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ARIZONA ED CONNECTIONS

Arizona Education Connections is a newsletter highlighting some of the important work happening in Arizona to improve the education outcomes for foster youth. By fostering connections between practitioners, policy makers and community organizations, we hope to strengthen statewide efforts on behalf of these children. For more information or to contribute content to future communications, please contact Yeji Jung at yjung@youthlaw.org.

FosterEd Celebrates Volunteer Program



Five Years of Community Members Supporting Foster Youth

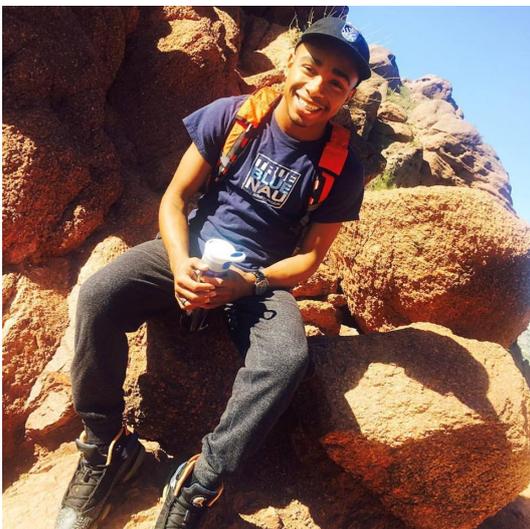
It is with bittersweet gratitude that we announce FosterEd Arizona is closing its volunteer program after five years of serving young people as Academic Guides, Volunteer Educational Champions, and College & Career Success Coaches.

Our volunteers, a diverse group of working parents, retired educators, and college students served more than 160 kids in three counties. They advocated for fair school discipline, assured Special Education services, helped students transition from group homes to new families, tutored everything from colors to Calculus, coached students from sophomore in high school to college freshman and did it all with patience, compassion, and a growth mindset.

FosterEd will continue to do its amazing work in Pima, Maricopa, and Yavapai County, shifting our focus to engaging community members through state and local policy work. Educational Champions will be found in students' families and teams and tutors will be provided through outside resources for any student that needs one. Our volunteers will continue to do incredible work in their communities with other programs. We hope you'll enjoy this edition of our newsletter which celebrates the work our volunteers have done over the last five years.

A Few of our Rockstars

We had over 135 actively assigned volunteers during our program's duration. Every volunteer has done incredible work, but here are a few rockstars that agreed to share their reflections on their work.



"I volunteered with FosterEd, and the experience has been extremely rewarding. During the course of the semester I worked with a student who needed assistance with a few courses. We got to work, outlining goals and working towards them, one by one. Our goal was to develop a drive for continuous improvement AND IT PAID OFF! Helping him manage his school work is helping me manage my own school, work and social life balance, and honestly

it's just plain AWESOME to help someone else! -Matthew, Phoenix

"Learning to read as an adolescent is no easy feat. I, as an adult, am learning so much from this whole experience that it almost takes my breath away. I see [my student] grow, smile, tell me things are going pretty well for him, and I am so happy for him." -Laurie, Tucson



The student I was working with needed some help with a school project. After we finished working on it, she told me that I should stop worrying and stressing out so much, because I needed to know what I difference I made for her, and how much I helped her. I bawled my eyes out the whole way home! What profound words from a middle school student! It's not always so easily identifiable what a difference we are making in a young person's life, but for most of the foster-involved youth we work with, it is the first time they have someone on their lives who is there by choice, not as part of a professional role. -Lori, Tucson

"We have both felt so grateful for the opportunity to be connected with students that needed someone to be present for them, and that we got to be that for them through FosterEd. FosterEd gave us the opportunity to work directly with foster students, and was such a unique way of sharing pieces of ourselves with our students." -Regan, Tucson & her mom Lisa, Prescott



A Note from our Volunteer Coordinator

Engaging volunteers in any organization should be beneficial to the individuals giving their energy and time, the populations they serve, and the organization itself. FosterEd Arizona created a volunteer program that supported young people in foster care striving towards their educational goals and simultaneously raised awareness in our communities, creating advocates out of educators, students, and parents.

As the coordinator of the FosterEd Arizona Volunteer Program, I am incredibly proud of the connections that volunteers of all different backgrounds made with our students. Every match, every goal, and every champion has made an impact in our children's lives.

Our volunteer program's ethos was beautifully summed up by longtime volunteer Sue Vardon when she reminded me, *"I don't expect things to suddenly happen. Our job, as adults who work with kids, is to plant seeds, even if you don't get to see what grows."*

We hope the students we worked with will thrive in their education. If they remember the adult in their life that worked with them for a few weeks, months, or years, all the better. We will certainly remember our work with them.

[Read our complete evaluation of the FosterEd Volunteer Program here.](#)

FosterEd AZ Welcomes Meghan Arrigo as New Director of Policy & Youth Leadership



Please tell us about your background.

I am inspired by the creativity, determination and resiliency of young people and it's been an honor to work alongside so many great leaders over the last several years. Prior to coming to FosterEd, I served for six years as the Arizona co-lead for the Annie E. Casey Foundation's national effort, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. I partnered with alumni of foster care to improve policies and practices to enhance the wellbeing and outcomes of those who also experienced care.

What's important to you about the work FosterEd does?

Prior to my employment at FosterEd, I spent time working with community partners and young people to expand post-secondary education access and funding for those who have experienced foster care. There has been a lot of state and national attention on making college more affordable and attainable, and I think that is great. What I thought was missing was elevated conversations and action around helping and supporting young people in getting to high school graduation first. What I love about FosterEd is the focus and advocacy they do in partnership with young people, families, school districts and DCS to help ensure this happen.

What is one sticking point that young people in foster care face in terms of their education?

Many young people in foster care will transfer schools mid-semester and not get credits for the classes they took at their old school or they will transfer schools mid-semester and get put in different classes than those they were taking at their old school. Some states and jurisdictions have successfully implemented partial credit policies to address this issue and award partial credits to students for the hours they were able to attend and earned. With policies and practices in place that acknowledge and address the unique needs of students in foster care, we are better positioning them for educational success.

What are you most excited about when it comes FosterEd's mission?

I'm excited about expanding partnership and collaborations to ensure that all young people in foster care have both educational champions and the supports in place to graduate with a wide array of possibilities.

Arizona Education Connections is a publication of FosterEd Arizona. For more information about FosterEd visit foster-ed.org.

FosterEd is an initiative of the [National Center for Youth Law](http://www.nctlaw.org).



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