



# **Our Children: Emancipating Foster Youth**

## **Community Action Guide**



League of California Cities California State Association of Counties California School Boards Association

# Our Children: Emancipating Foster Youth Community Action Guide

## Cities Counties and Schools Partnership

*The Cities, Counties and Schools (CCS) Partnership* is unique in the nation. Incorporated in 1997, it is a nonprofit, nonpartisan collaboration of associations of local elected officials. The partners that constitute CCS Partnership are the League of California Cities, the California State Association of Counties, and the California School Boards Association.

The Board of Directors of the Partnership is comprised of the officers and executive directors of the three statewide associations. Together the board members represent the majority of local elected officials in the state. The goal of the partnership is to create a culture of collaboration among local elected officials in California's 478 cities, 58 counties, and more than 1000 school districts. The purpose of local jurisdictional collaboration is to improve the conditions and quality of life for California's children, families and communities.

## 2007 Conditions of Children Task Force

In 2005 the CCS Partnership established the Conditions of Children Task Force with each association appointing members to serve one-year terms. In 2005 the task force discussed multiple issues facing children and their families. The 2006 task force had a single focus – understanding childhood obesity and creating an action agenda for addressing it. For 2007 the task force took on a new focus, emancipating foster youth.

### Members of the 2007 Task Force

Luan	Rivera	Chair, CCS Partnership	Immediate Past President, California School Boards Association
Stewart	Bubar	Board Member	Culver City Unified School District
Davis	Campbell	Board Member	CCS Partnership Board of Directors
		Board Member	Yolo County Board of Education
Connie	Chin	Board Member	Modesto City School District
Janice	Friesen	Director, Region 7 CSBA	Castro Valley Unified School District
Yvonne	Garrett	Community Services Director	City of La Mesa
Sharon	Jones	Director, Region 17 CSBA	San Diego County Office of Education
Barbara	Kondylis	Supervisor	Solano County
Lynn	MacDonald	Board Member	Placer Union High School District
Jean	Quan	Councilmember	City of Oakland
Alene	Taylor	Supervisor	Kings County
Tony	Thurmond	Councilmember	City of Richmond

The task force was supported in its efforts by staff from the three associations and CCS Partnership. They were:

Willie	Beaudet	Administrative Assistant	CCS Partnership
Connie	Busse	Executive Director	CCS Partnership
Qiana	Charles	Legislative Analyst	California State Association of Counties
Genevieve	Morelos	Legislative Analyst	League of California Cities
Marguerite	Noteware	Research Consultant	California School Boards Association
Francesca	Wright	Consultant	CCS Partnership



*“When a child leaves the system, they should be better off than when they entered.”*

Crystal Luffberry,  
Project Manager  
California Connected by 25 Initiative

## The Process

The task force met four times in 2007 to learn from experts and discuss the role and responsibility of local governments in addressing the needs of former foster youth. Speakers included:

- Crystal Luffberry, *Project Manager, California Connected by 25 Initiative;*
- Steve Trippe, *Executive Director, New Ways to Work;* Michele Byrnes, *Project Manager, John Burton Foundation;*
- Karen Grace-Kaho, *California State Ombudsman for Foster Youth;*
- Tad Kitada, *Director Prevention Services Department, Placer County Office of Education;*
- Patty Archer-Ward, *Interagency Services Manager, Placer County Office of Education;*
- Chet Hewitt, *Director Social Services Agency, Alameda County;*
- Sam Cobbs, *Executive Director, First Place for Youth, Oakland CA;* and
- Kordnee-Jamilla Lee, *former foster youth.*

See Appendix A for speaker bios

Following each presentation the members discussed what they had learned and developed their ideas into this action agenda

## The Product

*Our Children: Emancipating Foster Youth, a Community Action Agenda* is the result of the group’s efforts. It represents the view from local government for how to best address the needs of foster youth who are aging out of the system. Glossary and resource guides are available at the end of this document.



*“No public care can replace the care of family. Children aging out of the system are a bad outcome. Our goal should be for the child not to be in the system long enough to age out.”*

Chet Hewitt,

President and CEO  
Sierra Health Foundation  
former Director Alameda County  
Social Services Agency

## The Issue

California has the largest number of children and youth in foster care of any state in the nation with approximately 83,000 children in care. Each year over 4,000 of those youth emancipate from the system as they turn 18 years old. They exit care largely unprepared for managing life on their own. Some have been in care since they were young; most have multiple foster home and/or group home placements. On average they have had six placements.

For many of these young people the outcome of public parenting is unemployment, under-education, homelessness and prison. Studies show that about two-thirds of the incarcerated population were foster youth at some point in their lives. For all of the youth, the effects of their years in foster care are lasting. The state removes these youth from their homes and becomes their parent. As a parent the state has failed.

Honoring Emancipated Youth, a non-profit agency serving transitioning foster youth in San Francisco, has compiled the following statistics<sup>1</sup>:

### Homelessness

Within 18 months of emancipation 40-50% of former foster youth become homeless

65% of emancipating foster youth need immediate housing when they exit the system

### Employment

50% of emancipated foster youth experience high rates of unemployment within 5 years of emancipation

60% of former foster youth earn incomes at or below \$6,000 per year, which is substantially below the federal poverty level of \$7,890 for a single individual

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<sup>1</sup> Barriers Facing Foster Care Youth: National and Local Statistics About Emancipating Foster Youth. [www.heysf.org/pdfs/HEYFosterYouthStatistics.pdf](http://www.heysf.org/pdfs/HEYFosterYouthStatistics.pdf)

## **Education**

70% of teens who emancipate from foster care report wanting to go to college, 10% attend and less than 1% graduate from college

83% of foster children are held back by the third grade

75% of children and youth in foster care are behind grade level

40% of foster youth complete high school compared to 84% of the general population

## **Mental & Physical Health**

33% of all foster care alumni have no form of health insurance

Former foster youth experience Post Traumatic Stress disorder at a rate 2 times the level of U.S. war veterans

Nearly 50% of foster children suffer from chronic health conditions such as asthma, visual and auditory problems, dental decay and malnutrition

50-60% of children in foster care have moderate to severe mental health problems

Foster children are more likely than other children on Medicaid to have mental health or substance abuse conditions

## **Incarceration**

Foster youth with multiple placements are 5-10 times more likely to become involved with the juvenile justice system than youth in the general population

25% of former foster youth will be incarcerated within the first 2 years of emancipation

## Through No Fault of Their Own



*In California current programs for emancipated foster youth are fragmented and underfunded, fail to provide comprehensive assistance and service and do not reach a significant number of former foster youth in a meaningful way.*

*Expanding Transitional Service:  
Investing in California's  
Tomorrow*

On average, youth who emancipate from foster care have been in the system for five years. Children are placed in foster care through no fault of their own. They are not given a choice and they have no recourse. Nothing they have done is the cause for this painful and debilitating circumstance. Most are placed in the system because of neglect by their parents or care givers. They must learn to navigate public agencies, strange adults acting as parents, unfamiliar homes, changing schools, changing neighborhoods and many other challenges adults would find daunting. Siblings are often separated and may never see each other again.

Unlike other teens, foster youth are not allowed to act out their frustrations during this difficult time in their lives; acting out lands them in juvenile hall, in a group home far from all they know or in yet another home placement with an unfamiliar family. At 18 they must be ready to navigate life on their own without a family or a system to support and guide them.

The trauma of losing their friends, homes, communities and often siblings; the multiple placements; the disruptions of their education and the limited access to personal resources leave many foster youth without the preparation and support needed for independent life at 18 years of age. Actually, non foster youth ages 18-26 who live with their families receive a great deal of financial and emotional support. The California Advocacy Institute at the University of San Diego released a report in January 2007 stating that parents provide approximately \$44,500 of financial support to their "adult" offspring in the years between 18 and 26.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Children's Advocacy Institute. (2007) *Expanding Transitional Services for Emancipating Foster Youth: An Investment in California's Tomorrow*, University of San Diego School of Law.

## Call to Action

In the best of all possible worlds, all children would be loved and cared for by parents who have the resources and skills to nurture them into successful adulthood. When that is not the case and children are removed from families, every effort would be made to find that quality of care in permanent homes. Since the world is not ideal, we must ensure that youth exit our child welfare system with these minimal assets:

1. **Connections to adults** who care about them and will remain connected to them throughout their lives;
2. **Knowledge of and access to support systems**, including housing, employment support, educational options, and health care
3. **A High School Diploma**;
4. **Work Experience**;
5. **A safe, stable place to live**;
6. **Opportunity** to continue their education; and
7. **Financial resources**.

If cities, counties and schools take a coordinated and committed approach, these seven assets can be made available to the more than 4,000 California youth who “age-out” of foster care each year. Children removed from their homes and placed in the care of the state belong to all of us. It is our responsibility to see that they receive the support they need to become independent adults. Cities, counties and schools all have roles to play in parenting these children into adulthood.

### Areas of Critical Need

The task force repeatedly heard five areas of critical needs for youth leaving the system. Those areas are **housing, employment, education, mental and behavioral health, and permanency**. Emancipating foster youth need the same supports as our “home-grown” children through their mid-twenties. Local government can provide leadership and partner with other agencies to provide the needed connections, guidance, access and support. Individuals and localities can also act in support of proposed federal legislation that would extend foster care benefits to youth, if they choose, up to the age of 21. (See Appendix B for information on S1512)

## 1. Housing



*“Many former foster youth prefer scattered housing when they exit care. This model allows youth to be integrated into the larger community and provides a high level of independence.”*

Michele Byrnes  
Project Manager  
John Burton Foundation

*“I turned 18 a month before I graduated from high school. The day after graduation, I was kicked out of my foster home, where I had been for nearly two years. I was 18, a high school graduate on my way to college in the fall, and homeless,” said Nicole Dobbins, FosterClub.<sup>3</sup>*

Housing is perhaps the most immediate need for emancipating youth. Many have been in the system for years and have no resources to obtain housing. Additionally, affordable housing is frequently not available.

### What can be done?

Cities and counties can help address this critical need by:

- a) Ensuring that there are a variety of **affordable and safe housing options** and choices for youth aging out of care.
- b) Establishing policies to give **priority for emancipated foster youth in subsidized housing**.
- c) Requiring **housing agencies to leverage** THP Plus Transitional Housing and Proposition 1-C funds and EPSDT funds. (See glossary for definitions)
- d) **Be aware of the number** of youth who emancipate each year in your community their demographics and individual needs.

3 Pew Charitable Trusts (2007) *Time for Reform: Aging Out and On Their Own. More Teens Leaving Foster Care Without a Permanent Family.*

## 2. Education

***“It is clear that youth formerly in foster care are among the most disadvantaged and underrepresented students in higher education”***

*National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators*

***“I was in the group home. I went to school on the grounds, and now that I am in a foster home those credits for some reason don't count, so now I am 90 credits behind and I'm in the 12th grade.”*** – Shimia, Former Foster Youth





*“It is important to enforce existing laws like AB 490. If a youth is placed from one county to another, it is important for the new county and the new school to be notified and records transferred quickly.”*

Tad Kitada  
Director Integrated Services  
Placer County Office of  
Education

Youth in foster care often have difficulty accumulating credits for high school graduation. Changes in placement mean changes in schools. Often credits from one district and/or school do not match those of another. Sometimes youth are not in a school long enough to complete a course. Other times the education they receive in a group home does not meet state standards. Although law requires the expedient transfer of student record, it frequently takes weeks or months for school records to be transferred from one district to the next. County offices of education have foster youth liaisons, as do some schools and districts. Their job is to ensure the educational needs of foster youth are met. However, at the school level this is a duty added to many others held by a teacher or other staff member and the time is insufficient for them to be fully attentive to the needs of foster youth.

AB 490, passed in 2004, is intended to improve public school procedures so that foster youth have a better chance to succeed in school. The bill intends to minimize the need for youth changing schools unnecessarily, requires that partial credits be given for work completed and that school records be transferred between schools within 2 days. The bill also requires designation of a foster youth education liaison in each district. Unfortunately, its implementation is uneven across the state.

### **What can be done?**

Schools, cities and counties

can improve educational outcomes for foster youth when they:

- a) **Comply with quality implementation of AB 490**
- b) **Provide supplemental supportive services to foster youth.**
- c) **Coach guardians and youth** on meeting high school graduation requirements, college admissions requirements and on available resources including outreach and recruitment of foster youth into AVID programs. (See glossary for definition)
- d) **Cross train child welfare and school administrators and teachers** on what information can be shared and what should remain confidential.
- e) **Partner with institutions of higher learning to supply**

**mentoring/tutoring to foster youth.** Consider programs such as the Guardian Scholars Program, which helps with financial aid, tutoring, preferential registration, and year-round housing.

- f) **Give foster youth priority for enrichment and other programs.**
- g) **Ensure that non-public schools** serving foster youth meet state and district educational standards.

### 3. Employment



*“Every young person emancipating needs to have work experience. We need to put it into law.”*

Steve Trippe  
Executive Director  
New Ways to Work

Many foster youth are not prepared for the world of work when they leave foster care. They may not have had opportunities to develop employable skills or to have experience in a job. Foster youth typically earn far less than their non-foster peers.

#### What can be done?

There is a role for both cities and counties in addressing the employment needs of foster youth. They should ensure foster youth have meaningful employment and job skills training opportunities before aging-out of the system by:

- a) **Develop programs** with local businesses, cities, counties and school districts and higher education to hire foster youth.
- b) **Train and provide incentives** for youth in meeting job expectations, such as being on time and appropriately dressed.
- c) **Link** Workforce Investment Act programs, high schools and community colleges with Independent Living Programs to coordinate outreach, recruitment and support of foster youth in career technical education and employment pathways
- d) **Provide paid internships** in city and county departments
- e) **Make workforce development services youth friendly.**

## 4. Mental & Behavioral Health

***"One day when I got in an argument with my aunt, I grabbed my pills for depression and took off running to the park. I didn't feel like being alive no more so I took 15-20 of them."*** Joel M, former foster youth<sup>4</sup>



*"Domestic violence is a big issue for these youth. They need help to understand what a healthy relationship is."*

Sam Cobbs  
Executive Director  
First Place for Youth

Seventy-five percent of children are in foster care due to their parents' substance abuse.<sup>5,6</sup> Children in these families frequently suffer serious emotional and behavioral problems, and they themselves will frequently exhibit a tendency to choose risky behavior, including the use of alcohol or other drugs later in life.<sup>7</sup>

Youth in foster care have higher rates of mental health issues than other youth. Substance abuse is common. They need help in learning to identify their behavior and in thinking as an adult before they leave the system.

### What can be done?

- a) **Allocate mental & behavioral health resources** for foster youth in care as well as post-emancipation.
- b) **Address addiction issues.**
- c) **Offer services to youth in after-school hours.**
- d) **Fully utilize EPSDT funds** (the child health component of Medicaid, the primary source of mental health services funding for former foster youth under the age of 21.)

<sup>4</sup> M, Joel. (2006) "My Second Chance" L. A. Youth, [www.LAYouth.org](http://www.LAYouth.org)

<sup>5</sup> Young, N.K., Gardner, S.L., & Dennis, K. (1998). Responding to alcohol and other drug problems in child welfare: Weaving together practice and policy. Washington, DC: CWLA Press.

<sup>6</sup> Connect for Kids (1999) "The Impact of Substance Abuse on Foster Care" downloaded from [www.connectforkids.org](http://www.connectforkids.org)

<sup>7</sup> ibid

**"It's important to know that there is someone I can count on who wouldn't turn their back on me." Foster Youth**

**"When you're in foster care, they boot you out at 18 and you are on your own. It's called emancipating." – Foster Youth**



LA Youth Photo

## 5. Permanency

Regina Louise Ollison former foster youth and author of *Somebody's Someone*<sup>8</sup> points out that you are never too old to be adopted. She herself was finally adopted at age 41. All foster youth who emancipate need to be "somebody's someone".

When foster youth were asked what permanency meant to them they said things like: someone to share special occasions and issues with, your picture on someone's refrigerator, your side of the church is full at your wedding, someone to call when good things happen, or someone who will not let you not call.

### What Can Be Done?

- a) **Adopt the permanency pledge** (See [www.cpyy.org](http://www.cpyy.org)) and utilize school, city and county communications to help families understand opportunities for providing permanency.
- b) **Develop programs, such as FosterClub's Permanency Pact** that creates a formalized facilitated process to connect youth in foster care with a supportive adult.
- c) Utilize **kinship databases** and connect foster youth to living relatives. Develop procedures and train county child welfare staff in use of the software and in the procedures.



"Every county should have and use some version of family-finding software."

Karen Grace-Kaho  
California State Ombudsman  
for Foster Youth

<sup>8</sup>Ollison, Regina Louise. *Somebody's Someone: A Memoir*. New York: Warner Books, New York, 2003

## Roadmap to Action



### 1. Learn about the issue

- **Talk to foster youth** and their adult advocates.
- **Learn about your city, district and county's emancipating youth.** How many are there? What services are being provided? How are schools tracking them?

### 2. Address the issue collaboratively.

Learn and plan across jurisdictions, departments, agencies and sectors.

- **Invite business, service, faith-based, youth-led, and community-based** organizations to help diagnose and address the situation for foster youth aging out of the system in your community.
- **Include foster youth and former foster youth** in designing and assessing the effectiveness of programs. This may include a stipend and help with transportation.
- **Develop shared measures of success**, such as high school graduation, completion of California State University admission requirements, workforce readiness, and a permanent home.
- **Investigate and build upon lessons from islands of excellence**, such as lessons from California Connected by 25 Initiative, New Ways to Work, community planning models, ombudsman models, interagency and intergenerational models like San Pasqual Academy, internship programs, and data sharing models.
- **Link agencies and systems**
  - Cross-train across agencies, programs.
  - Link Workforce Investment Act programs with Independent Living Programs.
  - Identify and address data sharing barriers.
  - Identify and address policy barriers.
- **Build public awareness.**
  - Utilize your communications staff to share promising stories and build new partnerships.
  - Plan to celebrate the National Foster Care Month in May.
  - Pass a resolution to address the needs of emancipating youth (See Appendix C for a sample resolution)

### 3. Proactively Train Care Givers and Youth

- **Information and Referral.** Develop mechanisms for all foster youth and their guardians to become aware of existing and local supportive services such as THP-Plus, California Youth Connection ([www.calyouthconn.org](http://www.calyouthconn.org)), Independent Living Skills Program (ILP), Chaffee Vouchers, Medi-Cal to age 21, [www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov](http://www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov), 211 systems and others. (See glossary)
- **Care Giver Support.** Explore peer-support models for caregivers. Outreach to kinship care providers who often are unaware of available resources.
- **Coach guardians and youth** on meeting high school graduation and college admissions requirements and on available resources.

### 4. Uphold Existing Law

- **Utilize kinship databases** to identify relatives of children in child welfare.
- **Ensure all schools understand and implement AB 490**, which allows foster youth to be immediately enrolled in a school without cumulative files and medical records, and requires partial credit for course work completed.
- **Ensure all your foster youth have educational passports** –records of where they have gone to school, credits accumulated, grades, etc.
- **Ensure all group homes are teaching to state educational standards.**

## Islands of Excellence



Initiatives like *California Connected by 25*, *New Ways to Work's* Transition Action Teams and the continual efforts of *Casey Family Programs* are addressing the issues of foster youth and emancipating foster youth in particular. They provide funds for technical assistance and networks of support to communities who are working to address the needs of this population.

Following are some examples of what local jurisdictions are doing for and with emancipating foster youth. They can serve as guides for those who wish to begin or expand their own efforts.

## Alameda County

- The county provides **housing** through *First Place for Youth, Beyond Emancipation* and *Project Independence* to address the housing needs of emancipated foster youth. The County is also funding a new *Emancipation Village* that will provide supervised housing and supporting services for emancipated youth.
- Alameda County has made strides in addressing **permanency**. According to Chet Hewitt, former Director of Social Services, 1,600 children have been adopted in the county in the past 5 years and the rolls of foster youth have been reduced from 5,000 to 2,600 in that same time period. Family finding software is used to locate family members as potential foster care providers or who may be able to act as permanent sources of support and connection.
- Project Hope is a collaborative effort to increase **employability and education** of transitioning foster youth. This is a joint effort of the Alameda County Department of Children and Family Services, Alameda County Workforce Investment Board and the City of Oakland Workforce Investment Board. The project sets aside federal Workforce Investment Act formula funds for aging out and former foster youth, and links the youth to numerous providers and one-stops.
- Independent Living and mental health counseling are provided through a U.S. Department of Labor grant. The county created a liaison position to serve as a “translator” between the foster care world and employment and training programs. Mental health services are provided under the Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSTD) child health component of Medicaid.

## Placer County

- Placer County addresses the needs of emancipating foster youth as well as all children in the child welfare system through an integrated services approach. Teams of workers from education, mental health, probation, and child welfare share caseloads. The most challenging cases are handled by the SMART team composed of the highest-level managers in the partnering systems.
- The system promotes **academic achievement** through tutoring, mentoring, counseling and enrichment programs. Tutors go to the youth and follow them from placement to placement to ensure continual support in reaching high school graduation.
- The county has developed a **shared data system** through its integrated team approach. This supports timely transfer of records between systems, between schools and to foster families. By assigning education specialists to integrated teams and paying them for 20% of their time from child welfare, all team

members have access to the California Welfare System/Case Management System.

- *Keys* is a **vocational services** program that has historically served youth on path to homelessness and those with significant barriers to employment. It is limited to 25 youth due to financial restriction. PRIDE Industries, a private non-profit that helps disabled youth find and retain employment, expanded its services to include jail and probation populations. PRIDE provides job coaching and employment. Admission criteria for foster youth is based on an Individual Educational Plan (IEP).

### San Diego County

- San Pasqual Academy is **the first residential academy in the country to serve only foster youth**. The academy is a collaboration between San Diego County, the County Office of Education and non-profit providers. The Academy campus is comprised of a school, residences and acreage. High school-aged foster youth and their siblings as young as 12 are residents. The school meets A-G (college entrance) graduation requirements, offers remedial support and offers a variety of arts and enrichment programs to expand skills. There is also career planning on site as well as medical care. Youth live in residences of 8 with house parents. There are 19 additional houses located on the property. These houses accommodate transitioning youth for up to three years after high school graduation. Senior citizens, who receive discounted rent in exchange for providing expertise and support to the youth, occupy some of these houses. Some staff members live in the remaining homes. The Academy creates learning environments that focus the youth on furthering their education and increasing their independent living and vocational skills to prepare them for emancipation. Through a private foundation, any youth qualified for college receives full financial support.
- The San Diego County Office of Education and California State University San Marcos have developed a collaborative to better prepare future teachers for working with foster youth. Student teachers from the university serve as **mentors/tutors** for foster youth

### Santa Clara County and Tulare County

Both Santa Clara County and Tulare County have established employment programs for emancipating foster youth.

- Santa Clara County's *Emancipated Foster Youth Employment Program* provides **entry-level job opportunities** to untrained; economically disadvantaged emancipated foster youth who are transitioning out of the system. Between 130 and 150 youth "age out" of foster care in the county each year at age 18 and are at risk of poverty, homelessness and being placed in institutions. In the past, the county had limited job opportunities for these youth. Three county departments developed a pilot employment program for the youth to be trained for paid temporary assignments. The program has now been expanded to include more



than 500 alternately staffed entry-level positions. To date, 30 emancipated foster youth have been hired into temporary positions and 10 have been hired into permanent positions with the county.

- Tulare County's *Youth Transitions Program* was established to provide at-risk youth with an opportunity for real **work experience and a career path** leading to self-sufficiency and lifelong success. The program provides jobs with Tulare County Health and Human Services Agency for selected youth - a match that benefits both youth and an agency that traditionally had difficulty keeping all of its positions filled. Each participant is provided an assigned mentor, opportunities for training and preparation for various civil service examinations. Through participation in this program, young people are finding a confidence and independence they have not previously known. In addition, the salaries paid to them have provided needed income and positioned them on the road to becoming self-sufficient.

### **The City of Fremont**

- The City of Fremont has blended three types of funds to provide transitional housing for older foster youth. These include Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) social services grants, "tenant-based rental assistance" funds (TBRA) from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) HOME program, and city general funds.
- Fremont and the neighboring city of Livermore are using these funds to support Project Independence of the nonprofit Tri-City Homeless Coalition. Project Independence provides rent subsidies and case management for up to three years for transitioning foster youth. City support for Project Independence began in 2002 with \$151,000 in TBRA and by 2006 had grown to \$207,000 to assist a minimum of 15 participants for up to 36 months.
- Fremont has also helped support the Rotary Bridgeway apartment complex, which includes eight units set aside for transitioning foster youth.

**The City of Oakland** uses funds from Measure Y, a local voter-approved tax initiative to address several transition issues, with greatest emphasis on housing and employment.

- The Oakland Fund for Children and Youth (OFCY) addresses employment, access to safe and affordable housing, and healthy choices.
- The Oakland Youth Council gives priority to youth in transition for employment and training programs.
- The city's workforce board applied successfully for a special US Department of Labor grant to meet employment, housing, and other support needs of youth in transition.
- The city's Community & Economic Development Agency channels some CDBG funds to supportive or transitional housing for transitioning foster youth.

## San Francisco

- The City of San Francisco created a mayor-appointed Transitional Youth Task Force which has made the following recommendations:
  - Put mayoral support behind developmentally-appropriate policies for transitional-age youth (TAY)
  - Create an inter-agency council to improve service delivery quality
  - Increase system capacity via four community-based centers for TAY and other issue-specific programs.
- A team from San Francisco's Human Services Agency and Department of Public Health meet monthly with the foster youth liaison from San Francisco Unified School District and interested community based organizations. Meetings focus on improving the education of foster youth.
- The city has found ways to finance transition age youth services:
  - Blend funding from the Human Services Agency and the city general fund for support services;
  - Use Section 8 vouchers to support occupancy of 24 transitional housing units;
  - Channel state housing funds to programs for transitioning foster youth; and
  - Provide training and employment for transitioning foster youth through community based organizations with Children's Fund allocations by the Department of Children, Youth, and their Families.

## California Connected by 25 Initiative

- *California Connected by 25 Initiative* (CC25I) is focused on building an integrated comprehensive continuum of services across systems to support positive youth development and successful foster youth transitions to adulthood. It is part of the larger Annie E. Casey Family to Family Initiative and is funded by five foundations. Five counties participate: Fresno, Orange, San Francisco, Santa Clara and Stanislaus. Humboldt County is completing its self evaluation and will join the initiative in fall 2007.
- The initiative focuses on foster youth 14 to 24 years old. Each county conducts a self evaluation and develops an individual plan that addresses: K-12 education; employment/job training/postsecondary education; housing; independent living skills; financial literacy; savings and asset development; personal/social asset development; and permanency.

## New Ways to Work Transition Action Teams

- The Youth Transition Action Team Initiative (YTAT) is a grant-funded effort to bring together the resources of the workforce, education, and child welfare systems to better prepare adolescents who are current or former foster youth to achieve economic, educational, and employment success as they transition into the adult world. The strategy is designed to support counties statewide in meeting their systems improvement objectives.

- The project:
  - Provides coaching, training, and cross-initiative networking
  - Works with 13 Counties: Glen, Humboldt, Los Angeles, Orange, Placer, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Tehama, Tulare and Ventura.
  - Supports collaboration across agencies (child welfare, education, workforce development, juvenile justice) and with youth and community leaders to assess community resources, develop plans, and assist county child welfare in youth permanency.
  - Focuses on high school graduation and completion of California State University admission standards, workforce readiness, employment, and support networks.
  -

## Conclusion

California is waking up to the issues faced by emancipating foster youth and the need to extend services and care beyond 18 years. Over 30 pieces of legislation related to foster care were submitted to the Assembly and Senate in 2007. These along with the 35 pieces of legislation passed since 2000 show a commitment by the state to attend to foster children. While many of these bills were not specific to the emancipating youth population, all would have an impact as children move through the system.

State legislation is important but it is at the local level that programs and support occur. This report presents the challenges faced by emancipating foster youth and suggests ways for cities, counties and schools to take action to improve outcomes for this population.

Repeatedly as the task force met and discussed the plight of emancipating foster youth, three things were clear 1) the outcomes for children reared in a public system are largely negative; 2) in a state of over 37 million people with the ninth largest economy in the world, we ought to be able to provide for the needs of 4,000+ emancipating foster youth each year; and 3) collaboration and coordination across jurisdiction provides the strongest possibility of being able to meet these needs.

Cities, counties and school districts can and should make a difference for emancipating foster youth. Local government and schools can work together to help shepherd foster teens into successful adulthood. Doing this will be a service to foster youth and to society as a whole. Cities, counties and schools can work collectively and comprehensively to overcome the piecemeal nature of supports now available to emancipating youth.

Where else can such an impact be made for so specific and vulnerable a population? By working immediately and directly to assist the 4,000 youth who age out of the system in California each year, local jurisdictions can reduce homelessness, crime, and incarceration. There is the very real possibility to create employment, healthy relationships and productive citizens. We can do better. It is time to act.

## Glossary

*Below are definitions for terms used in this document. Some have been taken from FosterClub.com's [website of terms](#) in youth friendly language at [www.fyi3.com/fyi3/Informed/Glossary/index.cfm](http://www.fyi3.com/fyi3/Informed/Glossary/index.cfm).*

**211** – Since 1993 many communities have joined the national 2-1-1 initiative to use these three digits as a quick, easy-to-remember telephone number for finding human services answers.

**AB 490** – California legislation providing educational rights for children in foster care and responsibilities of local educational agencies and placement agencies.

**AVID** - Advancement Via Individual Determination is an educational program designed to help underachieving middle and high school students prepare for and succeed in colleges and universities.

**Chafee Vouchers** - The Chafee Educational and Training Voucher Program (ETV) provides resources specifically to meet the education and training needs of youth aging out of foster care. This federally funded program makes vouchers of up to \$5,000 per fiscal year available to eligible youth attending post secondary educational and vocational programs.

**Educational Passport** - The passport is a document that contains a student's credentials from the educational world. The passport is the student's personal property that can be used in moves from high school to college, from college to college, from school to job, from job to school, and so on.

**EPSDT, Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment Program** is the child health component of Medicaid, the primary source of mental health services funding for former foster youth under the age of 21.

**ILP or Independent Living Program** - A federally funded program administered through counties which provide services to foster youth age 14 or 16 and over to prepare for adulthood. The program provides classes in life skills, vocational training, and equipment needed for job training. Also provides funds for college scholarships, skills training, and rent assistance. See how Contra Costa County describes their program [www.cocoilsp.org/home.html](http://www.cocoilsp.org/home.html) .

**Kinship Care** – placements with family members other than parents. Although kinship care is one of the oldest human traditions, it was not formally recognized as a legitimate placement option for children in foster care until the passage of the federal welfare reform in 1996 and the Adoption and Safe Families Act in 1997.<sup>2</sup>

**Permanency** is both a process and a result that includes involvement of the youth as a participant or leader in finding a permanent connection with at least one committed adult who provides: a safe, stable and secure parenting relationship; love; unconditional commitment; lifelong support in the context of reunification, a legal adoption, or guardianship, where possible, and in which the youth has the opportunity to maintain contacts with important persons including brothers & sisters. A broad array of individualized permanency options exist; reunification and adoption are an important two among many that may be appropriate. (Definition from California Permanency for Youth Project.)

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<sup>2</sup> Davis, Ryan L. (2006) College Access, Financial Aid and College Success for Undergraduates from Foster Care. NAFSA, [www.nasfaa.org/Subhomes/ResearchHome/NASFAAFosterCare%20Report.Pdf](http://www.nasfaa.org/Subhomes/ResearchHome/NASFAAFosterCare%20Report.Pdf)

**Scattered Site Housing** – Housing units scattered throughout the community designated for young people.

**Transitional Housing Placement Programs (THPP)** are for former foster youth ages 16 to 19. These programs are funded through the CDSS and licensed through community care licensing. They may be communal living or scattered site models.

**THP-Plus or Transitional Housing Placement – Plus** - A housing program for 18-24 year olds. THP-Plus is administered by the California Department of Social Services, and has been found to help foster youth achieve stable housing, living wage employment and higher education. Current demand exceeds availability. Counties typically contract with non-profit service providers and gets reimbursement with standard rate \$1800-2200/mo/youth. No reimbursement of county administrative costs for county, but non-profit gets administration covered.

## Resources & Organizations

**California Youth Connection (CYC)** promotes the participation of foster youth in policy development and legislative change to improve the foster care system. The California Youth Connection is guided, focused and driven by current and former foster youth with the assistance of other committed community members. Visit their website for current policy proposals at [www.CalYouthConn.org](http://www.CalYouthConn.org)

**Casey Family Programs** is a national operating foundation that has served children, youth, and families in the child welfare system since 1966. Its mission is to provide and improve—and ultimately to prevent the need for—foster care. [www.casey.org](http://www.casey.org)

**Child Welfare League of America** is an association of nearly 800 public and private nonprofit agencies that assist more than 3.5 million abused and neglected children and their families each year with a range of services. [www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org)

**California Connected by 25 Initiative (CC25I)** is a collaborative effort of five foundations assisting public child welfare agencies and their communities to build comprehensive transition-aged foster youth supports and services for youth 14 through 24. It is currently working in Fresno, Orange, San Francisco, Santa Clara and Stanislaus Counties. [www.f2f.ca.gov/California25.htm](http://www.f2f.ca.gov/California25.htm)

**The California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP)**, a project of the Public Health Institute, offers many resources on permanency. <http://www.cpyp.org>

**Family to Family** The Family to Family (F2F) Initiative was developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 1992 to address the growing challenges in the nation's child welfare system. Within California, twenty-five counties representing almost ninety percent of the children in foster care have implemented this Initiative. [www.f2f.ca.gov](http://www.f2f.ca.gov)

**FosterClub** FosterClub is a national network for young people in foster care. [www.fosterclub.org](http://www.fosterclub.org)

**HEY (Honoring Emancipated Youth)** strengthens and connects San Francisco's systems of support for Bay Area foster care youth so that all youth emancipating or aging out of the foster care system can enjoy a healthy transition to adulthood. [www.heysf.org](http://www.heysf.org)

**L. A. Youth** is an online newspaper with monthly articles for and by foster youth. [www.LAYouth.com](http://www.LAYouth.com)

**John Burton Foundation for Children without Homes** currently has several initiatives focused on helping California counties connect foster youth to housing and social security benefits. The Foundation also researches policy options. [www.johnburtonfoundation.org](http://www.johnburtonfoundation.org).

**National Foster Care Month** is a national campaign to promote greater awareness of foster youth. It is in May. [www.FosterCareMonth.org](http://www.FosterCareMonth.org)

**National Center for Youth Law** seeks to protect abused and neglected children, expand health care and other public benefits for youth, and improve child support collection. [www.youthlaw.org](http://www.youthlaw.org)

**New Ways to Work** helps communities prepare youth for success as adults. [www.nww.org](http://www.nww.org)

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