



PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

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

San Pasqual Academy Emphasizes Cross-Agency Collaboration

Submitted by: San Pasqual Academy, San Diego Workforce Partnership

Community: County of San Diego County, California

Key Partners: San Pasqual Academy; San Diego County Office of Education; New Alternatives, Inc.; San Diego Workforce Partnership, Casey Family Programs, ACCESS, and (partners in the YES Program); County of San Diego County Health and Human Services Department

Subject: Cross-System Collaboration, Education, and Career Preparation

All Youth – One System Elements: Education; Career Preparation; Community Services and Support

Functions: Create Linkages and Connect Systems and Improve Program Practice

The Challenge:

At a conference spearheaded by the County of San Diego Board of Supervisors in the late 1990s, foster youth explained that moving from foster home to foster home and group home to group home, made it difficult to obtain a consistent education. Every change in foster or group home also brought a change in schools. Employment preparation was also a challenge because it was difficult to access job training and work opportunities. The County of San Diego and the City of San Diego have a history of strong support for youth workforce development and for foster youth, so leaders across the spectrum of community services and supports wanted to address these related problems. They worked together to develop a stable living situation with access to all needed services.

The Practice and Evidence:

The practice: San Pasqual Academy is a first-in-the-nation residential education campus designed specifically for foster teens. Located in Escondido, CA, the Academy provides foster teens with a stable, caring home, a quality, individualized education, and preparation for independent living. San Pasqual Academy offers an alternative placement option in the continuum of care for San Diego County foster teens.

San Pasqual Academy opened in October 2001 with four major partners involved in the operation of the Academy: New Alternatives, Inc. manages the residential component; the San Diego County Office of Education oversees the high school; the San Diego Workforce Partnership (the San Diego WIB) manages the work-readiness component called the YES Program; and the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency manages child welfare services.

The evidence: San Pasqual Academy is in the middle of its sixth academic year. Currently (December 2006) there are 130 students residing at the Academy; the majority attend the on-

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site high school and approximately ten attend the local middle school. An additional 20 youth are enrolled in the Academy's transitional living program. "Graduation is one of the steps in facilitating their successful integration into the world and college," said Dan Radojevic, Employment Services Coordinator for the YES Program at San Pasqual Academy. In the class of 2005, 22 youth graduated; 16 went directly on to college. The other six enrolled in the Academy's transitional living program, which requires them to enroll in college and get a job within a certain time frame.

The Details:

Process for establishing the program: Responding to the foster youth at the 1999 conference, San Diego leaders decided to create a residential educational program that also offered other needed support services. The County of San Diego Board of Supervisors, led by Supervisors Greg Cox and Ron Roberts, along with the Honorable James Milliken, Presiding judge of the Juvenile Court, spearheaded the effort. Thus, the Board of Supervisors allocated twenty-four million dollars to purchase and renovate a 238-acre former boarding school site.

Private partners played a big role as well. Robert K. Ross, former Director of the County's Health and Human Services Agency, told the Action Alliance for Children, "In San Diego, a notoriously conservative county . . . there was no way we were going to advance a children's agenda by a call for bigger government. Public-private collaboration was 'mission critical.'" Within the political climate described by Dr. Ross, more than \$12 million in private donations was raised and 400 stakeholders from child welfare, academic, business, judicial, foster care and law enforcement backgrounds took part in a 2-day conference to lay the foundation of the Academy. The four components of care - housing, education, work readiness, and child welfare - were incorporated into the foundation and multiple funding streams were channeled.

Each of the partners came to the Academy with its own system, so collaboration and coordination were crucial. According to Radojevic, "We had to have a common language, [so] we got together and created a Memorandum of Understanding of all the roles and responsibilities of the partners on the campus. [We also hold] a lot of meetings using similar tools for assessment and determining needs of students on campus. So we all work together."

Strategy and practice: Leaders in the County of San Diego recognized the need to provide adolescent foster youth alternative, stable housing and an opportunity to keep attending the same school. They saw this need extending beyond completion of high school and/or the age of 18.

San Pasqual Academy is built around a unique partnership of public and private agencies. New Alternatives, Inc., a non-profit agency, administers the residential component of the Academy. Foster youth, who live in homes with up to seven peers and house parents, learn how to run a household, including preparing meals and managing household functions and finances. In addition to the care and supervision provided by the residential program, New Alternatives, Inc. offers services through the on-campus Health and Wellness Center, a Day Rehabilitation Clinic, an Intergenerational Mentoring Program, and an Alumni Housing Program.

The San Diego County Office of Education provides the on-site high school program. Class sizes are kept small to ensure personal attention and individual access to computers. (Each youth receives a privately donated computer upon graduation). Extra-curricular programs include sports, music, culinary arts instruction, and yoga. The Academy also incorporates businesses, a cyber café, pool, farm, and gym, with the whole campus wired to state-of-the-art standards.

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The YES Program, a collaborative composed of San Diego Workforce Partnership, Casey Family Programs and ACCESS, Inc. offers a Work Readiness and Self-Sufficiency Program on campus at the Qualcomm Technology and Career Information Center. "We've made it a foster youth One-stop," Radojevic said. The County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency manages the child welfare services of the dependent youth placed at San Pasqual Academy and advocates on their behalf in Juvenile Court.

Each youth must request placement at the Academy, and Radojevic pointed out that voluntary participation makes a big difference in the youths' attitudes about being there. Since youth choose to be at the Academy, they take ownership of their home and school.

Evaluation: Each partner tracks the outcomes mandated by its funding source.

Lessons Learned:

Support from all the partners has been critical to San Pasqual Academy's success. "We would not work if we didn't have the total buy-in of the governmental leaders and leadership in the various systems," said Radojevic.

What's Next for this Promising Transition Practice?

The Academy is planning to increase its capacity so that it will serve 250 youth.

Where to go for more information:

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Links:

San Pasqual Academy website
www.sanpasqualacademy.org

Promising Practice article on the San Diego YES Program:

"San Diego Youth Empowerment Services (YES) Offers Connections to Range of Services"
www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytat/promisingpractices/SanDiegoYes.pdf