



PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

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

Fresno County Pilots Co-Located Youth Services on High School Campuses

Submitted by: Pam Lassetter, Assistant Director of Fresno County Workforce Investment Board

Community: Fresno County

Key Partners: Fresno County Workforce Investment Board Youth Program, Fresno Unified and County School District

Subject: Career Preparation, Education

All Youth – One System Element: Career Preparation, Academic Achievement

Function: Improve Program Practice

The Challenge:

The Fresno County Workforce Investment Board directed the Fresno County Workforce Investment Youth Program (FCWIYP) to begin focusing on academic excellence for WIA youth, which exceeded the one grade level of reading or math improvement typically required by WIA. The goal became an increase of at least two grade levels. Ideally, WIB members would like every WIA youth to score a minimum of at least tenth grade levels in math and reading before graduation.

Accordingly, youth had to be tested and receive remediation services based on their test results. The assessments included a basic skills test based on GED requirements that identified the specific skills youth needed to improve upon. Similarly, high schools also assessed students' academic skills at Career Resource Centers. These assessments were sometimes duplicative, and FCWIYP offered additional software which targeted specific literacy gaps in reading and math.

Pam Lassetter used pre-existing weekly "Continuous Improvement" meetings to discuss the new goals with providers who worked directly with youth. Throughout several of these meetings, providers identified access to youth as the main barrier to meeting the new academic excellence standards. One issue providers highlighted was difficulty getting youth to come into Youth Service centers to complete the required testing and remediation. Also, providers had to meet with youth after school or on the weekends because of their school schedules. Many youth had difficulty meeting on weekends because of transportation issues. Some providers mitigated this problem by developing relationships with school staff so they

could meet during the short time between class periods. Providers felt that this limited time frame for interacting with their youth limited the quality of their work, and made it more difficult to help their clients meet the new academic standards.

The Practice and Evidence:

The practice:

The co-located Youth Service Centers serve WIA eligible youth ages 14-18 on high school campuses at the high school Career Resource Centers. The providers who offer case management for WIA enrolled youth are on campus during regularly scheduled hours. These hours are different at each school as they need to be compatible with other activities held at the centers. Youth can meet with their providers during these hours, and can also complete required assessments and basic skills remediation. This pilot project is now in its second year and a new procurement cycle will start at the beginning of the 2008/2009 academic year.

The Details:

The process for establishing the program:

Pam facilitated a Youth Council meeting, where she raised concerns about difficulty accessing youth and asked for input from Youth Council members. One of these members managed the ROP program and another was a high school principal. They suggested a pilot program in which youth service centers were co-located on high school campuses through the high school career centers. Youth Council members directed Pam to meet and discuss the feasibility of this proposal with four High School principals.

During her meetings with the principals, Pam gave a PowerPoint presentation (<http://www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytat/promisingpractices/FresnoCountyWIAPresentationtoPrincipals>) and discussed what FCWIYP could offer in exchange for participation in the co-location pilot project. Specifically, Pam offered access to sophisticated WIA assessment and remediation software, incentive money for WIA enrolled youth showing academic progress, and staff to help support the work school counselors and teachers were already doing. The principals agreed that the WIA Youth Service Centers could be housed in their campus Career Resource Centers if FCWIYP would purchase the assessment software. After meeting with the principals, FCWIYP staff met with school counselors and began developing relationships with them. These relationships have continued to strengthen as FCWIYP staff is always available to talk with counselors and principals if they have any concerns. Additionally, FCWIYP staff visit the school sites to check in with school staff about how the project is working for them periodically.

The strategy and practice:

FCWIYP providers offer relationship based case management for their youth. They serve as mentors and also provide workshops, academic assessment and tutoring, career guidance, leadership development, and incentive money for youth who improve their grades. Providers work closely with school counselors; they function as an extension of school staff by offering one on one case management and creating individual basic skills attainment plans with students. Youth are only able to participate in work experience aspects of the program after they have raised their reading and/or math levels.

Providers work closely with school counselors and some teachers and parents as well. For example, the principals of some schools have asked that providers attend parent-teacher conferences. Additionally, referral systems have been put in place so that teachers and counselors can easily refer struggling students who meet WIA eligibility criteria to FCWIYP. This has helped teachers and counselors better understand the services offered through WIA and has generated increased numbers of youth served at the co-located Youth Service Centers.

Evaluation:

After one year of operation, staff members gave a PowerPoint presentation highlighting impacts of the pilot project (<http://www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytat/promisingpractices/FresnoCountyWIACo-LocationEvaluation.pdf>). The project had a wide range of positive outcomes including improved grades, high graduation rates (100% in one school), increased utilization, increased information sharing between workforce and education partners, and increased referrals from campus staff. School staff and principals also indicated that they liked the program, and principals from participating schools have asked to be included in the program again next year. Additionally, principals from other schools have asked to have Youth Service Centers on their campuses as well.

Lessons Learned:

Pam Lassetter suggests that administrators “make sure they understand the problems and barriers to serving people,” when thinking about how a program will be implemented. It is crucial, she explains, that these barriers are addressed in order for a people to actually use services and to fully benefit from them.

What’s Next for this Promising Transition Practice?

During the next procurement cycle, requirements for holding a contract to serve WIA youth in Fresno County will include co-located Youth Service Centers on any high school campus with ten or more WIA clients. Based on feedback from FCWIP staff, school staff, and principals, she feels there is strong support for this expansion. Additionally, Pam would like to continue to increase the comfort level of teachers so they come to providers for help with WIA eligible students.

Where to go for more information:

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Pam Lassetter’s PowerPoint presentation to school principals:

<http://www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytat/promisingpractices/FresnoCountyWIAPresentationtoPrincipals>

PowerPoint Presentation highlighting positive outcomes of co-location pilot

<http://www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytat/promisingpractices/FresnoCountyWIACo-LocationEvaluation.pdf>