



PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

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

Pasadena's Foothill Workforce Investment Board Runs Department of Labor Pilot for Foster Youth

Submitted by: Foothill Workforce Investment Board (FWIB)

Community: Pasadena, California, Planning Area 3 (PLAD 3)

Key Partners: Foothill Workforce Investment Board, CommunityBuild, California Employment Development Department, and the Jackie Robinson Center

Subject: Transition Support, Career Preparation

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

Function: Improve Program Practice

The Challenge:

The Pasadena/San Gabriel area of Los Angeles County - the Department of Labor's Planning Area 3 - is one of the two California Counties with the largest number of youth entering and emancipating from foster care. Dianne Glean of the Foothill Workforce Investment Board (FWIB) wrote the following description of the challenges foster youth face:

To date there are approximately 100,000 young people between 16 to 21 who are leaving or have left foster care. Thrust into adulthood, after years of being babysat by a system - state or county agencies, these young people face an inordinate amount of barriers and challenges that their peers [do not face]. When they become 18, the state is no longer obligated to provide assistance of any kind. Many of these youth leave the system with no more than a list of apartments or rental agencies, and a few necessities for living on their own. Consequently most "age out" only to fall out – mentally, emotionally, and physically, while struggling to transition into adulthood.

Self-sufficiency is not an expectation in the case of an emancipated youth, but a demand. Time is of the essence as transitional help is almost null and void after 21. Therefore this is an unreasonable demand when compared with youth from intact families. Families provide a support net when they fall financially and emotionally, with no time restraint.

Helping youth in foster care is the most difficult task in youth work. Transitional programs for young people leaving Foster Care are very important if they are to successfully transition to adulthood. The Foothill WIB has, however, risen to the challenge, the challenge of helping youth in the Foster Care System make a successful transition into adulthood.

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The Practice and Evidence:

The practice: In March of 2005 FWIB secured the Foster Youth Self Sufficiency Demonstration Grant. "It is our goal to bring together the people and resources needed to make their transition from a system to being a productive member of society as smoothly as possible," wrote Glean. The FWIB partnered with Community Build in the Los Angeles area to serve 100 youths as established by the grant. The FWIB program serves 50 youth in the San Gabriel area and its partner serves another 50 in the Los Angeles area.

The evidence: According to Glean, the 13 youth enrolled between May and June of 2005 benefited immediately from 155 hours of work experience in the Pasadena Summer Rose program from June to August 31, 2005 in various city departments. These youth were offered contracts for an additional four months with various city departments. The FWIB saw this extension as an excellent opportunity because it provided participants with the six months' work experience that most employers require for full time jobs. In the first two months of the program, three of the youth secured full time employment with the City of Pasadena Recreation Department, Pasadena City College, and the Employment Development Department.

Another success grew out of the financial management class. As part of this class, FWIB was able to open savings accounts for 11 participants with the Pasadena Federal Credit Union (PFCU) by making the initial deposit of \$5.00, giving them a start to saving.

The program reported the following successes in the first six months of 2006:

The Foothill Youth Self Sufficiency Program (FYSSP) had the opportunity to take part in a recruitment process for foster youth two-year internship positions with the County of Los Angeles. On March 17, 2006, we completed the applications in a group setting and submitted 19 applications. Eleven (11) of our youth were contacted for testing. Six (6) of our youth were successful in the testing process, and went on to be interviewed. Three (3) of them were offered the opportunity to work with the Internal Services Department. It must be noted that six (6) youth were accepted by the county for this program and three (3) of those accepted were from the FYSSP. This is a full time job with benefits, and very high probability of permanent employment at the end of the internship. The Program Coordinator for the Intern program also called to personally comment on the standard of the applications submitted by our youth.

In May of 2006, six (6) of our youth participated in the Central Arroyo Seco Trail restoration. The trail is part of Brookside Park, in Pasadena. This project was sponsored by the City of Pasadena's Department of Public Works. Through a partnership between Parks and Natural Resources, MASH, and Career Services of the City of Pasadena a major step in the Central Arroyo Seco Trail restoration project was completed. Our young adults were recognized in the City of Pasadena's official Newsletter of the Department of Public Works for their part in uncovering the beauty of the arroyo stone walls and the original drainage system of the Brookside trails.

In The month of June of 2006 we were happy to see 12 of our youth successfully complete High School and graduate. Staff attended several of the graduations in support of our youth. FYSSP hosted a graduation party at the Jackie Robinson Center, which was attended by mentors, graduates, fellow participants and FYSSP staff. Additionally in June three (3) of our youth were accepted for summer intern positions with Kaiser Permanente.

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The Details:

The process for establishing the program: The FWIB has been able to house the FYSSP at the Jackie Robinson Center in Pasadena, which is also home to a senior center. This affords the program a unique position to provide needed mentors and positive interactions for the youth, partnering them with seniors for various activities. "This is a nice fit to fill a void in both the lives of the seniors and the foster youth population," noted Glean.

The strategy and practice: The FYSSP staff emphasize the fact that few youth from intact families are expected to be completely self-sufficient at age 18. "We subscribe to, and adopt the realistic view of current professionals working with disconnected youth that self-sufficiency for the general population does not occur until about age 26," Glean writes. "In addition, learning to live independently is really a life-long process for this particular population. These young people deal with drug and alcohol addiction, homelessness, and incarceration, mental health disorders, combined with neglect and rejection issues, as well as abuse. Many are on a self-destructive path due to frustrations trying to 'make it' on their own. The resiliency they mustered as a child to survive living in the system often fails them on emancipation."

The FWIB is committed to the demonstration program, to reengaging disconnected youth by providing the services that will meet their needs as individuals. This is not a cookie cutter approach. "It is imperative for programs to deal with each youth as his or her own unique person, with his or her own set of individual issues and circumstances. We strongly believe in this individualistic approach," Glean explained. "This approach requires time - time that our dedicated staff is eager and willing to spend directing and overseeing the progress of each participant."

The Foothill program has a "very passionate staff" of 2 case managers, 2 peer advocates, 1 career advisor and 1 academic advisor. Participants are recruited through referrals from the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Probation Department as well as through direct recruitment through community involvement. "FWIB works closely with Casey Foundation's Alumni Center in Pasadena," added Glean. "The program is about jobs, education, and money. It is about finding and keeping a place to live." Participants learn financial management and gain access to educational, training, work experience, and vocational and employment opportunities.

For youth leaving foster care, the risk of long term disconnection from school, work, and community are extremely high. Inadequate education and workforce preparation are common challenges. To combat this situation, FWIB has every participant enrolled in career preparation classes designed to teach how to get and retain a job. There are scheduled workshops, but in keeping with the individualistic approach, every participant does not necessarily attend each workshop; they take part only in those that will meet their needs in preparing for and maintaining employment, as well as workshops designed to enhance the healthy development of the whole person.

FWIB has partnered with Toastmasters to facilitate a leadership workshop. Public speaking skills aid not only in developing public speakers, but assist in building youth's self confidence and self esteem. Public speaking practice also helps with interviewing and communication skills for teamwork in the work place. In addition, this workshop also indirectly addresses anger management issues that many participants face, teaching them how to communicate their ideas, thoughts, and feelings. "The leadership workshop has been a hit with the youth," Glean writes.

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In addition to working directly with youth, the staff makes efforts to develop jobs outside of the work experience program by involving the community. Positive contacts have been established with Mervyn's, Target, Home Depot, Office Depot, and Ross.

Evaluation:

The FYSSP tracks the WIA-mandated criteria.

Lessons Learned:

The staff has learned that pre-established relationships with other community members have enabled them to help support youth with immediate needs. According to Glean, "The program has been able to come to the immediate assistance of several youth entering college in the fall semester with books and supplies. A relationship developed with a local bookstore allows the youth to receive books and supplies and the FWIB is invoiced. This proved to be a great support service for those who had not yet received their financial aid check and alleviates some of the stress of starting college. The FWIB's long history of working relationships and partners in the community is a definite plus to the program."

What's Next for this Promising Transition Practice?

FWIB plans to continue working with foster youth currently enrolled in the program, as they are in constant need of case management and crisis intervention. FWIB also hopes that relationships with the various partners continue to grow and strengthen despite the absence of additional funding. These partnerships have proven critical for the delivery of a holistic, comprehensive service delivery system for foster youth.

Where to go for more information:

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Links:

Foothill Workforce Investment Board Youth Services web site
www.foothilletec.org/youth_services.html