

Youth Formerly in Foster Care Help Create Federal Foster Care Transition Toolkit

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Being a youth in foster care can be difficult. Some youth in foster care often experience trauma before entering into the foster care system. Once youth enter foster care, there are often a lack sufficient role models and resources are either scarce or spread out. Gaining access to information about even the simplest things, like opening a bank account, can be a real hurdle. That's why the recently released [Foster Care Transition Toolkit](#) is so important.

The toolkit was first envisioned in 2015 at a roundtable at Cincinnati Community College. During this meeting, students from the [Columbus State Community College Scholar Network](#) urged the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and other agencies to help them and other youth in foster care across the country better transition to college, successfully navigate through college and then to a career.

This toolkit, developed in coordination across the executive branch was designed with constant feedback from youth in foster care and stakeholders from across the country, to inspire current and former youth in foster care to pursue college and career opportunities. The toolkit includes tips and resources intended to help youth in foster care access and navigate social, emotional, educational and resource barriers as they transition into adulthood.

Secretary John B. King, Jr., invited seven students – some of whom helped develop the toolkit – to a roundtable discussion at ED. The students talked about their successes, struggles and the obstacles they faced to make it to

and through college. They also brainstormed about how ED could better support youth in foster care and gave ED employees ideas about getting the toolkit into the hands of youth who need it.

The idea of developing and maintaining effective support systems was a key theme that emerged from the discussion. During the conversation one student shared that he might have not taken a year off of college if he had additional support like the [Boise State Impact Scholars Program](#) and another student Rachel from Washington expressed her desire to encourage all states to join the [foster care until 21 movement](#), like her hometown of Washington, which allows youth in foster care to receive services until 21 years of age.

Secretary King also shared his personal story and applauded the students for their commitment to helping create more thoughtful programs and policies for youth in foster care. Rafael López, Commissioner of the [Administration on Children, Youth and Families](#), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), also attended the roundtable and followed-up saying “Your voices and expertise can make a tremendous difference. Almost all of the progress that we’ve made in child welfare over the last few years has been rooted in the powerful stories and recommendations from youth and alumni of the foster care system.”

College can be an extremely hard system to navigate emotionally and financially, even when a student has supportive caregivers, teachers, school administrators and programs. Without access to these resources, it can be really easy for a youth in or formerly in foster care to get lost. As we were wrapping up student from Los Angeles said this is why rethinking the current

educational and social system could go a long way toward working for – and not against – traditionally marginalized communities like youth in foster care.

This session was a part of the ongoing “[Student Voices](#)” series at the Department through which students engage with senior staff members to help develop recommendations on current and future education programs and policies.

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