

## 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/>)**

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/>)**

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/>)**

**Workforce Programs Limited to Youth with Foster Care Experience:**

**Joe and Linda Daniel Success Fund FastForward Pilot (<https://www.fastforwardva.org/>, and <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](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 of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (<https://www.vadars.org/>)**

The Department of 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.