



PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

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

Humboldt County Partners with Private Business to Offer Summer Employment Opportunities for Youth

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Community: Humboldt County

Key Partners: Humboldt County Workforce Investment Board (HCWIB) and Youth Council (YC), Employment Development Department (EDD), Department of Health & Human Services—Social Services Branch—Employment Training Division (ETD), Northern California Indian Development Council, Inc., Hoopa Tribe, Klamath-Trinity Joint Unified School District, Humboldt State University.

Subject: Work Experience, Occupational Skills Training

All Youth – One System Element: Career Preparation

Function: Improve Program Practice

The Challenge:

Two primary challenges face youth programs in Humboldt County. The first challenge is that DOL/WIA youth monies for Humboldt County have decreased by almost 50% since 2000. The decrease is significantly higher when compared to CETA and JTPA-funded youth programs of the 1970's, 80's and 90's.

Secondly, youth programs in Humboldt County were “decentralized” in 2002, with the positive result of more youth being served in more regions of the county. However, decentralization meant that resources originally directed to youth work experience or occupational training programs had to be re-directed to support the staffing needed to be able to work with youth in more regions of the county.

In short, decreasing public revenues coupled with higher staffing costs have exacerbated the problem of less money available for direct youth training activities. This has resulted in less youth having summer job employment opportunities.

The Practice and Evidence:

The Practice:

The *StepUp for Youth Jobs* program is based on a simple practice: match youth to jobs that “make sense” in terms of a youth's interest and commitment to work at the job and the type of job order placed by an employer.

The evidence is also clear: a recent economic and workforce development study (*Targets of Opportunity*) conducted by the Humboldt County Workforce Investment Board, found there are expanding, good-paying jobs with upward career mobility in our economy. The study also indicated a difficulty by many employers in hiring entry-level workers that are “ready to work.” Employers often repeated this sentiment, regardless of the industry sectors they represented.

Work Experience:

Two main tracks of activity start in early spring:

- Development of summer jobs with employers, and
- Outreach/recruitment and assessment of youth to be matched to those jobs.

Eligibility criteria for youth to participate in the StepUp program is simple: a youth’s expressed desire and demonstrated commitment to want to work. Employers are told that the StepUp program will save them time and trouble and that only youth with demonstrated work maturity skills that match the requirements outlined in their job order, are sent for interviews.

Occupational Training:

In addition to the StepUp work experience job referrals, the Youth Council was the catalyst in bringing in other funding partners to create a unique *Digital Pathways for Tribal Communities* video project. Youth learned video development skills, as well as video and audio editing skills performed on Apple computers using Final Cut Pro. They learned to use industry-standard video and audio software widely used in workplaces with multi-media functions.

The Details:

The process for establishing the work experience element of StepUp:

Terry Coltra, Chair of the Youth Council, challenged Youth Council and HCWIB members to “step-up” and pledge to hire a youth at their place of business for the summer, and/or donate funds to be used for placing youth at a summer job with another employer. The scope of the challenge was broadened to include public and private sector employers from throughout the county.

HCWIB staff began searching for alternative ways to boost the capacity of work experience programs for youth. Staff found examples from other areas of the State where private employers were sponsoring youth work experience opportunities, and/or providing short-term employment at their businesses.

The Chair of the Youth Council brought the *StepUp for Youth Jobs* concept to the Youth Transition Action Team committee (YTAT), and gained support from the Director of the Department of Health and Human Services. EDD and ETD were brought into the planning phase, and WIA youth program operators began coordination activities.

The strategy and practice:

The local EDD office plays a crucial role in managing the job development and job order systems used with StepUp. Using the EDD job order system, StepUp job orders are suppressed from regular EDD listings, and are assigned their own area in the CalJOBS system. Youth or youth workers have online access to these job listings.

WIA youth program operator staff partner with EDD Youth Employment Opportunity staff to develop jobs with employers. Teams accomplish this through cold calls, visits to businesses, letters, and presentations to chambers of commerce and service clubs.

Youth are recruited from all area high schools. Some youth are referred from community service providers, including juvenile justice, foster care, and Independent Living Skills staff. Youth attend job search workshops at area high schools and at The Job Market (central location of Humboldt's One-Stop System). Youth are trained on how to login and use the CalJOBS system, including how to navigate to the special area where StepUp job orders are kept. Youth are assessed, matched and referred to appropriate jobs by EDD, ETD and regional WIA youth program operator staff.

Workshops and assessment appointments are used as a basis to evaluate each youth's level of work maturity skills (e.g., showing up on time, showing up regularly, working independently and as part of a team, appropriate grooming, able to take initiative, problem solving, etc.).

The process for establishing the occupational training element of StepUp:

In April 2007, the Youth Council directed that \$23,000 be directed to multi-media occupational training activities (*Digital Pathways for Tribal Communities*). The YC funds helped leverage an additional \$50,000 from other community partners. This included the donation of ten (10) new Apple computers to Hoopa High School by the Northern California Indian Development Council, Inc. The Hoopa Tribe, the Klamath-Trinity Joint Unified School District, and Humboldt State University (HSU) also pitched in resources that resulted in the creation of a video-equipped computer lab loaded with industry-standard video software. Funders also helped purchase quality, industry-standard video cameras and sound equipment.

The strategy and practice:

HCWIB developed a Memorandum of Agreement that clearly spelled out each entities role and responsibility for the project. HCWIB contracted with the Bay Area Video Coalition (BAVC) to provide a college-approved curriculum, a trained instructor, and technical assistance during the course of the project. The WIA youth program operator and the Hoopa Tribe program coordinator selected youth for the project. Youth learned about the elements of storytelling, capturing, compressing and editing video and audio footage. Youth were paid for more than 80 hours of work and earned 3 college credits from Humboldt State University. Youth created DVD projects individually or on a team basis. Nine (9) projects were created, including two (2) original music videos. The project concluded with a community showing of the youth's work to more than 100 community members, HCWIB board members and Humboldt State University administration and teaching staff.

Evaluation:

The work experience component of *StepUp for Youth Jobs* began in the summer of 2006, and resulted in thirty-three (33) youth being matched to public and private sector jobs.

The successes of 2006 made it easier to increase the number of employers engaged in the 2007 *StepUp for Youth Jobs* program.

- This year's program matched seventy-five (75) youth to summer jobs. About half of the job matches were made to jobs in the private sector. More than ten (10) young people have been hired permanently at the businesses where they worked over the summer.

- Seventeen (17) youth participated in the *Digital Pathways for Tribal Communities* occupational training project. Of these youth, eight (8) enrolled in post-secondary education, six (6) returned to high school and three (3) remain out-of-school. Of the youth remaining out-of-school, two (2) are being hired for temporary video project jobs, and one (1) has been hired by the local Hoopa newspaper office to work with their graphic design and layout team.

Lessons Learned:

StepUp for Youth Jobs is a program known for its flexibility, its commitment to the principle of an “All Youth One System” service delivery approach, and its attempt to look at services for youth through the filter of a system rather than through the filters of individual programs.

StepUp for Youth Jobs has commitment and support from the Director of the Department of Health and Human Services, from members of the Workforce Investment Board and the Youth Transition Action Team, the Employment Development Department Manager and the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors.

Groups wanting to develop a program similar to Humboldt County’s *StepUp* program should take care in determining roles and responsibilities of participating partners. They should also be ready to challenge partners to push the edges of their program requirements and funding guidelines in order to truly be a youth program open to the “All Youth One System” approach.

What’s Next for this Promising Transition Practice?

Humboldt County is positioning to expand the *StepUp for Youth Jobs* program by making plans for a year-round version. The Youth Council has “stepped up” and committed more than \$55,000 for each of three years towards hiring a full-time *StepUp for Youth Jobs* coordinator. Monies would also be used to fund work experience and occupational training activities. DHHS—Social Services and the Probation Department have followed the YC leadership by committing more than \$50,000 each for each of the next three years for the same purpose. Youth transitioning out of foster care and juvenile justice systems will be prioritized for *StepUp for Youth Jobs* services. The success of the 2006 and 2007 *StepUp for Youth Jobs* has resulted in more than \$150,000 per year being directed to *StepUp* activities for the next three years!

Where to go for more information:

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