Why Do We Need To Support College-bound Foster Youth With School Supplies?

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Backpack and school supply drives often don't meet the needs of older youth in foster care; this story is part 2 of 3.

By Tamar Sebesta

After I graduated high school as a single teen parent, I was filled with an overwhelming sense of pride because of what I had accomplished and where I was planning on going. Knowing that only 2% of teen parents graduate college, and 3% of foster youth gain a college degree, I felt determined to beat the societal statistics against me and run straight into my new journey. However, the reality of the struggles I would face were a constant fear lingering in the back of my mind every day. Little did I know that feeling would continue throughout my journey as a painful reminder of what I would face. Compared to my peers I was, and still am, tasked with a whole list of extra struggles that affect me in my short- and long-term college journey.

After exiting the foster care system I was placed back with my single dad who had his own struggles. Shortly after, I became pregnant at 15 with my now 5-year-old son, becoming a single parent myself. No one in my family ever went to college, and no one was there to help or support me in this endeavor. I was able to find a small support system that really was my backbone as I entered this new phase; however, it was new territory for everyone and all the pressure was on me to succeed and beat my family stigma. I didn't understand how little help I truly had until I realized how much it would take for me to even finish my first semester of college.

Tamar Sebesta

I remember sorting through different resources available to me on campus, and it was thanks to my psychology professor that I was able to find help, such as on-campus childcare, grants and supportive programs like the Equal Opportunity Program and Guardian Scholars. These programs on campus helped me not only further my educational support, but provided resources for things like school supplies, which are required to even attend classes. I remember my first semester, before I was aware of these programs. I spent $750,

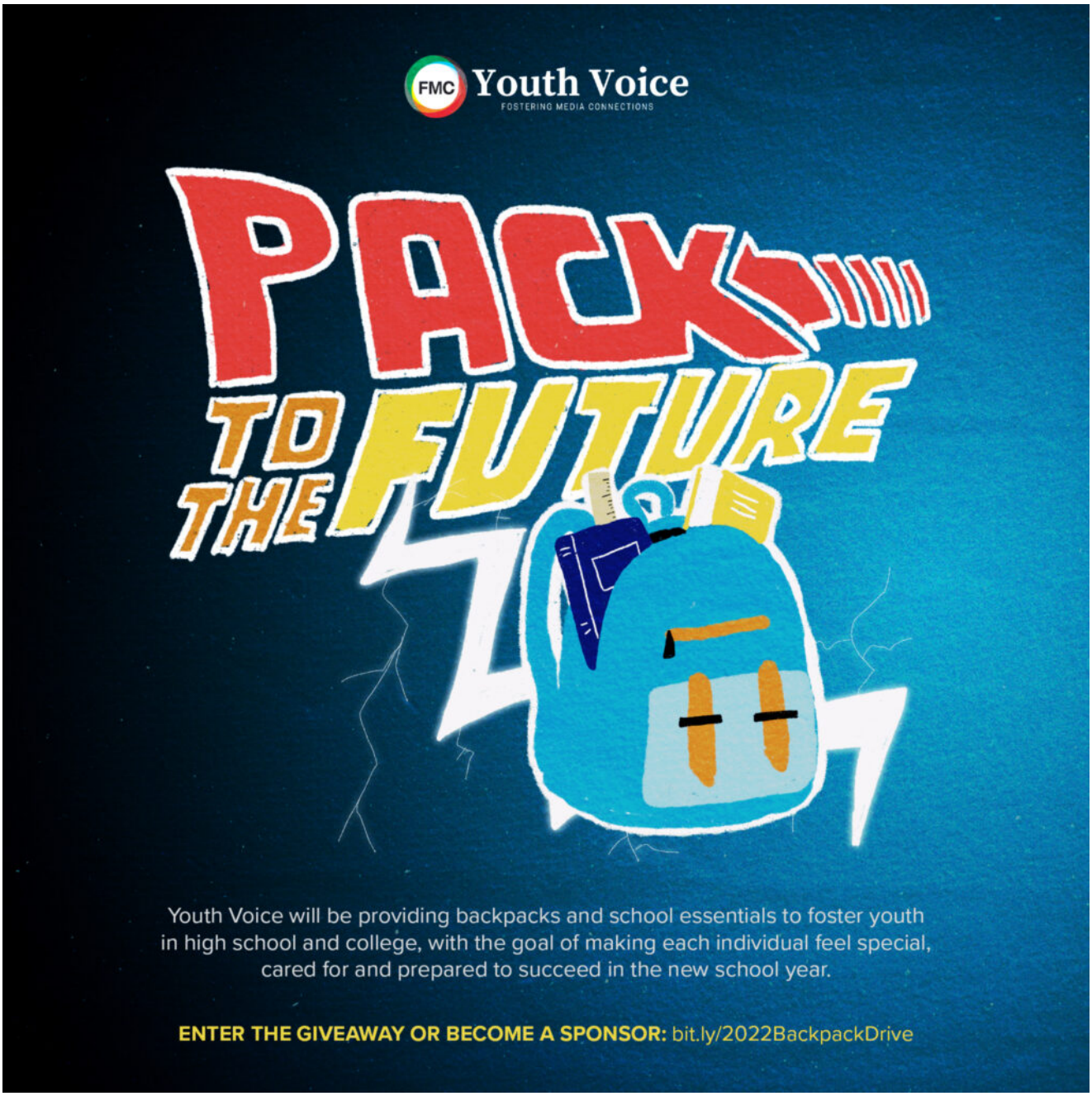
using a credit card, just to buy books and materials, and I had no idea how I would pay that back. The reality is the out-of-pocket costs for education are high, and continuing can be just as costly.

I exited foster care before I turned 13, and most campuses do not allow you to join in on their programs because of funding issues. I was lucky enough to be at a community college where they had enough funding, but the reality that this is going to be a new challenge at the university I'll be attending this fall haunts me. I still need these resources, no matter what age I exited care. This is the same reality for so many other youth who have had similar experiences. That is why the Youth Voice backpack giveaway is so essential to people like myself.

This drive reminds me of the support I personally am going to need relatively shortly, and brings up so much angst about the difficulties that youth face in simply acquiring basic school essentials that should be provided to them. We don't have people there to pay for our college experience; for us college is especially hard. So many of us have to work to offset things like tuition costs, supplies, and simply living. Other people who have dependents, like me, are supporting their children while trying to further their education to ultimately provide a better life for their children.

Just because we are "adults" to a certain standard doesn't make our needs less important. For us, a little extra help can mean either buying school supplies or paying rent. We are constantly making decisions about what is the priority; we want to change this outcome for the future, and become a better version of ourselves. Let's practice compassion for ourselves, and for others, to help create a higher number than just 3% of former foster youth graduating college.

By donating to this backpack drive you will be providing foster youth just like me with supplies we need to continue our education and thrive. If you want to take part in this year's drive, you can make an individual donation, shop our Amazon wishlist or become an event sponsor.



Our Pack to the Future Backpack Giveaway will provide school supplies, backpacks and more to college-bound youth who have spent time in foster care. For more info on how to get involved, please contact our team:

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