



PROMISING FOSTER YOUTH TRANSITION PRACTICE

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

Ventura County Project T.R.E.N.D.S.S. Coordinated Services across Systems

Submitted by: Ventura County Youth Council

Community: Ventura County, California

Key Partners: Ventura County Youth Council, County of Ventura Children and Family Services, Ventura College Foster Youth Program, Ventura County Superintendent of Schools, Independent Living Program, County of Ventura Probation Agency, Interface Children Family Services, and County of Ventura Business and Employment Services Department

Subject: Career Preparation, Transition Support

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

Function: Improve Program Practice

The Challenge:

In 2003, roughly 3,500 youth aged out of foster care in California. The Ventura County Children and Family Services and the Ventura County Youth Council staff knew that within two to four years of emancipation, 51 percent of the emancipated youth were likely to be unemployed and 40 percent would have been on public assistance or incarcerated. The staff of the two agencies recognized that a lack of collaboration between their systems was preventing some youth from getting services that would help them avoid these hardships.

The Practice and Evidence:

The practice: Project T.R.E.N.D.S.S., a pilot project operated between July of 2003 and June of 2004 by the Ventura County Youth Council, expanded and enhanced services available to foster youth. T.R.E.N.D.S.S. stands for **T**eens **R**eaching for **E**mployment **N**ow and **D**eveloping **S**elf-Sufficiency, the result of a "Name-the-Project" contest that exemplified the program's commitment to involving youth in the design and implementation of services. The project targeted foster youth ages 16-21, with a primary focus on emancipating or recently emancipated youth ages 18-19. Services included career counseling, information on local employers and occupations, vocational training, subsidized work experience, job preparation workshops, job placement assistance, and follow-up support to ensure long-term success.

Even though Project T.R.E.N.D.S.S. ended, self-sustaining networks were established to continue to connect workforce and child welfare services in the county.

The Evidence: Project T.R.E.N.D.S.S. provided at least 35 foster youth throughout Ventura County with career counseling, information on local employers and occupations, vocational training, subsidized work experience, job preparation workshops, job placement assistance, and follow-up support to ensure long-term success. Most stayed with the required activities. "We

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[saw] that when youth connect to the activities we have going for them, it helps them to focus and stay out of trouble,” commented Frank Ramirez, Youth Services Manager for Ventura County.

The Details:

Process for establishing the practice: Project T.R.E.N.D.S.S. was funded through a grant from the state. The county subsidized the training programs by offering employers a contract that defrayed up to 50 percent of their expenses for running the training programs. The grant monies also helped establish a common database to track participants and mentoring/leadership activities.

When marketing the idea, staff developed a flyer and distributed it to anyone who came into contact with foster youth, including people at nonprofits and faith-based organizations. They also spread the word through presentations and mini-workshops on Career Days.

Strategy and practice: As part of the Youth Council's overall menu of youth services, Project T.R.E.N.D.S.S. built on an existing “All Youth-One System” infrastructure and networking process. Memos kept everyone in the network involved in each youth's situation and progress. Youth Service staff attended the emancipation conference when a youth “aged out” of the county's system, and informed him or her about the range of services that were available.

Serving youth between the ages of 16 and 22, Project T.R.E.N.D.S.S. aimed to add structure and flexibility to the process of weaning youth from foster care by coordinating services that had not previously been integrated. Youth workers identified each participant's “support system” – all the people involved with that youth, such as the case manager and probation officer – and fostered communication and cooperation among them. Strategies included meetings, networking, youth ownership of the program, and shared software.

Project T.R.E.N.D.S.S. offered work-readiness workshops and comprehensive employment and training services. Youth who completed the work-experience component could also get on-the-job training. Some did enter the job training programs while others received ongoing services at One-Stops or at local Girls and Boys Clubs.

Some employers expressed interest in retaining participants for regular jobs after the training ended. An account executive helped the others find jobs. Regardless of whether the young people secured an unsubsidized job by the end of the program, all of them acquired the necessary work readiness skills.

Until Project T.R.E.N.D.S.S., no practical link existed between services offered by the offices of Children and Family Services and employment and training programs. “That's where there needs to be linkage to One-Stops or to other entities that provide that expertise. That's what made this program stand out as a good solution,” said Ramirez.

Lessons learned:

People got excited about Project T.R.E.N.D.S.S. when the youth actually started the career preparation activities “because then they finally saw the results of youth getting connected to services. It had never happened before,” said Ramirez. He gave a lot of credit to the workshops youth attended before being offered work activities. Those introductory workshops made it easier for youth to build relationships with project staff and get used to a structured environment, which in turn made it easier for participants to make the transition into program activities – and actual employment.