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STUART FOUNDATION  
INVESTING IN CHILDREN & YOUTH TO CREATE LIFELONG IMPACT

The Walter S. Johnson Foundation

Promising Strategies from

## THE CALIFORNIA CONNECTED BY 25 INITIATIVE

TIPS AND RESOURCES TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR  
TRANSITION AGE FOSTER YOUTH



**The California Connected by 25 Initiative (CC25I) was developed to fundamentally change the trajectory for youth emancipating from foster care.** Led by Stuart Foundation and Walter S. Johnson Foundation, CC25I was a six-year, \$6 million investment to transform county child welfare practice in order to improve outcomes in key areas of the lives of foster youth ages 14 through 24. Additional support was provided by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation. The foundations initially provided grants to child welfare agencies in Fresno, San Francisco, Santa Clara, and Stanislaus counties, followed by Humboldt, Glenn, Orange, and Solano counties two years later. Through CC25I, the county sites focused on ensuring that youth had permanent, supportive relationships in their lives; connected them to safe and stable housing; addressed their educational needs; helped them access job training, internships, and employment; and assisted youth in building financial skills and assets. Foundation support also enabled the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) at UC Berkeley to provide the county sites with technical assistance and the Center for Social Services Research at UC Berkeley to assist the counties in implementing the Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) data collection system.

## **WHY THIS MATTERS**

Every year more than 4,000 young people age out of California's foster care system and far too many exit without the safety net or life skills they need to succeed. Removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect and often disconnected from their families and communities, these youth face many challenges when they exit foster care. They are less likely to complete high school and become employed than their peers and more likely to suffer from mental health problems, be a victim of crime, go to jail, become homeless, live in poverty, and rely on public assistance.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mark Courtney, *Network on Transitions to Adulthood Policy Brief: Youth Aging Out of Foster Care*. MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood and Public Policy. April 2005, Issue 19. <http://www.transad.pop.upenn.edu/downloads/courtney--foster%20care.pdf>.

***“When initiating partnerships you have to be transparent because your community already knows the outcomes. Just being upfront and sharing the data is an effective catalyst to engage people to come to the table and have these discussions.”***

Howard Himes, Deputy Director  
Fresno County Department of Social Services



### **Extension of Foster Care to 21**

With the passage of Assembly Bill 12 (AB 12), California’s Fostering Connections to Success Act in 2010, California foster youth will now be able to continue to receive child welfare supports and services past their 18th birthday until the age of 21. Under AB 12, youth will continue in extended care unless they opt out and will be expected to meet certain criteria, including working towards a high school diploma or GED, being employed at least 80 hours a month, going to college, or participating in a vocational or employment program. The bill also requires counties to track outcomes for youth in extended foster care. These changes to policy and practice present enormous potential to improve outcomes for transition age foster youth.

### **State Budget Cuts and Realignment**

While AB 12 brings opportunity, dramatic decreases in California state revenues and subsequent state and county child welfare budget cuts have and will continue to affect child welfare agencies’ ability to serve this population. In response to ongoing state budget shortfalls, the legislature passed the 2011-12 budget plan known as “realignment,” an agreement that shifts state program responsibilities and revenues to local governments. Under realignment, billions in revenue will go to local governments every year to fund various criminal justice, mental health, and social services programs, including child welfare. Counties will now have greater authority and flexibility in determining which services are funded and at what level.

For child welfare agencies already struggling to achieve better outcomes for foster youth with limited resources, realignment has significant implications. Child welfare has a responsibility to provide federally mandated services and because many services for transition age foster youth are not required, there is a very real potential that some of these services will be cut.

## SHARING WHAT WORKS

With the flexible funding, peer learning, and technical assistance the CC25I county sites received, they were able to focus on five core focus areas essential to the success of youth as they transition to adulthood. All of the counties focused on ensuring that youth had permanency in their lives by supporting loving and supportive relationships with adults and family. They worked to address youth's education needs, so that they were more likely to graduate from high school, attain a GED, and attend college. They connected them to safe and stable housing. They also helped youth access job training, internships, and employment and assisted them in building financial skills and assets.

Although no two counties utilized the same approach to achieve these outcomes, they all relied on three key strategies: developing meaningful and fruitful community partnerships, engaging foster youth as leaders and decision-makers, and collecting and evaluating data to inform and improve practice. As a result, the CC25I child welfare agencies reported that their internal systems were transformed and at every level they became more responsive and accountable for what happened to youth exiting care.



### KEY STRATEGIES & CORE FOCUS AREAS

The key strategies and core focus areas highlighted in this report include:

#### Key Strategies

- Community Partnerships
- Genuine Youth Engagement and Empowerment
- Data Collection and Evaluation

#### Core Focus Areas

- Permanency
- Education
- Housing
- Employment
- Financial Literacy

## TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR AB 12 IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of AB 12 is an unprecedented opportunity for California's county child welfare agencies to connect older foster youth to the services and supports they need until the age of 21. However, given the difficult fiscal environment and realignment, extending foster care also presents many challenges. Child welfare agencies have to work more effectively and leverage community partnerships to achieve better results for foster youth.

The CC25 Initiative offers promising strategies that will help inform AB 12 implementation across the state. This report shares those key strategies, highlighting what worked, the challenges that the sites faced, and the learnings from their work in the core focus areas. Technical assistance materials and resources to inform AB 12 implementation are referenced and available at [californiaconnectedby25.org](http://californiaconnectedby25.org)

The promising strategies, tips, and resources in this report can help counties implementing AB 12 to:

- Develop and help foster youth access the support services needed to meet AB 12 criteria
- Encourage emancipating foster youth to stay in extended foster care and not "opt out"
- Meet state and federal requirements to track outcomes for youth in extended foster care
- Increase agency accountability and transparency
- Improve outcomes for transition age foster youth

## **KEY STRATEGIES:** **DEVELOPING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

### **Why this Matters**

In general, systems of care for youth are fragmented and siloed, allowing youth to slip through the cracks. Many local agencies and community-based organizations have established histories of working independently with minimal collaboration or have specific departmental rules that create obstacles to collaboration. Information sharing is complicated by confidentiality concerns and incompatible data systems, which also hinder service integration.

Older youth in foster care need expertise and supports that child welfare agencies may not be suited to provide (e.g., financial literacy and employment services). Partnerships, collaboration, and integration of services across multiple agencies, community-based organizations, and providers not only help transition age foster youth access the services they need, but also streamline efforts and raise community awareness.

### **Tips for AB 12 Implementation**

With implementation of AB 12 and an expected increase of older youth in foster care, partnerships and access to services will be critical to ensure the success of youth in extended care. The following strategies can help counties forge strong, effective, and collaborative partnerships focused on this population.

**Self-Assess Current Outcomes and Service Needs.** In order to identify where community partnerships are most needed and key issues to collaborate on, complete an assessment of data trends and outcomes in the core focus areas, for example the number of youth graduating. Share the data with partners to increase transparency and establish common goals and desired outcomes.

**Coordinate with Existing Efforts.** Orange County built upon the Foster Youth Outcomes group established by the Family to Family Initiative<sup>2</sup>, incorporating the CC25I focus on transition age youth. The group included education, housing, health, and mental health organizations and reported to the Orange County Children's Partnership.

<sup>2</sup> Established in 1992, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Family to Family initiative is a nationwide effort to reform child welfare. In California, 25 of 58 county child welfare agencies participate in implementing the Family to Family four core strategies: recruiting, developing, and supporting resource families; building community partnerships; making decisions as teams; and evaluating results.

***“I have been with the Probation Department for 20 years and in the mid-nineties, we had no idea what Child Welfare Services was doing. We just performed our own duties not really knowing what the other agencies did. Because of CC25I and other collaborative efforts, we have developed closer relationships. We all work with the same kids. It takes a community.”***

Brett Moranda, Supervising Probation Officer  
Humboldt County Probation Department

**Establish a Governance Structure.** Solano County established a workgroup structure around each core focus area, for example employment and financial literacy. With a child welfare agency staffer serving as the group leader, each workgroup included agencies and service providers that the county had a history of working with, as well as organizations that had not been previously involved. The inclusion of diverse partners from the public and private sectors brought in fresh perspectives and increased opportunities for youth in the community. In Santa Clara County, workgroups for each focus area were co-chaired by a staff member from the child welfare agency and a community representative. The co-chairs selected were connectors capable of bringing critical stakeholders to the table, had access to resources, and served as champions for the youth in the community.

**Include Youth and Caregivers.** In Santa Clara County, youth engagement is prioritized and their inclusion in community partnerships is encouraged. Youth are often found seated next to agency staff or community partners and are active participants in workgroup meetings. Engaging caregivers and other supportive adults in collaborative relationships is also essential to improving outcomes for youth. Glenn County uses increasingly popular communication methods among youth and caregivers to bring them to the table, including Facebook and texting.

### Challenges to Consider

**There are no “free” partnerships.** Expectations for non-contractual partnerships should be established clearly and contractual partnerships should be evaluated for effectiveness. Expect to provide stipends and support for youth participants.

**Both leadership and line staff buy-in are necessary.** Without support from local policymakers and agency leaders, partnerships are difficult to get off the ground and institutionalize. Without support and input from line staff that work directly with the youth, the collaborative decision-making process is less effective.

**Caregiver involvement can be challenging.** Caregiver engagement and involvement was a consistent challenge for CC25I counties. Transportation, financial issues, family commitments, and busy schedules can hinder their ability to participate.

### Resource Links

- [CC25I Assessment Planning Tool](#)
- [CalSWEC AB 12 County Implementation Plan](#)
- [CalSWEC AB 12 Readiness Assessment Tool](#)
- [CC25I Self-Evaluation PPT Template](#)
- [Santa Clara County's CC25I Workgroup Structure](#)
- [Youth Law Center's Quality Parenting Initiative](#)



***“Working with California Youth Connection, our foster youth got together and created a Speaking Bureau to create awareness about foster care and the issues that they face in the community. They went to the Board of Education, the Board of Supervisors, and City Council and were able to pass a resolution to adopt May as Foster Care Awareness Month in Glenn County. It was pretty amazing. They received media attention and raised awareness for foster youth that wasn’t there before.”***

Robin Smith, Foster Youth Services Program  
Glenn County Office of Education & California Youth Connection Adult Supporter

## **GENUINE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT**

### **Why this Matters**

When youth are genuinely respected, heard, and included in decision-making processes, they become more engaged in their own destinies, make positive choices, and increase the credibility and responsiveness of the agencies and providers that serve them. Incorporating the opinions and suggestions of young people is critical to truly improve programs, services, and outcomes for transition age foster youth. Although child welfare agencies and other providers work with youth on a daily basis, staff are not always trained in youth engagement and youth involvement in service planning and decision-making is generally not an institutionalized practice. Often youth involvement is “tokenized” and one or two young people may be present at meetings and events, but they are not integrated, prepared, or supported as true partners. This limited youth participation usually does not represent the broader youth voice and thus, their perspectives are not genuinely heard and may carry little weight.

Effective youth engagement requires empowering youth to become leaders and decision-makers who are active in their communities. Genuine youth engagement and empowerment not only helps to create more responsive and effective services for transition age foster youth, but works to normalize their experiences in the community. When youth are encouraged to become connected to their communities through advocacy, jobs, internships, college tours, sports events, and other activities, they learn and grow from those experiences and build positive assets that help them face future challenges in life.

### **Tips for AB 12 Implementation**

With AB 12, counties will need to encourage youth to not opt out of extended care and identify and provide the services and supports that are effective in keeping youth in school and employed. The following strategies can help counties increase youth input, guidance, and participation and be better positioned to serve youth in extended care.

**Develop a Youth Advisory Board.** In an effort to formalize youth engagement of youth, the CC25I counties established youth advisory boards. San Francisco’s Youth Advisory Board has been instrumental in engaging foster youth to participate in transition services by planning and holding events and activities, such as job fairs, public health classes, “TGIF hang out” nights, and field trips. They are also the group that represents the youth voice in meetings with the deputy director to share their ideas and opinions on agency cuts and other important changes.

**Hire Former Foster Youth.** Many of the CC25I sites have hired former foster youth as youth advocates and youth engagement coordinators. Having a youth advocate position is extremely effective, as it brings in a youth voice and coordinates youth perspectives. In Solano County, this position has become a critical fixture in transition planning and permanency meetings, helping to ensure that youth advocate for themselves as they prepare to emancipate. Santa Clara County's child welfare agency developed a model for hiring foster youth within the county. They partnered with county human resources and developed a streamlined application and selection process for former foster youth, throughout which they provided applicants with support and guidance.

**Use Incentives to Bring Youth to the Table.** The CC25I sites used a variety of incentives to engage youth to participate in services and activities. Offering food, gift cards, school credit, and small amounts of money, as well as donated raffle prizes, such as an iPod or laptop, is an effective strategy to initially engage youth. Once youth are at the table, providing them with real opportunities to act as leaders and make decisions keeps them there.

**Encourage Youth Advocacy and Public Speaking.** Glenn County works closely with the California Youth Connection (CYC) to engage former foster youth to mentor current foster youth and promote foster youth advocacy and public speaking. With CYC, foster youth successfully presented requests for a "Foster Youth Awareness Month" to Orland City Council and Glenn County Board of Supervisors, garnering media attention and increasing public support for foster youth.

## Challenges to Consider

**Funding and resources for youth engagement are limited.** In general, not enough resources are available or allocated to support youth engagement. Seeking out and maintaining funding requires staff time and energy. Adequate resources for sustained periods of time should be secured before hiring former foster youth.

**Perceptions of foster youth.** Agencies and providers often undervalue the foster youth "voice." Inherently, systems of care have a dynamic where youth are case-managed and disempowered. Successful implementation of AB 12 will require agencies to shift their perceptions from foster youth as children, who are merely recipients of services, to foster youth as young adults, who are essential contributors to the design and implementation of services.

**Traditional government structures do not encourage youth involvement.** Most agencies and government entities serving youth have not considered nor created mechanisms for including youth perspectives. Meetings and hearings are often scheduled during school hours and youth are not invited to participate. Public officials and other stakeholders require education on the benefits of youth involvement and technical assistance on how to create an open, safe, and democratic environment where youth can understand the conversation and contribute.

## Resource Links

- [Solano County Youth Advocate Job Description](#)
- [Santa Clara County Youth Advisory Board Bylaws](#)
- [Humboldt County Youth Advisory Board Application](#)
- [V.O.I.C.E.S.](#)
- [California Youth Connection](#)
- [Hart's Ladder of Youth Voice](#)

***“Youth engagement is having conversations with youth, prepping them, and inviting them to the table. Youth empowerment is having youth take charge, lead the discussions, and make their own decisions on housing, health, and mental health.”***

Lyssa Trujillo, Youth Engagement Technical Assistant  
California Connected by 25 Initiative



***“Many counties don’t know how many foster youth are employed, but can easily find out how many are incarcerated. So the act of focusing on positive outcomes and collecting the data is very important. The process of measuring helps change practice.”***

Teri Kook, Director of Child Welfare, Stuart Foundation

## **DATA COLLECTION AND EVALUATION**

### **Why this Matters**

Are California’s foster youth finishing high school? When they emancipate from care, do they have safe and affordable housing? How many end up homeless? Are they able to go to college? Are they employed?

We know from studies and anecdotal reports that outcomes for most youth emancipating from foster care are bleak. However, without a data collection system to consistently and accurately track key outcomes for this population over time, it is difficult, if not impossible, for child welfare agencies to establish baselines, measure progress, and use data to improve practice and outcomes. Good data on key outcomes helps agencies and service providers determine gaps in service, address areas where more focus is needed, and allows them to more effectively hone in their supports on the youth who most need them. It can also prevent the duplication of services. Furthermore, ongoing data collection and documentation of progress motivates staff, maintains momentum, and makes the case for further investment and support from community partners, local and state policymakers, and philanthropy.

### **State Reporting Requirements and Limitations**

Currently, county welfare agencies use the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) to track all child welfare cases, monitor changes in the placement status of youth, and generate mandated state and federal reports on child welfare outcomes. County social workers are required to complete and periodically update a Transitional to Independent Living Plan (TILP) for youth in care ages 15-16 and attach this information to the youth’s record in CWS/CMS. The TILP provides a narrative guide for case managers, youth, and their caregivers to identify concrete goals and progress made in key outcomes areas, including education, employment, transitional life skills, and permanent connections. Along with the TILP, the counties are also required to report the Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP) services received by youth in CWS/CMS.

Counties are also required to report data to the state on specific outcomes in aggregate for a quarterly youth cohort at the time of emancipation through the SOC 405 E report. However, counties do not have a standard database, software, or methodology to collect this information. Without support, counties often rely on best guesses and hand tallying of printed data reports and case files to meet this aggregate reporting requirement, a time-consuming process that can result in data errors. As a consequence of aggregate reporting, counties have no way to further analyze the information as it relates to the individual youth experience. They also lack the data on youth demographics, service delivery, and child welfare outcomes, which are critical to program development and improving practice.

Once youth emancipate, they are no longer tracked in CWS/CMS, with the exception of aftercare services provided. However, services that former foster youth receive after they exit the system are frequently provided by contracted community organizations that do not have access to CWS/CMS and county child welfare agencies are not funded to collect the data.

### **Why Efforts to Outcomes?**

As a result of these limitations, CC25I implemented Efforts to Outcomes (ETO), a secure, web-based database developed by Social Solutions, to more effectively track a comprehensive set of outcomes for transitioning youth. The decision to utilize ETO for CC25I self-evaluation efforts was driven by a number of factors: the CC25I sites were already using ETO functions to meet Family to Family requirements; the system is

easy to customize; and it allows great user flexibility, providing different levels of access to the data, including authorized users beyond the child welfare agency. Not only does ETO track outcomes in focus areas, it also enables counties to track transition services received, document outcomes at relevant points in time, and automatically generate state mandated reports. ETO also allows counties to track and report outcomes for other youth initiatives, such as Transitional Housing Program-Plus (THP-Plus).

Through ETO, outcomes for youth were reported in a series of assessments that counties completed with youth in particular age ranges and at specific points of time:

- Assessment A - completed for youth ages 14-15 in care (optional)
- Assessment B - completed every six months for youth in care between the ages of 16 to 19 (mandatory)
- Assessment C - completed only once, as close to the actual date of emancipation as possible (mandatory)
- Assessment D - completed annually for youth through the age of 21 who have left care (optional)

Launching ETO was a major step in collecting and using data to measure outcomes for transition age foster youth. Although final decisions and requirements for AB 12 data collection have yet to be established, it is clear that ETO enables counties to document and evaluate their progress on outcomes for transition age foster youth and satisfies state and federal requirements to measure their impact. Discussions are currently underway to determine the potential for statewide expansion of ETO to track outcomes for youth in extended foster care under AB 12.

## Tips for AB 12 Implementation

**Partnerships are Crucial.** No single individual or agency is responsible for knowing, tracking, and improving all of the outcomes for transition-aged youth. Strong connections with housing, education, health, and employment partners are needed to address confidentiality issues, establish data sharing agreements and MOUs, and access information needed for assessments.

**Include Data Collection Responsibilities in Job Descriptions.** Implementing and sustaining data collection takes a commitment and may require changes in practice, including revising job responsibilities.

**Link Youth Assessments to State Reporting Requirements and Emancipation Meetings.** To minimize time spent on reporting requirements, counties can link ETO assessments to mandated state reports, such as the TILP and 405 E. In addition, many counties have planned emancipation preparedness meetings, which provide an opportunity to administer the Assessment C.

**Allow Youth to Self-Report.** Youth may feel that the questions are too personal or may not feel comfortable sharing information with the social worker or staffer administering the assessment. Allowing youth to self-report with guidance from the social worker or having a youth coordinator administer the assessment are strategies that can help increase assessment completion rates.

**Develop Mechanisms to Assist and Motivate Staff.** Creating up-to-date lists of education, health, housing, and other key contacts is an easy way to help social workers complete assessments. Developing web dashboards that display highlighted outcomes motivates staff and reminds them of the usefulness of the assessments.

**Use Data to Improve Practice.** ETO data and outcomes should be reviewed and evaluated by staff and workgroups on a regular basis to look at trends, highlight areas of success, and discuss potential practice improvements.

## Challenges to Consider

**Implementing an extensive data collection system is ambitious. ETO required significant resources, staff dedication, start up time, and ongoing technical assistance for the counties.** Buy-in at upper levels of management and from staff is needed before implementing a new system.

**Youth placed out-of-county pose a considerable challenge to data collection efforts.** Coordination of data collection is more difficult when youth are under the supervision of one county but living in another:

## Resource Links

- [“What is Efforts to Outcomes \(ETO\)?” Fact Sheet](#)
- [Center for Social Services Research, UC Berkeley](#)
- [“Assessment C” Form](#)
- [CC251 Data Review and Discussion PowerPoint](#)
- [Social Solutions](#)

**“Instead of waiting for our partners to provide job training, we brought the youth to the table. There are a lot of county resources and employment providers out there that we leveraged. As a result, we have increased the number of youth with internships and jobs.”**

Steve Nelson, WTS/Employment Coordinator  
San Francisco Independent Living Skills Program



## **CORE FOCUS AREAS: PERMANENCY**

### **Why this Matters**

Permanent supportive relationships and lifelong connections to caring adults are fundamental to the well being of foster youth and their success in all areas of life. Former foster youth that have a strong relationship with caring, supportive adults are more likely to continue their education, stay employed, and become engaged in their communities. Having a connection to family is extremely important to youth, even if the relationship does not guarantee a place to live or financial support. Permanency, or a lack thereof, can affect a young person's life long after leaving foster care.

The CC25I sites worked to build permanent relationships for youth through a number of strategies, including family finding, inviting those that the youth has familial and other significant relationships with to planning meetings and activities, addressing issues of grief and loss, and developing teams to support permanency efforts. The child welfare agencies worked to ensure that all youth leave the foster care system with at least one lifelong connection to a caring, committed, and loving adult.

### **Tips for AB 12 Implementation**

In order to achieve desired outcomes through AB 12, it is critical that youth have permanent connections in their lives. These strategies were noted by the CC25I sites as being effective in supporting lifelong connections for youth.

**Focus on Permanency Early and Often.** In Fresno County, social workers begin having conversations with youth and caregivers about permanency as soon as youth enter care. On a regular basis, youth are asked about the permanent connections in their lives and social workers provide that feedback to caregivers.

**Engage in Family Finding.** Through CC25I and the California Permanency for Youth Project, Stanislaus County received technical assistance from the Center for Family Finding and Youth Connectedness, which led to a contract with a family finding agency that is utilized on a day-to-day basis. When family finding searches are made, information on connections is stored in the Lifelong Connections database, which youth can access by request. Stanislaus County now provides technical assistance to other counties to implement their model.

***“Permanency is now ingrained in all of us. There is an integrated way of serving youth and social worker culture has been transformed.”***

Nenita Dean, CC25I Project Manager  
Stanislaus County Child and Family Services Division



**Integrate Permanency Efforts.** By integrating permanency into team decision-making models, as well as activities and planning around other core focus areas, the CC25I sites were able to better develop and support lifelong connections and family relationships. The development of the THP-Plus host family model, which allowed emancipated youth to receive support while living with family or a caring adult, connected youth to safe, stable, and supportive housing, while supporting permanency in their lives. San Francisco County found that permanency efforts can be incorporated into employment assistance and youth were able to find jobs through family connections. Through the Independent Living Skills Program, San Francisco County holds a “Permanency Night” where youth invite their lifelong connections to meet staff and their peers.

### Challenges to Consider

**There is no one definition of permanency.** Foster youth need lifelong relationships with supportive, caring adults, whether those relationships are legally defined or not. All permanency options should be explored with youth, including reunification, adoption, supporting sibling relationships, re-establishing relationships with relatives, and nurturing non-familial relationships.

**Foster youth need both permanency and transition services.** While there often can be tension between permanency and transition planning, they should not be mutually exclusive. Some permanent relations might provide emotional connections and support, which are critical to youth development, but may not have the “social capital” and connections needed to further their education, find employment, and become financially stable. Youth need both relationships and support services to become successful adults.

### Resource Links

- [3-5-7 Model: A Practice Approach for Permanency Work Children & Youth](#)
- [A Guide to Permanency Options for Youth](#)
- [A Guide to Implementing the Host Family Model in THP-Plus](#)
- [National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness, Seneca Center](#)
- [Family Design Resources, Inc.](#)

## EDUCATION

### Why this Matters

Foster youth face significant challenges in their lives, resulting in education outcomes that are far behind other youth. About half (49.5%) of California's foster youth that exits care receive a high school diploma or equivalent<sup>3</sup>, compared to 75% of all California students.<sup>4</sup> Most foster youth perform below grade-level and many end up repeating a grade. Foster youth are also more likely than their peers to qualify for special education, miss school, and have disciplinary problems. And just a small percentage of emancipated foster youth earn a college degree.<sup>5</sup>

It is well documented that having a high school diploma and access to higher education increases employment opportunities and earnings. On the other hand, high school dropouts are more likely to have substance abuse issues, get involved in criminal activity, and become teen parents. Recognizing the vital importance of education in the lives of foster youth, the initiative made academic achievement for transition age youth a primary focus. The county sites spent significant time and resources on K-12 and higher education strategies, including collaboration between child welfare and targeted school districts, co-locating child welfare and education staff, establishing working referral relationships with education support programs, and sharing education data. As a result, over a three-year period, the percentage of emancipating foster youth in the CC25I counties that completed some or all of their A-G requirements (UC/CSU college prep) increased from 31% to 45%, the percentage of youth that passed CAHSEE high school exit exam (both Math and English) increased from 44% to 45%, and the percentage of youth graduating from high increased from 42% to 45%.<sup>6</sup>

### Tips for AB 12 Implementation

As youth enter extended foster care under AB 12, they will have to meet certain criteria to remain eligible, including working towards a high school diploma or GED and going to college. The following strategies implemented by the CC25I sites contributed towards helping foster youth achieve those goals.

**Co-Locate Case Managers on Campuses.** Fresno County made K-12 education a high priority by co-locating case carrying social workers on all high school campuses attended by foster youth, which helped the agency understand the needs of youth as they prepare for college and supported the development of stronger relationships between social workers and students.

**Establish Education Data Sharing Agreements.** As a result of collaborative partnerships in Humboldt County, a court order was implemented to share education data across agencies, allowing for the referral of youth to college preparatory programs such as AVID, Talent Search, and Upward Bound. Orange and Fresno counties have utilized the Foster Focus database to access student data in real time.

<sup>3</sup> Data reflect youth who exited care from October-December 2009 and are from the SOC405E, Exit Outcomes for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care Quarterly Statistical Report. See California Child Welfare Co-Investment Partnership. *Understanding Outcomes for Youth Exiting Foster Care*, Insights Vol. 3, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Statewide Graduation Data, Cohort Outcome Data for the Class of 2009-10. California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) accessed on DataQuest, September 29, 2011. [data1.cde.ca.gov/Dataquest](http://data1.cde.ca.gov/Dataquest).

<sup>5</sup> Legislative Analyst's Office. *Education of Foster Youth in California*. May 2009. [www.lao.ca.gov/2009/edu/foster\\_children/foster\\_ed\\_052809.pdf](http://www.lao.ca.gov/2009/edu/foster_children/foster_ed_052809.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> For more information on data and outcomes from CC25I, see *The Premise and Promise of the California Connected by 25 Initiative* at [californiaconnectedby25.org](http://californiaconnectedby25.org).



**Draw Down Title IV-E Education Funding.** Orange County was the first among CC25I counties to seek a draw down of Title-IVE funding to support education programs and resources and provided peer training to the other counties. Funding from the Orange County Office of Education's Foster Youth Services and Probation Department's juvenile detention funds were used to strengthen available academic supports, increase service partnerships, and draw down an additional \$250,000 in Title IV-E funding. The increased financial support allowed Orange County to double the number of school-based social workers and educational liaisons available to provide case management and other support to better serve the educational needs of foster youth.

**Develop Connections with Colleges.** San Francisco County's educational liaison has strong connections with numerous colleges in California and other states. In addition, staff take youth on college tours, which allows them to visualize themselves in college and connect with the schools. In Humboldt County, as a result of increased focus on this population, Humboldt State University is creating a comprehensive campus support program known as ELITE (Excelling by Living Independently Through Education) to ensure that former foster youth are receiving on campus support services.

**Connect with College Readiness and Campus Support Programs.** There are several education programs that benefit transition age foster youth, for example Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and Bridge Program. In particular, several CC25I counties worked closely with AVID to enroll youth in this highly successful college access program. California College Pathway programs, including Guardian Scholars and Renaissance Scholars, are available in 79 college campuses across the state.

**Inform Caregivers on Foster Youth Education Issues.** The CC25I counties reached out to caregivers to increase their understanding of topics ranging from foster youth's educational rights, high school graduation and UC/CSU admission requirements, and the availability education-related services and opportunities available to youth. Foster Ed Connect provides resources and answers to frequently asked questions for caregivers, teachers, lawyers, and advocates.

### Resource Links

- [California Foster Care Education Law Factsheets](#)
- [Working with Foster Youth in AVID: Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Realizing the Promise of AB 12: Recommendations for Improving Higher Education Outcomes for Foster Youth, John Burton Foundation Policy Brief](#)
- [Foster Focus PowerPoint](#)
- [California College Pathways](#)
- [Foster Ed Connect](#)
- [California Foster Youth Education Taskforce](#)



***“Before CC25I, no one looked at education outcomes and there were no expectations. Now that’s 100 percent different.”***

Daphne Short, Data Analyst  
Stanislaus County Child and Family Services Division



**“Finding housing is a huge stressor for foster youth. When I was able to alleviate that concern I was able to be successful. Knowing that housing was there made me want to participate in other areas.”**

Former Foster Youth, Santa Clara County



## HOUSING

### Why this Matters

Before foster youth can focus on completing their education and finding work, they need safe, stable, and affordable housing. Unfortunately, housing instability is an issue that most foster youth face upon emancipating. In California, two out of every three emancipating foster youth have an “imminent housing need.”<sup>7</sup> Studies have shown that former foster youth are more likely to experience housing instability or homelessness in early adulthood than their peers. Transition age foster youth seeking housing face numerous difficulties, including securing rent and a security deposit and finding an adult co-signer or guarantor. In addition, without previous independent living experience, transitioning foster youth may not know how to negotiate relationships with landlords and roommates, or how to budget finances so that an apartment can be maintained. As a result, they often bounce between multiple living arrangements, are unable to pay rent, and face eviction.

Former foster youth living in supportive housing are more likely to stay employed, have higher wages, and be enrolled in school. Over the course of the initiative, the county sites strived to connect youth with supportive housing options by expanding their Transitional Housing Placement (THP) programs and increasing the capacity and range of housing options available to youth exiting the foster care system. With the concurrent expansion of the state’s THP-Plus program, the number of funded transitional housing units available to foster youth throughout the entire state has grown from 50 in 2003 to nearly 1,400 today.

### Tips for AB 12 Implementation

Although many youth opting into extended foster care under AB 12 will continue to live in their current placements, others will want more independence as adults. Through CC251, the county sites developed numerous strategies to connect youth to housing options, providing important lessons learned for counties as they implement AB 12.

**Educate Community Partners on Foster Youth Housing Needs.** Fresno County reached out to the housing community (local renter associations, building developers, housing authorities, and property management companies) and informed them of the housing needs of transition age foster youth, encouraging the collaborative development of scattered site housing resources.

**Utilize the THP-Plus Host Family Model.** Stanislaus County implemented an innovative housing program called the host family model, now widely regarded as a best practice. The host family model was created as a strategy to provide emancipated foster youth with financial resources to live in a family home or with a supportive, caring adult.

<sup>7</sup>THP-Plus Statewide Implementation Project. *A Guide to Implementing THP-Plus*. [www.thpplus.org/pdfs/THP-Plus Implementation Guide Revised-1.pdf](http://www.thpplus.org/pdfs/THP-Plus%20Implementation%20Guide%20Revised-1.pdf).

**Access HUD Vouchers for Foster Youth.** San Francisco and Stanislaus counties were able to collaborate with their county housing agencies and apply for and access HUD Section 8 vouchers for foster youth through the HUD Family Unification Program.

**Consider a Dorm Housing Program.** Through CC25I and the THP-Plus program, Santa Clara County developed a dorm housing program at San Jose State University (SJSU), which provided stable housing for former foster youth attending SJSU and nearby community colleges, allowing them to engage in school more fully.

### Resource Links

- [A Guide to Implementing THP-Plus](#)
- [A Guide to Implementing the Host Family Model in THP-Plus](#)
- [Supporting the Housing Needs of Former Foster Youth on Campus](#)
- [John Burton Foundation](#)
- [HUD Family Unification Program](#)



## EMPLOYMENT

### Why this Matters

Not long after CC25I was initiated, the country entered a period of recession and California unemployment rates skyrocketed. Since 2008, the statewide unemployment rate doubled to 12% and youth unemployment, particularly for low-income youth and youth of color, has reached record highs. In the current economic climate, foster youth, who are already disadvantaged in the job market by their lack of post-secondary education, employment experience, and job skills, face even greater hurdles to finding living-wage work. Foster youth also face other challenges in gaining real life work experience. Some are in placements that hinder participation in work activities and others struggle with transportation.

Although connecting youth to employment opportunities was a significant challenge, the CC25I county sites did make progress in developing stronger partnerships with employment agencies, workforce organizations, and employers. In the midst of the recession, they helped foster youth develop employment skills and access internships and vocational training. While the majority of counties were unable to place emancipating foster youth in part-time or full-time jobs, their increased focus on employment issues created a foundation for future success.



## Tips for AB 12 Implementation

Effective employment strategies will be critical to ensure that youth are able meet their participation requirements under AB 12. The following strategies should be considered to strengthen employment opportunities for foster youth.

**Educate Local Workforce Programs and Employers.** Workforce development programs often fail to prioritize foster youth as a target group, which leads to an under-utilization of services. To counteract this trend, several of the CC25I counties established relationships with local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) to increase employment resources for foster youth. While these partnerships were not always initially successful, over time they helped to increase WIB focus on foster youth and provide more job-related opportunities. Other partnerships were also built with employers who created entry-level jobs for foster youth.

**Create an Employment Unit.** Santa Clara County developed a CC25 Career Development Unit (CDU), which provides young adults with job search support and assistance in finding a career path. Employment counselors with experience and expertise in the areas of job coaching and career planning can provide participants assistance with finding job leads, completing applications, preparing resumes, and interview practice. CDU also provides mentorship and guidance, continuing to support participants once they are involved in training or on the job.

**Hire Foster Youth.** Santa Clara County also pioneered a program that streamlined the process for hiring former foster across multiple county agencies, increasing their chances of employment. Youth participate in job preparation workshops and are supported through the process, from applying for a position to accepting a job offer. Not only does this program provide youth with needed jobs, when the county hires former foster youth, it sets a strong example for employers in the community.

**Provide Job Training Opportunities.** The Humboldt County ILSP program collaborates with partners to provide both onsite and offsite job training for foster youth. They work with Youth Ability to provide retail experience at the Angels of Hope thrift store and food service skills at the recently opened Vance Café. They also work with Big Brothers Big Sisters to provide clerical training.

## Resource Links

- [Santa Clara County Foster Youth Career Development/Employment Services](#)
- [Solano County Youth Advocate Job Description](#)
- [Contact Information for Local Workforce Investment Boards](#)
- [Humboldt County's Youth Ability](#)



***“We have a good relationship with the Orange County Workforce Investment Board. Whenever they write a grant, they include high-risk youth and foster youth. There are federal grants that require certain percentage in that category and they do their best to take advantage of them.”***

Irene Briggs, Senior Social Services Supervisor  
Orange County Social Services Agency

## FINANCIAL LITERACY

### Why this Matters

When exiting foster care, foster youth often lack a financial safety net and the support of caring adults to help them make sound financial decisions. Although ILSP life skills classes and workshops are supposed to provide foster youth with the financial skills they need to function independently, they are often inadequate, leaving foster youth without the common knowledge necessary to make sound financial decisions. Without good credit history and financial skills, foster youth struggle to access housing, pay for school, and manage their money so that their basic needs are met. Research has shown that the accumulation of assets among youth can also contribute to other positive outcomes, such as increased long-term planning, more positive expectations for the future, reduced engagement in high-risk behavior, and improved social connectedness.

The CC25I sites worked to improve financial literacy for transition age foster youth and support for savings to help reduce their economic hardships. Specifically, the sites set out to improve the financial competency of youth emancipating from foster care, increase savings and asset building among current and former foster youth, and provide opportunities and experiences that lead to economic success.

### Tips for AB 12 Implementation

The following strategies can help ensure that foster youth in extended care under AB 12 make sound financial decisions and have access to financial supports.

**Establish Partnerships with Credit Unions.** Solano County established a successful partnership with Travis Credit Union to open and maintain Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) for transition age foster youth. Accounts have ATM withdrawal access with a \$100 withdrawal limit per day and youth can deposit their paychecks via direct deposit, ATM, or at a branch. Prior to emancipation, the credit union notifies foster youth that the account must be changed to an adult account, with an option of having a financial mentor. Credit unions benefit foster youth in a number of ways. Having a bank account allows youth to deposit checks without having to pay high fees associated with check cashing and lending services. In addition, credit unions generally provide lower fees and better rates than banks.

**Implement a Financial Literacy Program.** Solano County developed *Money Matters*, a three-pronged initiative to educate foster youth about personal finance, credit, and debt as a required element of the Independent Living Skills Program. The program includes a 16 hour financial literacy class, special savings accounts, and financial mentors. Through *Money Matters*, foster youth are given funds and provided support to open and maintain savings accounts at Travis Credit Union.

### Resource Links

- [Solano County Money Matters Program – Contact Lynn De Lapp, Ldelapp@davisconsultants.net](#)
- [Santa Clara County Financial Literacy and IDA Program](#)

***“This is such important information for our foster youth to be getting before they go out on their own. Money is something that they have to deal with every day of their lives.”***

Rosie Wentworth, Program Development Director  
Consumer Credit Counseling Service of the North Coast



## CONCLUSION

The child welfare system has the responsibility to ensure that youth leaving care have the skills, resources, and supports to successfully transition into adulthood. For far too long, California has failed to meet these goals. Now, with AB 12, California has an extraordinary opportunity to live up to its promise and change the trajectory for emancipating foster youth.

Undoubtedly, implementation of AB 12 will present numerous challenges. For most counties, providing additional services and support to young, independent adults will be a new endeavor, requiring non-traditional approaches, different ways of interacting with youth, and cooperation and collaboration among all community stakeholders. Furthermore, in order for counties to truly meet the needs of youth in extended foster care and ensure better outcomes in the long-term, adequate resources are needed for training, services, youth engagement activities, and collaborative partnerships.

The counties participating in CC25I demonstrated that even with small levels of funding, enormous progress is possible. By partnering with diverse community stakeholders, actively engaging youth in decision-making, and collecting data to analyze the results of their efforts, the CC25I county sites were able to improve education, permanency, housing, and other critical outcomes for transition age foster youth, ultimately increasing their opportunities and ability to succeed in life. As a result of their efforts, the CC25I child welfare agencies became more responsive and accountable, working towards a more youth-focused system.

Over the past six years, the CC25 Initiative sites gained invaluable knowledge and experience to better serve youth in extended foster care. These promising strategies and lessons learned are a starting point for other counties and stakeholders looking to replicate their success and enhance services for young adults in care under AB 12 and emancipating foster youth.

## GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

**A-G Requirements.** A-G requirements refer to the high school courses required for entrance to the University of California and the California State University systems. The California State University (CSU) system requires a minimum of a “C” grade in all A-G courses while the University of California (UC) system requires a 3.0 Grade Point Average in the A-G courses meaning that a “C” grade can be balanced by an “A” grade in another class. (Source: Silicon Valley Education Foundation)

**AB 12.** Assembly Bill 12 (AB 12), authored by Assembly Member Jim Beall, Jr. and former Assembly Speaker Karen Bass, is also known as the California Fostering Connections to Success Act and was signed into law on September 30, 2010. AB 12 allows California to take advantage of several components of the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-351), including extending foster care for eligible youth beyond age 18 until the age of 21 starting January 1, 2012. (Source: AB 12 Primer; John Burton Foundation)

**IDA.** An individual development account (IDA), also known as a matched savings account, is a savings account established to help young people learn financial management, obtain access to the mainstream banking system and save money for assets. (Source: Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative)

**ILP/ILSP.** An Independent Living Program (ILP), sometimes called an Independent Living Services Program (ILSP), is a federally funded program administered through counties that provides services for foster youth ages 14 and over to prepare for adulthood. The program provides classes in life skills, vocational training, tutoring, mentoring, and enrichment activities. It can also provide funds for college scholarships, skills training, and rent assistance. (Source: Transitioning Foster Youth Guide, CCS Partnership)

**Permanency.** 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 relationship; love; unconditional commitment; lifelong support in the context of reunification, a legal adoption, or guardianship, where possible; and the youth has the opportunity to maintain contact with important persons, including brothers and sisters. (Source: California Permanency for Youth Project)

**THP-Plus & Host Family Model.** The Transitional Housing Placement Plus (THP-Plus) program provides affordable housing and comprehensive supportive services for up to 24 months to help former foster care and probation youth ages 18 to 24 make a successful transition from out-of-home placements to independent living. THP-Plus offers the host family model, which provides financial resources for emancipated foster youth to live in a home with a caring adult or family. The host family model serves young adults who are at least 18 and under 24 years of age for up to 24 cumulative months and receives a monthly THP-Plus stipend and guidance and support from the THP-Plus service provider. At the same time, the youth has access to safe, stable housing and a comprehensive array of supportive services. Certain host family models also provide the youth participant a monthly stipend. (Source: John Burton Foundation)

**Title IV-E Education Funding.** In addition to Title IV-E Foster Care and Adoption Assistance reimbursement programs, states are also allocated funds through the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program and the Education and Training Vouchers program under Title IV-E for activities and services related to youth who are transitioning (or who have already transitioned) out of the foster care system. (Source: Casey Family Programs)

**Workforce Investment Board.** Local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) oversee the delivery of workforce services relevant to their local residents and businesses. They also bring together business leaders to respond to local workforce needs. Although each WIB has its own charter, organization, and unique context, they all operate local One-Stop Career Centers, which provide workforce, education, and business services. Workforce funds allocated to local WIBs support the job training, placement, and business services delivered through the One-Stop Career Centers. These Centers, through partnerships with other local, state and federal agencies, education and economic development organizations, provide access to job, skill development and business services vital to the social and economic well-being of their communities. (Source: California Workforce Investment Board)

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### The County Sites

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Glenn County - Human Resource Agency, Social Services Division

Humboldt County - Department of Health and Human Services, Social Services Branch, Child Welfare Services

Orange County - Social Services Agency

San Francisco County - Human Services Agency, Department of Human Services, Family and Children's Services

Santa Clara County - Social Services Agency, Department of Family and Children's Services

Solano County - Health and Social Services Department, Child Welfare Services

Stanislaus County - Community Services Agency, Child and Family Services Division

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