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## Public Relations

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# Wayne State University receives DHS contract to help foster youth thrive in college

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The Wayne State University School of Social Work has received a three-year, \$340,197 contract from the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) to provide youth transitioning out of foster care with the educational, material and social resources they need to thrive as WSU students.

Children who exit the foster care system at the age of 18 or older tend to lack independent living skills and have a diminished secondary education as a result of frequent relocation. These setbacks, coupled with unstable living arrangements and emotional trauma, make children aging out of foster care far less likely to enroll in and graduate from college than youth in the general population. This award will help the School of Social Work spearhead a WSU Foster Youth Access and Retention Program to give 25 undergraduate-enrolled foster youth at Wayne State reliable housing and transportation, a social support system, physical and mental health services, financial aid, life skills, mentoring, and training for post-university employment.

The program will train liaisons, dubbed "foster youth champions," within Wayne State's offices of Student Financial Aid, Counseling and Psychological Services, Career Services, and Housing and Residential Life; the Campus Health Center; and other relevant university offices. It will also employ a full-time living skills/campus coach who will develop a customized service plan for each student based on the student's strengths and goals, assist program youth in all areas of life skills, identify mentors for program participants, and provide crisis and other counseling. The program will be supported by a number of community partners, including Childhelp of Greater Detroit, which will assist with mentoring; Farmington Hills-based GreenPath Debt Solutions, which will provide financial literacy education; and the Southfield-based Park West Foundation, which will provide advisory support and program sustainability.

Program leads include Angelique Day, Ph.D., assistant professor of social work, and Janet Joiner, Ph.D., assistant dean of admissions and student affairs in the School of Social Work. Day has conducted extensive research on college-going foster youth, and she developed one of the state's first foster care and higher education initiatives at Michigan State University in 2008. Day is also credited with developing the foster youth mentoring curriculum used by several Michigan colleges and universities. She said the program will advance knowledge by transcending research in the fields of higher education and child welfare in order to better understand the critical components necessary to ensure that foster care youth can graduate from college at the same rate as their peers.

"Wayne County provides child welfare services to nearly half of all foster care youth in the state," Day said. "We have a duty here at WSU to ensure that these young people have the option to attend college with support."

Wayne State University is a premier urban research institution offering more than 350 academic programs through 13 schools and colleges to nearly 29,000 students.

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