



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

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Tools

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