

“Back” to College? FL Dept. of Education and Pathways Can Help

Throughout Florida, college students served by members of the Positive Pathways Network are planning to go “back” to college. Many college facilities are closed to regular activities, and institutions are following the U.S. Centers for Disease Control’s

guidelines for reopening and on-campus activities. For information about courses or other college operations at specific schools, see the individual college COVID-19 website pages or contact the college directly.

Also, as part of their collaboration with the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) all of Florida’s public colleges and universities have appointed designated points of contact to help support students using the DCF tuition and fee exemption.

If you have difficulty reaching campus-based designated point of contact, remember that the Positive Pathways Regional Points of Contact are ready to support any student or adult who needs to be connected to resources to facilitate students’ post-secondary education anywhere in Florida. These highly-connected and experienced professionals are strategically located around the state and know the communities in their region well.

Positive Pathways Programs supports foster care liaisons and the child welfare community’s independent living workers. We are a DCF program and our staff has extensive connections throughout Florida not only with colleges, universities, and technical colleges, but also with foster care agencies. We help ensure that students from foster care reach their post-secondary dreams, despite COVID-19. If you need us, email Pathways@EducateTomorrow.org.



Quick Links

[COVID-19 Toolkit](#)

[College and University Plans](#)

[State College Foster Care Liaisons](#)

[University Foster Care Liaisons](#)

[Regional Points of Contact](#)

Once Homeless, FAU Student Graduates with Degree in Accounting

Markisha Mehide faced hard times when she enrolled in her first accounting class at Palm Beach State College (PBSC) in 2018.

“I was living in my car,” she remembers. “My kids were staying with my mom and grandma. I felt like I had really messed up my life.”

Despite those grim circumstances, Markisha kept her eye on her long-held goal of becoming an entrepreneur. After earning an associate’s degree in business administration and management from PBSC, she continued her studies at Florida Atlantic University (FAU) as an accounting major.

From that point on, things fell into place. Ms. Mehide moved in with her family and was introduced to Dr. Kimberly Dunn, a Positive Pathways Member and FAU accounting professor who founded Champions Empowering Champions (CEC). CEC is a non-profit that helps students who have experienced homelessness or foster care. Ms. Mehide was among the first FAU students to become an active participant in the program, which



Markisha Mehide, with her children, Makayla and Horatio

Continued on Page 2

Once Homeless, Graduate Helped by Positive Pathways Members at FAU

Continued from Page 1

became a 501-c-3 last year.

One week before her 28th birthday, Markisha received her bachelor's degree in accounting during an FAU virtual graduation ceremony, a major step closer to reaching her dream of becoming an entrepreneur. When Ms. Mehide lists the people who helped her along her 10-year journey to obtain her degree, she mentions several Positive Pathways members, such as Dr. Dunn, Jasmine Moore of Educate Tomorrow, and Ashlee Kelly of the AOK Scholars Foundation. She also credits Andrea Reino, her Champions Empowering Champions mentor.



Markisha Mehide

"I would not be where I am today without their support," she said. "Champions did everything they could for me, from tutoring to giving me household and school supplies," she said. She also credits her family, including her older brother, Quintan, and her children, Makayla, 7, and Horatio, 5. She also credits her own goal-orientation and perseverance. "My main focus was school, and I never gave up even when it got really hard," she added. "I battled with personal shortcomings that changed my life, but I never gave up on school. It took me 10 years to get my college degree, but I did it."

Statewide Virtual Tutoring Pilot Program Launched by Educate Tomorrow

In response to needs expressed through a survey of more than 150 students throughout Florida, Educate Tomorrow, the Miami-based non-profit that administers Positive Pathways, has established The Educate Tomorrow Virtual Tutoring Program, a free statewide tutoring service. The pilot program



is open to students using the DCF tuition and fee waiver served by Educate Tomorrow and the AOK Scholars Foundation statewide. Dr. William Presswood, a veteran teacher, adjunct professor, and foster and adoptive father, is the primary tutor, under the direction of Educate Tomorrow. Dr. Presswood assesses students' needs and either tutors them himself or connects them to a volunteer tutor with expertise in the student's subject area.

"Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, there has been an increasing need to help students stay on track academically," said Dr. Amy Rubinson, Care Coordination Manager at Educate Tomorrow, who organized and oversees the program. "On the survey, 65% of the students said they needed help with study skills. Since in-person lessons at colleges will be limited in the foreseeable future, we believe the need for this program will only grow."

For more information about the Program, or to request tutoring for a students, contact Dr. Presswood at wpresswoodedd@gmail.com, or Dr. Amy Rubinson at Rubinson@EducateTomorrow.org.

DCF Granted Flexibility Waiver to Protect Young Adults Aging Out of Care

Thanks to a proactive DCF and help from the Federal Government, Florida young adults from foster care don't have to worry, at least for now, about losing their eligibility for post-18 services because COVID19 circumstances prevent them from meeting eligibility requirements. The Title IV-E provision for Extended Foster Care (EFC) requires that emerging adults participate in a "qualifying activity" like finishing school or gaining work skills and experience. In 2018-19, more than 1,300 of the 2,992 young adults receiving Independent Living (IL) services in the state were in the EFC category. The rest of the young people receiving IL services were either in Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS) (1,221) or receiving aftercare services (427). Most students served by Positive Pathways members receive PESS.

On May 22, as Covid-19 shut down schools and businesses, DCF requested a "IV-E flexibility waiver" from the federal government to help ensure that students aging out would not lose their eligibility for EFC based on not meeting education and work eligibility requirements. The waiver was approved, and 18-year-olds throughout Florida were able to breathe more easily since they will remain eligible for EFC while the waiver is in effect.

College and Community Leaders Strive to Help Students From Foster Care

The power of professional networking became clear during the July 1st monthly Positive Pathways call when Angie Snyder presented information about her work as assistant dean of students/case manager at Florida Southwestern State College.



Angie Snyder
Assistant Dean &
Case Manager

Under the auspices of the college's Bucs C.A.R.E. Program, Ms. Snyder has rallied partners on and off-campus to provide support the more than 125 students using the DCF tuition and fee exemption on her campus. You can hear Dean Snyder's presentation on the new Positive Pathways Podcast by clicking [HERE](#).

Ms. Snyder said she was inspired to increase her attention to students from foster care at her college after she attended a community forum hosted by Pathways Member Dr. Dan Hoover, assistant dean of student services at Florida Gulf Coast University.



Pam Bress, Esq.
Executive Director & Co-founder

During the August monthly call, leaders from Ready for Life Brevard (RFLB), including Executive Director and Co-founder Pam Bress, Esq., shared about their program. RFLB provides key services to young people from foster care and related backgrounds.

The program offers a solution-based skills center that helps teens and young adults remove barriers to their education and employment through connections to lifeline support networks.

To access the Ready for Life Brevard website, click [HERE](#).

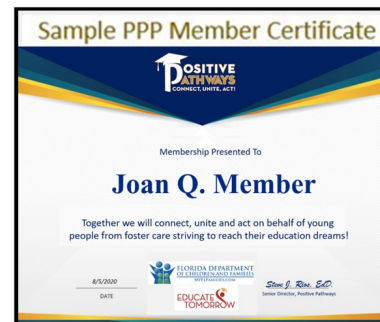
Positive Pathways Now Offers Monthly New Member Orientation Sessions

Each month, the Positive Pathways Program now offers new and existing members the opportunity to participate in an hour-long orientation about the Program. The orientation takes place immediately after the Program's 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST) monthly statewide conference call, usually held on the first Wednesday of each month. The orientation runs from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. EST.

Participants learn about the Program, one of the few of its kind in the nation, and hear about programs and services available to students who age out of foster care in Florida.

The orientation also covers information about the important partnerships that Positive Pathways has developed with other statewide organizations, such as the Florida College Access Network (FCAN), the Guardian ad Litem Program, and the AOK Scholars Foundation.

The October meetings will take place on Wednesday, October 7th (Monthly meeting 1:30, New Member Orientation 2:30, click [HERE](#).)



Positive Pathways New Member Orientation—Register TODAY!



Positive Pathways is funded by the Florida Department of Children and Families and Educate Tomorrow, which administers the program. Our mission is to support student service professionals who help youth from foster care transition to and through college. To include information in this newsletter, contact Dr. Steve J. Rios, Senior Director, Pathways@EducateTomorrow.org, (786) 223-7541 or (786) 223-6884. URL: www.PositivePathwaysFlorida.org.

