



## The ASPIRE Initiative

### **Program Description:**

The ASPIRE Initiative empowers youth who are currently or formerly in foster care to get on the path to economic self-sufficiency through financial literacy training, assistance in accessing employment and education services, and support in saving toward, purchasing, and sustaining durable assets.

Youth begin their participation in ASPIRE with an eight-hour, classroom based, comprehensive financial literacy training, with a curriculum tailored to the unique needs of youth in foster care. Youth are assisted with setting savings goals and opening an Individual Development Account (IDA) with Citizens Bank.

### **Who is Eligible?**

Youth ages 14-26 who have spent at least one day after their 14<sup>th</sup> birthday in an out-of-home DCYF placement.

### **What are the Direct Benefits to Youth?**

Youth are provided with \$100 to “seed” or open an account and are matched dollar for dollar up to \$1,000 per year toward the purchase of assets (such as: cars, education expenses, housing expenses, health expenses, and investments. Youth can also receive \$40 in April and October for completing our OPPS Survey.

### **What are the Program Requirements?**

Youth will need to have a valid State Identification Card, a Driver’s License, or a Passport to begin the financial literacy portion of the program.

Youth must be able to open a Citizens Bank IDA savings account in order to enroll and actively participate in this program. (A valid government issued I.D. is required to open a bank account.) Youth need to be regularly saving money toward achieving their savings and asset purchase goals. Youth must also notify program staff of any changes in contact information.

### **What is the Referral/Application Process?**

Young people referred to Works Wonders will be automatically enrolled in ASPIRE as part of the Works Wonders training.

### **Key Program Staff:**

Cherai Dimeo

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# Works Wonders™ Education and Training Hub

## Program Description:

Works Wonders™ is an evidence supported career development and employment engagement program that provides 16 hours of skills based training, a minimum of 12 weeks of one-on-one career coaching, and paid work-based learning opportunities. An Employment Specialist works with youth to explore their career interests, build a CareerEd Plan, build foundational skills, and then put those skills to use in the real world.

In addition to workforce development, Foster Forward hosts GED Classes onsite. Space is limited, but priority is given to current and former foster youth. Classes are held Monday – Thursday from 10am – 1pm. Enrollment is open, as space is available. Testing is free.

## Who is Eligible?

Youth ages 16-26 who are in or who have aged out of foster care and are participating in the voluntary aftercare service.

## What are the Direct Benefits to Youth?

- 16 hours of skills E<sup>2</sup> training
- \$100 incentive completion of FULL Intervention (WW and Aspire)
- 12 weeks one-on-one career coaching
- Financial Literacy and Asset Matching
- Career portfolio development
- Paid work-based learning opportunities, such as internships, job shadows, and informational interviews.
- Assistance with obtaining and maintaining jobs.

## What are the requirements?

Youth must complete the E<sup>2</sup> Training and be meeting with their Employment Specialist in order to be eligible for the paid work experiences.

## What is the Referral/Application Process?

Youth may be referred by a guardian, case worker, social worker, or by themselves. Youth who are preparing to age-out or participating in Enhanced Case Management can self-refer or be referred by their case worker.

## Key Program Staff:

Bernadette Tavares, Works Wonders Program Coordinator  
401-438-3900 x 120

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*Works Wonders is part of a 360° wrap of Foster Forward services designed to ensure the successful transition of young people from the Rhode Island foster care system to adulthood.*



## Real Connections

### Program Description:

The goal of the Real Connections program is to ensure that all youth leave state care with positive, permanent adult connections and options for a successful future. Through collaboration with DCYF and community agencies, Real Connections works to identify adult connections for teens that are vulnerable to "aging out" of state care without positive, consistent adults to rely on. We believe that relationships with caring adults are central to a young person's ability to transition successfully into adulthood.

Real Connections staff support youth and their care providers in identifying adults from their existing network that have the potential to become positive, life long supports. We do this by using three methods: Eco Mapping, Record Mining, and Online Search Strategies.

Real Connections employs a mentoring model to strengthen those relationships that are not immediate placement options but **may become** placement resources and can provide long term support. The program searches beyond immediate family members to identify extended family and "fictive kin," which could include coaches, teachers, neighbors and the other valuable community resources that are too often overlooked.

If no adult connection from within the youth's own network can be identified youth are then matched with a mentor from the community. All identified adult connections undergo a 5-hour mentor training and are supported for a minimum of a year.

### Who is Eligible?

Youth ages 18-25 most in danger of aging out of care without a permanent adult support.

### What are the Direct Benefits to Youth?

Through this voluntary program, young people will be able to cultivate a positive relationship with an adult and work toward achieving specific goals that they identify (such as applying for college or finding a job).

The mentor/mentee relationship is supported to help youth achieve permanency.

### What is the Referral/Application Process?

Referrals can come from DCYF staff, CASA, foster parents, community providers or youth may also choose to self-refer.

To refer a young person, go to [www.fosterforward.net](http://www.fosterforward.net) to print the application. You can either provide the application to the youth or help them to complete it and then fax it to Kate Bronner, Program Coordinator at 438-3901 or 55 South Brow Street, East Providence, RI

### Key Program Staff:

Kate Bronner, 401-438-3900 x 108, [kate.bronner@fosterforward.net](mailto:kate.bronner@fosterforward.net)

Michelle Lockwood, 401-438-3900 x123, [michelle.lockwood@fosterforward.net](mailto:michelle.lockwood@fosterforward.net)

*Real Connections is part of a 360° wrap of Foster Forward services designed to ensure the successful transition of young people from the Rhode Island foster care system to adulthood. Real Connections is supported through the generous support of the Rhode Island Foundation and The Sinclair Family Foundation.*



## ASPIRING Young Leaders Program

### **Program Description:**

The ASPIRING Young Leaders Program (AYLP) was built locally in Rhode Island as part of the ASPIRE Initiative to mirror the youth leadership training provided by The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. This leadership program will build upon the strengths of youth who have experienced foster care and empower young leaders across the state to succeed.

Young Leaders will participate in a three day leadership program, developing skills in: Communication, Strategic Sharing, Relationship/Team Building, Self-Advocacy.

### **Who is Eligible?**

Youth ages 14-22 who have spent at least one day after their 14th birthday in an out of home DCYF foster care placement. Ideal candidates should be responsible, respectful, and demonstrate strong leadership potential. AYLP runs once annually with a maximum of twenty young people in each class.

### **What are the Direct Benefits to Youth and Children?**

After completing the ASPIRING Young Leaders Program, participants will have the opportunity to participate in advocacy and program development opportunities, including presenting at conferences, conducting trainings, sitting on advisory committees and working to empower other youth while participating on local youth leadership boards.

### **What are the requirements?**

Young people must complete an application and participate in a 20 minute phone interview to assess their readiness for the program. After phone interviews are conducted applicants will be informed of their acceptances (not everyone is chosen). Young people are expected to attend the training in its entirety, all 3 days. Young people must possess the appropriate level of maturity and be interested in developing leadership skills.

### **What is the Referral/Application Process?**

Youth interested in attending this training must complete the AYLP application by the specified deadline in any given year.

### **Key Program Staff:**

Victoria Ferrara, Director of Programs  
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# Your Way Home

## Nine Month Progress Report

Referrals to the Your Way Home Rapid Rehousing program began in August. To date we have received 11 referrals to the program through the Rhode Island Continuum of Care. We are proud to report that out of these 11 referrals, 9 are stably housed, and the other 2 are involved in the housing search process. Half of the participants are already engaged in ASPIRE or Works Wonders, and the others are signed up for classes.

## Strengths

- HUD funding from CoC was just approved for year 2, and looks to be a durable funding stream moving forward
- Strategic Help Initiative contributed \$60,000 for the first year and appears interested in continuing
- Funding/ability to serve homeless youth offers strong leverage for the grant applications



**Alex's Story:** Alex was the very first referral to the Your Way Home program. A 22 year old woman, she had been chronically homeless for several years. She moved into her own apartment in October, but we found that she was still taking the bus to Providence to hang out with her friends on the streets. We recognized that she needed other positive supportive adult relationships, so we connected her to Barbara, our resident family finding expert. While Alex has not always been easy to engage, we've seen a shift in her demeanor since starting work with Barbara. The prospect of reconnecting with her biological siblings is helping her engage in other important long-term planning work with her case manager.



## Challenges

- HUD is highly restricted funding source, has to be paired with other more flexible funding
- Pressure from Coordinated Entry to serve youth with children and the difficulty finding lead safe housing that meets HUD requirements
- Pressure from CoC to serve youth with acuity scores higher than recommended for rapid rehousing strategy because of the lack of resources for this population

## Opportunities

- Expansion of our housing portfolio through Consolidated Homeless Fund or forthcoming ACF opportunities
- Opportunity to be thought leaders in solving system wide issues such as lead and lack of affordable housing