



Promising Foster Youth Transition Practice

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

The Dream Center and Coffee House **Helping Build a Better Future for Kern County's Foster Youth**

Submitted by: Kern High School District

Community: Kern County

Subject: Foster Youth Friendly One-Stops, Education, Career Preparation, Coordinating Youth Services, Cross System Partnerships, Paid Work Experience, Youth Leadership, Transition Support, Occupational Skills Training, Systems Improvement

All Youth–One System Element: Comprehensive Youth Development Approach

Function: Create Linkages and Connect Systems

The Challenge:

More than 2,557 children are in out-of-home care in Kern County with about 200 youth aging out each year. In 2006, the Superintendent of Schools moved Foster Youth Services out of the Department of Alternative Education to the [Kern County Network for Children \(KCNC\)](#). At that time the Director of Network for Children became painfully aware of the needs of foster youth in the county and wanted to find a way to make things better. Around the same time, the United Way of Kern County was targeting foster youth as one of their priorities. Through collaboration, a steering committee referred to as the *Dream Team* was developed and a plan was set in motion that took just under two years to implement moving from an idea to the grand opening in October, 2008, of the [Kern County Dream Center and Coffee House](#). The center is youth-driven with current and former foster youth as Dream Team members deciding who should be stationed at the center, identifying the resources to be provided, and creating a youth-friendly environment.

The Details:

Working together with youth and community partners, KCNC has created an innovative resource center for foster youth that serves as an easily accessible, inviting hub for comprehensive, integrated services and unique job training.

The Dream Center assists current and former foster youth transition to independence and self-sufficiency. Services utilize a formal case management system, with co-located staff from Kern County Probation, Kern High School District and the Department of Human Services Independent Living Program, on-site and available, reducing the duplication of services and increasing the accessibility to opportunities for youth.

PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

The Dream Center's goal is to provide services and resources that address the following priorities:

- Provide timely and appropriate school placement for foster youth.
- Assist foster youth with advocating for their own needs.
- Assist foster youth with completing their educational and/or vocational programs.
- Assist foster youth with successfully transitioning to independent living and higher education, vocational job training programs, and other career-related opportunities.
- Weave together resources available through Kern's Mental Health System of Care, Health System, Child Welfare Services, Probation, Schools, and Employment Services.
- Provide an integrated and comprehensive linking and referral system.
- Facilitate the integration of case management and support services among agencies and community-based organizations that cross systems.
- Provide foster youth with opportunities to participate in and build informal support networks.
- Provide foster youth with hands-on job training and experience operating a small business.
- Invite foster youth to provide input in service delivery design, evaluation, and county policy development.

The Dream Center offers Kern County's current and former foster youth a range of support services and structured programs. Services based at the Dream Center include:

- Mentoring from former foster youth ([FYS Brochure](#))
- Tutoring ([Project D.R.E.A.M.](#))
- Life skills workshops
- Education, training and employment support
- Information, referral and advice
- Advocacy material

Facilities and resources include computers available for use at the Resource Center, internet access at both the Resource Center and the Coffee Shop, photocopier and fax, and a resource library.

In addition, the Dream Center serves as a job incubator in a couple of different ways. Emancipated foster youth are trained to serve as paraprofessional case management advocates to help foster youth negotiate educational and social service systems and achieve self-sufficiency. Former foster youth are also employed in the [Dream Center Coffee Shop](#). Currently there are about seven youth employed in the Coffee Shop and two youth employed as Advocates in the Resource Center.

One of the other key activities that takes place at the Dream Center and Coffee House is Project Independence, a joint effort between the Kern High School District's Adolescent Career Training (ACT) program and the Rotary of Bakersfield. The program utilizes United Way funds for teaching foster youth basic soft work skills and helping youth get placed at job sites. Once youth are prepared to be linked with private sector partners for employment, the

ACT staff place the students with participating businesses based on their employment skills and career interests. ACT staff also provide oversight of the youth and employer support.

Key Partners:

The Foster Youth Resource Center and Coffee House is a collaboration between the Kern County Network for Children, Foster Youth Services, local businesses, public agencies, non-profits and community members. On-Site Partners include Foster Youth Services of Kern County, Kern High School District, Kern County Probation, Independent Living Program (ILP)-Department of Human Services, Transitional Age Youth (T.A.Y.)-Department of Mental Health, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Valley.

Evaluation:

Currently an “Efforts to Outcomes-based”, web-driven measurement system is being designed for the center through Social Solutions. It is in the design phase and will measure contact with youth, track services that they are getting and improvements that are taking place. The system will measure such things as decreases in placement moves, WIA performance outcomes, employment, and advancement in basic skills. This will allow for the data that is required in different programs, to be tracked in one place. It will make it possible to share some client information between agencies and will provide a way for agencies, at the very least, to know if they have a client in common.

Lessons Learned:

Karine Kanikkeberg, a Resource Teacher with the Kern High School District states, “It has been a really smooth process. We weren’t as prepared for so many kids. About 20 kids called looking for employment help in the first month of being open.” She wishes that they would have had a bigger bank of un-subsidized employment opportunities when the Center opened, although the community does seem like they are starting to step up and help out.

What’s Next for this Promising Transition Practice?

Current priorities for the Center are to develop a calendar of ongoing events that will be developed and coordinated by youth and posted on the website. There will also be an emphasis on creating a bigger bank of private sector employers who are willing to give foster youth a chance.

Where to go for more information:

Karine Kanikkeberg

Resource Teacher

Kern High School District

Career Resource Department

karine_kanikkeberg@khsd.k12.ca.us