

Federal Agency Shines National Spotlight on Wayne State University Foster Youth Retention Program

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Wayne State University's Transition to Independence Program will be featured during Foster Care Awareness Month in a publication of the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

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Wayne State University's Transition to Independence Program (TIP), an initiative developed by the School of Social Work to help students aging out of foster care thrive in their studies, will be featured during Foster Care Awareness Month in a publication of the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

The May issue of Children's Bureau Express, which is read by nearly 23,000 child welfare professionals nationwide, will profile the program as part of what School of Social Work Assistant Professor and TIP Director Angelique Day calls Wayne State's "institutional reaction" to the serious educational challenges faced by Wayne County's foster youth population, which is by far the state's largest.

Among these challenges are poor rates of college preparedness and retention, caused by chronic school-year disruptions that occur when youth change foster families, and a lack of the independent living skills necessary to successfully manage classes, work, relationships and responsibilities.

Only about 50 percent of foster youth graduate from high school by age 19; fewer than 10 percent attend college.

Funded by a three-year, \$340,197 grant from the Michigan Department of Human Services, TIP partners with Detroit-area organizations to provide eligible WSU students with a range of free support, including professional mentoring, legal representation, financial literacy training and counseling, and even care packages during finals week.

On campus, TIP has appointed staff – dubbed "foster youth champions" – to serve as liaisons between WSU foster youth and key university offices. These offices include the Academic Success Center, Admissions, the Office of the Dean, Financial Aid, Counseling and Psychological Services, Career Services, Housing and Residential Life, and the Campus Health Center. The program also employs a full-time life skills coach to provide program participants with additional support.

According to Day, Wayne State has retained 84 percent of the 99 foster youth ages 18 to 24 who have enrolled in the program since the fall of 2012.

“These results are very promising,” said Day. “They are well above the average retention rates of other first-generation, low-income students who enroll at Wayne State University.”

Wayne State University is a premier urban research institution offering more than 370 academic programs through 13 schools and colleges to nearly 29,000 students.

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