

FAIR FUTURES PROGRAM MANUAL

SECTIONS 1-4

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MANUAL OVERVIEW & CONTRIBUTIONS

BACKGROUND: THE FAIR FUTURES NYC STORY

Fair Futures is a youth-led advocacy movement in New York City (NYC) and a coalition of over 100 non-profit organizations and foundations advocating for young people who have experienced foster care to have access to the long-term supports they need to achieve their potential. The Fair Futures NYC advocacy is fully youth-led by the Youth Advisory Board.

Fair Futures is also a youth-centered, comprehensive model that serves young people who have been in the foster care system from 6th grade through age 26. The model includes a robust middle school program that prepares students for success in middle and high school and a long-term coaching program from 9th grade until age 26 that includes professional coaching, tutoring, and comprehensive social-emotional, academic, career development, employment, housing, and independent living supports.

The Fair Futures model was developed through a 1.5 year-long research project that included the expertise of NYC's executive and program-level leadership in child welfare and youth development. The model's services and service-delivery are based on best practice programs in NYC and nationally that serve young people in foster care and have achieved strong results at scale. The model also infuses best practices at critical junctures derived from other NYC-based foster care agencies, educational and workforce development organizations, and evidence-based national models.

In NYC, the youth-led advocacy was successful in securing \$10 million in City funding for 2019-2020 to implement Fair Futures across the child welfare system in NYC. In Year 2 (2020-2021), \$12 million was received; in Year 3 (2021-2022), \$20 million was secured; and in Year 4 (2022-2023), \$30.7 million was baselined in the City budget to make Fair Futures sustainable. FY23 was also the first year that Fair Futures expanded to serve young people ages 21-26 who left foster care, making NYC the **first in the nation to serve young people through age 26 on the public dollar**. NYC funding was also allocated to expand Fair Futures to the juvenile justice sector.

In 2018, the NYC Administration for Children's Services formed a **public private partnership** with the Foster Care Excellence Fund foundations to ensure quality implementation of the model systemwide. These foundations pooled over \$4 million in funding over three years (2019 – 2023) to fund the infrastructure needed to implement the Fair Futures model. The infrastructure includes the creation of this manual and the accompanying materials, robust trainings and technical assistance for all Fair Futures staff, the development of an online resource directory that is regularly updated, and the creation of an online platform (Care4) to track youth progress and house materials/resources.

Katie Napolitano and Emil Ramnarine have overseen the implementation of the model in NYC since its inception, and in 2022 launched what is now called the **"Center for Fair Futures."** The Center for Fair Futures provides implementation and professional development supports to organizations implementing the Fair Futures model, including a series of trainings, 1:1 technical assistance, 1:1 coaching, workshops, and learning communities. All staff have access to an online platform that tracks young people's goals/progress and houses materials and resources to support staff with "how to" help a young person on their journey. These materials are regularly updated and publicly available to on the Fair Futures [website](#).

FAIR FUTURES PILOT IN BUFFALO/ERIE COUNTY

Following the success in NYC, several key stakeholders encouraged the Center for Fair Futures team to embark on its first expansion to a new region – Buffalo and Erie County. To fund and pilot the model, a public-private partnership was formed between Erie County Department of Social Services, [Say Yes Buffalo](#), the [Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo](#), the [Redlich Horwitz Foundation](#), Bank of America, and Casey Family Programs. The pilot will be implemented by [Say Yes Buffalo](#), a non-profit with deep community roots and a commitment to a wide range of high-quality services.

To tailor the model to Buffalo/Erie County, the Center for Fair Futures and the Say YES Buffalo team spent 1.5 years engaging and partnering with local organizations in the education, workforce development, housing, and child welfare space. The Fair Futures manual, materials, and resources were refined with local partners and will be publicly available (and regularly updated) [here](#).

All local organizations are invited to attend the Fair Futures/Say YES trainings and learning communities. Please reach out to Sylvia Lloyd at slloyd@sayyesbuffalo.org. We are honored to partner with the Buffalo and Erie communities to provide Fair Futures to young people in foster care!

A MODEL THAT MEETS YOUNG PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

The model, and this manual, are **fully centered around meeting the needs of current/former foster youth**, regardless of their academic status or life situation. As such, this manual and the Fair Futures “Goals & Steps” framework can apply to any young person.

This manual serves as a guide on how to engage young people, help them gain academic and career development experiences in line with their interests and goals, and support them through the challenges they commonly face in the transition to adulthood. The Fair Futures manual offers evidence-based strategies for effectively engaging youth in a long-term coaching relationship and helping youth develop and make progress towards their academic, career development, and housing/independent living goals.

The manual maps out, step by step, how to support young people based on their current situation. It also links to a comprehensive set of tools, materials, and vetted resources that staff can use to assist young people throughout their journey.

MODEL FLEXIBILITY AND STRUCTURE

There is inherent flexibility to the Fair Futures model, as it is centered around young people’s needs and meets a youth where they are. However, it also provides a lot of structure to assist staff with “how to” help a young person at every juncture on the journey they choose. It maps out the steps on how to navigate various systems and access the academic, career, and housing resources, programs, and opportunities available to youth in Buffalo/Erie, based on where they are and where they want to go.

Innovation is always encouraged! Organizations adopting this model can continue to use or develop their own program branding, infuse additional program components or best practices, or slightly alter staff titles/roles, as long as they deliver all of the key components of the model.

MODEL LIMITATIONS & POTENTIAL ADDITIONS

While Fair Futures is not a clinical model, Coaches help facilitate access to any mental health or supportive service a young person needs and help ensure follow-through. As Coaches build strong relationships with young people, they often become aware (or informed) of any mental health, health, or substance abuse challenge(s), as these issues often get in the way of academic and career development progress. Thus, Coaches can help ensure young people are accessing Medicaid Care Management services and are meeting with their Care Managers and/or Case Planners to address any needs or challenges.

The Fair Futures model also is designed to integrate enhancements. Examples of additional components that could be infused into the Fair Futures model through private funding include, but are not limited to:

- Additional on-site job readiness and/or internship programs
- “Gap-year” programming or other academic/vocational bridge programs
- Professional mentors for students in a post-secondary setting
- Wellness activities, such as yoga, meditation, and healing circles
- Credible messenger leadership programs
- Youth advocacy/organizing activities (beyond participation in the FF Youth Board)

THE ONLINE PLATFORM – CARE4

CARE4 IS A USER-FRIENDLY, CLOUD-BASED, PROGRAM MANAGEMENT TOOL THAT SERVES THREE KEY FUNCTIONS:

#1. Tracking youth progress using the Fair Futures “Goals & Steps” framework.

In this framework, **Goals** are standardized and represent positive outcomes and **Steps** represent progress towards goals. Steps also serve to help guide Coaches on how to help a young person achieve that particular goal.

The Online Platform will allow Coaches to work with young people to develop academic and career development goals, based on where they are and where they want to go, and track progress in a visual way. For young people aging out of care, it can be used to track progress in obtaining and maintaining housing and building independent living skills.



#2. Generating automated reports on a youth-level, Coach-level, program-level, and aggregated-level that show progress towards Goals and other key academic and career development data.

#3. Housing codified materials, tools, and vetted resources in the areas of education, career development, and housing & life skills. These materials were developed collaboratively by the Center for Fair Futures in each topic area. These materials are updated twice each year, and as needed. These materials are incorporated into all of the “Goals & Steps” Worksheets on Care4 so that they can guide staff as they are working on a particular step.

TIP!

Throughout this manual, the functions associated with the Online Platform are outlined.
Please note that these may change slightly as the platform continues to be improved.

CONTRIBUTIONS

This expansion was made possible through a public-private partnership between several key foundations, Say Yes Buffalo, the Erie County Department of Social Services, and several additional organizations providing high-quality youth development, academic, workforce development, and other services in the Buffalo and Erie County area. We are grateful for the contributions made by this group.

The Buffalo/Erie Public-Private Partnership key partners:

[Say Yes Buffalo](#)

Erie County Department of Social Services

Buffalo Futures

[Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo](#)

[Redlich Horwitz Foundation](#)

Casey Family Programs

Bank of America

The following individuals made significant contributions to the development, revision, and/or review of the Fair Futures Manual and materials:

Katie Napolitano & Emil Ramnarine, Center for Fair Futures

Liz Nellis, Consultant

Amanda Paul, [Say Yes Buffalo](#)

Sylvia Lloyd, [Say Yes Buffalo](#)

Michael Zink, [At The Table](#)

[Parent Network of Western New York](#)

[Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo](#)

In addition to the key partners listed above, representatives from the following local organizations were interviewed so that their expertise could inform the Fair Futures Manual, materials, and model:

[Buffalo Public Schools Adult Education](#)

[Erie1 BOCES](#)

[Fostering Greatness](#)

Gateway-Longview

[Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo](#)

[New Directions Youth & Family Services](#)

[Northland Training Center](#)

[Parent Network of Western New York](#)

[The Service Collaborative](#)

[SUNY Erie Community College](#)

The Youth Employment Coalition

PART 1: FAIR FUTURES PROGRAM SUMMARY

SECTION 1. BACKGROUND AND NEED

All young people need long-term, healthy relationships with caring adults and access to resources and opportunities to succeed. The Fair Futures model upholds the notion that young people in the child welfare system, most of whom have experienced trauma and loss, have the same capabilities as children without such experiences, but can face multiple obstacles to reaching their full potential. Additionally, when foster youth “age out” of the system, typically at age 21, they – like most young people – are often not prepared for independent living.

Youth in foster care who do not have access to long-term, comprehensive support have significantly lower rates of high school graduation, post-secondary persistence and completion, and employment. Without a high school degree, young people are at high risk of facing chronic unemployment and/or system involvement. Youth who age out of foster care are among the populations at greatest risk for becoming homeless, incarcerated, or experiencing early pregnancy/parenthood.

However, outcomes for young people who receive access to long-term coaching and quality academic and career services are significantly stronger.

Foster youth are incredibly resilient. They have dealt with more adversity and trauma than most adults will ever experience, and when they are equipped with consistent, caring, authentic adult relationships and the individualized supports that every young person needs, these youth can make tremendous strides in their social/emotional, academic, and career development.

SECTION 2. GOALS

The overarching goal of the Fair Futures model is to provide young people with the long-term coaching, social/emotional, academic, and career development supports they need to:

- Develop relational skills and a strong network of positive peer and adult supports;
- Prepare for and graduate high school;
- Connect to and persist in post-secondary settings;
- Build progressive career development experiences in line with their interests and academic/vocational plans that will help them navigate onto a living wage career pathway;
- Access and maintain affordable housing (for young people who age out of foster care) and gain independent living skills.



SECTION 3. FAIR FUTURES STAFF & KEY MODEL COMPONENTS

At scale, Fair Futures serves young people in foster care starting in the 6th grade and sticks with young people until age 26, regardless of their permanency status. (Note: Current Buffalo/Erie funding is for ages 11-21. The middle school model has not yet been implemented.)

There are no eligibility criteria and coaching is voluntary; a young person can choose to leave and return to the program at any time. The model is all about meeting young people where they are, believing in them, and helping them reach their full potential.

The model includes the following positions at scale:



A best practice that agencies could adopt is to have an **Outreach Coordinator** who was previously in foster care and received support. They can serve as a Credible Messenger and help recruit young people to the program who have not engaged (or who have disengaged).

⁺Tutors are for students in grades 6-12. Agencies can to sub-contract with a quality tutoring vendor or create their own tutoring program; see [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 6](#).

Key components of the model include:

A ROBUST MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAM PREPARES STUDENTS FOR SUCCESS IN HIGH SCHOOL

In middle school, Fair Futures students will receive educational advocacy, access to in-home, weekly tutoring, individualized assistance with the high school selection process, and connections to extracurricular activities.

Two key components of the middle school program include the Middle School Education Specialist and in-home, quality tutoring:



The Middle School Education Specialist:

The Middle School Education Specialist oversees up to 40 students at a time.

The key duties of the **Middle School Education Specialist** are to:

- Proactively monitor the academic performance of all middle school students;
- Provide educational advocacy to middle school students, as needed, and ensure students are receiving the supports they need to succeed;
- Connect middle school students to trauma-informed, weekly, in-home tutoring by a quality tutoring provider
- Connect students to extracurricular activities afterschool and in the summer;
- **Provide individualized assistance with the high school selection processes to all 8th grade students and their families.** The Specialist will ensure that all students apply to quality, best-fit schools.

In-home Tutoring:

From 6th to 8th grade, students will receive weekly, in-home tutoring from a Tutor (at a 1:15-18 ratio) who works from a strength-based, youth development lens and provides the individualized academic and social-emotional support students need to excel in middle school and prepare for high school. Tutors will report academic progress, needs, and concerns to the Middle School Education Specialist and also work with the Specialist to help ensure young people are connected to extracurricular activities.

To implement the tutoring component, agencies can subcontract a quality third party tutoring provider or build their own tutoring program.

COACHING FROM 9TH GRADE THROUGH AGE 26 BY FULL-TIME, TRAINED, PROFESSIONAL COACHES



Starting in the 9th grade, young people are matched with a Coach who works from a caring, authentic, trauma-informed, strength-based approach and builds a trusting relationship with the young person.

Coaches are full-time, trained professionals that receive significant training and professional development supports from the Center for Fair Futures.

The relationship between the Coach and the young person is the central part of the model; without this relationship, Coaches cannot help young people achieve their goals.

COACHES ARE NOT CASE PLANNERS OR CASE MANAGERS

Case Planners are required to focus on keeping the young person safe, making diligent efforts towards permanency planning, and working according to court-mandated timelines. The primary job of a Coach is to form a trusting, authentic, and transformational relationship with the young person (one that is not protocol-bound). Coaches are able to meet young people wherever they feel most comfortable and with greater frequency than mandated by a Case Planner. Coaches collaborate with young people on their level and always use a strength-based, youth development approach. Overall – the Coach's focus is on meeting the young person where they are, building a trusting relationship, believing in them, helping them achieve their academic and career development goals, and sticking with them – no matter what.

Coaches receive weekly supervision and support from Coach Supervisors, and a Program Director supports the Supervisors and oversees the program.

At a high level, Coaches perform the following activities:

(See [Appendix A: Fair Futures Staff Screening & Hiring Toolkit](#) for a full job description)

- **Build relationships** with up to 15 young people
- Provide **ongoing social/emotional support**
- Work 1:1 with young people to **develop goals** based on their interests and take measurable steps towards their goals
- Connect young people to best-fit schools/programs, career development experiences, and opportunities in line with their goals;
- **Help young people persist in academic/career development settings** by checking on them weekly, visiting the school/program, forming a relationship with the Primary Person at the school/program
 - Help them navigate any challenges that arise and celebrate their successes
- Help young people **plan/prepare** for the next step on their journey
 - Should a youth not be successful in any particular school/program setting, Coaches help young people reflect on the experience, provide support, and work with them to set new goals and transition to the next opportunity
- **Collaborate** with Say YES colleagues, foster care agency staff, the school, and foster parents/parents, as needed, to help youth achieve their goals and ensure their overall well-being
- Connect young people to **peer group supports** and build positive relationships
- Ensure young people who are aging out can access and **maintain stable, affordable housing** and **build independent living skills**

TUTORS FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NEED



At scale, the Fair Futures middle school tutoring component continues throughout high school. High school students in need of individualized support should be connected to quality, weekly tutoring (in-home or in the community, wherever the young person prefers).

Tutors, like Coaches, should work from a strength-based, youth development lens and build a positive relationship with the young person. Tutors provide the support students need to improve their academic skills and post-secondary preparedness. Tutors should report to Coaches on a monthly basis and inform them of student progress, needs, and any concerns.

(See [Fair Futures Program Manual, Section 19](#))

CAREER DEVELOPMENT, COLLEGE, & HOUSING SPECIALISTS



After Coaches build a relationship with young people and help them develop goals, they connect youth to Specialists to assist them in conducting specific tasks to achieve their goals. These usually include assistance with identifying and applying to a best-fit school/college, program, or housing opportunity in line with their goals.

All Specialists receive additional training in their respective areas of focus and provide **three key benefits**:

1. Supporting the Coach with some of the more time-consuming aspects of educational advocacy, college application, financial aid, job and housing applications, etc.
2. Ensuring that at least one person is well-trained and knowledgeable about the resources and pathways available for foster youth in Buffalo/Erie
3. Expanding the young person's network of positive staff/adult support

Specialists can also provide one-off, "targeted services" (specific services, such as assistance with filling out an application) to young people who do not want to participate in longer-term coaching but still need supports in certain areas.

THE BUFFALO/ERIE PILOT WILL NOT INCLUDE SPECIALISTS.

While Specialists provide critical supports, the Buffalo/Erie pilot will not include this role for the foreseeable future. Instead, Coaches will collaborate with the Career Coaches at The Hub to do deep career exploration and help them connect to best-fit career pathways. Coaches can also collaborate with Say YES Guidance Counselors to help young people with college applications. For housing, Coaches will work with the young person's foster care agency to submit applications if they are aging out and need housing.

PEER GROUPS

Peer groups are an important component of the Fair Futures model. To stick with the program over the course of years, young people need to feel connected not only to their Coach, but to the program itself and other adult and peer supports.

Peer groups help young people develop positive relationships with their peers and serve as important motivational and skill-building forums. They are often a space that allows young people to start or continue the process of healing by learning about managing stress, healthy communication and self-expression, and mental/physical wellness.

Peer groups are not typical workshops; they have a Facilitator (not an Instructor) who lets the young people drive the discussion/activity. Coaches (or other Fair Futures staff) should take turns organizing and facilitating peer groups. Coaches can learn a lot about young people's thoughts, concerns, and challenges through these groups, which can help them in their coaching sessions. (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 25](#))

SECTION 4. SUMMARY OF SUPPORTS YOUNG PEOPLE RECEIVE THROUGH COACHING

Coaches work with Specialists and Tutors, as needed, to provide young people with robust social/emotional, academic, career development, and housing/independent living supports.

1. SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL SUPPORT & EMPOWERMENT THROUGH COACHING

Coaches build a trusting relationship with young people and provide ongoing emotional support. Without this supportive relationship, Coaches cannot help young people set goals or make progress toward their goals.

To build a strong relationship, the model emphasizes consistency, constancy, and creativity. Be consistent in reaching out at least once per week, and when one approach does not work, try another! And when you do connect, remember to be your authentic self. Suggest fun activities in line with their interests to get to know them better.



Coaches should be in touch with young people regularly (minimum once/week), and not always about their academic or career development progress! They should engage young people in activities and have conversations about various aspects of their life – their concerns/fears, relationships with others, interests, challenges, etc. If there is a crisis situation or something to celebrate, Coaches should be there for the young person and provide the support that they need.

Once Coaches have built a positive rapport with young people, they can help them set goals, based on their interests and where they are. They play a critical role in helping young people regain control over their own lives and their future.

2. ROBUST ACADEMIC SUPPORT



Coaches help oversee a young person's academic journey and progress – they ensure they are enrolled in a best-fit school, attending school, and have the supports and resources they need to be successful, graduate, and enter and persist in a post-secondary setting.

ROLE OF A COACH AS IT RELATES TO ACADEMIC SUPPORT:

For young people who are disconnected and without a high school degree/GED, Coaches help them re-engage and reconnect them to a best-fit academic setting. However, they do not simply tell the young person why they should go back to high school – the young person knows this, *and* has likely heard it from many other adults in their lives. Coaches try to understand the drivers as to *why* that young person may have disconnected, and perhaps first help that young person connect to experiences in line with their interests. This could include any type of extracurricular activity, job, or other type of career development experience where they can build their self-esteem, sense of self, and start to envision success. Coaches meet them where they are, and when they are ready they can help them enroll in a best-fit high school setting. For more creative, innovative approaches see [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 20](#).

For students in high school or a GED program, Coaches review transcripts and academic data when it becomes available, visit the school with the young person at least 1x per semester, and discuss graduation and post-secondary plans (and include other adults in these conversations). If/when needed, Coaches provide educational advocacy, connect students to quality tutoring, and assist with transferring students into a better-fit high school or high school equivalency (HSE) program. Coaches also coordinate with the student's Case Planner, tutor, teachers, and parents to support their academic needs and plans. (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 18](#))

Coaches help all young people explore post-secondary opportunities, including college and/or vocational programs, starting in the 9th grade, or as early as possible if the young person joins the program at an older age. Even if the young person is not interested, it is the role of the Coach to make sure they are aware of all of the opportunities available to them. For example, they should know that SUNY colleges are not only free for them, but that the financial aid will cover most (if not all) of their living expenses.

If the young person is not interested in college, they should know about all the free sector-based training programs in Buffalo/Erie that could lead to a higher-wage career path. The young person will make the decision, but they need to know all of the possibilities. For young people who are interested in a post-secondary setting, Coaches will often work in conjunction with Specialists to help young people develop plans. (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 21](#))

For students on a college-bound pathway, the Coach (and Say YES Guidance Counselor) will help the young person explore and identify best-fit colleges, complete college and financial aid applications, access opportunity programs, re-enroll each semester, and reapply to all forms of funding each year. The Coach will play an important role in providing persistence support at critical junctures before, during, and after each semester. (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 21](#))

For students on a vocational or direct employment pathway, the Coach will connect the youth to the Career Coach at The Hub to identify and apply to best-fit vocational/workforce programs, civil service pathways, internships, employment, and/or apprenticeship opportunities. (See [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 21](#) and [Section 22](#))

Once a young person is enrolled in a post-secondary setting, the Coach helps the young persist by following up during critical junctures, connecting them to resources, and providing ongoing social/emotional support.



TO PROVIDE POST-SECONDARY SUPPORT, A COLLEGE SPECIALIST SHOULD:

- ☐ Meet with young people interested in college to have an exploratory and informational session and discuss what that roadmap/timeline would look like at their particular high school or GED program
- ☐ Monitor PSAT/SAT scores of those students who do take them, and meet with them to discuss/refine college options
- ☐ Organize college tours
- ☐ Help young people apply to colleges in line with their interests, preferences, and performance
- ☐ Assist students with college essays and personal statements, where needed
- ☐ Review any college applications or financial aid forms filled out by the student's school/guidance counselor to ensure they are correct
- ☐ Ensure that students apply to any Opportunity Programs available to them
- ☐ Sit with students and help them apply to FAFSA, TAP, ETV, Say YES and all applicable scholarships, including reviewing their essays and helping with letters of reference
- ☐ Ensure students are signed up for any entrance interviews/exams
- ☐ Fill out all of the required paperwork for Room & Board, if applicable
- ☐ Reach out to students to ensure they are enrolled in the proper classes each semester, and assist with enrollment, if needed
- ☐ Help young people reapply to all forms of financial aid and scholarships each year
- ☐ Assist students with transferring colleges, if needed

3. CAREER DEVELOPMENT SUPPORTS

Coaches ensure **all young people engage in at least one career exploration activity each year**, either with them or the Career Coach at The Hub. All young people, regardless of their situation, are also encouraged to engage in **at least one career development experience/activity** each year based on their interests, strengths, needs, and academic situation.

It is extremely important for young people to start building their resumes at any early age, including through extracurricular, leadership, and community service activities. Engaging in career development experiences can also help young people build their self-esteem, sense of belonging, network of adult and peer supports, and the soft skills required for success in life. It can also help young people re-engage in school and improve their performance, as these experiences can help them envision pathways to success and why a degree is so important.

Both the Coach and Career Coach can help young people make progress toward their career development goals.



ROLE OF A COACH IN PROVIDING CAREER DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT EACH YEAR:

- ☐ Conduct career exploration activities with young people (a required Goal – see [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 22](#));
- ☐ Ensure the young person has working papers, if needed, and has an updated resume each year (a required Goal – see [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 22](#));
- ☐ Work with the young person and/or refer the young person to a Career Coach to engage in a discussion at least 1x each year around potential career development experiences that young person could have that year based on their interests, strengths, and academic plans (a required Goal - see [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 22](#));
- ☐ Assist all young people in selecting at least one career development experience each year that is in line with their interests and academic situation/background (a required Goal – see [Fair Futures Program Manual Section 22](#));

To do so, the Coach can:

- Expose youth to extracurricular, youth development, community service, and/or leadership activities, which help youth build their resumes, self-esteem, and develop critical soft skills needed in the workplace;
- Refer young people to on-site opportunities at Say YES, such as internships and apprenticeships;
- Help young people apply to workforce programs or employment opportunities;
- Refer young people to the Career Coach to help them apply to vocational programs;
- Provide persistence coaching to young people employed or enrolled in any external program by checking in with them regularly and building a relationship with the “primary person” at that program.

4. HOUSING AND INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS

For young people aging out of foster care, Coaches work closely with the **Case Planner** to help them access stable, affordable housing.

While Coaches often help facilitate permanency by helping young people build trusting relationships with adults, the roles/responsibilities associated with permanency are in the domain of the Case Planner. **The goal is always to help the young person find a safe, stable, loving family and a broad network of supportive adults.**

If full funding for Fair Futures is available through age 26 in Buffalo/Erie, Coaches will help them navigate the difficult transition into independent living.

ROLE OF A COACH IN PROVIDING HOUSING AND INDEPENDENT LIVING SUPPORTS:

- ☐ Coaches the young person on ALL of the types of housing available to them. Reach out for technical assistance if needed! Encourage the young person to apply to all, or at least to two different kinds so that they have options - remind them that they can always turn it down;
- ☐ Helps the young person coordinate with a Case Planner to ensure that all young people’s housing applications are submitted as early as possible (by age 19 if their goal is to age out);
- ☐ Accompanies the young person on any housing interviews;
- ☐ Helps young people move in and obtain furniture; reaches out every day that first week to provide emotional support during this often scary transition;
- ☐ Helps young people obtain public assistance, if/when needed;
- ☐ Helps young people maintain their housing by providing independent living supports such as budgeting, obtaining a bank account, and advocating with landlords, if needed.

5. CONNECTIONS TO POSITIVE PEER GROUPS

Coaches should connect young people to peer groups, whenever possible. As mentioned above, peer groups help young people develop positive, supportive relationships with their peers. A best practice is for agencies to convert their PYA (Preparing Youth for Adulthood) workshops into peer groups, if applicable. The difference between a workshop and a peer group is that peer groups are youth-led/co-facilitated. The young people decide the topics and help lead the discussion, versus having an Instructor lead the workshop. This also helps with empowerment and buy-in!

Peers also serve as credible messengers. If a young person is disconnected or struggling and one of their peers talks about how they went through the same experience and were able to overcome it, that can be incredibly motivating. Agencies have often found that peer group forums can be the source of breakthroughs and “ah-ha” moments; literally one conversation can help a young person reframe their situation and start moving forward with their goals.

Peer groups can also help young people improve their job readiness by helping them improve critical soft skills (listening, responding respectfully, etc.).

To recap, peer groups help young people to:

- Form positive peer relationships and build their support network
- Avoid involvement in negative peer groups
- Be heard, feel that they are not alone, and part of a larger community
- Meet credible messengers that they can relate to and be inspired by
- Learn about topics related to wellness and stress management
- Build and reinforce critical soft skills
- Gain leadership/community service experiences that they can include on their resumes
- Stay connected to the Fair Futures program
- For agencies who do not have enough young people to implement peer groups, the Fair Futures Youth Board Director will be organizing and forming system-wide Youth Board events with young people.