



PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

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

Next Generation Center Bronx, New York

Submitted by: Next Generation Center, The Children Aid Society's Foster Care Division

Community: South Bronx, New York

Key Partners: Voices UnBroken, Abada Capoeira NYC, Creative Alternatives New York, The Lineage Project, School of Visual Arts, FEGS, NYC Administration for Children's Services

Subject: Career Preparation, Coordinating Youth Services, Paid Work Experience, Cross System Partnerships, Transition Support, Community Services and Support, Occupational Skills Training

All Youth – One System Element: Community Services and Support

Function: Create Linkages and Connect Systems

The Challenge:

The Next Generation Center (NGC) is strategically located in the Morrisania section of the South Bronx, one of New York City's highest-risk communities in terms of child well-being. Thirty-eight percent of households earn an annual income below \$15,000; single mothers account for 78.1 percent of births; 75.8 percent of children are born into poverty; and the teen pregnancy rate is 17.7 percent. Child welfare data for this borough are equally unsettling. A startling 6,327 children and youth from the Bronx were in the foster care system in 2003, representing approximately 25 percent of the total foster care census in New York City.

In 2006, Mayor Bloomberg commissioned a panel to study persistent poverty in New York. The Commission identified three groups – the working poor, young adults and young children – that they believed would benefit most directly, immediately and dramatically from well-focused and coordinated interventions. [Click here to download this report.](#)

The Practice and Evidence:

The practice:

The Next Generation Center is a community-based program in a high-need community that welcomes all young people ages 14-24. The Center is a program of the Children's Aid Society's (CAS) Foster Care Division with the goal of creating a safe and enriching space for all those who need it and especially for those who are disconnected or at risk of becoming disconnected. Youth receiving services from the center are referred to as "members."

Members of the Center represent a diverse group including current and former foster youth, youth who have been incarcerated, and youth from the neighborhood. Referrals to the center come from CAS, the Legal Aid Society's Juvenile Rights Division, the Administration for Children's Services, a number of foster care agencies from across the city, and through word of mouth.

The NGC is a one-stop shop that combines and co-locates the expertise and best practices of the child welfare, workforce development and youth development fields. All of NGC's programs are informed by youth development principles and focus on life skills acquisition, educational achievement, job readiness, creative self-expression, youth empowerment and technology instruction. The Center offers career counseling, job readiness and entrepreneurship training, and job development services; academic guidance and advocacy, tutoring and college counseling; housing assistance legal services; youth leadership and peer mediation training; individual counseling and support groups; technology and multimedia instruction; therapeutic drama, poetry, creative writing and spoken word, culinary arts and digital photography. Members may also access medical, dental and mental health services at the Family Center one block away.

The Details:

The process for establishing the programming:

The NGC is a collaborative effort on many levels. First and foremost, the center is a youth-adult partnership. Members are actively involved in the establishment of the center. The youth advisory council, regular town hall meetings and constant dialogue with members, provides ongoing feedback on everything from programming to policies. The center also brings in partner organizations to provide specialized programming such as high-quality job readiness training and subsidized internships, therapeutic drama workshops, capoeira, yoga, creative writing, digital photography and other skills training and arts classes.

The Next Generation Center (NGC) is funded largely through the generosity of foundations and individual benefactors, including the Stahl Family Foundation, the New York Life Foundation, the Dodge Foundation, New Yorkers for Children, and the Lerner Foundation. All the programming and facilities expenses, as well as the majority of personnel costs, are privately funded.

The Children's Aid Society receives public funding from the New York City Administration for Children's Services to cover the salaries of two out of ten NGC staff.

The strategy and practice:

Since all youth have different needs and are at different places in terms of age, maturity, skills, health etc., programming must be tailored accordingly. Youth, ages 14-18, and those without work experience must take M.O.N.E.Y. (Making Ourselves Newly Employed Youth), the center's job readiness program. Those with work experience, but without the soft skills needed to enter the labor force, are placed in vocational programming, industry-specific training and/or subsidized internships. Finally, those with the requisite skills and experience are assisted in applying for unsubsidized employment.

NGC's Employment Coordinator assesses the skills and interests of members in order to determine which level of programming is most appropriate. So far, assessment has been very individualized, based on one-on-one discussions between staff and the young people.

Evaluation:

Youth evaluate programs and activities continuously and also feel comfortable with the staff.

Lessons Learned:

"Involve youth and give them ownership from day one," says Lynne Echenberg, Next Generation Center Director. Youth played an integral part in the creation of the center from choosing its name through a naming contest, to communicating needs and wants in relation to program planning, to participating in the welcome orientation for new members.

What's Next for this Promising Transition Practice?

Some of the new initiatives NGC staff are planning to roll out in the next 6-12 months include: equipping a sound and video editing studio for aspiring musicians and filmmakers and launching an entrepreneurial café to be run and staffed by members.

Where to go for more information:

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