

Title: The Florida Reach Initiative: Increasing Access and Success for Emerging Adults from Foster Care

Abstract: This dynamic innovative symposium will use extensive audience participation and a modified PechaKucha format – short, highly-focused and energetic presentations – (15 slides, on display for 20 seconds – 5 minutes speaking time) by five advocates of effective programs that lead to post-secondary success for extremely vulnerable students, and extensive audience participation, to create a sense of urgency for action via an experiential learning event. During the course of the symposium, audience members will experience rapid fire information presented by enthusiastic presenters and will have a chance to put fake money on the table in support of the most effective presentations.

Description of the Initiative: Each year, between 20,000 and 30,000 emerging adults leave foster care in the United States. Approximately 50% of foster care alumni (FCA) leave care without having obtained a high school diploma or a general equivalency diploma (GED). Although 70% of FCA desire to attend college -- a percent similar to their non-fostered peers only about 20% enroll in college (compared to 60% of youth not in foster care). Estimates of the percentage of foster youth who graduate from college range from 1% to 11%, depending on how and when educational attainment is measured, compared to about 25% of the general US population. Some of the key ways that former foster youth are supported toward academic success include mentoring, the use of Guardians ad Litem, campus-based support programs.

Florida Reach is grassroots, state-wide initiative uniting advocates of vulnerable emerging adults throughout the state to improve post-secondary outcomes and career transitions for foster care youth and alumni through resources, support, and networking. Through monthly meetings and public awareness activities and a website, Florida Reach centralizes information about resources for youth and alumni of foster care in Florida and helping to increase information sharing and collective impact. Network membership is open to all, especially postsecondary education institutions' staff and campus champions, youth and alumni of foster care, K-12 counselors, educators and staff, community organizations and other service providers, caregivers and mentors, local college access networks, courts, law enforcement and juvenile justice system, career and work force services, housing champions.

Goals: The goal of this symposia is to increase awareness and action among audience members because 1. There are urgent needs among emerging adults who aspire to post-secondary success, 2. There is limited money to be obtained, 3. Everyone can make a difference by giving their time or money.

Format: The format for this symposia will be a modified innovative and will involve the audience in a substantial way. As audience members enter the room they will be given \$1,000 dollars in play money and will told they need to spend it before they leave the room.

The moderator will take on the role of a "host" and will introduce several "guests" – each of whom has a particular service that they provide to help vulnerable emerging adults aspire to and succeed in post-secondary education. The guests will be asked to "sell" their service with their strongest modified (5 minutes instead of 6 minutes 40 seconds) Pecha Kucha presentation to pitch their service as "the best and only service" needed by our community to increase post-secondary success for homeless, adopted, relative care and independent living youth. After five presenters "market" their services, each will go into a different section of the room and will be joined by audience members, cash in hand, who also

believe that that particular service is the premiere service that should be funded to improve educational outcomes for youth from foster care. The speaker will collect the “cash” and then be joined by an assistant who will moderate and intense discussion among “donors” around the speaker’s service. The groups will discuss what they will do with the money that they now have in hand. After a specified period of time, the groups will present their plan to spend their money. The entire audience will then vote, using their cell phones and a system called polleverywhere.com. The winner will be declared and will get everyone’s money (That last part will not be shared until the very end).