



**EMPLOYMENT AND HUMAN SERVICES
CONTRA COSTA COUNTY**

TO: Family and Human Services' Committee Members **DATE:** July 29, 2019
David Twa, Contra Costa County Administrator

FR: Kathy Gallagher, Director, Employment and Human Services Department
Kathy Marsh, 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. Contra Costa County CFS ILSP designed a service model that includes both group services, events and one on one support. This model has been replicated in other counties throughout California.

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. It is a voluntary program and youth must meet the criteria to qualify.

The Continuum of Care Reform draws together a series of existing and new reforms to our child welfare services program designed out of an understanding that children who must live apart from their biological parents do best when they are cared for in committed nurturing family homes. Assembly Bill 403 provides



the statutory and policy framework to ensure services and supports provided to the child or youth and his or her family are tailored toward the ultimate goal of maintaining a stable permanent family.

PROGRESS TO DATE:

For the past thirty-one 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. 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.”

ILSP is funded by the federal Title IV-E and state dollars. Contra Costa County ILSP has received many awards and accolades.

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.

This past fiscal year, six hundred and forty-two (642) individual current and former foster youth were served both individually and in-group settings (i.e. workshops, classes, etc.) One hundred sixty-four (164) of these youth are Non-Minor Dependents. The 642 individual youth served is out of 769 individual youth eligible to participate in ILSP that reside in Contra Costa County.

ILSP PILLAR - HOUSING

Transitional housing for foster youth and emancipated young adults continues to be delivered in Contra Costa County. Two providers contract for the Transitional Housing Placement Program (THPP); serving youth ages 16-18. Five providers contract for the Transitional Housing Program Plus Foster Care (THP+ FC) under AB 12. Contra Costa County also has thirty-three THP+ slots available countywide. Three providers serve emancipated youth, aged 18-24. THP+ provides 24 months of supported housing for youth ages 18-24 who have emancipated from the foster care system at ages 18-21. Housing continues to be a significant challenge for young adults as they emancipate.

ILSP PILLAR- EMPLOYMENT

ILSP has been collaborating with the Workforce Development Board of Contra Costa County to provide employment assistance and training to eligible foster youth via the Workforce Innovative and Opportunities Act (WIOA). We work with the organizations that hold the WIOA contracts. Twenty percent (20%) of the caseloads for these providers have to include the foster care population.



ILSP PILLAR- EDUCATION

ILSP supports and encourages foster youth to stay in school through curriculum that motivates youth to strive towards graduation, pursue a higher education either through college, vocational education or apprenticeships and embrace learning as a lifelong process. This past year, 107 participants graduated from high school and 11 graduated from college. All of the graduates were honored at the 31th Annual ILSP Recognition Event where fifty-three scholarships totaling over seventy thousand dollars, were awarded. ILSP supports the case carrying social workers to identify life-long connections for those youth participating in ILSP.

ILSP provides the extra workshops that provide assistance to youth in their senior year of high school to assist them with fulfilling their goals they have for themselves after graduation.

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, Job Corps – Treasure Island, Sierra College

ILSP has developed relationships with the following agencies and organizations to serve our foster youth and to support programs and events. The Assistance League of Diablo Valley, Volunteer Emergency Services Team In Action, Inc. (VESTIA), The Orinda Woman’s Club, Honorable Judge Lois Haight Foster Youth Foundation, Volunteers of America Foster A Dream, Suzy Todd Photography, and Friends of ILSP, to name a few.

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. ILSP provides activities and supportive services to help encourage positive social development and exposure to typical child hood activities. Through a variety of excursions such as outings, 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 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 system at age 18 or 19 years old. They have an option to emancipate out of foster care or to remain in under AB 12. ILSP continues to support these youth during and after they make their decision. In addition, VESTIA funds provide supportive services to emancipated foster youth in need or crisis.

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SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

Youth who emancipate from foster care are expected to become self-sufficient upon emancipation. 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.

The Contra Costa County CFS ILSP has upwards of 769 eligible youth each year. This past fiscal year ILSP held eighty-five (85) workshops/events that an average of sixty-four (64) individual youth attended. Six hundred and forty-two (642) individual youth received services this past fiscal year. 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. The ILSP staff has a unique ability to connect with and engage the youth that are participating and this serves them well when discussing lifelong connections and plans for post foster care. In this era of Community Care reform, ILSP will continue to support the case carrying social workers and youth to identify lifelong connections post foster care.