

**EMPLOYMENT AND HUMAN SERVICES
CONTRA COSTA COUNTY**

TO: Family and Human Services' Committee Members **DATE:** July 31, 2017
David Twa, Contra Costa County Administrator

FR: Kathy Gallagher, Director, Employment and Human Services Department
Kathy Marsh, Interim 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 and its efforts to serve foster youth in the ILSP program.

BACKGROUND

The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 permanently authorized the Independent Living Program (ILP) which offers training, services and programs to assist current and former foster youth achieve self-sufficiency prior to and after leaving the foster care system. The Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-169), amended Section 477 of the Social Security Act providing more flexibility in the use of ILP funding (see 42 USC 677).

In California, County Welfare Departments have the flexibility to design services to meet a wide range of individual needs and circumstances for current and former foster youth. Every California County operates an ILP. Youth participation is voluntary. Overwhelming evidence supports the fact that youth leaving foster care are in need of greater support as they transition into adulthood. Foster youth nationwide are found to have an increased likelihood of early parenting, instability in relationships, not graduating from high school, lower school performance, increased health and mental health concerns, homelessness, incarceration, substance abuse, and a higher rate of unemployment.

In September 2010, Governor Schwarzenegger signed into law Assembly Bill 12, the California Fostering Connections to Success Act. AB12 took effect on January 1, 2012 and allows young adults to be provided transitional support to age 21 and ensure that they are given the necessary skills to survive on their own. A young adult must be in a high school or a GED program, enrolled in a college or vocational program, employed at least 80 hours per month, participating in a program designed to remove barriers to employment, or unable to work/attend school because of a medical condition. The young adult must also live in an approved placement and sign a mutual agreement with their case worker, Supervised

Independent Living Placement (SILP). With this legislation, young adults will receive the support of the foster care system to age 21, extending the time to work with young adults in foster care with more parity in assistance provided to children from intact families.

PROGRESS TO DATE:

For the past twenty nine years, the Children and Family Services Bureau of the Employment and Human Services Department has provided services through the Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP). This program educates and supports youth in a wide variety of areas designed to inspire a successful transition to adulthood, and empowers foster youth to become responsible adults. Staff working in the program are Contra Costa County employees. Under the direction of a Program Coordinator and an Assistant Coordinator, the five program specialists continue to provide services to Contra Costa County foster youth, out of county youth and probation youth, while embracing the CCC CFS ILSP Vision statement:

“Our vision is to move every youth from stagnation to motivation, from limitations to possibilities; from dependency to self-sufficiency; from the past to the future.”

As a result of their successful approach and accomplishments, the Contra Costa County CFS Independent Living Skills Program has received recognition throughout the State of California and nation for its performance and youth services. The program continues to emphasize and promote positive youth development to support young people in developing a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging and empowerment. ILSP is funded by the federal Title IV-E and state dollars.

ILSP offers a variety of skill building trainings and youth engagement activities to promote self-sufficiency in foster youth. Development activities and programs include, but are not limited to, employment preparation, vocational training support, education resources, financial literacy and housing assistance. ILSP spotlights four core areas called the Four Pillars when providing hands-on, experiential learning experiences. The Four Pillars consist of Education, Employment, Housing and Well Being. Workshops and events are provided in the East, West, and Central parts of the county to attract more youth participation and to provide a shorter travel distance for care providers and youth attending weekly workshops and events.

This past fiscal year, six hundred and ten (610) current and former foster youth were served both individually and in group settings (i.e. workshops, classes, etc.) One hundred forty seven (147) of these youth are deemed “Non-Minor Dependents,” and have chosen to remain in foster care under Assembly Bill 12.

ILSP PILLAR - HOUSING

Transitional housing for foster youth and emancipated young adults continues to be delivered in Contra Costa County. Under the Transitional Housing Placement Program (THPP), two providers serve the in-care foster youth age 16-18. Under the Transitional Housing Program

Plus (THP+), three providers serve emancipated youth, aged 18-24. The emergence of Assembly Bill 12 produced an additional transitional housing opportunity called Transitional Housing Program Plus Foster Care (THP+ FC), which has 5 providers. This program serves young adults, ages 18-21 that have opted to remain in foster care as Non Minor Dependents under AB12. Housing continues to be a significant challenge for young adults as they emancipate. The Housing Continuum that Children and Family Services created has improved the numbers of young adults being served, but now that AB 12 has been implemented, some of the existing providers are opting to serve the Non Minor Dependent population exclusively, creating an increased need for housing to serve those young adults opting to emancipate from foster care at age 18 or 19.

ILSP maintains its efforts to develop housing options in the community through collaborations with community based organizations, faith based organizations and individual citizens whom are willing to offer support (i.e. room for rent). The constant goal in this area is to develop more permanent housing options for foster youth. For example, ILSP has established connections with the Housing Authority and receive Section 8 lists when they become available so that ILSP participants can apply. Our ILSP staff assist youth in applying for these opportunities. Additionally, the contracted providers, such as the County's Homeless Programs and First Place for Youth, work diligently to develop more permanent housing options and advocate for improved housing options for foster youth. This past fiscal year we began to refer youth to Safe Time who provides host homes to potential applicants.

ILSP PILLAR- EMPLOYMENT

ILSP has been partnering with the Workforce Development Board of Contra Costa County to deliver employment services to eligible foster youth through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. ILSP refers youth to participate in the Earn and Learn Summer Employment Program. ILSP continues to cultivate working relationships with the three contracted agencies providing services through the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA). Our work includes referring 20% of the foster care population to both the "In School and Out of School" programs throughout the school year. The case managers for the contracted agencies present at ILSP staff meetings and ILSP workshops in order to recruit youth and disseminate information for services available to them. This collaboration has proven to be beneficial to our program and program participants and the number of foster youth served with WIOA have been steadily increasing because of our partnership.

The East County Youth in Transition Committee comprised of Uplift Family Services, The Contra Costa County Office of Education Foster Youth Services and The Contra Costa County Children and Family Services' Independent Living Skills Program has been partnering with the Los Medanos Community Healthcare District since 2011 to provide summer internships for youth transitioning out of the foster care system. The Internship is designed to provide valuable employment skills to the youth participants. Youth work in groups and learn public speaking skills and they conduct research on health care issues identified by the Los Medanos

Community Healthcare District. This summer will be the seventh year of this award winning internship.

Los Medanos Community Healthcare District's Summer Intern Program projects include:

- 2011 - Healthy Eating Habits and Fitness: Pittsburg Seafood Festival
- 2012 - Under Age Smoking: Curbing teenage smoking
- 2013 - A Battle for Breathing: Air Pollution, Lung Cancer, and Asthma in the Community
- 2014 - The Heritage Project: Bridging the Age Gap between youth and senior citizens
- 2015 - Healthy Youth Council: Impacting Our Community to Stop Diabetes
- 2016 - Youth Empowerment Group: The Trends of E-cigarettes and Cigarettes usage

LMCHD's Summer Intern Program achieved the following awards and recognitions:

- 2013 – Exceptional Public Outreach & Advocacy Award from California Special Districts Association
- 2013 - Certificate of Recognition for Public Outreach & Advocacy from Assemblyman Jim Frazier
- 2013 - Letter of Recognition for Public Outreach & Advocacy from Assemblywoman Susan Bonilla
- 2013 - Letter of Recognition for Public Outreach & Advocacy from Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO)
- 2014 - Innovative Program of the Year Award from California Special Districts Association
- 2015 - Exceptional Public Outreach & Advocacy award for small districts

ILSP PILLAR- EDUCATION

It is well documented that foster youth are under-educated, lack basic educational skills and often drop out of high school. ILSP supports and encourages foster youth to stay in school through curriculum that motivates youth to strive towards graduation, pursue a higher education and embrace learning as a lifelong process. Our collaboration with the County Office of Education and Mt. Diablo Foster Youth Services allows us to partner in order to get resources and support to youth in need. This past year, one hundred and seven participants graduated from high school and eleven graduated from college. All of the graduates were honored at the 29th Annual ILSP Recognition Event where fifty-three scholarships totaling over seventy thousand dollars, were awarded.

ILSP provides the following trainings and events to foster youth with a concentration on Senior Youth, to better prepare them for post-secondary education:

- Scholarship Workshop
- Financial Aid Workshop
- Preparing Personal Statements

- Navigating the Community College System
- College Campus Tours
- Understanding the FAFSA, Chafee Grant and Board of Governor's Fee Waiver
- Senior Night Workshop
- College Luncheon
- Understanding the UC and the CSU system

ILSP has established specialized relationships and collaborations with the following agencies and colleges to provide a seamless transition upon emancipation from foster care:

- **Los Medanos Community College:**
A "Student Connection Team" was developed to provide youth with a direct contact person within each department on campus, giving them a person to connect with while navigating the community college system. ILSP East County Life Skills trainings are held on campus once per week, exposing youth to the college environment. Tours and information about the various programs and areas of study at Los Medanos Community College are included as a part of the Life Skills Curriculum. Presentations from departments are held as often as possible.
- **Job Corps – Treasure Island:**
ILSP continues to maintain a relationship with Job Corps, one of the largest career technical training and education programs in the nation for students ages 16 through 24. Job Corps provides hands on training in careers such as the Culinary Arts, Construction, Healthcare, Security and Protective Services. Housing, meals and basic medical care are afforded to our youth through the course of the program. ILSP is offered site visits for youth who are interested in enrolling at Job Corps and priority opportunities have also been made available to ILSP youth. Under AB12, this is an approved Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP) for our young adults.
- **Sierra College:**
The Sierra College provides foster youth various programs, inclusive of an on-campus housing option. Programs such as the TRiO program, Umoja, Puente, First Year Experience, EOPS and CARE have proven to benefit ILSP youth. Our continued relationship has nurtured a priority enrollment and registration into these programs. Several times per year, ILSP takes appropriate youth to the campus for tours, assessments and introductions of the services available to them. College Counselors are on site during these presentations and financial relationships are in place to assist our youth with securing housing/dorm deposits should they choose to attend Sierra College. Under AB12, this is also an approved Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP) for our youth.

ILSP has developed relationships with the following agencies and organizations to better serve our foster youth and to support programs and events:

- **The Assistance League of Diablo Valley:**
ILSP has collaborated with the Assistance League of Diablo Valley to develop a Senior Sponsorship Program as well as various scholarships for our youth.
The Senior Sponsorship Program is designed to financially assist graduating seniors with the expenses for typical events during their Senior Year in High School. The program funds such things as senior pictures, yearbooks, prom tickets, cap/gown expenses, graduation announcements, as well as laptop/tablet purchases. This past year, 25 ILSP participants were sponsored \$400.00 each totaling \$10,000.00. In addition, the Assistance League provides each emancipating youth with an “On Your Way” Duffle bag filled with various household products and basic necessities to assist them as they progress into adulthood.
- **Volunteer Emergency Services Team In Action, Inc. (VESTIA):**
VESTIA has served as a fiduciary agent for ILSP donations. In addition, this past year, the VESTIA Board sponsored a part of the expenses for the 29th Annual Recognition Event held to honor graduating seniors. The VESTIA scholarship committee awarded eleven (11) scholarships totaling \$11,000.00 that evening. We receive items for our onsite Food Pantry, donated clothing for our onsite clothes closet and school supplies for our youth as often as needed.
- **The Orinda Woman’s Club:**
The Orinda Woman’s Club has provided scholarships annually to our graduating seniors. This past year, 8 youth benefited from a total of \$8,000.00 in scholarships towards their college education.
- **Honorable Judge Lois Haight Foster Youth Foundation:**
In 2001, Honorable Judge Lois Haight established a foundation specifically to serve our population of youth and has since provided hundreds of scholarships to our youth in excess of \$440,000.00. This past June, she presented twenty (25) scholarships totaling \$25,000.00 to seniors of the class of 2017.
- **The Wilhelmina Johnson ILSP Youth Award:**
Wilhelmina Johnson was an avid youth advocate, social worker and program analyst who dedicated 24 years to Contra Costa County youth and was instrumental in the establishment of Contra Costa County’s Independent Living Skills Program. She believed that every youth deserved a chance regardless of their background. ILSP honors youth who have demonstrated the ability to overcome significant barriers and achieved personal growth with this scholarship each year.
- **Foster A Dream:**
ILSP collaborates with Foster A Dream to host the annual Holiday Network Event as part of the Well-Being Pillar. In addition, Foster a Dream has provided our youth with

backpacks containing school supplies during our Fall Retreat Kick-off Event. Foster A Dream also provides scholarships to graduating seniors each year.

- **Free Senior Portraits by Suzy Todd Photography:**
Suzy Todd approached ILSP and offered her professional services to ILSP seniors. She wanted to give back and does so by providing seniors with free senior portrait packages valued at \$300 each.
- **The Secret Elves:**
During the Holiday season, ILSP hosts a Holiday Social event for our youth to provide them with donated gifts from the Secret Elves. The Secret Elves have provided gifts that teens are able to enjoy during the holiday season. This past year, The Secret Elves provided each youth a ukulele and lessons on how to play one. In addition, youth were given gift cards to purchase a personal item of their choice.
- **Friends of ILSP:**
“Friends of ILSP” is an informal group of ten members of the Philanthropic and Educational Organization that will provide scholarships and financial assistance to ILSP graduates. This organization is providing scholarship monies to upcoming or former graduates of the Independent Living Skills Program that wish to or are pursuing higher education or certification from a trade school. Applications are accepted throughout the school year and contact by this organization is ongoing. They provide birthday and holiday cards and frequent contact throughout the year to let our young adults know that they are cared for.

ILSP WELL-BEING

Youth in foster care often do not experience childhood in the way most children who live with their families of origin do. 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, but not necessarily extra-curricular activities such as 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 resource 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 a variety of excursions such as outings to baseball and football games, field trips to beaches, bike riding, ski trips and water rafting, foster youth are able to experience fun activities that a typical teenager might, but are also mentored in developing positive social skills and are further engaged in the ILS program. The State of California Department of Social Services has emphasized the importance of supporting the well-being of foster care and ILSP is the perfect mechanism to provide this intervention. The ILSP staff is trained in an approach

called Positive Youth Development. This approach enables them to engage youth and motivate them to strive to improve their lives and grow into happy and healthy adults.

ILSP - AFTERCARE

Each year, 100-150 foster youth are eligible to age out of foster care at age 18 or 19 years old. If they choose to emancipate out of foster care, then at that point, they are on their own to support themselves. Some foster youth are fortunate to remain with their resource parents or relatives; other youth are able to participate in a Transitional Housing Program, but most of them will struggle once they leave the system. The funds provide supportive services to emancipated foster youth up to age 21 years old. The needs of emancipated youth are severe. They often call in crisis, homeless and in need of basic necessities such as transportation, food and shelter. The Aftercare program provides emancipated foster youth as well as Non Minor Dependent young adults living under AB12 regulations supportive housing, employment, educational, and crisis services.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

ILSP promotes the development of leadership in foster youth. Whenever possible, emancipated foster youth are invited to share their experiences with ILSP youth and to facilitate workshops or trainings. In addition, ILSP promotes participation and support of the Contra Costa County California Youth Connection (CYC) chapter. CYC is a statewide advocacy organization specifically geared towards developing leadership in and advocacy skills to engage foster youth with policy makers to improve the foster care system. CYC is mainly responsible for all of the positive legislative changes impacting the child welfare system. Additionally, each year ILSP prepares foster youth to participate in a leadership group called the Speaker's Bureau. These youth are trained in public speaking and work with ILSP to speak to community groups, advocate for legislation at the State Capitol and be the Youth voice in the child welfare system. This past year, our local chapter of CYC received the Local Issue Award for bringing healthy eating awareness to our local group homes and for hosting the Iron Chef Challenge, which paired our participants with care providers who together, prepared a nutritious meal.

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 this task is difficult for this population. Rates of homelessness for emancipated foster youth have 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 time in the foster care system.

ILS programs have been implemented by Child Welfare programs in order to help prevent these negative outcomes. The Contra Costa County CFS ILSP has upwards of 800 eligible youth each year and endeavors to provide resources in collaboration with the foster care system. Much of the work of the ILSP Coordinators and staff is spent cultivating collaborative partnerships with community based organizations and other foster youth serving groups. Their expertise in engaging youth and motivating them to stay in school, graduate, and obtain life sustaining employment is critical. This work was acknowledged by the 2014-2015 Contra Costa County Grand Jury, in report 1509, entitled, "The Benefits of the California Connections to Success Act in Contra Costa County." With the Board's continuing support and commitment to the ILS program, foster youth will continue to benefit from quality skill building workshops, events and one on one support. They will continue to acquire better social skill development and improve transitions into adulthood.