

Foster care is a complex set of institutional and social systems involving parents and their children, child welfare agencies and staff, host households and adoptive families, school systems, employers, and many informal networks of mentorship and kinfolk. While the health and well-being of children, youth, and families is often at the heart of this work, many systemic challenges exist that may prevent individuals from accessing services and networks of policy and action ostensibly designed to help.

In this issue of *Focus On Poverty*, we peer through the lens of foster care to highlight work on race and well-being outcomes, post-secondary education, and extended benefits for young adults moving out of the foster care system. While these are just a few of many important topics related to foster care, we hope the insights contained within inspire conversation as well as action.

We start with an overview from researchers Reeve Kennedy, Marina Potter, and Sarah Font addressing the intersection of racial disparities, well-being outcomes, and youth experiences in foster care. The authors describe how outcomes related to education, employment, housing, and mental health correspond with demographic factors such as age, race and ethnicity, and geographic location to provide a more nuanced understanding of these important relationships.

Next, Nathanael Okpych and Mark Courtney review barriers to completing a college degree for young adults with foster care histories seeking post-secondary education. Their longitudinal approach evaluates students with foster care histories attending 2- and 4-year colleges and compares outcomes with low-income first-generation college students over a 10-year period. Results suggest that financial assistance, balancing school with employment needs, and the challenges of parenting as a student all have significant effects on those young people. On-campus assistance programs, when they exist, can also be very helpful for these students.

Thom Reilly and David Schlinkert also take a longitudinal approach. They assess outcomes for emerging adults with foster care histories who are offered extended eligibility for assistance programs, expanding access from 18 to 21 years of age. The authors assess 20 years of extended eligibility for young adults in Clark County, Nevada. Keys to enhancing positive outcomes include direct financial assistance, health care coverage, and access to case management and support services.

Included within this issue of *Focus On Poverty* are a Research to Watch item and the Classroom Supplement. Researcher Sarah Font is following a cohort of over 75,000 Wisconsin high school students and tracking differences between those in contact with the Child Protective Services (CPS) system and peers who are low-income but not otherwise involved with CPS. Identifying and addressing barriers to educational attainment remains an important focus for youth who face economic insecurity as well as those moving through the foster care system. The Classroom Supplement offers potential discussion questions as well as a list of IRP and other resources related to foster care and child welfare.

Thank you for reading *Focus on Poverty*. Please send any questions or comments to IRP Communications Director Judith Siers-Poisson at sierspoisson@wisc.edu. A note to educators: If you use *Focus On Poverty* in the classroom, we would especially love to hear from you!