

2020 Positive Pathways Conference to Celebrate Five Years of Positive Growth

The next Positive Pathways annual conference will celebrate the success of a movement that has seen the number of students from foster care attending college soar from around 1,500 in 2015 to more than 5,700 today, a 280% increase!

The event, which regularly attracts Positive Pathways members from all over Florida, will be held on May 11 and 12, 2020, at the Embassy Suites by Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista South (see flyer Page 2).

To honor the hundreds of Florida Reach and Positive Pathways members who have helped thousands of students from foster care succeed in college and graduate, the conference title and theme are “Connect, Unite, Act: Five Positive Years.”

Five years ago, the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) began to fund an organized effort to unite professionals and volunteers serving college student from foster care throughout the state. At first, DCF paid for a consultant to work with volunteers around Florida. The group established and built Florida Reach as a network of concerned individuals and students. Three years ago, DCF established Positive Pathways as a contract with Educate Tomorrow, to continue the Florida Reach initiative.

Since then, the network has grown to more than 200 members, including campus-based foster care liaisons appointed at each public college and university. Additional funders, such as the AOK Scholars Foundation, the Helios Education Foundation, and others, have enabled Educate Tomorrow to compliment the Positive Pathways work with research briefs, community forums, the potential for direct support of new campus work, and funds to hundreds of students.

“We truly have experienced five positive years,” said Brett McNaught, program supervisor of Positive Pathways and chief executive officer of Educate Tomorrow. “We look forward to a conference during which we will hear great stories of success, celebrate students and professionals, and plan for a great future.”

This year, the college students that benefit from Positive Pathways’ service to foster care liaisons will play a larger role in organizing the conference. They will serve on the organizing committee and will participate in the panel discussions during the conference.

Positive Pathways Program Associate Racquell “Racqui” Perry, Esq., who aged out of foster care and went on to earn degrees in criminal justice and law from Florida



Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU), will cochair the conference with Dr. Steve J. Rios, senior director of Positive Pathways. She will be joined by several other former foster youth who will help organize the conference. Other students who will help lead the conference are: DeMarco Mott, a master’s degree student at Florida International University, and Paoli and Dominique Rosario, sisters who are enrolled as undergraduates at the University of South Florida in Tampa.

“I look forward to working with current students to help present what I believe will be our most important conference yet,” said Ms. Perry. “Who better to deliver advice about serving college students from foster care than college students from foster care?”

Research : Member Discovers Student Challenges, Supportive Network

Dr. Althea Kanessa Blake, a Positive Pathways member, recently earned a Doctorate of Education in Curriculum, Teaching, Learning, and Leadership from Northeastern University. Dr. Blake’s doctoral thesis explored the experiences of campus coaches (foster care liaisons) and how participation in Positive Pathways impacts their efficacy beliefs. Dr. Blake considered it important to explore this aspect of the foster care liaisons’ experience because “the sheer scope of challenges both coaches and students face can be daunting, thus eroding coaches’ confidence in their



abilities and subsequently their ability to accomplish tasks related to the role,” she said.

For her study, Dr. Blake, a counselor / advisor for Trio Student Support Services (SSS) at the University of South Florida, interviewed campus coaches throughout Florida and listened to hours of Positive Pathways conference call recordings to conduct her study. The data she reviewed revealed that campus coaches experience several challenges in their roles. First, there is sometimes a disconnect between liaisons’ backgrounds and their duties. For example, one campus coach’s background is in financial aid and is therefore limited in the support she can directly provide a student facing a mental health crisis.

Secondly, coaches experience challenges engaging with students from foster care due to inconsistencies in the processing of tuition waivers, students’ hesitancy to identify as having been in foster care and coaches’ reluctance to reach out to students in a manner that may be considered inappropriate. Coaches also shared

that it was sometimes difficult for them to establish collaborative relationships with campus partners, although some have been able to rely on community partnerships. The last challenge identified is difficulty navigating the myriad of resources within their communities, which Dr. Blake notes is a better problem than having a lack of resources.

Despite these challenges, most of the coaches interviewed feel confident in their ability to serve youth from foster care, which was not always the case. For instance, one coach described herself as being “not super confident” when she first assumed the campus coach role but expressed that her confidence has “taken a complete 180” since engaging with the network. Another coach said her confidence has “changed tremendously”. Interestingly, the coach with the second lowest level of engagement (there was one coach in study who had not yet worked with program in any capacity) described her confidence level as increasing by “maybe 20% out of 100%”. Those who indicated an increase in their confidence attribute it mostly to the social capital they’ve gained from their association with the network as well as to the direct guidance they received from the program’s director, Dr. Steve Rios.

In conclusion, Dr. Blake found Positive Pathways to be a useful tool for campus coaches, though she proposes several ways in which Positive Pathways and the state can better support campus coaches. Based on self-efficacy theory and the collective impact framework, she suggests (1) increased effort in appointing campus coaches / foster care liaisons based on their qualifications rather than on convenience, (2) referring coaches to Positive Pathways for training early in their roles, (3) creating regional clusters that allow more opportunities for face-to-face interactions, (4) establishing institutional buy-in to guarantee coaches are allotted adequate time and resources to dedicate to this role, and (5) advocating for uniform processes with regards to processing tuition waivers.

Video Promotes Value of Campus Support for Students From Care

The messengers are from Colorado, but the message is valuable for everyone who work with students in foster care. During the seven-minute video, college students from foster care discuss their experiences persevering toward diplomas through personal issues and instability. Their stories are similar to those heard by Positive Pathways members throughout Florida. We share this video, a collaborative effort between Mile High United Way’s Bridging the Gap Program and Rocky Mountain Children’s Law Center, so you can use it to help deliver a universal lesson about the value of programs that



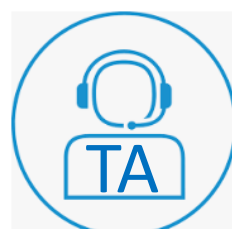
Click [HERE](#) for YouTube video.

support these students. “My biggest supports to get through school were my academic advisors,” said one student on the video. “They were really willing to listen and help me get the support and the things that I needed to make it through and graduate.”

February Positive Pathways Webinar to Cover Research on the Network

Who?	Dr. Althea K. Blake, Guest Presenter
What?	Webinar: The impact of Positive Pathways on the efficacy beliefs and performance of campus coaches.
When?	Wednesday, February 5, 2020
Where?	Online during the monthly Positive Pathways conference call.
Why?	For members to understand key challenges faced by students from care on their campuses, and how they can help
How?	How: A link to register will be sent during the last week of January. Stay tuned.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GUIDE



How you ever woken up in a cold sweat wondering if a student’s foster care tuition exemption waiver was processed correctly, or at all? To help you sleep better, Positive Pathways has developed a new technical assistance guide, in collaboration with DCF and several members who lead campus-based programs. The Tuition Exemption Form (Waiver) Procedure Guide can be accessed [HERE](#). Let us know if you find it helpful or if you have suggestions or any questions about the process or the guide.



POSITIVE PATHWAYS / FLORIDA REACH 2020 CONFERENCE

CONNECT, UNITE, ACT: FIVE POSITIVE YEARS

DAY 1 MAY 11, 2020 | 9:00-5:00 P.M.

DAY 2 MAY 12, 2020 | 9:00-11:30 A.M.

Embassy Suites by Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista South
4955 Kyngs Health Road, Kissimmee, FL 34746

We Invite You to Join Us

Free and Open to the Public



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JOIN THE POSITIVE PATHWAYS NETWORK

Before you Can
Connect, Unite,
Act – CUA!
You Need to
JoinA!

Are you an “Official” Member of the Positive Pathways Network?
It doesn’t take much, just visit our website,
You can join this movement by visiting www.PositivePathwaysFlorida.org.
We look forward to welcoming you!

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