



## **Youth Transition Action Teams Initiative**

Leveraging Community Resources to Ensure  
Successful Transitions for Foster Youth

### **Cross-System Collaboration and Partnerships**

#### **Introduction**

Youth serving organizations and community teams are striving to develop coordinated and connected youth-serving systems. Increasingly, funders are asking for evidence that communities and organizations are coordinating services and collaborating effectively. Practitioners and decision-makers are frequently in search of strategies for successfully partnering across systems – child welfare, workforce, mental health, and education. In response to these inquiries, New Ways to Work partnered with the California Institute of Mental Health (CIMH) on March 27<sup>th</sup> to host a content conference call on the topic of Cross-System Collaboration and Partnerships. The call was part of the CIMH Transition Age Youth Collaborative and the Youth Transition Action Team Initiative at New Ways to Work.

Using the nationally-recognized framework, [Elements of a Comprehensive Youth-Serving System](#), New Ways to Work discussed how organizations and communities across the country have used this framework and other tools to guide their cross-system collaborative work and to support partnerships. Also featured was a facilitated discussion with practitioners from the following counties who shared information about their successful partnerships and the programs or products they created as a result.

- Orange County Partnership between Workforce & Mental Health
- Los Angeles Cross-System City & County Partnerships
- Shasta County Cross-System Partnerships & Youth Resource Fair

#### **Strategies for Cross-System Collaboration**

The strategies and experiences shared by practitioners that sustain successful cross-system collaborations and partnerships are similar. The All Youth-One System Frameworks support these collaborations to create sustainable partnerships. Successful partnerships convene leaders and promote policy, create linkages and connect systems, build awareness, and measure effectiveness to improve overall program practice. The following summaries highlight specific strategies and experiences agencies and providers have had when creating cross-system collaborations and partnerships between workforce, child welfare, mental health agencies and providers and other youth-serving agencies and organizations.

#### **Convene Leaders and Promote Policy**

Successful partnerships convene local leaders, practitioners, and customers across disciplines to support systems improvement. The success of the partnerships depends on their ability to:

- Ensure youth participation throughout the system
- Develop local policies and adjust regulations and procedures
- Align funding to follow priorities
- Make commitments public
- Identify and enlist influential champions

Successful partnerships set attainable goals, and garner commitment and involvement of leadership. The following strategies ensure participation in the partnership, which promotes policy and aligns systems. As a Youth Transition Action Team County, LA County began their collaboration by convening key stakeholders from the city, education, probation, workforce areas, community based organizations, and other partners, to discuss opportunities the City and County had to better work together. When the team first came together, they had to build a better understanding of the different responsibilities within the

County and City. The team then decided they would have the most success if they focused on the school district. Work began within the school to improve students work readiness skills by referring them to WIA services and later a summer employment program was started.

### **Create Linkages and Connect Systems**

Through a successful partnership, a comprehensive youth-serving system is created to ensure successful transitions for all youth. Successful partnerships:

- Involve youth in all facets of systems development;
- Assess all existing services, opportunities, and supports;
- Address barriers and gaps;
- Implement an integrated network that builds on existing practices; and,
- Build linkages across systems and organizations.

Partnerships are often formed to better link youth to services offered by the county to ensure services are being adequately used and not being duplicated. Counties use mapping activities to determine where services are being offered and to address the barriers or gaps in these services. Mapping activities can also be used to determine where services and staff can be co-located between agencies to build linkages across systems and organizations. Links that connect systems to ensure successful outcomes for youth can be developed through mapping activities.

Currently, LA County is mapping all of the Independent Living Skills Programs and workforce centers within the county to see if one-stop employment centers and Independent Living Skills Programs can be co-located. As a strategy to address barriers and gaps in services, Orange County also plans to co-locate their one-stop employment services and mental health services. In order to better prepare youth, Shasta Twenty-first Century Career Connections hired a counselor to work within the schools to prepare students for student led IEPs and to assess all existing services, opportunities, and supports for youth as they transition to adulthood.

### **Build Awareness**

An effective partnership builds awareness to ensure the community is aware of youth issues and demands a system that keeps youth at the center. Partnerships build awareness by:

- Engaging youth in marketing and advocacy activities;
- Implementing a strategic communication plan;
- Publicizing and promoting efforts and results;
- Sharing information, research, and practices across disciplines; and,
- Conducting outreach to families and communities.

By utilizing the following strategies, partnerships are building community awareness of youth issues. Shasta Twenty-first Century Career Connections developed a Transition Resource Fair to provide a venue for Youth-Serving Professionals to learn about available community resources to help youth make positive transitions. The Transition Resource Fair evolved from the Youth Transition Action Team Initiative Fall Foster Youth Employment Forums, Sponsored through a partnership of: New Ways to Work, the Child and Family Policy Institute of California, and Casey Family Programs. The Forum served as the impetus for partners to discuss the most effective strategy to inform the community about available resources.

Orange County is also addressing the sustainability of the communication effort, by assessing the impact of staff changes on the effectiveness of the collaboration. A strategic communication plan will help Orange County share information, research, and practices across disciplines even with staff transitions.

## Measure Effectiveness

Outcome indicators are used to measure effectiveness and examine issues of disproportionate participation and disparate outcomes within successful partnerships. A thriving partnership will:

- Engage youth and partners in measuring results;
- Establish core outcomes across disciplines;
- Set measurable individual and system objectives;
- Create common data and evaluation measures; and,
- Use data to measure effectiveness and improve program performance.

Successful partnerships will use data to measure effectiveness and improve program performance. Orange County measures program effectiveness by monitoring program referrals quarterly to determine who has been referred and where for WIA services. By creating common data and evaluation measures, the quarterly report is used to make sure the neediest youth, foster youth, and emancipating youth are receiving services.

## Improve Program Practice

A successful partnership has been formed when regular and sustained efforts to align systems and improve services are underway that develop a clear understanding of the other systems. Through these partnerships relationships have been strengthened and youth are better prepared to transition to adulthood. Successful partnerships:

- Promote and ensure permanence;
- Align practices among systems;
- Conduct staff development activities;
- Engage workplace and community partners; and,
- Provide the communication link.

In order to improve program practice, partnerships have developed common tools and forms, created cross-agency trainings to improve the understanding of services being offered, and developed cross-system referrals to better support cross-system collaboration. Orange County developed the [County of Orange One-Stop System/Youth Program Service Referral](#) form that is used to refer youth to program services within the County. Orange County has also formed an emancipation sub-committee, which is a subsection of the Board of Supervisors and serves as an oversight committee. The committee was formed to support probation, but has been extended to include all youth who age-out of the system. The committee provides a communication link and offers the partners an opportunity to better align services to better serve youth.

Staff development is a critical element of a successful partnership. Partners have to be familiar with all of the services offered by partnering agencies and their roles and responsibilities. LA County has created a cross-system training for social workers, probation officers and other youth workers to ensure service providers understand and refer youth to available services.

Programs have also been invited to share their successes with cross-system collaboration with other youth serving agencies. Shasta County's Futures Project is one of eighteen programs nationally chosen to develop dialogue about cross-systems collaborations. This dialogue provides other youth serving agencies examples of successful strategies that improve cross-system collaboration, which enhances program practice, and ensures better outcomes for transition age youth.

## **Additional Information and Resources**

- View the materials from the content conference call  
[www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytat/events.html#twoz](http://www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytat/events.html#twoz)
- For more information about the Youth Transition Action Teams go to  
[www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytat.html](http://www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytat.html)
- Foster Youth Employment Forums Summary Report  
[www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/FYSummaryReport.pdf](http://www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/FYSummaryReport.pdf)
- To view additional promising practices please visit  
[www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytat/practices.html](http://www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytat/practices.html)