



Summary Report on  
OCFS Higher Education  
Initiatives

*December 2009*

## **Foreword**

*Recognizing the important role that career planning and higher education play in helping youth in care make a successful transition to self-sufficiency, Commissioner Gladys Carrión established an interagency committee in 2007 to develop strategies for increasing the number of youth in care who enter college or vocational training and successfully complete their post secondary education. This report provides a summary of the higher education initiatives undertaken by the Office of Children and Family Services in partnership with local social services districts, voluntary agencies, the Adolescent Services Resource Network, Youth In Progress, COFCAA, CUNY, HESC and other state agencies. The report includes recommendations for 2010 that build and expand upon the education and career planning initiatives currently underway. In addition, the report includes new strategies that the committee would like to move forward on in 2010. The committee is hopeful that the report will be widely circulated and that other professionals will use the resources and access the partner agencies, organizations, etc. highlighted in the report to promote college and career planning opportunities for youth in care. With the dissemination of this report, the committee is also hopeful that other appropriate public and private agencies, organizations, etc will become part of this important initiative.*

# Summary Report on OCFS Higher Education Initiatives

***December 2009***

One of Commissioner Gladys Carrión's initiatives is to increase the number of youth in care who graduate from college or vocational training and successfully complete their post-secondary education. Over the past several years OCFS has undertaken a number of initiatives to address this issue. The following is a summary of the work that OCFS has undertaken during 2009 related to the OCFS higher education agenda.

## **A. Committee on Education**

Several years ago OCFS established a multi-agency committee to develop strategies to improve the outcomes for youth in OCFS care enrolled in post-secondary education and vocational training programs. During 2009, the Education Committee became established as a subcommittee under the Adolescent Services and Outcomes Workgroup. The focus of the Adolescent Workgroup is to increase the number of youth in care who will be able to make a successful transition to self-sufficiency and develop into healthy, functional citizens with permanent attachments to supportive adults, families and communities. Higher education and career planning are a major priority of this workgroup. Representatives of the workgroup and the Education Committee include local social services districts, voluntary agencies, the Adolescent Resource Network (OCFS training partners), other state agencies serving youth and Youth In Progress (OCFS foster youth leadership and advisory group), State Education Department, Higher Education Services Corporation, City University of New York, Department of Labor.

## **B. OCFS Partnerships**

The work of the Education Committee has provided OCFS with opportunities to develop new partnerships with other state agencies and key organizations which are critical to helping youth in care pursue post-secondary educational and vocational training goals. Below are some of the critical partnerships that OCFS has formed and/or developed during 2009:

### ***Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA)***

COFCCA has played a critical role in identifying appropriate partners to participate on both the Adolescent Workgroup and the Education Committee. In addition, COFCCA co-sponsored with OCFS the regional education forums in 2008 and 2009.

***Children’s Cabinet Disconnected Youth Subcommittee on Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice***

Education and Workforce Readiness is one of the key issues that this subcommittee would like to address at it relates to disconnected youth. Several participants on the Education Committee also participate on the Disconnected Youth’s Subcommittee on Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice. One of the efforts of this subcommittee is to explore strategies recommended by the Education Committee to improve educational outcomes for youth in care.

***CUNY Office of Academic Affairs***

The CUNY Office of Academic Affairs oversees University policies governing the academic programs of CUNY and its 19 colleges and more than 100 research centers. This partnership has been critical as the University offers learning opportunities at every level, including strategies that prepare youth to start thinking about college as young as in the elementary and middle school years. OCFS recognizes the importance of developing career planning strategies that target youth as young as elementary and middle school age.

***Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC)***

HESC is the state agency that administers financial assistance programs and the New York State Tuition Assistance Program. This agency has been critical in helping OCFS understand the issues related to paying for college. For example, for purposes of financial aid, a foster youth has the status of an *independent student*, and this status impacts the amount of financial aid the youth is eligible for. HESC is exploring partnering with OCFS to develop a *Youth In Care Corner* on the HESC website to provide service providers, foster parents and youth in care with key information on what youth in care need to know about financing their post-secondary education.

***Orphan Foundation of America (OFA)***

OFA serves thousands of foster teens across the United States. OFA provides them with college scholarships, connects them with mentors and internships, sends them care packages, and advocates before Congress on their behalf. OFA is a passionate champion of foster youth. OFA also manages New York States’ Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program.

***Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID)***

VESID provides vocational counseling and rehabilitation services that result in successful employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities and their employers. Many of the foster care population are children and youth with identifiable special needs who would be eligible for VESID services. VESID will be partnering with the Adolescent Resource Network on meeting requests from districts and agencies for training on meeting the needs of special needs youth transitioning to the community.

**Supportive Service Programs - Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)-State University of New York and Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP)-Private Colleges and Universities**

EOP is a program within the colleges and universities in the SUNY system. HEOP is an academic support program within a number of private colleges and universities. EOP and HEOP programs provide access, academic support, and financial aid to students who show promise for mastering college-level work, but who may otherwise not be admitted. These programs are critical to providing youth in care with supportive services. Youth must be accepted into the program at the time of enrollment. Youth in care have not been underutilizing these valuable programs.

***AmeriCorps***

AmeriCorps provides opportunities for 75,000 Americans to give back in an intensive way to their communities and country each year. It consists of three main programs: AmeriCorps State and National, whose members serve with more than 2,900 national and local nonprofit and community groups; AmeriCorps VISTA, through which members serve full time fighting poverty; and AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps), a team-based residential program for young adults 18-24 who carry out projects in public safety, the environment, youth development, and disaster relief and preparedness. AmeriCorps is a 10-month, full time residential program for men and women between the ages of 18 and 24. Full-time AmeriCorps members perform 1700 hours of service and upon completion earn an education award of \$4,725 that can be used to pay for college or to pay back qualified student loans. Full-time AmeriCorps members also receive a living allowance, health insurance, and if income eligible, child care. Part-time members perform 900 hours of service and upon completion earn an education award of \$2,363. Members also receive training and learn valuable life skills.

***Department of Labor/ Career Zone***

Career Zone is an Internet based career exploration and planning system developed by the New York State Department of Labor. It offers direct access to in-depth career and education information for more than 800 occupations. This is an important tool for service providers, foster parents and youth to know about.

***Job Corps***

Job Corps is a free education and vocational training program administered by the U.S. Department of Labor that provides youth ages 16 through 24 with vocational and academic training. Job Corps has GED services available on its campuses. This could be an excellent resource for youth transitioning out of foster care.

**C. Initiatives to Improve Educational Outcomes for Youth in Care**

In addition to forming and building upon critical partnerships during 2009, the Education Committee has developed a number of strategies and initiatives to improve educational outcomes for youth in care. Major initiatives/strategies included:

### ***White Paper on: Educational Opportunities for Youth in Care***

In 2008, the Education Committee developed a white paper on the educational opportunities for youth in care. This document provides statistics, background and research information on the importance of enhancing post-secondary education and vocational training opportunities for youth in care. During 2009, OCFS has been building on and refining the initial recommendations outlined in the white paper. The document is available on the OCFS Education website. [http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/ddps/Edu\\_opp/White\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/ddps/Edu_opp/White_Paper.pdf)

### ***Survey of Older Youth***

The initial step of the education subcommittee was to survey older youth in foster care regarding their needs for services and support while attending college/vocational training. The results of this survey are being used to guide the work of the subcommittee and helped to develop the topics of the education forums.

### ***Education Forums***

Six very successful regional educational forums were held around the state in 2008 to provide caseworkers in local districts and voluntary agencies and foster parents with information that will help service providers and foster parents assist youth in care to apply for and enter college. Because of the success of these forums, six regional education forums were again held in 2009. However, recognizing that not all youth will go to college, the 2009 forums built and expanded upon the previous years' forums and included a career planning and job readiness component. The forums were sponsored by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA) with support provided by the Adolescent Services Resource Network (ASRN).

Although each of the forums were unique and addressed regional needs, all the forums included participation and/or materials from the partner organizations/agencies identified above. In addition, the forums held in 2009 included the following components: youth participation, and presentations on paying for college, Career Zone, the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program, supportive services for students at college (Education Opportunity Programs EOP) and help for students with disabilities. Commissioner Carrión provided remarks at the day long event in New York City. A tape of the Commissioner's remarks was shown at the other forums. The Rochester forum had a unique focus on students with special needs.

Below is a schedule of the educational forums that were held in 2009:

**New York City**

Date: June 12, 2009 from 9-3:00  
Time: 10-3:00  
Location: Hunter School of Social Work, 129 East 79<sup>th</sup> Street  
Contact: Melissa Rivera  
[m.rivera@hunter.cuny.edu](mailto:m.rivera@hunter.cuny.edu)

**Long Island**

Date: September 15, 2009  
Time: 9:00 -1:00  
Location: MercyFirst in Syosset, NY  
Contact: Barbara Goodman  
[bblausteingo@notes.cc.sunysb.edu](mailto:bblausteingo@notes.cc.sunysb.edu)

**Mid Hudson**

Date: September 14, 2009  
Time: 1:30-5:30  
Location: Children's Village  
Contact: Barbara Goodman  
[bblausteingo@notes.cc.sunysb.edu](mailto:bblausteingo@notes.cc.sunysb.edu)

**Albany**

Date: September. 10, 2009  
Time: 9-12:30  
Location: Northeast Parent and Child Society, Schenectady, NY  
Contact: Erika Leveillee  
[eleveill@pdp.albany.edu](mailto:eleveill@pdp.albany.edu)

**Rochester Region**

Date: July 24, 2009  
Time: 8:30-3:30  
Location: Ontario County DSS, Training Facility, Canandaigua, NY  
Contact: Alis Sefick  
[aliss@bsc-cdhs.org](mailto:aliss@bsc-cdhs.org)

**Buffalo Region**

Date: October,28, 2009  
Time: 9:30-3:30  
Location: Hopevale  
Contact: Susan Tournour  
[suet@BSC-CDHS.ORG](mailto:suet@BSC-CDHS.ORG)

***Education Resource Directory***

In 2009, OCFS expanded upon the higher education directory that was developed in the previous year to include a vocational training component and the directory was renamed the *New York State Education and Career Planning Resource Directory*. This directory includes educational and vocational resources by region. It was made available to participants who attended the education forums. The resource directory is also available on the OCFS Education website.

[http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/ddps/Edu\\_opp/NYS%20Education%20Resource%20Directory.pdf](http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/ddps/Edu_opp/NYS%20Education%20Resource%20Directory.pdf)

***Geographic Information Center (GIC)***

During 2009, information on higher education, vocational training and employment and training services/programs were added to the Geographic Information Center. The GIC is currently available to local district and voluntary agency staff who have access to the intranet. The GIC enables staff to view programs and services within a specified location. Staff are able to locate resources within a 100 miles of the defined area. The GIC includes such information, referred to as points of interest, as child care services, DJJOY facilities, congregate care programs, etc. During 2009, CUNY, SUNY and private colleges were added to this tool, along with information on vocational training and employment and training programs available in specified areas. A youth

development coordinator helping a youth to find a college, for example, will be able to use this tool to connect with the various colleges and universities as well as obtain contact information for the EOP and HEOP supportive services programs, if available at the college or university.

#### **D. National Governors Association (NGA) Learning Network**

New York State is one of seven states selected, in 2009, to participate in a learning network focused on youth transitioning out of foster care. Through this opportunity, OCFS is being exposed to what other states are doing in a number of areas such as housing, education, etc. relevant to youth transitioning out of foster care. OCFS has chosen education as the area of focus, including trying to develop strategies for **sharing data systems** with the State Education Department to improve the exchange of information when youth move from school district to school district. The information obtained through participation in the learning network is being used by OCFS to influence the development of new educational strategies in New York State. The Learning Network is providing opportunities for states to learn through in-person meetings, technical assistance phone calls and the identification of resource materials that may be helpful to a state. OCFS participated in an in-person meeting in Washington, D.C. on May 14- 15, 2009. Some of the information that was shared at this meeting helped influence OCFS' higher education initiatives for 2010 noted below.

#### **E. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008**

One of the provisions of this law provides for the educational stability of children placed in foster care. OCFS filed regulations on an emergency basis which require when a child is placed into foster care and it is in the best interests that the child continue to be enrolled in the same school in which the child was enrolled when placed into foster care, the agency with case management, case planning or casework responsibility must coordinate with applicable local school authorities to ensure that the child remains in such school. When it is not in the best interest of the child to continue to be enrolled in the same school district, the responsible agency must coordinate with applicable local school authorities so that the foster child is provided with immediate and appropriate enrollment in the new school and to arrange for the transfer of all of the applicable school records of the child to the new school.

On September 25, 2009, the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy hosted a meeting to bring together such agencies as OCFS, State Education Department, Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children and advocates to discuss educational stability of foster children. Several OCFS Education Committee members participated in the meeting. Two of the major issues that need to be resolved to implement the law and regulations are: for foster children remaining in their school of origin, how transportation to the school of origin will be provided and paid for, and, for foster children changing schools, how to achieve immediate enrollment to ensure prompt continuation of special services for those children with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

#### **F. Recommendations for 2010**

In 2010, OCFS will not only build and expand upon the education and career planning work that began over the past few years but OCFS will also initiate new strategies.

Below are the recommendations for 2010 designed to increase the number of youth in care who enter and successfully complete college or a vocational training program.

**1. *College Access Challenge Grant Program (CACG)***

OCFS is pursuing funding under CACG to help increase the number of youth in care who are prepared to enter and succeed in post-secondary education. HESC is the lead agency for this grant. OCFS is proposing to use the funding for:

- ❖ Youth in Care Regional Ambassadors
- ❖ Regional Youth Education Forums
- ❖ Youth In Care College Challenge Web Site
- ❖ College Preparation Videos For Human Service Professionals
- ❖ College Preparation Videos For Disconnected Youth
- ❖ College Preparation Posters and Print Material
- ❖ Informational Webinar Series With College Residence Life Staff
- ❖ Trained and experienced individuals to guide students through the process of accessing college

**2. *Charter Schools and other High School and Career Planning Programs***

Charter schools are another way that youth in care can access education services especially as a means of promoting the continued educational placement of children in their own communities. OCFS will begin to identify different types of charter schools and other alternative programs around the state that provide specialized instruction in career exploration and development. The goal is to develop relationships with these schools and to disseminate information to districts and agencies on the application process for these various schools/programs. Charter Schools accept students using a lottery system. For more information visit: <http://www.nycchartercenter.org/facts.asp>

**3. *Accessing SUNY and CUNY College Supportive Service Programs***

Education Opportunity Programs (EOP), Higher Education Opportunity Programs (HEOP), College Discovery(CD), and Seeking Elevation Education and Knowledge (SEEK) provide supportive services to at-risk students. Through our partnerships with these programs at the education forums, we have learned that often youth in care are unaware of these programs. Also, students must apply/be accepted into these programs at the time of admission to college and are not eligible for the program later on. Generally these programs are unaware of the service needs of youth in care and have no way of formerly identifying whether the applicant/participant is a youth in care. For example, all EOP programs have a supplemental application. The Education Subcommittee is working to ensure that both CUNY and SUNY do a better job of capturing how many youth in care are applying to their programs by adding a field/checkbox on their application.

- ❖ Explore the possibility of identifying foster care status on the SUNY/CUNY application and then have this result in an automatic waiving of the application fee and referral to the appropriate college support program(s).

EOP eligible students have their SUNY fees waived. For more information visit:

<http://www.suny.edu/Student/faq/faq/cfm?groupid=8&faqname=EOPFAQ>

- ❖ Explore the possibility of designating a person at each SUNY/CUNY campus to work with youth in care. Names of liaisons could be posted on their website. Visit [http://www.suny.edu/student/academic\\_eop/cfm](http://www.suny.edu/student/academic_eop/cfm)
- ❖ Continue to build on the partnerships that began with these programs during the 2008 and 2009 educational forums and partner with them on the future regional educational forums.
- ❖ Develop and implement cross training to understand the issues faced by the child welfare and education systems.
- ❖ Explore the possibility of giving priority to youth in care in these programs.
- ❖ Explore the possibility of on-campus housing for youth in care during school breaks.
- ❖ Whenever possible, youth in care in NYC should participate in CUNY's pre-college programs. At Home in College, for example, helps students complete FAFSA, TAP, apply for college, and if applying to CUNY, provides a fee-waiver. College Now is another important way for students to get early college prep or college credits.
- ❖ The summer immersion programs are good places for foster care youth students (but they do have to be accepted to CUNY).
- ❖ Weekend workshop (or several consecutive weekends) in October would be a good time for foster care youth to fill out college apps, financial aid applications, and so on. We are all learning that waiting until college application time is too late for crucial college prep skills.
- ❖ Create partnerships with organizations like Goddard OPTIONS program, so that students can take advantage of what they have to offer.

#### **4. Model Programs**

There are a number of pre-college model programs (e.g. Independence Bound in Erie County and New Yorkers for Children Guardian Scholars Program) that could be replicated and disseminate the information statewide to districts and agencies. Where possible, encourage districts agencies to link students to college access programs existing in their district/region.

#### **5. Formalize the Message**

Caseworkers, foster parents and the adults youth have in their lives must make education a priority in their work with youth in care so that these youth will see college/career training as a real possibility. Identify funding and develop a marketing campaign to promote college and career training.

- ❖ Disseminate posters, brochures, resource materials to districts and agencies.
- ❖ Create tip sheets and templates for case planners that contain the different parts of our "formalized message."

#### **6. Training/Resource Materials**

To guide youth in care through the transition from high school to college or career training, local district and voluntary agency staff and foster parents need training on the college application process, the financial aid process, supportive services available, pre-college programs and career planning.

- ❖ Explore the possibility of developing an education training curriculum specifically for local district and agency staff and foster parents that ASRN could deliver.
- ❖ Continue to build on the development of resource materials for LDSS, voluntary agencies and foster parents that include a career planning focus and incorporate into the MAPP curriculum the role of foster parents in promoting education.
- ❖ Develop resource materials for youth on career planning and post secondary education, including programs that are not part of a traditional college degree program. We may be able to work with NASFAA and HESC to make this happen. Visit: <http://www.nasfaa.org/redesign/fanight/pdfs/fosteryouth.pdf>

#### **7. *SED/Tracking educational progress of youth in care***

There is a need for access to accurate and consistent educational records to measure the outcomes (graduation rates, test scores, competencies, etc.) of youth in care. Records are also difficult to retrieve due to multiple school placements. Rules surrounding earning credits hinder youth in care that have multiple school placements. Youth in Care with special needs have difficulty entering college particularly with an IEP or Local diploma.

- ❖ Explore possibility of creating a data sharing agreement between OCFS and SED. One is currently being piloted between ACS/NYC Board of Ed.
- ❖ Explore possibility of supplemental services for youth in care to include but not limited to: tutoring, PSAT, SAT, GED, prep, etc.
- ❖ Require agencies like ACS to collect student ID numbers at intake before a child is placed in the care of a voluntary agency. Consider advocacy to expand this to include youth receiving mandated preventive services.

#### **8. *Housing***

- ❖ Identify funding supports available to help pay for housing for youth in care/former foster youth.
- ❖ Partner with the Disconnected Youth's Housing Subcommittee.
- ❖ Take a closer look at the age youth in foster care graduate from high school and see if there might be a way to create a formal exception to policy to extend room/board support to youth who age out of foster care while they are still enrolled in college.

## Education Committee Participants

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Joe Gorman	Higher Education Services Corporation
Kathleen DeCataldo	NYS Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children
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Melissa Rivera	Adolescent Services Resource Network at Hunter College
Mia Simon	CUNY
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Nicole Lavan	Services Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies
Richard Larson	Children's Village
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Valerie Tomeck	OCFS
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Dan Zeidman	OCFS

# Resources

**HESC**

<http://www.hesc.com>

**VESID**

<http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/> and  
<http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/transition/students.htm>

**EOP-Colleges with Universities in the SUNY System**

<http://www.eop.com/>

**HEOP-Private Colleges and Universities**

<http://heop.org/>

**AmeriCorps**

<http://www.americorps.gov>

**CUNY Office of Academic Affairs**

<http://web.cuny.edu/academics/oaa.html>

**DOL- Career Zone**

[www.nycareerzone.org](http://www.nycareerzone.org)

**Orphan Foundation of America (OFA)**

[www.orphan.org](http://www.orphan.org)