

**EMPLOYMENT AND HUMAN SERVICES
CONTRA COSTA COUNTY**

TO: Family and Human Services
Committee

DATE: November 14, 2011

FROM: Joe Valentine, Director, Employment and Human Services Department
Valerie Earley, Director, Children and Family Services Bureau

SUBJECT: Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP)

Recommendation

Accept this report from the Employment and Human Services Department; and continue to support the Children and Family Services Bureau efforts to serve foster youth in the ILSP program.

Background

In 1999, the Foster Care Independence Act was passed by the Federal government. This legislation, sponsored by the late Senator John Chaffee, doubled funding for state-wide independent living (IL) programs. There was overwhelming evidence emerging that youth leaving foster care were in need of greater support from foster care into adulthood. Foster youth nationwide were found to have increased likelihood of early parenting, instability in relationships, not graduating from high school, lower school performance, increased health and mental health problems, homelessness, substance abuse, and a higher rate of unemployment.

ILSP has been serving current and former foster youth for 23 years. For the past twelve years the Children and Family Services Bureau of the Employment and Human Services Department has expanded the scope of services that the Independent Living Skill Program offers for 16 to 21 year old foster and emancipated youth as a result of this legislation. The ILS program has received recognition throughout the State of California and nation for its service and youth services.

Year at a Glance:

Each year ILSP offers a variety of skill building and youth engagement activities in four major areas. The Four Pillars consist of Education,

Employment, Housing and Well Being. ILSP provided weekly programming in three regions of the County – West and Central and East.

This past year, of the over 800 youth eligible for ILSP, 534 current or former foster youth were served both individually and in group settings (i.e. workshops, classes, etc.), 321 youth (16-21 years of age) participated in the workshops offered. 246 emancipated youth (18-21 years of age) were served in the ILSP Aftercare program. Workshops are posted on the ILSP website throughout the year. <http://www.cocoilsp.org/home.html>

The Four Pillars: Updates

Housing

Transitional housing for foster youth and emancipated foster youth continues to be delivered in Contra Costa County. Two providers served the in-care foster youth age 16-18 in transitional housing, called THPP. Four providers served emancipated youth, aged 18-24, transitional housing called THP+. This past year, 17 foster youth were served in THPP and 102 emancipated youth were served in THP+.

Employment

ILSP continues to collaborate with the Workforce Development Board and the Contra Costa County Office of Education to provide a dedicated Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Case Manager that is housed at ILSP. The ILSP WIA Case Manager served 29 in school and out of school Youth this past fiscal year. The ILSP WIA Case Manager also conducts employment workshops alongside ILSP Specialists throughout the year.

Through the East County Child Welfare Redesign Youth in Transition Committee a Youth Internship program was created to provide 6 youth with little or no employment history a chance to gain work experience through the Los Medanos Health Care District and the Antioch Senior Center. Upon completion of their internship, each youth received a certificate of completion and a \$500 stipend provided by the Office of Education.

Each ILSP Specialist assumes the role of providing employment workshops and one on one service delivery to all eligible youth in need of employment assistance.

The ILSP Project YES program, an employment program that places foster youth in county agencies, is in its third and final year of funding through Conoco

Phillips and we are aggressively seeking alternative funding to sustain this worthwhile program.

Education

This past year 167 youth were identified to age out of the foster and probation systems. ILSP issued 136 Graduation Stipends between June 2010 and July 2011. In June of 2011 60 youth attended and was honored at the 23rd Annual ILSP Recognition Dinner where 16 scholarships worth thousands of dollars were awarded. As funds have been limited to put on an event for the graduating youth, ILSP was fortunate to have the event fully sponsored by the community. For the second consecutive year, the event was held at Calvary Temple Church and supported by a variety of vendors including Calvary Temple Church, Sunrise Bistro, Classic Catering and the Wellness City Challenge. The event was quite a success.

In addition to providing workshops on financial aid and taking tours of college campuses, ILSP has collaborated with the Assistance League of Diablo Valley to develop a Senior Sponsorship Program. This program is in its third year. As there are few funding streams to support extracurricular activities and expenses for foster youth, the program was designed to assist graduating seniors to be able to partake in the typical events that were once difficult for caregivers to afford. The Assistance League raises money and that money is granted to 35 seniors. Each senior received \$450. The Senior Sponsorship program funds such things as senior pictures, year books, prom tickets, and caps and gowns. It is well documented that foster youth are undereducated and often drop out of high school and lack basic educational skills. Supporting our foster youth to stay in school through such programs helps assist youth to strive to achieve graduation.

Well-Being

Youth in foster care often do not experience childhood in the way most children do who live with their families of origin. They have suffered child abuse and neglect, been removed from their families and many older youth spend the remainder of their childhood moving from home to home. The foster care system is designed to fund board and care and basic needs, and even this is woefully underfunded. Some youth in foster care miss out on participating in sports, arts, birthday parties, spending the night at friend's homes, and the like. They are in turn exposed to the sub-culture of foster care. They learn the survival skills needed to cope with placement changes, rejection from foster parents, and the grief of not being with their families. Instead of developing positive social skills, for instance, some are learning to cope with living in a group setting with other foster youth who are struggling

with their own issues. ILSP provides activities and supportive services to help encourage positive social development and exposure to typical childhood activities. Through excursions to sporting events such as the Oakland A's and Raider's games and field trips to bowling or swimming, foster youth are able to experience fun activities that the typical teenager experiences, but are also mentored in developing positive social skills and are further engaged in the ILS program. ILSP conducts Men and Women groups to discuss pertinent information such as sexual responsibility, accountability, decision making, goal planning and self esteem.

Aftercare

Each year, between 100-150 foster youth age out of foster care at age 18 or 19 years old. At that point, they are on their own to support themselves. A few foster youth are fortunate to remain with their foster parents or relatives, other youth are able to participate in the Transitional Housing Program, but most are literally pushed from care as soon as the foster care checks end. The State funds counties to provide supportive services to emancipated foster youth up to age 21 years old. This past year, 246 emancipated youth were served by ILSP. The needs of emancipated youth are severe. They often call in crisis, homeless and in need of basic items like food and shelter. The foster youth who go off to college, struggle at holiday breaks and summer, when the dorms are closed. The aftercare program provides emancipated foster youth supportive housing, employment, educational, and crisis services.

Fund Raising Efforts

ILSP has successfully applied for and received grants to enhance service delivery. A grant from PMI supplied ILSP with the necessary funding to create a Food Closet where youth in need are able to come to the ILSP Center and receive a "Food Box" loaded with non-perishable foods that will last a week or two. ILSP also applied for a \$14,000.00 grant through the Orinda Woman's Club that will provide funding to enhance our after care program. The current state allocation for the entire aftercare program (350+ youth eligible) is \$28,000.00 or \$80 each annually if every youth was in need. ILSP will continue to seek funding opportunities and opportunities to collaborate with community agencies and the general public to fill the gaps caused by decreased funding over the last several years.

Emerging Legislation

Finally, the most significant legislative change is the passage of AB12 California Fostering to Success Act. AB12 is California's legislation that allows foster care to be extended to age 21. This law has wide spread implications to the Child Welfare system and goes into affect in 2012.

Studies have shown that foster youth who stay in care to age 21 have better outcomes than those counterparts that emancipate at age 18. The State of California has been developing regulations and rules to implement this new law over the past year. This clearly has implications on ILSP which will in the future be serving dependent young adults in its aftercare program along with emancipated foster youth.

Summary/Conclusion

Youth who emancipate from foster care are expected to become self-sufficient at age 18 or 19 years old. This entails the ability to maintain stable housing, maintain employment, and maintain one's physical health. Research on the outcomes of emancipated foster youth indicates that these tasks are difficult for this population. Rates of homelessness for emancipated foster youth has been found to be as high as 42% and housing moves are generally related to poverty and lack of stable family relationships. Foster youth also have high rates of incarceration, especially when they have experienced multiple placements and episodes in foster care. Some of the current information states that 72% of prisoners were once in foster care. With the passage of AB12 to extend foster care, it is hoped that the outcomes for foster youth will improve to a great extent. Contra Costa County has been an active party in the planning for AB12 at the state and local levels.