



Promising Foster Youth Transition Practice

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

San Bernardino Peer and Family Assistants Bring Youth Voice to ILP

Submitted by: County of San Bernardino Children's Services Independent Living Program

Community: San Bernardino County

Subject: Youth Leadership, Transition Support

All Youth–One System Element: Youth Leadership

Function: Build Awareness, Create Linkages and Connect Youth to Resources, Plan and Facilitate Events.

The Challenge:

Historically there has not been significant youth input into the planning process for the Independent Living Program (ILP) in San Bernardino County. As a result of low enrollment in the County's ILP Program, the Department of Children's Services agreed that youth voice was a key element that was missing in their strategy for effectively connecting and communicating with young people. A "Peer and Family Assistant" position was created with this goal in mind. The County of San Bernardino Department of Human Resources, defines the position as former foster youth who provide peer counseling and linkages to services and supports for dependents of the Department of Children's Services, and assist with the implementation, facilitation, and on-going coordination activities of the Independent Living Program. San Bernardino currently has three Peer and Family Assistants (PFAs). All three are currently college students with flexible schedules, working up to 40 hours per week.

The Details:

When the Peer and Family Assistants were brought on board, they were provided an orientation that included a review of the mission statement of the county. Their advice was sought when developing policy, creating forms and defining ways of attracting more youth to the Independent Living Program. Their tasks were very youth driven, with the primary goal of reaching dependency youth in care and making sure they know that there is a support person available to them in ILP that had been in their shoes. The PFAs follow up with youth who participate in ILP activities as well as those who signed up for the program but did not follow through.

The three PFAs have specific assignments, one is in charge of the quarterly newsletter, one is in charge of getting information out to group homes about upcoming events, and another is in

charge of marketing. All three participate in outreach to youth. They also organize and conduct events.

One of the biggest accomplishments of the PFA's has been their critical input into the Transition Out Check List and the ILP Training Goals. All social workers use this checklist with the youth and caretaker at the youth's time of transition. Workers use the training goals when assessing youth for ILP services at age 15 ½ and every 6 months when updating the Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP). The PFAs were able to give valuable input about things that should be included on the checklist that may not have been thought of otherwise. [Click here to view the Checklist and ILP Training Goals.](#)

The PFAs have also been instrumental in attending and giving their feedback to the Family to Family Program which consists of community partners and foster parents coming together to work on behalf of foster youth. They are always in demand for speaking engagements.

Every quarter, there is an orientation and training for new social workers. The PFAs participate in the training and share their experience in the foster care system, the various services that are available, what was helpful for them, and how it adversely affected them when their social worker didn't talk to them about specific issues. The Social Workers regularly use the PFAs as a resource, especially in those times when a youth is resistant to working with ILP.

The PFAs have taken a large role in the Independent City Event. They have been very involved and have assisted in restructuring the event to be more interactive and appealing to foster and probation youth. They are very resourceful in connecting with outside programs and partners to obtain such things as raffle prizes for the youth that attend.

The PFAs also go to Foster Parent Associations to share both their positive and negative experiences in foster homes. They place a strong emphasis on the importance of caregiver involvement in their presentations.

Some of the other ways in which the PFAs assist the ILP Coordinator is in organizing events such as a weekend trip to Catalina Island, Senior Conference, an ILP Exit picnic (which introduces youth to aftercare services and resources when they transition out of care), a Prom Boutique (in which prom dresses and tuxedos are donated for high school seniors who want to attend prom), and involvement in the ILP Intro Picnic (which introduces youth to the services provided by ILP). This year they made the ILP Intro Picnic event "youth centered" with a "Fear Factor" theme that was both fun and informational. PFAs also promote ILP services to group homes, write and collect articles for the newsletter, assist in preparing for monthly ILP taskforce meetings, provide support and advocacy by participating in Team Decision Making meetings for youth who are ILP eligible, and serve on other Department of Children Services (DCS) committees and ILP taskforce meetings.

From the very beginning, people were excited about the development of these positions and from the top down, there was a lot of support to make it happen and as a result, it took very

little convincing to get the positions implemented. The positions are funded through the Department of Children and Family Services. [Click here for a Peer and Family Assistants Job Description.](#)

Key Partners:

San Bernardino Department of Children's Services, Cameron Hill After Care Service (CHAS), Cameron Hills Corporation (THP+), Chaffey Community College, Clyde Stewart, CSUSB (EOP), California Youth Connection-San Bernardino Chapter, Knotts Family Agency, Life Development Institute, Olive Crest (THPP), County Probation Department, San Bernardino Superintendent of Schools (FYS), San Bernardino Valley College, Transitional Age Youth (TAY)Center, Victor Valley College.

Evaluation:

It is clear that the Peer and Family Assistants have made an impact. The number of youth enrolling in ILP has increased since the PFAs have come on board. Current foster youth are even inquiring about how they might be able to become a PFA once they age out of the system. In the future, the ILP Supervisor and Coordinator will request feedback from the foster youth about their involvement with the PFAs. They may also decide to distribute evaluations of the PFAs at the various ILP activities.

Lessons Learned:

According to Kevin Anderson, ILP Supervisor, the biggest lesson learned is that

"Youth input is invaluable. What we think they need is not what they always need. Youth know what they need."

What's Next for this Promising Transition Practice?

There will be continued emphasis on youth outreach and advocacy. There is also a goal to highlight youth talent. The PFAs are currently working on putting together a talent show for foster youth. They have a strategic plan and an outline in place and are looking at securing a place and identifying sponsors.

Where to go for more information:

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