



Foster Youth Employment California Regional Forums 2006

Creating Successful Employment Opportunities
for Transitioning Foster Youth

Foster Youth Employment Forum Impact Report

Annually in California, more than 4,000 youth age out of foster care at the age of eighteen. The experience of transition to the adult world can be overwhelming, as these young people often lack the basic skills, experience, and resources essential for successful adulthood. In many cases they are left to navigate the range of potential support, educational, and career related services and opportunities available to them by themselves as they prepare for life on their own. These young adults leaving foster care can achieve economic success in today's complex world. However, like all young people, they need the opportunities, support and preparation for life in the 21st century that we take as a given for our own children.



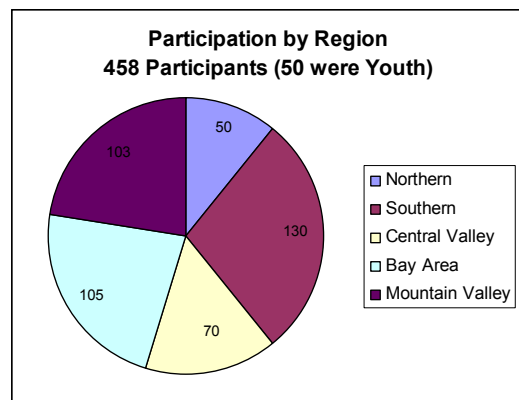
Pre-employment training, career preparation, and experience in the workplace are central to making a successful transition to adulthood for current and former foster youth. Yet professionals in the child welfare system often are not well connected to local workforce development programs, while those that focus on the employment preparation needs of young people are often not familiar with the workings of the child welfare system, or the particular stressors facing foster youth in transition.

Workforce areas throughout California are increasing the focus of their Workforce Investment Act funded youth programs to serve youth in the foster care system. However, many report challenges in understanding the child welfare system and in effectively identifying, recruiting, and serving these youth.

In the fall of 2006, with the generous support of Casey Family Programs, New Ways to Work partnered with the Child and Family Policy Institute of California to create cross-system awareness and improve local collaboration between county child welfare agencies and local workforce investment areas through a series of forums conducted across the state. The intent of the forums was to better connect these two systems and to highlight and promote cross-agency approaches to better serve foster youth throughout California. **The Foster Youth Employment Forums** provided an opportunity for participants to learn about quality local programs, to develop a working knowledge of both the WIA workforce and child welfare systems, and to meet potential new partners and colleagues to collaborate with in the future.

Cross-system Participation

Throughout the state, over 450 county staff members and representatives from child welfare, workforce development, juvenile justice, education, state agencies and leadership, and other partners attended the forums to discuss and learn about programs in their region that have implemented effective strategies for improving employment opportunities for foster youth. In addition, about 50 youth



(primarily current and former foster youth) attended the forums and participated as keynote speakers, panelists, and participants in conversations about their county's services. Individual registrants identified affiliation within the following youth-serving systems and/or agencies:

- Of the 458 total participants:
- 37% Workforce Development
 - 27% Child Welfare Services
 - 30% Social Services
 - 27% Education
 - 33% Youth Development
 - 14% Juvenile Justice
 - 16% Other

Employment Forum Impacts

458 participants attended one of five regional forums resulting in heightened awareness of the child welfare and WIA workforce systems.

95% of forum participants felt that key information provided about either the child welfare or WIA workforce systems was useful. The information provided regarding system structure, governance, funding and critical issues was discussed. Numerous participants talked about sharing the information with colleagues, new staff and community members to create a broader understanding of each system. In one case, county leadership has tailored the PowerPoint presentation prepared for the forums to their own community, and are using it to train staff in the workforce, child welfare, youth development and juvenile justice arenas.

The full PowerPoint presentation can be downloaded at www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/FYForumSlideShow.pdf.

Twenty-five quality practices were documented and disseminated, many of which have the potential for replication statewide.

New Ways staff collected promising practices on the topic of foster youth and employment, including many of the programs described by panelists at the forums. Ten promising practices were compiled and disseminated to all participants on a CD along with a variety of tools and resources from the Youth Transition Action Team Initiative. 15 additional practices have been collected since the forums were conducted. Each practice is indexed by organization, subject, All Youth-One System element and Youth Transition Action Team functional area. The full collection of 25 promising practices is available online at www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytat/practices.html.

Each forum featured a panel presentation where quality practices from the region were showcased. The panels featured innovative ways to make one-stop centers more youth friendly, strategies to structure projects and deliver services across systems, effective ways that agencies and programs are providing pre-employment and career preparation services to foster youth, and specific programs that provide meaningful employment opportunities for youth in transition.

What People Liked (in their own words):

- “It was a representation of many different providers, including youth.”
- “The networking opportunities and learning about other’s programs.”
- “Networking in the context of problem solving.”
- “This was a lot of well presented and good information. Great resources provided.”
- “I liked each segment of the forum. However, I enjoyed the panel best. I also liked the visuals and the interaction between the different groups. Thank you also for the directory of people.”
- “The opportunity to hear directly from the youth. The resources are easy to duplicate.”
- “Good connections with some people that had not been engaged before.”
- “Loved having the youth talk about their experiences.”
- “The system design/discussion and outcomes of systems, and bringing it together with philanthropy and funding sources.”
- “The networking opportunities. The overview of CWS and employment services (developing a shared vocabulary).”
- “Networking, collaborating, brainstorming, and interacting.”

County and multi-county discussion groups shared and discussed coordinated approaches to providing meaningful employment opportunities for current and former foster youth.

During the daylong forum, participants were given the opportunity to meet by county (or in some cases multiple counties in the same region of the state) to discuss current collaborative strategies underway and to develop plans for future collaboration between systems.

Highlights from the discussions included plans to:

- Develop joint projects such as youth resource centers and pre-employment/employment programs.
- Conduct cross-team training and host cross agency meetings. Many included ideas on how to bring line-staff together from various agencies. Participants expressed excitement about taking the information shared at the forum and disseminating it system-wide in their community. The need for cross-training regarding emancipation issues and eligibility criteria were common themes, as well as ideas on how to better communicate across systems. Ideas included the use of technology to facilitate better communication and methods to increase familiarity and trust cross-system.
- Target outreach to other systems including juvenile justice, education (including School Attendance Review Boards), Cal-learn, Transition-age Youth partnerships under the Mental Health Services Act, and others.
- Design and implement common enrollment and release forms, coordinate case plans, as well as other technical ways to better support the alignment of programs.
- Engage youth in local planning and decision-making. A number of areas have developed or plan to develop internal employment opportunities as a strategy to increase youth voice in their system.
- Better utilize WIA workforce programs for foster youth.
- Provide more work-based learning and career preparation opportunities for foster youth.

The full transcription of this segment of the forums can be found in Appendix C.

Participants identified personal actions or commitments as a result of forum participation.

At the end of each day, participants were asked what they would do or do differently as a result of their participation in the forum. Participants indicated they would:

- **Support Foster Youth Access to One-Stops:** Participants indicated they would: increase support in guiding youth to resources through local One-Stop Centers; establish employment as a goal towards emancipation; register all youth at the One-Stop and focus more diligently on employment readiness for foster youth; or focus on making One-Stops more (foster) youth friendly.
- **Network with New Colleagues:** Participants indicated they would: reach out to new contacts and collaborate more effectively; strengthen connections to, conduct forums with, and work more with neighboring counties; or work more closely with agencies across systems.
- **Collaborate Across Agencies & Systems:** Participants indicated they would: increase collaboration of agencies; have collaboration meetings each month; or continue to build partnerships.

What people said:

I will.....

- “Focus more diligently on employment readiness for youth.”
- “Reach out to new contacts and collaborate.”
- “Develop resource sheet for use by youth/servers for each element of All Youth-One System.”
- “Look at ways to improve services for our underserved foster/probation youth in the area of employment and work skills.”
- “Explore collaborations to expand existing programs.”
- “Connect and collaborate more.”
- “Share YTAT materials with local partners.”

- **Apply the Youth Transition Action Team approach:** Participants indicated they would explore connecting to or commit to forming a Youth Transition Action Team.
- **Better Utilize Resources:** Participants indicated they would apply shared resources to issues facing transitioning foster youth and continue to educate themselves and share resources with colleagues and partners.

New Ways and the Child and Family Policy Institute distributed and posted on-line resources for child welfare service and workforce professionals seeking to implement or improve programs and initiatives that address the employment needs of transitioning foster youth.

The following resources were provided to forum participants.

1. Youth Transition Action Team Guidebook
2. USDOL New Vision for Youth
3. What Works Policy Brief : Foster Youth Employment
4. Foster Youth Employment Regional Forums 2006 PowerPoint
5. California Service Area Map
6. The Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act (AB 636): Improving Results for Children and Youth in California
7. Getting the Job Done: Effectively Preparing Foster Youth for Employment
8. Understanding the Child Welfare System in California: A Primer for Service Providers and Policymakers
9. Training & Employment Notice No 18 – 05 – John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program
10. On-Line Resources to Support Foster Youth Educational Success
11. National Governor’s Association Policy Academy Factsheet
12. Common Measures At-A-Glance
13. New Strategic Vision for the Delivery of Youth Services under the Workforce Investment Act, Employment and Training Administration
14. The Workforce Investment Act: A Primer
15. Foster Care Legislation Summary 2006
16. California Education Factsheets
17. Workforce Investment Act Funds – Pre-Vocational Training, Governor’s Discretionary Grants RFP

State policy recommendations emerged.

In an effort to inform ongoing state-level work and focus on addressing the employment needs of transitioning foster youth, participants were asked to identify barriers to cross-system work and to highlight areas or issues that state policy makers need to address.

Throughout the forum proceedings the following recommendations impacting state level policy emerged:

- Pre-employment training beyond what is offered (or available) through WIA is needed
- Cross-system training and technical assistance opportunities (such as the forums) need to be expanded
- Awareness of the importance of career preparation opportunities needs to be built within the child welfare system (including care givers)
- All foster youth should be provided meaningful employment experience prior to aging-out
- Barriers to cross-system data sharing need to be eliminated
- Common ways of measuring success and reporting progress need to be established across systems
- Better connections between and integration of ILP and WIA programs need to be built
- Additional mental health services need to be made available

- Local areas need help in building capacity to serve foster youth and other out-of-school youth
- Transportation barriers need to be addressed
- Services, including one-stop services, should be offered in after-school hours
- One-stops need to be encouraged and supported to be more youth-friendly
- Training is needed on how to utilize Chafee vouchers for education and training
- The issue of program instability (creating a transient staff that results in distrust from some youth) needs to be addressed
- Practitioners need examples of and time to talk about the technical aspects of blending services

These recommendations will be further explored and refined with individuals from throughout the state at the follow-up session to the forums being held at the California Workforce Association Youth Conference on January 16, 2007.

Sponsorship & Thought Partners

The Foster Youth Employment Forums were sponsored through a partnership of New Ways to Work, the Child and Family Policy Institute of California (an affiliate of the County Welfare Directors Association), and Casey Family Programs.

In addition, the forums were organized with significant support and input from regional planning teams, consisting of

- Local child welfare, social service, and workforce development professionals
- Engaged leadership from the statewide Foster Youth Employment, Training, and Housing Taskforce
- California Department of Social Services
- California Workforce Investment Board
- Employment Development Department
- National Governor's Association Policy Academy on Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care
- California Workforce Association
- California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office

Follow-up & Next Steps

During the 2007 program year, New Ways will first share lessons learned from the regional forums with participants at the California Workforce Association Youth Conference on January 16, 2007. Policy recommendations will be further developed during the pre-conference session with the purpose of informing the policy agenda of the Foster Youth Education, Employment and Housing Taskforce and the National Governor's Association Policy Academy committee focused on foster youth employment issues.

In addition, New Ways will use recommendations from the regional forums to expand the Youth Transition Action Team initiative, reach out to and include more counties in the initiative and focus YTAT approach on influencing state policy and improving local practice. The YTAT will continue a series of communication strategies including an expanded listserv, newsletters, issue briefs and the continued collection of promising practices.

Finally, New Ways will seek additional investors to secure funding to support follow up on the employment forums and produce additional forums focused on topics such as access to career technical education programs and career related programs in the K-12 system, and transitional youth systems building. New Ways plans to continue the momentum that has begun with the Youth Transition Action Team initiative and the 2006 Foster Youth Employment regional forums, and will continue to focus attention and local action on the employment needs of foster youth.

Full Report Appendices

The following appendices supplementing the full report are available online at www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/FYForumsFullReport.pdf.

- Appendix A: Local Focus & Planning
- Appendix B: Regional Forum Details
- Appendix C: Community Collaborative Ideas by Region
- Appendix D: Results of the Acronym Activity
- Appendix F: Listing of Promising Practices
- Appendix G: Youth Transition Action Teams Factsheet
- Appendix H: Forum Facilitators

Additional Information & Resources

For more information about Casey Family Programs, go to <http://www.casey.org/Home>. For more information about the coordinating organization, New Ways to Work, and the sponsoring initiative, Youth Transition Action Teams, go to www.newwaystowork.org. For more information about the Child and Family Policy Institute of California, go to www.cfpic.org.



The Foster Youth Employment Forums were made possible with the support of Casey Family Programs.