



PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

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

Tulare County Youth Transitions Program Offers Paid Work Experience

Submitted by: Tulare County Workforce Investment Board

Community: Tulare County, California

Key Partners: Tulare County Workforce Investment Board, Community Services and Employment Training, Inc., Tulare County Health and Human Services Agency, Tulare County Probation Department, and Tulare County Board of Supervisors

Subjects: Paid Work Experience, Cross-system Partnerships

All Youth – One System Elements: Career Preparation, Youth Leadership

Function: Improve Program Practice

The Challenge: In Tulare County many youth were leaving foster care without any work experience or a good sense of employers' expectations. The Tulare County partners: Tulare County Workforce Investment Board, Community Services and Employment Training, Inc., Tulare County Health and Human Services Agency, Tulare County Probation Department, and Tulare County Board of Supervisors, saw a need to provide transitioning foster youth with paid work experience combined with guidance to help them enter the workforce and prepare to support themselves. At the same time, Tulare County Health and Human Services had experienced a huge staffing need for entry-level positions.

The Practice and Evidence:

The practice: In the fall of 2006, the partners began the Youth Transitions Program (YTP). The YTP "places students and trainees in clerical jobs with Tulare County at Health and Human Services Agency locations," explained Jed Chernabaeff, staff writer for the *Tulare Advance-Register*. The YTP serves current foster youth through age 18 and former foster youth through age 21. To date (November 2006) about 50% of participants are in care and 50% have emancipated. A total of forty youth will be enrolled in the program. They can work for up to 1600 hours over two years, earning \$7.50 per hour. Each youth is assigned a mentor to guide them through the experience. When a given youth and his mentor feel he is ready for a permanent job, he can enter into the competitive job process for County positions.

The evidence: As of November 2006, the program was just getting under way, so no hard data was available. However, the partners expressed confidence that the program would prove valuable. As reported by Chernabaeff, the deputy health and human services director of Tulare WORKS, David Crawford, thinks the program will provide the work experience that the youth lack and employers want and need. "It will also give them a skill set and work ethic that employers want," Crawford said. In fact, by the time youth finish the program, they should be prepared to apply for a County job. The financial support from the Board of Supervisors is benefiting not only

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the youth but also the County Department of Health and Human Services, which is able to fill more positions.

The Details:

Process for establishing the program: The Youth Transitions Program operates year round, but it grew out of a program that placed foster youth in summer jobs with the Department of Health and Human Services. Eldonna Caudill, Senior Analyst for the Tulare County Workforce Investment Board, explained that the partners worked on the summer program for a couple of years, promoting it at Workforce Investment Board's One-Stop orientations. This program was supported with Workforce Investment Act (WIA) dollars, and the successful outcomes demonstrated the value of the approach.

According Caudill, the year-round program "had buy-in from the very top. The Director of Health and Human Services, the Board of Supervisors, and the Workforce Investment Board all supported it." The program is a joint effort among four partners: Community Services & Employment Training Inc., the Tulare County Workforce Investment Board, Tulare County Health and Human Services, and the Tulare County Probation Department. The Tulare County Board of Supervisors allocated \$228,000 to be used for wages for youth enrolled in the program.

Strategy and practice: The strategy for serving youth is to combine the actual work experience with mentoring so that youth receive guidance in work preparation and life skills as they are working. The program implementation strategy is to pool resources to assist foster youth who are eligible for support not only through Health and Human Services, but also through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).

Youth are hired to fill training positions. Mentors work with youth to help them acquire a good work ethic and to learn how to conduct themselves on the job. Mentors also guide them in creating a resume that includes their work experience and in preparing job applications when they are ready to look for unsubsidized employment.

Encouraging youth to continue their education is also a key goal. WIA programs have educational outcomes, and it was a condition of the partnership with HHS that the program not interfere with schooling. According to Caudill, HHS readily agreed to this stipulation and has been very supportive of the youth. HHS works with participants to create a schedule that doesn't interfere with their schooling. Caudill said the message to youth is, "Tell us what you need and what your hours are going to be."

Providing opportunities for youth to develop leadership skills is a third important component of YTP. A number of the participating youth have been recruited to take part in Tulare County Youth Council committee work. The Tulare County Youth Council has adopted a strategy of inviting youth to serve on committees rather than to sit on the Council. Much of the Youth Council's work is conducted in committees, which are formed to guide specific projects such as creating a youth-friendly web site or developing a series of youth-led trainings for WIA-eligible young people. Youth are recruited to join a particular committee to help with a particular project. The YTP participants who serve on the committees are paid to take part in committee work since they are County staff and, like other staff, they do this work as part of their job.

Several YTP participants are serving on the Transitional Housing Committee, where they are helping to write a grant proposal for transitional housing support. Caudill said, "They know they probably won't benefit from the transitional housing, but they like helping the next generation of foster youth."

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Evaluation: The Youth Transitions Program will use the Workforce Investment Act requirements for evaluation as well as the evaluation criteria mandated by the other partners.

Lessons learned:

Thus far, the YTP appears to be a promising strategy for recruiting young people into human service careers, and the committee work has been the catalyst. Caudill reported that a number of the youth are seriously thinking about human services as a career even though they know they can make more money doing something else. Caudill also maintains that the committee work is helping the youth to develop as leaders; she has seen the young people grow from meeting to meeting.

What's Next for this Promising Transition Practice?

The partners will continue to select participants, connect them with mentors, and place them in positions with the Health and Human Services Agency.

Where to go for more information

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Links:

Tulare County workforce Investment Board website:
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