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Volunteering with Project F.O.C.U.S.

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What is Project F.O.C.U.S.

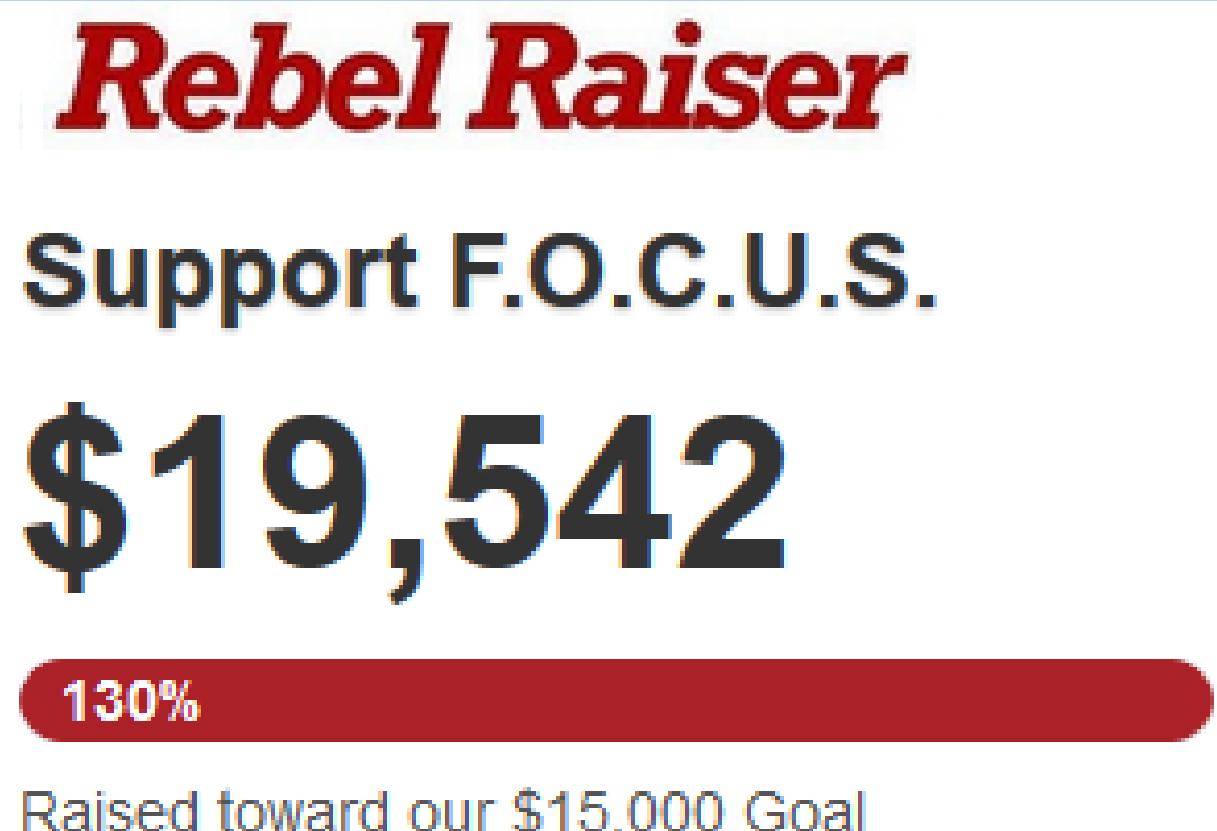


- **Long Form:** “Forming Occupational and Community Understanding for Success”
- **In Simple Terms:** Project F.O.C.U.S. helps those with developmental and intellectual disabilities achieve their academic/employment goals.
- **History:** Technically, Project F.O.C.U.S. came into being in 2013. However, the first student was accepted into the program in the Spring of 2015. Because of the nature of the program, periodic and successful ‘RebelRaiser’ campaigns have been held to supplement funding. This has helped the program to continually increase the amount of students they are able to accept.

The Social Issue Addressed

- **Project Importance:** Project F.O.C.U.S. is addressing the issue of education for those with developmental disabilities. This is an important ‘focus’—especially here in Nevada.
- **Abysmal Performance:** According to the Guinn Center, only 29% of college students with intellectual disabilities in Nevada graduated from 2014 – 2015. During this same period of time 71.3% of Nevada students graduated college. That is a massive 42.3 points of difference. This ranks Nevada as the worst in the ‘Intermountain West’, and one of the worst in the entire country.
- **Ideal Situation:** The ideal situation for Project F.O.C.U.S. would involve all students with intellectual disabilities having an equal opportunity for education and employment.
- **My Approach:** While Project F.O.C.U.S. has a noble goal, because of the ‘Project’ paradigm it follows, it is unlikely to succeed long-term. A better way of going about this ‘Social Change’ would be to have a top-down approach to education. How I would go about doing this would involve making the exceptions and assistance a part of the functionality of the DRC. Instead of being opt-in, make it mandatory for students with developmental disabilities to have these accommodations.

	All Students %	Students with Disabilities %	Gap %
Nevada	71.3	29.0	42.3
Arizona	77.4	64.4	13.0
California	82.0	65.0	17.0
Colorado	77.3	53.8	23.5
New Mexico	68.6	59.3	9.3
Texas	89.0	78.2	10.8
Utah	84.8	67.9	16.9



References:
“Pathways to Nowhere: Post Secondary Transitions for Students with Disabilities in Nevada.” Guinn Center Research, www.guinncenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Guinn_Pathways_Jan-2017.pdf.
Morton, Keith. “The Irony of Service: Charity, Project and Social Change in Service-Learning.” Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 1995.
“Home Page – UNLV F.O.C.U.S.” Project F.O.C.U.S., www.unlvcoe.org/focus.
Cortiella, Candace and Horowitz, Sheldon H. “The State of Learning Disabilities: Facts, Trends and Emerging Issues.”. New York: National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2014.

Volunteer Experience

- **My Role:** As a volunteer, I was tasked with helping students complete various assignments. Most of these assignments involved me helping with English—something I am quite comfortable with.
- **Student Role:** Students within the program are to socialize and work on assignments for each course they take. The main difference between this and normal course work is the loosened requirements. Other than that, the coursework is virtually the same.
- **Expectations:** Coming into this Service Learning project, I expected it to be a tutoring-based experience—mainly helping with course work. While that was partially the case, it wasn’t nearly as prevalent as I expected it to be.
- **Views Challenged:** When I first started to volunteer, I expected it to be quite difficult for me to communicate effectively. But, my fears were quickly alleviated when I found out that wouldn’t be the case. This changed my entire outlook regarding those with intellectual disabilities.