

AT-A-GLANCE

Initiative Start Date:
2008

Initiative Location:

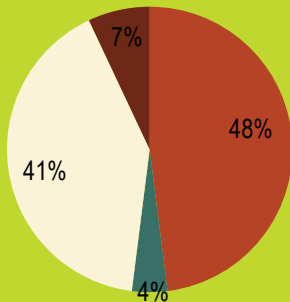


Initiative Budget:
\$800,000 plus \$1.6 million in tuition scholarships

Age Range of Youth:
12 – 25 years old

Number of Youth Served:
160 annually at WMU

- Diversity of Youth Served:**
- Black/African American
 - Latino/Hispanic
 - White/Caucasian
 - Other/Unknown



ABOUT

Leaders at Western Michigan University (WMU) were troubled by the fact that youth who have been in foster care are significantly underrepresented in higher education. Only three percent of youth who have been in foster care earn a college degree compared to 24 percent of the general population. "We cannot, as a society, afford to lose the potential these young people represent," says WMU President John M. Dunn. "At Western Michigan University, we are passionate about insuring that no segment of our society is kept from having access to higher education." WMU's Center for Fostering Success (the Center) was created to help youth who have aged out of foster care successfully transition into college, complete their degrees and move into careers. The mission of the Center is to improve college graduation and career achievement rates among young adults aging out of the foster care system.

KEY ACTIVITIES

- **Campus-based Student Support** – includes coaching support available 24/7 year round, tuition scholarships, campus housing during semester breaks, specialized courses, professional mentors, leadership and employment opportunities; state foster care worker located on campus; all via Seita Scholars Program
- **Outreach** – support to a statewide network of colleges and universities in Michigan to increase access and success of foster care alumni in post-secondary education; share and adapt best practices to individual schools and collaborate with key partners; all via Fostering Success Michigan.
- **Training** – use data driven Fostering Success Coaching Model at WMU and other institutions to develop youth's asset-based skills.

HIGHLIGHT

A Youth Thrive site visitor described the Center for Fostering Success as a veritable "marching band of comprehensive services, very structured, very participatory and with the strongest possible peer-to-peer support. And like a marching band, it creates a sense of joy to see all the pieces working together." The Center for Fostering Success benefits from the deep commitment of administration, starting with the university's president who sees this as a flagship program that merits significant financial support including, more than \$1.5 million in scholarships. Commitment is also personal. For example, WMU staff invite student for holiday meals. The campus AFSCME union members volunteer to move all of these students'

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.

belongings in and out of the dorms each year. The annual “Resilience Project” connects students to caring senior citizens in the community to share their experiences. Many of these relationships continue after graduation. Students themselves take on leadership roles planning conferences, speaking at events and providing input to the statewide network and Fostering Success Coaching Model Training program.

BUILDING THE PROTECTIVE & PROMOTIVE FACTORS

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

Social Connections: In addition to building coaching skills among educators and support staff, the Center invests in strategies to build relationships youth need with peers, professors, volunteers and professionals to support academic efforts, develop transferrable professional skills and explore future employment options.

Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence: Supports are intentionally designed to address the academic, social and developmental gaps that youth may have as a result of their time in foster care. The Center promotes strategies that are responsive to students and encourage educational continuity through continuous enrollment, seamless transfers between institutions or planned ‘stop-outs’ for students who might otherwise be at risk of dropping out.

USING DATA

The Center for Fostering Success reviews their intervention efforts and student performance indicators on an annual basis to inform program and practice decisions. In student support, youth from foster care are compared to students who are “First Time in Any College” (FTIAC). Outcome data indicate that students from foster care are as likely to return to WMU for a second year, suggesting that the program is leveling the academic playing field. In outreach, Fostering Success Michigan supports a network of over 3,200 state and national partners who insulate the education to career pipeline for Michigan’s 4,500 youth from foster care.