

HOT TOPIC HIGHLIGHTS

Nicole Magnusson Informs LWVDE and AAUW about Foster Care Initiatives, Gaps in Services



Nicole Magnusson

On Monday, January 23, League of Women Voters Delaware members and AAUW Newark branch members gathered at Michael's Restaurant to hear an inspiring and informative presentation about aging out of foster care services. Nicole Magnusson, who was once on the receiving end of foster care services and now works for the Office of the Attorney General, shared her experiences with the foster care system and provided overview on many programs that provide direct services for youth aging out of foster care. There are about 700-800 children in foster care in Delaware, and about 75% age out each year, Magnusson explained. Before many of the programs that Magnusson introduced had been created, children in the foster care system used to grow up under-educated, under-paid, and under-employed, and some were described as being in the "foster care to prison pipeline."



Thanks to many of the organizations Magnusson introduced to LWVDE and AAUW, foster care services have dramatically improved in Delaware over the last decade or so. The Fostering Connections Act created developmentally appropriate care for young adults between 18 and 21, and the 2013 Ready By 21 initiative recognized that foster care and after care isn't "one size fits all." The Ready By 21 initiative assists in helping foster care youth who have aged out with housing, bills, and education as well as provide Independent Living Workers to mentor the young adults. As Magnusson mentioned, investing in these services have phenomenal return on investment and save the state millions of dollars because they prevent arrests, unemployment, and more.



As progressive as Delaware is in their foster care services initiatives, there are remaining gaps in services. Transportation, as well as insurance and driver's licenses, is hard to obtain. There is also the issue of permanency. Youth need permanent connections, "a forever family...that they can always come back to" as Magnusson explained. A college education is pushed for all foster youth, yet college isn't for everyone. Magnusson suggested that more opportunities for trade school and apprenticeships should be introduced as options, as well as soft skills such as resume workshops and interview practice.

Simple things can change the trajectory of a youth's life. Through Magnusson's work, as well as the work of other volunteers and board members like her, policies and initiatives can be created for youth aging out of foster care that help make a better transition from the nest to the sky.

Julie Millisky, AAUW