

## Preparing a Future for a Better Tomorrow

Education is one of the most precious attributes a human being can possess; the education one receives can never be taken away from them. Every child, no matter where they come from or who they are, deserves the right to a quality education guided by mentors who have the child's best interests in mind. In our state of California, I feel that the youth in foster care are severely overlooked and forgotten in regard to this vision of quality education for children. My dream is to create a non-profit organization called College for You, or C4U, designed with the vision in mind to increase the high school and college graduation rate among youth in foster care.

There is nothing more detrimental to a young child's life than to go through school without understanding the importance of education. For many children in foster care, educational achievement is burdened by several circumstances over which the children have no control. A national average reports that by the age of eighteen, a child in foster care would have moved from foster home to foster home a total of three times. At the same time, the child often continues to struggle with school work from every new school they encounter.<sup>1</sup> Registration at a new school can mean that credits don't transfer, and that children miss critical days, weeks or months of learning which create ever-widening gaps in their education. No child should have to struggle in his or her education because of their enrollment in foster care.

Volunteering in my school and community has helped me to understand the intrinsic rewards which can be gained by helping those less fortunate. C4U is unique unlike any other organization because I would design the program to have high school juniors and seniors

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<sup>1</sup> *National Foster Care Coalition. Foster Care Facts 2009.*  
<http://www.nationalfostercare.org/facts/> 27 September 2009.

volunteer as mentors for the high school graduation and college application process for foster children. Volunteers of the C4U program would receive a certificate for their service, and a partial scholarship to their university for helping others earn a quality education. Using teenage mentors would cultivate greater educational outcomes for foster youth as a result of the personal relationships that would be developed between the students and their foster care children whom they are mentoring. C4U would be designed around the vision statement of “Preparing a future for a better tomorrow”.

C4U chapters would be community based organizations which would meet at a local community service district or high school three to four times a month. High School 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade volunteers would be recruited through an interview process administered by the adult advisor of each chapter. Funding through C4U would be created through benefiting the community itself. Local carwashes, walk-a-thons, recycling, bake sales, lawn work, and yard sales are a few examples of the different service activities which could be used to gain funds. More importantly the teenagers and children who work and run these types of events would be the volunteers, as well as the foster care children themselves. In this way the foster youth in the program would be able to share their personal story to members of the community regarding the ways in which their C4U chapter has supported them in achieving their educational goals

A program such as College for You is a crucial need in California, and more importantly in communities all across the nation. A report issued by the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) found that more than 26 percent of foster children have repeated a grade at least once since the seventh grade; 60 percent have failed a class in the previous year; and over a third were

below grade level in written language, math, and reading.<sup>2</sup> A study by Casey Family Programs concluded that fewer than 27 percent of foster children who graduated from high school went on to college, compared to 52 percent of high school graduates overall.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the college dropout rate among foster youth is far higher than the rate among other students.<sup>4</sup>

Having foster youth participate in a mentoring program like C4U is crucial for their academic success. The 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade volunteers would be responsible for developing strategies to help the foster children make a successful plan for college. Registering for different standardized tests, meeting application deadlines, and developing essays are a few crucial needs for which many teenagers in foster care require assistance. C4U would not only be used for the college application process, but it would also be a source for after school tutoring in a wide range of subjects.

Not only is admission into college a challenge for foster children, but financing a college education is even a greater burden. Just filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) itself is the first obstacle. It is as daunting as an income tax form, and some of the language can be confusing for teenagers who have never been exposed to large amounts of paperwork. The volunteers and mentors of C4U could provide step by step instructions from students who have completed identical or similar forms, and this will insure that the foster children's questions will be answered. Each C4U chapter would be responsible for providing scholarships for the foster children of the program. In addition, chapters could also grant

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<sup>2</sup> CWLA. Barriers to a Secure Adulthood. 2009.

<http://www.cwla.org/ADVOCACY/fostercare070619.htm>. 27 September 2009.

<sup>3</sup> CASEY. Supporting Success. 2008.

<http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/pdf/SupportingSuccess.pdf>. 27 September 2009.

<sup>4</sup> CASEY. Supporting Success. 2008.

<http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/pdf/SupportingSuccess.pdf>. 27 September 2009.

scholarships to those youth volunteers who give up their personal time to assist others in need.

As previously mentioned, the funds for the scholarship would be collected through donations and community car washes, walk-a-thons, yard sales, and bake sales all run by youth.

My vision for College for You is for it to expand to a variety of communities across California, and eventually across the country. My overall dream would be for every youth in foster care to have hope in his or her goals for higher education, and that they would be able to go out into the world feeling prepared to meet the challenges of everyday life. Not only would C4U help the foster youth reach educational goals, but it would also give them a sense of independence and accomplishment by surrounding themselves with mentors who inspire and motivate them to excel. In our state of California, it is our duty as citizens to provide encouragement to those less fortunate. By helping others, we achieve greatness not only for ourselves individually, but for our nation as a whole.

## References

1. CASEY. Supporting Success. 2008.  
<http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/pdf/SupportingSuccess.pdf>. 27 September 2009.
2. CWLA. Barriers to a Secure Adulthood. 2009.  
<http://www.cwla.org/ADVOCACY/fostercare070619.htm>. 27 September 2009.
3. *National Foster Care Coalition*. Foster Care Facts 2009.  
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