

Coming this Fall: Regional Convenings on Foster Youth Employment

Regional convenings on connecting foster youth to employment opportunities are being planned for the fall. The forums will provide an opportunity to present information about and share examples of successful strategies for supporting gainful employment and work-based learning opportunities for foster youth. Regions will highlight local successful programs and services from multiple systems, including workforce (through One-Stops and other service providers); Child Welfare (through ILP and other programs); and education (through school-to-career and small schools). Community teams will identify inspirational speaker(s) and include a panel of people who can discuss their programs, foster youth who've experienced them, and/or employers who have been local champions.

The planning committee, a subgroup of the Foster Youth Employment, Training, and Housing Taskforce, facilitated by Karen Grace-Kahoe, California State Ombudsman for Foster Care, is coordinating the effort. "We are currently identifying communities within each of these regions to plan, coordinate, and host each of the regional forums, help to identify panelists, and recruit participants from throughout the region," said Chandra Larsen of New Ways.

Stay tuned for email updates and announcements for the fall Foster Youth Regional Employment Convenings, or contact Chandra if you would like to be part of the planning committee at clarsen@newwaystowork.org.

FOSTER YOUTH EMPLOYMENT REGIONAL CONVENINGS – REGIONAL COMMITTEES:

1. **Northern:** Counties of Del Norte, Siskiyou, Modoc, Humboldt, Trinity, Shasta, Lassen, Tehama, Plumas, Glenn, Butte, Colusa, and Lake.
2. **Mountain Valley:** Counties of Sierra, Nevada, Placer, Yuba, Sutter, Yolo, Sacramento, Amador, Alpine, Calaveras, Tuolumne, and Mono.
3. **Bay Area:** Counties of Mendocino, Sonoma, Napa, Solano, Marin, Contra Costa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Alameda, Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, San Benito, and Monterey.
4. **Valley:** Counties of San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Mariposa, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare, San Luis Obispo, and Kern.
5. **Southern:** Counties of Inyo, San Bernardino, Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Riverside, Orange, San Diego, and Imperial.

San Francisco Launches a Youth-Led Transitional Youth Task Force

On March 15th at the San Francisco *Building Bridges* roundtable, the city's Transitional Youth Taskforce (TYTF) was sworn in by Mayor Gavin Newsom. The TYTF is addressing issues affecting the lives of youth transitioning to adulthood. It is working in partnership with the San Francisco Youth Commission and utilizing strategies developed through the Youth Transition Action Teams Initiative. The TYTF is serving as the San Francisco Youth Transition Action Team.

The TYTF intends to bring together all systems of care that currently work with at-risk transitioning youth, including city departments that serve youth, the Adult Probation Department, and higher education providers to define ways that these systems can work together more effectively. Currently, the TYTF is using the Youth Transition Action Team Initiative's [Elements of a Comprehensive Youth-Serving System](#) framework in order to identify and plan for the work of the team. (PDF 308 kb) ([www.newwaystowork.org/mastertools/Frameworks and Charts/YCi/AYOSElementsFramework.pdf](http://www.newwaystowork.org/mastertools/Frameworks%20and%20Charts/YCi/AYOSElementsFramework.pdf))

To read more about the Task Force, see the [full article](#). (PDF 68 kb) (www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/transitionmay06/TYTF.pdf)

To contact the San Francisco Transitional Youth Taskforce, email Marlo Simmons, Adolescent Health Coordinator for the Department of Children, Youth and Their Families at marlo@dcyf.org

ABOUT THE TRANSITION YOUTH TASK FORCE

[Transitional Youth Taskforce Charge Sheet](#) (PDF 93 kb) (www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/TYTFChargeSheet.pdf)

[Resolution to Form a Transitional Youth Taskforce](#) (PDF 67 kb) (www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/0304-005TYTFResolution.pdf)

New Foster Care Legislation Issue Brief and Overview

Youth Transition Action Teams are comprised of leaders from across the spectrum of each participating county's public and private sectors. Team members are committed to articulating and bringing into being a comprehensive youth-serving system for all their transitioning and emancipated foster youth. While dedicated to this broad vision, many Team members find they need to get up to speed on the challenges facing foster youth in arenas where they are not experts—and they need information on supports that are already available.

To supply background information in the arena of legislation, New Ways has produced two documents on legislation affecting current and former foster youth. The first is an issue brief called *Foster Youth: Legal Issues and Legislation*, and the second is a synopsis of key foster care legislation from 1982 to 2005, entitled *An Overview of California Foster Care Legislation*.

The issue brief, [Foster Youth Legal Issues and Legislation](#) (PDF 202 kb), is organized around the needs that foster youth themselves say are most fundamental, and it highlights legislation that seeks to address these needs. The brief was developed from remarks made by the panelists on the March 16, 2006 initiative content conference call: Miriam Krinsky Executive Director of the Children's Law Center of Los Angeles; Kathryn Dresslar, Staff to Assemblyman Mark Leno (D–San Francisco); and Jennifer Troia, Equal Justice Works Fellow at the Youth Law Center. (www.newwaystowork.org/publications/fosteryouth/FosterYouthLegalIssuesBrief.pdf)

[An Overview of California Foster Care Legislation](#) (PDF 112 kb) provides synopses of key legislation from 1982 through 2005. It is organized by such administrative issues as system improvement and cross system collaboration and information sharing, and client issues such as family and sibling connections and kinship support. (www.newwaystowork.org/publications/fosteryouth/CAFosterCareLegislation.pdf)

COMING SOON: *An Overview of Educational Options for Foster Youth*

Call for Promising Practices that Support Foster Youth Transition

The Youth Transition Action Teams Initiative collects and shares stories of promising practices implemented by organizations that support transitioning and former foster youth as they enter adulthood. These practices come from a variety of locations and settings, and they serve a diverse range of young people. They are being carried out by organizations, agencies, and inter-disciplinary partnerships in child welfare, workforce development, education, civic and government bodies, and other community-based programs.

Call for Promising Practices: Foster Youth Transition

Share your promising practices with a statewide audience. Please share your promising practices with others throughout the state, highlighting your strategies to support current and former foster youth in academic achievement, career development, social services and supports, and youth leadership.

Suitable Subjects

Suggested topics include

- Youth-friendly One-Stops,
- WIA eligibility,
- Data collection and sharing,
- evaluation models,
- Strategies for gainful employment and work-based experiences,
- High school academic success,
- Support for transitions to college,
- Support for permanent relationships,
- Access to affordable transition housing, and
- Youth involvement in planning and decision-making.

For more information, contact Chandra Larsen at New Ways clarsen@newwaystowork.org or (707) 824-4000 ext. 21.

Content Call Resources Available at Youth Transition Action Teams Website

Five key topics have been addressed on Youth Transition Action Teams content conference calls since September:

- Evaluation and Data Collection
- Workforce Development for Foster Youth
- Legal Issues Facing Foster Youth
- Educational Options for Foster Youth
- Youth-Friendly One-Stops

Each call featured panelists with expertise in the topic describing their work, engaging in discussion with the New Ways facilitator, and answering questions from participants.

For each call, materials and links to panelists' organizations have been posted. These resources will remain available on the Youth Transition Action Teams' [Meetings and Events Archive](#) web page. (www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytat/events.html)

ON THE GROUND

Innovative Approaches from Around the State

Program Spotlight: The V.O.I.C.E.S. Emancipation Center of Napa County

Published in *Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development eUpdate* for March 2006. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

The V.O.I.C.E.S. (Voice Our Independent Choices for Emancipation Support) Emancipation Center of Napa County, California, opened its doors on Tuesday, November 22, 2005, and became the first-ever youth-led emancipation center in the United States. V.O.I.C.E.S. is a not-for-profit organization with the goal of creating comprehensive services and resources to support the successful transition of foster youth in Napa County to healthy, safe, productive, and independent adulthood. Ten dedicated emancipating/emancipated foster youth and adult partners from On the Move and Progress Foundation co-created the V.O.I.C.E.S. Emancipation Center to integrate systems and centralize resources and services in Napa County, build an intergenerational learning community, and develop holistic youth empowerment approaches to support emancipated foster youth to become independent and successful adults and community members.

On December 31, 2005, just over one month after V.O.I.C.E.S. opened its doors, the city of Napa was hit by a major thunderstorm. The Center was left flooded with at least one foot of standing water. The next morning the youth showed up at 8:00 am to begin removing furniture and carpet, saving what they could, and taking items that could not be salvaged to the dump. The youth then began working to secure donations to replace the items that had been destroyed.

The services and programs at V.O.I.C.E.S. are continually growing and developing. In addition to supporting young people with housing, employment, transportation, education needs, and everything in between, they are currently launching three projects:

- Arts Project – Which is one way for youth to explore the community of Napa Valley by offering exposure to different forms of art.
- Community Service Project – A way for young people to identify a community need and design a meaningful service project to address this need.
- Youth Led Trainings – A way for youth members to train adults who interact with youth about different ways to work collaboratively with each other.

As well as everything mentioned above, V.O.I.C.E.S. is currently piloting an internal youth empowerment program to foster personal, interpersonal, and professional learning, skill building, and career development. Their goal is to create a sustainable employment model to address the need for youth participation in all levels of the operation and visioning of V.O.I.C.E.S.

To learn more about V.O.I.C.E.S., call (707) 251-9432 or send them an email at voices.napavalley@sbcglobal.net.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

Funding Opportunity from the Administration for Children and Families

Grant: Collaboration between TANF and Child Welfare to Improve Child Welfare Program Outcomes

Organization: Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families

Deadline: June 19, 2006 (old date: May 18, 2006)

The purpose of this funding is (1) to demonstrate models of effective collaboration between public assistance —Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)—and child welfare agencies that will improve outcomes for children and youth who are in or are at risk of entering the child welfare system; (2) to evaluate and document the processes and outcomes of these collaborations; and (3) to develop identifiable sites that other states/locales seeking improved collaboration can look to for guidance, insight and possible replication. State, local, or special district governments and Native American tribal governments are eligible.

Contact: Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACYF)

www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/open/HHS-2006-ACF-ACYF-CW-0103.html

Youth Initiate, Design, and Testify at Hearing on Emancipation

On May 12, 2006 the California State Assembly Select Committee on Foster Care held a hearing in San Francisco on emancipation. The focus and the format of the hearing had been requested by CYC members and other youth, who set the agenda and chose the speakers. Six of the eight people testifying were current or former foster youth; the two adults—William C. Bell, Executive Director of Casey Family Programs, and Karen Grace-Kahoe, State Ombudsman for Foster Care— were chosen by the youth.

The California Assembly Select Committee on Foster Care held one of its public hearings on foster care on May 12 in San Francisco. Unlike earlier gatherings, this one was initiated by youth who approached the select committee and suggested that one of their hearings be designed by foster youth. The committee members readily agreed.

The hearing organizers, members of the California Youth Connection (CYC), designed the agenda and invited six youth from two different organizations and two adult speakers to participate—William C. Bell, President and Chief Executive Officer, Casey Family Programs; and Karen Grace-Kaho, California State Ombudsman for Foster Care in the California Department of Social Services. In addition, they arranged for

youth to be given top priority for speaking during the public comment period.

After the panelists spoke, more than two dozen youth lined up for a chance to make additional comments to the committee. Their stories echoed the others': adults who did not care or make an effort to connect them with services left them struggling; caring people and needed support services made all the difference. To read more about the hearing, see [full article](http://www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/transitionmay06/Hearing.pdf) (PDF 90 kb). (www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/transitionmay06/Hearing.pdf)

CYC CORNER

News from the California Youth Connection

CYC Member's Perspective on the Emancipation Hearing

By Nicole McGovern, Member, Alameda CYC Chapter



I was very happy with the turnout of the meeting. I loved looking back into the crowd and seeing so much support for foster youth!

All the speakers were really informative, and provided wonderful recommendations for everyone to think about. It's really wonderful to hear everyone's ideas and know that someone is really taking them seriously.

One of the most exciting parts of the meeting for me was when the mayor [Gavin Newsom of San Francisco] came to

speak. It was surprising because nobody expected him to be there, but more importantly than that, it was comforting to know that he understood some of the issues that we were addressing and that he really cared about and had a commitment to our cause.

Overall, the event was a huge success. The speakers on the agenda were clear and powerful, and at the end, when the meeting was opened up for comment, there were many people waiting to voice their concerns and solutions. The day, in a word, was empowering!

Nicole was one of three CYC members to testify. To read Nicole M^c Govern's testimony, [click here](http://www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/transitio nmay06/Testimony.pdf). (PDF 62 kb) (www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/transitio nmay06/Testimony.pdf)

FOSTER YOUTH INVITED TO TELL THEIR STORIES

California Assemblymember Rebecca Cohn (D–San Jose) is collecting life stories from current and former foster youth for a book. She invites any interested young person to contact her staff member Alicia Orozco at (916) 319-2024 or alicia.orozco@asm.ca.gov. They would like to have stories by July 1, 2006—or at least to have heard from youth by then saying they are working on something.

RESOURCE ROUNDUP

Publications & Materials

Education Handbook for Caregivers

A new handbook, [Helping Your Child Succeed in School: An Education Handbook for Parents and Caregivers of Children and Youth in the Foster Care System](#) (PDF 247 kb) is available. It covers the school system, special education, children's educational rights, parents' & caregivers' rights, and discipline. (www.newwaystowork.org/publications/fosteryouth/ParentHandbook2006.pdf)

Foster Care Education Fact Sheets

The California Foster Youth Education Task Force has created [Foster Care Education Fact Sheets](#) (PDF 238 kb), which cover AB 490, education rights, special education, nonpublic schools, AB 3632, functional behavioral assessments and behavioral intervention plans, school discipline, and special education discipline. (www.newwaystowork.org/publications/fosteryouth/CaliforniaEducationFactsheets.pdf)

Magazine by and for Foster Youth

[Represent](#), formerly called *Foster Care Youth United*, has been published bimonthly since 1993. The publisher, Youth Communication, helps teenagers develop their skills in reading, writing, thinking, and reflection, so they can acquire the information they need to make thoughtful choices about their lives. The theme of the May/June 06 issue is "Family Forever." (www.youthcomm.org/Publications/FCYU.htm)

Youth Development Message Board

The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development (NCWRC) has a [message board](#) where practitioners can discuss issues regarding Educational Training Vouchers and Independent/Transitional Living Programs. Visitors can ask a question of their peers or find out about programs or promising practices from across the country. Everyone is invited to join in the discussion. No registration is required. NCWRC is a service of the Department of Health and Human Services Children's Bureau. (www.nrcys.ou.edu/dboard)

CONNECTIONS

Timely Sources of Information

Casey Family Programs

www.casey.org

California Department of Social Services

www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb

Foster Care Alumni of America

www.fostercarealumni.org

Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care

<http://pewfostercare.org/>

Child Welfare League of America

www.cwla.org/

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

www.jimcaseyyouth.org/

Children's Law Center of Los Angeles

www.clcla.org

Youth Law Center

www.ylc.org

Youth Development Message Board

www.nrcys.ou.edu/dboard

National Center for Youth Law

www.youthlaw.org

Report on Nonresident Fathers

In [What About Dads?](#) from the Urban Institute, researchers present their findings on child welfare practices of identifying, locating, and involving fathers of children in foster care. They found that nonresident dads are not often involved in case planning and nearly half are never contacted by the child welfare agency. (www.urban.org/publications/411316.html)

Foster Care Alumni of America (FCAA)

FCAA is a new, national non-profit organization transforming the lives of children, youth and adults who share the foster care experience by connecting them into a well-supported and organized community and ensuring they become a powerful, collective voice of change for both individuals and the whole foster care system. The mission of Foster Care Alumni of America is to connect the alumni community and to transform policy and practice, ensuring opportunity for people in and from foster care. www.fostercarealumni.org

Report on Relative Caregivers

This Generations United report, titled [All Children Deserve a Permanent Home](#), highlights data that demonstrate the foster care system's significant reliance on relatives to care for children. The report also illustrates the need for subsidized guardianship for children for whom reunification or adoption is not viable. (http://ipath.gu.org/documents/A0/All_Children_Deserve_A_Permanent_Home.pdf)

Report on Kinship Care

The Urban Institute has issued a report on Kinship care, entitled [Trends in Service Receipt: Children in Kinship Care Gaining Ground](#). The report states that the standard of living for children in kinship care improved significantly between 1997 and 2002, according to the National Survey of America's Families. Factors such as living in poverty or without health insurance both showed a downward trend. (www.urban.org/publications/311310.html)

RESOURCE ROUNDUP, continued

Publications & Materials

Youth Today Report Roundup

From *Youth Today: The Newspaper on Youth Work*. Reproduced with permission of the publisher.
By Jennifer Moore

Child Welfare/Foster Care Resources

Health Care for Adolescents and Young Adults Leaving Foster Care: Policy Options for Improving Access

Center for Adolescent Health & the Law/National Adolescent Health Information Center

This issue brief describes the health status of foster care alumni and the medical hurdles they face upon leaving the child welfare system. It also summarizes policy options to improve access to health care for former foster youth.

Meeting the health care needs of the more than 20,000 youth who age out of foster care each year is critical to their successful transition to adulthood, according to adolescent health experts. Providing health insurance coverage is paramount for ensuring their access to dental exams, family planning, mental health services and treatment for illness and injury.

While the option to extend Medicaid and coverage under the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) to former foster youth up to age 21 has been available to the states since July 2005, only 10 states have implemented the expansion. Free. 8 pages. (919) 968-8850, www.cahl.org/PDFs/FCIssueBrief.pdf.

Program Evaluation: A Synthesis of Lessons Learned by Child Neglect Demonstration Projects

Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

In 1996 and 1997, the Children's Bureau funded 10 demonstration projects to implement and evaluate a wide range of prevention, intervention and treatment strategies for neglected children and their families. This report synthesizes the challenges, strategies and lessons learned in evaluating the five-year projects.

Common challenges included selecting instruments, establishing comparison groups, collecting data and analyzing the impact of individualized services. Among the helpful evaluation management strategies were detailed evaluation plans, sufficient evaluation budgets and project duration, strategies to address staff turnover, strong evaluation teams, and support and technical assistance. Information about key contacts, evaluation designs, instruments and outcomes on each of the programs can be found in the appendices. Free. 18 pages. (800) 394-3366

<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/focus/evaldemo/evaldemo.pdf>

State Standards and Capacity to Track Frequency of Caseworker Visits with Children in Foster Care

Office of the Inspector General (OIG), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Using a national survey, the OIG sought to determine (1) whether states have written standards regarding the frequency of caseworker visits with foster children, (2) whether states can provide statewide automated reports on the frequency of caseworker visits and (3) the frequency of caseworker visits documented by such reports.

Researchers found that while 43 states had written standards for at least monthly visits, only 20 could produce statewide visitation reports. Nineteen of those produced their reports using the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS), on which approximately \$2.8 billion in federal and state funds has been spent since 1994.

Seven of the 20 statewide reports indicated, on average, that fewer than half of children in foster care were visited monthly in fiscal 2003. There are no federal requirements for how often children in foster care must be visited by caseworkers. Free. 41 pages. (202) 619-1343, <http://oig.hhs.gov/oei/reports/oei-04-03-00350.pdf>.

Safe Jobs for Youth Month Kit

Every May is Safe Jobs for Youth Month, and the Labor Occupational Health Program at UC Berkeley updates their [Safe Jobs for Youth Month Kit](http://www.youngworkers.org). (www.youngworkers.org)

The Kit includes a teaching activity; fact sheets; tips for parents, teachers, and community groups; a poster and sample proclamation; and order and evaluation forms. Some materials are available in Spanish.

CAPITOL STEPS

News about Federal Budget & Legislation and Proposed California Foster Care Legislation

News about Federal Budget & Legislation

FY 2007 Budget

On May 18, the House of Representatives voted 218-210 to pass its version of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 budget resolution (H. Con. Res. 376). The budget resolution passed after Republican leaders promised Republican moderates that they would find an additional \$3.1 billion for labor, health and human services (HHS) and education programs. (Source: Association for Career and Technical Education online [ACTEonline])

The House will only consider the additional funding if they offset it with commensurate spending cuts in either discretionary or mandatory programs. The House Appropriations Committee has already increased its discretionary allocation to the Labor-HHS-Education subcommittee spending by \$4.1 billion, \$3.1 billion short of the nearly \$7.2 mentioned in the House provision. Congressional staff are skeptical that the House and Senate will agree on a Budget Resolution before the November election. (Source: National Youth Employment Coalition)

Next, key House and Senate leaders will negotiate differences between the House- and Senate-passed budget resolutions into a final bill that they hope can pass in both the House and Senate.

Higher Education Act

Congress has not yet reauthorized the Higher Education Act, but the fiscal year 2006 federal budget—enacted in February 2006—included several higher education provisions that will provide additional financial aid to low-income working adults and other non-traditional students.

Workforce Investment Act

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) reauthorization continues to be stalled due to unresolved concerns over religious hiring provisions. The National Youth Employment Coalition thinks it unlikely that the bill will be taken up before the November elections. To see the Association for Career and Technical Education's FY 2007 Federal Appropriations chart for workforce development programs, [click here](#). (www.acteonline.org/policy/legislative_issues/upload/Funding_Chart_FY07.doc)

Kinship Caregiver Support Act

The Kinship Caregiver Support Act, S 985, is a bipartisan piece of legislation introduced by Senators Thad Cochran (R-MS), Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY), and Tim Johnson (D-SD). The bill authorizes the federal government to make kinship navigator grants to assist caregivers to connect with services for children, and authorizes states to provide Title IV-E payments to kinship caregivers (an arrangement currently prohibited by Department of Health and Human Services regulations). The bill has been referred to the Senate Committee on Finance.

INFORMATION ON INCREASED FINANCIAL AID

A two-page document, called [New Student Aid Changes Help Nontraditional Students](#), from the Center for Law and Social Policy examines those provisions and what they likely mean for low-income families and students. (www.clasp.org/publications/dra_studentaid.pdf)

Proposed Foster Care Legislation in California Update

Package of Proposed Foster Care Legislation

Members of the State Assembly Select Committee on Foster Care have proposed 26 bills designed to improve and extend services, create a state-level accountability structure, and promote family connections. Most of the bills are currently in the Assembly Appropriations Committee. The Select Committee has created a [May 2006 bill description](#) (PDF 51kb) and status report. (www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/transitionmay06/ProposedFosterCareLegislationStatusMay06.pdf)

NEW RESOURCE ON AB 490

The California Foster Youth Education Task Force has issued a [FAQ about AB 490](#), the legislation that addresses barriers to equal education opportunities for foster children and youth. (www.newwaystowork.org/publications/fosteryouth/AB490QuestionsAnswers.pdf)

FROM THE BENCH

Judicial Rulings Affecting Youth in Foster Care

At-Home Mental Help for Foster Youth

From Youth Today: The Newspaper on Youth Work. Reproduced with permission of the publisher.

By Jessica Weiss

A federal judge last month ordered California to provide mental health services to its most need youth in their homes and communities—a decision youth advocates say could keep as many as 50,000 foster children out of restrictive group homes and institutions.

The order came in *Katie A. v. Bonta*, a class-action lawsuit that challenged the practice of institutionalizing foster youth who are in need of mental health care. According to various studies, California spends \$540 million a year to house and treat approximately 4,500 children in secure facilities—placements considered largely ineffective by youth advocates and public interest groups.

U. S. District Judge A. Howard Matz ordered the state to use Medicaid funds to provide two key forms of less restrictive treatment: wraparound services and therapeutic foster care (TFC). Those treatments, in which family participation is a core element, allow children to receive individualized care in their own homes or in the homes of foster parents.

“the hallmark of these services is a method of partnering with the children and their families to provide care that is individually based,” said Ira Burnim, legal director of the Bazelon Center for Mental health Law, a Washington, D.C.-based national advocacy group that was one of the plaintiffs. “And that is the answer to what’s wrong with the youth mental health system.”

California unsuccessfully argued that wraparound and TFC are not “services” but “approaches” or “philosophies”—words not included in Medicaid regulations, according to the court’s order. The court noted that several states, including Arizona, use Medicaid funding to pay for wraparound services and TFC.

“If California meets this challenge, it will set an excellent example for the many other states that continue to neglect their foster children,” Burnim said in a news release.

Matz ordered the state to begin providing less restrictive services within 120 days of the ruling.

“We are reviewing the decision,” said Leah Brooks, a spokeswoman for the California Department of Health Services.

“The defendants and plaintiffs must now get together and discuss how to implement the injunction—and that is the real challenge,” said Patrick Gardner, an attorney with the National Center for Youth Law in Oakland, California, which was also a plaintiff.

More than 80,000 children are in foster care in California. Various studies report that 70 to 84 percent of them have mental health problems.

Fate of the California High School Exit Exam Still Being Decided

Will the California High School Exit Exam pass its own test and remain a requirement for a high school diploma? This question is still being answered in the courts. The next decision will be made by the State Court of Appeals, which will meet on July 25 to begin considering the case sent to them by the state Supreme Court on May 23.

The last two weeks of May saw court rulings that left students, educators, and lawyers adjusting to the unfolding events. On May 12, Alameda County Superior Court Judge Robert B. Freedman decided in favor of the plaintiffs in *Valenzuela vs. California*, and ruled the exams could not be used as a graduation requirement. Judge Freedman agreed

with Valenzuela’s attorney, Arturo Gonzalez, that some students had been denied their constitutional right to an equal education, due to the substandard schooling they received.

Jack O’Connell, State Superintendent of Schools and architect of the exam, appealed the decision directly to the state Supreme Court. On Wednesday, May 23 the California Supreme Court overturned the May 12 ruling and reinstated the exam for the Class of 2006. According to the *Los Angeles Daily News*, “The high court did not disagree with . . . Judge Freedman’s conclusion that the students may have had an unequal education, attorney Arturo Gonzalez said.

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The justices merely said that Freedman's remedy—suspending the exit exam—was wrong.”

Superintendent O'Connell is applauding the ruling. He has promoted the exam as a means to recognize students who worked hard, to assure employers that diplomas certify the attainment of basic skills, and to hold schools accountable to their students.

However, the process continues. The Supreme Court then instructed the state Court of Appeals to hold hearings on the merits of the plaintiffs' case, and the Fourth Division of the California Court of Appeals has scheduled hearings to begin on July 25.

Lawyers representing Liliana Valenzuela and other Richmond High School students who did not pass the exit exam were prepared to submit briefings.



ABOUT YOUTH TRANSITION ACTION TEAMS (YTAT)

The Youth Transition Action Team Initiative focuses on bringing together the resources of the workforce, education, philanthropic, and child welfare systems to better prepare adolescents who are current or former foster youth to achieve economic, educational and employment success as they transition into the adult world.

Transition Action Teams are made up of leaders from the child welfare, education, workforce development and other local systems, working together to improve transition outcomes for youth touched by the child welfare system. Teams are also charged with assisting their county in achieving their child welfare system enhancement goals, particularly in the area of youth permanency.

Funders for the initiative are Casey Family Programs (Initiative sponsor), California Department of Social Services, Walter S. Johnson Foundation, Jewish community Foundation (for the Los Angeles County Team), Peninsula Community Foundation's Center for Venture Philanthropy (for the San Mateo County Team), and the San Francisco Foundation (for the San Francisco Team).

For more information about the YTAT initiative, please contact Chandra Larsen at clarsen@newwaystowork.org.

New Ways to Work

103 Morris Street, Suite A
Sebastopol CA 95472
(707) 824-4000 phone
(707) 824-4410 fax
www.newwaystowork.org

The Thoreau Center
1016 Lincoln Boulevard Suite 222
San Francisco, CA 94129
(415) 995-9860 phone