



PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

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

California Connected by 25 Initiative Is Helping Counties Expand Services and Supports

Submitted by: Crystal Luffberry, Program Manager, California Connected by 25 Initiative

Communities: Alameda, Fresno, San Francisco, Santa Clara, and Stanislaus Counties, California

Key Partners: Annie E. Casey Foundation Family to Family Initiative, Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation, Walter S. Johnson foundation, Stuart Foundation, and William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

Subjects: Systems Improvement, Education, Career Preparation, Community Services and Support

All Youth – One System Elements: Education, Career Preparation, Community Services and Support

Function: Improve Program Practice

The Challenge:

More than 83,000 children are in foster care in California today – all of whom have been removed from their homes to protect them from harm. For these children and youth, the State of California assumes the responsibilities associated with parenting, including preparing older youth to function successfully on their own. However, discharging foster youth at age 18, or shortly thereafter, from state-provided supports and services results in many of these youth having no place to live, no job, and no family safety net or lifelong committed adults to support their transition.

Adolescence is a time of discovery, growth, and developing independence; however, few young people at age 18 are prepared to be wholly alone and independent, especially foster youth who are already overcoming difficult circumstances and have had their homes and family lives disrupted. The 4,000 foster youth who transition out of California's foster care system every year face daunting odds. National and other research have shown that 46% of foster youth drop out of high school, 25% become homeless and 51% are unemployed.

Many valuable programs are in place, but still more support is needed. Public investments in three key programs - Independent Living Program (ILP), Transitional Housing Program Plus (THP+), and Chafee Educational Training Voucher Program (ETV) - totaled \$51.4 million in FY 05-06, but served only a portion of the foster youth who could benefit from these services. Philanthropic investments have been important in building upon and expanding these resources for youth in programs such as Guardian Scholars, California Permanency for Youth Project, etc. Ensuring that youth who age out of care have the means and the motivation to become successful adults requires expanding the focus of supports and services to include significant new investments and innovative approaches to support these youth to explore their unique talents

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and interests; develop knowledge, skills and aspirations; and establish the relationships and connections that they will depend on for a lifetime.

The Practice and Evidence:

The practice: The California Connected by 25 Initiative (CC25I) was developed with this expansion of supports and services in mind. A pilot program of California's Family to Family Initiative (F2F), CC25I is a foster youth transitions reform initiative targeted towards youth ages 14 to 24. The purpose of CC25I is to develop a comprehensive continuum of services supporting positive youth development and successful foster youth transition to adulthood. CC25I is part of the national Connected by 25 Initiative established by the Youth Transition funders Group, a network of grant makers whose mission is to help vulnerable youth connect by age 25 to the opportunities, experiences, and support systems that will enable them to succeed throughout adulthood. Five California Family to Family counties have been participating in CC25I since it began in 2005: Alameda, Fresno, San Francisco, Santa Clara, and Stanislaus. Each is building upon the F2F and Youth Transitions and Permanency work they have already accomplished. CC25I counties receive up to \$480,000 in grant assistance over three years to implement plans developed as a result of a self-assessment process and technical assistance.

The Evidence: County planning and implementation of CC25I proposals is on track and sites are very excited by their work and progress. Partnerships are being expanded and promising programs and practices are developing within the counties. This includes new partnerships with local education agencies, financial institutions, local Workforce Investment Boards, and the start-up of three new Gateway programs and three new Transitional Housing Plus programs (THP+). The increased focus on K-12 education outcomes and post-secondary education has resulted in several CC25I counties considering development of Guardian Scholar programs. In addition, several counties are implementing matched savings accounts (Individual Development Accounts) to encourage financial competency, savings, and asset development.

A database and outcomes framework has been developed for county self-evaluation and program improvement regarding youth transition. Though no data are available yet, counties have reported that developing their capacity to track outcomes for this population of youth and providing the database needed to do so is very important step in their transition system reform efforts.

The Details:

Process for establishing the program: Two key funders of California foster youth programs and youth transition programs - Teri Kook of Stuart Foundation and Denis Udall of Walter S. Johnson Foundation - partnered with California's Family to Family site team leader, Bill Bettencourt. Together they developed a vision in 2004 for a comprehensive initiative to help county agencies partner with their communities, integrate systems, and build local continuums of supports and services that would improve the outcomes for emancipating/emancipated foster youth. Through information sharing, peer exchange, and coordinated grant making, funding was expanded. The extensive collaboration by Stuart Foundation, Walter S. Johnson Foundation, and California's Family to Family Initiative were key to laying the foundation that made this initiative possible. By aligning the Initiative with the work of the Youth Transition Funders Group's Foster Care Work Group and establishing this Initiative as part of the national Connected by 25 demonstration sites, funding was further expanded by grants from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation as well as the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation; additional in-kind resources were made available from the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative.

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In addition to grants to participating counties, funding is supporting training and technical assistance to counties and their partners, development and implementation of a CC25I outcomes framework and database, and a systems evaluation by UC Berkeley. Through the CC25I grants made to the county agencies participating in the initiative, further local, state, and federal funds are leveraged for this work.

Strategy and practice: Counties are building their CC25I programs on the partnership, team decision-making, and self-evaluation already well established in their F2F programs. CC25I benefits from the momentum and visibility of F2F in the state, and ensures CC25I is understood and recognized as a reform and system improvement initiative in public child welfare.

Several requirements are made of each CC25I county. Because of the lack of data regarding this population and the inability of counties to evaluate their transition programs based on outcome data and trends, CC25I counties must agree to implement the CC25I database and gather and enter transition outcome data for all in-care foster youth 16 to 19 years old, and for a random sample of emancipated foster youth 18 to 21 years old. In addition, counties must participate with their local community partners in assessment of their current transition system in order to identify gaps, prioritize needs, and determine strategies for building a comprehensive continuum of supports and services for transitioning foster youth ages 14 to 24. Their assessment, planning, and proposal must address 7 focus areas critical to youth transition: K-12 education, housing, employment/job training/postsecondary education, personal and social asset development, financial literacy/savings and assets, and permanency, as all are necessary and interrelated for success in adulthood. Outreach, youth engagement, community partnership, training and technical assistance, and twice-yearly convenings have been critical to county success, not only in implementation of the initiative, but also in planning and development of local CC25I proposals.

Evaluation: An outcomes framework consisting of data indicators across the 7 focus areas (K-12 education, housing, employment/job training/postsecondary education, personal and social asset development, financial literacy/savings and assets, and permanency) has been developed. This framework can be utilized for youth 14 to 24, but it is only required to be used for in-care youth aged 16 to 19, and aftercare youth 18 to 21. Child welfare, probation and/or ILP workers conduct an assessment questionnaire with in-care youth or their caregiver every six months (generally at the time of court or administrative review and case-plan/TILP development). An assessment questionnaire is also completed at the point of each youth's emancipation, as well as on or near the 19th, 20th, and 21st birthday for a random sample of emancipated youth. The assessment questionnaire includes information on the required data/outcomes indicators and data gathered by the workers is then entered into the CC25I database, which has been developed in web-based Efforts to Outcome software (ETO). The CC25I database also includes fields, mailing labels, etc. for ILP program case management. A Custom report is being developed for the required Independent Living Program Annual Statistical Report (SOC 405) and the Annual Narrative Report. Many reports are available in ETO and others can be created through use of a Query Wizard. See Links, below, to view a copy of the CC25I outcomes framework. (Note: Those indicators that are in bold are required to be gathered and entered in CC25I ETO.)

Lessons learned:

Crystal Luffberry, Project Manager for CC25I, shared three strategies for improving practices:

- It is critical for child welfare and their partners to engage together in a broad-based assessment and planning process in order to identify gaps, prioritize needs, align their goals, and develop strategies for integrating systems and meeting the comprehensive needs of

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transitioning foster youth. See Links, below, to access a copy of the CC25I assessment document.

- The state and county context is ever-changing and affects planning, implementation, and marketing/outreach. See opportunities in those changes, network and brainstorm regarding how to use those changes to your advantage. Partner with others working on transition-age youth issues through alignment of goals, activities, and funding whenever possible. A strong collaborative philosophy and network of resources will bring the most flexibility and adaptability to any situation.
- Build in opportunities to step back from planning and/or implementation and consider whether or how peer support and/or technical assistance might be helpful. Getting a fresh perspective and some targeted information can really help.

What's Next for this Promising Transition Practice?

"We hope to add three new CC25I counties next year [2007] and will work during the coming year with our counties on sustainability of their Connected by 25 work," said Luffberry. "We are in the early stages of planning a short video or DVD encouraging donation/investment in opportunities for emancipated youth such as funds to support housing, postsecondary education, matched savings accounts, etc. Our vision is for this DVD to be available to and potentially utilized by community or children's foundations across the state to seek donor-advised funds or other community donations to help former foster youth achieve their goals, dreams and aspirations."

Where to go for more information:

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Links:

CC25I Logic Model

www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/CC25ILogicModel.pdf

CC25I Outcomes Framework

www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/CC25IOutcomesFramework.pdf

CC25I Assessment Document

www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/CC25IAssessmentDocument.pdf

CC25I "Initiative in Brief"

www.f2f.ca.gov/res/CACConnected.pdf