Increasing Access to Education and Services for Foster Care Youth

Students who have been in the foster care system now have a network of support and resources at the College to help them complete their educational goals and address challenges they often face, such as homelessness, food insecurity, financial difficulties, and lack of family support.
Approximately 40 staff and faculty members at the College have completed training coordinated by the Institute for Community Engagement and Civic Leadership. Individuals from partner organizations, such as Youth Valley House, Juvenile Law Center and The Village Arts and Humanities conducted sessions on topics such as foster care law, trauma-informed care, housing options and emergency funding opportunities. As a single point of contact for foster care students, these individuals are able to direct students to services and support at the College or through external partners that will help them resolve issues and continue their college education. Led by the Institute, the support program officially launches in May, which is foster care awareness month.

“We are developing champions on campus,” said Michelle Lopez, coordinator of Community Engagement and Civic Leadership Initiatives.

A shared database of information and contacts for trained faculty and staff is also accessible to all department heads at the College, enabling them to answer questions and provide referral information to students who need assistance. About 140 students have identified themselves as foster youth, but the College believes the total is much higher.

Youth in foster care are emancipated after they turn 18, but they can sign themselves back into the foster care system until age 22. Some support is offered through system agencies, but more is needed to help students make it on their own and complete their education.

“A lot of resources exist, but students don’t know where to look. Some students also don’t want to reassociate themselves with the foster care system,” said David Thomas, Ed.D., associate vice president for Strategic Initiatives and dean of the Division of Access and Community Engagement.

 Cabrini, Temple and West Chester universities are also a part of this work that started through a partnership with University of Pennsylvania’s Field Center for Children’s Policy, Practice and Research, allowing for the exchange of resources and ideas among the institutions. These universities also hold transfer agreements or partnerships with the College, allowing foster youth to continue receiving the help they need when continuing their education at one of these universities.

“The relationships that we have with transfer institutions further student support and care,” said Dr. Thomas.

The Institute has also begun to reach out to high school seniors in the foster care system, educating them on the advantages of a college education and introducing them to a collegiate environment.

“We are developing champions on campus.”

—MICHELLLE LOPEZ
Coordinator of Community Engagement and Civic Leadership Initiatives

“Students from the CB Community School tour the Main Campus and meet with Admission recruiters who help students fill out financial aid forms and answer questions,” said Dr. Thomas.

The Institute’s initiative comes at a time of critical need for foster youth in Philadelphia. More than 5,436 children were in foster care as of Sept. 30, 2016, according to a winter 2017 report from the School District of Philadelphia’s thenotebook.org. Teens and young adults, age 13 to 20, represent 38 percent of that number. Many children leave foster care during the course of each year, with reunification with family the ultimate goal. More than half of the children in foster care experienced failed reunifications in 2016, and older children, age 12 to 17, accounted for 60 percent of reentry cases.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Add to the number of much-appreciated care packages received by the College’s foster youth. The packages include snacks, toiletries and a letter of encouragement. Visit www.sharethecare.net for more information.

Know the issues facing foster youth. Contact Michelle Lopez at milopez@ccp.edu or 215.751.8373.