

DRAFT

POLICY FOCUS AREA III: Support Emancipating and Emancipated Youth in Their Transition to Adulthood

1. THE ISSUE

Despite California’s best efforts to improve the readiness of foster youth for the transition to adulthood, far too many youth still leave care unprepared for life on their own – without the skills, preparation and supported transitional opportunities that will enable them to find and maintain stable employment, continue their education, and experience permanent connections to adults, peers and their communities. Achieving the goals of permanence, education, and employment requires time, connections, and resources beyond the age of 18 for most young adults. At the same time as the movement to improve the systems that serve foster youth and reduce the number of youth who emancipate out of care are being intensified, new approaches to support and provide services to transitioning foster youth in their communities must also be put in place. Emancipated foster youth, along with other populations of ‘transitional youth,’ need a stable set of focused and developmentally appropriate services and opportunities to succeed as young adults, and supportive families and communities to nurture their success.

2. THE GOAL

California must target resources and provide systematic supports to increase the ability of foster youth who are emancipating, or who have already emancipated from foster care, to achieve their goals and successfully make the transition to adulthood. This requires new investment to create a performance-based, cross-system service delivery continuum able to meet the individual needs of each transitioning foster youth and achieve the following three fundamental goals:

Permanence – every youth has lifelong connections with family, peers, and supportive adults;

Education – every youth receives a quality education, high school diploma, and support in pursuing and succeeding in post-secondary opportunities;

Employment – every youth has work experience and training opportunities that prepare them for, and place them in, living wage employment and careers.

3. THE SITUATION

The US Census Bureau tells us that about half of young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 in the United States live at home with their parents. For young people who have been removed from their families by the court and live in foster care, that level of support and stability is seldom available after their 18th birthday. Only Vermont, Illinois, and the District of Columbia currently provide continuing foster care support after the age of 18, and that is wholly supported with state and local dollars because, federal funding is not currently available to extend care and/or services past that age. Eighteen states, including California, provide Medicaid eligibility up to the age of 21 to youth who have emancipated from foster care, addressing at least the need for continuing medical coverage for emancipated youth. In California, if youth are likely to earn a high school diploma or GED by age 19, they can stay in care between their 18th and 19th birthdays until that goal is achieved. It is also possible for a California county to extend care for foster youth under certain circumstances, (if they are still in school) until age 21, but only a minimal patchwork of state and federal funds are available to meet the needs of these young adults, meaning that counties must bear the expense of extended care. A few counties offer extended care to age 21 to youth in their communities. This is done at the discretion of the court, and is usually reserved for individual cases with unusual circumstances.

Comment [B1]: Are there counties other than Los Angeles that do this?

According to the Pew Charitable Trusts' report "Time For Reform: Aging Out and On Their Own," of the more than 24,000 youth who leave foster care each year without a permanent family, one in four is incarcerated within the first two years, one in five becomes homeless at some time after the age of 18; only 58% complete high school (compared to 87% in the general population); and only 3% earn college degrees (compared to 28% in the general population). These are just some of the statistics that make it clear that the developmental needs of these young people have not been met by the system(s) that have assumed parental control over them.

About 65% of foster youth emancipate from care without a place to live.¹ One study found that youth have difficulty finding housing because of a "lack of employment history, a credit history, or a co-signor."² Instead of ending up on the street, more than a third of the youth

¹ Delgado, Melanie, Robbert Fellmeth, Thomas R. Packard, Karen Prosek, and Elisa Weichel. Expanding transitional services for emancipated foster youth: An investment in California's tomorrow. Children's Advocacy Institute University of San Diego School of Law. www.caichildlaw.org

² Scarcella, Cynthia Andrews, Roseana Bess, Erica Hecht Zielewski, and Rob Green. The cost of protecting vulnerable children V. The Urban Institute. <http://www.urban.org/publications/311314.html>

who age out of foster care go back to live with their biological family, even where the circumstances that precipitated their entry into foster care have not been resolved. (Krinsky 2005) Many others are homeless as they do not have families, communities, or adult supporters, or have been disconnected from them as a result of their foster care experiences.

“The lack of a “safety net” for these former foster youth – now young adults – means that they truly struggle to “make ends meet”, often ultimately becoming a more burdensome and larger cost to society than if a much smaller, up-front investment had simply been made to better prepare and advise them during transition and the years preceding it.”³

The cost to society is significant. For example, according to a May 12, 2006 Select Committee Hearing of the California Legislature, more than 70% of all State Penitentiary inmates has spent time in the foster care system.

Research by the Workforce Strategy Center found that, “there is a need for the development of a long-term and comprehensive college and career program and policy strategy for foster care youth.” Additionally, researchers concluded that, “there is a significant resource base available for support of foster care programs and programs to connect foster care youth to college and career.”⁴

Foster youth are not the lonely population facing the difficulty of transition from youth to adult. A recent study conducted in Long Beach and Los Angeles by Northwestern University identified that one in five youth and young adults ages 16-24 were both out of work and out of school.

4. THE CHALLENGES

- 1. There are multiple service delivery systems (such as transitional housing, mental health, workforce development, community colleges, independent living) that provide various services that young adults need, but they are offered in very different venues, have differing eligibility criteria, and information about them is scattered.** In most cases, youth are expected to navigate this maze of service and support opportunities in the adult system without a guide.

³ 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,

⁴ Workforce Strategy Center. Promising practices: School to career and postsecondary education for foster care youth. <http://www.workforcestrategy.org/publications/promisingpractices2.pdf> page 2

2. **Our adult systems are not geared to apply developmentally appropriate approaches to working with youth and young adults** and the systems themselves are fractured and not well connected to each other. When services are available at all, emancipated youth face a new world of regulations, eligibility requirements, expectations, and service strategies. They also must develop relationships with an entirely new group of caseworkers, counselors and service providers – not necessarily trained or attuned to the developmental needs of youth as a group, or the specific needs and circumstances facing emancipated foster youth.
3. **Training in youth and adolescent development is seldom a part of required training** for those who work with these youth, so developmental needs may not be identified or addressed. In addition, many foster youth face the special challenges of unresolved trauma and other developmental hindrances that place them at a disadvantage. As a result, foster youth often lack the capacity to be effective advocates for themselves as they emancipate, or to fully utilize the supports that are available.
4. **Among the barriers to comprehensive services is the fact the various programs have differing age criteria**, ranging from 18 to 21 to 24 to 30.
5. **The Chafee Foster Care Independence Program offers limited funds for education, housing and career training.** Actual funding levels have decreased by approximately \$3.6 Million between 2000 and 2007, while the number of youth served has nearly doubled in the same time period.

Comment [st2]: Include CWDA Statistics here – or as an attachment?

5. THE OPPORTUNITIES

A number of conditions are in place that makes it timely to address this issue in California, including the following:

1. There is a heightened awareness of foster youth transition issues in the state and in the nation.
2. Strong and innovative pilot programs are working in communities across the state.
3. Efforts to ensure permanent connections to caring adults for all youth as they leave care are taking hold across the state.
4. New legislation requiring that high schools keep students enrolled until they are 22 years old if they do not pass the California High School Exit Exam, will become effective in January 2008.

5. Senator Barbara Boxer has proposed S. 1512, The Foster Care Continuing Opportunities Act, which would provide federal matching funds to help states provide essential foster-care services such as food, housing and legal help to youth to age 21.

6. THE SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

The following suggested solutions have been proposed by practitioners, policy makers and youth themselves over the past 18 months.

1. Form and support comprehensive, youth-driven “opportunity” centers that hire and mentor youth, and provide access to career development and employment opportunities, life skills, behavioral health services, emancipation preparation, and a place to connect to a community of peers. These centers should leverage the best that is available in the community for youth, and may expand on already existing opportunities, such as youth one-stops.
2. Develop and implement a voucher program targeted to foster youth and building off of the concept of Individual Training Accounts in the workforce system. Vouchers could be made available to pay for services identified in a unified Transitional Plan.
3. Extend eligibility for foster care benefits and services to at least age 21, and preferably to the 25th birthday.
4. Extend targeted support in permanency, education, housing, mental health, career development and employment to age 25, and design a system to connect these supports to each other and to ensure access for the young adults.
5. Ensure that Transition Planning Conferences are held for every youth in care beginning at age 15, and require all counties to include connections to important adults (permanency) and critical employment services in their plans.
6. Provide coordinated services and cross-agency youth development and resiliency training, planning and coordination to ensure that every adult interaction is focused on helping to guide youth in their transition to adulthood.
7. Develop and implement coordinated information services and resource guides for youth.
8. Develop a system that stores critical youth data and information in an electronic file—all in one place. Further develop the concept of a “smart card” that would include this information.

9. Implement expanded THP+ programs in every county.

7. POCKETS OF INNOVATION/SUCCESS

San Francisco Larkin Street Youth Services – Avenues to Independence

Larkin Street Youth Services provides a full spectrum of services needed to help San Francisco's most vulnerable youth move beyond life on the street. Larkin Street serves homeless and runaway youth, ages 12 – 24 (80% are age 18-24). They offer a range of housing options – from emergency shelter to permanent supportive housing – in addition to essential wraparound services including education, technology and employment training; healthcare, including mental health, substance abuse and HIV services; and case management.

Larkin Street Youth Services provides a way toward self-sufficiency for youth aged 18 to 24 through Avenues to Independence (ATI). ATI assists young adults as they step from adolescence to adulthood by offering comprehensive services along with stable long-term housing. Prior to entering ATI, the residents are either marginally housed, living on the streets, staying at an emergency shelter, or in foster care services. The majority of residents enters the program with very few practical life skills, minimal job history or transferable skills, little to no emotional support, and are sometimes struggling with substance abuse and/or mental health issues. In addition, Larkin Street's comprehensive education and employment services provide young people with the opportunities, resources, and guidance they need to succeed. From schooling to immediate work to long-term career training, Larkin Street Youth Services works with each youth to ensure that they are developing the skills and accessing the resources that will keep them off the streets for good.

Napa County V.O.I.C.E.S. Youth-Led & Youth-Run Emancipation Center

Voice Our Independent Choices for Emancipation Support (V.O.I.C.E.S.) Emancipation Center of Napa County, California, opened its doors on Tuesday, November 22, 2005, and became - as far as the leaders know - the first-ever youth-led emancipation center in the United States. The center provides a place for youth to gather and get connected to a range of services. V.O.I.C.E.S. provides emancipating foster youth with a comprehensive array of individual support services, opportunities for leadership and community development and structured initiatives that require a commitment over time and are focused on meeting a specific set of needs.

For more information, see the Napa County Promising Practice at www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytat/promisingpractices/NapaVOICES.pdf

San Diego Youth Employment Services (YES) Transition Network

In 2000 the key partners—Casey Family Programs (Casey), San Diego Workforce Partnership (SDWP), and ACCESS, Inc.—developed the Youth Empowerment Services (YES) Program. The YES Program, now called the YES Transition Network, provides services that address the unmet needs of many emancipating foster youth, especially in the areas of remedial education, housing, work readiness skills, and connections to employment opportunities.

The YES Transition Network serves current and former foster youth as well as other at-risk youth from ages 13 through 24. YES has a strong and active employment services component, but staff recognize the fact that youth cannot successfully deal with employment and career issues until they have addressed other life challenges as well. To that end, they work with youth on a continuum of services and activities that blend employment with the other transition issues they must handle.

For more information see the San Diego County Promising Practice online at www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytat/promisingpractices/SanDiegoYes.pdf.

Alameda County Pivotal Point Youth Services

Pivotal Point is a non-profit organization designed to promote self-sufficiency among high risk, underserved youth age 16-24. Through intensive employment training, vocational skills development, entrepreneurship training, case management, and other comprehensive supportive services, Pivotal Point helps youth successfully make the transition into productive, prosperous adults. Their programs focus on providing young people with services, referrals and resources needed to obtain self-sufficiency and mobile stability to ensure progress toward their life goals.

For more information, see Pivotal Point's website at www.ppys.org.

San Francisco Transitional Youth Taskforce Proposes Transitional Youth Centers

In March 2006, San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom, in partnership with the San Francisco Youth Commission, created the Mayor's Transitional Youth Task Force (TYTF). He asked leaders of City departments, representatives of community-based organizations, and young people to come together to develop recommendations on how the City could improve outcomes for San Francisco's most vulnerable transitional youth—those ages 16 through 24 who are disconnected from education, employment, and social support systems.

In October 2007, the Task Force released a report reflecting the group's work in its first year. The report, *Disconnected Youth in San Francisco: A Roadmap to Improve the Life Chances of San Francisco's Most Vulnerable Young Adults*:

- Examines the resources and systems currently in place to help disconnected youth in San Francisco
- Identifies critical deficiencies in the current approaches

- Calls for a new vision and a new set of commitments
- Proposes 16 specific steps needed to implement this vision

Among the recommendations in the report is a proposal for the development of four comprehensive neighborhood-based multi-service centers to provide high quality services for disconnected transitional age youth.

For more information about the San Francisco TYTF and to read the report, go to www.dcyf.org/Content.aspx?id=1566¬e=1572&ekmense1=14_submenu_26_link_2

Kern County ACT – Adolescent Career Transition

ACT is designed to assist youth who are emancipating from the foster care system achieve self-sufficiency. Paid work-experience of up to 500 hours is coupled with life skills courses to assist youth with the transition to adulthood. Referrals to this program are made via Department of Human Services, Independent Living Program staff who continues to work with CRD staff to ensure the success of the young adults. Monthly workshops are conducted around topics of interest as determined by participants to further assist their transition to adulthood. Monthly incentives are available to eligible participants providing further external motivation for success.

For more information see the Kern County Promising Practice online at www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytat/promisingpractices/KernCountyACT.pdf

Fresno County Foster Bridge Youth Program

The Fresno County Foster Bridge Youth Program is a program provided by a collaborative group of partners. Fresno County Independent Living Program, Fresno County Workforce Investment Board, Arbor Education and Training, Fresno City College, and The Walter S. Johnson Foundation. The Foster Bridge Youth program is designed to help foster care youth ages 18-21 years of age, make the transition into college and/or vocational training opportunities more manageable. Services available to a foster youth are financial assistance, college / vocational training, career planning, assessments, assistance with enrollment into Fresno City College, childcare assistance, transportation assistance, peer support, college preparation, and Fresno City College faculty support. Students enrolling in this program enter a cohort of classes consisting of English, Math, and Guidance Studies. The foster youth have direct access to their academic counselor and set out educational plans. The students are monitored for two semesters leading up to the career/ vocational program of their choice. Students receive individualized attention concerning their personal and academic paths.

For more information, see the Fresno County Promising Practice online at www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytat/promisingpractices/FresnoFosterBridge.pdf

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

Legislative/Statutory Remedies

1. Establish and fund Comprehensive Youth Opportunity Centers for transitional youth, with flexibility for communities to leverage and expand existing less comprehensive centers or build “virtual centers.”
2. Establish a Youth Transitions taskforce to eliminate cross-system barriers to universal transition plans, and limit numbers of case workers involved with an individual youth. Coordinate the development of transition plans across systems that are youth centered, youth led and designed, that increase resources and emphasize locating permanent people to support youth in their transition. Explore development of a voucher system tied to youth-developed transition services plan.
3. Extend the timeline of flexible foster care services, to include “family finding,” to age 25.
4. At a minimum, allow foster youth to remain in care until they complete high school (or to age 25)
5. Allocate funding for training caregivers/families in youth and adolescent development and planning for youth transition to adulthood.
6. Extend supportive services and independent living programs to ages 12-25.

Policy and Regulatory Changes

1. Ensure that access to housing through THP+ is available to every emancipated foster youth and that the conditions for initial eligibility and continued support are consistent with and support the goals of permanence, education, and employment.
2. Establish priority targets for current and former foster youth at all levels in adult systems and incentivize targeting developmentally appropriate services to youth and young adults in transition.
3. Increase affordable residential opportunities on or near community college campuses.
4. Provide free tuition and support for emancipated foster youth in California’s public higher education systems.
5. The certification process of local one-stop centers under WIA should include criteria of what it takes to be “youth –friendly”. Explore the application of current one-stop resources and approaches to support youth one-stops or opportunity centers.

Local Practice

1. Local housing agencies should provide priority for section 8 vouchers to former foster youth.
2. Local Youth Councils should ensure that existing one-stops are youth-friendly, and explore the development of youth one-stops or youth opportunity centers.
3. Youth development training provided to those in youth-serving systems should be made available to those in the adult system that work with youth and young adults. The adult systems should examine how services are delivered to young adults and consider new, developmentally appropriate approaches to ensure the effectiveness of those services.

