



## PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

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

## Sacramento's Casey Great Start Young Adult Program Helps Youth Meet Needs and Make Plans

**Submitted by:** Casey Great Start (CGS)

**Community:** Sacramento County, California

**Key Partners:** Casey Family Programs, Sacramento County Independent Living Program, Sacramento Employment and Training Agency (SETA), The Department of Human Assistance (DHA) and Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency (SHRA)

**Subject:** Transition Support, Youth Friendly One-Stop

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

**Function:** Improve Program Practice

### **The Challenge:**

Approximately 400 youth were expected to exit the foster care system in Sacramento during 2006. Because they have reached the age of 18 years, these youth will be considered adults and as such will no longer be eligible for public foster care support. Still teenagers, more than one-half of those in foster care left the system alone, without family or other positive role models to help them as they transition to adulthood.

As a result, a very high percentage of "aged out" foster youth in Sacramento County have ended up either homeless or living in very high-risk environments. They have limited skills, so obtaining employment and an income eludes them. Survival is paramount and these youth are forced into behaviors that put their long-term survival in jeopardy.

The following research indicates that within 12 to 18 months of leaving the system,

- 40% of foster youth will suffer serious physical victimization, including sexual assault;
- 30% will be homeless at least once;
- 37% will be incarcerated; and
- 33% will be forced to rely on long-term public assistance.

### **The Practice and Evidence:**

**Practice:** The Casey Great Start Young Adult Program provides self-sufficiency transitional services to emancipating foster youth in the areas of employment, housing, education, physical and mental health, as well as peer and adult support. These services are offered at two of the One-Stop Career Centers in the areas where foster youth concentrations are the highest. The goal is to help current and former foster youth aged 12 – 24 years old make a successful transition into adulthood.

**Evidence:** In 2006 Casey Great Start provided direct service to 160 youth. They received

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245 referrals from the Independent Living Program and they connected these youth to resources. They connected 230 foster youth to employment.

### **The Details:**

***The strategy and practice:*** The Casey Great Start Young Adult Program provides employment focused self-sufficiency transitional services to transition-aged foster youth, foster care alumni, and group home youth. The Young Adult Program is a collaborative program with the sole purpose of helping foster youth make a successful transition from the foster care system to an independent, self-sufficient adult life. Casey Great Start builds self-esteem and counsels and coaches youth to enter post-high school training and employment.

Each youth is assigned to one of two CGS Youth Specialist case managers. Because many youth need help with all of their basic needs, the Youth Specialists are available to assist youth with everything from job training and interview tips to apartment hunting and life skills assessments. If a Youth Specialist does not offer a specific "youth need," he or she will assist the youth in finding and collaborating with other programs that better meet their needs, while continuing to manage the case. The Youth Specialists have referred youth to the following services as needed: Independent Living Program, transitional housing, mental health, alcohol and other drug treatment services, GED prep/testing, health care, parenting classes, child care, faith-based support, youth empowerment, clubs, and after-school activities.

Current and former foster youth ages 16 - 24 residing in Sacramento County are eligible. This includes young people who were in kinship care, group home settings, adoption and guardianship, as well as probation youth. Youth can enter the program through social worker referral, but walk-ins are always welcome.

Casey Great Start closely collaborates with Sacramento County Independent Living Program (ILP). All youth eligible for ILP services are referred, and ILP Social Workers remain the lead case managers. CGS supports ILP eligible youth by offering employment training, career development, education and financial aid information and "gap-services."

**Evaluation:** The employment data is collected by Sacramento Employment Agency (SETA). They collect data in the following areas: total visits by foster youth, age breakdown, ethnic breakdown, gender breakdown, employment characteristics, education status, and the percentage change in foster youth numbers. This data is collected at all of the Sacramento One-Stop Career Centers. According to Casey Great Start Manager, DeWayne Norris, collecting this data enables them to determine the number of youth they serve and identify the most needed resources. "It also enables us determine if we have seen an increase in the number of youth accessing the One Stops since we began focusing on making all One Stops 'youth friendly,' Norris explained. "We have seen an increase at all 12 of the One-Stops."

**Lessons learned:** Norris shared the following insights:

*We have found that collaboration is extremely important. It gives you the ability to maximize resources without duplication. The more partners you have the chances of eliminating gaps in services are much better. The most challenging aspect of working with the youth is maintaining contact. They are extremely mobile. Many come to us dealing with emergency situations that require immediate response. Many times we don't hear from the youth until they have a need.*

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

The program will also offer support services to foster parents, grandparents raising grand children, and Foster Family Agencies.

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

CASEY GREAT START  
925 Del Paso Blvd.  
Sacramento, CA 95815  
916-263-0570  
[fmayers@delpaso.seta.net](mailto:fmayers@delpaso.seta.net)

DeWayne Norris  
Casey Great Start Manager  
Systems Improvement  
925 Del Paso Blvd.  
Sacramento, CA95815  
(916) 263-1887  
[dnorris@casey.org](mailto:dnorris@casey.org)

### **Link:**

Casey Family Programs web site:  
[www.casey.org](http://www.casey.org)