



Association for Children
of New Jersey

Getting Foster Youth to and through College

Successes and Challenges of the New Jersey Foster Care Scholars Program

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Introduction

In 2003, New Jersey took advantage of federal funding to start a scholarship program for foster youth to attend college. State officials anticipated that a few dozen youth would apply. But New Jersey Foster Care Scholars drew 90 young people its first year. By the 2007-08 academic year, the number enrolled in the program had grown six-fold to 556. Of those, 443 went on to register for classes and receive grants.

The popularity of the scholarship program is a testament to its importance. Many young people flocking to apply for scholarships see an opportunity for higher education that they thought they would never have.

“I always thought, ‘College costs too much. I don’t have money to pay for it,’”—Kassim, 22, in the scholarship program three years and starting his senior year of college.

Young people know a college degree is increasingly essential to success in today’s competitive economy. Without it, they risk spending their lives stuck in low-wage work.

Youth aging out of foster care are particularly vulnerable. Many come from families unable to provide the stability or support children need to succeed in school. After being removed from their homes because of abuse or neglect, the children may endure repeated moves, further disrupting their schooling. The results of such childhood trauma, deprivation and dislocation can show up in their academic records. Among a 2005 sample of Midwestern foster youth, more than a third had not achieved either a high school diploma or GED by age 19. That is more than three times the percentage of their peers without this basic level of educational attainment.¹

The New Jersey Foster Care Scholars program (NJFC Scholars) requires scholarship recipients to have either a high school diploma or GED. But some begin college with an educational deficit they have to make up through non-credit remedial courses. In addition to academic challenges, former foster youth are more likely than their peers to lack either the financial or emotional support of parents. On average in the United

States, young people ages 18 to 34 receive an estimated \$38,000 from parents to pay for college, supplement wages, assist with down payments on a house and other types of financial help.² This gives an idea of what former foster youth lose when they lack parents’ financial support during college and after.

Typical college students also rely on parents for non-material assistance, including emotional support; advice on possible career paths and how to adapt to college life; and a place to live during college breaks. Studies show the lack of family involvement experienced by many foster youth creates a need for supplemental, non-financial supports, such as mentoring or counseling. For some students, such supports could make the difference of whether they stay in college or drop out.

The Association for Children of New Jersey has taken a look at the scholarship program through interviews with staff at the state Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the private agency that administers the program for the state; older foster youth and their counselors; and officials in other states that run similar scholarship programs. This report is the second in a series of ACNJ briefs on youth aging out of foster care.

To address the needs of foster youth, a comprehensive scholarship program should have:

- **Stable funding** sufficient to cover students’ room and board costs as well as tuition and fees.
- **Non-material assistance** for students, including mentoring or counseling and access to academic tutoring.
- **Expansive eligibility rules** that offer scholarships to youth who left foster care as teenagers through adoption or guardianship in addition to those still in care or who have aged out.

■ **Practices based on the principles of “positive youth development,”** an approach designed to help youth become independent, self-supporting adults. This approach helps young people strengthen their abilities to make good decisions, reach out to community resources for help, and connect to the larger society.

■ **Extensive data collection to track the progress of students,** including on how many graduate and what conditions are conducive to success in college. For example, data should be collected on whether students live on or off campus; are in state custody or enrolled in some state-funded service for aging out youth; whether they work full- or part-time; and whether they have student loans.

Our findings show New Jersey has most of these elements at least partially in place. But some are missing:

■ New Jersey’s scholarship program lacks a sufficient, stable source of funding because the Legislature never appropriated funds to implement a 2003 law guaranteeing former foster youth free tuition to state public colleges. Notably, the program lacks enough funding to cover room and board costs for all students. The lack of a legislative appropriation is of particular concern because of a cut this year in New Jersey’s share of federal funds for foster youth scholarships. The federal funding cut is a result of a reduction in the number of New Jersey children in foster care.

■ New Jersey offers mentoring to NJFC scholarship recipients but not all students have availed themselves of the service. Students may also receive counseling or case management from other sources, including a Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) caseworker, if they are still in state care. The challenge for New Jersey is that scholarship recipients have varied situations. Some may be receiving the counseling and emotional support they need; others may not. Academic tutoring is not offered through NJ Scholars. Students who need academic support are expected to seek it at their college.

■ New Jersey’s scholarship program has more expansive eligibility guidelines than scholarship initiatives in many other states. The state has intentionally, for example, opened enrollment to youth who are homeless, in Kinship Legal Guardianship, or who were adopted from foster care between 12 and 15 years old. Still, data suggest the program reaches only a fraction of the approximately 1,900 young people who may be eligible.

■ DCF embraces the positive youth development approach to older youth and has this year conducted trainings in it for caseworkers and contracted service providers. The state is also incorporating some principles of positive youth development directly into the scholarship program, such as through a new requirement for scholarship recipients to sign an agreement that sets out their obligations in the program.

■ New Jersey has insufficient data on youth who have received scholarships. DCF and Foster and Adoptive Family Services (FAFS), the private agency that administers NJFC

Scholars for the state, are concerned that too many students are dropping out. They need data to confirm this and to track what might be contributing to the problem. FAFS will this year begin a significant expansion of its data collection, including on the number of students who return each year and the number who withdraw.

I. **How It Began: A State Law With No Funding**

Former Governor James McGreevey and the New Jersey Legislature in 2003 passed a law establishing the Statewide Tuition Waiver Program.³ Despite its name, the law does not waive the college tuition of foster youth. Rather, it mandates that the state cover whatever tuition costs remain for eligible foster youth at state public colleges and vocational schools after all other grants, such as from Pell and the Tuition Aid Grant (TAG), are applied. In addition to these restrictions, the law was never funded by the Legislature, which has undercut its potential benefit to foster youth.

Federal Funding to the Rescue But it is Not Enough

New Jersey has been able to avoid appropriating money for the tuition-waiver law by relying largely on federal money. Around the same time the state law was passed, federal scholarship funds became available through Chafee Independent Living Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) for foster youth. The ETV program allows states to give up to \$5,000 per year to current and former foster youth for higher education tuition, room, board and other expenses.

DCF has supplemented the ETV funds with significant additional financing from other state and federal grants to its department. It has used this mix of funding to fulfill the tuition-waiver law’s mandate and go beyond it by providing scholarships to both public and private colleges, in and out of state. The funding is insufficient, however, to cover room and board for all students; housing costs are a big source of anxiety for many scholarship recipients. The funding crunch has been exacerbated this year by a cut in the state’s share of federal ETV funding from \$1,066,000 to \$926,000.

II. **How it Works: Some Quick Facts on the New Jersey Foster Care Scholars Program**

■ The scholarship program is run through a partnership of three agencies—DCF, FAFS and the Project Myself program at Rutgers University School of Social Work. FAFS, formerly called the Foster Parents Association, was a driving force behind the state’s establishment of a foster youth scholarship initiative.

■ DCF contracts with FAFS to administer the program, which includes processing applications; determining the size of grants based on students’ eligibility and need; liaising with college financial aid offices; and disbursing grants for tuition and living expenses as varied as a computer, child care, or a bus pass.

- FAFS' responsibilities also include outreach to potential scholarship recipients. Its contract this year calls for less mass outreach, such as through advertising, and more targeted outreach to organizations and individuals who work with older and former foster youth, which DCF thinks will be more effective.
- DCF also contracts with the Rutgers School of Social Work to run Project Myself, which provides mentoring and arranges volunteer community service work for scholarship recipients.
- Students can qualify for scholarships through meeting the eligibility rules of either the state tuition waiver or federal ETV programs. Scholarships are also available to youth who have been homeless or left foster care through adoption or Kinship Legal Guardianship, an important benefit to families who provide permanent homes to older foster youth.
- Although there are several ways to qualify, scholarships all essentially come out of the same pot of money, which is a combination of federal and state funds.
- The maximum ETV grants are \$5,000 per academic year. Grants may be higher for students who qualify under the tuition-waiver program and whose remaining tuition costs, after other federal and state grants are applied, exceed \$5,000. FAFS works to develop a scholarship package for each student that maximizes the availability of funds.
- Most scholarships provided are for college; approximately 10 percent of the youth in 2007-08 applied for scholarships to private technical schools.

- FAFS encourages students to choose a college, public or private, that best meets their needs. Many foster youth begin their studies at state community colleges, which offer vocational-type courses such as in nursing or technology that may be in line with students' career goals. Courses at two-year colleges are also less costly than at four-year schools, which is particularly important when students must take non-credit remedial classes.

III. How NJFC Scholarship Participants Fare How They Fare Financially: The Anxiety Over Living Expenses

College is an expensive proposition. Many NJFC scholarship recipients attend with no financial support from family.

As shown by examples on the chart below, the "cost of attendance" at New Jersey public and private colleges varies greatly. The chart does not include the costs at private technical schools, which can approach or exceed that of private colleges.

Students attending community colleges typically get nearly all their tuition covered by federal and state grants. They are more likely to get NJFC scholarship aid for room and board. But those at the more costly four-year schools, particularly schools that are private or out of state, are less likely to have anything but tuition covered. These students are more likely to have to pay some or all of their room and board and other living expenses on their own.

continued on page 6

Sample of One Year of Higher Education Costs in NJ vs. Grants Available for Youth in NJ Foster Care Scholars Program¹

Cost of Attendance²

	Felician College (Private)	Montclair State University (Public)	Rutgers University (Public)	Brookdale Community College (Public)
Tuition and Fees	\$23,500	\$9,781	\$10,614	\$1,772
Room and Board	\$9,350	\$10,304	\$9,482	\$9,239
Books	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$600
Transportation	\$800	\$1,152	\$900	\$1,136
Miscellaneous	\$1,800	\$3,637	\$1,500	\$849
Total Cost	\$36,450	\$25,874	\$23,496	\$13,596

Maximum Entitlement Grant Eligibility

	Felician College (Private)	Montclair State University (Public)	Rutgers University (Public)	Brookdale Community College (Public)
Federal Pell Grant	\$4,731	\$4,731	\$4,731	\$4,310
Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG)	\$1,000	\$1,800	unknown	\$400
State Tuition Aid Grant	\$10,136	\$6,036	\$7,922	\$2,646
NJ Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) ³	\$2,500	\$1,400	\$1,400	\$1,050

From NJ Foster Care Scholars, either:

	Felician College (Private)	Montclair State University (Public)	Rutgers University (Public)	Brookdale Community College (Public)
State Tuition Waiver or Maximum Chafee ETV	0 \$5,000	Covers remainder of tuition and fees only, after other grants are applied \$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000
Total Grants (excluding tuition waiver)	\$23,367	\$18,967	\$19,053	\$13,406
Deficit	\$13,083	\$6,907	\$4,443	\$190

¹ All costs calculated based on full-time, in-state student living on campus. In the case of Brookdale Community College, estimated costs are for a student living independently.

² Cost of Attendance is the amount calculated by the college and used in the calculation of financial aid, including for NJFC Scholars.

³ The New Jersey EOF serves students who are capable and motivated to attend college but who are economically disadvantaged and had poor high school preparation. It is primarily available to students from lower socioeconomic school districts. EOF is offered by nearly all private and public colleges and is administered separately at each college.

Comparison of State Scholarship Programs for Foster Youth

Numbers are for 2007–08 year unless otherwise noted.

Eligibility	Number of potentially eligible youth ¹	Number scholarships	Tuition coverage to state public colleges	Tuition coverage to private colleges	Tuition coverage to out-of-state colleges
<p>NEW JERSEY</p> <p>1. Eligible for tuition waiver: Youth who have been homeless or in foster care for at least 9 months at age 16 or older and youth who have lived in DYFS-funded transitional housing. Also homeless youth. Must apply by 23rd birthday and attend college full-time.</p> <p>2. Eligible for ETV: Youth 16 to 21 who were in care or adopted from care after 16th birthday.</p> <p>3. Youth who left care between ages of 12 to 16 through adoption or Kinship Legal Guardianship.</p>	1903 total for state	443 total for state	Yes	Yes, except for students who qualify only for tuition waiver	Yes, except for students who qualify only for tuition waiver
<p>CONNECTICUT</p> <p>Youth must voluntarily remain in state care to get scholarships. Eligibility for vocational school is up to age 21; for college it is up to age 23.</p>	1,581	562	Yes	Yes	Yes
<p>MARYLAND</p> <p>1. Eligible for tuition waiver: Youth in care upon receipt of h.s. diploma or receipt of GED, or adopted from care after 14.</p> <p>2. Eligible for ETV: Youth in care or who have aged out of care, and those adopted from care after age 16.</p>	3,038	128 tuition waivers; 256 ETV recipients, 2006–07	Yes	No on tuition waiver, yes on ETV.	No on tuition waiver, yes on ETV.
<p>NEW YORK</p> <p>ETV program only: Youth in care or who have been in care from age 18 up to 23, and those adopted from care after age 16.</p>	8,680	810	Yes	Yes	Yes
<p>NORTH CAROLINA</p> <p>1. Eligible for ETV program: In state care on or after 17th birthday or adopted from care after 16th birthday. Eligible up to age 23.</p> <p>2. Eligible for NC REACH, a new program starting in 2008-09: Youth who aged out of care at age 18 or were adopted from care after age 12.</p>	1,583	263 ETV recipients. No number available for NC REACH as it is new program.	Yes	Yes on ETV; no on NC REACH.	Yes on ETV; no on NC REACH.

¹ Based on the number of youth ages 16 to 21 who are or were in foster care. 2004 data from the federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS)

Room and board coverage	Other Supports	Federal ETV Funding	Other federal money	State contribution	Total amount spent
Amount available is generally what is left after tuition. Maximum grant for tuition, room and board is \$5,000.	Mentoring and community service work through Project Myself. Some students also receive counseling or case management from DYFS caseworkers or through DYFS-funded programs.	\$1,066,000.	\$947,327. (from Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and Chafee Independent Living funds	\$905,396. (from state grants to DCF and DCF purchase of services)	\$2,918,618.
Youth receive up to \$1,813. per month from state housing program.	Funding from ETV also used for tutoring, computers and other supports.	\$668,612.	Unknown	\$7,336,157. on tuition, housing and other supports.	\$8,004,769.
Independent living supports (rent, utilities, etc.) available on case-by-case basis	Mentoring, tutoring, and other supports provided by Orphan Foundation.	\$962,000.	None	\$307,200. to tuition waiver program. \$86,580 to ETV program.	\$1,355,780.
Generally, amount available for room, board and other expenses is what is left after tuition and fees are paid.	Mentoring, tutoring, and other supports provided by Orphan Foundation.	\$2,603,191.	None	\$234,287.	\$2,837,478.
1. ETV: Amount available is generally what is left after tuition. Maximum grant for tuition, room and board is \$5,000. 2. NC REACH: fully covers room, board, transportation and school supplies.	In both the ETV and NC REACH programs, mentoring, tutoring, and other supports are provided by Orphan Foundation.	\$947,000.	None	1. ETV: State contribution is equal to at least 20 percent of federal grant, or \$189,400. 2. NC REACH: not available.	1. ETV program: At least \$1,136,400. 2. NC REACH: unknown.

Housing in particular can be a big source of anxiety for scholarship recipients. Unlike other college students, many youth in the scholarship program have no stable family home where they might live while attending classes or during college breaks.

One student, whose name is being withheld, said housing and money are constant sources of worry: “Where am I going to go over the winter break? What do I do for housing junior and senior year? How can I work full-time and maintain the GPA I need?....Money is a huge thing.”

Even some who may have a family or foster family they could live with choose to stay away. One student told ACNJ he avoided spending time at his foster home because it is in a crime-ridden neighborhood. He does not want to subject himself to that environment.

The Difficulty Students Face with Housing is Fueled in Part by Limitations of the State Tuition Waiver Law.

The law restricts waiver money to be used only for tuition, not housing. It also covers only what remains of tuition after other grants are applied. That can amount to very little aid for students whose tuition is covered nearly in full by Pell, TAG and other grants. Students at private or out-of-state colleges with higher tuition costs who could benefit most from the waiver are ineligible because it can be used only for state public colleges.

The damaging effect of these restrictions is perhaps most evident for students who qualify only for tuition waiver and not ETV. This includes homeless youth who were never in state care, youth who first apply for scholarships after their 21st birthday, and those who continue their studies after their 23rd birthday.

Among students ineligible for ETV, the fortunate ones live in a DYFS-funded transitional or independent living program or with their family or foster family. DCF last year began to extend foster care payments to families of college students so that more foster families may continue providing a home for young people pursuing a higher education.

But some youth are left to cover room and board through working full-time or student loans. The potential loan burden is a concern. There is growing alarm nationally that the increasing loan burden on U.S. undergraduates is excessive and harmful to their future prospects. This is a greater worry for former foster youth who are more likely to lack financial support from parents after college when loans become due.

“The scholarship was central to my academic success,” says James Taylor, 25, profiled in a Star-Ledger newspaper article⁴ when he graduated from Kean University in June 2008. James told ACNJ that while his tuition was covered by the tuition waiver, he paid for living expenses through working and student loans that amount to more than \$30,000 for his five years in college. He feels lucky the total isn’t higher. But he added that students need affordable, safe housing. “No one expects to get a free ride. But the environments we have to move to, you have to deal with drugs and vandalism and theft. Areas near college campuses are too expensive.”

How Scholarship Recipients Fare Academically and Emotionally

Living expenses aren’t the only source of stress for some foster youth in college. Some begin college with educational deficits and find themselves placed by their colleges in non-credit remedial courses. It can be frustrating to earn no credits while struggling to balance work and school.

“The first year was all non-credit classes. It seemed kind of pointless,” said Delanne, 20, a community college student. But she said that after her DYFS case was closed when she was 18, she benefited from counseling in a DYFS-funded aftercare program for former foster youth. “I had somebody to really guide me and help me.”

Students who do not need remedial courses can also feel overwhelmed by the demands of course work, jobs and personal responsibilities.

Jasmine, 23, found it a struggle a couple of years ago to balance caring for her baby daughter, working part-time, and carrying a full course load at a four-year college. She transferred to a community college where, “It seemed like the professors were more willing to sit down and talk if you needed to.” She completed her associate’s degree and is transferring to another four-year college this fall.

College students need emotional support and guidance to steer their way to a degree. Delanne has gotten that from a counselor in a state-funded program. Jasmine said she has benefitted from mentoring from Project Myself. The situations of NJFC scholarship recipients are varied, with some in DYFS-funded programs or state care and others living on their own without counseling or case management. DCF needs to ensure that all students have someone to offer guidance and encouragement.

IV.

How Project Myself Works

Project Myself was founded in 1999 to offer supports to the then small number of former foster youth receiving DYFS scholarships. The program now serves NJFC scholarship recipients. It also runs the Transitions for Youth web site, www.transitionsforyouth.org, for aging out youth and operates a small summer program in which scholarship recipients live on the Rutgers campus, receive living stipends and participate in summer internships.

Project Myself’s services to scholarship recipients have evolved over the years. In the past, it gave them several options for participating, including mentoring a younger NJFC scholarship student or doing community service. For the 2008-09 academic year, the plan is for graduate interns in social work to provide all of the mentoring, which promises a higher quality of service. In addition, all NJFC scholarship recipients will be required to do volunteer community work for 20 hours per semester. The purpose is to help them connect to their communities, gain experience that can guide career choices, and have something to put on their resumes.

All NJFC scholarship recipients are supposed to participate in Project Myself. But in 2007-08, only about a third were active, according to the Project Myself program director. One problem is that some students, after receiving their grants, don't keep in touch with either Project Myself or FAFS and fail to apprise them of changes in contact information. When Project Myself staff reach out by phone or email to students who have not contacted the program on their own, they often cannot get through or their messages aren't returned.

That should change this year. NJFC scholarship recipients are being required to sign a participation agreement in which they pledge among other things to keep in regular contact with FAFS and to participate in Project Myself. This means more students could potentially benefit from Project Myself. But it raises the question of how the program's small staff of two employees plus four social work interns could handle a potential tripling of their caseload. DCF may need to examine whether more funding is necessary for Project Myself to serve all scholarship recipients effectively.

V. How NJFC Scholars is Changing in the 2008–09 Academic Year

Despite the enormous growth in the scholarship program over the past few years, it is facing a federal funding cut. Chafee ETV funds are distributed to states based on their overall number of children in foster care. A significant drop in children in out-of-home placement in New Jersey has led to a 13 percent cut in ETV funds to about \$926,000.

DCF has responded to both the funding squeeze and concerns about student retention by making certain changes to program management and the requirements upon scholarship recipients. The goal is to stretch available funds without turning away eligible students.

- Students will now have an October deadline to apply for scholarships for fall semester and March to apply for spring, in contrast to the past practice of rolling admissions throughout the year.
- The program will operate on an academic year. Previously, it ran on the federal fiscal year. That allowed some first-year students to receive up to \$10,000 in ETV grants instead of \$5,000 because they received one full installment early in the calendar year and the second after the start of the new fiscal year in October. The maximum ETV grant will now be up to \$2,500 per semester, consistent with federal guidelines.
- Students will have to sign a participation agreement.
- Youth whose semester GPA falls below the required 2.0 will be put on academic probation and will have to demonstrate they have sought academic tutoring. They will have one semester to bring their GPA up or they will lose their scholarship.

DCF and NJFC program staff hope these changes will encourage students serious about higher education to pursue scholarships. They believe some foster youth may have pursued college scholarships because they lacked a sense of direction

and were drawn by ETV funding for living expenses. But since the scholarship program began, there are more options for older foster youth in New Jersey. DYFS now allows young people to stay in foster care until age 21. The state also has significantly increased the amount of subsidized housing for aging out youth. These changes should help DCF reserve the scholarship program for those who really want higher education.

VI. What Other States Are Doing

The critical need to provide educational supports to former foster youth has been widely recognized by the federal government and states. It is useful to compare New Jersey's program to scholarship initiatives elsewhere to see what our state is doing well and where it might improve.

All 50 states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico receive federal Chafee ETV funds for educational supports to older foster youth. Some, unlike New Jersey, fail to fully utilize these funds and return some portion to the federal government.

Eighteen states and the District of Columbia also give some type of tuition support for foster youth. The most common approach is like New Jersey's, a tuition waiver to state-funded colleges and vocational schools. Unlike New Jersey, however, at least some of these states have made a direct appropriation from their state budgets to fund the waiver.

Most states offering tuition waivers or other educational supports also cover at least some of the cost of housing and other expenses. Connecticut stands out. It spent \$7.3 million of state funds last year in addition to \$668,612 in ETV funds to cover full room and board, tuition and other expenses for foster youth attending any accredited college, public or private, in or out of state. Participants have no need for student loans. Unlike New Jersey and most other states, Connecticut requires youth to remain in state care to receive the tuition and housing aid.

Connecticut officials aren't satisfied with their program's graduation rate, 52 percent in 2005. Similar to New Jersey, they believe some students not ready for college may have enrolled because they or their social workers felt the young people weren't ready to live independently. To combat this, the state is now offering alternative paths to independence, including a new employment program that helps youth sustain gainful employment for 12 months while giving them limited support for living expenses.

New Jersey also offers housing to older and former foster youth through transitional living and independent living programs. The cost of these programs is not included in the \$2.9 million spent on the scholarship initiative. Although some college students live in such housing, there are no spots reserved for them.

A glance at other states' programs suggests the New Jersey program might have an untapped potential for raising private money. Private fundraising could not substitute for stable and adequate state funding to the New Jersey program. But it might allow the scholarship program to offer more supports, such as through expanding mentoring or other services to scholarship recipients.

A model for this may be the national Orphan Foundation of America, which administers foster youth scholarship programs for nine states and raises private money to supplement its services. OFA's executive director says the program focuses strongly on both student retention and positive youth development.

OFA's practices include requiring that every ETV scholarship recipient be enrolled in a student support group and get matched with one of the trained volunteers in OFA's national virtual mentoring program. OFA matches mentors based on students' stated needs, including professional and career interests, according to the foundation's web site. Each student also receives three personalized care packages a year and phone calls and text messages on birthdays and during holidays and exam periods. Both the mentoring and care packages are funded at least in part through private donations to OFA.

For students identified as at a high risk of dropping out, OFA staff try to help students pinpoint obstacles to their achievement. The efforts appear to pay off in some states. In North Carolina, 85 percent of the students who began college in 2004-05 remained in school three years later. In New York state, the retention rate is lower: 65 percent of ETV recipients in 2007-08 were returning students. OFA is obligated under its contract with New York to improve retention.

New Jersey has recognized some OFA activities as "best practices" and is consciously adopting some. The participation agreement that students in the New Jersey program will have to sign this year is an example of positive youth development, as is the emphasis on community service at Project Myself.

VII. Conclusion

The fast growth of the NJ Foster Care Scholars program since it began five years ago shows its importance: The program touched a need. Its growth also testifies to the program's inclusiveness. New Jersey has gone beyond the requirements of the state tuition waiver law to meet the needs of vulnerable youth who have been in foster care or homeless. In addition, the state is taking important steps this year to strengthen the program, including requiring youth to get tutoring if their grades begin to slip and collecting data to track the progress of students.

But the lack of a legislative appropriation for the tuition waiver law or, for that matter, for any part of the NJFC Scholars program, has forced DCF to scramble for funding each year. The cut in federal ETV money this year exacerbates the funding crunch.

One solution could be for New Jersey to make the tuition waiver a true waiver by not charging tuition to eligible foster youth attending state public colleges and vocational schools. That would allow the scholarship program to use more of its funds for students' living expenses. Another option is for the Legislature to appropriate money for the tuition waiver law. Either way, the scholarship program would end up with more funds for strengthening its supports to foster youth in college. Those supports could make a difference, helping more foster youth achieve a college degree and become successful adults contributing to the future of New Jersey.

Notes

¹ Courtney, M., Dworsky A., Ruth G., Keller T., Havlicek J., Bost N. (2005) *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 19*.

Chapin Hall Center for Children at The University of Chicago, p. 20.

² Fernandes, A. (2007) *Vulnerable Youth: Background and Policies*. Congressional Research Service Report to Congress, p. 2

³ Statewide Tuition Waiver Program: N.J.S.A. 40 (C.30:4C-101 to 30.4C-105)

⁴ Livio, S. "Hard-Fought Success: One Man's Experience Shows the Challenges Facing Former Foster Children." (June 29, 2008) *The Star-Ledger* (Newark, New Jersey), p. 21.

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