



PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

Fall 2021

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DCF ESTABLISHES OFFICE OF CONTINUING CARE, DIRECTOR TO SPEAK TO PPP NETWORK



Taylor Peck

The Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) has established a new office to help meet the needs of students over age 23 who had been in foster care in Florida. The Office of Continuing Care (OCC), which will be the new home of the Positive Pathways Program, began on October 1. The OCC will provide services to students from foster care who have reached age 23 when DCF's core services end.

OCC will be led by Taylor Peck, who is transitioning from her role as director of Florida's Foster Information Center, which serves foster parents. Ms. Peck is a former foster parent and a guardian ad litem. She also served as a legislative aide to a former Florida senator. A Florida State University graduate, Peck holds a bachelor's degree in writing and media and a master's in public administration. Ms. Peck will introduce herself and share a bit of her vision for OCC during the Nov. monthly conference call. Register [HERE](#).

Cal Walton III, who oversees Positive Pathways for DCF, moved from the DCF Office of Child Welfare to the OCC and will continue to oversee Positive Pathways, which is administered by Educate Tomorrow and has been led by Dr. Steve J. Rios since it was created by DCF in 2016.



Cal Walton, III, J.D.

Mr. Walton, Youth and Young Adult Transitions Services, presented about the OCC and other positive changes related to the state's independent living program during the October Positive Pathways meeting. Click [HERE](#) to view Mr. Watson's presentation.

FSU'S LISA SCHELBE TO DISCUSS POST-COLLEGE SUCCESS AMONG FOSTER CARE ALUMNI

What college experiences are associated with better employment, financial, and mental health-related outcomes for foster alumni college graduates?

That question will be addressed during the Fall Positive Pathways Webinar, scheduled for November 3, 2021, during the next Positive Pathways monthly meeting.

Dr. Lisa Schelbe is a member of the Florida State University Social Work Faculty. Dr. Schelbe will be interviewed by Positive Pathways Senior Director Dr. Steve Rios about her recent research on risk factors that impact post-college success for foster-care alumni college graduates.

Dr. Schelbe's study, coauthored with Washington State

University Assistant Professor Amy Salazar, was recently published in the Children and Youth Services Review.

The study focused on college experiences associated with better outcomes for 262 college graduates who are foster care alumni and participants in the Casey Family Scholarship Program or the Foster Care to Success National Scholarship program.

Read the study here: Factors associated with post-college success for foster care alumni college graduates - ScienceDirect Click [HERE](#).



Dr. Lisa Schelbe

DAYTONA STATE DESIGNATES ACADEMIC ADVISOR TO SUPPORT STUDENTS USING DCF TUITION EXEMPTION

Octavia Mulberry, the new point person for students using the DCF tuition and fee exemption at Daytona State College, jumped at the opportunity to serve our students while on a tour of campus resources with other academic advisors.

During a tour of the college's Center for Women & Men, Ms. Mulberry heard Director Erin LeDuc discuss the importance of supporting students from foster care and homeless settings. Ms. LeDuc told the advisors about the special project that Daytona State has developed to assign students using the DCF exemption to one particular advisor. Ms. Mulberry was intrigued and approached Ms. LeDuc.

"Ms. LeDuc said they would LOVE to have a point of contact in our office," said Ms. Mulberry, who has been an academic advisor at Daytona State since September of 2020. "I was so interested. I told her I definitely wanted to be that person. I have always had a desire to help students with challenging situations."

Since making the commitment to help students using the tuition exemption, Ms. Mulberry has worked with Ms. Leduc to develop outreach materials for students from homeless and foster care backgrounds and has already helped a number of students from foster care become acquainted with the college's food pantry, emergency transportation assistance, and career-ready clothing closet. She also is working with the college's data department to determine how many students are using the DCF and homeless student exemptions.

"I am so grateful to Octavia, her enthusiasm and how she so willingly agreed to take on this special population and unique role," said Ms. LeDuc. "I'm also proud of our Director of Academic Advising Michelle Goldys, who collaborated with me to make this population and work a priority at Daytona State."

Ms. Mulberry holds a bachelor's degree in supervision and management from Daytona State College and will soon complete her master's in business administration with emphasis in leadership from Colorado Christian University.

To contact Ms. Mulberry, email her at octavia.mulberry@daytonastate.edu or call her at (386) 506-3000.



Octavia Mulberry



"I always had a desire to help students with challenging situations. I wasn't in foster care. However, I feel that the things I went through have given me a desire to help in that direction."

- Octavia Mulberry,
Academic Advisor

NETWORK MEMBERS SATISFIED AND OFFER ADVICE

The Positive Pathways Program is effective and can still be improved. Those were the Program's 2021 member feedback survey, released and presented recently to members throughout Florida.

Fifty-three respondents, or approximately 25% of the Program's more than 200 members, indicated that the program was meeting their needs. When asked about the six main aspects of the Program, all major components received a 96% or higher satisfaction rating. Positive comments included the following:

"As a community advocate, the networking and information are important to me."

"The Network is SO useful in terms of knowing how our colleagues serve our students holistically and with innovation."

Members also made suggestions to improve the network, such as focusing on service providers beyond foster care agencies and developing a "think tank" so that members of the network can discuss the best ways to address issues students face during college. Respondents also suggested that presentations be moved to the beginning of the meetings in case attendees can't stay the entire time. They also recommended that efforts be made to help students throughout Florida become more aware of Positive Pathways beginning at age 13 because "this is a very hard and critical time for them and their parents while they transition to [become] independent young adults. Click [HERE](#) to read the full survey report.



Educate Tomorrow, which administers Positive Pathways, has appointed Demarco Mott, who aged out of foster care in Miami, as a member of its Board of Directors.

Mr. Mott, a Bahamian native and CEO and President of Aqua Lucaya Water Park LTD., in the Bahamas, leads the Citrus Family Care Network Youth Advisory Council and is a member of the DCF Independent Living Services Advisory Council.

An accomplished professional, Mr. Mott holds a Bachelor of Arts in English and a Master's in Business Administration, and he is completing a Master of Arts in Disaster Preparedness and Management, all from Florida International University.

One of the most active former foster youth in the Positive Pathways Network, Mr. Mott says he is proud to serve on the Board of Directors of an organization that has done so much for him personally as well as for thousands of other former foster youth and homeless youth.

"Educate Tomorrow has been a key pillar of my success, from the earliest part of my education and in the later parts of my foster care experience," Mr. Mott said. "The faces in the organization remain familiar, compassionate, and committed. My interest to serve on the board of such

an impactful organization is more like a calling...and I will serve with honor."

"If you have met DeMarco you would understand why we appointed him to our board," said Brett McNaught, CEO of Educate Tomorrow. "He brings a combination of infectious enthusiasm, the fight of an advocate, and the spirit of an entrepreneur that make him a logical choice for where we are headed as an organization."

Educate Tomorrow, a 501(c)(3) organization that was funded in 2003, administers Positive Pathways and a number of other innovative programs, several of which have become nationally recognized models of service delivery to young people from foster care and homeless backgrounds.

Mr. Mott's three-year term as a board member began on October 1.



Demarco Mott



EDUCATE TOMORROW AT FAU HONORED BY PALM BEACH ILLUSTRATED MAGAZINE

The Educate Tomorrow at Florida Atlantic University Program was named Outstanding Academic Program by Palm Beach Illustrated magazine in September. The award criteria include learning outcomes, impact on students and the community, and level of innovation. During the award ceremony, the Program, which began in 2016, was praised for its growth and outcomes. Approximately 90% of Educate Tomorrow at FAU students are in good academic standing, and 48% graduate on time. In addition, more than 70% of the Program's students have at least a 2.5 GPA.

"What is truly rewarding about this award is the recognition that our students are using the resources and support we provide to help them meet their goals, excel in their education, and graduate," said Mr. Joe Murray, who created the program with support from Educate Tomorrow, the organization that oversees Positive Pathways. "Hopefully, this award will bring additional attention to the continuing unmet needs of our students and encourage many others to step up to help." Palm Beach Illustrated is read by some of the county's most prosperous residents and successful entrepreneurs.

Congratulations to the FAU team, Assistant Director Tracyann Burton, Advisor Holly Winters, and Joe Murray, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Advising.



Pictured, from left to right: Educate Tomorrow at FAU students Mr. Matthew Patterson and Ms. Alexia Betances joined Associate Dean Joe Murray to accept the award.



RISE COORDINATOR, STUDENTS PRESENT AT DANIEL'S "FOOTPRINTS" ANNUAL CONFERENCE



Dr. Althea K. Blake

On September 2nd, Dr. Althea Blake and a panel of students from universities throughout the state of Florida presented at the annual Daniel Memorial Institute Independent Living Conference in Orlando. Blake is the Program Coordinator for the Road to Independence, Success, and Excelled (RISE) program at St. Petersburg College (SPC) and a long-time participant in the Positive Pathways network. The panelists included Bethany Edilla from University of Central Florida (UCF), Adonis Romero Zuniga from Florida Atlantic University (FAU), and University of South Florida (USF) alumna Dominique Rosario.



Dr. Blake's presentation, titled Traveling the Road to Independence, explored the collegiate experiences of students who have aged out of foster care; Zuniga provided additional insight as a student who's currently classified as homeless.



Dominique Rosario

While the students' testimonies demonstrated how Florida has been able to see an increase in the postsecondary completion rates of students from foster care, it also highlighted how we can better support this student population. Students attributed their success in part to their involvement in on-campus student support programs and local advocacy groups. For example, Edilla expressed how fortunate she has been to have the support of UCF's Knight Alliance, which operates under the leadership of Positive Pathways member Dr. Tammie Nadeau.



Adonis Zuniga

Zuniga mentioned the support he's received from Educate Tomorrow at FAU as well as the HOMY Collective

Rosario's Alma mater, USF, just recently established a formal program for students, USF PEARLS, but she received support from Educate Tomorrow. In reflecting on the challenges they faced transitioning to college, students discussed what they wish they had known, such as special financial assistance and housing programs. Edilla and Rosario proposed a more gradual hand off from child welfare workers to campus coaches. Building the courage to face their trauma and address their mental health was also discussed in depth.

As Dr. Blake continues to develop SPC's RISE program, which was established in December 2020, she intends to use the insight shared by the panelists in addition to the feedback from current SPC students to pave a stronger and clearer pathway to college in St. Petersburg and the greater Tampa Bay area.

JOIN POSITIVE PATHWAYS TODAY WE ARE YOUR NETWORK FOR SUCCESS!

Positive Pathways is a Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) program funded by DCF and Educate Tomorrow, which administers the program. Positive Pathways is one of the few programs of its kind in the nation and demonstrates DCF's commitment to provide services and support to young adults after they leave foster care and age in to post-high school programs offered by DCF.

Positive Pathways' supports higher education and child welfare professionals who work with transitioning young adults pursuing post-secondary education. We provide technical assistance, networking services, and professional development. Join us as we continue to make a difference in the educational lives of Florida's resilient young adults in care. Click [HERE](#) to join the Network. You will be glad you did!

For more information, reach us at:

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Dr. Steve J. Rios, Senior Director
Positive Pathways Program

