

# IMPACT REPORT

**FIRST STAR**  
**KVC WEST VIRGINIA ACADEMY**  
2023- 2024

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*ACADEMY DIRECTOR: VALERIE NICHOLS*





#### First Star's Mission:

First Star provides high school youth in foster care with the opportunity, tools, and support to successfully transition to self-sufficiency through higher education or other viable pathways.

#### First Star's Vision:

We envision a world where youth in foster care have equitable opportunities to acquire education and skills to achieve fulfilling and productive adult lives.

First Star's Academies are a long-term college-prep program for high school foster youth. We keep our scholars on track for high school graduation and prepare them for higher education and adulthood by providing specialized programming that addresses the academics, life skills, and adult supports unique to students in foster care.



Want to get involved or become a partner? Please reach out to the Academy Director using the contact information below!

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## KVC WEST VIRGINIA MISSION STATEMENT:

To enrich and enhance the lives of children and families by providing medical and behavioral healthcare, social services and education.

# The Academy Model

## ACADEMY PROGRAMMING INCLUDES...



### MONTHLY ACADEMIES

Monthly programming over four years for youth in foster care focused on academics and life skills while they are in high school.

### CAREGIVER ENGAGEMENT

Seminars and workshops that provide tools to caregivers to become advocates for their youth.

### STEAM ACADEMY

Virtual Tech Talks and access to labs that focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math.

### ALUMNI PROGRAM

Offered to scholars who graduate the Academy as a resource during their transition to adulthood.

### SCHOLAR ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Leadership opportunity for scholars focused on becoming civically engaged and enacting change in their local communities.

### SUMMER ACADEMY

Intensive 2-4 week residential enrichment program on a university campus.

### VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT

Weekly mentoring and tutoring sessions, as well as an open environment to connect and build community through virtual hangouts.



## Media Handles



Please follow our social media and stay connected with our academies and alumni programs

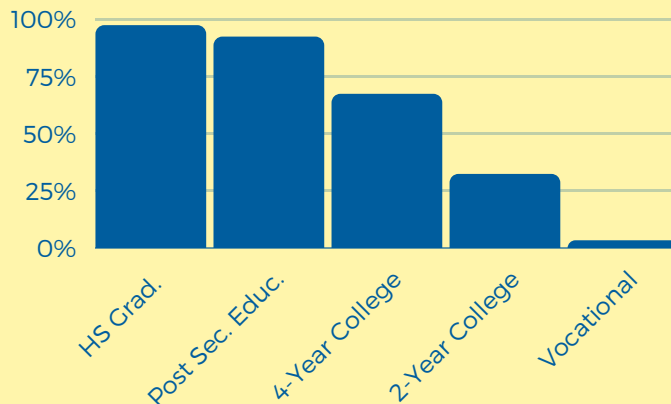


@FirsStarInc | @FirstStar\_Alumni | @FirstStarSteam | @fs.scholaradvisorycommittee

# FIRST STAR SCHOLARS ARE BEATING THE ODDS

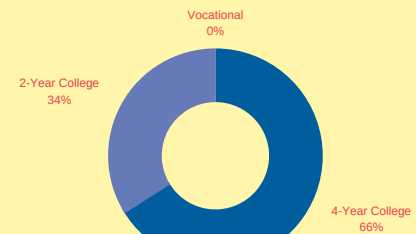
## NATIONAL GRADUATING CLASS

2023-2024 ACADEMIC YEAR

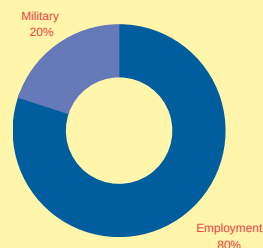


All data above and to the right is representative of internal data collected by First Star National and all data is self-reported by Academy Directors.

## POST SECONDARY EDUCATION



## NON POST SECONDARY EDUCATION



## 2023 STEAM

This summer First Star hosted the summer campaign First Star "STEAM in the Summer" Day, a fun, collaborative, interactive day of scholarly engagement in science, engineering, technology, arts, and mathematics. 100 % of our participating academies accessed the grant funding to support scholar participation in STEAM programming for Spring or Summer of this year. **KVC scholars spent a week at our host university, Fairmont State University, learning about careers and majors in STEM.**



## CELEBRATING SCHOLAR VOICE



The First Star Scholar Advisory Committee created a podcast series titled the Scholar Voice Podcast where they engaged in dialogue around advocacy and leadership development to build community with foster youth across the network.

The podcast is housed on our Youtube page, check it out!

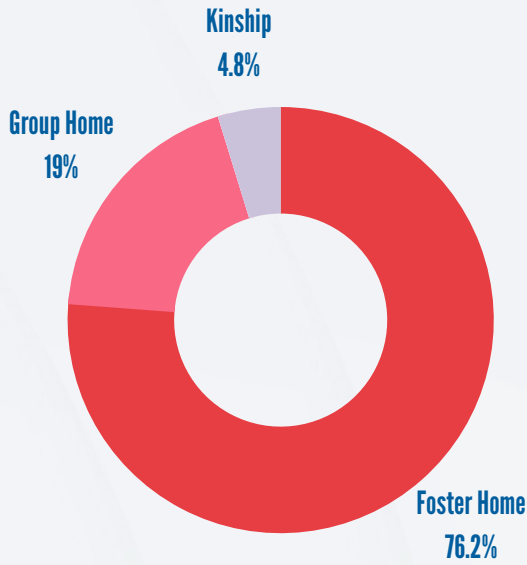


The First Star Alumni Program's goal is to remain connected and ensure Alumni have access to resources and the First Star network as they transition into adulthood, career, and advanced education.

- 63% of the 2023 graduating class enrolled in the Alumni Program
- The 2023 Alumni Awards Show awarded our largest graduating senior class and almost 30 Alumni during our annual community celebration in June 2023

# FIRST STAR KVC WEST VIRGINIA ACADEMY DATA

## Scholar Data

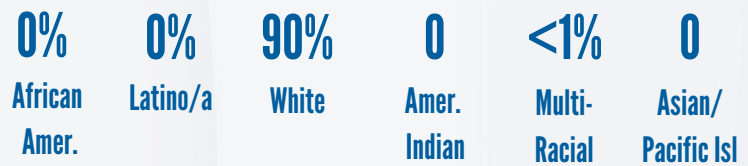


Foster Home	76%
Group Home	19%
Reunified with Biological Parents	0%
Adopted	0%
Guardianship	0%
Kinship Care	<1%
Indep. Living / Emanc.	0%
Other	0%

### GENDER IDENTIFICATION



### RACE/ETHNICITY



### GRADE LEVEL



### CLASS OF 2023

100% of First Star KVC West Virginia Academy seniors graduated from high school in 2023!

*100% of FS KVC W. Virginia graduates are pursuing higher education opportunities!*

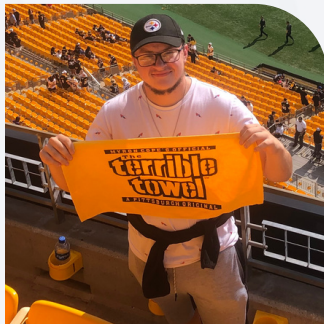


# PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS



Academics - Mathematics, Language Arts, Science and SAT Prep classes  
Teambuilding Activities - led by Youth Coach mentor staff

Lifeskills - Social Emotional Learning, Dance, Financial Literacy, Power Chats, Art, and Career Exploration workshops



## Summer Transitions: Senior Story



John is academically gifted and has always had an affinity for math; he even competed in state-wide math competitions in middle and high school. Unfortunately, both his parents passed away, and he entered foster care during his first year in high school. Even after multiple placements and school changes, John managed to maintain a 4.0 GPA and never lost sight of his desire to go to college. John explored various careers in mathematics, met with college professors, and decided his true passion was to become a high school math teacher. John enjoys breaking down the complexities of math and explaining it in ways that are easier to understand. John is a natural leader and continues to work with First Star as a Peer Mentor. We are incredibly proud of John and his journey to become an educator. John is currently a freshman at Concord University in West Virginia. He's an avid tennis player, a die-hard Steelers fan, and a talented karaoke singer.

"First Star has given me many opportunities and resources I didn't know about. They introduced me to college staff and professors who helped me understand the path to education and my passion in life." - John

## ACADEMY SPOTLIGHT



### INTRODUCING NEW ACADEMY DIRECTOR

Valerie Nichols



Valerie Nichols is a therapist who joined the Kanawha KVC team in August 2019. She has a Master's Degree in Counseling from Marshall University, and truly has the 'heart of a social worker' in her approach with the children and families with whom she works. Valerie lives in the Kanawha County area, and enjoys traveling to National Parks with her family.

### ACADEMY STAFF SPOTLIGHT

I am incredibly proud of our scholars and their achievements. Not only have their grades improved, but what's even more impressive is the hope and optimism they now have about their futures. During the Summer Academy, they explored career opportunities with industry professionals, participated in team-building exercises, and learned life skills that will help them transition into adulthood. They see a world full of opportunities for success after high school and truly understand the importance of higher education. It's a fantastic transformation to witness!



### SCHOLAR TESTIMONIALS

"First Star has become my second family!" - Daren

"I like being in First Star; it allows me to see that other kids like me are going through the same things. The program makes me feel secure and know that I am not alone. I feel like First Star is something all foster kids should have access to because of the support and how it makes foster care easier". - Arionna

I would definitely recommend First Star to other kids in foster care. It's a life changer. You get to meet a lot of good people and learn a lot of important stuff, like life skills that I wouldn't have learned without First Star. - Addison



# SUMMER ACADEMY HIGHLIGHTS

KVC hosted Monthly Sessions

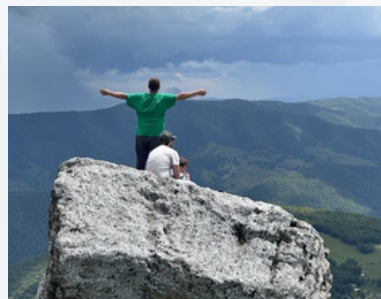
**Session 1:**  
JUNE 18th - JUNE 25th

**Session 2:**  
JUNE 25th - July 1st



## WVU Launch Lab

Our scholars toured the internationally-recognized West Virginia University LaunchLab, a comprehensive, one-stop innovation and commercialization center. We learned how products are developed from concept to launch. We met with Dr. Carrie White, Executive, and Carla Posey, Prototype Engineer. Our scholars were able to see various prototypes of current design projects, and we collaborated as teams to build sample products to demonstrate how the design process works.



## Experiential Learning

Our scholars spent a week at Experience Learning, at Spruce Knob, West Virginia. Experience Learning specializes in wilderness-based programs, offering participants the opportunity to go beyond the classroom through a combination of cooperative living, hands-on science activities, self-sufficiency, and group learning. By immersing themselves in the landscape, experience, and each other, students form bonds and foster confidence that will last a lifetime. Our scholars participated in orienteering and learned how to navigate to the top of Spruce Knob using only a compass and relying on teamwork to navigate to the top. Other activities included canoeing, river snorkeling, mountain biking, fly fishing, cave spelunking, cooking classes, team building exercises, capped off by a talent show on our last night.



## Huntington Bank: Financial Literacy Workshop

Huntington Bank gave a presentation on the importance of financial responsibility, followed by a real-life scenario in which our scholars were assigned a budget and tasked with managing monthly finances, which included purchasing a car, mortgage/rent, food, entertainment expenses, and investments and savings. Afterward, we toured one of Huntington Bank's Fairmont Branches, where the Branch President, Carletta Edwards, gave us a tour, discussed employment opportunities, and yes... let us see the vault!

