



## Promising Foster Youth Transition Practice

*Youth Transition Action Teams Initiative*  
Leveraging Community Resources to Ensure  
Successful Transitions for Foster Youth

### **Alameda County's Employment Plus Program Prioritizes Services to Foster Youth**

**Submitted by:** Alameda County Workforce Investment Board

**Community:** Alameda County

**Subject:** Cross System Partnerships, Coordinated Youth Services, Transition Support, Community Services and Support.

**All Youth–One System Element:** Community Services and Support

**Function:** Improve Program Practices, Create Linkages and Connections

#### **The Challenge:**

According to the Alameda County Foster Youth Alliance, every year around 300 youth exit the foster care system in Alameda County. Studies show that within two to four years after aging out of the system, 46% do not complete high school (compared to 26% of non-foster youth), 51% are unemployed, 40% receive public assistance or are incarcerated, and 25% are homeless.

Historically, the Alameda County Workforce Investment Board (ACWIB) serves Workforce Investment Act (WIA) eligible youth through the Employment Plus Program. In past program years, one contractor has been responsible for serving foster youth and transitioning teens residing within the 13 cities in Alameda County, but not including the City of Oakland (which is a separate workforce area).

#### **The Details:**

In a new three year procurement that began July 1, 2008, four, geographically distinct, contractors now enroll 308 youth across four different areas within Alameda County, outside the city of Oakland. The WIB's decision to approve four geographically designated providers to deliver services was based on recommendations of the Youth Policy Council (YPC). Upon approval,, WIB staff were asked to identify a percentage share of services for foster youth that each contractor would enroll. An Ad Hoc committee of the YPC met with WIB staff and developed the following Employment Plus Foster Youth Service goals:

1. The number of foster youth to be served by the entire Local Workforce Investment Area (LWIA) will be 15% for each PY 2008/2009 youth service provider.

2. Contractors will develop a stronger relationship with Alameda County Foster Care Services to accept appropriate referrals for youth who may be eligible for WIA services.
3. Contractors agree that applicants who do not meet enrollment requirements or who cannot be served for any other reason will be referred to other appropriate programs.

In addition to the requirement that 15% of each contractor's caseload serve foster youth, 70% of the 15% must be disconnected, meaning that youth are out of school, without an educational plan, or emancipated. The other 30% must be connected, meaning that they are in school or in the foster care system.

While this requirement to serve foster youth does not result in much of an increase in terms of the number of foster youth served overall compared with previous program years, it does significantly increase program accessibility for foster youth and requires more effort be put into collaboration among those providing services for foster youth in the county.

### **Key Partners:**

Alameda County Workforce Investment Board, Youth Policy Council, Associated Community Action Program, Berkeley Youth Alternatives, Hayward Adult School, Tri Valley Community Foundation, ILP, Beyond Emancipation.

### **Evaluation:**

The WIA program is subject to both internal and state monitoring. The ACWIB relies on YPC representatives from the foster care department to report on improvements and needs of foster youth. The four contractors meet monthly along with the ILP Providers and Beyond Emancipation to discuss program elements and strategize around how to address issues as they come up. Six months into this new procurement, contractors reported that many of the youth they were seeing did not have diplomas or GEDs and were interested in employment almost immediately. Those youth who are too old to be served by WIA are referred to Beyond Emancipation for services. Regular evaluation of program services takes place on an ongoing basis.

### **Lessons Learned:**

In light of the possible cut backs that WIA programs may experience, The Program Finance Specialist of the ACWIB states that it is important to continue to maintain communication and build relationships. They are continually building on the work of [Project Hope](#). It is especially important to move forward with the integration model in communicating and connecting the work of the Workforce Investment Board and the County's Children and Family Services Department. It has also become evident that leadership plays an integral role in implementing program improvements that result in better systems collaboration.

The challenge is to keep all stakeholders working together in spite of the funding cuts each partner faces. Stakeholders must be diligent in reaching out, not retreating. The demand for services will not diminish, and the needs demand more than a singular response.

### **What's Next for this Promising Transition Practice?**

One of the primary goals of the Alameda County Workforce Investment Board is working on a process for effective referrals with contractors and improving connections and communication with group homes and foster parents. A monthly meeting schedule has been set that includes the four service providers, ILP, and Beyond Emancipation.

Rosario Flores, Program Finance Specialist for the Alameda County WIB, is concerned about the high number of emancipating youth who end up receiving services through CalWorks and General Assistance Programs. It is her goal to engage [Project HOPE](#) partners and WIA formula funded Youth Operators in developing strategies to make better employment and educational connections for these youth in order to lessen their reliance on public assistance, as well as creating greater awareness within these systems about the specific needs of the foster youth population.

### **Where to go for more information:**

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