Ohio Reach Post-Secondary Designation
Campus Support Program Guide

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Introduction

Ohio Reach, in partnership with the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) and The Ohio Children's Alliance (OCA), has launched a designation program for accredited colleges, universities, and Ohio Technical Centers to provide supportive services to students with a history in foster care, kinship care, or out-of-home placement. The purpose of this directive and designation is to establish supportive criteria, hereafter named the "Ohio Reach Postsecondary" Designation, necessary for Ohio's public and independent colleges and universities and technical centers to be recognized as being supportive and inclusive of foster care-connected students. The Ohio Reach Designation Advisory Committee will evaluate applications and recommend institutions in Ohio to earn the Ohio Reach Postsecondary Designation.

A report published by Children's Defense Fund-Ohio shows that Ohio falls behind most other states on outcomes related to youth and young people who were in foster care. Ohio ranks in the bottom 10% of the U.S. on four indicators for youth who were in foster care highlighted in the National Youth in Transition survey:
• Graduating high school or getting a GED (60%);
• Being employed (46%);
• Being enrolled in school at age 21 (12%); and
• Experiencing incarceration (37%).
When current high school students who are in foster care are surveyed, the vast majority express a desire to attend post-secondary education, though less than 25% enroll.

There are still chances to improve these outcomes in Ohio! Research shows that there are proven strategies to help students with experience in foster care succeed in post-secondary education. Programs with comprehensive, wrap-around support for students are shown to increase retention and graduation rates. While all campus programs will be structured slightly differently, based on capacity and the number of eligible students, there are 10 program elements that Ohio Reach has designated as being a vital piece of this support. This guide includes details and best practices related to all 10 areas of support.

Student Eligibility: All students with a history in foster care, kinship care, or other out-of-home placement are eligible for on-campus Ohio Reach services. Students may have been placed in foster care for any length of time, in any state.

Program Elements

Designated Campus Liaison
Each institution of higher education must establish a Designated Campus Liaison to serve as a single point of contact for all students who are accessing Ohio Reach program services. The Campus Liaison will serve as the institution representative for all Ohio Reach initiatives. This single point of contact for students is a vital part of Ohio Reach programming, allowing students to directly contact a staff person who is committed to this cause. The Campus Liaison should have buy-in regarding the Ohio Reach

mission and be prepared to advocate for students. Campus Liaison may have roles in Student Support Services, Financial Aid, Academic Advising, or other university departments. If possible, the institution can consider how the Liaison's workload can be adjusted to ensure that they have additional time to commit to program planning. If not possible, Liaisons are able to work within their existing role to build the Ohio Reach network on campus.

Campus Champions

Campus Champions serve an important role as a point of contact and resource within specific institutional departments. When students need further on-campus support, the Liaison should be able to directly connect them with a Champion. Champions can serve in varying capacities, but their main purpose is to be a person that the Liaison can directly refer students to for further information and assistance.

Recommended departments include:

- Admissions
- Academic Advising
- Student Support Services
- Financial Aid
- Counseling Services
- Career Center
- Housing Services
- Disability Services
- Student Life
- Campus Foundation/Development Office

Some tips for identifying Champions:

- Invite staff in various campus departments to attend one of your program events.
- Forward invitations for Ohio Reach webinars to potential Champions.
- Speak at staff meetings and events, sharing details about Ohio Reach and the importance of programming.
- Work with your campus administrators and high-level administration to share the value of Ohio Reach programming.

Many campuses will create a committee consisting of the Liaison, Champions, other interested staff members, and administrators.

Resource Connection

The Designated Campus Liaison must have the ability to connect students to resources, both on-campus and community. To best provide these resources, the Liaison should maintain or have access to a local resource guide. Liaisons should use these resources to ensure that all foster care-connected students have their basic needs, including food and housing, met. The Designated Campus Liaison will demonstrate a plan to provide a "warm hand-off" to both on- and off-campus resources to support students.

One way to support students through resources is to create a referral system that supports the youth in accessing the service. This can include making direct contact with a department to let them know the

youth is coming and encouraging the youth to schedule an appointment while in your office. At some campuses, departments offer priority to youth referred by the Liaison, bypassing waiting lists or other obstacles to access services.

Resources can include the following:
- County Child Welfare Agency
- Ohio Education and Training Voucher (https://www.fc2sprograms.org/ohio/)
- Bridges to Success (https://bridgestosuccess.jfs.ohio.gov/)
- Local school districts
- Independent Living Programs
- Youth Navigator Network (https://ynn.jfs.ohio.gov/)
- Local public transit agencies, to offer transportation vouchers or discounts
- Career assistance
- Clothing access and organizations
- Legal rights and assistance
- Food Pantries and resources
- Childcare resources
- Comprehensive Case Management Employment Program (CCMEP) (https://jfs.ohio.gov/owd/CCMEP/)
- Medicaid

If you find that many of your students struggle with access to housing or your institution does not offer on-campus housing, consider creating a Housing Resource Guide with information on shelters, community organizations, and other local housing resources.

Community Building and Social Activities

Community Building and Social activities offer students a sense of belonging and family, allowing them to feel safe and supported. Students may also not have friends or others to go to for support, so the network created by a campus support program is a vital resource.

This can include

- Dinners
- "Lunch N Learn" opportunities
- Group outings
- Study groups
- Life skills trainings
- Movie nights
- Field trips
- Graduation celebrations

Outreach and Identification of Students

In order to serve students, institutions must identify and reach foster care-connected students. Current and former foster youth are oftentimes hesitant to self-identify due to stigma or distrust in systems. It is important that institutions and Campus Liaisons work proactively to identify students to share the available resources. Institutions must engage in targeted outreach to students, with efforts made to identify and support them. There are multiple proven ways to connect with students.

1. On-Campus Marketing
    a. Create flyers and a brochure that describe your campus program. These can be distributed at campus events, hung up in the student union, distributed to campus departments, and shared with community partners.
    b. Ensure that campus program information is displayed on the institution's website.
    c. Set up a booth or table at student involvement fairs or other events.
2. Financial Aid Outreach
    a. If possible, work with Financial Aid to do coordinated outreach to students who either self-identify as foster youth on the FAFSA or who are accessing ETV funding.
    b. You can set up a resource email notification to contact students who answered "yes" to the foster care identification question on either the FAFSA or application.
3. Application Questions
    a. If your institution does not currently ask about foster youth status on your application, advocate to add it to the admissions process.
4. Surveys
    a. Students can be surveyed at application, admission, during first year experience, or at student support services.
5. Freshman Experiences/Orientation
    a. Present, pass out flyers, or have professors share resources during freshman experience courses/first year seminars or orientation.
6. Community Connections
    a. Connect with your local child welfare agency and make sure that they are aware of the services offered on your campus. They can refer students to your program and offer connection to other services.
    b. It is also recommended to connect with local school districts, who should have a Foster Care Liaison as well. They can help to identify students who are considering attending your institution.
    c. Provide Opportunities for youth who have experienced care to visit your Campus and learn about the supports available to them on your campus and visualize themselves on a college campus.
7. Work with Staff
    a. Present to other staff at events or trainings.
    b. Faculty, staff, and administrators can also help identify youth and refer them to the on-campus program.

Be aware of the stigma attached to youth who have experienced foster care and use this knowledge to market your program to students. Students with experience in foster care may not want to be labeled or be perceived to be receiving special compensations because of their past experiences.

Expanding the Eligibility of On-Campus Resources

Many institutions offer a variety of resources for students, including, but not limited to: group counseling, additional tutoring services, career counseling, and mentorship. Efforts should be made to expand the eligibility of restricted programs to include alumni of foster care, or to connect Ohio Reach students with these resources. You cannot offer every resource in your program, so it's vital to create partnerships and work on campus to create a resource network for students.

Liaison and Champion Training

During 2023, Ohio Reach will offer free, online training and resources to Campus Liaisons. These trainings will cover topics from working with foster care-connected students to best practices for on-campus resources. Each designated Campus Liaison must commit to attending at least one virtual meeting per quarter, to total four per year.

Program Continuity Planning

Each Institution must have a transition plan in place for the Campus Liaison, to ensure continuity of services for students if the role is vacated. In addition, as Campus Champions transition, the Liaison should work within the departments to find suitable replacements. We recommend using a program email, allowing students to maintain a single, recognizable point of contact through staff changes.

If the Campus Liaison for an Ohio Reach program changes, the Ohio Reach Coordinator must be notified in writing of the new Liaisons name, contact information, and title.

Data Collection

Data is a necessary aspect of programming, allowing programs to analyze results, seek funding, and provide services to the best of their ability.

Campus Liaisons must collect student data in the following areas:
   a. Number of students served/registered
   b. Student outcomes (drop out, stop out, graduation, continuation)
   c. Demographics
   d. Average GPA for registered students
   e. Number of students accessing other campus resources (tutoring, career counseling, etc)

A form will be provided to each Liaison for data collection. Liaisons will be required to submit the completed data form at the close of each semester.

Mentorship

Each university program must offer a Mentorship program to Ohio Reach students. Mentorship programs should be designed to best fit the capacity of the institution and needs of the students. Some example structures for Mentorship programs are included below.

   1. Group Mentorship
      a. Where a single mentor is matched with a small cohort of mentees.

2. Family Style Mentorship
    a. A small group of multiple mentors and multiple mentees meets together and engage in conversations and activities
3. Peer Mentorship
    a. Youth can be selected and trained to serve as mentors to incoming students.
4. Liaison Check-Ins
    a. Schedule regular, structured check-ins with students. Be sure to take the time to discuss their current needs and progress towards their goals.
5. Use existing mentorship programs
    a. If your institution or community already has a successful mentorship program, you may refer students to that program.

Optional Program Elements

Year-Round Housing

Each year in Ohio, roughly 1,000 young adults age out of foster care. 50% of them will experience homelessness. Many students who were in foster care do not have families to return to during breaks, leaving them struggling to find a safe space to stay. Without stable housing, educational success is difficult. If your campus does not offer on-campus housing, you can work with other resources to ensure that your students have access to stable housing.

Campuses with on-campus housing should explore options to provide year-round or dedicated housing to students with foster care history.

Career Counseling

Many institutions and campuses offer Career Counseling services to students. Current and former Ohio Reach students have identified Career Counseling as important resource, helping to set them up for success after graduation. Consider adding specific, tailored Career Counseling to your services or creating a structure for referrals to existing services for Ohio Reach students.

Cohort Structure

Depending on program size, consider adopting a cohort model, where students are matched into smaller cohorts and participate in tailored activities.

In-Depth Tutoring Resources

If possible, offer proactive tutoring and educational resources, specifically formatted for students being served by your program. You can make referrals to tutoring services, offer priority scheduling, or offer specific group tutoring.

Community Leadership Opportunities

Provide opportunities for students to mentor other students or participate in outreach programs. Look into federal work study programs to hire foster care-connected students as support roles for your program. Many programs also find success by including students in program planning, committees, and advocacy work. Consider a student advisory board or specific committee to help collect and provide insight.

Life Skills Learning Opportunities

Campus Support Programs are in a valuable position to offer wrap-around support to students with experience in foster care. Many programs offer various Life Skills learning opportunities. These courses can be offered on campus, by the campus liaison, by other institutional staff, or by community partners.

Suggested Life Skills topics are:

- Employment skills
- Resume writing
- Interview skills
- Study skills
- Time management
- Independent living skills
- Cooking and grocery shopping
- Peer pressure
- Communication skills
- Parenting support and skills
- Healthy lifestyle
- Social-Emotional skills
- Money management

Transition Services for Students (Pre- and Post-University)

Pre-
- Liaisons are encouraged to work with local school districts and high schools to share program information, recruit students, and provide application information

Post-
- Connect with on-campus career counseling and services to help students discover their interests and potential career opportunities
- Work with local job centers, placement agencies, and career coaching organizations to provide resources to students
- Connect with graduate programs to help students make decisions regarding continuing education