



PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

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

“BustNOut” Website Provides Current and Former Foster Youth with Access to Information

Submitted by: Glenn County Human Resources Agency

Community: Glenn County, California and counties in the northern region of California

Key Partners: The lead partner is Glenn County Human Resources Agency (HRA). Butte County was also a funding partner, in the origination phase. Other partners include the Independent Living Program providers, One-Stops, and county welfare departments of the northern region: Colusa, Del Norte, Glenn, Humboldt, Lake, Lassen, Mendocino, Modoc, Plumas, Shasta, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, and Yuba Counties, as well as Yuba College.

Subject: Comprehensive Website for Foster Youth

All Youth – One System Element: Community Services and Support

Function: Improve Program Practice; Access to Information

The Challenge:

The staff of Glenn County Human Resources Agency (HRA) who work with foster youth saw the struggles these young people face when they transition to adulthood. A number of times the youth were disadvantaged because they lacked a sense of where to go and what to do as they were emancipating. They often don't have access to resources, and they [frequently] aren't welcomed in employment resource centers. HRA staff thought that a youth-friendly website could be an effective way to make the information available to youth transitioning from foster care.

While mandated to serve the emancipating foster youth in Glenn County, the HRA staff recognized that youth in neighboring counties were experiencing the same difficulty. They thought it might be possible to pool efforts and resources to serve youth throughout the area with a single web site. The intention was to help foster youth find a local One-Stop center. “If we could put information on the web, if they had access to it, they could see all the resources that are available to them,” explained David Allee, Employment Manager for the HRA.

The Practice:

The result of the regional effort was a foster youth-friendly website called BustNOut.com, on line since 2004. The site features information from each of the participating counties. Employment information is showcased in each county as well as agency contact information to assist with health and safety issues. Topics include the following subjects:

- personal survival
- health
- housing
- rights
- One-Stop Centers in their region
- Records
- the courts
- education and training
- jobs and careers
- money and budgeting
- transportation
- entertainment
- service directories
- fostering community

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A message board is provided. Former foster youth who have made the transition to adulthood successfully offer advice in an advice column. Discussion forums are also available for peer support, foster youth alumni, and former foster youth (youth who returned to their families before emancipating).

The Details:

The process used to establish the practice: Scott Gruendl, Administrative Deputy Director for the HRA, initiated the collaborative. The website was developed in stages with stakeholder input gathered from throughout the region. Glenn County HRA extended invitations to the 15 other northernmost counties in California to participate. Most of the counties and/or the ILP providers took part at some point in the process as did Yuba College.

The strategy and practice: Designing and establishing the web site was accomplished in three phases: 1) gathering design input from stakeholders; 2) populating the website with content from the various counties, marketing the website to ILP providers, and installing the server; and 3) completing the content and training county staffs to carry out the administrative functions.

The first phase involved getting stakeholder input. "We asked people who provide services and who work in ILP to sit down with us and begin designing a web-based product," explained Allee. "We also asked current and former foster youth." In January of 2003 they started holding focus groups, brainstorming sessions, and some workshops to help in the design and standards. They chose four locations throughout the region - Susanville, Redding, Williams, and Chico - to make it easier for stakeholders to participate. Approximately 90 people attended in total, including foster youth. In all the meetings, the approach was to hear from the youth and those who serve them about what was wanted.

At the end of the first phase, the initial funders—Glenn County's HRA and Butte County—put out a call for bids for someone to create the product. They chose a provider from Chico to create the web site and provide message board moderating services. Glenn and Butte shared initial responsibility for maintenance and updates. They also supplied training for all the participating counties so the administering staff would know how to update and maintain their county-specific portion. The training took place during the spring of 2004. The cost for this highly useful, regional support effort for foster youth is very modest, totaling only \$85,000 from inception to now. To date the HRA of Glenn County has not passed on any costs to other counties. "We are paying for the maintenance and upkeep at this point, primarily through HRA," said Allee.

What's Next for this Promising Transition Practice?

The next step is to enhance access to other counties by marketing the site. This could be managed through any media such as television ads, radio announcements, and/or public service announcements on cable access television. The plan could also include potential billboard advertising and for branding a number of materials.

Where to go for more information

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Links:

BustNOut website www.bustnout.com

BustNOut PowerPoint www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/bustnout.com