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## PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

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

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## Los Angeles City & County Cross-System Partnerships Supporting Successful Youth Transitions

**Submitted by:** Los Angeles County Youth Transition Action Team

**Community:** Los Angeles County, California

**Key Partners:** City of Los Angeles Community Development Department Youth Opportunity System, Workforce Development System, Human Services and Family Development; DCSF Emancipation Services; LA Probation; LAUSD; Youth Council; Education Coordinating Council

**Subject:** Cross-System Partnerships, and Career Preparation

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

**Function:** Convene Leaders and Promote Policy, Build Awareness, and Create Linkages and Connect Systems

**The Challenge:**

One in every four residents in the City of Los Angeles is under twenty-one, creating a serious public need to ensure that the entire youth services system is linked and efficient. Members serving on the City of Los Angeles Youth Council faced the crucial task of maximizing, leveraging, and connecting all the players to make the best use of their resources.

Youth in Los Angeles, particularly from South and East Los Angeles, have less exposure to jobs and lack early work experience. A report released in the fall of 2003 found that one out of every five Los Angeles youth ages 16-24 is both out-of-school and out-of-work. The numbers were based on U.S. Census data in 2000. Early work experience is considered necessary to gain early development of “soft skills” needed to compete and succeed in the workplace. This disconnection from work compounds the problem of low completion rates for high school, documented recently by this study and others on Los Angeles area youth and education.

**The Practice and Evidence:**

**Practice:** When the City of Los Angeles and City of Long Beach Workforce Investment Boards released a study in 2004 on their cities’ out-of-school and out-of-work youth, it served as a tipping point for city/county collaboration on supporting youth. The results

were first presented in November 2004 at a Youth Summit for Los Angeles Area Youth Councils. This was followed by a two day symposium bringing together policy leaders and practitioners. Youth presenters shared their stories and ideas on how to engage youth back to school and into employment. Many case managers that serve foster youth and youth involved in the juvenile justice system participated. Attendees recognized that the study results, which showed high numbers of disconnected youth, were the tip of the iceberg, and became the catalyst for the city to look at all its disconnected youth especially its foster and probation youth services and policies. Youth violence was also a catalyst.

In May 2005, the City of Los Angeles WIB presented the findings to the wider community, including elected officials, leaders of community-based organizations, and business and other local leaders. To read more about the study, the Youth Summit where it was presented to Los Angeles Area Youth Councils, and the public forum, [click here](#) or visit the YCideas Youth Council index [www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/yci/ycideascouncilindex.html](http://www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/yci/ycideascouncilindex.html) and scroll to the City of Los Angeles Youth Council listings.

### **The Details:**

Since the 2005 Summit, initiatives—including the Los Angeles Youth Transition Action Team (YTAT)—programs and policy changes have been undertaken to support youth employment. Beginning in February of 2006, the City’s Community Development Department took the lead in spearheading the YTAT. According to Laura Cantú, Assistant Director of the City of Los Angeles Community Development Department, “We knew that in order to be successful, we would need the County on board,” so the city invited representatives from the county to co-convene the YTAT. This has provided city and county with an opportunity to understand “who we are, what each system provides, and what youth each system serves.”

Currently, the Los Angeles YTAT includes representatives from City of Los Angeles, Community Development Department, Youth Opportunity System, Workforce Development System; DCSF Emancipation Services; LA Probation; Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD); Youth Council; Education Coordinating Council; Human Services and Family Development.

### **The strategy and practice:**

Since the launch of the YTAT, city and county agencies across systems have been working together through their YTAT to pilot and develop programs and implement policy changes to support youth employment. Since launching the YTAT, they have successfully coordinated information sharing across systems about the programs and services available to foster youth, as well as expand existing programs and target the involvement of foster youth.

For example, YTAT partners regularly make presentations at ILSP meetings concerning referral processes for WIA programs, as well as information about accessing city-wide programs such as the Summer Jobs and the Job Shadow programs run out of the CDD

Youth Opportunity program. In addition, as a result of bringing LAUSD to the table, the partnership has worked to ensure that basic information concerning college enrollment and scholarships are distributed to all transitional coordinators and high school counselors.

According to Cantú, the City of Los Angeles Youth Council spearheaded a lot of the youth issues. The Youth Council members are leaders from the community, education and private industry and they are committed to supporting youth. They wanted to emphasize the need for foster youth employment preparation to all the city stakeholders. The Youth Council members met with the mayor who supported their work, and they brought community leaders together to meet with the county board of supervisors. The Youth Council members advocated for motions and funding to support youth employment programs before the city council, which successfully passed a youth employment motion in April, geared towards having city departments hiring youth. “The Youth Council members, City Council members and the mayor came together and made it possible to have the Hire LA program and that helped put issues at the forefront,” said Cantú. The mayor also committed \$4 million for summer youth employment. The County added \$6 million to increase summer employment and replace CalWorks dollars that were going to be lost.

The city council has also gotten involved. They are looking at issues from youth development, violence prevention, education, health and affordable housing; some of the council members are strong advocates when it comes to the youth of Los Angeles. “The Youth Council, city council, and mayor are leading the way,” said Cantú.

In addition to the youth employment policy, a major accomplishment has been gaining the support of the public education institutions, like Los Angeles Unified School District and the Los Angeles Community College District. The Superintendent and Chancellor have taken on the issue of disconnected youth, especially youth transitioning from care to employment and college opportunities. This has helped to advocate and make it a priority to support emancipating foster youth and probation youth. The District is working with community organizations to outreach to transitioning foster youth, and they are looking for ways to develop programs that will support the students’ needs

In 2007, the Los Angeles Youth Transition Action Team participated in the 6-month intensive YTAT Foster Youth Employment Focus Series, in which they set a goal of expanding their annual summer jobs program and targeting the involvement of 500 foster youth. The Los Angeles YTAT Focus Series team successfully engaged foster youth in their Summer Youth Employment Program. They are continuing to study the success of this project and cross reference lists in order to collect demographic data and outcome data on the 2007 Summer Youth Employment Program. Additionally, they will report on the successes of the program to key stakeholders and begin advocating for additional meetings with ILP Coordinators.

### **Evaluation:**

In Los Angeles, the ISIS data system is in place. The difficulty is in trying to meet dual measurements. Cantú reported that they have successfully used ISIS for probation youth, and they would like to tie it to foster youth also.

### **Lessons learned:**

Los Angeles recommends the following specific strategies for successfully engaging city and county partnerships:

- Prevention and data are hooks that get the board of supervisors' attention. Remind board members that when youth come out of foster care, they are considered adults, yet the adult system isn't prepared to help them. An investment in these youth prevents such things as homelessness, use of emergency rooms, and violence. It's to the city's benefit to say we want to partner with you in order to keep any more youth from becoming homeless, violent, etc.
- Demonstrate how foster youth transition is an issue that everyone can be invested in. Point out that if they make that investment, they will definitely prevent a lot of negative outcomes.
- The youth themselves are persuasive. Bring youth to the board of supervisors' chambers and let them tell their stories. It is tremendously powerful.

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

On the horizon for the LA YTAT is to find better ways of centralizing and maintaining updated information about service providers, improving outreach and tracking of foster youth in the Summer Jobs program, and focusing on transitional housing opportunities.

### **Where to go for more information:**

Laura Cantú  
Assistant Director  
City of Los Angeles  
Youth Opportunity System  
Community Development Department  
Workforce Development System  
1200 W. 7th Street, 6th Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90017  
(213) 744-7135  
[Laura.Cantu@lacity.org](mailto:Laura.Cantu@lacity.org)