State of Foster Youth Affinity Group at Bakersfield College

The foster youth affinity group is gradually evolving with the addition of the EOPS/NextUp Program. The NextUp program provides services to students who went into foster care on or after their 16 birthday and are under 26 years old at the start of the academic year. Foster youth who meet NextUp criteria are eligible to receive additional resources and services which include counseling, priority registration, emergency housing grants, mental health community referrals, transportation, book and school supply assistance.

The NextUp program was recently implemented in the Fall of 2018. With the implementation of this new program, there was also the need to hire dedicated staff. It was not until late fall that targeted recruitment efforts began. A list of self-identified former or current students were reached by emails and phone calls to inform them of our NextUp program.

Prior to the implementation of the NextUp program, the foster youth task force had a team of staff who made themselves accessible to foster youth students. However, with no physical department to refer them or hand them to foster youth had limited assistance.

Five Year Trend, Disaggregated by Demographics

With the growth of student enrollment at Bakersfield College, the number of foster youth has also increased. As we look at the data for the foster youth affinity group, a 20% growth can be noted for first-time students from fall 2014 to fall 2018 and almost a 5% increase from fall 2017 to fall 2018. The majority of the first-time foster youth students are of Hispanic/Latino backgrounds and are in the age range of 19 or younger (see graphs below).
While foster youth face barriers, some have taken the challenge of attempting 15 units or more their first semester. From fall 2017 to fall 2018, there was a considerable increase of 46% of foster youth attempting 15 units and a 350% increase among those attempting 30 units (see graphs below). This can be attributed to the intrusive advising efforts that encouraged students to take 15 units or more each semester.

While some foster youth attempted to take 15 units and 30 units for the year, many are underprepared to take college level Math and/or college level English (see graph on the next page). The data shows that only 1% of students completed transfer English and Math.

Foster youth encounter more challenges than the average student. Challenges they face include unstable housing, lack of a support system outside of school, transportation, food security and limited technology access to computer, phone or email which can affect the student’s academic performance.
Events and Actions Taken to Advance the Momentum Points

Prior to the implementation of the NextUp program, the foster youth task force had provided event support to the annual Independent City event held in October which exposes current foster youth to topics that will help them transition off from foster care to independent living.

In addition, event support was also provided to the YES Conference typically hosted in March. The YES Conference promotes awareness of foster youth services and resources to middle school, high school, family resource parents and community members.

With the addition of the NextUp program, new partnerships have been established to increase awareness of foster youth services available at Bakersfield College. The following is a list of community partners established in the last year:

- Department of Human Services- Independent Living Program/AB 12
- Kern County Probation
- Kern County Behavioral & Recovery Services
- VALOR Transitional Housing Foster Care Agency
- ASPIRANET Transitional Housing Placement Foster Care Agency
- Kern Bridges Youth Homes
- Kern County Superintendent of Schools – Foster Youth Services
- Kern High School District-Mc Kinney-Vento/Foster Youth Liaison

In efforts to increase the visibility of the Foster Youth/NextUp Services, presentations and a referral system was developed to create an easy hand off of students.
As a result of the partnerships, request for Bakersfield College campus visits have been made. This past spring, Kern Bridges foster youth and Kern High School foster youth visited our BC campus. The agenda consisted of a campus tour, career pathways information, and team building.

**Looking Ahead at the Next 3 Years**

In planning for the next academic year, the goal is to increase the number of self-identified foster youth participating in the NextUp program. By enrolling into the NextUp program, foster youth can benefit from the resources and support services available to them.

As noted earlier in the data, the majority of first-time students are 19 or younger, making more presence at the high schools will help high school foster youth be more aware of resources and encourage them to enroll at Bakersfield College.

Developing a mentoring program for foster youth is also in the plans. Foster youth lack support systems and by creating a safe space and healthy peer relationships can help them build their confidence to succeed in college.

Along the lines of safe space is also wellness. This past spring semester in collaboration with Student Life Social Work Interns a series of Wellness workshops were offered. Wellness workshop will continue to be offered to help foster youth build resiliency.

In addressing the completion of transfer math and english, the goal is to strengthen academic support services for foster youth students by providing specialized tutoring services that will help them persist in their courses.

By addressing some of the barriers foster youth encounter, foster youth can focus on their academics and attempt more units and ultimately achieve a certificate or degree.