

FAME

Michigan State University

www.socialwork.msu.edu/outreach/foster_youth_alumni_svcs.php

AT-A-GLANCE

Initiative Start Date:
2007

Initiative Location:



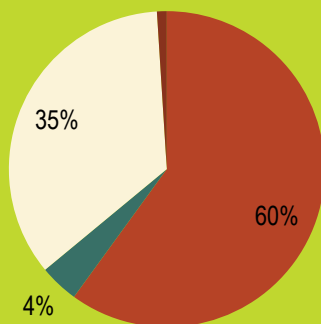
Initiative Budget:
\$105,000

Age Range of Youth:
15 – 21 years old

Number of Youth Served:
135 annually

Diversity of Youth Served:

- Black/African American
- Latino/Hispanic
- White/Caucasian
- Other/Unknown



ABOUT

Adjusting to college is a big step. At Michigan State University (MSU), the Fostering Academics Mentoring Excellence (FAME) program makes that transition easier for students who have been in foster care, kinship care, other placements or who have been homeless. FAME's goals are to increase the number of youth who have been in foster care that apply to colleges and ensure they have access to the necessary financial, academic and personal resources to succeed. "We know how few foster care youth apply to college and complete their degree," explains Professor John Seita, one of FAME's key faculty supporters. "I was in foster care myself and when I went to college years ago, it was a miserable, lonely experience. We want students today to feel supported, comfortable and connected."

KEY ACTIVITIES

- **Summer Camp** – held annually on campus over four-days, for 30 high school-age youth who have been in foster care from across the state; expose them to college life (e.g., attend classes, stay in dorms and participate in recreational activities); provide information about application and financial aid processes. MSU students who are foster care alumni are the camp counselors.
- **Coaches, Mentors, Champions** – match knowledgeable, supportive adults to students depending on needs and interests; coaches focus on life skills; mentors focus on professional/career development; champions help navigate and link youth to on-campus resources.
- **Student Activities Board** – provide leadership opportunities to FAME students who plan events, give input on services and engage in advocacy, public speaking and outreach on campus and in the community to increase awareness of the program.
- **FAME Care Packages** – collect donated new items (e.g., snacks, MSU gear, gift cards, supplies) and give to FAME students during final exam week to support them during a stressful time.

HIGHLIGHT

Beyond its direct support of students, FAME has an impact on MSU's operations. A simple but significant change is the addition of a checkbox on MSU's application form that asks applicants to indicate whether they were previously in foster care. This enables MSU admissions staff to flag students right away and make them aware of financial aid and other the benefits available to them. FAME has an impact on how administrators do their jobs. "I always stop what I am doing to take a FAME student's call," says Jennifer Shappell, FAME champion for financial aid. "So many adults have failed them in the past. The adults on this campus are not going to fail them too."

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Youth Thrive is a research-informed framework developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) that identifies five protective and promotive factors for youth (age 11-26):

- Youth Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Adolescent Development
- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence

The goal of Youth Thrive is to increase the likelihood that all youth are supported in ways that advance healthy development and well-being and reduce the impact of negative life experiences. Youth Thrive focuses particularly on vulnerable youth, beginning with those involved in the child welfare system.

CSSP conducted a national search to identify initiatives that provide compelling examples of programs and policy efforts that build the five protective and promotive factors for youth in the child welfare system. This is a profile of one of the 15 selected exemplary initiatives.

BUILDING THE PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS

The exemplary initiatives address all or most of the protective and promotive factors. Here are several examples:

Social Connections: With new relationships and support from coaches, mentors and champions, young adults are better able to manage the demands of college and build the skills and resiliency they need to succeed in life.

Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence: The opportunity to attend college represents a very high level cognitive achievement, and the summer camp is one of those memorable, intense group experiences that can boost social and emotional growth.

USING DATA

The FAME summer camp has been the subject of a formal evaluation which found that the camp contributed to perceived increases in youth's knowledge about college life, funding opportunities and admissions procedures as well as enhanced life skills, self-concept and sense of purpose – all of which can be the stepping stones from foster care to higher education (Kirk & Day, 2011). FAME's ongoing internal evaluation activities include collecting qualitative feedback from students and mentors and quantitative data on program services and student outcomes. For students in FAME's *mentoring* program, results include:

- 100% feel there is an adult who cares about them.
- 80% feel more confident.
- 80% have learned about other resources available at MSU.
- 70% have higher expectations of themselves and a more positive view of their future.
- 60% report they have improved their time management skills.

For students in the *coaching* program:

- 100% remain enrolled in college, have safe, affordable housing, have an open bank account and report satisfaction with the coaching program.