

DRAFT

POLICY FOCUS AREA IV: Provide Work Experience and Job Opportunities That Lead to Economic Success

1. THE ISSUE

It is difficult enough for young people with the support of a stable family, broad community connections, and educational supports to find their way from their first job to stable employment, and from there to a growing and engaging career. Often adolescents find their first job through family or community connections. Foster youth, who have been removed from their family, community and school, do not have the same level of support and have even a tougher time securing employment, succeeding at their first job and establishing a solid work history that leads to economic and personal success and stability. Public and private sector employers, if given the right encouragement, incentives and support, can play a role in providing early employment opportunities and career pathway opportunities to foster youth.

In order for foster youth to be truly prepared for economic self-sufficiency, they need access to opportunities that allow for relevant learning and varied experiences in the workplace. Employers should be recruited and supported to not only provide career track employment opportunities but also to play the role of career mentor in providing real-world, hands-on information that prepares youth to successfully obtain and maintain employment. Youth need early access to a continuum of opportunities that gradually introduce concepts of employer expectations, workplace culture and soft skills necessary to be successful in the workplace. Employer training should include information about the various ways in which employers can be involved in providing work-based learning experiences for youth such as informational interviews, job shadowing, work-based mentoring and internships.

2. THE GOAL

Encourage public and private employers to hire current and former foster youth. Also, ensure that all foster youth are exposed to these types of opportunities/experiences prior to their transition from care.

3. THE SITUATION

If employed at all, former foster youth earn significantly lower wages than other young people. According to Casey Family Programs, one-third have incomes averaging \$6,000, well below the poverty level, which is \$7,890 for a single individual. Without full-time employment, 25% of foster youth find themselves homeless after emancipation and end up in

more expensive systems of care.¹ Unemployment among foster youth is a critical problem, preventing them from obtaining housing and the normal supports of adulthood -- contributing to a cycle of poverty and dependence on public systems as adults. Currently, employment preparation and work experience are not emphasized enough during transition planning. They must be stressed early in adolescence and become expectations for youth prior to leaving care as a crucial element in successful transitions to adulthood and economic success. Insert paragraph about conditions facing emancipated youth. Far worse for them

4. THE CHALLENGES

1. A job-only focus can lead to dead end employment. Meaningful developmental opportunities in the workplace that provide stable entry-level employment leading to a career pathway, is needed to ensure success and stability for this population of young people. A narrow focus on obtaining employment does not address the fact that these youth often lack the life skills, soft skills, and job readiness preparation that will help them to stay employed and reach for the economic success that in the long run dictates their self-sufficiency.
2. Employers are wary of “system” youth and have false perceptions about their backgrounds, needs and potential. Employers tend to perceive that youth coming with a label are problematic and potentially non-productive in the workplace.
3. Outreach to employers that specifically focuses on hiring foster youth often creates a stigma that discourages employers from offering employment opportunities.
4. Perceived and real union issues and personnel policies often impede the hiring of youth, particularly in our public systems, where civil service hiring and promotion practices may seem to limit the ability of public agencies and programs to hire from a target population.

5. OPPORTUNITIES

1. The California EDGE Campaign. The campaign highlights the challenges and opportunities California faces in developing and maintaining a qualified workforce that will meet industry demands in light of growing globalization and increases in retirements. It outlines specific policy recommendations about providing all Californians access to high quality postsecondary education and skills training, providing working adults with opportunities to move up the skill ladder and linking workforce programs and institutions to create pathways to high wage jobs.
2. Industry pipeline initiatives exist in the adult workforce system and in communities around the state. Pipeline initiatives tied to high-wage, high growth industries are

¹ Erbes, Karissa MSW, 2007, *Southern Area Consortium of Human Services Emancipating Foster Youth Literature Review*, Southern Area Consortium of Human Services and San Diego State University, page 6.

facilitated by workforce development areas throughout California. These initiatives offer a great opportunity for youth providers, schools and others focused on preparing youth for economic success to connect to and build on in order to prepare youth to be successful.

3. Labor organizations continue to be interested and express that they are in desperate need of forming partnerships that help identify, recruit and prepare youth for careers in the trades.
4. There is a trend in counties to develop public sector internships and/or employment opportunities specifically targeted at foster youth and other youth that are consumers of county services.
5. There is a move in some local areas to develop campaigns to hire youth and young adults, particularly through summer jobs programs.

6. THE SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

1. Develop and fund a private/public sector employment initiative with a subsidized youth employment component - perhaps modeled after on-the-job training initiatives where the employer receives a subsidy for the training period for successful candidates.
2. Develop a “hire a youth” campaign, with appropriate infra-structure through the Workforce Investment Act system and in conjunction with the California Chamber of Commerce and other state wide business associations.
3. Provide targeted access to union apprenticeship programs and develop pre-apprenticeship activities in programs serving emancipating and emancipated foster youth in connection with the CA Edge Campaign
4. Encourage county departments to offer and support internships to current and former foster youth at age 16 and 17, by launching a state-supported public sector sequence of opportunities similar to the former Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) Summer Youth Employment and Training Program (SYETP) which provided; work experience, training, summer work, internships, case manager, stipends, subsidized pay, academic credit, and certificate programs.
5. Encourage social service departments to offer internal preparation, career pathway opportunities, and job placement assistance to former foster youth. seeking a career in child welfare.
6. Adjust civil service regulations to allow departments to hire and retain qualified program participants (clients) in permanent career-track positions. Allow for a percentage of targeted participants to be hired without the same testing and “list” requirements of the civil service system for youth who have been engaged in internship or temporary

positions in a department or agency.

7. Encourage all employers (state, county, local government, and private) to establish hiring and internship programs for former foster youth as part of a broader strategy focused on all transitional youth.
8. Implement an award model similar to the *Secretary of Labor's New Freedom Initiative Award* that annually recognizes non-profits, small businesses, corporations and individuals that have demonstrated exemplary and innovative efforts in furthering the employment and workplace environment for people with disabilities, a goal of President Bush's New Freedom Initiative.
9. Develop a structured system for both youth and employers that ensures supports are in place to deal with issues that come up inside as well as outside the workplace that impede the ability of foster youth to be successful. This should include supports for employers who hire foster youth, the provision of on-site support for early-on developmental experiences and the encouragement of career mentor/advisors for every foster youth.
10. Educators and workforce professionals as well as caregivers and guardians need cross-training to understand fully the needs of foster youth and be more aware of appropriate opportunities and resources. Employers involved in workforce development programs have historically been trained to work with adults and tend to hold adult standards to their youth employees. Employers and staff working with youth need training and support in understanding the challenges inherent in working with this population which include matching youth with experiences that are developmentally appropriate as well as skill-level appropriate. On-going support should be provided to facilitate strong employer relationships.

Comment [LE1]: Steve would like to discuss this solution.

7. CURRENT POCKETS OF INNOVATION/SUCCESS

Tulare County Youth Transitions Program

In Tulare County many youth were leaving foster care without any work experience or a good sense of employers' expectations. Partners across agencies saw a need to provide transitioning foster youth with paid work experience combined with guidance to help them enter the workforce and prepare to support themselves. At the same time, Tulare County Health and Human Services had experienced a huge staffing need for entry-level position.

In the fall of 2006, the partners began the Youth Transitions Program (YTP), which has earned the California State Association of Counties (CSAC) *Challenge Award/Most Replicable Program Award*. Tulare County was chosen out of 260 programs competing for the CSAC Challenge Awards. Tulare County's strong partnerships across systems have resulted in both employment and leadership development opportunities for vulnerable youth. Partners include youth, Community Services and Employment Training (CSET), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and Probation. Together, these groups have worked to open Extra Help positions in Tulare Works (in the department of Health and

Human Services), and create a new job title, “Trainee,” specifically designed for youth participating in the Youth Transitions Program. The Youth Transitions Program serves all WIA eligible youth with an emphasis on foster youth. The program serves about 35 youth continuously, some of whom go on to interview and attain permanent county positions. Others find permanent positions with local businesses after completing the program. Youth may keep their Trainee positions for up to 2 years for over 1500 hours each year.

For more information see the Tulare County Promising Practice www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytat/promisingpractices/TulareYouthTransition.pdf.

Los Angeles Summer Jobs Program

In 2007, the City of Los Angeles Community Development Department and partners within their Youth Transition Action Team connected 200 ILP-eligible youth foster and probation youth to their Summer Youth Employment program “Hire LA” by strengthening their cross-system connections. The successful pilot has led to increased expansion for 2008, including expanding program to include job shadowing and work internship month and continuing to strengthen partnerships with LAUSD and connecting to in-school youth.

Emancipated Foster Youth Employment Program

In Santa Clara County, a program has been developed and implemented that provides entry-level job opportunities to untrained, economically disadvantaged emancipated foster youth who are transitioning out of the system. Between 130 and 150 youth "age out" of foster care in the county each year, at age 18. These youth often have no safety net, are unemployed or become unemployed, or fall into the hidden homeless population. Studies and regional evidence have also shown that a significant number of these young adults end up in expensive systems of care, such as jail and welfare. Prior to the development of the Emancipated Foster Youth Employment Program, the county had limited job opportunities for qualified emancipated foster youth, and the existing job opportunities were only available within the Social Services Agency. In early 2006, three county departments came together to develop a pilot employment program for youth to receive training for temporary, paid assignments. Training included interviewing tips and assistance in completing job applications, followed immediately by interviews for initial job assignments. The program has now been expanded to include more than 500 alternately staffed entry-level positions. To date, 30 emancipated foster youth have been hired into temporary positions and 10 have been hired into permanent positions with the county.

Step-up initiative in **Humboldt**.

Comment [CM2]: Detail to be added.

8. WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE TO IMPROVE YOUTH OUTCOMES ACROSS THE STATE?

Legislative Policies/Statutory Remedies

1. Create legislation and appropriation for a public system based internship program.
2. Shift eligibility for emancipated foster youth to be eligible for Cal Works transition child care services.
3. Create legislation and appropriation for a subsidized on-the-job training program in partnership with the private sector, ILP and workforce investment boards modeled after OJT in the workforce system including staff to support supervisors and youth.

Policy and Regulatory

1. Encourage the State Youth Vision Team and California Workforce Investment Boards to develop a statewide Hire a Youth campaign in conjunction with the California Chamber of Commerce.

Local Practice

1. Remove adult status requirement for eligibility to apply for county positions or create a student classification.
2. Create open dialogue about how to leverage recruitment and outreach to employers.
3. Develop mechanisms to provide support for youth in retaining employment and supervisors that hire them.