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## PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

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

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## Contra Costa County Foster Youth Services Program Helps Transitioning Youth

**Submitted by:** Catherine Giacalone, Contra Costa County Office of Education, Youth Development Services

**Community:** Contra Costa County, California

**Key Partners:** Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD), Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP), Contra Costa County Office of Education (CCOE), Contra Costa County Workforce Investment Board (WIB), Contra Costa County Probation Department

**Subject:** Education, Career Preparation, and Transition Support

**All Youth – One System Element:** Education; Career Preparation; Community Services and Support

**Function:** Improve Program Practice

### **The Challenge:**

The fragmented system of services in Contra Costa County was not preparing foster youth to transition to employment. Part of the problem was that many foster youth were frequently changing schools, which made it difficult for them to complete high school before they emancipated. The correlation between a high school diploma and meaningful, sustaining employment is well documented. High school completion or a GED is a minimal requirement for employment with a viable living wage. There was a realization that preparing for a successful career began long before one's 18th birthday.

### **The Practice and Evidence:**

**The practice:** Representatives from the education, workforce development, and social service systems in Contra Costa County met to address education, transition, and career readiness. The partners made a commitment to help transitioning foster youth and out-of-home youth get necessary support and services. The approach was to address a common need: to keep foster youth enrolled in school. Education liaisons were hired to facilitate the location of school records, timely enrollment in school, and ultimately to improve academic performance.

**The evidence:** In the 2005-2006 program year 550 group home youth and 950 foster and kinship families received services through the Foster Youth Service Program. Five hundred fifty-seven school records were transferred to other schools. The average number of days between entering placement and enrolling in school was two days. Eight hundred foster youth received an Education Plan and post-secondary educational support services through the Independent Living Skills program.

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### **The Details:**

***Process for establishing the program:*** The Contra Costa County Office of Education received a grant to convene countywide foster youth service providers in order to better address educational outcomes for group home youth. The Employment and Human Services Department was interested in expanding the program to address the needs of all youth in out-of-home placement and provided additional funding to expand the role of the Education Liaisons. Probation joined to seek resources for the young people in the juvenile justice system. Many of the agencies were motivated by legislative mandates and the need to develop a system to track educational records and to support school performance for foster youth. The Workforce Investment Board also focused resources on foster youth, directing funding toward high school completion, career assessment, job internships, and post-secondary school opportunities and/or careers.

***Strategy and practice:*** The strategy that was developed centered on the co-location of Education Liaisons, who are employed by CCCOE and housed at Employment and Human Services offices as well as Probation. Having Liaisons on-site provided social workers with easy access to educators familiar with school processes and procedures and created an environment that fostered collaboration. Each school district in Contra Costa County identified a Foster Youth Services Liaison who works with the County Liaison to assist with enrollment, record location, and school success. The Education Liaisons also participate in the Team Decision Making process. All transitioning youth meet with a team of professionals prior to emancipation to help them plan for a successful transition. EHSD partially funds the Education Liaisons.

The Workforce Investment Act Counselors work closely with the Independent Living Skills program to further support high school completion, post-secondary school opportunities, and career preparation. The WIA counselors are located at school districts and at One Stops throughout the county. Strategic planning took place through a Foster Youth Services Advisory group that developed the co-location plan and provides oversight. The Advisory Group meets quarterly.

***Evaluation:*** Currently the program is monitoring the number of Health and Education passports completed at EHSD and at Probation. Additionally each CCCOE/WIA counselor develops Individual Service Strategy plans for the foster youth enrolled in the WIA program. Twenty percent of each counselor caseload is reserved for foster youth. Each youth has an education and employment goal. Goal attainment for each youth is tracked.

### **Lessons Learned:**

Locating CCCOE staff within Employment and Human Services has helped to eliminate institutional barriers and created opportunities for meaningful collaboration that has benefited foster youth.

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

The Foster Youth Services Advisory Board is expanding to include new partners. This year the Education Liaisons will also be located at the Children's Residential Placement Unit (the unit that places group home youth) and on high school campuses with large numbers of foster youth.

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

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