



FOSTER PROGRESS

Equipping Your Campus to Serve Foster Youth

Kate Danielson, Founder and Executive Director

1. Intro to Foster Progress
2. Intro to Foster Care
3. Aging Out
4. Barriers Students Face
5. Recommendations to Help Students Overcome Barriers

Foster Progress

Empowering youth who have experienced foster care to attain a college degree and transition into adulthood successfully through mentoring, advocacy, and educational opportunity.

Mentoring &
Scholarships

Training &
Advocacy

Y-CAP

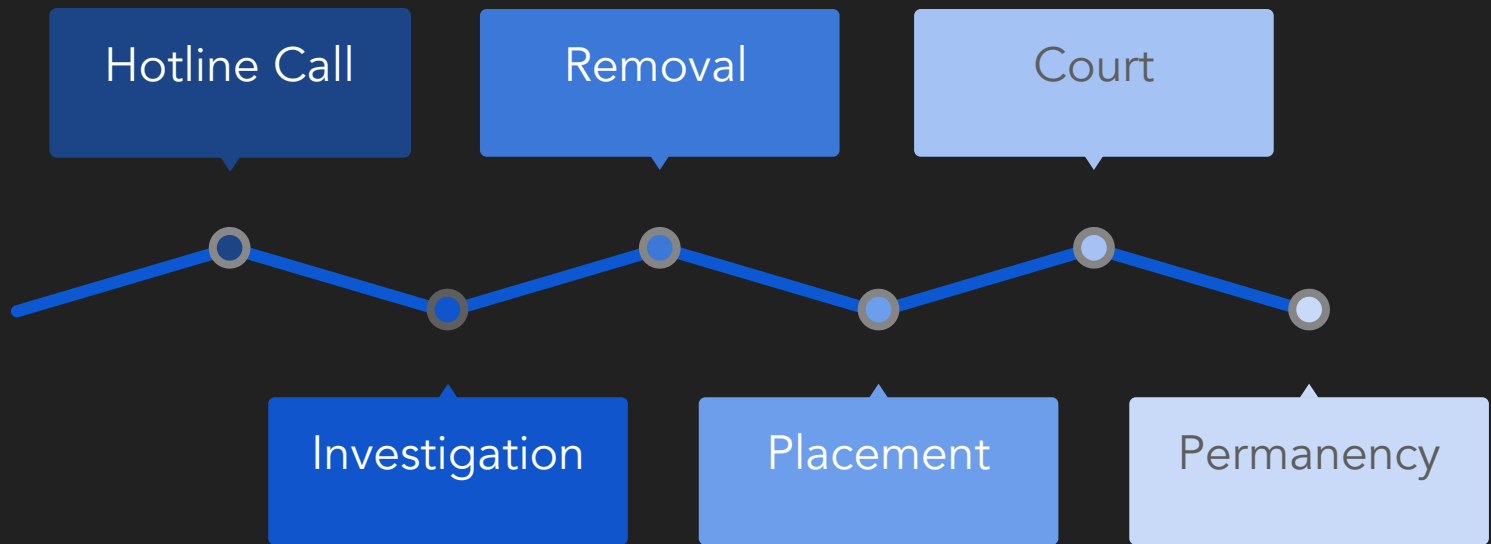
Y-CAP

Youth in Care
College Advocate Program

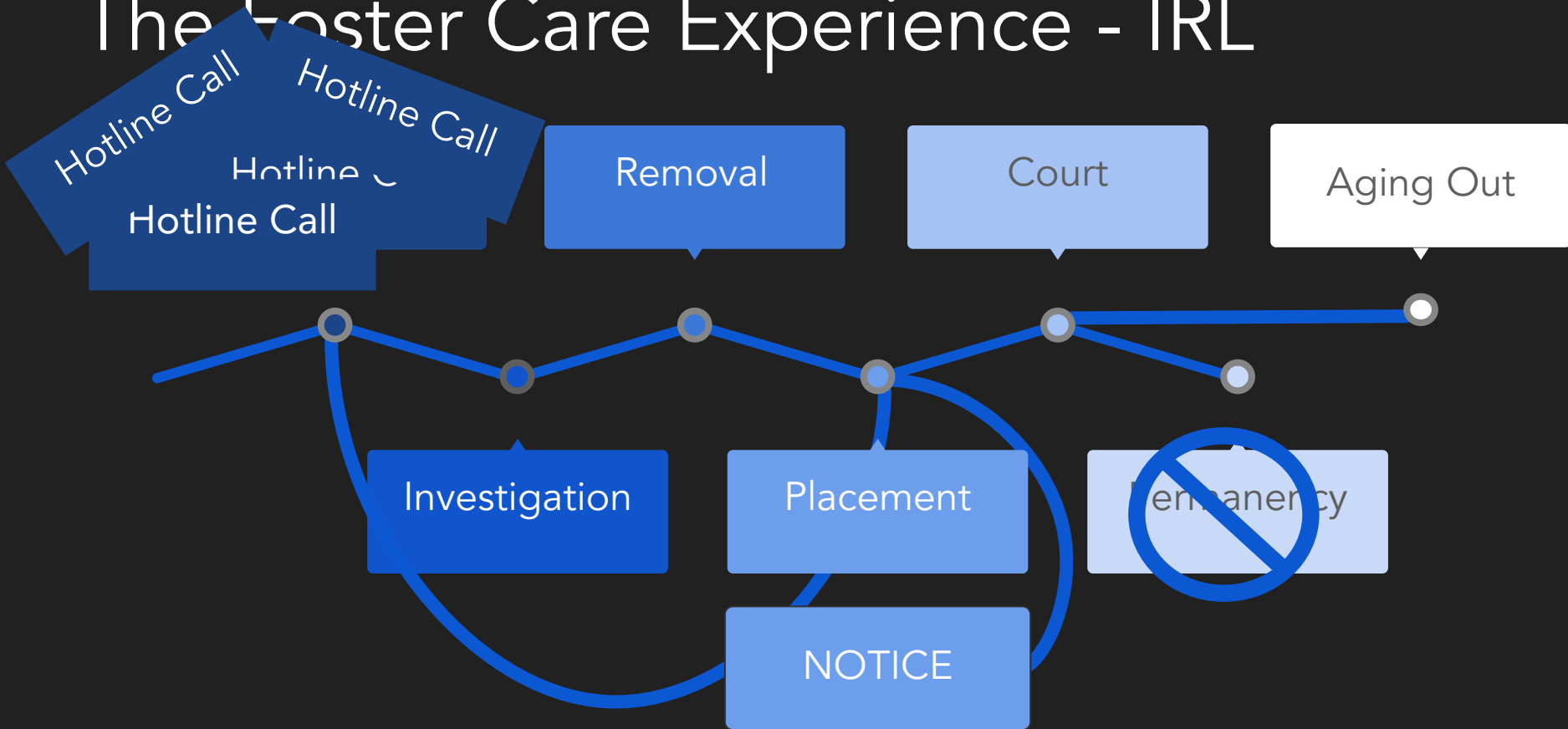
Peer advocates on college campuses running supportive groups for youth who have experienced foster care

- University of Illinois at Chicago
- University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign
- Northern Illinois University
- Northeastern Illinois University
- Governors State University
- Harold Washington College
- Eastern Illinois University

The Foster Care Experience



The Foster Care Experience - IRL



Aging Out



28,000 youth “age-out” of foster care each year in the US between the ages of 18-21.

In 2011, Illinois had the third highest rate in the country of youth aging out.

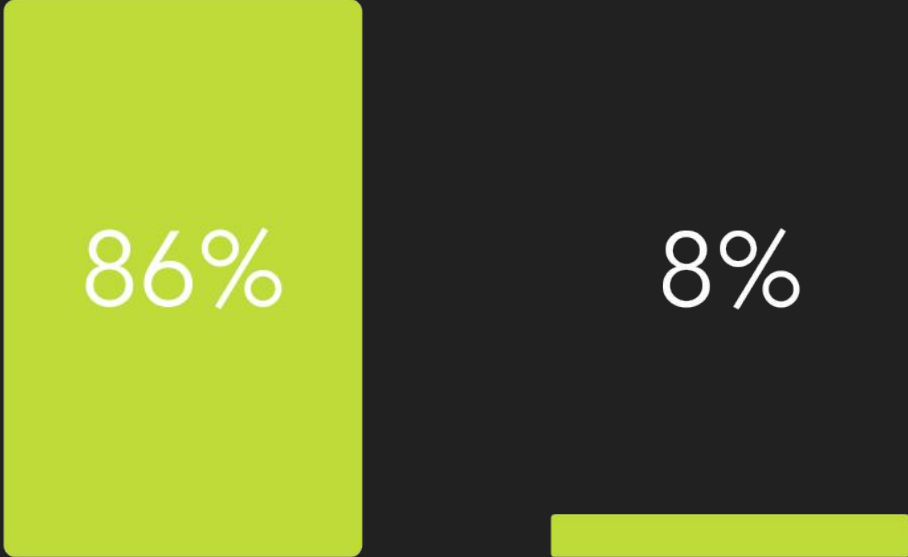
In 2011, around 50% of youth in Illinois exited foster care by aging out.

Outcomes for Youth Aging Out

Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning
of Former Foster Care Youth at age 26, 2011



Degree Attainment



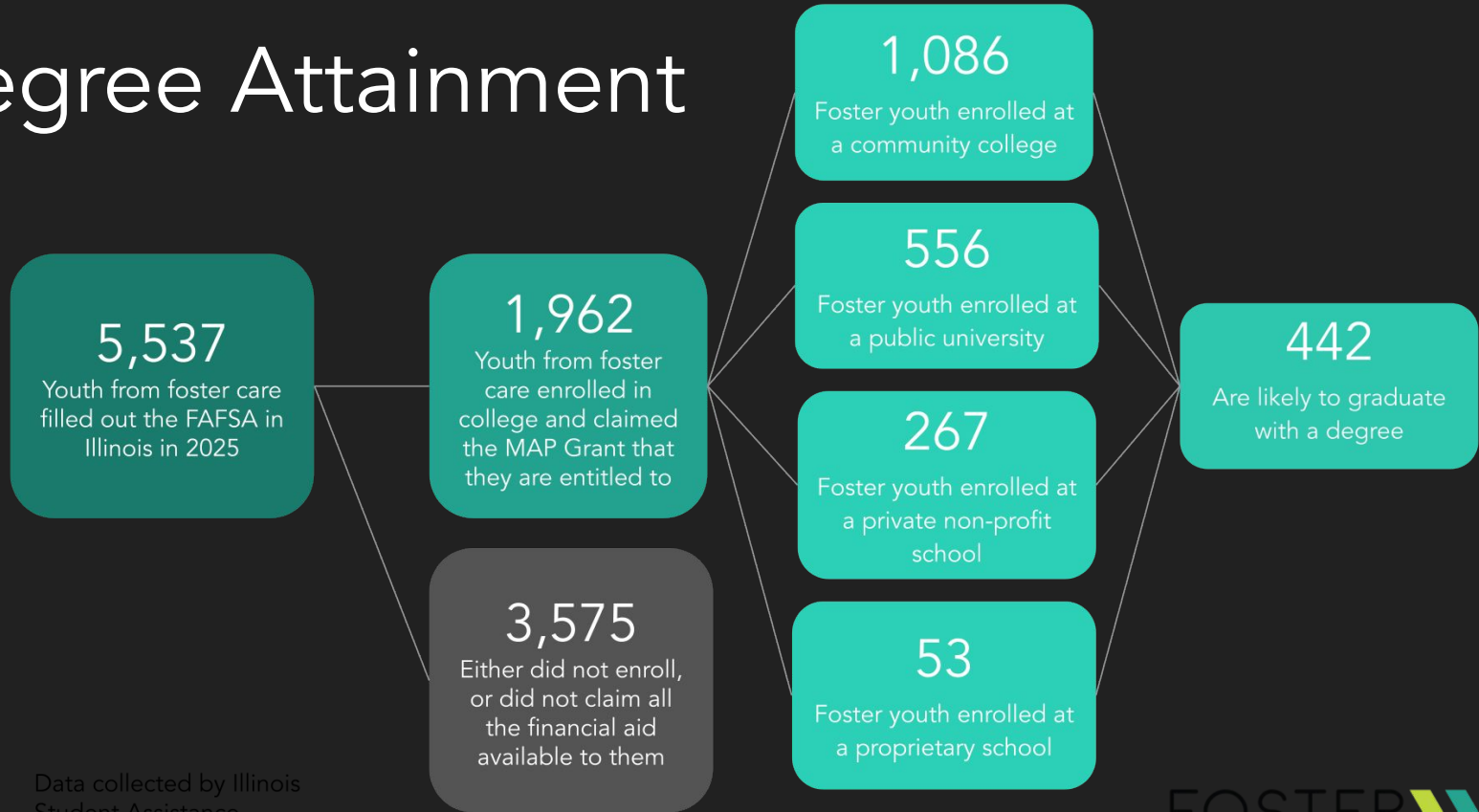
86%

Youth from foster care
who say they want to
attend college

8%

Youth from foster care
who earn a college
degree

Degree Attainment



Data collected by Illinois
Student Assistance
Commission, 2025

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Barriers Our Students Face

trauma

complex
family
relationships

biases

mental/
emotional
health

educational
deficits

early
parenthood

financial
instability

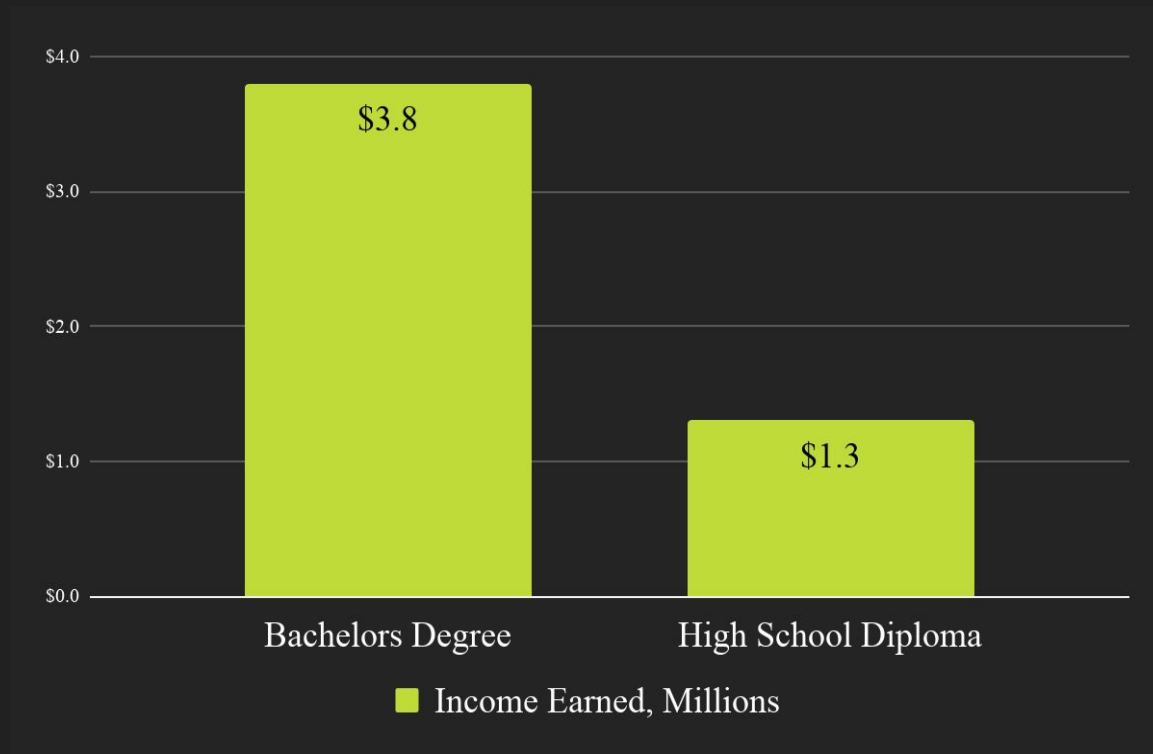
lack of
caring
adults and
family ties

housing
insecurity

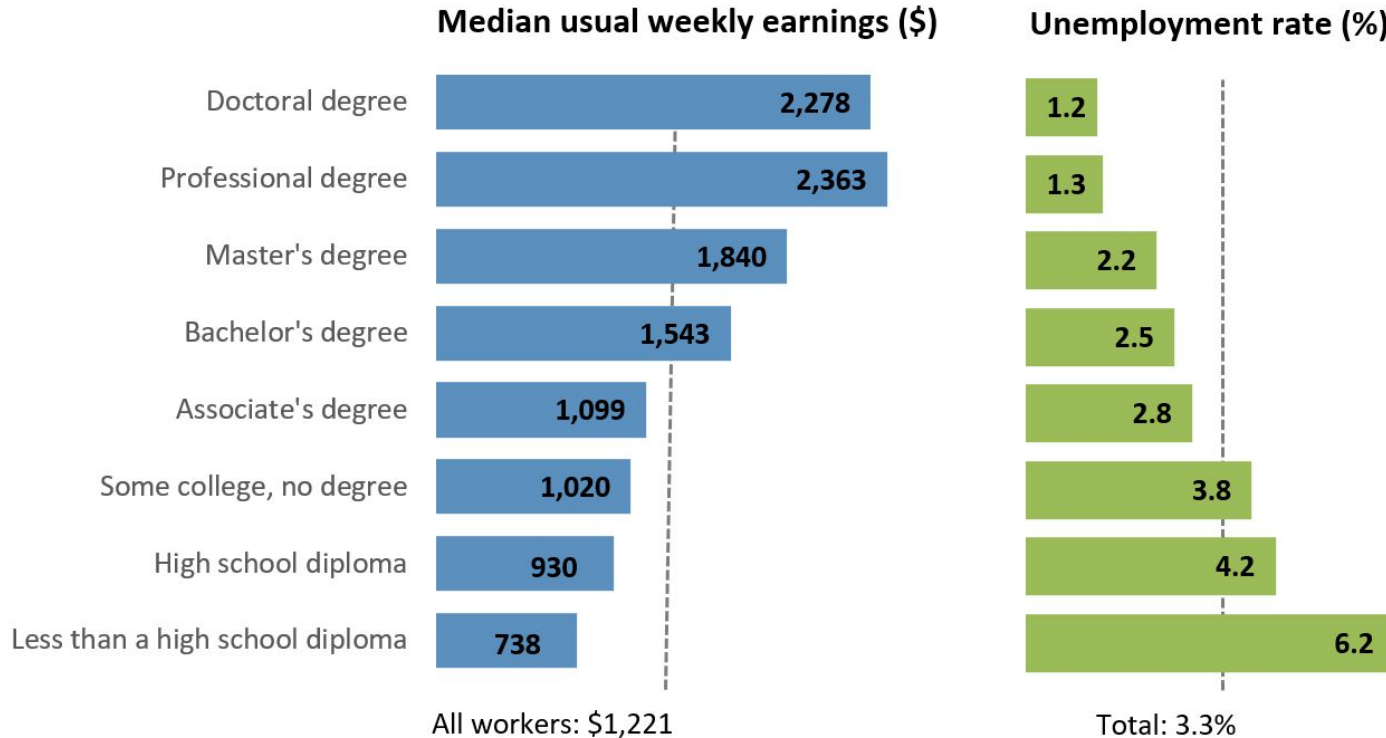
burdensome
documen-
tation

Is college worth it?

An individual with a Bachelor's degree will earn 84% more than someone with a high school degree over their lifetime.



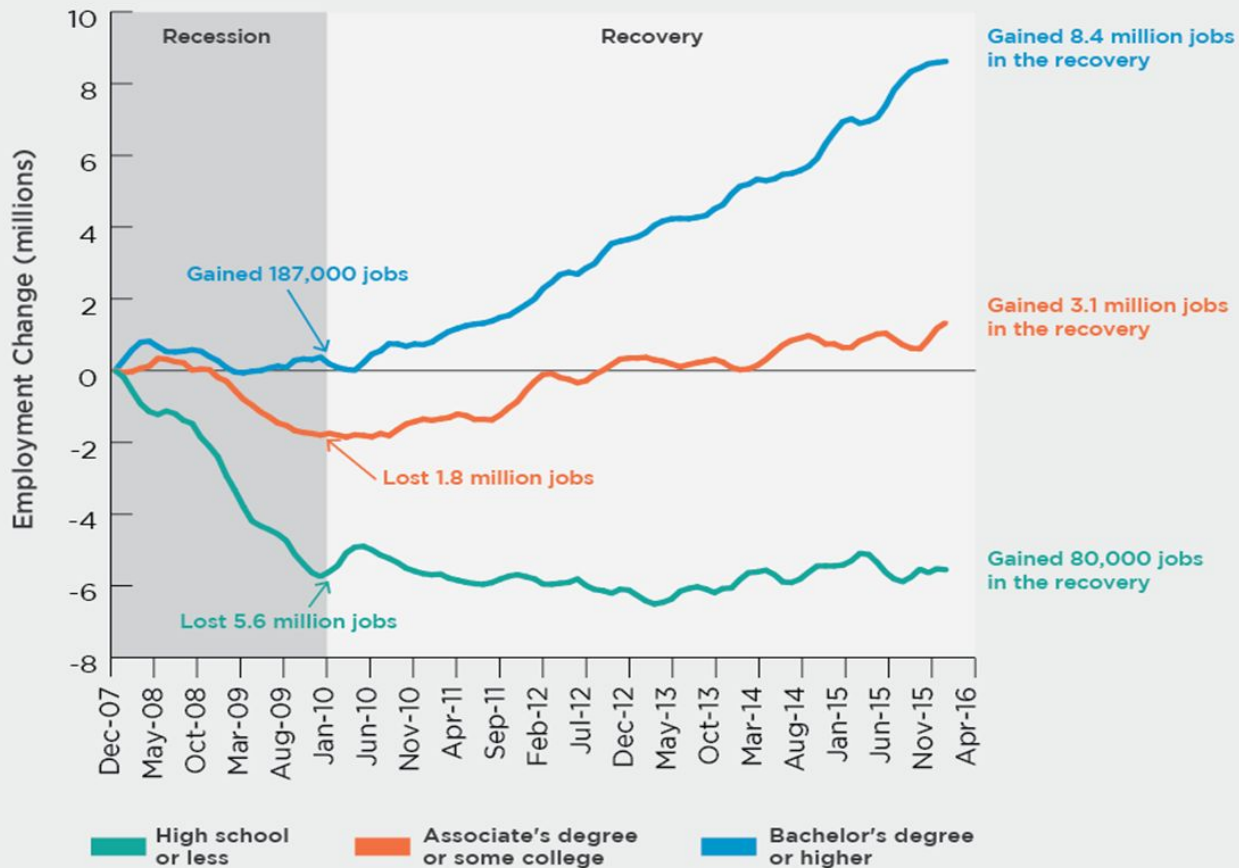
Earnings and Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment, 2024



Note: Data are for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

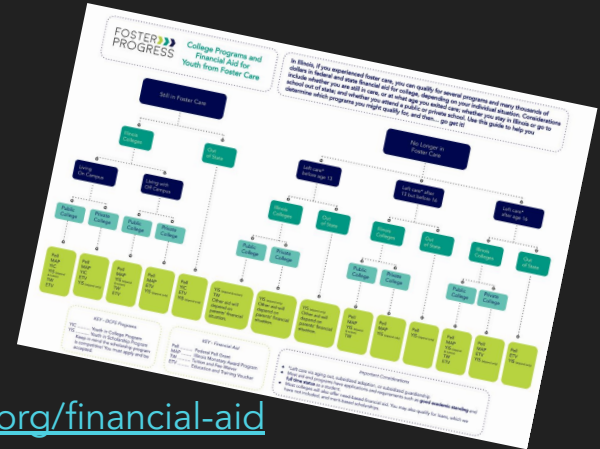
Is college worth it?

Figure I. Workers with a Bachelor's degree have added 8.4 million jobs in the recovery, but workers with high school diplomas or less added only 80,000 jobs after losing 5.6 million jobs in the recession.



Status determines access

- Still in care
 - Living with foster parent
 - Living in an ILO/TLP
 - Living on campus
- Achieved permanency (at what age?)
 - Returned home
 - Adopted
 - Guardianship
- Aged out
- Failed adoptions
- Full time vs part time
- In state/out of state
- Public/private schools



Barrier: Finances

- Insufficient or incorrect information about accessing financial aid
- Slow reimbursements/disbursements of financial aid
- No/limited income
- No financial safety net
- No supportive adult
- Learning to budget on their own
- Small fees are insurmountable
- Student loans may be inadvisable
- Hard sell to invest in a degree now and forgo an immediate income

Solution: Flexible Financial Aid

- Liaisons and Peer Advocates become experts in financial aid and advise students on accessing it
- Correct, thorough, easily digestible information at students' fingertips
- Generous Financial Aid packages, not including loans - inclusive of different populations, flexible, quickly accessible
- Easy access to emergency funds
- Quick pathways to high earning jobs
- Part-time flexibility
- Stackable credentials



Barrier: Lack of Support

- Protected, confidential status
- No/limited permanent family support
- No one to turn to for emotional support or advice
- No ride to campus on move in day
- No one to celebrate successes

Solution: Foster Connections

- Advocate for the HOUSE Liaison to be a full time role
- Create opportunities to self-disclose status to others, such as “Meet & Greet”
- Make sure the students know where to find the Liaisons
 - Multi-pronged marketing (flyers, website, social media, announcements, etc.)
- Team approach across offices
- Establish a Y-CAP Program on your campus

Barrier:

Housing Insecurity

- Nowhere to go over school breaks, like summer and winter holidays
- Complicated family dynamics, both bio and foster
- Difficulty living with roommates
- Difficulty planning ahead

Solution:

Housing Stability

- Provide campus housing
- Keep housing open during breaks
- Create a "home for the holidays"/host family program
- Flexible financial aid that can be applied to housing

Barrier: Burdensome Documentation

(Birth certificate, State ID/Driver's License, Proof of Wardship/Status as Foster Youth, Required questions about parent/guardian, Independent Status on the FAFSA, Tax Transcript/Verification of Non-Filing)

- Youth often don't have access to these documents or understand what they are and how to find them.
- "Mandatory" requirements
- Rule themselves out before asking for help, give up

Solution: Minimize Requirements

- When possible, have staff verify students' status in foster care.
- Only require what is federally mandated
- Train staff to use plain language, not technical terms, and to give clear instructions on where to find documents
- Require verification only one time
- Don't call something "mandatory" if it's not

Stay in touch!



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Further Reading

Campus Coaches Make Crucial Difference to Foster Youth in College, [Youth Today](#)

College Campus Support Programs Are Strong Model of Services Helping Foster Youth, [Youth Today](#)

Getting by and getting ahead: Social capital and transition to college among homeless and foster youth, [Children and Youth Services Review](#)

Increasing Competency, Self-Confidence, and Connectedness Among Foster Care Alumni Entering a 4-Year University: Findings from an Early-Start Program, [Journal of Social Service Research](#)

Experiences and outcomes of foster care alumni in postsecondary education: A review of the literature, [Children and Youth Services Review](#)

Developing an on-campus recruitment and retention program for foster care alumni, [Children and Youth Services Review](#)