How to make Seeds grow in the Dark :

Improving post-secondary outcomes

for youth affected by Foster Care

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"The *Scholars* Creed"

Society will draw a circle that shuts me out, but my superior thoughts will draw me in.

I was born to win, if I do not spend too much time trying to fail.
I will ignore the tags and names given to me by society,
since only I know what I have the ability to become.
Failure is just as easy to combat as success is to obtain. Education is painful and not gained by playing games.
Yet it is my privilege to destroy myself, if that is what I choose to do.

I have the right to fail,
but I do not have the right to take other people with me. God made me the captain of only on life - my own.

It is my right to care nothing about myself,
but I must be willing to accept the consequences for that failure.

And, I must never think that those who have chosen to work, while I played, rested and slept, will share their bounties with me.
My success and my education can be companions

that no misfortune can depress,
no crime destroy, and no enemy can alienate.

Without education, man is a slave,
a savage wandering from here to there, believing whatever he is told. Time and chance come to us all.
I can either be hesitant or courageous.

I can swiftly stand up and shout: This is my time and my place.
I will accept the challenge.

Taken from Marva Collins' Way   Pratt 2019

An Eco-System for Change

- *This workshop will* express the *dreams*, *visions*, and *solutions* of a community geared towards assisting young adults aging out of the foster care system earning a Bachelor's Degree at Cleveland State University.

- *This workshop will* introduce and explain the Fostering Success and Leadership Programs at Cleveland State University and highlight The Sullivan-Deckard Scholarship Opportunity Program for highly motivated youth who are aging out of foster care.

- *This workshop will* facilitate an interactive process for meaningful conversations regarding the estimated 437,465 youth in foster care of which, 23% are Black or African-American.

- *This workshop will* share the story of how such unique programming came to be using appreciative inquiry for positive change to achieve and sustain academic success for foster youth, thus witnessing seeds growing out of darkness.

If you can look into the seeds of time, And say which grain will grow and which will not, Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear Your favors nor your hate. -Banquo-

○ Some seeds fly or glide in the wind.

○ Some seeds stick to animal fur and are carried away.

○ Some seeds are carried by birds and dropped for animals to bury.

○ Some seeds pop from plants and shoot seeds everywhere

○ Some seeds travel by floating on water.

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Environmental Factors
Foster Care vs Fostering Success & Leadership

- **Foster Care-** The Federal definition states that Foster Care means *24-hour substitute care* for children placed away from their parents or guardians and for whom the State agency has placement and care responsibility.
  - Children range in age from 0 to 21, and on average, will remain in state care for nearly two years. In many cases, sibling groups are separated, and children move from placement to placement and experience no sense of permanency while in the dependency system.
  - 75% of children in foster care are working below grade level in school. 50% will never graduate from high school or obtain GED. Only 15% of foster children will attend college, and fewer than 3% will earn a college degree. Over 1/3 of all foster teen boys will be incarcerated before age 21 of that number 23 percent were Black or African-American. Black children are around 2x's as likely to be placed in foster care as white kids.

"Imagine a world where hospitals suspended care for patients whose diseases were to disruptive to cure, or where firefighters neglected to use water for houses where the fires were to unruly and didn't look as if they could be put out." Jarrett Pratt

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What is *"The Dark"*

○ ***The Uninformed-*** Perceptions of youth in care and the expectations for those youth in life. Shedding the idea that youth in foster care are troubled, hardened, aggressive, delinquent, irresponsible and, in some aspects, dangerous.

○ ***The Unhelpful*–** The use of **Careless Language**, Real vs Biological; when the word *'Real'* outweighs the experience of what's *"Real"*. The idea youth in foster care are incapable of assimilating into healthy family & social relationships.

○ ***The Unintentional-*** Resources that provide control without power. Solutions that de-escalate the crisis but don't enable the development , and gatekeepers who hold implicit biases

"Someone I loved once gave me a box full of darkness. It took me years to understand that this too, was a gift".
Mary Oliver

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What is the "*Light*"

○   **THE PRATT CENTER:** Provides a unique multipurpose space at Cleveland State University that enables students from a wide range of cultural backgrounds in learning to navigate a diverse global society. The Fostering Success and Leadership Programs are designed for youth who are aging out of foster care or have experienced foster care and aspire to pursue an undergraduate degree.

○   **The Sullivan – Deckard Scholarship Opportunity Program :** Provides an opportunity for highly motivated youth who are aging out of foster care to pursue an undergraduate degree. The program offers the benefits of a world-class education at Cleveland State University with a system of support that is structured from Seven Core Program Components:

○ 1. Financial aid for tuition, books, fees and instructional resources.

○ 2. Year-round housing with an approved meal plan.

○ 3. Academic coaching and institutional support services.

○ 4. On-campus employment with Career advising, mentoring.

○ 5. Campus and community engagement with additional support

○ 6. Peer assistance, mentoring and support.

○ 7. A structured Transition Plan for University life and academic success.

"The undeniable truth is that the everyday educational experience for many students violates the principle of equity at the heart of the American promise. It is our collective duty to change that". -Arne Duncan–

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Re-framing the Issue

"Fostering Success & Leadership in addition to Care "

A system of education is not one thing, nor does it have a single definite object, nor is it a mere matter of schools. Education is that whole system of human training within and without the schoolhouse walls, which molds and develops men (and women).

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Essential *Questions*

- How do we as the change agents and solution drivers get the message to this generation in care, that they can be the leaders of tomorrow?

- Can we create systematic change by introducing opportunities for growth and the long-term development of youth in care who participate in Success and Leadership Programming?

- Are you willing to help the seed who may be overwhelmed in darkness find light?

Calling Forth the Harvest ...

- To facilitate an interactive process for meaningful conversations regarding improving post-secondary outcomes for youth affected by Foster Care.

- To initiate positive collaboration among community resources who share similar interests in assisting young adults aging out of the foster care system in earning a Bachelor's Degree.

- To provide a newly informed, helpful, intentional community of stakeholders with resources that have been proven to work for students affected by care.

- To provide light to seeds who are currently emerging from darkness.

"Ensuring that our educational system is a doorway to opportunity – and not a point of entry to our criminal justice system – is a critical, and achievable, goal," Former U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder.

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