

I S.A.W. Change: A Self Advocacy Workshop

An IWL Staff Presentation

By Vanessa Raymond

The Leadership Scholars Certificate Program is a two-year selective, interdisciplinary certificate program that prepares Rutgers undergraduate women to be informed, innovative, and socially responsible leaders.

Leadership Scholars design and implement social action projects to expand their understanding of issues and problems and to develop leadership skills.

This project gives Scholars the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge they have gained about leadership, advocacy, and social change with the practical and experiential knowledge they have developed about a particular policy issue or problem through the field site placement. It also further develops leadership skills by giving undergraduates the opportunity to *practice* leadership *through* action.

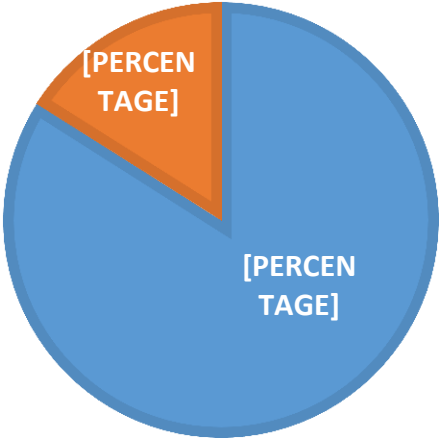
To find out more please visit the Institute for Women's Leadership's website at <http://iwl.rutgers.edu>.

Intellectual and Conceptual Foundations

Educational Outcomes of Former Foster Youth

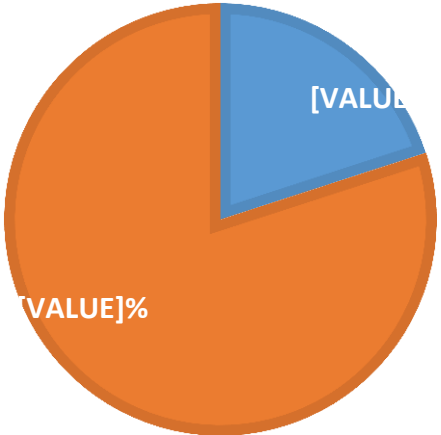
17-18 YEAR OLD FOSTER YOUTH

■ Want to go to college ■ Don't



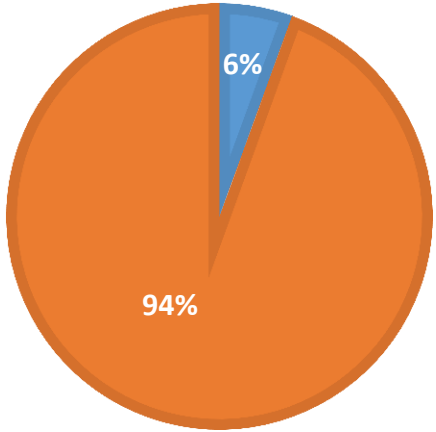
FOSTER YOUTH WHO GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL

■ Attend College ■ Don't



FOSTER YOUTH WHO ATTAIN A BACHELOR'S DEGREE

■ Attain ■ Don't Attain



Source: National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, *Fostering Success in Education: National Factsheet Educational Outcomes Children in Foster Care*

Barriers to Higher Education

Most obstructive barriers for former foster youth pursuing higher education include, but are not limited to: **financial** difficulties, needing to **work**, and concerns about **housing**.

Overcoming the Barriers

- There's a huge difference in earnings as an employee for a former foster youth's life for those who go on to attain some kind of college education, whether they finish or not, as compared to high school graduates.



\$481,000

for former foster youth with a four year degree, this much more is earned over the course of work-life, on average



\$129,000

for completing any college, this much more is earned, on average

Advocacy

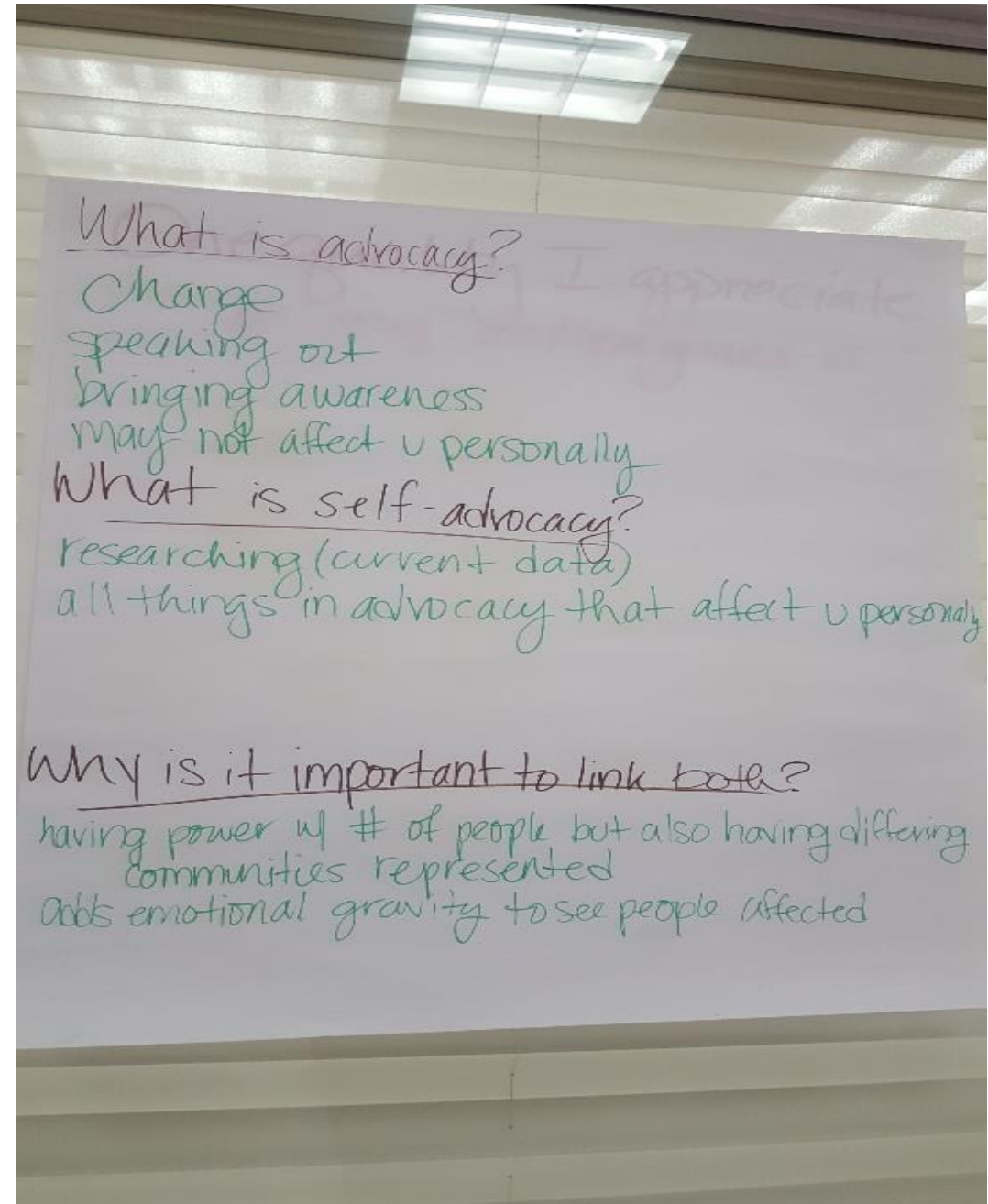
- Initial direction of project
 - Panel discussion with art component and resource sheet
 - Individual advocacy to Rutgers high-level administrators for free break-period housing
 - Chancellors Nancy Cantor and Phoebe Haddon
 - Advocacy in conjunction with the School of Social Work to New Jersey legislators
 - Letter-writing campaign workshop to Price Family Fellows
 - Vice President Advocates for Children of New Jersey, Mary Coogan
- Advocacy continues in a sustainable way
 - Price Family Fellows
 - Interview with IWL social media

Why Letter Writing?

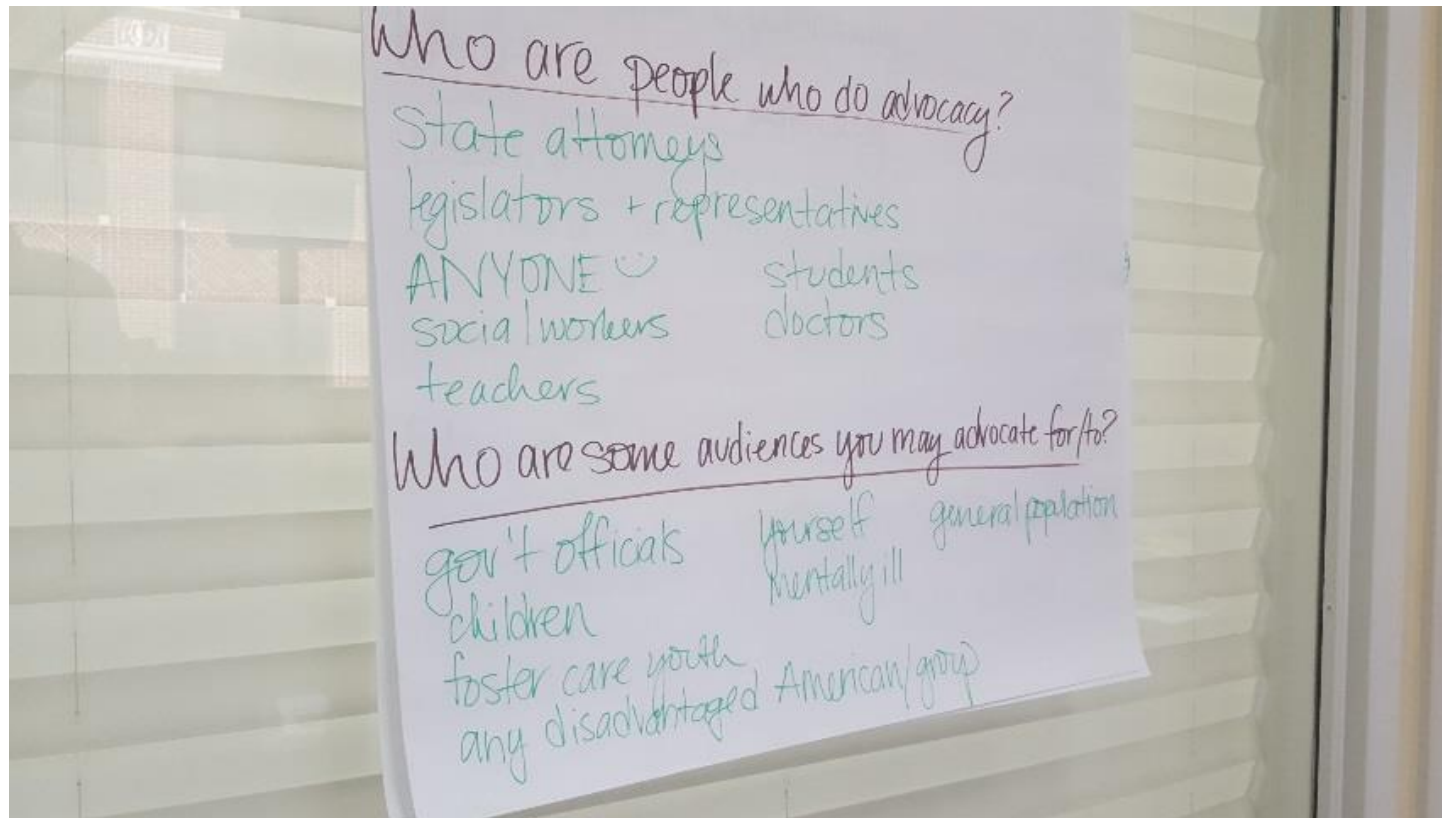
- Allows for a personal impact that otherwise would be missed or less impactful in a phone call or email.
- Sending a lot of letters about one issue makes the policymaker think more thoughtfully and urgently about it.
- Representatives respond more to letters than lower effort methods.
- Middle of spectrum of effort.
 - Not as much effort as speaking face to face with rep but not as little effort as writing an email.

Project Impact

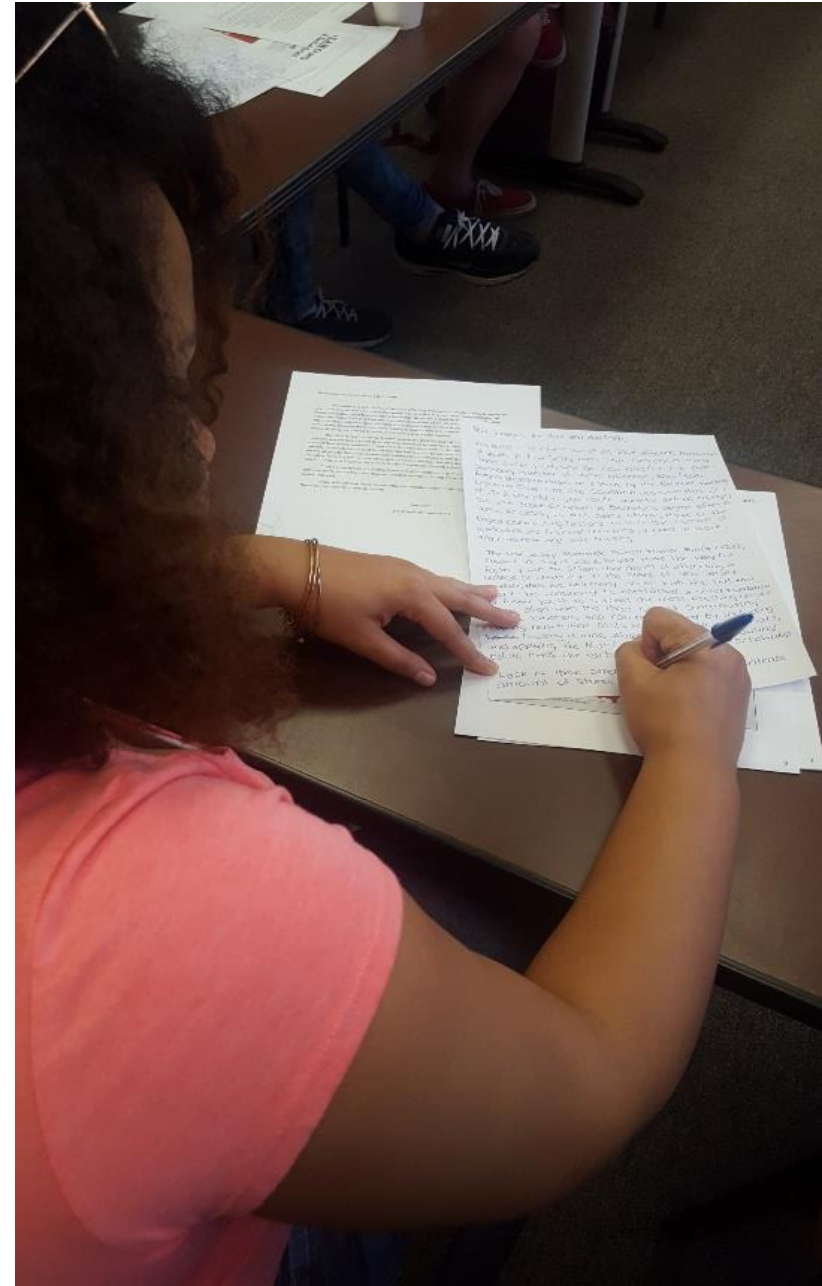
- Space to develop self-advocacy knowledge and skills for former foster youth at Rutgers
- Gain knowledge of current statistics about former foster youth in higher education



- Learn how foster care focused legislation moves through the New Jersey legislature using the Statewide Tuition Waiver Program as a personal example
- Gave students specific tools to create social change through a means they may have previously felt uncomfortable with or did not have any previous knowledge about



- Empowered students to see a visual representation of their impact through a letter to effect change at the state and university levels
- Understand their personal strengths to utilize their best vehicle(s) for advocacy



Big Picture Insights

- We, former foster youth, are important and deserve to be heard
- Working for social change is not a one-size-fits-all movement
- It is okay to work outside one's comfort zone
- Patience is key
- The legislative process is incredibly daunting, but important to know
- Work with what is already there, don't recreate the wheel!
- Small acts of change are just as important as big ones

Lessons Learned about Women's Leadership

- Being confident and comfortable with my ability to lead
- Understand that social change takes time
- Be cognizant of decisions, but don't overanalyze
- Be realistic with goals
- Patience and self-care go a long way
- Enjoy the product of your hard work!

Partnerships Built

- IWL Staff and Interns
 - Sasha, Mary, Susmita, and Alex
- IWL Scholars
- Price Family Fellows Program Project Coordinator
 - Adam Staats
- Price Family Fellows
- Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology
 - Robin Lang

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