NCHP

National Conference for
Hidden Student Populations

Fifth Annual National Conference
Proceedings for Hidden Student Populations

2025

NCHP

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TO CONNECT TO ZOOM ROOM: CLICK ON AGENDA ITEM.

Please note: To provide space for our presenters to transition in and out of sessions, attendees will be in waiting rooms prior to the start of a session and will be returned to waiting rooms at the end of each session.

NCHP

Day 1. February 19, 2025

Virtual

Time Zone: CST

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11 AM

Open Room for Networking　　　　　　　　　11:00 am -12:00 pm

12 PM

Welcome & Brief Overview　　　　　　　　　12:00-12:15 pm

PDQ 1　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　12:15-1:00 pm
But What Happens After Graduation?: A Think Tank Exploring
How to Support Students During Their Transition After Graduation

1 PM

Break　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　1:00-1:10 pm

2 PM

Session 1　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　1:55-2:40 pm
Exploring Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Identity Development
Among Diverse Post-Secondary Students with Foster Care Histories
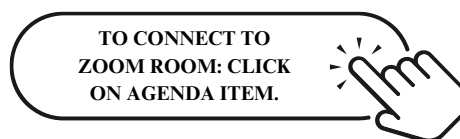
Closing　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　2:40-3:00 pm

3 PM

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Day 2. February 20, 2025

Virtual

Time Zone: CST

TO CONNECT TO ZOOM ROOM: CLICK ON AGENDA ITEM.

11 AM

Brainstorming with Doctoral Students and Recent Graduates   *(Zoom link emailed to attendees)*   11:15-11:45 am

12 PM

Welcome Back   12:00-12:15 pm

Session 1   12:20-1 pm
A . . . Review of Educational Outcomes . . . Experience in Foster Care

Session 1   12:20-1:00 pm
Smile, You're on Camera: Using Video Notification to Enhance . . . Engagement

1 PM

Session 2   1:10-1:50 pm
Understanding Fosterphobia and What it Means for Higher Education

Session 2   1:10-1:50 pm
The Prevalence of ACEs and . . . Hidden Student Populations . . .

2 PM

Break   2:00-2:40 pm

3 PM

Session 3   2:50-3:30 pm
From Foster Care to College: . . . Motivations of Black Foster Youth

Session 3   2:50-3:30 pm
Building a Data-Driven Future: ... Embark Georgia Research Consortium

Closing   3:40-4:00 pm

4 PM

Looking Forward to 2026 at UGA   4:00-4:30 pm

But What Happens After Graduation?: A Think Tank Exploring How to Support Students During Their Transition After Graduation

Presenters: Dr. Lisa Schelbe

Abstract: Efforts have been made to increase postsecondary education access and success for students from hidden populations. Enrollment, retention, and graduation rates are used as metrics for success. However, increasingly there is concern about what happens after graduation for students from hidden populations. Institutions of higher education and campus support programs have an opportunity and responsibility to make sure that students from hidden populations not only thrive while pursuing their degrees but also are set up for success after graduation. This roundtable will discuss the arguments to focus on life after graduation as well as strategies to ensure positive post-graduation outcomes for students from hidden populations.

A Landscape Scan of Research on the K-12 Education of Young People in the United States Who Experience Foster Care, Incarceration, and/or Homelessness

Presenters: Maddy Day & Stephanie Malia Krauss

Abstract: Across the United States, more than 1.6 million young people struggle to stay and succeed in K-12 schools because of homelessness, foster care, and/or incarceration. Though these students collectively surpass the population size of the states of New Hampshire and Hawaiʻi, they are often hidden from education discussions and decisions. These young people face extreme challenges and endure oppressive system conditions that make school difficult, impeding their learning and life outcomes. These young people are disproportionately students of color, living in poverty, and often face numerous barriers to educational access, stability, and success.

A Landscape Scan of Research on the K-12 Education of Young People in the United States Who Experience Foster Care, Incarceration, and/or Homelessness presents findings from a comprehensive review of research published between 2010 and 2024. The authors identified over 400 relevant peer-reviewed articles and field-produced research reports, 200 of which were analyzed directly and focused specifically on the K-12 educational experiences of young people in the U.S. experiencing homelessness and

systems-involvement; the research team considered 27 federal clearinghouses with studies on young people, and selected ten relevant clearinghouses to search for studies on this topic; 20 interviews and two focus groups were conducted with leading researchers from multiple disciplines. Through these activities, the landscape scan sought to answer three questions:

1. What research has been published on the education experience of youth in the US experiencing homelessness, foster care, and/or the juvenile justice system?
2. What are new and persistent research gaps and opportunities?
3. What can we learn from available research that can positively impact educational experiences and outcomes for these young people?

This landscape scan points to six future priorities:

1. Intersectional research examining multiple system experiences
2. Cross-system collaboration and data-sharing
3. Research collaboratives and support for scholars with lived experience
4. Translation of research into actionable resources for policymakers and practitioners
5. Expanded federal clearinghouse inclusion criteria
6. Prevention, intervention, and longitudinal research

Existing research shows investment, energy, and gaps in research on the K-12 education of young people experiencing homelessness, foster care, and incarceration, especially when experiences are combined or rotational. The path forward requires sustained commitment, funding, and elevated visibility from decision makers so that the emerging and established researchers focused on this topic can continue to build evidence for improving educational experiences and outcomes for young people most harmed by the systems meant to support them.

Education Reach for Texans: A Moody
M-Pact Initiative Supporting Lived Experience Experts

Presenters: Dr. Sheila Bustillos, Brenda Sweeten, Dr. Toni Watt, & Kayli Lord

Abstract: This pilot program enhances engagement in campus-based support programs among students who have experienced foster care (SEFC), improves retention rates, and increases tuition and fee waiver usage. To achieve this, we are partnering with seven two-year and four-year higher education institutions in Texas, and with Dr. Jamie Bennett, a consultant and lived-experience expert, to implement the Fostering Success coaching model at the seven pilot sites. Originally developed for professionals working with SEFC, this model will be adapted to train our student employees in the best peer coaching practices. It emphasizes holistic care by integrating Casey Family Programs' Seven Life Domains, helping students focus on their present and future goals rather than their past experiences. Through this initiative, peer coaches will gain transferable skills that will support their future careers while encouraging success for the SEFC they serve.

A critical component of this program is research and outcome evaluation. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, we will assess program outcomes such as tuition and fee waiver utilization, retention rates, and academic performance indicators (e.g., GPA and credit completion). The process evaluation will involve interviews, focus groups, and data

collected by liaisons and coaches to assess peer coaching effectiveness, the extent to which liaisons feel more supported in their roles, and the benefits and challenges of serving as a peer coach. We are looking for feedback from conference peers on research and/or evidence-based practices for peer coaching, literature suggestions, and any other information we may collect on how to improve our program design.

February 19, 2025
Day 1, Session 1

Exploring Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Identity Development Among Diverse Post-Secondary Students with Foster Care Histories

Presenters: Kayli Lord, Dr. Sheila Bustillos, Dr. Nathaniel Brown, Dr. Blayne Stone, Jr., & Dr. Brenda Morton

Abstract: This proposed qualitative research study explores the racial, ethnic, and cultural identity development of young adults with foster care experience who are enrolled in post-secondary education. Grounded in the Casey Family Programs' It's My Life Framework (2006) and transracial identity theory, this study examines how cultural and personal identity formation occurs within this population. The It's My Life Framework was developed with input from individuals with foster care experience, families, and stakeholders to guide institutions in establishing campus support programs. It consists of seven domains: education, finances, housing, health, life skills, social relationships, and cultural and personal identity. Prior research (Watt et al., 2023) indicates that while many institutions address financial, academic, and health-related needs, fewer provide support for housing, mentoring, or cultural identity development. This study focuses on the cultural and personal identity domain, aiming to better understand the unique challenges and experiences of foster care alumni in higher education.

Implications: This research bridges the gap in understanding how students aged 18-25 understand their own racial and cultural identities in the context of being in the foster care system. There is a

lack of knowledge of how students who have experienced foster care receive support or lack thereof in their racial/ethnic cultural identity and how they perceive that identity in the context of the foster care system.

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February 20, 2025
Day 2, Session 1

A Systematic Review of Educational Outcomes of Students with Experience in Foster Care

Presenters: Maddy Day, Dr. Nathanael Okpych, Dr. Kenyon Lee Whitman, Lisa Jackson, Dr. Liz Neria Pina, & Jane Lee

Abstract: Students who experience foster care (SEFC) remain some of the most educationally marginalized youth in the U.S. However, rates of secondary and postsecondary outcomes vary widely across studies limiting the ability to inform policy (Okpych, et al., 2023). At present, there is no definitive publication that reports secondary and postsecondary education rates based on best available empirical evidence. The goal of this study is to fill this gap in the literature by reviewing methodologically sound studies with SEFC published between 2000 and present.

Research Questions:

1. What are the secondary completion rates, postsecondary education (PSE) enrollment rates, and PSE completion rates for SEFC?

2. What are the differences by race and ethnicity in secondary completion rates, PSE enrollment rates, and PSE completion rates for SEFC?

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February 20, 2025
Day 2, Session 1

Smile, You're on Camera: Using Video Notification to Enhance Student Engagement with Vulnerable Populations

Presenters: Dr. Victoria McWilliams, Dr. Layonda Bennett, and Niki Lang

Abstract:

- Developed a literature review to find other research on student engagement practices for hidden populations.

- Met with the institution review board to obtain permission to conduct research on our student population.

- Decided on the schedule of contact with the students and communication format.

- We divided the entire caseload into two groups to evaluate effectiveness. There is the control group that does not receive the video announcements and the experimental group that receives the video intervention.

- By conference presentation, students will receive five videos from Hand In Hand staff.

- Our participants are students attending a two-year community college with lived experience in the foster care system.

- Initial assumptions are that students who receive the video are more engaged with our staff and are more likely to attend our programming.

Implications: By completing this study, we hope to learn more about our students and best practices in effective communication with our target audience. Effective communication with this population will allow deeper understanding of the needs of this population in the short term and increase retention/persistence of this vulnerable population in the long term.

February 20, 2025
Day 2, Session 3

From Foster Care to College: Understanding the College-going Motivations of Black Foster Youth

Presenters: Dr. Blayne Stone, Jr. & Dr. Kenyon Lee Whitman

Abstract: College students' decisions to pursue further education are frequently motivated by a variety of factors. The journey to college is not the same for all students with higher education goals. Black foster youth face bewildering journeys to numerous higher education campuses around the country (Lane, 2017; Smith, 2015). Black foster youth must navigate a bevy of upstream challenges including but not limited to: the U.S. carceral system and systemic anti-Black racism (Roberts, 2022). These overlapping structures contribute to Black foster youth being over-represented in the foster care system, a lack of family privilege, and their involvement in the legal system (Langley et al., 2022; Roberts, 2022; Whitman & Lopez, in press). Despite the overrepresentation of Black youth in the U.S. foster care system (AFCARS, 2023) there is a dearth of research on Black college-going foster youth). Emerging research has documented how Black foster youth deeply aspire to go to college (see Devost, 2022; Johnson, 2021; Stone, 2024;). We add to this growing body of research, in doing so we counter the deficit discourses that frequently represent this specific group, more critical qualitative research is essential.

Our research questions are:

1. What are the structural challenges Black foster youth navigated to enroll in college?

2. What are the motivations of Black foster youth to pursue college?

To answer these research questions we use BlackCrit and Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) and as our theoretical framework to examine the structural challenges that Black foster youth traverse and the motivational factors that led Black college-going foster youth to pursue a post-secondary education.

This study took on a qualitative methodological approach, specifically phenomenology to unpack the lived experiences of 31 Black individuals from across the country. Two semi-structured interviews with participants illuminated several key factors that inspired their journey to higher education, revealing the personal motivations and driving forces behind their decision to enroll. We have four preliminary findings:

- Navigating desperate family dynamics
- A passion for learning
- The sense of serenity offered by school
- The drive to reimagine themselves and prove others wrong

The findings provide insights into the factors that motivate participants to pursue postsecondary enrollment. It also pushes back on the public discourse that often overlooks their successes after enduring the additional hardships of a supplementary, this study provides stories of achievements and triumph within this often-overlooked population that social workers, college personnel and other foster youth advocates can learn from.

Implications: This study offers several implications for stakeholders who strive to improve the educational outcomes of both current and former Black foster care youth, because of the required brevity we offer two here. First, by increasing awareness of this population's challenges, the child welfare, K-12, and higher education systems can respond to the hardships that frequently hinder youth from achieving educational success. As the participants' stories emphasize, there is a need for greater collaboration between child welfare and education to address the persistent historical barriers. Second, colleges and universities must build new and more effective pathways to overcome the trenches and moats that often exclude Black foster youth from accessing the postsecondary education. Lastly, the stigmas often associated with foster youth, particularly those who identify as Black, can be permanently transformed. These youth and adolescents are intelligent, resourceful, and creative, and they can thrive when given the right opportunities.

February 20, 2025
Day 2, Session 2

The Prevalence of ACEs and Self-Identifying Members of Hidden Student Populations at Land Grant Universities: Academic Implications

Presenters: Dr. Kerri Kearney, Dr. Kayla Loper, Dr. Lisa Kerr, Dr. Lisa Will, Mallory Shuler, Dr. Sarah Gordon, & Dr. Liz Neria

Abstract: Undergraduate college students arrive at their institutions with broad ranges of educational preparation, support networks, and life experiences. This study explored the presence of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), including students who self-identify as members of hidden student populations, generally defined as college students with experience with socially stigmatizing trauma, at three land grant institutions in the south/southeastern region of the United States. Using chi-squared analysis, this study found that first-generation college students were more likely to self-identify as members of one or more hidden populations compared to their peers. Approximately one in three undergraduate students reported ACEs scores of four or more, which is considered significant for long-term impacts on the brain, stress, and the immune system. Students who self-reported higher conventional ACEs scores also self-reported an affiliation with a hidden population at a greater rate. However, almost one in five students who did not self-identify as a member of a hidden population still reported ACEs scores of four or more. While GPA did not show a statistical difference in the overall academic performance of hidden and non-hidden student populations, there appeared to be a practical difference.

Instructors should expect that almost one in every three of their students may be carrying the effects of traumatic experiences into the learning environment, which has pedagogical and teaching practice implications. Although some areas on campus have trauma trained professionals, the majority of campus staff and faculty are not equipped to support students with trauma and those who identify as members of hidden student populations.

February 20, 2025
Day 2, Session 2

Understanding Fosterphobia and What it Means for Higher Education

Presenters: Dr. Kenyon Lee Whitman & Dr. Blayne Stone Jr.

Abstract: Children who are involved in the child welfare system are not viewed in a favorable light. Movies like Annie, The Blind Side, and Losing Isiah—and shows like Criminal Minds and The Fosters, have influenced the ways in which generations of people look at foster care and children and families who have been entangled in the system. Whitman who was in foster care for over 12 years and Stone, who has served and supported foster youth have experienced how the foster care system overlooks, marginalizes, and even dehumanizes young people and their families. This dehumanization impacts students who have experienced foster care from seeking and receiving the necessary support they rightfully deserve.

We unpack how foster youth experience stigma, marginalization, prejudice, and dehumanization because of their foster care status. We explain this oppressive ideology as fosterphobia. We theorize that fosterphobia stems from the organizing framework that makes biological nuclear families normal, better, and more "right" within the broader context of family arrangements. The mainstream narrative presents foster youth as troublesome, criminal, and at-risk (Calheiros et al., 2015). We discuss how fosterphobia is

a fear of difference, a fear of relinquishing the privilege of being born into a nuclear family, it is a pathology, born from white supremacy that denotes people who are born into a family that is not: same race, heteronormative, middle-class to affluent, and biological are rendered less than (Letiecq, 2019; Polikoff, 2008). Fosterphobia is responsible for the deficit thinking that something is inherently "wrong" with foster youth, this messaging creates shame and stigma foster youth must navigate, oftentimes making them not want to out themselves as foster youth publicly, pushing them to the margins.

Fosterphobia is a system that operates across multiple domains, like other forms of oppression (i.e. racism and homophobia), fosterphobia occurs: institutionally, individually, socially, and culturally. Fosterphobia intersects with other identities, particularly with Black children. With the overrepresentation of Black children in foster care, anti-Black racism magnifies fosterphobia; creating a pathology that youth from foster care are not worthy of love, care, and compassion thus blaming them for their plight and living conditions.

It is important to put a name to this form of systematic marginalization to hold those people who are fosterphobic accountable. We use the Five Faces of Oppression (see Young, 1990) to contextualize fosterphobia and how it impacts young people at college campuses and in the broader society.

Implications:

Due to the required brevity we offer five ways student affairs professionals can contend with fosterphobia:

1. College campuses embody family privilege assuming that every student on campus comes from a traditional nuclear family structure often, leaving foster youth without nowhere to go for the winter and summer breaks, lack of a financial safety net, and having to navigate university-wide events (e.g. orientation, move-in day, and homecoming) that cater towards students with family privilege to name a few.

2. Students' stories are exploited to fundraise money and to raise the profile of the campus.

3. The stigmatization of foster care hinders students from "outing" themselves to seek services.

4. The services foster youth sometimes need to succeed in college is seen as a deficit.

5. Saviorism and paternalism foster youth advocates/supporters often embody.

February 20, 2025
Day 2, Session 3

Building a Data-Driven Future:
Updates from the Embark Georgia Research Consortium

Presenters: Dr. Katherine Adams, Dr. Grace Bagwell Adams, Dr. Renni Turpin, & Dr. Lori Tiller

Abstract: Since its inception at the 2024 NCHP, the Embark Georgia Research Consortium has been at the forefront of advancing knowledge on postsecondary access and success for youth in foster care. This session will present an overview of the Consortium's research agenda, which focuses on four key areas: (1) evaluating statewide summer programs designed to equip high school foster youth with college-readiness skills, (2) mapping campus support services at Georgia's four-year institutions, (3) analyzing long-term trends in ETV program participation and impact using an eight-year dataset, and (4) leveraging a new data-sharing agreement with the state child welfare agency to study college enrollment patterns over a decade. The presentation will highlight findings from two completed studies—ETV program outcomes and summer programming impact—while offering insights into the Consortium's ongoing research and next steps.

Implications: By analyzing longitudinal data and statewide program effectiveness, this research advances understanding of systemic barriers and facilitators in higher education for students experiencing foster care. Insights will guide policymakers, educators, and child welfare agencies in designing more effective interventions and scaling best practices to improve college enrollment, persistence, and completion rates.

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