



PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

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

**Kern County’s Project Success
 Offers Career Preparation and Paid Work Experience
 for In-School Foster Youth**

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

All Youth – One System Element: Career Preparation; Education

Function: Improve Program Practice

The Challenge: The Career Resource Department staff received feedback from participants in the district’s paid work experience program for emancipated foster youth (Adolescent Career Transitions, or ACT) that the program was great, but they needed work experience sooner.

The Practice and Evidence:

The practice: After hearing from the ACT participants, the Career Resource Center (CRC) staff decided to take some of their existing in-school Workforce Investment Act (WIA) grant money to provide work preparation classes, one-on-one counseling, and paid work experience for foster youth who were in school. The CRD staff named this cluster of services Project Success.

The evidence: The program is evaluated using the WIA criteria: Improving basic skills, gaining employment, etc. The following chart shows data for foster youth being served in October of 2006:

Project Success

Serving youth currently in foster care and attending secondary school

Total Number Served (inc. CE)	Currently Enrolled	Number Completed / Possible Completers	Diploma Attained / Diplomas Possible	HS Certificate of Completion	Hired (at WEX site)	WIA Goals Attained
130	20	89/129	21/31	5/6	8	274

The chart was supplied by Karine Kanikkeberg, Resource Teacher, Career and Workforce Development, Career Resource Department of the Kern County High School District.

PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

The Details:

The Strategy and practice: The program is tailored to meet the education and work preparation needs of transitioning foster youth. According to Karine Kanikkeberg, resource teacher for career and workforce development in the Kern High School District's Career Resource Department, "[We saw that] we could not just plop them into the workforce because so many have moved so much and need school credits. We wanted to get them some school credit, and we decided we need to provide both [credits and paid work experience.]" The program consists of an after-school class lasting six to eight weeks, followed by 100 hours of paid work experience. The class is taught by a credentialed teacher and the program is supported by an eligibility staff person who takes care of paperwork, provides transportation, attends many of the classes, and meets with students one-on-one at several junctures during the program to make sure that the work placements are appropriate.

When they looked at barriers to the youths' continuing employment, they discovered that retention was more of an issue than job acquisition. In the classes they focus on skills that promote job retention: conflict resolution, problem solving, balancing school and work. They also cover some aspects of work readiness and they reinforce skills learned in Independent Living Programs (ILP).

Project Success staff also work closely with each youth to establish trust and to place him or her in a work experience situation that will assure success. With younger youth, ages 14 and 15, placements are frequently in day care or after-school programs on elementary school campuses. The goal with older youth is to place them in private sector jobs that may lead to ongoing employment. However, not all youth are ready to work outside of a relatively protected environment. In these cases they might be placed in a job on a high school campus.

Project Success is designed to serve 60 to 75 youth a year. The staff runs three sessions during the school year. Students can enroll multiple times. "Some youth enroll in one session and they have gotten what they need. Others have so many emotional issues that they [choose to return,]" said Kanikkeberg. "We've been lucky to have a stable staff." The continuity in staff has made it easier to establish trust with youth.

Lessons Learned:

The program was started in February of 2004, and the staff has continued to refine the program since that time. One of the biggest lessons they learned during the first year was to spread the sessions out during the year and with each session to focus on serving youth in two schools that are near to each other and have similar schedules. The first year they ran four sessions simultaneously in locations that were far apart. "It was a logistical nightmare," said Kanikkeberg. The current session includes 19 students from two neighboring high schools—Golden Valley and South. The school days end at very close to the same time, so the eligibility specialist can easily pick up students at Golden Valley and get them to South High School for the class.

What's Next for this Promising Transition Practice?

According to Kanikkeberg, they plan next steps based on feedback from the youth and on their own observations. This means that next steps can change after each session. Currently, the plan is to incorporate workshops for youth nearing completion of their 100-hour work experience. These workshops will focus on job acquisition skills like filling out job applications. The youth and the staff feel that these workshops could help them transition out of the paid work experience and into a private sector job.

PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

Where to go for more information

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

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