



PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

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

**Kern County Adolescent Career Transition (ACT)
 Provides Paid Work Experience**

Submitted by: Kern High School District/Career Resource Department

Community: Kern County, California

Key Partners: Kern High School District/Career Resource Department, Kern County Workforce Investment Board

Subject: Career Preparation, Subsidized Employment, Work Experience

All Youth – One System Element: Career Preparation

Function: Improve Program Practice

The Challenge: Beginning in 2001, the Career Resource Department staff of the Kern High School District began hearing more about the needs of foster youth while attending conferences, including the National Youth Employment Coalition. This increased awareness, coupled with the changes in the Workforce Investment Act that made serving foster youth a top priority, led the staff to realize they needed to provide services expressly for foster youth. At issue, though, was what services could they provide that were not already being met by other agencies in Kern County.

The Practice and Evidence:

The practice: In 2002, the Kern High School District Career Resource Department staff decided to send in a separate proposal to the WIB to work with emancipated foster youth. The WIB approved the proposal and has funded the program, known as Adolescent Career Transition (ACT), since that time. ACT offers 500 hours of paid work experience, geared to individual needs. ACT uses a tiered system of work experience, geared to meet each youth’s level of work experience and skills. The goal is for each young person to get an unsubsidized, private sector job by the end of their time in the program.

The evidence: The following chart presents some of the recent data:

ACT – Adolescent Career Transition Serving emancipated foster youth

Total Number Served (inc. CE)	Currently Enrolled	Hired (at WEX site)	Attending Post-Secondary	Military	Diploma Attained / Diplomas Possible	WIA Goals Attained
68	19	19	28	4	8/13 (4 currently attending)	178

The chart was supplied by Karine Kanikkeberg.

PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

The Details:

The process used to establish the practice: The first order of business was determining what services were already being provided. Karine Kanikkeberg, resource teacher for career and workforce development in the Kern High School District's Career Resource Department, said that she spoke with "everyone who would listen," including people at the Kern Human Services Agency, public housing, in secondary education, at the community college, and former foster youth themselves. Kanikkeberg discovered that subsidized housing and job search programs were already in place. "Subsidized employment was the piece that was missing," she said, so they focused there.

The Kern High School District Career Resource Department staff were already partnering with the Kern, Inyo, and Mono Counties Workforce Investment Board (WIB) to serve youth who had dropped out. They developed a separate WIA proposal for working with emancipated foster youth, and in 2002, the WIB approved it to support ACT. Finding participants the first year was challenging, but the ACT staff were able to get referrals from the Independent Living Programs and the Department of Human Services.

The strategy and practice: Establishing trust with each youth is an important cornerstone of the program. A project specialist meets with every young adult three to four times before making a worksite placement. This strategy works especially well with the young people who "are coming with zero: no experience and no skills," said Kanikkeberg. When this is the case, "We place them in safe work sites where we know the supervisor has empathy, tolerance, and will work with them. These work sites tend to be public agencies," she added. The youth will typically work a hundred hours in the safe sites and then have an evaluation to determine if they are ready for more real world work.

Because the Career Resource Department staff run both ACT and Project Success, a work preparation program for youth still in care, they sometimes encourage Project Success participants to move to ACT if they still need help. "Now, having been around, we have a pretty good network," said Kanikkeberg. Word has gotten out about the program and they get many personal referrals. "The best marketers are the youth," said Kanikkeberg.

Evaluation: The program is evaluated using the WIA criteria: Improving basic skills, completing certificate program or high school, gaining employment, etc.

What's Next for this Promising Transition Practice?

According to Kanikkeberg, they want to do more independent-living-program-reinforcement activities in a group setting, so the youth form a sense of community among themselves. "It seems to help them to know there are others going through what they're going through." The challenge is finding a time that works for everyone. Most of the ACT youth are both attending community college and working, so coordinating schedules is difficult. Currently the ACT project specialist is working with the youth, exploring different dates and times. Pay day workshops or Saturday workshops are two options they are exploring.

Where to go for more information

KERN HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT
Career Resource Department
2727 F Street
Bakersfield, CA 93301
661-322-7492

Resource Teacher, Career and Workforce
Development
Career Resource Department
(661) 322-7492
Karine_Kanikkeberg@khsd.k12.ca.us

Karine Kanikkeberg