



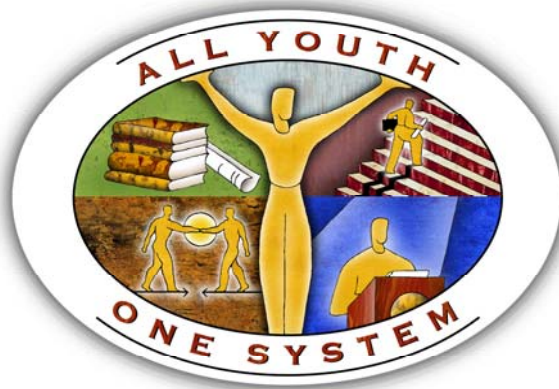
YCIDEAS

*A Compilation of Promising Practices from Youth Councils throughout California
2001-2005*

Youth Council Institute

Chapter Eight

Serving Special Populations



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Project HOPE: A County-wide Partnership Extends Services to Emancipated Foster Youth

Youth Council: Alameda Workforce Investment Board

Elements: Career Preparation, Youth Development and Support, Youth Leadership, Comprehensive Approach

Function: Coordinating Youth Services

Subject: Serving Special Populations, Youth One-Stops, Staff Development, Youth Involvement

The Challenge: Alameda County is home to some 700 foster youth who were receiving basic skills and job training through the Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP). However, the 200 to 250 youth who emancipated each year at 18 were unaware of Alameda County's WIA employment services for youth and its One-Stop Career Centers. The Alameda County Workforce Investment Board (ACWIB) saw an opportunity to offer foster youth employment information components that were not part of the Children and Family Services Department or ILSP, and believed that interagency services could be coordinated more effectively. In September, 2002, Program Finance Specialist Rosario Flores requested \$75,000 to fund an Employment Consultant who would act as a liaison between agencies. The objective was to share and extend supportive services and employment lists to emancipated foster youth, and to increase WIA youth enrolment for youth with barriers.

The Practice and Evidence: After meeting with all departments in order to understand what each had to offer, the ACWIB established a framework of monthly meetings for information sharing. They then brought in key partners in addition to the ILSP – Pivot Point (a community-based youth services organization), the Casey Family Foundation, the National Youth Law Center; the EDD, CASA (court appointed services), and several youth advocacy groups – and created Project HOPE (**H**elping **O**ur **Y**oung **P**eople with **E**mployment and **E**ducation). The program provides each foster youth with in-depth career assessment, work readiness skills, financial management counseling, short-term paid work experience, enrollment in various apprenticeship and training programs, support service payments for work clothing, training, and connection to the One-Stop system. Setting Project HOPE apart from other programs is the direct communication between the WIB and the Children and Family Services Department, along with an ongoing commitment to target the foster youth population.

Since its inception in September, 2003, Project HOPE has had excellent outcomes. It has reported 100 percent enrollment and placement across the whole time period, through April, 2004.

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The Details: The Employment Consultant’s mandate was to get at least 60 emancipated youth referred to One-Stops in Oakland and Alameda Counties within the calendar year (September, 2002-2003). Just as the position was being approved, the state offered the WIB a \$400,000 15 percent discretionary fund grant to serve 40 youth under WIA and 40 under Welfare to Work. Many older youth were paid a stipend to attend a pre-apprenticeship training in the construction trades. The project found apartments for those without homes, paid their rent, and asked for job placement assistance from the State Construction Building Trade Council when the youth had completed the pre-apprenticeship program. “Lo and behold. Many are now getting jobs,” Flores reports, emphasizing that “the main word here is collaboration.”

Flores has found that having a full-time paid staff person to make the liaison work and to conduct the necessary publicity campaigns has been essential. So are roundtable discussions with key individuals and organizations, on at least a monthly basis. Flores refers to the employment consultant as a “change agent” who puts a working system in place before moving on. “When the consultant leaves, you have an ongoing referral process and communication network in place, with the question of getting resources to youth always at the center,” she explains.

A key component of Project HOPE was a campaign to educate foster care social workers, many of whom were unaware of what the WIA and the One-Stop Career Centers had to offer. “Caseloads are so large, and it’s hard for youth to understand that they have to start employment planning as early as 16. So it starts with educating the social workers,” Flores points out. To that end, the ACWIB worked with Pivot Point Youth Services, which completed the case management, following through with career assessment and internships. Along with other partners, Pivot Point also educated foster parents, working to inform the whole family unit about resources and job opportunities.

A goal of the state pilot project was to identify former foster youth who could serve as peer educators. The WIB hired three youth who had to go through an interview process and be enrolled in college at least part-time. These peer educators are paid \$12/hour and are assigned to a One-Stop 20 hours per week in order to guide incoming foster youth through the WIA application process, and also make presentations at foster care group homes. “It’s great procedure and publicity,” says Flores.

Breakthrough Moment: Shy when she was hired, one peer educator is now making presentations to the State Legislature about the hardship she endured as a foster emancipated teen trying to find employment, then housing, then trying to assist her peers. “She has truly blossomed,” says Flores, “and it made me realize that the collaboration can work, the networking, that changes can be made, and that foster youth can be reached more effectively.”

What’s Next for this YCidea? The initial program cycle has come to a close, but Project HOPE is continuing. A priority is to educate probation judges in much the same way as social workers have been educated, encouraging them to mandate youth to an employment services

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program. “We want to prevent youth from entering the probation system by doing preventive education and getting them involved in community services and employment education,” Flores explains.

Another goal is to develop an Employment Resource Binder for foster care social workers that profiles each Alameda County One-Stop Career Center and how to access their services. The ACWIB is also working with the National Youth Law Center to establish a confidentiality agreement with WIA employment contractors and with Children and Family Services. Youth information must be handled very carefully and evaluated from a legal perspective. “We want to make sure that criteria that could make that youth eligible for WIA services is expedited to the employment contractor and/or the employer,” says Flores. “We’re going through all the fine print and establishing a boilerplate to share with other counties. It’s not glamorous, but it’s essential.”

Where to Go for More Information

Alameda County Workforce Investment Board

Rosario Flores

Program Finance Specialist ACWIB

(510) 259-3827

RFlores2@acgov.org

Tools

To read more about Project HOPE, please see [“Project HOPE”](#) by Thou Ny.

(<http://www.nww.org/yci/ycideabook/alamedaprojecthope.pdf>)

To read the WIA closeout report, please [click here](#).

(<http://www.nww.org/yci/ycideabook/alamedacloseoutwiapilot05.pdf>)



North Star Community: Housing and Support Services for Emancipated Foster Youth

Youth Council: Merced County Youth Council

Element: Youth Development and Support

Function: Coordinating Youth Services, Convening Local Leadership to Take Action

Subject: Serving Special Populations

The Challenge: Foster care youth who have been removed from their homes due to abuse, neglect, or abandonment become wards of the county and are placed in the foster care system until their 18th birthdays when they are emancipated. Oftentimes, many of these vulnerable young adults leave the system without adequate skills and are unprepared for life's challenges. Without a firm plan for success, which includes housing and employment, these young people often end up unemployed, homeless, and without those permanent, lifelong connections that are critical to a healthy life. In order to facilitate successful transitions for these young adults, adequate housing with inclusive, supportive living structures must be in place. The challenge is to design a transition support program that is time limited, with established goals, and with the outcome of a healthy, successful, independent transition to adulthood.

The Practices and Evidence: The Youth Council, through the efforts of Mark Gregory, Staff Services Analyst II for the Merced County Human Services Agency, has designed a program that will provide housing, supportive services, and permanent connections to a caring adult. This solution is a unique collaborative operating under the name of "North Star Community" and is aimed at meeting the critical needs presented each day by the emancipating youth in Merced County.

Details: The North Star Community is being created through a collaboration of a group of local business leaders, non-profit organizations, and government agencies. Each collaborator fulfills a unique and vital role in the overall development and success of the project and the residents. The business leaders bring particular expertise in the identification and development of housing resources as well as the financial means to make this project a reality. The Central Valley Coalition for Affordable Housing is the connecting point for the development of the community. Government agencies will provide counseling, transportation, ongoing financial commitments, and administrative expertise to the North Star Community and its residents.

The location for the North Star Community has yet to be determined, largely due to the lack of available property. However, they are currently working with the City of Merced and the Housing Authority on a 5-acre parcel within the City limits of Merced. The Community will consist of approximately 72 four-unit complexes that are primarily one-bedroom apartments with a few two-bedroom units for young women with children. The Community will be designed

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for expansion to allow for future growth. There will also be an on-site Administration building with classrooms, a medical area to conduct physical examinations and deal with routine medical emergencies, a day-care area for small children residing in the Community, and a recreational complex that will also serve as the Community's social area.

Young adults who are accepted into the North Star Community become part of a caring program where they work with a case manager who will assist them in developing and managing a plan to achieve their goals; receive an apartment, which must be maintained as though the resident were in a non-subsidized environment; match with a trained mentor; and receive assistance in finding a livable-wage job. Once employed, residents will place 30 percent of their earned income in a trust fund that will be available to the resident to access permanent housing upon preparing to leave North Star Community. Each resident may live in the community for up to two years; during this time, they will have access to professional counseling resources. Residents will be provided with the opportunity to participate in spiritual life development workshops and become a part of the North Star Community by participating in regular meetings, meals, outings, and trips.

Housing is a key component of making the North Star Community program work. The North Star Community has developed a unique strategy that creates affordable housing opportunities for young adults and provides a funding stream to help support the program. Each four-unit complex will house a low-income senior mentor who will be contributing monthly rent that will be used toward the operational costs of the Community. Additional operational costs will be borne by the collaborators, either through direct contributions or services provided through their regular allocations; fundraising by the non-profit and community business leaders, or grants. Effective property management, savings on financial costs, and a partial exemption from property taxes will also decrease the operational costs of the Community.

Breakthrough Moment: The breakthrough moment came when the Youth Council was able to partner with the Central Valley Coalition for Affordable Housing and developed the partnerships with the business and non-profit communities to buy in and commit to participating and supporting this project.

What's Next for this YCidea? The next stage in the process is to finalize the site, set the date for the groundbreaking, and begin the build which they anticipate will occur in early 2006.

Where to Go for More Information

Merced County Youth Council

Mark R. Gregory

Merced County Human Services Agency; Child Welfare Services

Staff Services Analyst II

Phone: (209) 385-3000 ext. 5456



Improving Transition Services for Foster Youth through One-Stop Support

Youth Council: North Central Counties Consortium (NCCC)

Element: Comprehensive Approach, Youth Development and Support

Function: Coordinating Youth Services

Subject: Serving Special Populations, Youth One-Stops

The Challenge: The five counties that make up the North Central Counties Consortium—Colusa, Glenn, Lake, Sutter, and Yuba--all have large areas that are rural. The scattered population, combined with inadequate funding for social services and few community-based or faith-based organizations, have historically led to significant gaps in services for current and emancipated foster youth. The Youth Council found that there was no bridging system for transitioning foster youth: no housing, no emergency homeless shelters for emancipated youth, no access to ongoing education, and in fact no bridge to independence aside from the Independent Living Program courses that were offered. The Youth Council needed to do something about this dearth of services. The challenge for the Youth Council was huge.

The Youth Council found that some of the five counties were able to do a wonderful job coordinating services with the County Health and Human Services Department, as well as with the Independent Living Programs; however, others were not. The Youth Council felt it imperative to educate all parties about the needs of foster youth and to begin to get the lines of communication open. The necessary communication topics included what the parties could do, who they could serve, and finally how to get the referrals moving so that foster youth could access services.

Another challenge was how to get the One-Stops moving in the direction of what foster youth want to hear and how to facilitate communication among the One-Stops, youth, and Department of Health and Human Services. There is a tremendous amount of institutionalization of the youth in foster care. They are used to having people tell them what to do, when to do it, and why to do it. At a certain point youth do not want to hear this anymore. The programs in place operate under the constraints of the WIA and their rules, so the need to conform can deter youth from being involved. Youth Council members recognized that it is difficult to make a government program into one that appeals to the foster youth and former foster youth it is intended to serve.

Practices and Evidence: The Council embarked upon the Foster Care Youth Project, one of three pilot programs supported by the State of California's 15 percent funds. The goal of the Project is to improve transition services for foster youth.

The Youth Council contracted the pilot project to the five counties. The WIA youth programs are also run by the One-Stop operators. The Youth Council wanted to educate partners in the One-

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Stops, educate the target population about how to use the One-Stops, and educate agencies that are working with current and emancipated foster youth.

The Youth Council brought the programs together and began to strategize about how educate all One-Stops partners (besides WIA partners) about how to work with foster youth. The Youth Council also realized they could educate the agencies that work with foster youth within the counties about what the One-Stops could provide. The specific focus was on the combining of efforts to serve foster youth and emancipated foster youth.

Rick Rickord, with State of California Employment Development Department, provided one-day training for all staff. The session was developed and focused solely on foster youth and their needs.

Since the trainings, the Youth Council and the One-Stops are educating and marketing the One-Stops system to emancipated and foster youth. They are trying to get youth to understand available services and to begin to trust the system. They want to educate others who work with foster youth about the One-Stops approach.

The county One-Stops operators were successful in accomplishing their goals not only to the target population but to other organizations as well. The evidence includes the increased service levels to both current and emancipated foster youth; improved relationships with the Department of Social Services and One-Stops; increased numbers of foster youth coming in to One-Stops, whether they are being enrolled or not; and increased levels of trust so that youth are using the One-Stops system.

Details: Before beginning the program, the Youth Council began making calls to One-Stop operators and The Department of Health and Human Services. The Youth Council verified that foster care youth were being underserved. The Youth Council realized they needed to step up the plate and improve services for current and former foster youth. They wholeheartedly accepted this challenge.

The Youth Council was actually approached by the State of California to participate in this pilot project because they serve a rural area.

Breakthrough Moment: The breakthrough moment actually consisted of two separate realizations. First, the Youth Council learned that there were landlords willing to work with the project to support emancipated youth by renting them apartments without co-signers or credit ratings. The Director of Health and Human Services was really impressed with this commitment. Second, the Youth Council members were heartened to see the WIB members being educated about the process of emancipating youth without any financial, family, or moral process which leaves these young people alone in the world.

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What's Next for this YCidea? The Youth Council is always looking for new sources of funding to serve high risk youth. The members of the Youth Council have made a commitment to the One-Stops and administrative entities to have active participants continue to be active without this pilot funding. These programs would be funded from the WIA funding. The Youth Council will continue to write grants and continue to look for funding and housing for high risk youth.

Where to Go for More Information

North Central Counties Consortium

Cindy Newton
North Central Counties Consortium
Administrative Entity
Program Director
(530) 751-8202
cnewton@ncen.org

Lettie Seaver
North Central Counties Consortium
Program Analyst
lseaver@ncen.org

Tools

[Web site for foster youth](http://www.fosteryouth.net) developed by the Glenn County Human Resource Agency
(<http://www.fosteryouth.net>)



Television Documentary Series on Preparing for Adulthood

CWIB Special Project: Northern Rural Training and Employment Consortium (NoRTEC)

Elements: Youth Development and Support, Youth Leadership

Function: Promoting Policies to Sustain Effective Practices

Subject: Serving Special Populations, Youth Involvement, Innovative Programs

The Challenge: High school students in the northern part of the state struggle to develop career goals and plan their future. A survey of 1500 high school seniors revealed that 90 percent of youth said they had a vision for their future. However, when asked what they had done to act on this vision, only 45 percent had taken concrete steps to put the plan into action. Survey results show that more than 50 percent of youth in Shasta, Tehama, and Trinity Counties did not have a plan as of May in their senior year of high school as they moved towards graduation. The survey results for youth with disabilities were consistent with the identified norm. Youth indicated parents and adults who had gained the respect of the youth significantly influence their plans for their future. NORTEC, a consortium of nine north California counties, has never had a formal Youth Council. However, the CWIB-funded Futures Project, funded by an Improving Transition Outcomes for Youth with Disabilities Project (ITOP) grant in the north state, wanted to provide a forum through which parents and the community as a whole could hear what was missing. It was agreed that it is important for adults who influence youth to hear the message and be given information and resources to help them support youth in developing a plan – knowing what they want to do, what their options are, and how to get there.

The Practices and Evidence: It was decided to use television as one of the tools to promote the message. A meeting was scheduled with the producers at Redding's local Public Broadcast System (PBS) station. The Futures Project staff shared the problem, survey results, and information from the ITOP grant, which included frameworks for youth with disabilities, with producers from the PBS station. The producers were excited about the project and saw this as a way to address an unmet community need. If parents and youth could become engaged and learn what career opportunities and supports were available and how to access them, success would be achieved on all fronts. (To access the survey, go to www.shastacareerconnections.org.)

Details: The Futures Project is funded by the CWIB through an ITOP grant, one of three pilot initiatives in the state.

The documentaries were produced in cooperation with the local PBS television station. As a result of conversations with Lorraine Dechter, Producer/Director, two television shows were produced, titled "The Futures Shows." The goal of each program was to promote a strong message to parents and adults in the community about how important they were in preparing youth for transitioning from high school to career.

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All involved agreed the best way to accomplish the goal was through youth voices.

Each show began with Sue Sawyer, Executive Director of Shasta 21st Century Career Connections, (a community-based intermediary organization with the Improving Transition Outcomes Project) providing the foundation for the program. The next segment focused on staff from the Smart Center speaking about how easy it is to work with an individual who has a sense of what they want to do, and knows what their skill sets are and how they can be incorporated into further education, work, and career. This piece was focused directly at parents and other caring adults who have the potential for a significant, positive impact on the lives of youth.

The film then segues into a ten-minute segment about two boys who have been friends for years. One youth is ADHD/learning handicapped and the other does not have learning challenges, yet both find themselves ill prepared to go forth into further education or the work world upon high school graduation. The audience witnesses the experience of these young men mentoring one another about how to set goals and move ahead as they begin to explore different businesses, visit the career center and an ROP program at their school, and read the local newspaper, all with the intent of learning about available life options.

The film closes with a variety of community businesspersons speaking about the importance of providing youth with the opportunities to explore their options. Business partners speak about what it means to be successful, to understand career ladders, to have a strong work ethic, and to know the importance of education. The program closes with the Redding City Manager urging the audience to build a critical mass of support for youth in identifying and developing life plans. He explains this can be accomplished when parents and community work together and focus on positive transitions for all youth.

The second program in the series focuses on youth speaking to youth. Each young person has a specific disability that impacts their life, yet each has developed internal tools to maneuver through some of life's challenges. They serve as mentors to one another. The youth identify life situations and share how they have dealt with them, and go into the deeper situations facing young people, especially if they are challenged learners. The key message of this film is the importance of seeking out caring adults to assist in sorting through and resolving life problems as they arise.

Now that the production is complete, the Futures Project is using the "youth to youth" piece as a stand alone. It is used in presentations to service organizations, classrooms, and various television stations. The film will also be used as a tool to teach decision-making skills in various curricula.

The film has been shared with the Shasta's 21st Century Career Connections. Sawyer, the Executive Director, says she wants it made available to schools as well as to Juvenile Probation, and any youth-serving organization in the county in order to promote student success. The ten-minute "voice of the youth" piece is the marketing "buy in" piece.

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Breakthrough Moment: The Futures Project Staff had been working on the project for quite a while and felt it important to test the films on a different audience and decided to share the films with the Shasta 21st Century Career Connections Board of Directors. The board is composed of a county administrator, a community college vice president, three business people, a director of a local intersegmental college partnership, and the director of career and technical education at a local high school district. The reaction to this film was “The message is solid and must be heard.” Youth audiences critiqued the film and said the message was strong, held their interest, and was something they could identify with. The film also received a positive reception from a local Rotary Club.

What’s Next for this YCidea? The Futures Project will share these films in every venue possible – schools, career centers, and community. The films are being used to promote the whole concept of helping youth set goals and make informed decisions based on career exploration activities. It is anticipated the number of options for internships available for youth will be increased through this effort.

Where to Go for More Information

Northern Rural Training and Employment Consortium

Sue Sawyer
Shasta 21st Century Career Connections
Executive Director
(530) 245-1544
<http://www.shastacareerconnections.org>

Providing Summer Employment for Underserved Youth

Youth Council: Solano County Youth Advisory Council

Element: Career Preparation

Function: Coordinating Youth Services

Subject: Serving Special Populations

The Challenge: When the WIA came into being, on July 1, 2001, it replaced the Job Training Partnership Act youth program, which was primarily summer-based and served about 600 youth in this suburban county. The Youth Advisory Council members saw that in order to offer any summer youth employment programs, they would have to find other partners and funding sources.

The Practice and the Evidence: The Council partnered with the Solano County Health and Social Services Department to create a summer employment program for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) dependents. The Youth Employment Program (YEP) serves approximately 45 youth each summer. They are placed in entry-level/trainee jobs across a range of fields, including county departments, facilities at Travis Air Force Base, animal shelters, and parks. YEP youth work four days a week for five hours a day, and attend a two-hour workshop each week; they receive minimum wage for these 22 hours.

“There’s a very big need for youth to have something positive to do in the summer, and we fill it with something that’s productive for the community and good for youth,” said Lynette Gray, Planning and Youth Development Manager. “We’re focused.” As Gray observed, the county gets a good return on its investment: “These youth are off the streets and spending their money.”

At the end of the summer, youth fill out a survey that rates their employment experience. The rate of positive responses at the end of the summer of 2003 was 85 percent. Even more concrete evidence of the program’s effectiveness is supplied by the test of ten work-related questions that is administered to youth before and after their work experience. (The questions, which are addressed in the weekly workshops, are very specific, such as, “Do you have a resume?” and “Do you know why you need a Social Security card?”) “It might look as though it’s a set-up, but the reality is that you’ve taught them, and the test is the instrument to show that they’ve learned it,” said Gray. “They do well.”

The Details: The Workforce Investment Board of Solano County, Inc. is a private non-profit that has a contract with the Solano County Health and Social Services (H&SS) Department to serve TANF/CalWorks welfare and foster youth. To get things going, Gray asked the County H&SS staff whether any funding was available for TANF dependents who needed a summer employment program.

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In return, the WIB and the Youth Advisory Council would establish work sites, do payroll for the youth, pay workers' compensation, and provide "World of Work" and "Life Skills" workshops that teach work-readiness skills and career exploration. "It's designed to complement WIA but with funding just from the county TANF system," Gray explains.

Start-up was slow because of the transition, and because simply going into the schools before they let out for the summer was no longer an option. Direct mail proved ineffective. The second year the county started outreach earlier, in late February, putting articles in a monthly newsletter called *Bridges* that is sent to all CalWORKs and aid recipients. "It's important to bring young people and parents in together to complete eligibility determination as early as possible, and then to keep the youth engaged by sending information till summer employment is ready," Gray notes.

Screening is intensive. Seventy-three percent of the candidates, of whom approximately 25 percent are foster youth, are basic-skills deficient. Staff carefully assesses skills, interests, and level of commitment, screening about ten youth for every one enrolled. "It's staff-intensive. And even if the young people don't stay in the program, they learn something through the screening process," says Gray.

The YEP program staff support participants in many innovative ways. They organize

- A pre-program Mini-Camp The week before starting work, youth spend four hours with staff learning basic work readiness skills: how to behave, to dress, to communicate. "Many of these young people do not have a role model at home who goes to work," Gray observed. Since the WIB's Youth Advisory Council cannot afford buses, "the young people need to make choices about how to get to work—that's part of readiness."
- Supervisor training Every work site has a primary and an alternate supervisor. Both have attended a two-hour training session, "so they know that they need to instruct the young people, watch them, check them, supervise them," Gray explained.
- Workshop presentations During the summer of 2003, a very seasoned case manager had all of the young people stand up during each weekly workshop to describe what they do and what they've learned from their supervisor since the previous week. For example, a young person working at the YMCA might have learned how to put chemicals in the pool. "These are not youth who have a lot of experience in even talking to adults," Gray noted. "We give them a script of what to ask their supervisor. Everything is planned to give them what they need to have the right answer at the end, to build confidence."
- An annual recognition ceremony Gray obtained a sizeable room, created certificates signed by the executive director, had plaques made for five outstanding participants, and lined up a keynote speaker. (In 2003 the speaker was a judge who was once on welfare.)

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During the first recognition ceremony, the executive director handed out the certificate to each young person, looking them in the eye and shaking their hands. “Some didn’t know how to shake hands, so the next year we decided to teach them,” Gray commented. “These are not the stars who get recognition in public school. They’re getting recognized because they worked hard and completed a program, and they’re happy.” Participants leave with a portfolio that includes a resume, sample application, and, where possible, a letter of recommendation.

Another top priority has been pleasing funders. The program’s funder has been the County, so at the end of each recognition ceremony, Gray makes short “success story” presentations to the subcommittee of the Health and Social Services Department.

Gray’s advice is to plan and coordinate “and have a road map, if you will. Check in with yourself to make sure you’re on track. If you have a deadline, you’d better stick to it.”

Breakthrough Moment: Gray was pleased with the wide range of services in the program, and confident that it would work. The successes of individual participants verified her thoughts about the program. Gray offered the following example. A young woman worked at the Medical Center at Travis AFB in Fairfield during the summer of 2003. She learned through her YEP work experience that she had a passion for helping people. As a result of her employment at the AFB, she has decided to join the United States Air Force after high school, and to seek an assignment as a medic to help her fellow soldiers.

Where to Go for More Information

Solano County Youth Advisory Council

Lynette Gray
Solano County Youth Employment Program
Planning and Youth Development Manager
(707) 863 4606
lgray@solanowib.org

Marion Aiken
Solano County Youth Employment Program
Manager of Youth Programs
(707) 649-3603
maiken@solanowib.org

Out-of-School Youth Order off a “Skillz Menu” to Acquire Basic Skills

Youth Council: Southeast Los Angeles County Workforce Investment Board (SELACO)

Elements: Career Preparation, Academic Excellence, Youth Leadership

Functions: Coordinating Youth Services, Measuring Quality and Impact of Local Efforts

Subjects: Serving Special Populations, Innovative Programs

The Challenge: Since 1995, the Southeast Los Angeles County Workforce Investment Board (SELACO-WIB) has run the Community Youth Corps (CYC), an employment and training program for out-of-school youth between the ages of 17-21. In 1997 and 2002 CYC received the nationally recognized Promising and Effective Practices Network (PEPNet) Award (see more here: (www.nyec.modernsignal.net/page.cfm?pageID=115)). Over the years, the program’s basic structure offered out-of-school youth an opportunity to receive minimum wage for work such as house painting, graffiti removal, community food distribution, and other community tasks for two-week periods, and then return to the classroom for two weeks to study for their GED and learn workjob readiness skills.

However, in 2002, with budget cuts and a virtually new staff, CYC realized that the program was attracting students who lacked employment/academic skills but who also lost interest in the skill-development component of the program after exhausting their work experience allocations. In an effort to retain out-of-school youth without using paid work experience as the primary motivator, and to ensure that all students exiting the program had the skills to obtain and maintain entry level employment, the CYC decided to redesign their program.

The Practice and the Evidence: CYC staff realized that their old marketing and program design did not reflect the types of employment training services that they offered, so they changed it to attract youth who would understand the need for skill development and personal growth. Recognizing that this population also needs to earn money during training, the CYC staff came up with a concept they called the “Skillz Menu”: an incentive-based program that ensures students earn money while completing a recognized training course or gaining certifications in various occupations. “It’s a creative self-help continuum that keeps students constantly engaged in learning activities that directly support positive WIA outcomes while also appealing to their interest: *money*,” explains Youth Services Manager, Valerie Lathern.

As of August 2004, the Skillz Café program was still in its assessment stage. It was implemented in May 2004 and the first group of youth was expected to complete ROP and other training programs that August. “These youth are excited,” Lathern reports. “Youth now better understand how to navigate the CYC program and are eager to use the menu. We merely reintegrate the

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message of Ed DeJesus, President of Youth Development and Research Fund, and tell our youth that these are their skill-learning years, not their money-earning years.” Participants clearly understand that the program goal is to make them marketable by equipping them with as many skills as possible.

Lathern feels that the program is particularly effective with out-of-school youth because it gives them the opportunity to “earn while they learn. We used to speak to them in work experience hours - now we speak to them in dollars. We deal with some interesting youth, some reformed drug dealers and single parents. This gives them a chance to learn a skill and keep some money in their pockets. The amount is up to them, and it gives them some autonomy. We say, ‘You’re here to make the choices and we’re here to guide you.’”

The Details: In a change from previous years, CYC makes their expectations very clear in the orientation: to assist youth in enhancing their income by acquiring as many skills as possible, which will result in their being marketable. “In the past, we tried to be the single stop for these youth. We still offer the full range of services, but we don’t try to provide everything ourselves. For example, for the GED, we partner with adult ed programs and Cerritos College. We leverage our resources,” Lathern explains.

While the youth are completing 30 hours of basic work-readiness workshops, they are given a “Skillz Menu” that lists tasks ranging from “Developing 10 Questions You’d Ask an Employer” an Appetizer that’s worth \$15, to “Obtaining a Full-Time Job” – a Main Course worth \$200. Youth then meet with their career development specialists and pick items from the menu - up to four each month - and establish the steps required to perform the identified tasks. The Skillz Menu was created to motivate students to select the “entrées” with the biggest incentives, like jobs, certifications, and college admission. “The idea is that they choose wisely based on a wide range of needs; some already have a GED while others aspire to better their math or reading skills,” Lathern explains. “The objective is to make learning fun.”

With little assistance from the CYC staff, youth must develop these skills independently and be prepared to demonstrate them at the monthly Skillz Challenge night, which brings them together to eat pizza, check out each other’s progress, and cheer each other on. One at a time, youth move between stations labeled Appetizer, Desserts, Beverages, etc. which are manned by various CYC staff, Youth Council members, employers, and former students. Participants state each item they have accomplished, describe it, demonstrate it, get their Skillz receipt stamped, and take it to the Cash Out window to receive their earnings. “Even the shyest youth participates. The others are very supportive whether a youth performs a skill for \$20 or one for \$180. One youth, a former gang member, took a few guys in the corner and showed them how to tie a tie. Those guys will never forget that they learned to tie a tie in the hallway at CYC and got paid for it,” Lathern recalls. Students leave the monthly challenges with earnings between \$25-\$180 in cash.

Unbeknownst to CYC participants, each has a total of 250-300 work experience hours (\$2,025) available after completing any recognized training program. They are allowed to spend 100

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hours (\$697) of their work experience hours in the Skillz Menu. The Skillz Menu was crafted so that if a participant “orders” wisely off the menu and gets a job placement, the WIB will never have to spend his or her work experience dollars.

The program represents a full-time commitment for the four dedicated CYC staff members. Lathern recommends that anyone interested in replicating such a program begin with their budget. “Assess how effectively your work experience dollars are being utilized by your youth. Are you getting the maximum skills for the amount you are investing? If you feel you could get more bang for your buck, creatively craft a menu that supports your desired outcomes.” Lathern credits Ed DeJesus’ emphasis on keeping services “real” for youth, and believes that youth need to be dealt with realistically.

Breakthrough Moment: The Skillz Café made sense to the staff right from the orientation and they felt more comfortable marketing the program. “People used to call asking if we had jobs, and now the callers are more interested in developing skills,” says Lathern. “We keep it real, but we put the burden on the youth. We tell them what we offer, and it is up to them. This new program design also aligns with the staff personalities and the CYC mission.” She describes the networking that takes place at the Skillz Café each month as “incredible.”

What’s Next for this YCidea? CYC will continue to assess the Skillz Menu’s growth and success. They would like to develop a menu that makes it easier to follow up on students who have exited the program. This is a challenge since at-risk youth are so mobile. The CYC Staff is working on a menu with services tailored to youth out in the job market. It will be integrated into the existing Skillz Challenge Night, but its incentives will primarily be donated items such as movie tickets, sporting events, pre-paid cell phones, and other community donations.

Where to Go for More Information

Southeast Los Angeles County Workforce Investment Board

Valerie Lathern
SELACO WIB
Youth Services Manager
(562) 402-9336 ext.2201
valeriel@selaco.com

Tool

[Community Youth Corps Skillz Menu](#)

(<http://www.nww.org/yci/fallreporterdocs/SkillZMenu.pdf>)



Project TRENDSS – Coordinating Services for Foster Youth

Youth Council: Ventura County Youth Council

Element: Career Preparation, Youth Development Support

Function: Coordinating Youth Services

Subject: Serving Special Populations

The Challenge: California’s 2003 statistics indicate that about 3,500 youth annually age out of the foster care system. Within two to four years of emancipation, 51 percent are unemployed. A quarter have been homeless for at least one night, and 40 percent have been on public assistance or incarcerated. Contributing to these dismal statistics is a lack of collaboration between people and systems that deal with these youth. The Ventura County Youth Council wanted to help their foster youth transition into adulthood more successfully.

The Practice and the Evidence: Serving youth between the ages of 16 and 22, Project TRENDSS aims to add structure and flexibility to the process of weaning youth from foster care by coordinating services that had not previously been integrated. Youth workers identify each participant’s support system—all the people involved with that youth, such as the case manager and probation officer—and support communication and cooperation among them. Strategies include meetings, networking, youth ownership of the program, and shared software.

Project TRENDSS started in July 2003, serving a total of 31 participants. Some were still in job training programs, some at One-Stops, and others at local Girls and Boys Clubs. Most were to graduate the next June and those in the training programs stayed with the required activities. “We’re seeing that when youth connect to the activities we have going for them, it helps them to focus and stay out of trouble,” comments Frank Ramirez, Youth Services Manager for Ventura County. The training programs were subsidized by the county, but some employers expressed interest in retaining participants for regular jobs after the training ends. An account executive helped the others find jobs.

To read more about Project TRENDSS and the success of one youth who participated, please [click here](http://www.nww.org/ycci/winterreporterdocs/ProjectTRENDSSUpdate.pdf) or visit (<http://www.nww.org/ycci/winterreporterdocs/ProjectTRENDSSUpdate.pdf>).

The Details: TRENDSS stands for “Teens Reaching for Employment Now and Developing Self-Sufficiency” – the result of a “Name-the-Project” contest that exemplifies the program’s commitment to involving youth in the design and implementation of services. Until Project TRENDSS, no practical link existed between services offered by the offices of Children and Family Services and employment and training programs. “That’s where there needs to be linkage to One-Stops or to other entities that provide that expertise. That’s what made this program stand

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out as a good solution,” says Ramirez. Project TRENDSS offers work-readiness workshops and comprehensive employment and training services. Youth who complete the work-experience component can also get on-the-job training, which involves a contract that defrays up to 50 percent of the expense for the employer. “It almost guarantees a job. It’s a very positive component,” Ramirez notes.

As part of the Council’s overall menu of Youth Services, the program builds on an existing “All Youth-One System” infrastructure and networking process. Memos keep everyone in the network involved in the youth’s situation and progress. Youth Service staff attend the emancipation conference when a youth “ages out” of the county’s system, and informs him or her about the range of available services. A common database tracks participants and mentoring/leadership activities. When marketing the idea, staff developed a flyer and distributed it to anyone who came into contact with foster youth, including nonprofits and faith-based organizations. They also spread the word in schools through presentations and mini-workshops on Career Days.

Breakthrough Moment: People got excited about Project TRENDSS when the youth actually started the activities “because then they finally saw the results of youth getting connected to services. It had never happened before,” comments Ramirez. He gives a lot of credit to the workshops that youth participated in before being offered work activities. Building relationships with project staff and getting used to a structured environment made it easier for participants to make the transition into program activities and actual employment.

What’s Next for this YCidea? Even though Project TRENDSS is no longer operational, information is still available.

Where to Go for More Information

Ventura County Youth Council

Amy Fonzo

Deputy Workforce Area Director

(805) 648-9542

amy.fonzo@mail.co.ventura.ca.us

SNIPPET

Enrolling Out-of-School Youth

Youth Council: Merced County Youth Council

Element: Youth Development and Support

Function: Coordinating Youth Services, Measuring Quality and Impact of Local Efforts

Subject: Serving Special Populations

The Challenge: Merced County was having trouble finding out-of-school youth. Their first youth service provider was unable to enroll enough youth to satisfy the requirements of their contract. Furthermore, the Youth Council members realized that not one of the 150 youth they had enrolled lived in County Housing Authority residences. They discovered that there was a group of youth that were not being served.

The Practice and Evidence: The Youth Council decided to develop a collaborative between out-of-school youth programs and the County Housing Authority. A job specialist from a service provider was placed in the Housing Authority office (rent free), and the records of this Housing office were opened to the provider to highlight prospective youth.

As a result, over 20 youth from the Housing Authority were enrolled in the out-of-school program in Merced County, and the service provider served more youth than the original contract called for. The only additional cost was the salary of one job specialist.

The Details: Youth Council members from the Housing Authority agreed to the idea after the Youth Council Staff presented it. The actual plan became a funded amendment to the older youth contract. The Youth Council conceived the idea, negotiated a contract amendment to implement the program, and monitored the program progress.

Where to Go for More Information

Merced County Youth Council

Although this program is no longer operational, information is still available. Please contact:

Dave Davis

Youth Council Staff

(209) 724-2166

ddavis@co.merced.ca.us