



The Excellence Academy

Children's Home + Aid's Excellence Academy provides youth in foster care with the vital support that they need to reach their fullest potential. Youth in foster care, exposed to severe abuse and neglect, suffer from emotional trauma that can hinder academic achievement. One study of fifteen-year old foster youth attending Chicago Public Schools found they were half as likely to graduate high school as other students and 11th grade foster youth were reading, on average, at a seventh-grade level.

Extensive research shows that when foster youth "age out" of foster care at age 18 - sent out to live on their own without the support of family or the Department of Children and Family Services - they fare much worse than their peers, experiencing alarming rates of **unemployment (60%), homelessness (14%) and teen pregnancy (48%)**. Although surveys of teens in foster care shows that most (70%) aspire to go to college, a mere **6%** of former foster youth in Illinois have earned a two-year or four-year college degree.

The Excellence Academy is designed to help prevent these disturbing trends, providing foster youth with supportive services like tutoring, counseling and mentors, as well as support to help strengthen foster families, which help foster youth achieve stability and success.

Excellence Academy Programming

The Excellence Academy serves 60 foster youth annually, age 11 and older, who have been identified as "high-risk" (due to academic, emotional, behavioral or developmental issues). The Excellence Academy has locations in two low-income communities on Chicago's South Side that have high concentrations of youth in foster care: **Englewood** and **South Suburban Hazel Crest**. Youth attend the Excellence Academy daily (3:00-6:30pm), participating in a fully comprehensive program, including activities in four categories:

- **Education:** tutoring, homework help, educational enrichment, standardized test preparation and educational advocacy;
- **Life Skills:** job training, computer skills, money management, health and home economics;
- **Counseling:** group and individual therapy to address childhood trauma; and
- **Violence Prevention/Social Emotional Learning:** recreational activities, leadership and character development, conflict resolution and community service.



Each youth participating in the Excellence Academy is matched with an **adult mentor** to provide stable, long-term connections with caring role models. The youth's foster family also receives counseling support to help the foster home be a stable and supportive environment for the child. Through the Excellence Academy, youth build networks of mentors, foster families, peers, employers and schools to support their successful transition into adulthood.



children's home + aid

www.childrenshomeandaid.org

Helping Youth Achieve Stability and Success

The Excellence Academy helps foster youth achieve outstanding outcomes:

- greater stability in foster homes,
- improved grades,
- improved attendance and school completion,
- fewer school disciplinary actions and
- improved independent living skills.

Thus far, the Excellence Academy has distinguished itself as a model program in Illinois, utilizing a unique, effective approach unlike any other Adolescent Foster Care program. For example, in Chicago's Englewood community, where approximately 50% of all youth (even those without the added challenges of being a foster youth) drop out of high school, a tremendous **96% of youth served by the Excellence Academy successfully advanced to the next grade level at the end of the last school year.**



Excellence Academy youth participate in a photography class as part of their academic enrichment programming.

Antwon: An Excellence Academy Success Story

Antwon had felt alone for most of his life: abused and neglected as an infant, he was placed with an adoptive family. By the age of twelve, the trauma and deep loss Antwon had experienced in his early childhood began to surface and Antwon suffered behavioral problems at home and in school. Unable to cope, his adoptive family brought Antwon to Children's Home + Aid's Daniel F. and Ada L. Rice Child + Family Center so that he could get the care and treatment he needed. Sadly, Antwon's adoptive family abandoned him - never even returning to visit him during his four years in treatment at the Rice Center. Antwon blossomed at the Rice Center, receiving therapy and support, he processed his difficult feelings and learned to control his behavior.

Children's Home + Aid was able to find Antwon a loving, supportive foster family to be placed with when he was ready to leave the Rice Center. So, at age 16, Antwon moved in with his new foster family on Chicago's South Side and was referred to Children's Home + Aid's Excellence Academy program in Englewood to help give him support as he dealt with the changes of moving from a suburban school to a large city high school. The Excellence Academy provided Antwon with educational support, advocacy, and enrichment during the after school hours, encouraging his love of reading and improving his performance in school. The Excellence Academy taught Antwon important life skills, like how to navigate the CTA and apply for jobs, helping him land his first job at age 16. Counselors and mentor volunteers provided a listening ear when Antwon ran into challenges and continued to work through his painful past. Excellence Academy staff worked with Antwon and his foster family, providing counseling and support to help the new family remain strong and stable.

With self-determination and the support of the Excellence Academy, Antwon graduated from high school, achieving a goal he never thought would be possible and something that is sadly not achieved by over 50% of teens in foster care. Now at age 20, Antwon attends community college and still attends the Excellence Academy, serving as an inspiration to other teens in foster care. Though he once felt alone and abandoned, with the help of the Excellence Academy, Antwon now has a network of support to help him achieve his dreams.