



Promising Foster Youth Transition Practice

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

Increasing Foster Youth Awareness and Access to Career Development Opportunities in High School

Submitted by: New Ways to Work

Community: San Francisco/Bay Area

Subject: Education, Career Preparation, Cross-System Partnerships

All Youth–One System Element: Career Development

Function: Build Awareness, Create Linkages and Connect Systems

The Challenge:

Career development, training, and employment is key to every child's development and preparation for adulthood. It is especially critical for children in foster care who must navigate multiple systems during and after care, often without the benefit of a permanent relationship with an adult, family, or community to support them on that journey. While studies show that youth outside of the foster care system receive support from their families until the age of 25, foster youth 'age out' of the foster care system at 18 and are often left to navigate this transition on their own, in the face of daunting odds. California offers a wide range of career development and employment preparation opportunities to its young people – through our public schools, community colleges, after-school initiatives, community-based training programs, workforce development, apprenticeship, and employer-sponsored training. Unfortunately, most foster youth are not routinely being counseled and supported to take full advantage of these opportunities. In order to improve employment outcomes for foster youth it is critical to leverage and access what's in place for any young person and ensure that it is available to all foster youth.

The Details:

In January of 2009, New Ways to Work received a grant from the San Francisco Foundation to increase awareness and access of foster youth to career development opportunities in public high schools. The original goal was to research and identify the opportunities available in five Bay Area Counties including Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco, and San Mateo. Feedback from individual counties indicated that in light of the fact that school budgets are unstable and programs, services, and staff are being regularly cut back or eliminated, mapping of specific opportunities and contacts may not produce accurate information. Based on this feedback, the goal was modified. New Ways staff set out to identify general programs and the types of services that tend to exist in districts and schools across the state such as Academy Programs, Career Pathways, and Regional Occupational Programs. New Ways then created the *Guide to Career Development Opportunities in California's High Schools*, which was distributed widely to social workers, ILP case managers, caregivers, youth, foster youth liaisons, and others advocating on behalf of foster youth. The guidebook outlines the opportunities and provides information on which questions to ask to find out if a particular program or service is available in a given school or community. To access the guidebook, go to:

[http://www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/CareerDevGuidebookJUNE2009\(2\).pdf](http://www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/CareerDevGuidebookJUNE2009(2).pdf)

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In addition to the guidebook, New Ways staff piloted a specific mapping project in San Francisco county, examining all high schools in the San Francisco Unified School District, mapping the career development and employment-related programs of study and courses, available resources, links to colleges, information about work permits, individual school descriptions, key contact phone numbers at each school, and locations. This Handbook of Options and Opportunities in San Francisco's High Schools was distributed by the SFUSD Foster Youth Services Coordinator to social workers, CASAs, Caregivers, Education Liaisons, and ILP staff. Middle school liaisons, caregivers, and social workers have been specifically targeted to receive this information in an attempt to increase awareness about options prior to entry into high school so that foster youth can make well informed choices about their secondary education.

Key Partners: San Francisco Unified School District and New Ways to Work

Evaluation: A survey of foster youth service professions including social workers, education liaisons, learning support professionals, counselors, and wellness coordinators was conducted to get a sense of how aware they were of the opportunities available and also to assess whether or not they felt that the guides provided would be useful in increasing foster youth awareness and access to the opportunities available. Of those who completed our survey, 69% reported being only somewhat aware of the full range of career development opportunities offered at their designated school sites while 31% reported being very aware. 94% of survey respondents felt that the information provided in the general *Guide to Career Development Opportunities in California's High Schools*, and the *Guide to SFUSD Career Development Opportunities and Options for Foster Youth, Caregivers, and Human Service Professionals* would be a useful tool in increasing awareness and access for foster youth.

Lessons Learned:

The lessons learned through this project are important in that every school and every district in every county is different, and offerings vary greatly from school to school and from year to year. District websites are often out of date and don't necessarily provide information about the range of career development and employment related programs and services that area available in the district. Information about accessing programs is also difficult to find in any central location, and again varies greatly from school to school or program to program. In most cases, one must search out opportunities school by school in order fully discover the options that are available. Navigating these systems, understanding educational jargon, and deciphering enrollment deadlines and requirements is a daunting task for any young person, even more so for those who may not have a helping hand to guide them. Foster youth, caregivers and the professionals that work with them need to build relationships with key individuals at their area schools, and regularly reach out to ensure that accurate information is gathered, and then define systems and approaches to share this information with others in their community.

What's Next for this Promising Transition Practice?

The SFUSD handbook will be used with foster youth and be incorporated into orientations and trainings with education liaisons, caregivers, and social workers throughout the school year.

Where to go for more information:

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