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## 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/yci/winterreporterdocs/ProjectTRENDSSUpdate.pdf) or visit (<http://www.nww.org/yci/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**

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