Foster Alumni Life Skills Training

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**Foster Alumni Life Skills Training**

A number of factors contribute to the likelihood college students completing a degree. These factors combined with barriers unique to the population of students who have “aged out” of the foster care program place an additional risk to success in college. Elise Buggs, director of Academic Success Partnerships at Eastern Michigan University, stated, in reference to foster care alumni: “they have already beaten the odds by getting into college—we want to be sure they have all the tools they need to not only be successful in their educational pursuits, but in all their endeavors going forward” (Johnson, 2013, para. 4). The Social Work Program and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) at Tarleton State University have a similar outlook on the challenges faced by foster care alumni.

The Social Work Department and ODI at Tarleton State University have proceeded from the preparation stage into the action stage by enlisting groups of social work students to study this problem and recommend a solution with elements from established programs that have been implemented on other campuses in Texas and other parts of the nation. The ODI seeks to provide an environment that embraces diversity and encourages inclusion for students and staff. This department is advancing in leadership, education, training, and interaction in which all students can be creative, access opportunities, and reach their fullest potential (ODI, 2014). ODI’s goals consist of expanding student horizons, encouraging diversity awareness, excelling through leadership, and extending cultural boundaries (ODI, 2014). Further, ODI seeks to encourage and promote the value of diversity and inclusion by cultivating mutual respect, acceptance, and understanding (ODI, 2014). Finally, ODI also has a variety of programs that assist students on campus, including MENtal Freedom, Tarleton Ally Program, Multicultural Ambassadors, and
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The collaborative goal of both the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and the Social Work Department is to create a program which will support foster care alumni students. Both organizations are dedicated to improving the quality of student life, specifically, marginalized and oppressed populations.

Through this partnership it is anticipated that the needs of the student foster alumni population will be met through obtaining life skills training.

Need

Since 1998, an average of 23,000 youth have exited the foster care system upon reaching the age of eighteen (United States Health and Human Services, 2013). According to Salazar (2013), foster alumni outcomes are worse than their counterparts in the general public with regard to their successful functioning and transition to adulthood. The impact on society is significant, as poor outcomes result in increased pregnancies, arrest and incarceration, and homelessness among the foster alumni population. One way to improve the outcome of foster alumni’s transition to adulthood is through a college education. Barriers exist for foster alumni enrollment in higher education, such as having few support systems available for successful graduation and efficient transition to adulthood. These barriers hinder the success of foster alumni as compared to the general population of youth who have access to family supports and other areas of the social system (Salazar, 2013). Studies reveal that 70-80% of foster youth express a desire to enroll in college upon graduation from high school, yet only 3% realize graduation outcomes (Courtney, Terao, & Bost, 2004; McMillen, Auslander, Elze, White, & Thompson, 2003; in Watt, Norton, & Jones, 2013) Barriers such as limited family and financial
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support are reported to be factors that contribute to low retention and graduation rates (Miller, 2009).

In collaboration with mentoring programs, life skills training programs contribute to foster alumni success in college (Pecora, 2012). Life-skills training is one of the main responses to preparing youth for emancipation, with a wide range of programs emerging on college campuses.

**Project Description**

The GetREAL life skills curriculum was created by Bob Berry in 1986, originally the program was done by hand, and it is now completely online. The program is used by major universities around the country. These universities include Louisiana State University, John Hopkins Universities, and Abilene State University, just to name a few (B. Berry, 2014). The program is being used in all 50 states and currently has over 37,000 users (B. Berry, 2014). The program is self-paced and the students are able to work on the program at their leisure. Once the program is started by the students they will have lifetime access to the program including any future updates. The GetREAL program has a minimal overhead due to it being online and accessible 24/7 with little to no teacher, student interaction. The training materials are not relegated to one computer and can be accessed by any computer. If a student does not have access to a private computer the students will be able to access the program on the university library computers. The objective of this program is to assist the foster care alumni students with the needed skills to be self-sufficient, manage goals, plan, manage finances, problem solve, and increase self-motivation, with the overall goal of increasing the graduation rates of foster care alumni who attend Tarleton State University.

The purpose of the GetREAL life skills trainings are to equip young adults with skills
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which will increase their abilities to gain independence and therefore increase the probability of graduation from college. Students who have aged out of foster care will benefit from this set of life skills modules. The GetREAL life skills trainings are divided into modules specifically geared to real-life instances of young adult independent living. Young adults who have aged out of the foster care system are accustomed to directives and specific guidance for daily living. As emancipated adults without supports these individuals have less probability for the successful outcome of college graduation. Through use of the proposed training curriculum, young adults will increase their probability of graduating college. The training curriculum is anticipated to be administered by the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

The GetREAL life skills program is designed to be a series of in depth life skills that is completely interactive. The program and its modules are designed to be motivational in nature to encourage the students to become completely self-sufficient as they become young adults. The program is also designed to prepare the students with the realities of the adult world along with skills that are beneficial to success. The graph below includes an overview of the modules the program includes, the skills mastered, as well as how many hours each module is estimated to take. The program provides tracking tools, progress reports, and assessments that provide data and monitoring.
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**PROGRAM NAME**

**PURPOSE**

**OUTCOMES**

**LENGTH**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Innerstate1 (GR)</td>
<td>Values, self-esteem, anger, stress, fear, relationships</td>
<td>5-50 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Portfolio (GR)</td>
<td>Share, learn, manage goals, explore, grow, market ME Lifetime</td>
<td>Lifetime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readiness (GR)</td>
<td>In-depth life skills, motivation, confidence, &amp; vision</td>
<td>20-25 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision (GR)</td>
<td>Design my life, decide my net worth, make a plan</td>
<td>7-10 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose (GR)</td>
<td>Comprehensive life mission, purpose, college, career</td>
<td>25-35 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial (GR)</td>
<td>Spending, banking, money, credit, loans, basic skills</td>
<td>10-15 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service (GR)</td>
<td>Community service, service learning, volunteering</td>
<td>8-12 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce (GR)</td>
<td>Problem solving, confidence, teamwork, &amp;</td>
<td>15 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choices (GR)</td>
<td>At-risk, better choices, new behaviors, self-motivation</td>
<td>15-25 hrs</td>
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**Goals, Objectives, and Methodology**

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<tr>
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<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. For the students to become fully self-sufficient and obtain a degree from Tarleton State University</td>
<td>A. From the time the students enter into Tarleton State University their freshman year through senior year of school, the students will complete the GetREAL life skills Program.</td>
<td>A-1 Focus will begin to assess what the students feel is most needed to better their chances of gaining a college degree. A-2 The students who have been identified by the Tuition Waiver will be offered the program upon their acceptance into Tarleton State University. A-3 Each month the students will be assess to see if they are utilizing the tools offered.</td>
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B. Upon Graduation the students will have completed the GetREAL Life Skills Program and will now have the life skills necessary to become fully self-sufficient.

| 2. Identify areas that affect the foster care alumni in obtaining a college degree | A. The proctors and students will work in a partnership to discover areas that affect youth |
| | B. Once areas of needs are identified, the proctors and students will work towards a resolution |

| | A-1 Focus groups will be held prior to the completion of modules so that each foster care youth can self-identify reason given for not completing college |
| | B-1 Once needs are addressed the students will address their goal with what they want to learn for the program |

The overall goal for this program is to have the foster care alumni who have been identified through the tuition waiver to become fully self-sufficient through this program and obtain a degree of their choice from Tarleton State University.

**Anticipated Outcomes**

The anticipated outcome of participation in the selected life skills training program is increased graduation rates among student foster alumni at Tarleton State University and increased self-sufficiency. The purpose of providing the GetREAL Life Skills Programs at Tarleton State University is to assist foster alumni students in learning the life skills necessary, to provide support in achieving their educational goals. According to the Casey Foundation’s Kids Count Data Center in 2013 there were 284 children in the foster care system in the following
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counties that are rural counties that surround Tarleton State University in Erath County (Casey, 2014). The need to address student foster alumni college graduation and retention will continue to grow in subsequent years. Further, by addressing the issue of student foster alumni retention and graduation rates at the earliest possible opportunity, participants are able to receive educational advantages. By acting now, student foster alumni will be offered an opportunity to be prepared for independent living, increasing success in college.

We expect that by providing student foster alumni with the skills necessary for independent living, students will be more adequately prepared for adulthood and successful outcomes in college. As more foster alumni are identified, we hope to expand the scope of influence, and to measure the effect of life skills training through data gathered in focus groups. Overall, this life skills program will yield increased rates of retention and graduation for foster alumni.

**Budget**

The budget of approximately $3,480.00 includes an initial purchase of training curriculum for 30 students and promotional materials for a total of 3 years. Anticipating, a total number of 30 students being served annually, funding will support a total of 90 students in a 3 year time period as well as $500.00 for promotional materials. The training curriculum is a one-time purchase for each student. The curriculum can be accessed for up to 30 days for free. After this 30 day time period is reached, students will have lifetime access to the program for a price of $22.00. Promotional materials include, flyers, banners, posters, mailings, etc.

An itemized budget follows:
Identification of the Funder

The Michael and Susan Dell Foundation seeks to provide support for children and youth in poverty by funding education programs. Have provided over one billion dollars to non-profit organizations committed to providing educational support to impoverished children. The founders believe that a college education is a “springboard out of poverty (Dell Foundation, 2014). Focus remains on programs that provide “non-cognitive curriculum”; character development, time management, management of environmental challenges. Previously funded programs include: ComPsych Education ($50,000) which provided students with non-academic supports--realizing that meeting non-academic needs have bearing on academic success, Lifeworks in Austin, Texas ($139,000) housing transition program for youth aging out of the foster care system. The founders seek to create lasting change by investing in social entrepreneurs.

Grant Application

Thank you for your interest in the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation. Making a grant request consists of the following steps:

- You must meet basic Eligibility Requirements for funding. You can determine if your organization and project meet our basic eligibility requirements online at www.MSDF.org/MSDFGrantApp.
- You must submit an Online Grant Proposal via our website. All unsolicited proposals must be received online via our website.
- You must complete a Grant Application at the request of Michael & Susan Dell Foundation staff. After submitting an Online Grant Proposal, it will be reviewed by Michael & Susan Dell Foundation staff. Should your project align with Foundation programs, we will contact you to complete a Grant Application.

Please take the time to become familiar with our Foundation Priorities before initiating this process. You may refer to our
This worksheet is provided to you so you can collect the information required for your grant request prior to starting your Online Grant Proposal. You are encouraged to determine whether your organization and project is eligible to submit an unsolicited proposal BEFORE you complete this Grant Planning Worksheet. You may determine your eligibility to submit an unsolicited proposal by answering the brief Eligibility Requirements questions at the start of the online proposal process. To determine your eligibility or to begin the online grant proposal, go to www.MSDF.org/MSDFGrantApp.

Eligibility Requirements

To determine whether your organization or project is eligible to submit an unsolicited proposal, you will be asked to provide the following information.

US Federal Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN):

Organization Type:

Geographic Area Served:

Focus Area:

Population/Age Served:

Type of Support:

We only accept unsolicited proposals from organizations for projects that meet our basic requirements for funding. You may determine your eligibility to submit an unsolicited proposal online at www.MSDF.org/MSDFGrantApp
Online Grant Proposal

If your organization and project meet the Eligibility Requirements, you will be prompted to complete our Online Grant Proposal. You must submit your Online Grant Proposal via our website. You are encouraged to prepare your answers after determining that you meet our Eligibility Requirements, but before you begin your Online Grant Proposal. This Grant Planning Worksheet is provided to you as a tool to assist in preparing your Online Grant Proposal. The information found on our Online Grant Proposal is composed in three sections: Organization Information, Request Information, and Contact Information. 

*Note, all unsolicited requests must be submitted online via our website. You will not be permitted to return this form.*

Organization Information

Organization Name:

Mailing Address:

Phone number:

Fax Number:

Website Address:

Affiliate Organization Information:

Director Name:

Operating Expenses and Year:

Revenue and Year:
Describe the charitable purpose for your organization. Please limit your answer to 500 characters (about 100 words). You will not be asked this question if your Tax Payer ID number is found in the IRS database of Taxpayer ID numbers for non-profit organizations.

Additional Organization Information

Provide any additional information regarding your organization you would like us to consider when reviewing your request. Please limit your answer to 1,500 characters (about 300 words).

Optional.

Request Information

Please provide the following information regarding this specific request or project. All fields are required.

Project Title:

Funding Requested:

Project Budget:

Number of Children Served:
Problem Statement:

Define the problem or issue you are working to address. This should primarily be data or numeric evidence documenting the problem in your geographic area and target population. Please limit your summary to 500 characters (about 100 words).

Project Description:

Provide a summary of your grant request and the overall project this grant will be funding. Include how the project addresses the above Problem Statement. Please limit your summary to 1500 characters (about 300 words).

Request Summary

Provide a brief description of how the funding requested will be used. Be specific about what the solicited MSDF grant will fund. Also include a summary of the overall project finances. Please limit your summary to 500 characters (about 100 words).
Summarize the goals of your program and how you will measure the program’s success. This should primarily be data, numeric evidence and metrics directly related to the above Problem Statement. Please limit your summary to 500 characters (about 100 words).

Contact Information

*Please provide the following information for the person whom we should contact about this request.*

Contact Name:

Contact Title:

Mailing Address:

Phone:

Email:

Fax:
After completing the Online Grant Proposal via our website, you will receive a confirmation email. Michael & Susan Dell Foundation staff will review your request and respond within six weeks. If it is determined that the proposed project is aligned with the mission of the Foundation, you will be contacted to submit a complete Grant Application for funding.

Again, the above information must be submitted online via our website. You will not be permitted to return this Grant Planning Worksheet. You may start your Online Grant Proposal at www.MSDF.org/MSDFGrantApp.
References


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