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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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### **Mendocino County Foster Youth Services Uses WorkAbility Model To Match Foster Youth with Employment Opportunities**

**Submitted by:** Foster Youth Services, Mendocino County Office of Education

**Community:** Mendocino County

**Subject:** Career Preparation, Paid Work Experience, Occupational Skills Training,

**All Youth–One System Element:** Career Development

**Function:** Create Linkages and Connect Systems, Improve Program Practice

**The Challenge:**

According to the 2007 Mendocino County Status Report on Children and Youth, compiled by the Policy Council for Children and Youth along with the Child Abuse Prevention Commission, only 18% of the 134 foster youth age 16-20, were employed, 6% were enrolled in college or higher education, 18% had completed vocational training, and 49% were enrolled in ILS services.

Mendocino County has adopted a successful model for helping foster youth gain valuable work experience, earn money, and ultimately, be better prepared for their transition to independence.

**The Details:**

In an effort to provide vocational support and training for foster youth in Mendocino County, the Foster Youth Services Coordinator is using foster youth resources through the California Department of Education to administer a small scale program based on the WorkAbility model. WorkAbility is a career development program designed for special education students in California with the goal of preparing students for the workplace and for independent living. In order to be eligible for the WorkAbility program, students must have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Ongoing collaboration with the MCOE WorkAbility Program administered through Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA), led to the Foster Youth Services WorkAbility model.

The Mendocino County Office of Education (MCOE), Foster Youth Services pilot program targets foster youth who do not have Individualized Education Plans, matching them with employment opportunities that align with their career interests and giving priority to older youth. The number of youth served varies year to year based on a variety of factors including how long students remain in their foster home placements and/or their jobs. Youth wages are paid through foster youth services funding with youth working 10 hours per week

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at minimum wage. Workers compensation costs are covered so there is no cost to the employer. As in the WorkAbility model, the hope is that youth will be hired as a regular employee at the end of their training period or that additional hours will be added by the employer. The program has seen many successes and has resulted in the development of a number of positive employer relationships within the community.

**Key Partners:** Foster Youth Services, MCOE, and Local Employers

**Evaluation:** Employers evaluate student worksite progress and behavior on a monthly basis.

**Lessons Learned:** Work experience is a critical esteem builder for foster youth. Every aspect of being a responsible worker must be taught (i.e. saying thank you at the end of an interview, calling in sick, giving notice when leaving a position). Nothing can be assumed when getting a student ready to work in the community.

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

Foster Family Agency Redwood Children's Services (RCS), is seeking to expand this practice by using Mental Health Rehabilitation Specialists to assist their MediCal eligible clients in addressing and resolving some of the behavioral and emotional barriers that are preventing youth from accessing jobs in the community. This WorkAbility concept would be available for foster youth without IEPs. RCS is also making available some funds to subsidize wages and workers compensation. This will make it easier for local businesses and artisans to hire youth for part time jobs in traineeship roles. A Mental Health Rehabilitation Specialist has been hired by RCS to provide case management and rehabilitation services and is working closely with the FYS Coordinator to provide prevocational services.

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

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