



Emerging Star Award Winner Christian Randle

When he was 13-17 years old, Christian “Chris” Randle attended school in a foster care residential placement in southeast Michigan, and expected his efforts would lead to a high school diploma. Unfortunately for Chris that didn’t happen. When he tried to enroll as a junior in a local community high school, he discovered his educational record listed no earned credits, rendering him also unable to make a dual enrollment in a community college. “While my peers are getting ready to go to college, I’m being asked to start high school all over again,” Christian, then 17, told Michigan’s Board of Education last year.

[His testimony](#) led the Board to urge the state Legislature to make reforms, and other administrative reforms followed that would better assist youth from foster care along their educational journeys. In Michigan, it’s a critical issue given that only 40 percent of youths in residential or juvenile justice facilities graduate from high school or earn a GED by age 19, compared to 80 percent of public high school students overall.

Most teens Christian’s age would have been traumatized by the news and hide in shame. But Chris took that unpleasant discovery in a positive direction. He spoke with peers and encouraged many youths like him to re-enroll in high school. He continued to talk publicly about his experiences and participated in forums before the Department of Education and leadership at the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. Chris rose to the occasion and became a sought-after interviewee for Detroit’s major media.

With the help of the Park West Foundation in Southfield, he re-enrolled in high school and encouraged many other foster youths to also re-enroll in school. Because of his advocacy and courage, important changes for foster youth have occurred. The state’s foster youth stipend has increased by 20 percent, the first increase in 12 years, and the list of school-based foster care liaisons has been made public. Recently, state Rep. Stephanie Young invited a team of youth including Chris to review three bills she’s proposing.

Today, Christian is 18 years old, lives independently, and serves as the Director of Youth Advocacy for Empowering Foster Youth through Technology at the Park West Foundation. He participates in weekly planning meetings, and continues to identify barriers to independence for youths from foster care while living under DHHS supervision.

Chris’ nominator writes: “Chris’s trauma of finding out he had no credits while he was working to advance academically helped all of us identify the source of this systemic inequity affecting thousands of children. His strong sense of self has allowed him to detail his challenges and barriers of navigating his education in the foster care system with many others who are facing the same challenges today.”

Congratulations Chris Randle!