



## Promising Foster Youth Transition Practice

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

### **Merced County's Transition, Employment, and Life Skills Program (TEAL) Helps Foster Youth Prepare for Independence**

**Submitted by:** TEAL Program Team

**Community:** Merced County

**Subject:** Career Development, Occupational Skills Training, Work Experience

**All Youth–One System Element:** Career Development

**Function:** Improve Program Practice, Create Linkages and Connect Systems

#### **The Challenge:**

In an attempt to address the needs of the many foster youth aging out of the child welfare system in Merced County who seemed to “be falling through the cracks” the Foster Youth Services (FYS) Coordinator obtained permission from the Department of Education to utilize FYS funding to develop a pilot program that utilizes [\*The Real Game California\*](#), a career development curriculum designed for Californians ages middle school and up. This curriculum helps participants discover the importance of education and lifelong learning while giving them tools and experiences that help them to make realistic and informed choices. . The Transition, Employment, Life Skills Program (TEAL), is a collaboration between Merced County Office of Education’s Foster Youth Services and the Youth Opportunity Program (YOP).

#### **The Details:**

The TEAL program uses a condensed version of [\*The Real Game California\*](#) curriculum to teach foster youth about the world of work, career planning, decision making (and its consequences), time and money budgeting, financial planning, coping with change, setting and achieving life goals, self-awareness, and how each student’s unique abilities affect life/work satisfaction. The TEAL program is specifically for foster youth and is designed to meet their specific needs. It is open on a referral basis to foster youth ages 16-20 years old. An Advisory Committee is responsible for outreach to individual foster youth, foster youth service providers, group homes, high schools, special education, court and community schools, probation, county human services, and other organizations that have access to the target population.

The TEAL program is conducted in three phases:

**Phase I** takes place over a three week period incorporating 18 hours of instruction focused on life skills, finance and the world of work utilizing *The Real Game*. This phase also includes a career interest assessment.

**Phase II** takes place over another three week period and is focused on employability. Topics covered in phase II are such things as career planning (using current California economic and workforce information and occupations), resume writing, and interview preparation. During this phase, students also compile a personal portfolio that can be used in the future to obtain employment. At the end of the second phase students are prepared to enter the competitive world of work with a professional portfolio and strong interview skills. Youth are eligible for phase three upon completion of phases one and two.

**Phase III** offers students the opportunity to be placed at a worksite that matches their identified area of interest. Each student is allotted a total of 192 hours of work experience at \$8.00/hour. Work experience hours can be banked for youth if they are not ready to be placed at a worksite or need to first address personal barriers. TEAL staff work with each youth to monitor their progress on the worksite as well as their school attendance and records. They work closely with foster youth to help them get to a place where they will be able to benefit from the opportunity to gain experience in a supported work environment.

Four support staff run the program. They facilitate the workshops, locate jobsites that are compatible with student interests, monitor worksite progress, and support employers through the process.

Once youth complete the entire program there is a graduation ceremony where they receive one certificate for finishing the *"The Real Game"* and another one for their successful completion of the TEAL program which goes into their comprehensive portfolio.

### **Evaluation:**

After the tremendous success of the first group of 13 students who completed the pilot, the state agreed to fund two additional programs. The third group of 30-35 students is scheduled to begin the program in April, 2009. Surveys were done with the first group that completed the program and the results were impressive.

Mae Perini, Merced County Foster Youth Services Coordinator states that, "When you sit down and talk with students, there is no question that this program has impacted them."

**Key Partners:** Merced County Office of Education's (MCOE) Youth Opportunity Program (YOP) and MCOE's Foster Youth Services (FYS), Merced County Human Services Department

### **Lessons Learned:**

One surprising lesson has been how much value students see in what the program offers. The program has really increased stability among those foster youth who participate. There has been less movement by these youth as they near the age of 18 because they have a desire to complete the program. They are focused and prideful about what they are doing.

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

The Foster Youth Services Coordinator has been laying the foundation and groundwork for sustainability of this program for months. A concentrated effort is being made to strengthen partnerships that will support the program's continued success and longevity.

**Where to go for more information:**

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For more information about *The Real Game California*, go to their website at

[www.RealGameCalifornia.org](http://www.RealGameCalifornia.org)