

# CHALLENGES AND REWARDS OF STARTING A FOSTER CARE PROGRAM AT A SMALL COLLEGE

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**ACC** ALVIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

# **PERSONAL STORY – MY INITIAL TRAINING**

- **Emergency Kinship placement of nephew by DFPS, both parents had passed**
- **Special needs required attending ARD meetings, Circle of Support meetings, Transition Meetings, Transport to Houston for PAL Training**
- **Had multiple case workers, Foster homes, Residential Treatment Centers and Supervised Independent Living (SIL)**
- **Worked with many medical and mental health professionals, and multiple agencies**
- **Chaotic - conflict in schools**
- **Work on both sides of the fence (personal and work)**
- **Learned about DFPS system related to placement and foster**

# **2015 – THE CHALLENGE BEGINS-PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER**

- In 2015, Keith graduated H.S. and was placed in a SIL program (unsuccessful)
- He had previously decided to extend foster care after age 18
- In 2015, the Texas Education Code (HB 3748) was amended to require at least one Foster Care Liaison Officer (FCLO) be appointed at all public institutions of higher education in Texas (Effective immediately 6/17/15)
- ACC College President was contacted by THECB to appoint the FCLO December, 2015
- A GAP between FCLO designation and receiving the Foster Care Liaison Officer Guide from THECB (April, 2017) <http://texaschildrenscommission.gov/media/2075/he-liaisons-guide-final-updated-76.pdf>

# **BUILDING A NEW PROGRAM AT ACC**

- Research began...Thank goodness for Internet!
- Contacted other programs in TX, and researched government and nonprofit tool kits
- Informed ACC departments and staff what I needed (Business Office and Financial Aid)
- Email sent to all Personnel about new designation of the FCLO
- In 2017 - organized a community roundtable meeting with state agencies, schools and college personnel
- Presented at Faculty/Staff workshops on campus about new program
- Created H.A.R.T. (Homeless, Adopt/Foster Resource Team) on campus
- Created posters, brochures and a checklist for new students
- Interviewed on radio show “Houston Matters” on KUHF

# **YOU CAN'T STOP BELIEVING IN THEM.... MORE ABOUT KEITH**

- SIL, Foster homes, and other facilities - nothing was working out and Keith failed to start
- Assisted Keith with applying for Social Security Disability after age 18
- Rented an apartment!!! Informed him this was an experiment (no other option)
- One day after playing video games for two years and after failing at a part-time job and trying college twice...Keith embraced college (Now, his job is his education)
- Keith is pursuing a computer science degree and has had three successive semesters
- He has joined the student organization called **Hart 2 Hart** as the Treasurer
- What do you think turned him around? His brain had to develop more... and he had to believe in himself... he craved independence. He had severe Social Anxiety.

# CHALLENGES IN TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

- Placement instability (multiple foster homes and more) for the Aged out
- Many experienced trauma. Trust is not there with adults.
- An observation: Students that have been adopted have more resources
- Ongoing mental health issues and/or disabilities
- Screen for disabilities - Did you receive services in high school? Main Streamed? Tell me about your learning experience in high school. Recommend Office of Disabilities.
- Many have difficulties with finances
- Many have children right out of high school – overwhelming responsibilities
- Human Trafficking is an issue with this population (Overwhelming Challenge)

# MORE CHALLENGES

- Lack of social and/or emotional support
- Lost records; many do not remember their benefits
- Most staff and faculty assume all students are on the same Social Economic Status and know how to do things – a constant challenge
- Many false starts with this population
- *A wish: The tuition and fee waiver was available after age 25 for those Aged out*
- Brains grow until age 25+
- Failure is not an option

# ASSUMPTIONS

- **Wrong Assumption:** Foster/adopt/independent students would not want to participate in meetings or a club (Even though the State made the suggestion)
- **Wrong Assumption:** Many would not want to share their personal experiences
- **Correct Assumption:** Many want to feel part of something
- **Correct Assumption:** Many want to connect with people like themselves



# **BE THERE FOR THEM**

- **FCLO role is to help them connect, explore and access resources**
- **FCLO assists with battles too: no money for books; classroom behavioral issues, and coaching on how to approach faculty**
- **Assist with basic classroom survival skills**
- **Encourage advocacy!**
- **Explain to them the importance of speaking up**

# UNACCOMPANIED STUDENT

McKinney Vento (Homeless/Independent)

Almost 800 students currently are unaccompanied and supported by the Alvin Independent School District. The district's Foster Care Liaison Officer and Student Services Specialist (Social Worker) refer graduating seniors to ACC. Can receive Financial Aid

# MORE ABOUT H.A.R.T. AND PROMOTION

- Brand new program: **Homeless, Adopted/Foster Resource Team (H.A.R.T.) – NO FUNDING**
- **Included homeless (Independent student – McKinney Vento student)**
- HB 2355 introduced in 2017 – relating to supporting homeless students in higher education-still in committee
- New Academic Advisor to support H.A.R.T.
- On back of business cards I put the following:
  - Foster Care Liaison Officer:
    - Serves as Point of Contact for Foster Care and Adopted Students
    - Serves as Point of Contact for Homeless (Independent) Students

# H.A.R.T.

- Visit area high schools (Recruiting)
- Created brochures and Facebook page
- How am I going to identify these students?????
- Business Office and Financial Aid refer students; run reports
- Tracking: Foster and Adopted are student types in college system if a tuition waiver is turned into Business Office

## **SUPPORTING THEM....**

- Financial Aid Director sends reports of students that stated they are homeless on FAFSA application (monthly) – FCLO calls and introduces program
- After doing intake with a new student, they are informed they will be required to meet with FCLO several times a semester if GPA falls below 2.0. (Accountability)
- An academic hold is placed on their record and student can not register
- Provide specialized academic advising and admissions support, career testing and counseling; provide case management and tracking
- Provide TSI testing fee waivers for Foster/Adopt and Unaccompanied (McKinney Vento) students

# **MORE SPECIALIZED SUPPORT**

- **Assist with connecting students with Financial Aid**
- **Assist with obtaining Tuition and Fee Waiver from PAL and other documents**
- **Assist with obtaining their shot records including Bacterial Meningitis Vaccination**
- **Refer independent students back to H.S. for McKinney Vento (M.V.) letter**
- **Refer to Financial Aid Director students with special circumstance students to possibly received M.V.**
- **Referrals to counseling services, community resources (medical, dental, behavioral); contacting Medicaid**
- **Assist with applying for benefits such ETV (paperwork); housing assistance**
- **Free phone if on Medicaid - Call carriers in your area (Qlink Mobile)**
- **Mention Aged Out Foster!**

# **H.A.R.T. 2 H.A.R.T. – STUDENT ORGANIZATION**

- **Students named student organization**
- **Elected student organization officers**
- **Currently researching fund raisers**
- **Developed by-laws, and registered with Student Activities**
- **They encourage each other!**
- **Attend bi-weekly meetings**
- **Amazing!!!! How happy they are!**

# UNIQUE SITUATIONS

- Applied for two Innovative grant(s) through the ACC Foundation \$1500 and \$1000
- Provides emergency support (ex: Taxi to Social Security office, paid for clothing for technical program and more)
- Gift cards to book store for books, supplies, quick food and drinks
- Identified food insecurities – suggested a food pantry and ACC is designated location for the Houston Food Bank (through Retention Office)
- YMCA provides free backpacks and supplies
- The Marketing Department and ACC Administrators very supportive!!!!
- Hurricane Harvey impact



# **BIGGEST CHALLENGE: SOME ARE NOT READY YET...BUT WE WILL BE THERE WAITING**

- Very rewarding experience working with this population
- Many want independence and acceptance and most want to go to college (few do)
- Constantly teaching problem solving skills; constantly being a coach
- Building trust
- Connecting students to resources Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is strong
- Encourage to take advantage of resources on and off campus

# **SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES AND REWARDS**

- **Biggest reward: Making a difference**
- **Plant seeds with this population and hope for the best...follow up with them- (Challenge)**
- **ACC Administration embracing a new program- (Reward)**
- **Students accessing the resources- (Reward)**
- **Found start-up funding (college foundation innovative grant) – (Reward)**
- **Students that qualify for benefits do not apply for them- (Challenge)**

# **ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES AND REWARDS**

- **We loose contact- (Challenge)**
- **Becoming one's advocate (Challenge)**
- **Many do not have transportation (Challenge)**
- **Help them obtain their paperwork and apply for benefits (Challenge)**
- **Check on them and just show that you care!!! Help them overcome adversity! (Reward)**

# THE FUTURE

- Future: *Foundations in Personal Finance*- online material that empowers to save, budget, avoid debt and spend wisely
- Future: Create a mentorship program
- Future: Continue to reach out to community partners
- Future: Celebrate student success

# KEITH AND I



# **QUESTIONS, ANSWERS & SHARING OF OWN EXPERIENCES**

# THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

A word cloud of "Thank You" in various languages and scripts, including: Thank You, Grazie, Gracías, Danke, Hvala, Merci, Dziękuję, and many others.