



1-31-2008

## Foster Youth Higher Education Initiative

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### WMU ScholarWorks Citation

Dunn, John M., "Foster Youth Higher Education Initiative" (2008). *WMU President John Dunn*. 361.  
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Foster Youth Higher Education Initiative  
John M. Dunn  
Jan. 31, 2008

Good Morning.

I'm happy to be here to talk about a program I am convinced will make a real difference in the lives of some college-aged young people who are among the most underserved in the nation.

- It is the Western Michigan University Foster Youth Higher Education Initiative. Its goal is to get young people who age out of foster care into college--WMU--and keep them here by providing the scholarship money and support network they need.

- **Why do we need it?**

- Last year 525 Michigan students aged out of care--most at 18
- Nationally, the figure is 20,000
- Once they're out of foster care, they have no home (many become homeless) and they don't have the family support/role models that most college students have.
- No money for college even if qualified
- If they do go to college, they have no home to go to during school breaks.
- Nearly 70 percent want to go to college, only 25 percent make it there and only one in five of those graduate.
- Bottom line--lost potential that is just not acceptable for us as a state or nation. We have the capacity to help, a commitment to student success and the programs and resources that we know will make such students successful. We don't want any qualified student to be denied the opportunity to reach his or her potential.

### **How did WMU get involved?**

- Our enrollment, financial aid and social work staff and faculty knew of the issue.
- Several--Yvonne Unrau, Mark Delorey and Penny Bundy--went to a Star Commonwealth Conference in Albion last spring and met John Seita.
- Began working with John and dovetailing our work with the Dept. of Human Services and Michigan Campus Compact.

### **Who is John Seita?**

- An former foster care youth--15 placements in two states
- A three-time WMU alumnus, now an assoc. prof. of social work at MSU
- A nationally recognized advocate for foster youth
- Two weeks ago Casey Family Services, part of the Annie E. Casey Foundation named him the Foster Care Alumnus of the year--that's the only one named in the nation, and it's an award made in honor of the impact he has had on foster care issues.

John Seita has helped us develop our initiative, and we've named the scholarship component in his honor.

### **What does the initiative include?**

- We're literally building a community of scholars who will support each other and receive the kind of support needed from the University.
- A full-tuition scholarship for qualified students who were in foster care when they graduated from high school
- Scholarship is renewable for four years • A partnership with KVCC to help former foster care students who begin their college studies there.
- On campus housing that will be available year round--even during break.

- A support structure for our Seita Scholars that uses the resources of offices campuswide--financial aid, counseling, career and student employment services and legal assistance.

- We have a cadre of current students who were once in foster care and who are helping advise and counsel us as we develop the program.

### **What's next?**

- Formally announced two weeks ago
- Getting the word out--working with the Michigan Dept. of Human Services
- Story is slowly working its way around--always generates high interest. Most people don't even know about this issue. John Seita's story is a powerful one.
- Hearing from foster care organizations in other states.
- Pilot program this fall

And of course, we are looking for your help and input. Help us spread the word by letting people in your sphere of influence know about this. Thank you.