



Promising Foster Youth Transition Practice

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

Foster Youth Summer Jobs*Plus* **Enhancing the Summer Experience for Foster Youth**

Submitted by: New Ways to Work

Community: Los Angeles

Subject: Cross-System Partnerships

All Youth–One System Element: Career Development, Comprehensive Youth Development Approach

Function: Create Linkages and Connect Systems

The Challenge:

A report released in the fall of 2004 titled “One in Five” found that one out of every five Los Angeles youth aged 16-24 was both out-of-school and out-of-work based on U.S. Census data from 2000. Early work experience is considered necessary to gain early development of the “soft skills” needed to compete and succeed in the workplace. This disconnection from work compounds the problem of low completion rates for high school by youth in foster care.

The Details:

Through a grant from the Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles, New Ways to Work, in partnership with the Los Angeles Youth Transition Action Team, set out to assist 100 foster youth in accessing summer jobs, and connecting their 2009 summer jobs experience to their career and educational goals as part of an initiative titled Foster Youth Summer Jobs*Plus*.

Utilizing New Ways to Work’s Quality Work-based Learning materials as a template, the LA Community Development Department, with New Ways support, revised their summer program materials and assessments to include the development of workplace skills goals set by youth with the help of their case manager and/or worksite supervisor.

New Ways convened two meetings to facilitate increased collaboration and partnerships between the child welfare and workforce development professionals that serve the same foster youth in different programs and settings. These meetings focused on increasing awareness among workforce development staff as to the unique issues and needs of foster youth, and fostered a sense of understanding regarding the foster youth experience. Through the meetings, suggestions and strategies for conducting more effective outreach and increasing the quality of services to foster youth were developed among the workforce development representatives. Staff from the Child Welfare System were able to gain a better understanding of the rules and regulations driving youth workforce programs, and increase their understanding of the program goals, strategies and expectations. Most importantly, Transition Coordinators from the Department of Children and Family Services as well as County Probation staff and workforce development program staff were able to come together and develop a plan for addressing common challenges in serving foster youth in their community.

PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

The group was energized and excited about the planning and collaboration that took place and left the September meeting having made commitments to launch new practices that would allow for more streamlined processes and a sense of cohesiveness between systems.

Another goal of these meetings was to provide information and resources to those working with foster youth about the range of opportunities and support services that exist - from those services and supports that are foster youth specific to those available to all youth. The need to connect foster youth to their next steps beyond the summer program and how to help youth in connecting their summer experience to future endeavors, was a crucial element in these sessions. An overview of existing programs and services was also provided.

When asked: As a result of your participation, what new strategies or activities will you implement in order to make better connections for foster youth? One partner stated:

"Invite coordinators and social workers to attend program orientations and also encourage partner agencies to outreach to foster youth."

Foster Youth Summer Jobs^{Plus} was an effort to enhance the summer experience of foster youth by creating greater awareness about the need for foster youth to have full access to the opportunities provided by the workforce development system. The effort focused on highlighting ways in which all systems serving foster youth can work in partnership to ensure a comprehensive set of services and supports are in place. The system representatives have a critical need to be connected, not only during the summer months but year-round to provide a seamless web of connected services to foster youth.

Key Partners:

City of Los Angeles Youth Opportunity System- Community Development Department, Department of Children and Families Youth Development Services, UCLA, Coalition for Responsible Community Development, Managed Career Solutions.

Evaluation:

Exit surveys were conducted with youth who participated in the summer jobs program. We hope to get a sense from these surveys about the impacts of our efforts as well as the areas that need continued focus in the future.

Lessons Learned:

One lesson learned in trying to work with providers to enhance the summer experience is that the time frame for summer planning is short and happens very quickly. It is important to begin discussions and planning of any new elements in advance of the summer months, and communication needs to happen across systems throughout the year.

What's Next for this Promising Transition Practice?

Transition coordinators and workforce providers along with the system partners from workforce development and Child Welfare have committed to maintaining communications throughout the year, and to begin collective planning for the 2010 summer program earlier in the year.

Where to go for more information:

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