vccs.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/vatuitiongrantflyer_rev_2.pdf)

In 2000, legislation passed that created the Tuition Grant program to provide tuition and fees at any Virginia community college for high school graduates or GED completers in foster care or the custody of a social services agency or considered a special needs adoption. This legislation was revised in 2009 and again in 2017 to cover non-credit workforce credentials.

Workforce Programs NOT Limited to Youth with Foster Care Experience:

FastForward (<https://www.fastforwardva.org/>)

FastForward programs are short-term (often 6-12 weeks) training courses for high-demand industries offered through Virginia's Community Colleges.

G3 (<https://www.vccs.edu/g3/>)

G3 is a training and education program for students with a family income of less than \$100,000 to help prepare them for high-demand careers in Virginia. This is a "last dollar" program which covers any remaining tuition and fees after other grants are used.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

WIOA funding is used to coordinate employment and training services across a variety of state and federal agencies resulting in increased access to training, education and support resources for learners/job seekers to succeed in the job market and their careers. WIOA funds are another source of financial aid for students who do not receive Pell Grants, and can be used to assist eligible students with tuition, books and occupational supplies.

Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (<https://www.vadars.org/>)

The Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) offers Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and transition services under the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program. Pre-ETS is designed to help students with disabilities explore jobs and identify career interests before their transition into the workforce. Beginning at age 14 through age 21 (or 22 under certain criteria), students with a documented disability may work with DARS at no cost for job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences and readiness training, counseling on postsecondary education and training opportunities, and instruction in self-advocacy. DARS partners with the students, families, their schools, and community partners to coordinate job exploration opportunities. Transition services under the VR Program include a coordinated set of outcome-oriented activities for students and youth with disabilities (aged 14-24) that promote movement from school to post-school activities. Post-school activities might consist of postsecondary education, vocational training, competitive integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living or community participation. Transition services must facilitate the achievement of the student's outcomes as written in

their Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), as well as the engagement of parents or official representatives of the student or youth with disability.

Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) (<https://www.doe.virginia.gov/>)

VDOE supports a variety of initiatives, programs and resources to assist workforce development for all students in Virginia public schools. These programs focus on career and technical education to help students who are transitioning to vocational training, post-secondary education and the workforce. The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) develops more fully the academic knowledge and technical employability skills of secondary education students and postsecondary education students who choose to enroll in career and technical education programs or programs of study. Local school divisions receive federal allocations for these programs directly with monitoring by VDOE. Secondary transition programs are sponsored by the VDOE and focus on preparing students who have disabilities for success after their pre-K-12 education. Students are supported to think about life after high school, identify their desired outcomes, and plan their use of community resources to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to achieve their goals. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) includes transition components in legislation with the goal of preparing students with disabilities to access supports and services so they may become as independent as possible.

Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice, Post-Secondary Programs (<http://www.djj.virginia.gov/pages/admin/ed-post-secondary.htm>)

The Post-Secondary Programs offered by the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice provides quality learning opportunities designed to prepare residents for fields of study that require rigorous mastery of both academic and technical skills that are needed for today's workforce. On-site training programs that help residents grow and achieve higher skill levels are provided. These training programs help build leadership skills to be an effective employee; teach practical skills and abilities for the job; issue certificates, certifications, and industry credentials; and offer college credit. Courses include the National Retail Certification, National Professional Certification in Customer Service, National ServSafe Certification and Culinary Cook Training, Financial Literacy, Veterinary Assistant, Microsoft Office Specialist, Fiber Optics and Cabling, and Service Dog Handler.

Virginia Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI) (<https://www.doli.virginia.gov/>)

The Registered Apprenticeship (RA) model is an "earn while you learn" model where an employee can become competent in a specific occupation. DOLI does not consider this a workforce development program because it is not generic, but specific to the occupation. Apprenticeship provides mentorship, a paycheck, and inclusion in the business culture on day one. The first customer in the RA model is the Employer/Sponsor who chooses to register in DOLI's system. Once XYZ corporation registers, the occupation needs to be registered, which must be on the Apprenticeable Occupation listing as provided by the U.S. Department of Labor. Once that is done, the Employer will either select an incumbent worker to be the apprentice, or recruit for an apprentice. It is the Employer's/Sponsor's job to recruit and select their apprentices. Upon selection, the individual apprentice can then be registered. DOLI is the State Apprenticeship Agency that administers this nationwide program, but the participating employers provide the direct apprenticeship. The outreach goal is to connect young adults with resources and knowledge about how to search for RA opportunities before they age-out of the foster care program. The potential apprentice needs to add RA to their job search.

Virginia Department of Social Services, Division of Family Services
(<https://www.dss.virginia.gov/>)

The Virginia Department of Social Services' (VDSS) Division of Family Services provides the John H. Chafee Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee Program) and the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program. The Chafee Program is a part of the VDSS Foster Care and Fostering Futures Program for youth who experience foster care at age 14 or older (typically for ages 14-18 but can go up to age 23 if certain criteria are met). Services are based on a formal life skills assessment to determine strengths and needs. Flexible funding may be used for academic support, career preparation, employment and vocational training programs, housing education, home management training, financial management skills training, substance abuse prevention, and preventative health activities. Many youth use the Program to build their skills for a vocational or trade program through classes and on-site training in the school setting, or commercial or private sectors. The ETV Program provides financial assistance to cover post-secondary education (college/university) and vocational training programs for youth who hold a high school diploma or GED and meet the specific foster care criteria. Generally, eligible youth include foster care youth ages 14-21, those aging out of Foster Care and Fostering Futures, ages 18-25; and youth at least 16 who were adopted or entered the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGap). The ETV Program extends eligibility to youth up until their 26th birthday, while placing a five-year limit on the total length of time a youth can receive funding. Vouchers provided to individuals may be available for the cost of attending an institution of higher education (as defined in section 472 of the Higher Education Act) and shall not exceed \$5,000 per eligible youth per year, or the total cost of attendance (whichever is less). Applicants must maintain a 2.0 grade point average or make satisfactory progress and complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), if applicable, and must apply annually to remain eligible. ETV funds can be used to cover tuition and fees, room and board, rental or purchase of required educational materials or supplies, books and transportation, special study educational project requirements, child care and other related expenses.

The challenges and gaps for older youth are many, including the following:

1. Workers may not be aware of workforce development programs, employment opportunities, community resources and funding to assist youth in obtaining meaningful employment.
2. Youth may lack the skills and support needed to hold a steady job or lack the academic preparation to attend college or vocational training programs.
3. A strategic coordination of programs in skill development and services is needed for older youth and young adults in and transitioning out of foster care.

Virginia Employment Commission (<https://www.vec.virginia.gov/>)

The Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) organizes a lot of information about the Virginia workforce, unemployment, and job opportunities. This agency researches the labor market, provides economic and demographic data, and compares information over time between regions. VEC provides information about which industries and occupations are growing, training opportunities, resume-writing resources and more. Virginia Career Works is one of the Programs within VEC.

Virginia Career Works (<https://virginiacareerworks.com/>)

Virginia Career Works is a program within the Virginia Employment Commission. The program prepares and connects people with employers through its network of professional partners and training providers. Virginia Career Works is Virginia's vital link between meaningful employment and growing businesses, changing lives and advancing economic prosperity. Eight agencies collaborate on Virginia's workforce needs, including the Virginia Departments of: Social Services,

Aging and Rehabilitative Services, Blind and Vision Impaired, Labor and Industry, and Education; as well as the Economic Development Partnership, Virginia Employment Commission, and the Virginia Community College System. These organizations assist employers in recruiting Virginia's talent, assist job seekers in finding jobs, and assist policymakers in locating the information they need to make solid decisions.

Virginia's Kids Belong (<https://www.vakidsbelong.org/>)

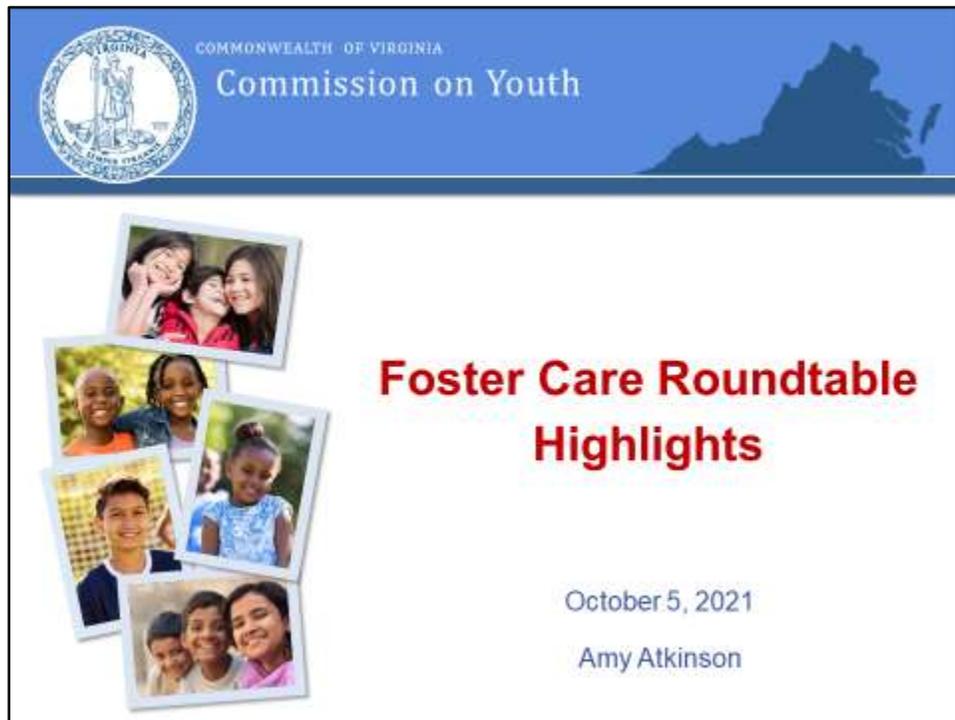
Virginia's Kids Belong (VKB) is the third state effort of America's Kids Belong, advocating for Virginia's children and families so that every child might have a place to belong. VKB empowers leaders in government, faith-based organizations, businesses, and the creative sectors to end the crisis for kids in foster care. America's Kids Belong is a 501(c)3 organization that mobilizes government, faith-based, business and creative leaders around the goal of permanency and belonging for every child. Combining grassroots and "grasstops" methods, America's Kids Belong runs innovative initiatives in states to help ensure that every child is in a loving home by: recruiting more foster and adoptive families, engaging wrap-around support for at-risk, foster & adoptive families along the way, and helping youth who have aged out without a family to reach their full potential.

Virginia Poverty Law Center (<https://vplc.org/>)

Virginia Poverty Law Center (VPLC) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization committed to breaking down systemic barriers that keep low-income Virginians in the cycle of poverty. Since 1978, VPLC has advocated on behalf of low-income Virginians, assisting state legal aid programs with legislative proposals that impact the poor, and provided training and resources in the following areas of law: consumer rights and protection, domestic and sexual violence, elder rights and resources, families, health, housing, and public benefits. VPLC is a clearinghouse of information on these issues. Staff members lead advocacy efforts in the courts and within legislative and administrative agencies, often collaborating with other groups across the Commonwealth. VPLC is the only statewide organization providing training to local legal aid program staff, private attorneys, and low-income clients relating exclusively to the legal rights of low-income Virginians. During each session of the Virginia General Assembly, VPLC staff work with lawmakers and advocate for bills that benefit low-income Virginians.

Voices for Virginia's Children (<https://vakids.org/>)

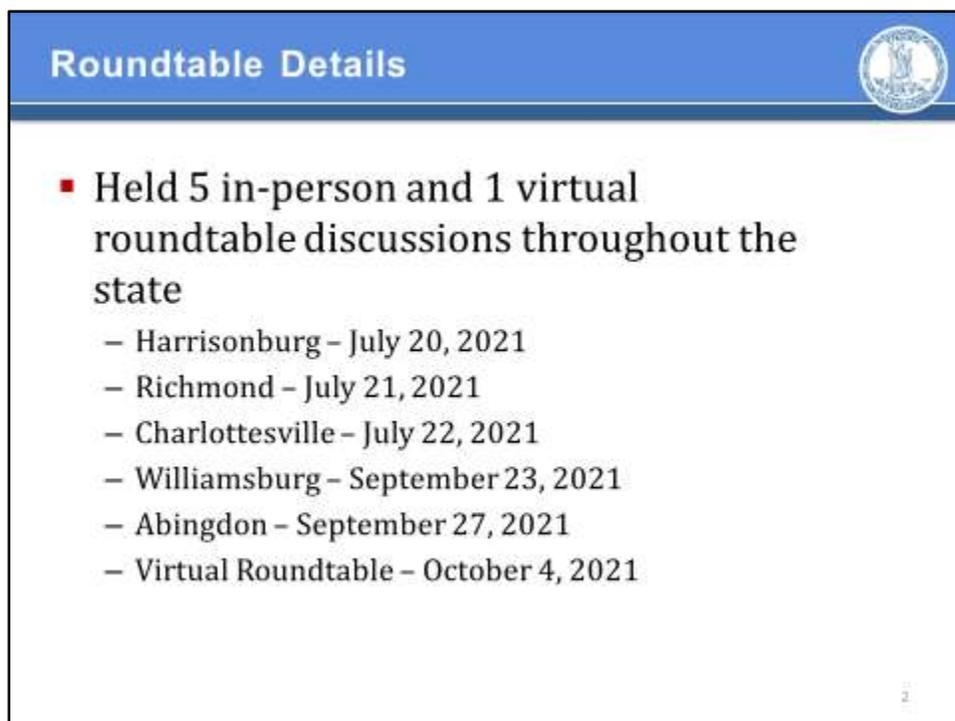
Voices for Virginia's Children is the commonwealth's only independent, multi-issue child policy and advocacy organization. They are the KIDS COUNT data center for Virginia, which includes more than 200 state- and locality-level indicators on child well-being over time. Using this data and independent policy research, Voices for Virginia's Children determines unmet needs and threats to child well-being, recommends sound policy solutions, provides objective input to policymakers, and educates and mobilizes leaders and concerned citizens to support policy initiatives. They focus on children whose needs are often overlooked, concentrating efforts on policies in the areas of early childhood, foster care and adoption, health and mental health, and family economic security.



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
Commission on Youth

**Foster Care Roundtable
Highlights**

October 5, 2021
Amy Atkinson



Roundtable Details

- Held 5 in-person and 1 virtual roundtable discussions throughout the state
 - Harrisonburg – July 20, 2021
 - Richmond – July 21, 2021
 - Charlottesville – July 22, 2021
 - Williamsburg – September 23, 2021
 - Abingdon – September 27, 2021
 - Virtual Roundtable – October 4, 2021

2

Participants



- **Total Participants with VCOY Staff:**
 - 18 Foster Care Youth, Young Adults, or Alumni
 - 1 Legislator
 - 2 LDSS Directors
 - 7 Local Department of Social Services Foster Care Supervisors and Staff
 - 9 Non-profit Organization Representatives (Fostering Acadia, Goodwill, Impact Living Services, Virginia Career Works, VCU, Voices for Virginia's Children)
 - 5 Community College/Great Expectations Representatives
 - 1 Higher Education Advocate

3

Harrisonburg – July 20, 2021



- More funding is needed to recruit foster care families in the community in which the youths already have connections and support.
- Students need consistent and engaged caseworkers at the school and in the local department of social services to provide the logistical and emotional support needed.
- Students in foster care are finding it difficult to graduate high school due to the lack of universal curricula, credit systems and term schedules across Virginia school divisions.
- Students need to be exposed to a variety of careers and vocations at a young age (12-14 years old) to be successful in determining their strengths and interests to pursue sustainable employment for the future.
- Students need engaging life skills training/mentoring/coaching to help prepare them for independent living. Gradually decreasing financial assistance over time encourages students to prepare for independence.

4

Harrisonburg Cont'd.



- Foster care youth are turning 18 without credit history to secure housing or car loans. Affordable housing is often non-existent.
- Youth who are in residential foster care facilities are even less prepared for independent living as everything is done for them in the group home.
- Youth do not know about the resources available to them, such as Great Expectations.
- Social-emotional support needs are not being met for these youth.
- Rural areas of the state do not have reliable transportation for the youth to get to work and go to post-secondary school.
- Youth are not always given the opportunity to reunify with birth parents.
- The iFoster App would be very helpful.

5

Richmond – July 21, 2021



- Funding for Foster care youth needs to be mapped out.
- Independent Living Programs are not being held to a "standard of completion." Eight domains are recommended by Fostering Acadia to hold programs accountable:
 - Education Completion
 - Driver's License and owning a vehicle
 - Savings- at least \$1K
 - Creating Credit History with a secured credit card
 - Stable Housing
 - Stable Employment
 - Having Copies and Access to Vital Records
 - Permanency

6

Richmond Cont'd.



- Foster care youth are not taking advantage of programs (Penn Foster Online K-12, Project Life, Speak Out, Fostering Futures, etc.).
- Need to hold foster families accountable for earnestly helping their foster youths with academics, life skills, and exploring their community and the world. There is a need for tutoring and education/emotional supports.
- A separate advocate is needed for the youth because there is no "right of appeal" for the youths. A Children's Ombudsman program might help.
- Workforce exploration and development needs to start earlier (age 14 years old at least). Foster care youth need help finding a job that they are interested in.
- Training in finding kinship/relatives is needed for local caseworkers.

7

Charlottesville – July 27, 2021



- Trauma-informed Care (TIC) directives are needed for all agencies working with foster care youth.
- Need a holistic approach to working with foster youth (emotional, logistical, housing, physical health, life skills, etc.).
- Virginia punishes instead of rewards foster families.
- Need better use of the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act for ages 16-24.
- Need training for job core skills (LEAP).
- Need more case managers in the field.
- Use Fostering Futures more strategically.

8

Williamsburg – September 23, 2021



- Need high quality and relevant life skills classes.
- Need programs to foster self-worth and build intrinsic motivation. These students need social-emotional support.
- Need for an Independent Living coach or mentor for each foster youth to provide support and guidance. Housing discounts and initiatives would be helpful. (Perhaps work with faith communities to help mentor and coach these youth.)
- A designated point of contact at each institution of higher education (IHE) for student support would foster success.
- Publicize resources for foster youth-iFoster App sounds great!
- Establish levels of exposure to the world and community—perhaps a small activities stipend.

8

Abingdon – September 27, 2021



- Middle and high school students in foster care are not finding out about the career and financial resources available to them (Great Expectations, Fostering Futures, etc.).
- Social workers are not providing social-emotional and career guidance.
- Great Expectations and other funding needs to be more flexible to meet unique needs of foster care students.
- The housing stipend offered by Great Expectations has been a great success.
- A point of contact at colleges and universities is needed.
- The Great Expectations program provides a pathway for success.

10

Virtual Roundtable – October 4, 2021



- Students would benefit from dedicated career counseling, and it needs to start in 8th grade.
- Popular vocational programs are often at capacity; students in foster care are left out (e.g., Certified Nursing Assistant--CNA).
- Foster parents need training on career resources/options.
- Funding to explore hobbies could lead to more meaningful career choices.
- Youth in foster care need to know their rights, as well as strategic thinking, problem-solving, project management, and other high functioning skills.
- Grants and support for business start-ups are needed.
- Need to work with undocumented foster care sooner on obtaining necessary paperwork.

11

Common Themes from Roundtables



- Foster care youth and young adults need a way to learn about and connect with financial, emotional, educational, and other support programs, coaches and mentors in their community.
- Funding is needed to increase flexible support for Great Expectations, decrease foster care case loads, and improve access to community resources.
- Better communication and data sharing across state agencies, schools, and organizations for foster care youth is warranted.
- Accountability standards for foster families and Independent Living organizations must be developed and enforced.
- Consistent mentors and coaches create stability and a safety net for each youth and young adult who has experienced foster care.

12

Common Themes Cont'd.



- Virginia school guidance counselors, public and private, need to provide standard career exploration, exposure to a variety of career fields, and interest assessments for every student.
- Each Institution of Higher Education (IHE) needs to have a dedicated and reliable support coordinator for young adults who have experienced foster care.
- Life skills classes need to be timely, relevant, engaging and emulate real-life situations.
- Meaningful Independent Living (IL) experience is needed that prepares youth for independence.
- Local workforce development boards should prioritize the foster care population.

13



ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Draft Findings and Recommendations

14

Finding and Recommendations



Finding: There is a lack of communication and coordination of resources with state, local, and private agencies that offer services to those who are currently being served or have been served in the foster care system.

Recommendation 1:

Develop the iFoster Portal/App to include Virginia- and locality-specific resources that are available for individuals who are currently being served or have been served in the foster care system, as well as for professionals serving the foster care population. Resources include workforce development assistance, educational opportunities, housing and living stipends or discounts, financial supports, internship and employment opportunities, and other resources that are available in Virginia for those involved in the foster care system. Update the App regularly with additional resources that are available to assist in the development of becoming a successful and independent adult. Ensure that all state and local agency employees working with foster care children, join and use the iFoster App with their foster care clients, assist foster care youth in subscribing to the App themselves, and remain current with newly added or updated resources.

15

Finding and Recommendations



Finding: There is a lack of communication and coordination of resources with state, local, and private agencies that offer services to those who are currently being served or have been served in the foster care system.

Recommendation 2:

Request the Virginia Social Services System (state and local departments of social services) through its regional and local offices, to identify workforce development organizations (such as Goodwill, Virginia Department of Labor and Industry's Apprenticeship Program, Great Expectations, etc.) and other foster care transition support resources in each locality, add them to the iFoster App, and communicate those opportunities to the local agencies on at least an annual basis.

16

Finding and Recommendations



Finding: Private companies and non-profit agencies are willing to hire those who have been in foster care. These organizations need to better understand the challenges of youth who have experienced foster care by becoming trauma informed. This awareness training will facilitate a smooth transition into the work world for both parties and encourage the development of a graduated training structure and mentoring plan to ensure success.

Recommendation 3:

Engage potential employers who hire foster care alumni in trauma-informed and accountability strategies training for employment success.

17

Finding and Recommendations



Finding: Great Expectations is a nationally recognized program that helps Virginia's foster youth earn the postsecondary credentials they need to achieve an independent and successful life. Currently, Great Expectations is available in 21 of the 23 Virginia Community Colleges and will be in all of the Community Colleges by the end of the year. Through the program, foster youth gain financial and additional supports needed to ensure their successful completion of the degree/credential sought. Currently, Virginia's program is funded solely through private funding.

Recommendation 4:

Introduce a budget amendment to develop a state-funded grant program for the Great Expectations Program. The Virginia Community College System (VCCS) shall develop the grant program to provide a range of funding for Community Colleges in the following areas: the hiring of college coaches or mentors; housing stipends; and transportation needs. VCCS shall report to the Commission on Youth the outcomes of the grant program by November 30 each year.

18

Finding and Recommendations



Finding: A point of contact is needed in Virginia colleges and universities to assist those who have been in the foster care system. Students with a history of a traumatic childhood living in a variety of foster care situations often suffer from post-traumatic stress and need extra support while becoming independent and learning how to face life's challenges while attending college, working, and sometimes taking care of a family.

Recommendation 5:

Introduce a budget amendment to direct the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) to examine the feasibility of having a point of contact at each state and/or private college and university for those who have been involved in the foster care system. SCHEV shall investigate the possibility of using federal dollars (such as the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) for this purpose and report their findings to the Commission on Youth by November 30, 2022.

18

Finding and Recommendations



Finding: The Fostering Connections to Success Act and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 and Title I, Part A provisions in the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) is intended to ensure school stability for students in foster care, requiring child welfare agencies to coordinate with school divisions. School counselors provide a critical link in assisting foster youth's educational and sustainable employment success.

Recommendation 6:

Request the Virginia School Counselor Association include training at its annual conference on foster care. The training should include trauma informed strategies for those working with students experiencing foster care, resources available with the iFoster App, and the importance of knowing these students and providing consistent checks and support. A representative from Great Expectations and Social Services should be invited to assist with this training.

20

Finding and Recommendations



Finding: The Fostering Connections to Success Act and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 and Title I, Part A provisions in the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) is intended to ensure school stability for students in foster care, requiring child welfare agencies to coordinate with school divisions. School counselors provide a critical link in assisting foster youth's educational and sustainable employment success.

Recommendation 7:

Request that all Virginia middle and high schools have dedicated guidance counselors who can provide consistent workforce development coaching for students experiencing foster care, including interest and strength surveys, exposure to various career fields, job trends and salaries, and resources available to the foster care population (such as the iFoster App, Fostering Futures, Great Expectations, successful independent living programs, etc.).

21

Finding and Recommendations



Finding: Quality Independent Living programs are beneficial to the youth and young adults who have experienced foster care by providing a gradual independence plan. These programs include standards of completion with requirements for a high school/GED diploma, driver's license and stable transportation, a savings account, possession of a secured credit card, stable housing and employment, ownership of and access to vital records, and permanency.

Recommendation 8:

Request that the Virginia Social Services System (VDSS and LDSS) review their requirements for foster care Independent Living programs in Virginia and include a gradual independence plan that includes these Standards of Completion. Quality Independent Living programs ensure that the youth are knowledgeable and have practical application experience with budgeting, housing solutions, job expectations, emotional regulation and management skills, transportation and health care options, communication skills, as well as problem-solving in the real world. Ensure each LDSS has a workforce development plan.

22

Finding and Recommendations



Finding: The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Youth Program is designed to serve low-income youth who face barriers to continued education and employment which includes those either in or aged out of the foster care system. Services provided through WIOA may include, but not limited to, the following elements: work experience opportunities; occupational skills training; on-the-job training; GED and high school completion options assistance; tutoring and basic skills education; leadership development opportunities; financial literacy; career counseling and exportation services; post-secondary education preparation; entrepreneurial skills training; apprenticeship opportunities; and supportive services.

Recommendation 9:

Request that Virginia Career Works, through the local workforce boards, prioritize serving the foster care population with WIOA funding and other workforce development opportunities.



VIRGINIA COMMISSION ON YOUTH

Meeting Minutes

Advisory Group: Workforce Development for Foster Care Youth

June 21, 2021, 1:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

(virtual meeting)

Attending:

Senator Barbara Favola (Co-chair), Delegate Emily Brewer (Co-chair), Suzanne Bednar, Jason Brown (VEC), Cassie Cunningham, Delegate Karrie Delaney, Erykah Ewing, Delegate Elizabeth Guzman, Tiffany Haynes, Vanessa Johnson, Brooks Kirkwood, Valerie L’Herrou, Senator Monty Mason, Leah Mills, Patricia Morrison, Sarah Morton, Amber Pajouhandeh, Gary Powers, Brent Rolsten, Donna Shires, Rachel Strawn, Alex Wagaman, Celest Williams, Deana Williams

Not Attending:

Jason Brown (Fostering Acadia)

Staff Attending:

Amy Atkinson, Will Egen, Kathy Gillikin

I. Welcome and Introductions

The Honorable Barbara Favola, Senator, Senate of Virginia

The Honorable Emily Brewer, Delegate, House of Delegates

Senator Favola and Delegate Brewer welcomed the Advisory Group to the virtual meeting. Senator Favola emphasized the incredible importance of foster youth having a pathway forward with a career field that fits their skills, enabling self-sufficiency to support themselves and their family. She thanked the 30 stakeholder members for their work with foster care youth. Delegate Brewer thanked all representatives, especially the foster youth panelist, for her participation in this purposeful and thoughtful work, assisting the most vulnerable. Senator Favola and Delegate Brewer are ready to move forward with the recommendations that come out of this group.

II. Foster Care Panel

Brent Rolsten, Moderator, Fostering Acadia

Amber Pajouhandeh, Foster Care Youth

Senator Favola and Delegate Brewer welcomed Senator Monty Mason and Delegates Elizabeth Guzman and Karrie Delaney for their leadership for a better transition process to the workforce for foster care youth. Senator Favola asked Amy Atkinson, Executive Director of the Virginia Commission on Youth, to introduce the Foster Care Panel. Ms. Atkinson introduced Brent Rolsten, Executive Assistant with Fostering Acadia.

Mr. Rolsten explained that he is representing Fostering Acadia as an extension of Jason Brown, the founder and CEO. Fostering Acadia is an independent living organization that currently works with 50 foster youths, ages 17-21, to help them become self-sustainable and successful. Fostering Acadia has seen very good results using individual coaches and mentors for each youth. Youths who come into the Program in their late teens or early twenties may enter the Acadia Homes Program beyond age 21.

Mr. Rolsten introduced a current foster care youth in the Fostering Acadia Independent Living (IL) Program, Amber Pajouhandeh, and asked her questions about her foster care experiences. Ms. Pajouhandeh described how she came to be in foster care at the age of 16. She had earned her GED certificate and was assigned to an amazing social worker through the Richmond Department of Social Services.

At age 17, the social worker suggested Ms. Pajouhandeh talk to Fostering Acadia's CEO, Jason Brown, to determine eligibility for their IL Program. Fostering Acadia's Independent Living Program was mutually agreed to be a good fit so she joined the Program. At 18, Ms. Pajouhandeh became pregnant and now has a child. With her savings and financial help from Fostering Acadia and her local department of social services, Ms. Pajouhandeh was able to find a job and buy a reliable car. She has turned her life around and would like to help improve the Virginia process for transitioning from foster care to employment and independent living. Fostering Acadia facilitates sustained positive relationships with a mentor well beyond the age of 21.

The challenges that Ms. Pajouhandeh mentioned include the following:

- finding affordable child care at age 18 for her young daughter (Some DSS will only cover part of the child care costs.)
- difficulty obtaining a driver's license
- assistance with health care for herself and her child
- finding sustainable employment during and after her pregnancy
- knowing how to get and keep a steady job
- finding affordable transportation that is reliable
- finding a concerned and invested case worker/s who will advocate for youths and find available resources that will help, especially moving from home to a group home
- having a good mentor that will stick with the youth no matter what
- knowing how to keep a budget, save money, and write a resume
- having a support system/sustainable positive relationships through and after age 21

This interview may be found at the following link: [Meeting Video Archive](#).

III. Great Expectations: Recent Initiatives

Rachel Mayes Strawn, Ph.D., Great Expectations Program Coordinator & Director Virginia Community College System

Delegate Emily Brewer introduced Dr. Rachel Strawn. Dr. Strawn explained how the Great Expectations Program helps high school students navigate college, coaching them for a variety of certifications and degrees, including community college degrees, specialty certifications, bachelor's and master's degrees. The Program began in 2008 and is currently at 21 of the 23 community colleges, with hopes to add the last two community colleges next year. With large percentages of foster care youth ending up in bad situations (59% incarcerated, 31% homeless and 60% relying on public assistance), Great Expectations fills a need by assisting with college admissions, making resource connections, finding affordable housing, and finding mental health services.

Dr. Strawn's presentation included information on Single Stop, the Gilliam Housing Initiative, the Daniel Success Fund FastForward Pilot, and the Virginia Tuition Grant for Foster Care Youth. This presentation can be accessed on the Commission's webpage under the Meetings tab.

This presentation may be found at the following link: [Great Expectations Presentation](#)

IV. Foster Care Workforce Development: A National Perspective

Jennifer Pokempner, Policy Director, Youth Law Center
Serita Cox, Co-Founder & CEO, iFoster

Senator Favola introduced Jennifer Pokempner to provide a national perspective on funding streams, strategies across the country and how to build and expand programs for foster care youth transitioning to adulthood. Ms. Pokempner described the barriers to success for foster care youth. Some of the factors to positive outcomes include access to high quality and stable education, stable and consistent relationship connections, connections to gain work experience, tailored supports, and the inclusion of foster care youth in the program design.

Ms. Pokempner emphasized the need for leveraging federal funding streams with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to provide family support and funds for ancillary support, leverage connections across systems, enable specialized support people and programs, eliminate barriers for eligibility, develop built-in ancillary training opportunities in every program (e.g., soft skills), and engage employers with training, support, recognition and tax credits. There is an unintentional screen-out of foster care youth. Foster Care, Juvenile Justice, and workforce liaisons are needed in the child welfare agency.

Delegate Brewer introduced Serita Cox to discuss the jobs program, seamless workforce development for foster care youth, and braided federal funding. Ms. Cox provided some background of iFoster and how they started as a national organization in 2010 and now provide an online resource portal for foster care families and organizations. Their goal is for

every child to have what is needed to become independent and successful with competitive and permanent employment. The portal serves 30,000 families and 14,000 foster care youth who annually consume \$125M in resources. Youth carry their documents with them in the portal with over 500 resources.

The iFoster Program Model includes 7 steps with a single entry in the portal. For Preemployment there are 4 steps: Employer Needs Assessment, Youth Job Soft and Life Skills Training (How Do I... training), Necessary Resources Provided, Youth Assessment Readiness. For On the Job, there are 3 steps: Youth Job Matching/Confidence-Building, Applications and Interviews, and Ongoing Coaching/Resource Support. iFoster provides the tracking for each step. They established a Transition Age Youth (TAY) Americorps Program as an internship experience with peer coaches, and to find a path into the public sector, do social work, and work in mental health or healthcare. Funding is braided with SNAP employment and training, Workforce Investment Board's on-the-job training, and other money sources (e.g., TAY Americorps, Chafee ETV, Apprenticeship Program, vocational training, Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services for individuals with disabilities, YouthBuild). Braided funding helps develop a more strategic plan and allows scaffolding to prepare for a job. Ms. Cox is willing to share a draft Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) waiver request to reduce out-of-school funds to 50% so that the remainder can be used to educate/train foster care youth. Curricula, metrics and goals must be aligned across partnership programs for each youth.

Alex Wagaman asked how iFoster prepares the foster care youth to know their rights and protections. Ms. Wagaman wondered about matching skills and the work environment with the youth, as well as matching mentors. Ms. Cox explained that iFoster has a training module about rights in the workplace, especially with LGBTQ youth. iFoster matches skills/safe work environment with the foster care youth and addresses individual needs, such as transportation needs, and workplace and home proximity. Permanent relationships cannot be forced but programs must provide a mentor that fits with each youth. Jenny Pokempner stated that there are too many youth aging out of foster care who don't have permanent relationship connections, and this is an area that needs to be addressed. Best practices are related to matching appropriate mentors individually with each youth. Confidence is the biggest barrier to success.

Leah Mills with the Dept. for Aging and Rehabilitative Services asked how many foster care youths have Individualized Education Program plans (IEPs). Ms. Cox said about 70% in California have either IEPs or 504s (a plan explaining how the school will remove barriers to learning for students with disabilities). The biggest issue is the name of the Department of Rehabilitative Services and how it has a negative stigma with youth. Ms. Pokempner stated that cross-system data sharing makes the process engaging for youth. Statewide policies of sharing information and communication are needed, making sure that youth are offered those services.

Vanessa Johnson agreed that data-sharing is so important and advocates for education being the gatekeeper of success. Programs need to collaborate for better outcomes.

Ms. Haynes asked what type of supports each program has that nurture permanent connection relationships. She also asked about what barriers exist within the programs for facilitating permanent relationships. Ms. Cox responded that criminal background records can be sealed and expunged if there is no murder conviction or the youth is not on a national sexual predator list. iFoster helps the youth identify assistance for life coaching or mentoring and supports those interactions as long as needed. Programs need to identify unhealthy relationships; trauma and secondary trauma are huge. UCLA's School of Resiliency designed a self-care program for everybody, and they will come on-site to train resiliency. iFoster works with employers about their new hire screening requirements. Programs need to provide an environment that encourages coaches so the foster care youth can find a mentor that they can work with.

Ms. Haynes asked how iFoster handles racial and economic inequities when assisting youth with workforce readiness. Ms. Cox explained that 90% of all foster care youth in the iFoster jobs program are minorities, 76% in foster care in one county are Hispanic, 46% in one county are African-American, and 33% are LGBTQ. iFoster employs as many minorities as possible and does employer site visits with the foster care youth in advance to personally see the job environment and make sure the youth feels safe.

Sarah Morton emphasized the importance of bridging and braiding workforce development funds to ensure that we can serve the youth without duplication. It needs to start at the state level. The iFoster portal sounds like Virginia's referral portal. She also emphasized youth serving on youth advisory boards (asking what youth were pulled to serve?) to provide their perspective. There are several issues to address:

- Agencies are unaware of this multitude of resources. Need to communicate and advocate about these resources.
- Need to figure out ways to close the gaps and eliminate barriers.
- An overhaul of the foster care system and funding sources is needed.
- Need to teach scaffold of progression. Better transition plans are needed to help foster care youth move from housing to being home owners, not moving into housing projects.

Both presentations may be found on the Commission's webpage under the Meetings tab.

V. Advisory Group Roundtable Discussion

Senator Favola segued from the previous questions into the roundtable discussion. Four themes were identified for the purposes of next steps:

- Need for a universal resource portal for youth within Virginia (education, resources, programs).
- Need to serve all youths in workforce development, including immigrant youths, foster care youths who are parents, youth in the criminal justice system, crossover youths, etc.
- Need for data-sharing across programs and communities to tailor workforce opportunities for each youth
- Need for facilitation of organic, long-term relationships, mentorships and coaches, and

unconditional support

Patricia Morrison emphasized the need to facilitate self-accountability for the youths by aligning resources, networking, using the apprenticeship program, etc. Self-confidence is so important. The Registered Apprenticeship Program allows youth to get paid and trained. Serita Cox mentioned that the iFoster resource portal is free and available to all with the capability to localize the information for Virginia.

Gary Powers wants to make sure that foster care youths are ready to be independent at age 21 and wonders whether the state is requiring programs to provide outcome metrics to predict success.

Vanessa Johnson stated that the youths that return home need to value their biological family members and learn how to facilitate positive relationships.

Cassie Cunningham works with the Children's Home Society of Virginia (Path Forward Program) and agreed that youths need some training on soft skills and need ancillary supports, how to obtain and maintain employment, as well as how to problem-solve with a supervisor.

VI. Next Steps and Adjournment

Senator Favola thanked everyone for attending and encouraged those who had additional thoughts or questions to contact Amy Atkinson or Will Egen. Senator Favola turned the meeting over to Amy Atkinson for next steps. Ms. Atkinson explained that Commission staff will be coordinating about 6-7 roundtable meetings with foster care youth throughout the state this summer and fall. Celest Williams and Rachel Strawn were planning to help with the roundtables. We want to hear from the youth to find out what they think is important in addressing the four themes that Senator Favola identified. The first roundtable is planned for July 20th in Harrisonburg. The documents that were provided for this meeting about the various programs should help us begin to eliminate silos and provide a springboard for discussion. The advisory group's goal is to pull draft recommendations together at the October 19th meeting for the Commission to consider. Then we will complete the difficult task of finalizing recommendations. Ms. Atkinson thanked Jenny Pokempner and Serita Cox for helping Virginia and offering to share information with us.

Delegate Brewer thanked the panelists and Commission staff, emphasizing that each of us learned more today about the parts we all play in improving our workforce development for foster care youth in the state. She emphasized the need to look at how we are aligning G3 goals with workforce development in the foster care space. Delegate Brewer suggested that Virginia needs to look at what age young people are being assessed and how we are getting them into vocation workforce development.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:20 p.m.

The video of this meeting may be found at the following link: [Meeting Video Archive](#).



VIRGINIA COMMISSION ON YOUTH

Meeting Minutes

Advisory Group: Workforce Development for Foster Care Youth

October 5, 2021, 1:00 p.m. to 3:30

(virtual meeting)

Attending:

Senator Barbara Favola (Co-chair), Jim André, Jason Brown (VEC), Cassie Baudeán, Delegate Karrie Delaney, Delegate Elizabeth Guzman, Tiffany Haynes, Samantha Hollins, Vanessa Johnson, Senator Monty Mason, Leah Mills, Patricia Morrison, Sarah Morton, Em Parente, Gary Powers, Eric Reynolds, Donna Shires, Rachel Strawn, Alex Wagaman, Deana Williams

Not Attending:

Delegate Emily Brewer (Co-chair), Suzanne Bednar, Jason Brown (Fostering Acadia), Caylie Fleming, Allison Gilbreath, Avi Hopkins, Janet Kelly, Valerie L'Herrou, Amber Pajouhandeh, Celest Williams

Staff Attending:

Amy Atkinson, Will Egen, Kathy Gillikin

I. Welcome and Introductions

The Honorable Barbara Favola, Senator, Senate of Virginia

Senator Favola welcomed the Advisory Group to the virtual meeting and thanked everyone for participating in this work. This meeting is convening virtually, pursuant to the seventeenth enactment of Chapter 1 of the Acts of Assembly of 2021, Special Session II. The Commission meeting is streaming for the public to view via the Virginia Senate streaming site. Senator Favola explained that the purpose of the meeting was to hear the Foster Youth Roundtable Highlights from several meetings across the state, understand the findings and determine next steps with the suggested recommendations. Senator Favola then introduced Amy Atkinson to share the highlights of the roundtable discussions.

II. Roundtable Highlights

Amy Atkinson, Executive Director, Virginia Commission on Youth

Ms. Atkinson described the roundtable discussions that were held. Starting in July 2021, Commission staff held five in-person roundtable discussions in Harrisonburg, Richmond, Charlottesville, Williamsburg, Abingdon, and one virtual roundtable on October 4. Participants included 18 foster care youth, young adults and alumni, as well as a legislator; local department of social services directors, supervisors and staff; non-profit organization representatives; community college Great Expectations representatives; and a higher education advocate. Ms. Atkinson provided a summary of each roundtable discussion, requesting input from the Advisory Group members who attended the roundtables. Ms. Atkinson noted that each meeting was unique to that particular part of the state; however, there were common themes.

Common themes included the following:

- Foster care youth and young adults need a way to learn about and connect with financial, emotional, educational and other support programs, coaches and mentors in their community.
- Funding is needed to increase flexible support for Great Expectations, decrease foster care caseloads and improve access to community resources.
- Better communication and data sharing is needed across state agencies, schools, and organizations for foster care youth.
- Foster families and Independent Living (IL) organizations must have accountability standards developed and enforced.
- Consistent mentors and coaches create stability and a safety net for these youth and young adults.
- Virginia school guidance counselors need to provide standard career exploration and exposure activities, as well as interest assessments for every student, but especially for youths experiencing foster care.
- A dedicated and reliable support coordinator for these youth/young adults in all Institutes of Higher Education is warranted.
- Life Skills classes are helpful but youths would like the activities to be more professional, relevant and engaging, simulating real-life situations.
- Workforce Development Boards need to prioritize the young people experiencing foster care.

Comments were made by members about forming good relationships between state agencies, such as the Departments of Education and Juvenile Justice, as being essential. Forming Independent Living (IL) units is essential, as well. There was agreement that the IL completion factors were helpful in providing quarterly measures of the programs. Members would like to see a holistic approach for helping youths experiencing foster care and a scaffold of progression, possibly through mapping career pathways.

Senator Favola recommended that changes in the foster care payment system should be made to reward positive outcomes with the youths or young adults. Dr. Em Parente explained that when funding flexibility is increased, sometimes there are unintended consequences. The evaluation tool for payments needs to be reworked to measure what the needs are and what families are doing to meet those needs. Senator Favola asked Amy

Atkinson to work with Dr. Parente to develop a recommendation pertaining to this for the October 19 Commission meeting. A member agreed that some foster care parents are falsifying documents to get a higher payment. Especially in foster care group homes, the youths who are excelling get less attention and so the facility does not focus on the needs of each child. Delegate Elizabeth Guzman asked what happens when document falsification is discovered. The Virginia Department of Social Services will follow-up on this for the next meeting. This answer requires a lengthy response.

Senator Monty Mason explained that the roundtable he attended in Williamsburg emphasized the need for a consistent personal coach or mentor over the years. These youths need to build their self-worth, confidence, and hope through facilitation by a coach or mentor.

In Abingdon, a pilot for a Great Expectations housing stipend was implemented and many recipients provided feedback that this saved them. All funds for the Great Expectations Program are provided by private donors currently. Members liked the idea of a housing stipend to supplement students' expenses while in college.

Members discussed the need for child care for young adults who are in foster care with children. Additionally, it was noted that career education should start in middle school so that foster youth have time to learn about careers and begin volunteering to build their work experience for a future resume.

More support for foster youths is needed to pursue their interests and talents for less traditional career options (child care, hair styling, art, etc.). Business grants or other financial support would help these young adults struggling to find a way to make money. Delegate Karrie Delaney agreed that there should be a pathway to encourage entrepreneurship.

A concern about undocumented youth who can't work until they have documentation of their citizenship status was also raised. Helping undocumented youth to obtain their paperwork is important.

III. Advisory Group Discussion – Draft Recommendations

Ms. Atkinson reviewed the findings and draft recommendations that came out of the roundtable discussion process.

Finding: There is a lack of communication and coordination of resources with state, local, and private agencies that offer services to those who are currently being served or have been served in the foster care system.

Recommendation 1: Develop the iFoster Portal/App to include Virginia and locality specific resources that are available for individuals who are currently being served or have been served in the foster care system, as well as for professionals serving the foster care population. Resources include workforce development assistance,

educational opportunities, housing and living stipends or discounts, financial supports, internship and employment opportunities, and other resources that are available in Virginia for those involved in the foster care system.

Members wondered how people would find out about this app. It was suggested that using the app can be required in the Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 Plans. A marketing roll-out plan will also be developed.

Finding: There is a lack of communication and coordination of resources with state, local, and private agencies that offer services to those who are currently being served or have been served in the foster care system.

Recommendation 2: Request that the Virginia Social Services' System (state and local departments of social services), through its regional and local offices, identify workforce development organizations (such as Goodwill, Virginia Department of Labor and Industry's Apprenticeship Support Program, Virginia Department of Business and Supplier Diversity, Great Expectations, etc.) and other foster care transition resources in each locality, add them to the iFoster App, and communicate those opportunities to the local agencies on at least an annual basis.

Finding: Private companies and nonprofit agencies are willing to hire those who have been in foster care. These organizations need to better understand the challenges of youth who have experienced foster care by becoming trauma informed.

Recommendation 3: Engage potential employers who hire foster care alumni in trauma informed and accountability strategies training for employment success.

Senator Favola mentioned that job coaches could work with employers, LDSS, local workforce boards, Goodwill of Central and Coastal Virginia and others. It was suggested that the Workforce Boards' Business Solutions Teams could help. A decision was made to keep this Recommendation as 3A and add Recommendation 3B about creating a pathway to entrepreneurship within the program.

Finding: Great Expectations is a nationally recognized program that helps Virginia's foster youth earn the postsecondary credentials they need to achieve an independent and successful life. Currently, Virginia's program is funded solely through private dollars.

Recommendation 4: Introduce a budget amendment to develop a state funded grant program for the Great Expectations Program. The Virginia Community College System (VCCS) shall develop the grant program to provide a range of funding for Community Colleges in the following areas: the hiring of college coaches or mentors; housing stipends; and transportation needs. VCCS shall report to the Commission on Youth the outcomes of the grant program by November 30 each year.

Senator Favola asked Ms. Atkinson to talk with Rachel Strawn about the amount of money that would be needed for each community college Great Expectations Program. Ms. Hayes

suggested connecting efforts with the YMCAs and community programs, such as the Boys and Girls Clubs. Education and training would be needed.

Finding: A point of contact is needed at Virginia colleges and universities to assist those who have been in the foster care system.

Recommendation 5: Introduce a Virginia budget amendment to direct the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) to examine the feasibility of having a point of contact at each state and/or private college and university for those who have been involved in the foster care system. SCHEV shall investigate the possibility of using federal dollars (such as the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs Fund) for this purpose and report their findings to the Commission on Youth by November 30, 2022.

Ms. Atkinson mentioned that Project HOPE, led by Patricia Popp through the College of William and Mary, has a homeless coordinator at each Virginia college or university and that she would contact Dr. Popp for more information about how they developed their structure statewide. Ms. Wagaman noted that there is a similar cohort model being piloted now at Arizona State University and that holistic needs should be addressed. Ms. Strawn indicated that all community college coaches have completed trauma-informed training and there are lots of good models out there. Currently, only 4% of foster care youth earn their four-year degree so dedicated coaches are greatly needed.

Finding: The Fostering Connections to Success Act and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 and Title I, Part A provisions in the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) is intended to ensure school stability for students in foster care, requiring child welfare agencies to coordinate with school divisions.

Recommendation 6: Request the Virginia School Counselor Association include training at its annual conference on foster care. The training should include trauma informed strategies for those working with students experiencing foster care, resources available with the iFoster App, and the importance of knowing these students and providing consistent checks and support. A representative from Great Expectations and Social Services should be invited to assist with this training.

Senator Favola would like to strengthen this recommendation by adding a provision for specific school counselor training and accountability. Dr. Samantha Hollins added that the Virginia Department of Education could work in partnership with VDSS and the School Counselors, possibly adding more counselors in the schools. Dr. Hollins will work with Ms. Atkinson to strengthen the language for this recommendation. Ms. Hayes added that a youth welfare approach should be mandatory for annual training and would strengthen the partnership between the agencies.

Recommendation 7: Request that all Virginia middle and high schools have dedicated guidance counselors who can provide consistent workforce development coaching for students experiencing foster care, including interest and strength surveys, exposure

to various career fields, job trends and salaries, and resources available to the foster care population (such as the iFoster App, Fostering Futures, Great Expectations, quality Independent Living programs, etc.).

There seems to be a lack of clarity among trauma-informed professionals and the academic professionals about how to use workforce development strategies. Ms. Atkinson will work with Dr. Hollins to revise this recommendation.

As an employer, Ms. Donna Shires has witnessed youth who have experienced foster care not being ready for the workplace. An internship program would help, but these youth need a lot of guidance about being on time for work, being productive, workplace etiquette, and how to regulate their emotions. Senator Favola asked for a new recommendation that would include the need for middle and high schools to provide work or academic internships to help prepare the youth for employment. Dr. Hollins will assist Ms. Atkinson with developing a new recommendation. Ms. Hayes added that the “modified” high school diploma does not suffice and is a barrier to employment.

Finding: Quality Independent Living programs are beneficial to the youth and young adults who have experienced foster care by providing a gradual independence plan. These programs include standards of completion with requirements for a high school/GED diploma, driver’s license and stable transportation, a savings account, possession of a secured credit card, stable housing and employment, ownership of and access to vital records, and permanency.

Recommendation 8: Request that the Virginia Social Services’ System (VDSS and LDSS) review their requirements for foster care Independent Living programs in Virginia and include a gradual independence plan that includes these Standards of Completion.

Senator Favola advised that a letter from the Commission Chair to the Virginia Department of Social Services should be written to strongly encourage the use of the eight domains for all Independent Living Programs as a Standard of Completion for each participant and use these domains as a program evaluation tool.

Finding: The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Youth Program is designed to serve low income youth who face barriers to continued education and includes services provided through those either in, or aged-out of, the foster care system. WIOA elements may include, but not be limited to, the following: work experience opportunities; occupational skills training; on-the-job training; GED and high school completion options assistance; tutoring and basic skills education; leadership development opportunities; financial literacy; career counseling and exploration services; postsecondary education preparation; entrepreneurial skills training; apprenticeship opportunities; and supportive services.

Recommendation 9: Request that Virginia Career Works, through the local workforce boards, prioritize serving the foster care population with WIOA funding and other workforce development opportunities.

There was a suggestion to add the words, “and promote” after “prioritize”. Foster care youth need to have priority for WIOA funds.

Senator Favola asked if there were any glaring omissions to the recommendations. Additional discussion took place about finding these youth a foster family. It is important to match youth with a foster family who is within their community, and with cultural and racial similarities. Ms. Cassie Baudeán added that child care needs to be emphasized more in the recommendations with a conversation about child care with potential employers. Senator Favola requested that a recommendation about child care be added. Dr. Parente explained that the local departments of social services can fund child care for foster care. Follow-up on the driver’s license for foster care youth and alumni is needed. Funding for foster care youth to purchase a vehicle and pay for auto insurance is needed, as well.

Today’s presentation on the roundtables across the state as well as these findings and recommendations can be found on the Commission’s website.

IV. Next Steps and Adjournment

The Honorable Barbara Favola, Senator, Senate of Virginia

Senator Favola explained that the findings and revised recommendations would be shared with the Virginia Commission on Youth members at their next meeting on October 19, 2021. Draft recommendations will be shared with the Commission and go out for public comment after October 19, 2021. Public comments will be received and presented to the Commission on Youth before recommendations are voted on. This is the last meeting of the Advisory Group on Workforce Development for Foster Care Youth. Senator Favola thanked the members of the Advisory Group and the Commission staff for all of their good work.

The meeting ended at 3:04 p.m. The meeting video is available on the Virginia Commission on Youth website and at the following link: [Meeting Video Archive](#).



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
Commission on Youth



Workforce Development for Foster Care Youth

October 19, 2021
Amy Atkinson

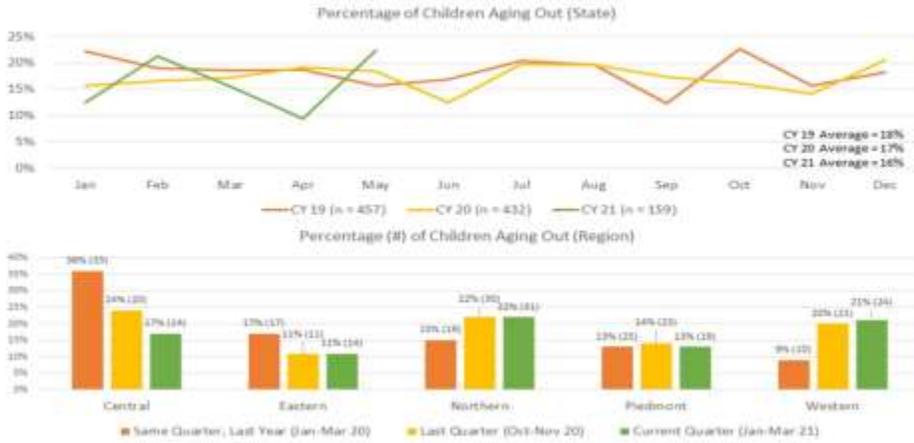
Foster Care Background



- A child is placed in Foster Care through no fault of the child.
- All children deserve to have a family, and to be loved, educated, supported, nurtured, and have equitable opportunities to succeed in life.
- Sustainable social capital, permanency supports, and connections to education and the workforce are essential foundations for independence.
- Federal, State, and Local resources exist to support foster care youth, young adults, and alumni.
- Foster care stakeholders want youth who have experienced foster care to be successful by being civically-engaged, earning a family sustaining income, and continuing to be lifelong learners.

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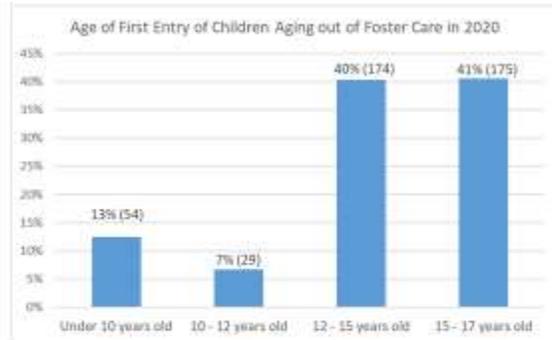
Youth Aging Out of Foster Care



Child Welfare Advisory Committee Meeting Presentation, page 18, June 23, 2021, Virginia Department of Social Services

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Youth Aging Out of Foster Care



- This chart from the Department of Social Services is based on children who emancipated during calendar year 2020.
- Overall, 432 children aged out during this time period.

Child Welfare Advisory Committee Meeting Presentation, page 18, June 23, 2021, Virginia Department of Social Services

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Aging Out Facts



	CY16	CY17	CY18	CY19	CY20
Fostering Futures % of Entry	32%	53%	50%	38%	58%
Total Eligible FF Population	534	567	641	656	510
Total Participating FF Population	170	303	317	247	294



Child Welfare Advisory Committee Meeting Presentation, page 18, June 23, 2021, Virginia Department of Social Services

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Why is Transitioning to Opportunities so Important for Foster Care Youth?



- Youth leaving foster care through emancipation, runaway, or switching to another agency, as opposed to reunification with family or adoption, suffer emotional, physical, financial, housing, and health challenges.
- Youth who leave foster care are more likely to:
 - become homeless (40% more likely),
 - drop out of high school (20% drop out),
 - be unemployed (62% unemployed),
 - not complete a college degree (less than 10%),
 - have physical and mental health problems, lack health insurance, use illegal drugs, become teen parents, live in poverty, and commit crimes.

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Why is Transitioning to Opportunities So Important for Foster Care Youth?



- Foster youth most likely experienced trauma from emotional and physical abuse, neglect, poverty, frequent moves, lack of consistent and loving caregivers, homelessness, food insecurity (29%), isolation, or other.
- Trauma can be overcome with professional help, consistent and positive emotional and financial support, policies and programs that provide resources and opportunities, as well as guidance during challenging times.
- Once consistent emotional and financial support are available, trust in others is regained and the youth is more open to finding and using relevant resources.

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Foster Care Facts



- 40-50% of former foster care youth are homeless within 18 months after leaving foster care.
- 60% earn incomes below the poverty line.
- Only 1-3% graduate from college.
- 25% will be in jail within 2 years of leaving foster care.
- 65% have seven or more school transfers from elementary to high school.
- 80% of women who have experienced foster care will get pregnant before they are ready.
- Foster care youth are 6 times more likely to be diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) than the general population and twice as likely as veterans returning from war.
- 81% of males are arrested compared to 17% of their peers who were not in the foster care system.

<http://www.fostercare2.org/ask-the-pros-2>

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Study Mandate



At its May 3, 2021 meeting, the Commission of Youth adopted the following study mandate:

- Youth aging out of foster care face significant challenges in navigating the labor market to obtaining meaningful employment.
 - The Virginia Commission on Youth shall convene an Advisory Group to include representatives from the Department of Social Services, Department of Education, Department of Labor, Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, the Virginia Employment Commission, One Stop Centers, local Workforce Investment Boards, the Virginia Community College System, local Departments of Social Services, advocacy groups, foster care youth and other relevant stakeholders. The Advisory Group shall review current policies, practices, and programs in Virginia that support youth aging out of foster care and make recommendations to improve workforce opportunities for youth in foster care.

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Advisory Group Members



- Senator Barbara Favola and Delegate Emily Brewer (Co-chairs)
- Jim André, VCCS
- Cassie Baudeán, Children's Home Society
- Suzanne Bednar, Adoptive Parent
- Jason Brown, VEC
- Jason Brown, Fostering Acadia
- Delegate Karrie Delaney
- Allison Gilbreath, Voices for Virginia's Children
- Delegate Elizabeth Guzman
- Tiffany Haynes, FC Youth Advocate
- Samantha Hollins, VDOE
- Avi Hopkins, Citizen Representative
- Vanessa Johnson, Richmond DSS
- Janet Kelly, Virginia's Kids Belong
- Valerie L'Herrou, Virginia Poverty Law Center
- Senator Monty Mason
- Leah Mills, VDARS
- Patricia Morrison, VDOLI
- Sarah Morton, Virginia Career Works
- Amber Pajouhandeh, Foster Youth Rep.
- Em Parente, VDSS
- Gary Powers, The Success Foundation of Virginia
- Eric Reynolds, Office of the Children's Ombudsman
- Donna Shires, Medworks
- Rachel Strawn, VCCS
- Alex Wagaman, VCU
- Celest Williams, Harrisonburg-Rockingham DSS
- Deana Williams, DJJ

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Advisory Group Meetings



- Chaired by Senator Barbara Favola and Delegate Emily Brewer.
- Commission Members, Delegates Karrie Delaney and Elizabeth Guzman and Citizen Member Avi Hopkins, as well as co-chair of Foster Care Caucus, Senator Monty Mason.
- Advisory Group met:
 - June 21, 2021
 - October 5, 2021
- Heard presentations from a foster care panel; the Great Expectations Program; iFoster; and the Youth Law Center.
- Reviewed and developed draft recommendations.

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Advisory Group Meetings



- State Agencies providing support to foster care youth:
 - Department of Social Services
 - Department of Education
 - Department of Medical Assistance Services
 - Department for Aging and Rehabilitation Services
 - Department of Labor and Industry
 - Department of Juvenile Justice
 - Department of Behavioral Health And Developmental Services
 - Virginia Community College System
 - Virginia Employment Commission
 - Virginia Commonwealth University

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Advisory Group Meetings



- Local agencies and organizations providing support to foster care youth:
 - 120 Local Department of Social Services
 - 132 Local School Divisions
 - Child Placing Agencies
 - Independent Living Programs
 - Non Profit Organizations
 - Foundations
 - Businesses
 - Advocacy Groups
 - Foster Family Providers
 - The Faith Community

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Federal Workforce Development Supports



- **McKinney-Vento Act** – Ensures educational stability for both homeless and foster youth.
- **John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program** – Grants offered to states to implement services/activities that will lead to self-sufficiency for current or former foster youth.
- **Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act** – Allows states to extend foster care and benefits up to age 21 with federal funding for states and counties.
- **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act** – The WIOA Title I Youth Program provides workforce development skills to qualified youth between the ages of 16-24 who are out of school, authorized to work in the U.S., and have barriers to employment or education.

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Federal Workforce Development Supports



- **WIOA Title I Youth Program**

- **Work Experience and Training**

- Occupational Skills Training
 - On-The-job Training
 - Summer Employment Opportunities
 - Work Experience Placement
 - Pre-Apprenticeship Opportunities

- **Supportive Services**

- Transportation assistance
 - Payment of credentialing/licensing fees
 - Childcare assistance
 - Books and training materials
 - Required uniforms and other work-related expenses

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WIOA Funding



LWDA	REGION	Youth – 2021
1	Southwest Virginia	\$638,384
2	New River/Mt. Rogers	\$734,283
3	Western Virginia	\$420,731
4	Shenandoah	\$551,160
5	Crater Area	\$470,971
6	Piedmont	\$309,474
7	Central Virginia	\$497,943
8	South Central	\$365,136
9	Capital Region	\$1,777,460
10	West Piedmont	\$586,185
11	Northern Virginia	\$1,205,393
12	Alexandria/Arlington	\$184,578
13	Bay Consortium	\$449,551
14	Hampton Roads	\$2,827,371

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Foster Care Workforce Development Support Programs



- Great Expectations Program
- iFoster Portal
- Virginia Department of Education-School Counseling

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Great Expectations



- Virginia Community College System (VCCS) program for young adults who have experienced foster care.
- Began in 2008.
- Privately-funded ONLY.
- Currently at 21 of 23 community colleges; soon to be 23.
- Helps foster care youth complete high school and navigate college by providing the following assistance:
 - Career exploration and coaching
 - Access to college degree and certification options
 - Individualized tutoring
 - Applying for college admission and financial aid
 - Applying for and keeping a job
 - Life skills training, including financial management
 - Personal counseling; finding affordable housing and mental health services
 - Coordinating student mentors

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iFoster Portal and App



- FREE national internet portal of resources for foster care youth, alumni, and professionals.
- Portal is linked directly to the iFoster app that can be used on cell phones.
- Hundreds of resources with companies, government agencies, and non-profits already included.
- Virginia-specific resources from the state and localities must be identified and added.
- If Virginia adds the local resources, there is no cost to use.
- Internet connection is needed—Hot spot or WiFi work for use in the field.
- Closes the gap in resource information that Transition Age Youth (TAY) need for self-sufficiency and independence.
- Digital Locker Technology for cell phones and laptops that stores documents in one place for future use.

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iFoster Portal and App Cont'd.



- What's included?
 - List of resources with contact information
 - Search feature with categories of support (housing, transportation, child care, education and training, employment, etc.)
 - Place to apply for resources
 - Tracking of resources used
 - Notifications and surveys
 - Program ratings and feedback options
 - Discounted products and services, and more
- Already have 376 Virginia members in the national portal:
 - 17 Transition Age Youth Members
 - 19 Professional Staff Members
 - 340 Caregiver Members

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iFoster Portal and App Cont'd.



- Mississippi
 - Identifying and adding their own resources to the iFoster portal (FREE).
 - Training employers on trauma through the portal.
 - Scaffolding foster care youth into jobs through mentorship, job training and career “cruising” and assessments to determine training needed for a particular job through the app.
 - Sharing documents in a centralized place.
- Next Steps
 - Need to identify state and local resources and then input the information.
 - Need to update resources regularly

<https://portal.ifoster.org/iFosterForYouth.aspx>

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Public Middle and High School Counseling



- Goal: “Students will investigate the world of work in order to make informed career decisions.”
- Grade 6-12 Public School Counselors are required to do the following:
 - Provide career awareness and exploration opportunities to students.
 - Assist students in identifying strengths, skills, preferences and interests related to career choices and success.
 - Teach the effect of career choices on quality of life.
 - Teach that punctuality, courtesy, proper dress and language, and hard work are essential for job success.
 - Assess the ability of students to demonstrate individual initiative, teamwork, problem-solving, organization, and communication.
 - Teach students to use research skills to locate, evaluate, and interpret career and educational information.
 - Assess students’ awareness of educational, vocational, technical and training opportunities available in high school.
 - Introduce self-employment as a career option.

“Standards for School Counseling Programs in Virginia Public Schools,” January 2004, Board of Education, Virginia Department of Education

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Highlights from Other States



- **Oregon – Passed the Former Foster Youth Tuition and Fee Waiver (HB 3471-A)**
 - Allows youth who spent 12+ months in foster care to waive tuition at a state university or community college.
 - Waiver is applied after all other financial aid is exhausted.
- **Oregon – Youth Villages: Transitional Living Program**
 - Youth work with specialists to find stable housing + employment, continuing education or training.
 - 84% of youth are living independently or with family 2 yrs. after completion.
 - 83% in school, graduated or employed after 2 yrs.
 - 77% remained jail-free.

<https://www.Oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/SpecialEducation/SecondaryTransition/Documents/tuitionwaiverquickfacts.pdf>
<https://www.Oregon.gov/dhs/children/fostercare/ILP/Pages/index.aspx>

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Highlights from Other States



- **Arizona**
 - **Bridging Success Early Start** at Arizona State University
 - For entering freshmen and transfer students with foster care backgrounds.
 - Move in early to learn about campus resources, personal success strategies, academic expectations.
 - Designated staff to assist foster care students.
 - **Arizona Foster Youth Award** tuition waiver program covers cost of undergraduate tuition and fees with combination of federal grants, scholarships and university aid.
- **Tennessee – Hope Foster Child Tuition Grant**
 - Youth in foster care are eligible to attend a 2-year or 4-year public institution without tuition with a high school diploma or equivalent
 - Students may attend a private institution but must pay costs above the average cost of public institutions.

Arizona – <https://Fosteryouth.asu.edu/early-start>
Tennessee – <https://tn.gov/collegepays/money-for-college/grant-programs/tn-hope-foster-child-tuition-grant.html>

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Highlights from Other States



- **Rhode Island – “Works Wonders” Research Program 2011-16**
 - Partnered with local businesses
 - Awarded a grant to use Workforce Investment Act Funding to give foster youth training skills and coaching needed for workplace success
 - 52% maintained employment after program completion; up from 38.3%

<https://www.fosterforward.net/works-wonders-research>

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Roundtable Details



- **Held 5 in-person and 1 virtual roundtable discussions throughout the state**
 - Harrisonburg – July 20, 2021
 - Richmond – July 21, 2021
 - Charlottesville – July 22, 2021
 - Williamsburg – September 23, 2021
 - Abingdon – September 27, 2021
 - Virtual Roundtable – October 4, 2021

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Participants



- **Total Participants with VCOY Staff:**
 - 18 Foster Care Youth, Young Adults, or Alumni
 - 1 Legislator
 - 2 LDSS Directors
 - 7 Local Department of Social Services Foster Care Supervisors and Staff
 - 9 Non-profit Organization Representatives (Fostering Acadia, Goodwill, Impact Living Services, Virginia Career Works, VCU, Voices for Virginia's Children)
 - 5 Community College/Great Expectations Representatives
 - 1 Higher Education Advocate

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Common Themes from Roundtables



- Foster care youth and young adults need a way to learn about and connect with financial, emotional, educational, and other support programs, coaches and mentors in their community.
- Funding is needed to increase flexible support for Great Expectations, decrease foster care case loads, and improve access to community resources.
- Better communication and data sharing across state agencies, schools, and organizations for foster care youth is warranted.
- Accountability standards for foster families and Independent Living organizations must be developed and enforced.
- Consistent mentors and coaches create stability and a safety net for each youth and young adult who has experienced foster care.

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Common Themes Cont'd.



- Virginia school guidance counselors, public and private, need to provide standard career exploration, exposure to a variety of career fields, and interest assessments for every student.
- Each Institution of Higher Education (IHE) needs to have a dedicated and reliable support coordinator for young adults who have experienced foster care.
- Life skills classes need to be timely, relevant, engaging and emulate real-life situations.
- Meaningful Independent Living (IL) experience is needed that prepares youth for independence.
- Local workforce development boards should prioritize the foster care population.
- Child Care and transportation challenges are a barrier to employment.

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Workforce Development for Foster Care Youth Findings and Recommendations



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Finding and Recommendations



Finding: There is a lack of communication and coordination of resources with state, local, and private agencies that offer services to those who are currently being served or have been served in the foster care system.

Recommendation 1:

Direct the Virginia Department of Social Services, in cooperation with the Virginia Commission on Youth, Department of Aging and Rehabilitation Services, Department of Education, Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of Medical Assistance Services, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, the Department of Labor, the Virginia Community College System, including the Great Expectations Program, local workforce development boards, the League of Social Services' Executives, private providers and advocacy groups to develop the iFoster Portal or an App with similar functionality to include Virginia- and locality-specific resources that are available for individuals who are currently being served or have been served in the foster care system, as well as for professionals serving the foster care population. (cont. on next slide)

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Finding and Recommendations



Recommendation 1 (cont.):

Resources include workforce development assistance, educational opportunities, housing and living stipends or discounts, financial supports, internship and employment opportunities, and other resources that are available in Virginia for those involved in the foster care system. Update the App regularly with additional resources that are available to assist in the development of becoming a successful and independent adult. Ensure that all state and local agency employees working with foster care children, join and use the iFoster App with their foster care clients, assist foster care youth in subscribing to the App themselves, and remain current with newly added or updated resources.

Recommendation 2:

Request the Virginia Social Services System (state and local departments of social services), through its regional and local offices, to identify workforce development organizations (such as Goodwill, Virginia Department of Labor and Industry's Apprenticeship Program, Great Expectations, etc.) and other foster care transition support resources in each locality, add them to the iFoster App, and communicate those opportunities to the local agencies on at least an annual basis.

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Finding and Recommendations



Finding: Private companies and non-profit agencies are willing to hire those who have been in foster care. These organizations need to better understand the challenges of youth who have experienced foster care by becoming trauma informed. This awareness training will facilitate a smooth transition into the work world for both parties and encourage the development of a graduated training structure and mentoring plan to ensure success. Many times employers do not understand trauma consequences that could impact the work habits and attitude of an employee.

Employment or entrepreneurship support are critical to help foster care youth and young adults and alumni to be successful in their workplace. The Virginia Workforce Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center, (VWIEC), an entity of Hampton University, in partnership with Old Dominion University, provides free services such as mentorship, education, networking, pitch competitions and assistance with financing strategies for adults who wish to become entrepreneurs. In addition, VWIEC provides supports for participants by removing barriers that restrict them, including child care, transportation, certification costs and business licensure fees.

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Finding and Recommendations



Recommendation 3a:

Request that local workforce development boards recruit and engage potential employers who hire foster care young adults and alumni in training that includes the effects of trauma, related child care issues for parenting youth, and gradual accountability strategies for employment success. Encourage employers to work through challenges on work attendance and productivity with external job coaches to support workers in finding success.

Recommendation 3b:

Request the Workforce Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center to provide support for foster care young adults and alumni who need business assistance. Those working in the foster care system with young adults who are interested in starting their own business should connect the young adults to VWIEC.

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Finding and Recommendations



Finding: Great Expectations is a nationally recognized program that helps Virginia's foster youth earn the postsecondary credentials they need to achieve an independent and successful life. Currently, Great Expectations is available in 21 of the 23 Virginia Community Colleges and will be in all of the Community Colleges by the end of the year. Through the program, foster youth gain financial and additional supports needed to ensure their successful completion of the degree/credential sought. Currently, Virginia's program is funded solely through private funding.

Recommendation 4:

Introduce a budget amendment to develop a state-funded grant program for the Great Expectations Program. The Virginia Community College System (VCCS) shall develop the grant program to provide a range of funding for Community Colleges in the following areas: the hiring of college coaches or mentors; housing stipends; child care; and transportation needs. VCCS shall report to the Commission on Youth the outcomes of the grant program by November 30 each year.

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Finding and Recommendations



Finding: A point of contact is needed in Virginia colleges and universities to assist those who have been in the foster care system. Students with a history of a traumatic childhood living in a variety of foster care situations often suffer from post-traumatic stress and need extra support while becoming independent and learning how to face life's challenges while attending college, working, and sometimes taking care of a family.

Recommendation 5:

Introduce a budget amendment to direct the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) to examine the feasibility of having a point of contact at each state and/or private college and university for those who have been involved in the foster care system. SCHEV shall investigate the possibility of using federal dollars (such as the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) for this purpose and report their findings to the Commission on Youth by November 30, 2022.

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Finding and Recommendations



Finding: The Fostering Connections to Success Act, Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, and Title I, Part A provisions in the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) are intended to ensure school stability for students in foster care, requiring child welfare agencies to coordinate with school divisions. School counselors provide a critical link in assisting foster youth's educational and sustainable employment success.

Recommendation 6:

Request that the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) provides virtual training for school counselors that includes trauma informed strategies for those working with students experiencing foster care, resources available with the iFoster App, and the importance of knowing these students and providing consistent checks and support. The Commission also requests that the VDOE partner with the Virginia Alliance for School Counseling (VASC) and the Virginia Department of Social Services to develop this training.

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Finding and Recommendations



Recommendation 7:

Request that the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) issue a memorandum that provides guidance to local school divisions regarding resources for school counselors on providing supports for students experiencing foster care, including the requirements of completing an interest inventory, the Career Connections course, and the Academic and Career Plan, as well as the updated guidance for the Profile of a Virginia Graduate (which establishes multiple paths toward college and career readiness for students to follow in the later years of high school, which could include opportunities for internships, externships, and credentialing). This guidance will also include resources on leveraging existing data and information on various career fields, job trends and salaries, and resources available to local school divisions from the Weldon Cooper Center and how to specifically support foster care youth and link to specific resources (such as the iFoster App, Fostering Futures, Great Expectations, successful independent living programs, etc.).

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Finding and Recommendations



Finding: Quality Independent Living programs are beneficial to the youth and young adults who have experienced foster care by providing a gradual independence plan. These programs include standards of completion with requirements for a high school/GED diploma, driver's license and stable transportation, savings account, possession of a secured credit card, stable housing and employment, ownership of and access to vital records, and permanency.

Recommendation 8:

Request that the Virginia Social Services System (VDSS and LDSS) review their requirements for foster care Independent Living programs in Virginia and include a gradual independence plan that includes these Standards of Completion. Quality Independent Living programs ensure that the youth are knowledgeable and have practical application experience with budgeting, housing solutions, job expectations, emotional regulation and management skills, transportation and health care options, communication skills, as well as problem-solving in the real world. Ensure each LDSS has a workforce development plan.

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Finding and Recommendations



Finding: The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Youth Program is designed to serve low-income youth who face barriers to continued education and employment which includes those youth either in, or aged out of, the foster care system. Services provided through WIOA may include, but are not limited to, the following elements: work experience opportunities; occupational skills training; on-the-job training; GED and high school completion options assistance; tutoring and basic skills education; leadership development opportunities; financial literacy; career counseling and exploration services; assistance with navigating child care options for parenting youth; post-secondary education preparation; entrepreneurial skills training; apprenticeship opportunities; and supportive services.

Recommendation 9:

Request that Virginia Career Works, through the local workforce boards, prioritize and promote serving the foster care population with WIOA funding and other workforce development opportunities.

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Finding and Recommendations



Finding: Foster care families receive a maintenance payment to provide for the basic needs for the foster child in their care. The Virginia Enhanced Maintenance Assessment Tool (VEMAT) is used to determine the need for, and amount of, enhanced maintenance when a child has a clearly-defined need that requires the parent to provide increased support and supervision due to the child's behavioral, emotional, or physical/personal care requirements. When children first enter foster care, it is expected that their needs may be higher due to the circumstances that led to the child's removal and the impact of the removal itself. However, as the child stabilizes in the foster home and the child's needs are met consistently over time, it is expected that the child's on-going need for support and supervision would decrease, and therefore the VEMAT score would decrease with subsequent reassessments. As a result, it may be viewed that foster families are financially penalized for a child's success.

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Finding and Recommendations



Recommendation 10:

Direct the Virginia Department of Social Services to convene a stakeholder group to determine the feasibility of adopting a new uniform assessment tool in determining the enhanced payments for children in foster care with additional needs. The stakeholder group shall consist of representatives from the Department of Social Services, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, Office of the Children's Services Act, Office of the Children's Ombudsman, private providers, licensed child placing agencies, local departments of social services, foster parents, and advocacy groups. The stakeholder group shall investigate ways to provide more flexibility regarding the foster care payment to address a wide variety of needs for hard to place children and develop ways to ensure accurate documentation. Consideration should be given to current assessment tools used in determining a child's needs such as the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) tool.

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Finding and Recommendations



Finding: Lack of transportation options provide a barrier for foster youth in trying to obtain an educational degree or employment. Evidence reveals that youth who leave foster care without their driver's license are less likely to make a successful transition to adulthood. These young adults are more likely to have limited housing, employment, and education choices. Without transportation it is difficult for those involved in the foster care system to get a job and establish a work history.

Recommendation 11:

Introduce a budget amendment to support the development and implementation of a statewide driver's licensing program to support foster care youth in obtaining a driver's license. Funding shall be made available to local departments of social services to reimburse foster care providers for increases to their existing motor vehicle insurance premiums that occur because a foster care youth in their care has been added to their insurance policy. The program may also reimburse foster care providers for additional coverage (i.e., an umbrella policy or the equivalent) that provides liability protection should a foster care youth get into or cause a catastrophic accident. Additionally, funding shall be made available to foster care youth in Virginia's Fostering Futures Program to assist in covering the cost of obtaining motor vehicle insurance. (cont. on next slide)

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Finding and Recommendations



Recommendation 11 (cont.):

The Department of Social Services shall develop reimbursement policies for foster care providers and foster care youth. The Department shall coordinate and administer the driver's licensing program based on best practices from similar programs in other states, to include developing educational or training materials that educate foster parents, private providers, and foster youth about (1) liability issues, insurance laws, and common insurance practices (to include laws about renewal and cancellation, how long an accident can affect premiums, how to establish that a foster youth is no longer living in the residence, and other applicable topics); (2) DMV requirements to obtain a learner's permit and driver's license; (3) what funding and resources are available to assist in this process, to include paying school lab fees for "Behind the Wheel" or paying a private driver education company; and (4) why getting a driver's license on time is important for normalcy and a successful transition to adulthood. The Department shall provide information on how many foster care youth were supported by this program and any recommendations to improve the program to the Governor, Chairmen of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees by November 30 each fiscal year.

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Finding and Recommendations



Finding: Lack of access to child care is a barrier to successful employment for parenting youth/young adults. Finding and paying for quality child care is a barrier to holding a steady job or completing an education program. Currently, local departments of social services will assist parenting youth in foster care with child care costs either through IV-E funding or the Children's Services Act. However, when the youth is no longer in foster care these funding sources are no longer available.

Recommendation 12:

Request foster care workers and others working with youth experiencing foster care to identify child care resources for their parenting youth. Ensure that youth aging out of foster care are placed on the local child care assistance program waiting list prior to aging out of care.

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Public Comment

Written public comment must be
received by 5:00 p.m.
on November 30, 2021.

Submission instructions are available
online (<http://vcoy.virginia.gov>)

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**Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDA)
WIOA Funding Amounts**

LWDA	REGION	Youth – 2021
1	Southwest Virginia	\$638,384
2	New River/Mt. Rogers	\$734,283
3	Western Virginia	\$420,731
4	Shenandoah	\$551,160
5	Crater Area	\$470,971
6	Piedmont	\$309,474
7	Central Virginia	\$497,943
8	South Central	\$365,136
9	Capital Region	\$1,777,460
10	West Piedmont	\$586,185
11	Northern Virginia	\$1,205,393
12	Alexandria/Arlington	\$184,578
13	Bay Consortium	\$449,551
14	Hampton Roads	\$2,827,371