



PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

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Nov. - Dec. 2022

Pathways Launches Series of Community Forums on Homeless Student Tuition & Fee Waiver

Positive Pathways launched a new series of Regional Community Forums recently at Miami Dade College's North Campus. The first forum, which took place in September at MDC's brand new Artificial Intelligence Lab, featured students using the state's innovative homeless tuition exemption, campus and community leaders sharing best practices, and Florida State Representative Marie Woodson, Dem., District 101, Hollywood.

More than 50 people attended the event, both in person and virtually from throughout the state. In October, a similar virtual event took place with representatives from Palm Beach County's public college, university, and school district.

At both events, attendees learned about the requirements of revisions to state law that took effect on July 1, 2022, as well as what campus and district leaders were doing to respond to the new requirements, which include the requirement to designate a homeless liaison at each campus. The revisions to the law were the result of House Bill 1577, sponsored by Rep. Woodson. See page 4 for specifics.

Broward College North Campus in Coconut Creek hosted the next forum, on October 28, 2022.



John Watson, New DCF Youth Advisor and UCF Student, to Be Featured Guest on Nov. 2 Positive Pathways Monthly Call

John Watson, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) Youth Advisor, will be the featured guest during the Nov. 2, Positive Pathways Monthly Call. Mr. Watson, a junior at the University of Central Florida, is well known to Florida's transitioning youth population. The meeting is scheduled for 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. (EST), on November 2, 2022. Click [HERE](#) to register for this event.

During his five years in foster care in Brevard County, John became a founding member, and later, Senior Advisor of the Brevard Youth Leadership Council (BYLC).

In 2020, John started working at Selfless Love Foundation's One Voice IMPAACT initiative as the Youth Council Specialist. For two years, John used his lived experience in care and his community connections to promote the development of young leaders and other Youth Advisory Boards across Florida.

Last August, John transitioned into the Youth Advisor position at the Office of Continuing Care for the Florida Department of Children and Families. His duties will include serving as a liaison between transitioning youth and DCF, as well as participating in forums (including Positive Pathways) as a voice for youth and young adults. John, who said he is "Glad to be a part of a great team at the Office of Continuing Care and working with the HOPE Navigators." has been developing a web-based independent living resource document to provide a one-stop shop for the wide variety of programs and services available to students who transition from foster care in Florida among many other projects and initiatives that focus on youth and young adults.

John received his associate degree from Eastern Florida State College in 2020 and is pursuing a bachelor's degree in Political Science from the University of Central Florida. John can be reached at John.Watson@myffamilies.com.



Youth Advisor
John Watson



Embrace Families

Mentoring Program Presented During October Call



Shannon Harding
Assistant Director
Manager
Youth Services

During the October Positive Pathways Monthly Call, two representatives from Embrace Families shared information about the organization's Legacy Mentoring Program. Shannon Harding, Assistant Director of Youth Services, and Gabriella Colon, Mentor Program Manager, reminded attendees about the benefits of mentoring and answered questions about their program.



Gabriella Colon
Mentor Program
Manager

The Legacy Mentor Program pairs teens ages 18 and under with a positive role model in the community. These mentors come from many walks of life, some of them having little to no experience within the foster care system, and others are giving back after spending years in foster care themselves, the speakers said. For more information about this program, visit Embrace Families site by clicking [HERE](#).

Dr. Althea K. Blake Appointed Program Manager of LEAP Tampa Bay College Access Network

Positive Pathways veteran Dr. Althea K. Blake is the new program manager with the LEAP Tampa Bay College Access Network. In her new role, Dr. Blake will guide the progress of LEAP's Working Groups and various projects, while maintaining a focus on serving underrepresented populations, according to the organization's website.

The LEAP Tampa Bay College Access Network is a network of more than 50 community partners committed to changing lives by connecting residents to education and training beyond high school.

Dr. Blake's most recently position was as the founding program coordinator of the Road to Independence, Success, and Excellence (RISE) Program at St. Petersburg College. At RISE, Dr. Blake helped develop a comprehensive support program for students using the foster care and homeless waivers. At SPC, Dr. Blake improved retention of these groups through intentional outreach and coordinating community and campus resources.

Although she is changing positions, Dr. Blake will continue to serve as volunteer Regional Point of Contact for the Positive Pathways Network.

"In my new position, I look forward to connecting with like-minded professionals who are also striving to make a difference in the lives of vulnerable student populations," said Dr. Blake, who can be reached at ablake@cftampabay.org



Dr. Althea K. Blake,
Program Manager,
LEAP Tampa Bay



PPP and FCAN to Jointly Host Nov. 3 Quarterly Webinar

On November 3, from 1 to 2 p.m., EDT, the Florida College Access Network (FCAN) will host the next Positive Pathways' Quarterly Webinar. The title of the webinar is "Supporting Students from Foster Care and Homeless Settings with the Transition to Postsecondary Education"

Dr. Steve J. Rios, Senior Director of Positive Pathways, will be joined by Jasmine Moore, AOK Specialist with Educate Tomorrow, and Patrick Simon, President of the Citrus County Coalition for College and Careers, for an hour-long webinar targeting high school guidance counselors throughout Florida. So far nearly 200 high school counselors from all over Florida have signed up for the webinar, the second one on this topic that FCAN and PPP have hosted. This session will highlight information about Florida laws related to students using the state's homeless student exemption that became effective on July 1.

"We are so grateful to know that so many high school counselors want to find out the latest information available to support these vulnerable and resilient students," said Dr. Rios, who has led the Positive Pathways Program since it was established by Florida's Department of Children and Families in 2016. Positive Pathways is administered as a DCF contract by Educate Tomorrow, a statewide and national non-profit organization based in Miami.

Ms. Moore serves as a founding committee member of the Advising Community for Students with Experiences in the Foster Care System for NACADA, the nation's largest association of student service professionals. She helped establish the Educate Tomorrow at Florida Atlantic University program at FAU in Boca Raton.

Mr. Simon is a former teacher, principal and director of research and accountability for Citrus County Public Schools. The Citrus County Coalition serves as the local college access network (LCAN). During the past two months, Mr. Simon and his team of volunteers have met with more than 200 students from foster care who want to transfer to some type of postsecondary education.



Jasmine Moore



Patrick Simon



Dr. Steve J. Rios

Webinar Topics

- State resources and benefits
- The Positive Pathways Program
- Effective high school to postsecondary strategies

REGISTER NOW
[CLICK HERE](#)

Students Use DCF Exemption to Earn Law Degrees



Florida's generous tuition and fee exemptions allow for students who qualify to obtain a free education. An increasing number of students are using the tuition exemption to earn graduate degrees. Two of these students are highlighted this month in our Student Success Stories, highlighting their accomplishments. Congratulations to Erykah Jackson, who earned her doctor of jurisprudence from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) Law School, and Amber Mannings, who graduated from Florida International University's Law School. Both of these hardworking women grew up in Miami Dade County and received guidance and support from the AOK Scholars Foundation, the staff of Citrus Family Care Network (formerly Our Kids) and Educate Tomorrow.



Erykah Jackson,
FAMU Law Graduate,
Class of '22



Both Erykah and Amber are determined and focused. They took advantage of the opportunities that were presented to them and maximized the tuition exemptions through hard work and perseverance.

- Varzi Jean-Baptiste
Educate Tomorrow



Amber Mannings,
Class of '22
FIU Law Graduate,
with Varzi Jean-Baptiste

Join Positive Pathways, YOUR Network for Success!

Positive Pathways is a Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) program funded by DCF and Educate Tomorrow, which administers the program. Our mission is to support campus-based foster care liaisons and community partners, including independent living professionals, as they provide focused and consistent support to young adults from foster care and homeless backgrounds who are pursuing post secondary education.

We provide technical assistance, networking services, and professional development. Click [HERE](#) to join the Network. We are YOUR network for success and look forward to working with you.

For more information, reach us at:

- Pathways@EducateTomorrow.org
- www.PositivePathwaysFlorida.org
- (786) 223-6884

Dr. Steve J. Rios, Senior Director
Positive Pathways Program





Regional Community Forums

Regional Responses to Florida's Updated Chapter 2022-65 (Requirements of House Bill 1577)

From now until next February, Positive Pathways staff will collaborate with leaders throughout Florida to conduct in-person and virtual community forums. We will reach out to campus, district and community-based care organizations and providers to invite participation. The forums will focus on how communities throughout Florida are working to implement the provisions listed below, especially requirements related to Positive Pathways' key member organizations and postsecondary educational institutions. Visit www.PositivePathwaysFlorida.org or contact Pathways@EducateTomorrow.org for more information.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF FINAL BILL ANALYSIS

BILL #: CS/CS/HB 1577 Homeless Youth
SPONSOR(S): Health & Human Services Committee and Children, Families & Seniors Subcommittee, Woodson and others
TIED BILLS: IDEN./SIM. BILLS: SB 1708

FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION: 117 Y's 0 N's **GOVERNOR'S ACTION:** Approved

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

CS/CS/HB 1577 passed the House on March 2, 2022, and subsequently passed the Senate on March 4, 2022. Part of the bill also passed the House and Senate in HB 7065 on March 4, 2022.

Homeless youth, often referred to as unaccompanied homeless youth, are individuals under the age of 18 who lack parental, foster, or institutional care. Each year, an estimated 4.2 million youth and young adults experience homelessness in the United States. Unaccompanied homeless youth, because of their disability of nonage and lack of finances, face particular challenges, such as accessing routine health care. During the 2019-20 school year, 6,926 of Florida's students were unaccompanied homeless youth.

A homeless youth who is 16 or older and meets federal requirements may receive certain benefits, including an identification card at no cost, the ability to petition the court to have the disability of nonage removed, and the ability to consent to certain medical treatment.

CS/CS/HB 1577 addresses the needs of homeless children and young adults. Specifically, the bill:

- requires district school boards to issue a certified unaccompanied homeless youth a card that includes information on the youth's rights and available benefits, and allows health care providers to accept the issued card as proof of the status as a certified unaccompanied homeless youth.
- expands the Keys-to-Independence program to unaccompanied homeless youth who meet certain requirements.
- waives fees for copies of a birth certificate for certified unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults who aged out of foster care.
- requires postsecondary institutions to have liaisons to assist former foster children and young adults and those experiencing homelessness to help students with issues related to the use of a tuition and fee exemption, and directs the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability to evaluate their effectiveness.
- requires postsecondary institutions to retain original documents on a student's tuition and fee exemption, and prohibits additional requests for such documentation.
- aligns Florida's eligibility for a tuition and fee exemption with federal law.
- requires any student determined to be an unaccompanied homeless youth for a tuition and fee exemption for a preceding year to be presumed homeless for subsequent years unless an institution has conflicting information.

The bill has no fiscal impact on state government or local governments.

The bill was approved by the Governor on April 6, 2022, ch. 2022-65, L.O.F., and will become effective on July 1, 2022.