



## Getting the Job Done: Effectively Preparing Foster Youth for **Employment**

BY LINDA LEWIS

### Why is this important?

Every year in California, more than 4,000 young adults “age out” of foster care when they turn 18.<sup>1</sup> They are capable of achieving economic success in today’s competitive market, and many do. But like all young people, they need the kinds of support and preparation that we take as givens for our own children. For foster youth, the experience of transition to the adult world can be overwhelming because they often lack the basic skills, experience and resources that are essential for success in adulthood.

Foster youth and young adults aging out of foster care need to become a clear focus of public policy, public and private investment, and civic concern. The transition from foster care to independence is difficult, and failing to provide support results in enormous costs in terms of unfulfilled lives, disrupted communities and the taxpayer burden of delinquency and dependence.

Children come into the foster care system when the Dependency Court determines that they have been abused, neglected, exploited, or abandoned and should be removed from their families. Some children are later reunited with their family members, but others grow up under the jurisdiction of the Dependency Court and the care of child welfare services until they turn 18 and “age out” of the system.

Educational achievement is a powerful predictor of future life success for all youth. High school dropouts are seriously at risk of being unemployed and on public assistance.<sup>2</sup>

# foster youth

Ensuring that these youth have the means and motivation to become successful adults requires innovative approaches: new partnerships that leverage services and mobilize resources across communities, and new ideas about how to think bigger, expect more and aim higher when we envision their futures.

The City of Los Angeles Workforce Investment Board's (WIB) Youth Council reached out to the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services and to the Foundation Consortium for California's Children & Youth to convene a symposium on foster youth because members believe that, by working with child welfare agencies, WIBs can increase the workforce participation and self-sufficiency of former foster youth. The expertise of WIBs in developing workforce readiness and job placement services can complement the services provided by child welfare organizations, to maximize impact on the lives of these youth. Everyone involved in creating healthy California communities has an interest in assuring that the 4,000-plus youth who emancipate from foster care in California each year are allowed the best possible chance for success. Addressing the needs of this vulnerable population will also have a positive influence on other societal issues such as homelessness and youth crime.

## What do we know about youth in foster care?

- Frequent changes in home and school placements can have a deleterious effect on foster youth. Poor academic performance often results from the lack of stability in school enrollment and poor school attendance, due to frequent changes in home placements.<sup>3</sup> In one study, a third of foster care youth attended five or more elementary schools.<sup>4</sup> And studies show that youth who have an average of one fewer home placements per year are nearly twice as likely to finish high school.<sup>5</sup>
- Youth in foster care are more than twice as likely as non-foster youth (37 percent to 16 percent) to have dropped out of high school. Moreover, youth in foster care are less likely to be enrolled in college preparatory classes (15 percent to 32 percent), even when their test scores and grades are similar to those of non-foster youth.<sup>6</sup>
- The incidence of mental health issues and learning disabilities among foster youth is substantially higher than in the general population.<sup>7</sup> In one study, over 50 percent of former foster youth had been diagnosed with a psychological disorder at some point in their childhood.<sup>8</sup>
- It is relatively easy for a youth who has come under the jurisdiction of the Dependency Court to slip into delinquency. Once a foster youth is adjudicated as a delinquent, it is more likely that s/he will be viewed as a troublemaker, will be difficult to place, and may not have access to services that otherwise would have been provided.

## What do we know about youth who have transitioned out of foster care?

- If youth in California do not hold a job prior to exiting foster care, there is slightly more than a 50–50 chance that they will begin employment after exit.<sup>9</sup> Within two to four years of emancipation, 51 percent of former foster youth are unemployed in California.<sup>10</sup>
- More than half of youth aging out of foster care have not graduated from high school.<sup>11</sup> Studies show that youth who have been emancipated from foster care without a high school diploma are unlikely to finish high school later.<sup>12</sup>
- In the past 12 years, 99 percent of net new jobs in the United States (16 million new jobs) required some training beyond high school, including technical and vocational certificates.<sup>13</sup>

- Although many former foster youth make connections with California's community college system, and many have laudable educational goals, only one to two percent earn a degree or certificate, or transfer to a four-year college. In comparison, 37 percent of students who attend community college nationally do complete a degree at some institution, and 19 percent transfer to a four-year college.<sup>14</sup>

### **What is the policy environment?**

Currently a number of policy improvements are being implemented in California that provide an opportunity for child welfare agencies and the Youth Councils of local Workforce Investment Boards to work together.

Since the passage of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act in 1999, more national attention and financial resources have been focused on older foster youth and those emancipated from the foster care system. In particular, the Chafee Act has given youth the access to funds for continuing education and training, housing needs, and maintained eligibility for Medi-Cal health coverage. However, the Chafee Act does not directly address special needs as related to employability and employment. Although programs throughout the nation seek to respond to these needs, opportunities are still woefully inadequate for foster youth to develop the necessary skills and experience for steady, livable employment. There is also much to learn about which components and characteristics of such programs lead to successful outcomes.

California is currently undertaking a number of efforts to improve results for youth in the child welfare system. The state's new Child Welfare Outcomes and Accountability Process (established by AB 636) and the federally mandated Program Improvement Plan (PIP) require comprehensive and integrated system changes to improve outcomes for children and families. In addition, over the past

several years a far-reaching strategic planning effort led by the California Department of Social Services and other stakeholders has resulted in a blueprint for improving child welfare services over the next five to ten years. All these reform efforts include the goal to improve outcomes for alumni of the foster care system by providing better support for the transition into adulthood.

The California Workforce Investment Board's State Youth Council has established a groundbreaking policy framework called "All Youth-One System," in which Youth Councils play a critical role in the workforce development of California's young people. The Youth Council Institute has provided a series of training events and on-site assistance, and developed written documents to train Youth Councils on the policy framework of All Youth-One System and to give Youth Councils a set of tools to use in building their capacity. The majority of California's Youth Council chairs, members and staff have taken advantage of these training opportunities, and they have made substantial strides toward developing strong community leadership around youth issues, including those related to foster youth. Additionally, the proposed amendments of the federal Workforce Investment Act would place increased emphasis on foster youth.

Youth who emancipate from foster care in California earn an average of less than \$6,000 per year following their 18th birthdays — substantially below the 2002 poverty level of \$8,860 for a single individual.<sup>15</sup>

CONSEQUENCES



Studies show that the more foster homes in which youth are placed, the more likely they are to have a state prison record after emancipation from care.<sup>16</sup>

## Who are the partners?

The convergence of these policy and practice reform efforts in California creates a golden opportunity for collaboration — among child welfare agencies, educational institutions, employers, Workforce Investment Boards and other public and private entities — on improving long-term outcomes for foster youth. On February 24, 2004, a group of 150 advocates, public and private service providers, child welfare professionals, employers and youth gathered in Los Angeles at a day-long symposium sponsored by the City of Los Angeles Workforce Investment Board's Youth Council and the Foundation Consortium for California's Children and Youth. The purpose of this symposium, *Crossroads 2004*, was to provide participants with information about the issues associated with employment for foster youth, and to develop recommendations addressing the most significant issues. The symposium has culminated in this policy brief which sets out specific recommendations to practitioners and local and state decision makers who focus on increasing levels of self-sufficiency for youth exiting foster care.

## What do foster youth need?

- **Stable living arrangements:** Many foster youth experience chronic instability in their living situations, both while in foster care and after emancipation. This plays havoc with schooling, the development of relationships, and employment or vocational training opportunities. Moreover, once foster youth leave care they face a critical lack of affordable housing, particularly since they have no record as tenants and no one to co-sign for them.
- **Increased autonomy:** While living in foster care, youth are subject to a number of restrictions imposed by foster parents or group caregivers in compliance with licensing requirements. In response to governmental agencies' concerns about liability, caregivers can be reluctant to allow youth to engage in age-appropriate activities outside home and school (e.g. taking a bus to an internship program or job, or participating on a sports team). When rules get in the way of development, licensing staff can

grant exceptions. Caregivers need to be fully informed of the process for requesting waivers and of their responsibility to do so.

- **Early comprehensive assessment:** Every youth needs to help create an individualized plan that addresses needs, builds on identified strengths and interests, and includes target dates for achieving specific objectives. The assessment should identify strengths and the support necessary for self-sufficiency, academic skills, learning disabilities and mental health. This plan needs to be reviewed with the youth at least quarterly, updating it as necessary. It is important to involve foster parents, other caretakers and birth family, as appropriate, so that the youth is supported in following through with established goals.
- **Involvement in all planning and decision-making:** Foster youth need to participate fully in all planning and decision-making about their care and their lives. Service systems have been moving toward better youth engagement, but significant changes in organizational cultures are required to put this principle fully into action.
- **Educational support:** High school graduation or equivalency is a requirement for most jobs. Opportunities such as stable school placement, educational advocacy, tutoring and counseling need to be available to all youth throughout their time in foster care. Moreover, post-secondary education and training need to be supported for foster youth as part of their comprehensive assessment plans.
- **Employment readiness:** Youth must have the ability to problem-solve, communicate effectively and act responsibly. They need caregivers and mentors to teach basic pre-employment principles such as arriving on time, dressing appropriately, being honest and having a good attitude. They also require programs that teach specific occupational skills and provide help in developing résumés and learning interview skills.

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## SARAH'S STORY

"I first entered the foster care system along with my three older siblings when I was two years old, after both our parents were incarcerated. For a while when I was eight, my family was together. We had a house, I went to school every day and we all seemed to be getting along. I was in the gifted program at school. I played the violin and clarinet and I was on the honors list. But everything fell apart again. My father burned up most of my books and my clarinet, and I went back into the system.

"My placements seemed to change every few months. After a while, I was so mad and depressed and stressed out that I started smoking marijuana and drinking. Because I moved around so much from placement to placement, it was hard to keep involved in school. Sometimes I didn't go to school at all because my foster parent or group home staff didn't get me enrolled. When I did go to school, I was behind in class and I was too embarrassed to ask for help. After a while, I lost interest in school and I stopped going even when I had the chance. When I was sixteen, I ran away from my group home so I could be with my sister. That didn't work out so I turned myself in and was sent back to Juvenile Hall. Although I had a "suitable placement" order from the court, no one wanted me so I spent nine months "dead time" in the Hall, just waiting.

"When I turned 18, I was no longer a ward of the court. Unfortunately, like so many other foster youth that leave the system at 18, I was sent out into the world without a plan, just hopes for the best. I always thought turning 18 and leaving foster care would be a wonderful day, but instead it was just a very scary one. I was lucky enough to get into an independent living center for transitioning foster youth. With the help of one of the counselors, I enrolled in a class so I could get my GED, but I had no job or substantial savings. The independent living center taught me things I would need to know eventually, like how to file taxes and write a check. But how could I think about writing checks or filing taxes when I didn't even have a job?

"It took six months for me to find my first job because I had never worked before. When I did find one, I ended up getting fired because I stopped going to work. A lot of times I missed the bus and I was scared my boss would get mad at me so I just didn't show up. When I did go, I was completely bored. I didn't have the right shoes so my feet really hurt at the end of the day. I know that it would have been better for me to talk to someone rather than just not show up, but by the time I figured this out, I had been fired already and there was no one to talk to about it.

"A couple of weeks before my 19th birthday I found out I was pregnant. Not only did I have to worry about how to survive on my own, I also had a baby to think about. I stopped smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol because I didn't want to hurt my baby. I was told that my goals of graduating high school, working part time, going to college, and raising a child were not realistic. I was feeling scared and discouraged about my life. I felt alone and I got really depressed and sometimes thought about killing myself. But I knew I needed to stay strong for my baby daughter.

"Now my daughter is born and I'm struggling to find work that accommodates my daughter's daycare schedule, my school schedule and the bus schedule. I have to move out of the independent living center soon and I'm not exactly sure what I will do. I want things for my life and for my daughter, but I don't know how or if I will be able to make it all happen."

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Young women who have emancipated from foster care in California, many of whom have become mothers, are four times as likely to receive welfare as other young women in the population.<sup>17</sup>

- **Sealing of records:** In most instances it is possible to arrange for mental health and delinquency records to be sealed. Once sealed, they need not be referenced on job applications or in interviews. Youth need support to maximize the privacy of their records, as well as help with understanding what information must be provided to potential employers and how best to disclose it.
- **Work experience:** Getting a job is vastly easier for those familiar with the world of work and who have already held a job. Foster youth need opportunities to visit a variety of employers, to talk with employees about their jobs, and to observe the workplace. Involving youth as volunteers and in subsidized work can provide valuable experience and lead to opportunities for paid employment. It is helpful to start exposing youth to the world of work during their pre-teen years, to begin actual training placements at 13, and to develop increasingly more responsible and lucrative placement options as they mature.
- **Logistical support:** For many foster youth, finding a job is only slightly more difficult than getting to — and keeping — that job once they have it. Foster youth and those transitioning from care need access to transportation services and childcare so that they are able to find and keep a job.
- **Financial literacy:** Financial literacy training is essential in preparing youth to manage available resources appropriately and to avoid predatory lending by moving into mainstream banking.
- **Mentoring and emotional support:** Both foster youth and youth transitioning from care need an employment mentor or peer counselor who will check in with them regularly and mediate issues that arise on the job. Beyond this, youth transitioning from foster care need enduring connections to caring and knowledgeable adults who will be their advocates, confidantes and guides.
- **Access to and awareness of services:** The availability of employment-related services for foster youth needs to be expanded, particularly to younger youth and in underserved areas. In

addition, an ongoing support system is critical during the transition years of 18 to 24. Outreach to foster youth and their caregivers needs to be expanded because they are too often unaware of services that are available.

### How do we know what works?

**Educational support:** Supports (e.g. tutoring and counseling) for students have demonstrated effectiveness in improving academic outcomes.<sup>18</sup> Studies show that youth who receive support in education are better able to hold a job and obtain health care, more likely to build a supportive social network, and less likely to go on welfare or to prison.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, each additional year of training or education beyond high school results in a significant increase in wages for youth.<sup>20</sup>

**Work experience:** Foster youth who hold jobs while still in foster care are four times more likely to graduate from high school than those who do not, and they do better in the job market once on their own.<sup>21</sup>

**Mentoring:** Studies have demonstrated that attachment to a supportive adult can be one of the key variables that correlate with a foster youth's resilience in difficult situations.<sup>22</sup> For most young people, parents play this role. For foster youth, other caring adults need to provide supportive social connections and networks. For example, studies show that youth with a positive relationship with the last or longest foster family are more than twice as likely to complete high school.<sup>23</sup>

**Service integration:** Youth receive better services when organizations work in a collaborative manner. The certifications section of the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 directs states to include a broad range of stakeholders in the planning, coordination and delivery of independent living services for foster youth.<sup>24</sup>

SARAH'S STORY, CONTINUED

"I became friends with a job counselor who visited my independent living center. She was funny and weird like me, and we got along. It was so nice to just talk to her and let out all my fears and frustration. She helped me plan out what I wanted to do and how I can get there. She also spent time with me practicing interviewing for jobs and driving me to interviews. My job counselor also told me about a family resource center in my neighborhood. At the resource center I was able to get help in finding an apartment, getting childcare for my daughter and learning how to manage my money. They even helped me figure out how to access transportation services that accommodate my hectic schedule. All of this allowed me to find and keep a job.

"By sharing the rent with a roommate who is also a former foster youth, I am able to support my daughter and myself. I decided to put my school plans on hold and work full-time. With the help of the job counselor, I found a job. I didn't love the work, but by now I knew enough to talk to my boss when I was starting to have trouble. After a while, my boss helped me and showed me how to do new things. Then he gave me work that was more interesting. I started taking classes at the community college. My boss gave me ideas of classes that might help me at work, and as I learned new skills he had me promoted. A college counselor talked to me about transferring to a four-year college and I have taken all but one of the classes I need to do that. I slip sometimes, but when that happens, I talk to my boss or my counselor at school or my roommate, and that helps a lot. My job counselor still checks in with me to see how I am doing and it feels good to know I can count on her for advice and support. I want things for my life and for my daughter, and now I know what I have to do to get there. I know I can do it. It's just going to take some time."

### What are the needs of employers?

Employers seek to develop and sustain a stable and productive workforce. They want to ensure that there will be a sufficient number of qualified people to perform the tasks needed to produce their product or service at a competitive price. Furthermore, they want to avoid the costs of high turnover by developing a cadre of competent, loyal and committed employees.

Employers function in an interdependent world. They recognize that the strength, capacity and stability of the employee pool are closely tied to the health and well-being of the community. As civic leaders, employers play a key role in developing and overseeing implementation of policies that will improve local life in ways that enhance their access to high-quality employees.

Too often, employers are unaware of the large potential of foster youth who are leaving care. Given the opportunity to become connected to services and strategies that assist in training and working with foster youth, employers often become enthusiastic partners. Employers also look for specific economic incentives, including time-limited subsidized employment or internships. Over time, employers will also want to experience tangible benefits in the form of measurable success in hiring and retention of qualified and loyal employees.



employers need...

## THE SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES EMPLOYERS LOOK FOR

United Parcel Service (UPS) has made a commitment to recruiting, training, and hiring youth for well-compensated work, while supporting them to continue to their education.

The School-to-Work programs:

- Partner with community colleges to offer on-site classes for employees
- Offer college preparation classes
- Provide career resource rooms
- Utilize mentors to help students manage their academic pursuits and employee responsibilities
- Teach punctuality, integrity, teamwork, and time management

Go to:  
[www.community.ups.com](http://www.community.ups.com)  
for more information.

The U.S. Departments of Labor and Education formed the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) to develop a list of the competencies and skills that workers must have to succeed in today's workplace. Most of these skills are first learned in the family and caregivers play a critical role in assuring that foster youth have specific opportunities to acquire and practice them.

### **Foundation skills**

*Basic skills:* Reading, writing, arithmetic, mathematics, speaking, listening

*Thinking skills:* The ability to learn, reason, think creatively, make decisions, solve problems

*Personal qualities:* Individual responsibility, self-esteem, self-management, sociability, integrity

### **Workplace competencies**

*Resources:* Know how to allocate time, money, materials, space and staff

*Information:* Acquire and evaluate data, organize and maintain files, interpret and communicate, and use computers to process information

*Interpersonal skills:* Work on teams, teach others, serve customers, lead, negotiate, and work well with people from culturally diverse backgrounds

*Systems:* Understand social, organizational and technological systems, monitor and correct performance, and design or improve systems

*Technology:* Select equipment and tools, apply technology to specific tasks, and maintain and troubleshoot equipment

## **Job Matching and Supported Employment**

Marriott Foundation's "Bridges from School to Work" matches youth and employer, provides ongoing support and facilitates an employer-employee relationship in which the needs of each are met. Nationally, Bridges has placed more than 6,000 youth into competitive employment with over 1,500 different employers. Eighty nine percent of youth who successfully complete the Bridges program receive offers of on going employment.

Go to [www.marriottfoundation.org](http://www.marriottfoundation.org) for more information.

## **Comprehensive Work Readiness**

The San Diego Workforce Partnership brings together child welfare agencies, employment agencies, Workforce Investment Boards, and non-profits to provide a comprehensive and progressive work-readiness program for foster youth, including:

- Job tours for youth as young as thirteen
- Instruction in vocational skills
- Visits to work sites supplemented by "job shadowing"
- Internships arranged with selected employers for older foster youth
- Mentors provide support and address any issues that may arise for interns
- Guidance through the transition from youths' internship to subsidized employment to unsubsidized employment

Go to [www.workforce.org](http://www.workforce.org) for more information.

## COORDINATING SERVICES FOR FOSTER YOUTH

### **Collaborative approaches to improve effectiveness of services**

The interplay of issues related to equipping current and former foster youth for successful employment make it clear that no one group can do it all alone. The number of jurisdictions and parties involved in decision-making and/or service provision requires effective collaboration to ensure access to needed resources, and to avoid gaps or redundancy in service. Effective collaboration allows agencies to share and leverage resources, to pool data and share accountability for outcomes, and to offer and utilize different perspectives, expertise and skills. Service integration through collaboration is a primary means of promoting system improvement.

Those engaged in collaboration on foster youths' transition, and more specifically on employment, have discovered that the diversity in disciplines, organizational structures and missions among the key parties make collaboration particularly challenging. Longstanding turf and power issues and a lack of regular communication channels further complicate the process.

The benefits of streamlining access to services and making better use of scarce resources make the challenges well worth addressing. The recommendations below provide guidance around the specific focus of collaboration.

Project TRENDSS (Teens Reaching for Employment Now and Developing Self-Sufficiency) is a program developed by the Ventura County Workforce Investment Board's Youth Council to coordinate services in the county for foster youth. Serving youth between the ages of 16 and 22, Project TRENDSS works with each foster youth to identify the people important in his or her life, and facilitates communication and cooperation between them. A database tracks program participants and their mentoring and leadership activities.

Project TRENDSS offers work-readiness workshops and comprehensive employment and training services that are subsidized by Ventura county. Youth who complete the work experience component can also get on-the-job training, which defrays up to 50 percent of the expense for the employer. Some employers have expressed an interest in retaining participants for regular jobs after the training ends, and an account executive helps other youth to find jobs. All the youth in the program acquire the work-readiness skills needed to become self-sufficient. Before Project TRENDSS, no practical link existed in Ventura County between child welfare services and employment training programs.

“Young people’s experiences at home, at school, in the community, and at work are strongly interconnected, and our response to problems that arise in any of these domains must be equally well integrated...” —William T. Grant Foundation’s Commission on Work, Family, and Citizenship, *“The Forgotten Half: Pathways to Success for America’s Youth and Young Families”*<sup>25</sup>



## What can we do?

I. First and foremost, communities need to work together to pool resources and skills to assist foster youth and those transitioning out of foster care to become both employable and employed at a living wage. Workforce Investment Boards, child welfare systems, probation departments, city and county governments, and businesses and service providers need to identify shared outcomes, identify overlaps and gaps in services, maximize and leverage resources, develop multidisciplinary service teams, address confidentiality and data-sharing issues, and address the portability of services across jurisdictions. None of these systems can afford to work alone.

We can work together to:

- Use California's new Child Welfare Outcomes and Accountability Process (established by AB 636) to focus attention on improving employment outcomes for transitioning foster youth. Be sure everyone who needs to be involved is at the table, and don't duplicate work that is already being done somewhere else.
- Coordinate individual plans for youth, including the Child Welfare Services' and the Department of Probation's individual transition plan, the Department of Education's individual educational plan, and the Workforce Investment Act's individual service strategy.
- Establish information-sharing protocols that support data-sharing among agencies without violating confidentiality rules, in order to facilitate access to services and reduce duplication of effort.
- Develop mechanisms to maximize revenue across cooperating departments, programs and jurisdictions. One possibility is to convene a multi-agency fiscal planning group. Partner agencies can collaborate to establish shared outcomes for youth employment. These outcomes can be used to guide allocation of and accountability for funding.

- Implement performance-based contracting and build into all contracts for foster youth-related services a requirement for collaborative partnerships with specific benchmarks for results.
- For caregivers, service providers, children's attorneys, licensing workers and other staff, provide significant and ongoing cross-training in how to address the needs of foster youth and employers, the stages of youth development, the stages of employability development, and community resources.
- Make sure that there is a body (i.e. the existing county children's collaborative or Emancipation Partnership) with responsibility for improving coordination, identifying needed policy changes as they arise, and removing barriers to successful collaboration and workforce development for foster youth. Be sure that these duties are explicit in the work plan of the group.

II. Child Welfare Services, Workforce Investment Boards and their Youth Councils, boards of supervisors, city councils and state government need to focus internally and with each other on how to incorporate the following policy and practice recommendations into their work plans. Over the years, many of these recommendations have been implemented in different parts of the state, with varying levels of success. We have drawn together the most promising practices and policy improvements, knowing that local adaptation will be necessary. In order to help youth meet their full potential, public and private sectors must join together to make them a priority and invest in their futures.

### Policy and practice recommendations for child welfare systems

- Ensuring stable living arrangements for older foster youth is one of the most important things child welfare systems can do to improve educational and employment success for foster youth.
- Implement the new statute AB 408 (Promoting Permanence for Foster Youth), which is intended to ensure that no child leave the foster system without a lifelong connection to a committed, caring adult.

- Prior to emancipation, every foster youth should understand his or her rights and the process by which the court can ensure maximum privacy of juvenile records. Foster youth also need training in how to handle past legal issues when completing job applications.
- Every youth, beginning at age 12 and no later than 14, needs to have a comprehensive transition plan that is updated annually. With the foster youth at the center — and utilizing a multi-disciplinary team including family members, caregivers, caseworker, workforce staff, attorney, service providers and other supporters — the plan should contain detailed educational support and workforce preparation goals with measurable interim benchmarks and accountability from team members for achievement of plan goals and methods for how and by whom youth will be linked to services that support their achievement.
- A transition plan should include a guaranteed workforce preparation package to prepare foster youth for employment. This package is comprised of a progressive program of job tours, job shadowing and mentoring, aggressive outreach to engage youth in opportunities for internships and volunteer experiences, and opportunities and support for part-time work beginning no later than age 16 and continuing through their emancipation from care.
- Coordinate with other organizations to conduct ongoing data collection on employment outcomes and wages for foster youth.
- Child welfare staff should participate on the Youth Councils of Workforce Investment Boards.

#### **Policy and practice recommendations for Workforce Investment Boards and their Youth Councils**

- Make staff available for participation in teams to develop the Guaranteed Workforce Preparation Package of Transition Plans for foster youth (both child welfare and probation youth, as appropriate).



- When negotiating performance expectations for programs, take into consideration the proportion of foster youth served and their special needs.
- For service providers, provide ongoing training in such areas as the special needs of foster youth, available resources, rules and regulations, and working in collaborative teams. Provide incentives for maximum participation.
- Provide information to employers, particularly small businesses, on potential availability for tax credits as an incentive for hiring foster youth.
- Explore ways to address continuity of employment services when young people move among jurisdictions. Some counties have multiple Workforce Investment Boards, while other Workforce Investment Boards encompass multiple counties.
- Engage employers as partners with foster youth, in such roles as mentor, tutor and job coach.

# recommendations

“It comes down to this: Child Welfare needs to find permanent homes for these youth by the time they are 12 to 14. Then use the support systems, such as the services offered through Workforce Investment Boards, to help the youth and their permanent caregivers. Also, reduce the caseloads for social workers so that they have the time to do all the coordination that is needed, so that youth who have no choice but to stay in the system get the attention they need to be successful. That means matching the youth’s placement so that they can be stable and have caregivers who really are concerned with these youth being successful.”

— Former county independent living program director

### **Policy recommendations for local governing bodies (boards of supervisors and city councils)**

- Consider investment in lifelong success and life preparation for disadvantaged youth as a priority for all local initiatives, focusing on higher educational attainment, improved access to health and mental health services, enhanced employment training and increased job opportunities. Find ways to promote youth employment in government, in publicly funded projects and with vendors.
- Develop a mechanism to provide bus passes for foster youth who are in school and/or employed. Determine requirements for school, training and work attendance associated with receiving the bus pass.
- Develop support networks for youth emancipated from foster care through age 24.

### **Policy recommendations for state government**

- State government should maximize opportunities for leveraging and collaboration. Appoint a representative from the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency to be on the State Interagency Child Welfare Team, and a representative from the California Department of Social Services to be on the California Workforce Investment Board’s State Youth Council.
- The Department of Social Services and the Labor and Workforce Development Agency should jointly develop and implement training modules that address cross-systems collaboration.

### **Policy and practice recommendations for California Department of Social Services**

- Conduct or support a communications campaign to increase positive perceptions of foster youth.

- Establish reasonable, flexible guidelines and a simplified “exception” process for safety and supervision of youth participating in age-appropriate independent activities (e.g. cooking, laundry, work experience, after-school sports, clubs).
- Pursue implementation of an Internet-based program for maintaining information on foster youth health and education status.

### **How do we get started?**

- Review recommendations in this brief and incorporate them into your work plans.
- Convene a summit to discuss ways to implement these recommendations and to jumpstart collaboration.
- Assure cross-membership on local Youth Councils and Emancipation Partnerships.

All society shares a responsibility to young people who have been removed from their families and placed in foster care. These youth often lack the family support, connections and resources that are taken for granted for other children. By focusing attention and investment on the needs and resilience of youth leaving foster care, we can assure they have access to the supports and opportunities they need to succeed. Success for foster youth translates into increased workforce productivity and citizen engagement, which in turn promotes success for the whole community.

## RESOURCES

### Connected by 25:

A Plan for Investing in Successful Futures for Foster Youth  
2004 resource from the Youth Transition Funders Group's  
Foster Care Work Group  
[www.youthtransitions.org](http://www.youthtransitions.org) (under Papers and Reports)

### Assessing the Effects of Foster Care:

Early Results from the Casey National Alumni Study  
2003 resource from Casey Family Programs  
[www.casey.org](http://www.casey.org) (under Resources, and then under Publications)

### It's My Life:

A Framework for Youth Transitioning  
from Foster Care to Successful Adulthood  
2001 resource from Casey Family Programs  
[www.casey.org](http://www.casey.org) (under Resources, and then under Publications)

Child Welfare Research Center  
Center for Social Services Research,  
University of California at Berkeley  
[www.ccsr.berkeley.edu/childwelfare/](http://www.ccsr.berkeley.edu/childwelfare/)

California's Child Welfare Services Redesign Final Report  
2003 report from the Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group  
[www.cwsredesign.ca.gov](http://www.cwsredesign.ca.gov)

Child Care Partnership Project  
2000 resource from the U.S. Department of Health and  
Human Services' National Child Care Information Center.  
[www.nccic.org/ccpartnerships/](http://www.nccic.org/ccpartnerships/)

California Department of Social Services  
[www.dss.ca.gov](http://www.dss.ca.gov)

California Workforce Investment Board  
Youth Development Resources  
[www.calwia.org/youth\\_development/](http://www.calwia.org/youth_development/)

California Youth Council Institute  
[www.nwwo.org/yci/](http://www.nwwo.org/yci/)

Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS)  
[www.scans.jhu.edu](http://www.scans.jhu.edu)

California Youth Connection  
[www.cal-youthconn.org](http://www.cal-youthconn.org)

The White House Task Force for Disadvantaged Youth's Final Report  
[www.ncfy.com/wbreport.htm](http://www.ncfy.com/wbreport.htm)

Kids Count Data Book, 2004 resource from the Annie E. Casey  
Foundation focusing on Kids Count  
[www.gecf.org/kidscount/](http://www.gecf.org/kidscount/)

Los Angeles County Emancipation Program Final Report  
2003 report from Sharon Watson et al, Los Angeles County  
Chief Administrative Office  
[www.ilponline.org](http://www.ilponline.org)

Fight for Your Rights: A Guidebook for California Foster Youth,  
Former Foster Youth and Those Who Care About Them  
Phil Ladew, The National Center for Youth Law, Oakland, CA  
Contact [info@youthlaw.org](mailto:info@youthlaw.org) for a copy.

Crossroads 2004 Symposium on Improving Employment  
Outcomes for Former Foster Youth  
[www.members.aol.com/crossroads2004la/](http://www.members.aol.com/crossroads2004la/)

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Needell, B. et al., University of California at Berkeley, Center for Social Services Research, <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>, under *Highlights* and then under *Exits Per Year* (July 2003).
- <sup>2</sup> Cited in Pecora, P. et al., *Assessing the Effects of Foster Care: Early Results from the Casey National Alumni Study* (Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs, 2003), 26. [www.casey.org](http://www.casey.org).
- <sup>3</sup> Cited in *Connected by 25: A Plan for Investing in Successful Futures for Foster Youth* (2004), 22. [www.youthtransitions.org](http://www.youthtransitions.org).
- <sup>4</sup> Pecora, P. et al., op. cit., 27.
- <sup>5</sup> Pecora, P. et al., op. cit., 43.
- <sup>6</sup> Pecora, P. et al., op. cit., 46.
- <sup>7</sup> Cited in *It's My Life: A Framework for Youth Transitioning from Foster Care to Successful Adulthood* (Seattle: WA, Casey Family Programs, 2001), 7. [www.casey.org](http://www.casey.org).
- <sup>8</sup> Pecora, P. et al., op. cit., 19.
- <sup>9</sup> Goerge, R. et al., *Employment Outcomes for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care: Final Report* (Chicago, IL: Chaplin Hall Center for Children, 2002), executive summary. <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/fostercare-agingout02>.
- <sup>10</sup> Youth Council Institute, "Coordinating Services for Foster Youth – Ventura County Youth Council," under *YIdeas* and then under *Comprehensive System* (2004), [www.nww.org/yci](http://www.nww.org/yci).
- <sup>11</sup> Wertheimer, R., *Youth Who "Age Out" of Foster Care: Troubled Lives, Troubling Prospects* (Washington, DC: Child Trends, 2002). [www.childtrends.org](http://www.childtrends.org).
- <sup>12</sup> Cited in *Connected by 25: A Plan for Investing in Successful Futures for Foster Youth*, op. cit., 21.
- <sup>13</sup> Management & Training Corporation, "Data Spotlight: What is the Value of Education."
- <sup>14</sup> Needell, B. et al., *Youth Emancipating from Foster Care in California: Findings Using Linked Administrative Data* (Berkeley, CA: Center for Social Services Research, 2002), 59-63. [http://cssr.berkeley.edu/childwelfare/pdfs/youth/ff\\_y\\_entire.pdf](http://cssr.berkeley.edu/childwelfare/pdfs/youth/ff_y_entire.pdf).
- <sup>15</sup> Goerge, R. et al., op. cit., executive summary.
- <sup>16</sup> Needell, B. et al., *Youth Emancipating from Foster Care in California: Findings Using Linked Administrative Data*, op. cit., 73.
- <sup>17</sup> Needell, B. et al., *Youth Emancipating from Foster Care in California: Findings Using Linked Administrative Data*, op. cit., 4.
- <sup>18</sup> Pecora, P. et al., op. cit., 27-29.
- <sup>19</sup> Cited in *Connected by 25: A Plan for Investing in Successful Futures for Foster Youth*, op. cit., 13.
- <sup>20</sup> Management & Training Corporation, op. cit.
- <sup>21</sup> Pecora, P. et al., op. cit., 43.
- <sup>22</sup> Cited in *It's My Life: A Framework for Youth Transitioning from Foster Care to Successful Adulthood*, op. cit., 9.
- <sup>23</sup> Pecora, P. et al., op. cit., 43.
- <sup>24</sup> Cited in *It's My Life: A Framework for Youth Transitioning from Foster Care to Successful Adulthood*, op. cit., 65.
- <sup>25</sup> William T. Grant Foundation's Commission on Work, Family, and Citizenship, *The Forgotten Half: Pathways to Success for America's Youth and Young Families* (Washington, DC: The Commission, 1988).

**The Consortium wants California's children to be safe, healthy and learning each day.**

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