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**NEBRASKA CHILDREN AND FAMILIES FOUNDATION**

**RECEIVES $2.2M GRANT FROM US DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO INCREASE ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION AND CAREER PATHWAYS FOR RURAL STUDENTS**

(Lincoln, NE) – Nebraska Children and Families Foundation has been awarded a significant Rural Postsecondary and Economic Development (RPED) grant, exceeding $2.2 million, from the US Department of Education. This grant is part of a nationwide initiative to enhance postsecondary education access and completion for students in rural areas. Through its Connected Youth Initiative (CYI), Nebraska Children aims to support 900 rural students over the next four years.

The initiative focuses on young people aged 14-25 who have experienced foster care, homelessness, housing instability, pregnancy, parenting, or human trafficking. The goal is to provide these students with academic, social, and career guidance, as well as postsecondary preparation services and assistance with basic needs, to help them thrive in their future careers.

This new RPED grant builds on the success of the Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential (LEAP) program, implemented by Nebraska Children and driven by a multi-year investment from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. LEAP has made a significant impact. Since its inception, 656 students have participated, preparing for and entering college. Of those 656 students:

* 81% enrolled in a 2- or 4-year program at one of six Nebraska postsecondary institutions.
* 67% completed their first year of education, increasing their chances of earning a degree or certification.

To put this into perspective, nationally, less than 50% of foster youth who enroll in college make it through their first year, compared to over 75% of first-generation, low-income students. Even more striking, less than 6% of students with foster care experience end up completing their degree or credential. Clearly, the LEAP program has been a game-changer. The RPED grant aims to build on this momentum, driving more success stories for Nebraska's youth.

In the first year of this new grant, Nebraska Children will collaborate with rural school districts including Scottsbluff, Norfolk, Hastings, Harvard, and Adams Central. They will offer comprehensive student support and enhance teacher credentialing for effective dual enrollment, allowing students to earn both high school and postsecondary credits. The initiative will expand to include more rural school districts in the second and third years.

Nebraska Children will also work with Bring Up Nebraska Community Collaboratives and state partners like the Central Plains Center for Services, Nebraska Department of Education, and Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. These partnerships will implement CYI Coaching and wraparound services to address students’ basic needs as they transition to postsecondary education.

Additionally, Nebraska Children and its RPED partners will collaborate with community colleges and other postsecondary institutions across Nebraska. The goal is to engage rural students in educational programs aligned with Nebraska's in-demand industries, ensuring they are well-prepared for successful careers.

“We're thrilled to boost support for young people in rural areas, helping them achieve their education and career goals," said Crystal Aldmeyer, VP of Connected Youth Initiative at Nebraska Children. "Disconnected from family and school, these young adults face tough challenges. By empowering these individuals, we're not just changing their lives—we're also building a stronger future workforce for Nebraska."

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Nebraska Children and Families Foundation partners with communities to create a well-being system that strengthens families, supports unconnected young people, creates learning opportunities for Nebraska’s future workforce, and empowers parents to raise healthy children. To learn more about our work, visit [www.NebraskaChildren.org](http://www.NebraskaChildren.org).

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