



Initiatives in Action: Youth Success Initiative



We can do more together.

From Foster Care to Foster Care Advocate

“Making the foster care system better is really what I like to do,” says former foster youth Tamisha Macklin.

After spending twelve years in the Colorado foster care system, Macklin is speaking out. She says she wants to make the Colorado foster care system better and the transition from foster care to independence easier for those boys and girls now in foster care.

Recently, she took her message to the Colorado State Capitol. The topic? Driver’s education for foster youth.

Colorado youth in foster care are routinely denied the opportunity to receive the classroom portion of driver’s education. Many of these young men and women do not have a biological parent, legal guardian or court appointed custodian to sign an affidavit of liability that will allow foster youth to take the course.

Depending on how Colorado lawmakers respond to House Bill 1059, that could all change. Passage of the bill will waive the requirement for foster youth to complete an affidavit of liability.

On Thursday, January 28, 2010, Colorado foster youth testified before the House Transportation and Energy Committee. They told lawmakers how the current barrier to driving and having a driver’s license is hampering their ability to become independent, self-sufficient members of the community.

Tamisha was one of those who testified. She was denied the option to take driver’s education when she was of age. She eventually got her license at age 20, but not having a driver’s license made it more difficult for her to get to work once she was living on her own.

The issue was proposed in a focus group of youth who are or have been in foster care. The focus group was conducted by Mile High United Way’s Bridging the Gap program. The youth in the focus group determined that this was one of the most important issues impeding their success.

Colorado has 13,000 children in foster care. More than one third of those are between the ages of 14 and 21. Each year an average of 360 of them “age-out” of the foster care system and are, for all intents and purposes, on their own. Without a clear path to acquire something as basic as a driver’s license, many foster youth face a tough road toward an independent future.



Tamisha Macklin, a former foster youth, is now a foster care advocate.

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Mile High United Way's Bridging the Gap program provides support for foster youth and advocates on their behalf.

"There are currently only five states that allow foster youth to drive and this is one step closer to Colorado allowing that option for our youth," says Kippi Claussen, Director of Population Based Strategies at Mile High United Way. "Driving can be a critical barrier keeping these young adults from becoming self-sufficient and able to live on their own and keep a job."

Tamisha enjoys being involved in the process.

"Just to have these experiences is something I never thought I would ever be doing," said Tamisha in an interview on "Colorado Matters" a Colorado Public Radio program.

The bill was approved by the house in early February and is now being considered by a state senate committee.

Hear more of the story by listening to the February 8 edition of "Colorado Matters," where both Kippi and Tamisha were interviewed, by visiting www.cpr.org.

For more information about our Youth Success Initiative, please visit our website at www.unitedwaydenver.org.

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Mile High United Way