



# Independent Living Roadmap and Toolkit

*A Guide to REALLY Prepare  
For Life After Foster Care*

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**OVERCOMING HURDLES IN OHIO YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD** is a statewide organization of young people (aged 14-24) who have experienced foster care. The OHIO YAB's mission is to be the knowledgeable statewide voice that influences policies and practices that effect all youth who have or will experience out of home care.

With help from the OHIO YAB, sixteen Ohio counties have established local/regional youth advisory boards: Allen, Ashtabula, Athens, Cuyahoga, Franklin, Geauga, Greene, Guernsey, Lake, Lorain, Lucas, Mahoning, Miami, Montgomery, Stark and Union.

**ALUMNI OF CARE TOGETHER IMPROVING OUTCOMES NOW OHIO** is dedicated to improving outcomes for current and former foster care youth. ACTION Ohio brings together the voices of youth, alumni and allies to create lasting change and generate hope for current and former foster youth, based on access to resources, ally support and alumni expertise.

Our initiatives include Three Days on the Hill, Suits for Success, Pay It Forward and Thanksgiving Together.

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# Introduction

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## Purpose of This Guide

My name is Michael Outrich. I aged out of foster care in 2011 from a Children's Home in Cuyahoga County, Ohio. I was on my way to Ohio University to pursue my dream of becoming a Meteorologist. Little did I know, I was about to be on my own, at a Public University, lacking the proper tools to live independently, and the personal development adulthood demands.

I was extremely excited to go to college and very confident that I would have what it took to succeed. Plus, I could finally get out of the constant regulations on who I could see, watch, date, among other things. I could finally live like other children who weren't in care and the beautiful independence that would come with it. I would finally be free!

What I didn't expect, was that while I would be living independently, my future uninhibited by anyone but myself, that I would have a LOT to learn and experience many hard life lessons along the way to reach my dreams, goals, and aspirations.

This guide is to present you with much of the information I lacked upon emancipation. It is to be used as a roadmap and resource toolkit to assist you in your development, and the demands living independently requires. Many of the things in this guide you may have to learn and experience for yourself. In doing so, you may fail, become frustrated, feel like you aren't making progress, or maybe you may feel you are still at square one...I know these feelings all too well. What I can tell you, is that these feelings are essential in personal development. Failure can lead to future successful moments which might not have happened had you not failed.

This guide can be consulted when you feel lost, in crisis, or are in need of guidance.

This guide is not to tell you what to do, since as an adult, you are in charge of your own decisions and life choices.

This guide is not to prioritize one track over the other, nor is it to encourage you to pursue one over the other. It is merely meant to be comprehensive to benefit and include all.

We have what it takes to succeed and to be our OWN ADVOCATES, sometimes we just need help reaching our next milestone. I wish you luck on your future endeavors and success, it takes a village, and as foster youth, we are capable of achieving great things.

## **Dedication**

This guide is dedicated to all foster care youth in care and foster care alumni, my many mentors, child welfare advocates, social workers, teachers, guidance counselors, foster parents, and all those who make it their duty to protect, enrich, and inspire youth of yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

# Preparation for Your Future

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Checklist of things to do while you are still in foster care:

- 1.) Focus on goal-setting and planning
- 2.) See what help your county might be able to offer
- 3.) Take a learning styles test
- 4.) Figure out what works best for you in terms of test preparation
- 5.) Group work in school: What's your leadership style?
- 6.) Go on Ohio Means Jobs website and take an aptitude test
- 7.) Learn about fee waivers for ACT and/or SAT
- 8.) Remind your county to check your credit report in case someone used your Social Security to apply for loans.
- 9.) General Skills (cooking, cleaning)
- 10.) Nag people about tracking down your academic records and certificates.
- 11.) Remind your caseworker that you need a photo ID, and an original copy of your birth certificate and Social Security card.
- 12.) Ask to visit colleges.
- 13.) Make sure that you are a legal citizen.
- 14.) Make sure to keep track of your volunteer experience, including speaking engagements, and include it on your resume.
- 15.) Find out more about the Bridges program.

# High School Checklist

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

## Progress in High School:

- How are my grades and test scores at school?
- Am I taking the right classes to prepare me for my future?
- Have I met with my school guidance counselor?
- Are all of my transcripts and academic records accessible and up-to-date?

## College/Universities I'm Considering:

- Have I made a list?
- Have I visited one or more colleges?
- Do I know that I can list up to 10 colleges on my FAFSA application?
- Does my list of colleges include schools I can definitely be accepted at, as well as dream colleges, so that no matter what, I have a back-up option?

## College Testing:

- Do the schools I'm interested in require the ACT or SAT?
- Have I signed up to take the ACT or SAT?
- Does my school offer any fee waivers that I could benefit from?
- Am I planning ahead so that I can take the ACT or SAT test more than once?
- Do I know which colleges I need to send my scores to?



## College Application Forms:

- Do I know what will be asked on a common application?
- Have I written a rough draft for my college admission essay?
- Have I shared my essay draft with a qualified adult for their feedback?
- Do I know who I'm planning to ask for recommendation letters?
- Does my school have a complete list of my academic transcripts?

## Financial Aid:

- Do I know the FAFSA deadline for early consideration?
- Have I filled out the FAFSA as an independent student?
- Have I done my taxes?
- Do I understand the difference between grants and loans?
- Have I looked into other sources of financial aid? (ROTC, AmeriCorps, scholarships)
- Does my county offer additional resources and/or incentives when going to college?

## Deadlines:

- Do I have a planner?
- Have I mapped out the deadlines for each of those opportunities?  
*(For example, if you want a four-year ROTC scholarship, you need to apply the summer before your Senior year)*
- Do I check my email regularly?
- Do I have a mentor who can check in on my progress, and help me stay on track?

# High School Resources

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## **ACT Fee Waiver**

**Services offered:** Free registration for up to two ACT tests.

**Website:** [www.act.org](http://www.act.org)

**Contact:** Your high school guidance counselor

## **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)**

**Services offered:** Requires schools and child welfare agencies to abide by specific guidelines and provide resources to ensure improved educational outcomes for children in foster care.

**Website:** <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/School-Improvement/Foster-Care>

**Contact:** Thomas Capretta, (614) 752-1615, [fostercare@education.ohio.com](mailto:fostercare@education.ohio.com)

## **Ohio Board of Regents**

**Services offered:** Detailed information about Financial Aid, State Grants and Scholarships. Students can also call the statewide hotline regarding higher education, financial aid resources, including vocational and technical education at 1-800-AFFORD-IT (233-6734).

**Website:** [www.ohiohighered.org](http://www.ohiohighered.org)

**Contact:** Tamika Braswell, (614) 728-8862, [tbraswell@highered.ohio.gov](mailto:tbraswell@highered.ohio.gov)

## **SAT Fee Waiver**

**Services offered:** Free registration for up to two SATs, two SAT Subject Tests, and four college application fee waivers

**Contact:** College Board's Midwestern Regional Office, (866) 392-4086

# Teen Employment Checklist

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

## Preparing Ahead of Time:

- Update your resume
- Practice writing a cover letter
- Find one or more adults who can serve as a reference
- Practice ahead of time for the job interview
- Dress professionally

## Role-Play to Practice Interview Questions:

- **Can you tell me a little about yourself?** *(Give a sound bite)*
- **Why should we hire you?** *(Share your qualifications to do the job, and how well you will fit in with their current team)*
- **What are your strengths?** *(Be accurate and relevant to the skills that will be needed in this particular workplace)*
- **What are your weaknesses?** *(Share an example of something you are currently working to improve)*
- **Tell me about a challenge or conflict you faced, and how you handled it.** *(Focus on how you handled the situation professionally).*
- **Where do you see yourself in five years?** *(Be honest and specific about your future goals)*

- **What other companies are you interviewing with?** *(Be vague. You can mention that you are exploring a number of similar jobs/companies)*
- **Why are you leaving your current job?** *(Keep things positive—you have nothing to gain by being negative about your previous employers. Focus on new opportunities and that the role you're interviewing for is a better fit)*
- **What are you looking for in a new position?** *(Refer to specific parts of the job description that they posted)*
- **What type of work environment do you prefer?** *(Describe an environment that is similar to the job you are applying for)*
- **How would your boss and coworkers describe you?** *(Focus on your strengths and good work habits)*
- **How do you deal with pressure or stressful situations?** *(Describe a specific example of how you handled stress positively and productively).*
- **What do you like to do outside of work?** *(Share a hobby. Keep what you share professional).*

**Be sure to ask:**

- **How will I be paid?** *(cash/check/direct deposit)*
- **What benefits does this job offer?** *(health insurance, time off)*
- **What is my schedule?** *(floating shifts vs. set schedule)*

# Self Advocacy Tips

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## Getting Connected:

- Does your county have a local Youth Advisory Board?
- Have you attended one or more of the OHIO Youth Advisory Board's statewide quarterly meetings?

## Being Your Own Best Self-Advocate:

- **Have you ever attended a court hearing, or spoken to a judge about your case?**
- **Do you have a CASA or GAL?**  
*The role of a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) or guardian ad litem (GAL) volunteer is to speak up for your best interests in court. You can request one, if you don't have one already.*
- **Have you attended one or more of your SARs?**  
*SAR stands for Staff Annual Review. You deserve a voice when it comes to your foster care case.*

## Tips for Effective Advocacy:

- **Diplomacy:** It's easier for your message to be heard if you assume the best intentions of the other person, rather than attacking them.
- **Strategic Sharing:** Decide ahead of time which details you feel comfortable sharing with others, and which personal details should be kept private.

# Higher Education Resources

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## Filling Out the FAFSA

**Website:** [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)

**Former foster care youth should fill out the FAFSA as an “independent student,”** in accordance with the 2007 College Cost Reduction and Access Act. This enables former foster youth to be eligible for financial aid.

Youth must fit into ONE of the following categories:

1. An orphan, in foster care, or a ward of the court at any time when the student was 13 years of age or older, OR
2. An emancipated minor or is in legal guardianship as determined by the court in their state of legal residence, OR
3. Verified as an unaccompanied youth who is homeless or at risk of homelessness and self-supporting

*Personal story from a former foster youth  
about their experience with the FAFSA  
goes here*

## **ETV Funds (Ohio Education and Training Voucher Program)**

**Website:** [www.fc2sprogram.org/ohio/](http://www.fc2sprogram.org/ohio/)

**Foster Care to Success provides up to \$5000 a year for college-related expenses.** Funding is limited and available on a first-come, first-served basis – so apply early.

### Eligibility requirements:

1. At least 18 years old, but younger than 21 years old to apply for the first time. Youth can reapply for ETV funds, if they have a current grant, until the age of 23.
2. Youth must either have been in foster care on their 18th birthday and aged out at that time, or adopted from foster care with the adoption finalized after his/her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, or will have their foster care case closed between the ages of 18 and 21.
3. Must be enrolled in a degree, certificate or other accredited program at a college, university, technical, or vocational school.
4. To remain eligible for ETV funding, youth must show progress toward a degree or certificate.

*Personal story from a former foster youth  
about their experience with ETV funds  
goes here*

## **Ohio Reach**

**Website:** [www.ohioreach.com](http://www.ohioreach.com)

**1.) Campus Liaisons:** Several Ohio colleges and universities have Ohio Reach Campus Liaisons to support the success for former foster youth pursuing post-secondary education. To find out more, contact Will Murray, Ohio Reach Coordinator, (614) 224-5802, [william@pcsao.org](mailto:william@pcsao.org)

**2.) College Mentoring Programs:** Ohio Reach awarded funding to four Ohio colleges to implement mentoring programming for foster youth on their campuses: Central State University, Columbus State Community College, Cuyahoga Community College and Ohio University.

### **a.) Central State University**

**Contact:** Zakiya Brown, (937) 376-6414, [zbrown@centralstate.edu](mailto:zbrown@centralstate.edu)

**The Central State Emerging Scholars Mentoring Program** provides a mentoring program for freshman with a foster care history, *Seeds2Success* workshops for foster youth to attend with their mentors, *Power Hour* study tables for Emerging Scholars and a *Helping Hand* by connecting them with local professionals who are foster care alumni and graduates of the university.

### **b.) Columbus State Community College**

**Website:** [www.csccl.edu/campus-life/cares/scholar-network.shtml](http://www.csccl.edu/campus-life/cares/scholar-network.shtml)

**The Columbus State Scholar Network (CSSN)** is available to current or former foster youth who are admitted and enrolled at Columbus State Community College. This program provides current and former foster youth with a network of support during their college journey, including a five-day conference, ongoing mentoring, monthly *Lunch & Learn* Workshops, peer-to-peer support and other campus resources.



*Personal story from a former foster youth  
about their experience with one of the Scholar Programs  
goes here*

**c.) Cuyahoga Community College**

**Website:** <http://www.tri-c.edu/student-resources/foster-youth-scholars.html>

**The Tri-C Foster Scholars Mentoring Program** pairs students with a faculty member or staff member to provide encouragement, connection to College resources, and emotional support to ensure that the foster scholar makes academic progress toward degree completion. The Mentor is a faculty or staff member who agrees to be available to the foster scholar (Mentee) throughout the academic year via in-person meetings, phone calls, and e-mail to provide support.

**d.) Ohio University**

**The OHIO Reach Scholars Program** is a resource at Ohio University that exists to support college-age foster youth, as well as those disconnected from their biological families. Previously, this program included a number of specialized support systems designed to meet the unique needs of former foster care students at Ohio University. This program is currently in a state of transition.

**Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG)**

**Contact:** Tamika M. Braswell, (614) 728-8862, [tbraswell@regents.state.oh.us](mailto:tbraswell@regents.state.oh.us)

**Foster youth at community colleges can apply for OCOG funds,** and have special permission to use these funds for housing if needed, in addition to other college-related expenses. The funding allocation is up to \$1,048 to assist with college living expenses.

# Higher Education ~ Questions and Answers

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## 1.) Why is it smart to actually visit the college that I am hoping to attend?

Too many students end up unhappy with their first college choice because they didn't do their research. #CollegeCompletion

## 2.) Why should I fill out the FAFSA?

To get financial aid for college.

## 3.) How many schools should I list when filling out the FAFSA?

You can list up to 10 schools. It's smart to list more than one, and to include an Ohio college so you can learn about how much state financial aid you might be eligible for...

## 4.) How does in-state college tuition compare to out-of-state college tuition?

Out-of-state tuition can be two or three times more expensive.

## 5.) What's the difference between grants and loans?

**Grants:** You don't have to pay back.

**Loans:** You have to pay back, often with interest.

## 6.) What's the difference between subsidized vs. unsubsidized loans?

**Subsidized:** The Federal Government pays the interest on the loan while the student is in college or while the loan is in deferment.

**Unsubsidized:** Interest on the loan starts adding up right away.

## 7.) What is the Federal Work-Study program?

It provides part-time jobs for undergraduate and graduate students with financial need to earn money to help pay education expenses.

**But it does count against your overall financial aid amount.**

**8.) What type of jobs exist on campus that I can often study during?**

Desk clerk at a dorm or manning the desk at a student center

**9.) What is the difference between an Associate's and Bachelor's degree?**

**Associate's degree** = 2-year degree that can be earned at community, technical and vocational colleges.

**Bachelor's degree** = 4-year degree that can be earned at a college or university.

**10.) What are the benefits of certificate programs, through a technical school or local community College?**

They take less time to complete (as little as two quarters), and the certificate can help you earn money right away. (i.e. baking, mechanics, etc.)

**11.) How can the military help with college?**

ROTC programs can result in a full, four-year scholarship.

**12.) What are the risks when it comes to online colleges?**

- No face-to-face time with instructor.
- Requires time management skills.
- Some online degrees are scams.

**13.) Where can I get cheap textbooks for college?**

Your professor should have a list of books that you need (use the ISBN# to get correct edition) You can get them at your college bookstore – but there can be cheaper options such as:

Half.com

Textbooks.com

Chegg.com (rent e-textbooks)

Abebooks.com (free shipping)

Booksprice.com (find lowest price)

Cheapesttextbooks.com (lowest price)

**14.) Why should I be wary of for-profit colleges?**

They are expensive and can be exploitive.

**15.) What should I know about College Meal Plans?**

If you live in the dorms, this may be mandatory, especially during your freshman year. It can be more expensive than just going to the grocery, and you will want to pay attention to cafeteria hours.

**16.) If I live in the dorms, how does it work for me to be assigned a roommate?**

You usually fill out a questionnaire as part of your housing application. The campus does its best to match you up with someone with similar interests.

**17.) What if I have problems with my college roommate?**

First, talk to your roommate. Then, talk your Resident Advisor (RA). Then, go to your Advisor. Go up the chain of command.

**18.) Why is having medical insurance important when you go to college?**

1. It's required at most schools
2. Being uninsured and then experiencing sickness/injury can keep you from finishing college

**19.) How can I get medical insurance?**

Foster care youth who "age out" of foster care in Ohio are eligible for Medicaid until their 26th birthdays. After being initially signed up for Medicaid at age 18, former foster youth must stay in touch with Medicaid, so that they don't lose services between ages 18-26. Please contact the Medicaid Hotline: 1-800-324-8680

**20.) Why should I meet with my college advisor on a regular basis?**

To create and keep working on your college completion plan, and how many credits you need to graduate.