



---

## PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

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

---

## Imperial County Establishes a Centralized Case Management System

**Submitted by:** Imperial County Youth Council

**Community:** Imperial County, California

**Key Partners:** Workforce Investment Board of Imperial County, Imperial County Youth Council, Imperial County, Imperial County Office of Employment Training Program Compliance

**Subject:** Coordinating Youth Services

**All Youth – One System Element:** Community Services and Support

**Function:** Create Linkages and Connect Systems

**The Challenge:** Imperial County is located in the southeast corner of California and is a rural, desert community. The county consistently has one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation, ranging from 22 percent in winter to 35 percent in the summer months. The population is about 150,000 (70 percent Hispanic) and has been identified by the California Employment Development Department (EDD) as having one of the highest concentrations of Workforce Investment Act (WIA)-eligible youth in the state (33 percent). Imperial County struggled with efficiently connecting youth with services due to a shortage of resources that strained their system, and a lack of connectivity between providers and leadership in other social service systems. Because of these inefficiencies and concerns with loss of services, the local Youth Council and Workforce Investment Board worked to identify systemic challenges and develop strategies and solutions.

**The Practice and Evidence:**

**The Practice:** In October 2003, the Workforce Investment Board of Imperial County (the WIB) made two changes to improve their efficiency when connecting youth with work. First, they transitioned to a centralized case management system in order to maximize resources. Second, they created controls for the new system to prevent loss of services. By centralizing case management, they were able to better coordinate with other service providers and more fully serve the comprehensive needs of youth. Helen Palomino, Program Analyst for the WIB, says, "By merging each other's strengths and allowing organizations to focus on what they did best, local providers were able to support youth through their services while one body focused on the administrative case management function."

**The Evidence:** Since they transitioned to centralized case management, their overall performance has increased despite budget reductions of 60 percent. In fact, performance is 34 percent above their benchmark. In addition, they've seen minimal changes in the number of youth served. In 1999, they were serving an average of 570 youth with a budget of 2.5 million dollars. By 2004, their funding had declined to 1 million dollars for youth, yet they were able to serve 550 youth and exceed their performance agreements. Palomino says of the transition to centralized case management, "The timing could not have been better because of the

---

## PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

---

reduction.... By centralizing case management, we were able to stay afloat and increase our performance.”

Recently their local One-Stop system underwent an efficiency study that evaluated the effectiveness and process of the whole system and found that Youth Services was given much credit. The study also favorably assessed the local Youth Services system and the partnerships that exist among the WIB, Youth Council, the County, and youth contractors for implementing an exceptional program in such early stages.

### **The Details:**

***The Process used to establish the practice:*** Several factors contributed to the successful merging of the centralized case management system. Youth Council members actively lobbied for a new implementation system and supported the transition. As a result, the WIB recognized that the Youth Council was a resource for implementing change. Members and WIB leadership also made it a priority to network with other individuals/organizations that were doing similar work. Developing relationships with key decision makers led to a new conversation about what was possible, culminating in agreements among the Youth Council, WIB, and Interagency Administrators.

Assuring players on all sides that their needs were being met was a challenge during the initiative. The breakthrough occurred when Swing and Palomino saw the results of creating a safe forum where contractor managers, compliance staff, and case managers could all discuss needs and opinions. Palomino says that during the course of the meetings, they were able to “just listen and get an idea about the problems and weakness, and build and create a strengthened process from it.... We were able to create ease in an environment that was previously very territorial.” What this afforded for leadership, Swing states, was for a clear “establishment of protocols. By agreeing to a give and take on all sides, a smooth and regulated process was structured.” Front line staff felt heard, and saw their ideas implemented into system change. They approached these meetings with “win-win as the message,” which Palomino says allowed participants to “experience the willingness of other players. It really just comes down to having dialogue, knowing where the challenges are, and responding accordingly.”

***The strategy and practice:*** The Imperial County WIB was inspired by the Daisy Wheel model presented at a Youth Council Institute (YCi) workshop. Since the WIB and Youth Council had adopted the All Youth-One System approach and had participated actively in YCi, they were able to access information and resources to assist them in their transition. Palomino says that they used “YCi as a credible base for trying something new.”

After spending time exploring procurement strategies, Imperial County decided to implement a service model that was a hybrid. They integrated the Daisy Wheel model in which their local youth programs centralize case management services with services delivered via a network of youth service providers. Their model featured a combination of cost reimbursement contracts and fee for service contracts. They also established a Youth Service Provider Network made up of fee for service and cost reimbursement contractors as well as non-WIA services.

The centralized case management approach entails certain contractual requirements for their service providers. First, they must identify leveraged in-kind contributions with other youth service agencies. Second, youth contracts require an MOU-type agreement between service partners. As a result, strong collaborative and cooperative relationships with schools, social services, behavioral health, employers, and One-Stops have led to an abundance of complementary services and great fiscal savings.

---

## PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

---

Imperial County found networking critical to meeting their goals. Palomino reflects that the “key is really building relationships so it is a win-win situation for all involved. Everyone has their own perspective about what problems are [affecting youth]. The secret to our success has been to build relationships with people who are willing to stretch beyond their personal perspective.” She added that “partnerships must emphasize mutual benefit, non-duplicative effort, and commitment to excellence.” Creative collaborations with the community college, CBOs, San Diego Labor Council, Literacy Volunteers of America, and other local organizations have led to leveraged funding and services. Palomino reflects that the key to her success with the networking has been to “really put myself on the line and build relationships with people working at all levels and connect them to others” who she knows can serve their needs.

Palomino and her project partner, Terry Swing, Program Compliance Coordinator for Imperial County Office of Employment Training, have worked together to establish strong protocols for improving the system. They started out by creating a safe space for the exchange of ideas and feedback among front line contractors, management, and monitors. “It really paid off,” says Palomino. “We were able to create a system where everyone was able to standardize and monitor the service providers” and front line staff felt as though their concerns were heard and implemented into the system. Based on feedback from all partners, Swing created several new protocols and worksheets that clarified “who gets what when and where. We established a new system that involves all players—fee for service and contractors—and the documentation allows everyone to track where they are at a certain place in time so that they know what needs to be submitted. Documentation comes in at the front end and the back end.”

In May 2005, the Imperial County WIB established a pilot project to leverage resources to help meet the needs of foster youth. Building on the success of centralized case management, this pilot was made possible due in large part to strong relationships between the WIB and the Department of Social Services. They have developed a work agreement to support foster youth connecting them with the right people from the Department of Social Services (DSS) and WIA Case Management providers. This agreement supports all existing MOUs and expands upon them. As a result, partners are able to establish cooperative work relationships with all parties. As Palomino says, they are “tapping in from both sides to support the comprehensive needs of all youth.”

In June of 2005, the Imperial County WIB is exploring the development of similar relationships between the County Office of Education and the Department of Rehabilitation with an eye towards merging services within their systems. For the first time, a representative serving youth with special needs has sought membership on the Youth Council. The agreement was highlighted in a federal Training and Employment Notice (TEN) issued this past January '06, whose subject was the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program.

They are also planning to work with WIA Adult programs by looking at providing services to 18- to 21-year olds.

### **Lessons learned:**

Imperial County has found many advantages to having a centralized case management system. Most notably, they've had great program performance, an overall savings in program costs, improved quality services, as well as improvement to existing and establishment of new program controls. The new model has also afforded them an opportunity to promote and establish several new effective practices including exit committee reviews and a system-wide standardization. They have also seen an increase in understanding of performance, new focus on quality vs. quantity, a maximized use of EDD Capacity Building Unit's trainings, and a centralized brokering role for framework services.

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

Imperial County is transitioning into another stage of youth services. System challenges and continuous funding reductions have forced everyone to work more creatively and resourcefully. They are moving forward with open communication, improved coordination of resources, and strong commitment to goals. They are actively seeking connection with agencies and organizations willing to merge activities and systems. Currently they are piloting cross-system activities with the Department of Social Services, Department of Rehabilitation, and WIA adult services.

Palomino says, "Centralized case management is a transition system for us. We have not yet arrived at the optimal system, and there's a lot more room for even better collaboration and coordination among systems and services." She adds that this project is in "continuous improvement. That's what most people fail to understand - you never arrive, you never really get there, you just continue to work on your process and find weak areas and strengthen them."

### **Where to Go for More Information**

WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD OF IMPERIAL COUNTY  
Imperial County Youth Council  
P.O. Box 618  
El Centro, CA 92244-0618  
(760) 353-6594  
[www.wibic.org/](http://www.wibic.org/) WIB site  
[www.wibic.org/](http://www.wibic.org/) site for youth seeking employment

Helen Palomino  
Workforce Investment Board of Imperial County  
Program Analyst - Youth Services  
(760) 353-5050  
[hpalomino@wibic.org](mailto:hpalomino@wibic.org)  
<http://www.wibic.org>

Terry Swing  
Imperial County Office of Employment Training Program Compliance Coordinator  
(760) 337-1318  
[tswing@icoet.org](mailto:tswing@icoet.org)

### **Links:**

Daisy Wheel Model  
Contact New Ways to Work:  
[clarsen@newwaystowork.org](mailto:clarsen@newwaystowork.org)

Youth Council Institute  
[www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/yci.html](http://www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/yci.html)

Training and Employment Notice (TEN) 18-05  
[www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/ImperialTEN.pdf](http://www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/ImperialTEN.pdf)