

Independent Living Skills Program
Children & Family Services Bureau



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Report to Family and Human Services Committee

Kathy Gallagher

Employment and Human Services Director

Family and Human Services Committee Report

Independent Living Skills Program

RECOMMENDATION:

Accept this report from the Employment and Human Services Department; and continue to support the Children and Family Services Bureau's efforts to serve transitional age foster youth through the Children and Family Services' Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP).

BACKGROUND OF ILSP SERVICES AND SERVICES FOR TRANSITION AGE YOUTH:

The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 permanently authorized funding for Independent Living Programs nationwide. The Contra Costa County Children and Family Services' Independent Living Skills Program sent a youth participant to the White House to give a speech during the bill signing ceremony of the John Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-169). In California, every county provides ILP services and County Child Welfare Departments have the flexibility to design services to meet the needs of current and former foster youth under their jurisdiction.

In September 2010, the California Governor signed into law Assembly Bill (AB) 12, the California Fostering Connections to Success Act. AB 12 is a voluntary program that provides extended foster care services and supports for youth ages 18 to 21. Youth must meet specific criteria to qualify for AB 12 services, such as being employed 80 hours per month, attending vocational training, or a combination of employment and skills development training. AB 12 supports transitional aged youth and provides an opportunity to strengthen their employability and develop life skills to support successful independent living.

Subsequently, AB 403, The Continuum of Care Reform was signed into law in 2015. AB 403 provides the statutory and policy framework to ensure services and supports provided to each child or youth and family are tailored toward the ultimate goal of maintaining a stable permanent family. The tenets of CCR align with ILSP service delivery and ILSP staff support the intended outcomes of CCR by participating in the Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTs) and following up with support needs identified during the CFT. This past fiscal year, ILSP staff participated in total of 155 Child and Family Team Meetings.

OVERVIEW OF CONTRA COSTA COUNTY ILSP:

Since 1988, the Contra Costa County Children and Family Services Bureau of the Employment and Human Services Department has provided services through the Independent Living Skills Program. Contra Costa County's ILSP educates and supports youth in a wide variety of areas designed to facilitate a successful transition to adulthood. Contra Costa County's ILSP takes pride in serving as a role model to other counties throughout California and has received many awards and accolades for their program development and services delivered.

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With the Continuum of Care Reform in mind, ILSP staff, during our participation in Child and Family Team meetings, provide support and services to eligible youth in four core areas that we refer to as the Four Pillars. The Four Pillars consist of Education, Employment, Housing, and Overall Well-Being.

ILSP PILLAR- HOUSING:

Contra Costa County contracts services for Transitional Housing Programs (THP) for current and emancipated foster youth. There are two types of THP housing programs, Transitional Housing Program for Non-dependent Minors (THPNMD), which serves 18-21 year olds participating in the AB12 program, and Transitional Housing Program Plus (THP+), which is available to young adults from age 21 up to their 24th birthday. The ILSP staff collaborate with transitional housing providers to ensure essential services and supports are available and readily accessible to the young adults being served. Quarterly meetings are held to address specific needs and identify permanency plans post-emancipation. Housing continues to be a significant challenge for young adults as they exit foster care and THP+ housing is a key component to the prevention of homelessness and preparation for a successful transition into adulthood. Contra Costa County has contracts to provide extended supportive services and housing units for thirty-one former foster youth. However, even with the extended services many former foster youth remain at risk of homelessness. The cost of housing is high, particularly in the Bay Area, and many of our youth who have aged out of extended foster care would benefit from an extended transitional housing program.

ILSP PILLAR- EMPLOYMENT:

ILSP has been collaborating with the Contra Costa County Office of Education (OOE), 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 WIOA contracts and refer youth to these employment programs for job readiness assessment, training, and support. Twenty percent (20%) of the caseloads for these providers have to include the foster care population. This past fiscal year in conjunction with the Office of Education ILSP was able to enroll 12 into the WIOA program.

For several years ILSP has been engaged in a community collaboration program under The John Muir Land Trust and has assisted with the development of *The Family Harvest Farm Project*. This was created as a job readiness program specifically to support current and former foster youth ages 18-24 in gaining work experience and developing employable skills. The John Muir Land Trust also donated funds to assist foster youth who may need to purchase appropriate clothing, such as work shoes and gloves. After countless planning sessions, *The Family Harvest Farm Project* broke ground this past summer, and four foster youth are currently working as

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apprentices on the farm. In addition to gaining valuable work experience, the program has provided youth the opportunity to further their knowledge about the environment and has expanded their networking community.

ILSP PILLAR- EDUCATION:

ILSP supports and encourages youth to stay in school through curriculum that motivates youth to strive towards graduation, pursue a higher education through either college, vocational education or apprenticeships and embrace learning as a lifelong process. This past year 86 participants graduated from high school and eleven graduated from college. Although, due to COVID-19, ILSP was unable to host what would have been Contra Costa County's 32nd Annual ILSP Recognition event this year, we were still able to celebrate. The honorable Judge Haight hosted a small gathering at Vic Stewart's restaurant to celebrate the educational achievements of our youth. Eleven ILSP participants were awarded Lois Haight Foundation for Foster Children scholarships totaling twenty-two thousand dollars. The total amount of scholarships and financial supports this year exceeded sixty thousand dollars.

The Assistance League of Diablo Valley awards 22 scholarships each year to help seniors with added high school expenses, such as prom tickets, clothing, graduation photos, and other expenses that occur. In addition, ILSP provides extra workshops that provide assistance to youth in their senior year of high school to assist them with fulfilling their goals after graduation. ILSP collaborates with the community colleges within Contra Costa County and Sierra Community College in Sacramento County. In addition to collaboration with the community colleges, ILSP also partners with agencies such as Year Up and Job Corps of Treasure Island.

ILSP PILLAR- WELL-BEING:

ILSP provides a variety of activities and workshops to support positive social development and broaden personal interests as well as promote healthy relationships within the community. ILSP promotes and emphasizes the importance of self-care through its wellness curriculum, some of which has recently been made available online and readily available to the youth and those providing direct services to this population. One of the workshops being offered this year is an expression arts series, Art, Recreation and Movement (ARM) which demonstrates and supports the use of art as a tool for self-expression and self-care. The ILSP unit provides supportive services to our youth, case carrying social workers, and caregivers with the goal of identifying and developing life-long connections and supporting youth in building healthy relationships.

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COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS/ COVID-19 RESPONSE:

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, ILSP has received tremendous support from the community agencies and partnerships they have developed over the years. An outpouring of support allowed us to assist youth financially with food and clothing during the pandemic. Once Shelter-in-Place went into effect, some youth became unemployed and have needed help with basic essentials. Since March 2020, ILSP has reached out to the community and received donations totaling \$25,000, that provide emergency financial support and Target Gift cards to help meet the essential needs of youth who lost their jobs and were struggling to make ends meet.

Our partner agencies and organizations continue to demonstrate their desire to help our youth develop lifelong connections and have helped not only with tangible items, but with the financial costs of doing this work. The Woman's League of Diablo Valley, The Orinda Woman's Club, Lois Haight Foundation for Foster Children, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), iFoster, Philanthropic Ventures, ARM of Care (Arts, Recreation and Movement therapeutic arts program), YFIA (Youth Financial Institute of America), Friends of ILSP, The Methodist Church of Walnut Creek, 1Closet, California Youth Connection, the Spark Initiative (a program of VOICES) and Family Harvest Farm Project are some of the organizations that ILSP works with who help support the foster youth in our county.

CONCLUSION:

Youth exiting from foster care are expected to be self-sufficient. Self-sufficiency entails the ability to maintain stable housing, maintain employment, and maintain one's physical and mental health. Research on the outcomes of emancipated foster youth indicates that this is a difficult task for these youth and ILSP workers to support these youth to become self-sufficient.

The Contra Costa County CFS ILSP has identified 700 youth who were eligible to ILSP services this past fiscal year. Of those, 584 youth engaged with one or more ILSP services during the year. ILSP held 85 workshops/events which served over 70 individual youth.

ILSP staff have expertise in engaging youth and motivating them to stay in school, graduate, and obtain life-sustaining employment. The ILSP staff has a unique ability to connect with and engage the youth and this serves them well when discussing lifelong connections and plans for their lives after leaving the system. ILSP Coordinators and staff cultivate collaborative partnerships with community-based organizations and other foster youth serving groups to grow each youth's connections with their community and get their various needs met. ILSP works in accordance with Continuum of Care Reform to try to improve outcomes for our youth.

With all of the challenges currently facing our society, foster youth often face exponentially more. ILSP offers crucial support so these emerging adults can face those challenges with perseverance, community support and resources, and self-care habits that will set them on a path to self-sufficiency and serve them throughout their lives.