



MEMORANDUM

Kathy Gallagher, Director

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To: Family and Human Services' Committee Members Date: June 28, 2021
Monica Nino, County Administrator

From: Kathy Gallagher, Director, Employment and Human Services Department
Kathy Marsh, Director, Children and Family Services

Subject: Youth Services Report - 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'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

In 1999, the Federal government passed the Foster Care Independence Act. This legislation, sponsored by the late Senator John Chaffee, doubled funding for statewide Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP). 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.

For the past thirty-three years the Children and Family Services Bureau of the Employment and Human Services Department has provided services through the Independent Living Skill Program (ILSP). ILSP serves youth between the ages of 15.5 to 21. The ILSP has received recognition throughout the State of California and nation for its service and service delivery model.

An ILSP Coordinator, Assistant Coordinator and three ILSP Specialists staff the program. ILSP is funded by the federal Title IV-E dollars with a 20% State match towards administrative costs and realignment funds.

PROGRESS TO DATE

During the pandemic, ILSP offered skill building and youth engagement activities, virtually, all covering four core areas, called the Four Pillars. The Four Pillars consist of Education, Employment/Vocational, Housing and Well Being. ILSP collaborated with partnerships established over the years to create and deliver a series of virtual workshops that met weekly.

This year, 415 foster youth have been served both individually and in group settings (i.e. Zoom workshops/classes/activities.) Six hundred and twenty seven (627) youth were deemed eligible for ILSP services. We relied on our donor community during the pandemic. Upwards of \$18,500.00 in donations were raised from the general community during the pandemic. This funding offered scholarships, gift cards, and emergency funding via VESTIA, Inc. to assist ILSP participants.

ILSP PILLAR – 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. Five providers served non-minor dependent youth, aged 18-21, transitional housing called THP+NMD. This past year, five (5) foster youth were served in THPP and one hundred twenty six (126) youth were served in THP+NMD. Housing continues to be a significant challenge for foster youth as they transition to adulthood. The Housing Continuum has improved communication between CFS ILSP and the housing providers.

Efforts continue to be developed creating housing options in the community (i.e. room for rent) through collaborations with community-based organizations and faith based organizations and individual citizens with resources to offer. The long-term goal in this area is to develop more permanent housing options for youth. For example, discussions continue with Health, Housing & Homeless Services (H3) to refer youth to permanent housing options. Additionally, the contracted providers work diligently to develop more permanent housing options and advocate for improved housing options for foster youth (See Table 1)

ILSP PILLAR- EMPLOYMENT

ILSP collaborates with the Office of Education to refer youth to their WIOA case manager. The Workforce Innovative Opportunities Act (WIOA) helps provide employment services to the ILSP participants enrolled in their program. This past year, ILSP provided employment workshops entitled, Employment Etiquette and How to get a Job during the Pandemic, through our partnership with Travis Credit Union and the Youth Finance Institute of America. In June of 2020, Family Harvest Farm opened, employing twelve (12) of our youth in paid internship positions. (See Table 1)

<https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2021/01/08/east-bay-family-harvest-farm-helps-foster-youths-find-purpose-community/>

ILSP PILLAR- EDUCATION

This current fiscal year, through our collaboration with the Contra Costa County Office of Education, eighty-two (82) youth have been identified to be eligible to graduate from high school this school year. All of the CCC graduates will be honored with the ILSP High School graduation stipend. ILSP continues to collaborate with the Assistance League of Diablo Valley to administer the Senior Sponsorship Program. 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 events that are difficult for caregivers to afford. The Senior Sponsorship program funds such things as senior pictures, yearbooks, and caps and gowns. Thousands of dollars continue to be raised via VESTIA and service organizations to provide scholarship opportunities for our youth each year. In collaboration with the Community Colleges, we host workshops to inform our youth of the supportive services on each community college campus to create a successful college transition. Supporting our foster youth to stay in school through such programs helps assist youth strive to achieve graduation. (See Table 1)

ILSP PILLAR 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 experience moving from placement to placement. The foster care system provides basic needs. Youth in foster care may miss participating in sports, arts, spending the night at friend's homes, and the like. ILSP provides activities and supportive services to help encourage positive social development and exposure to activities. This year provided an opportunity to explore therapy through art; participants were able to experience art activities virtually. The State of California Department of Social Services has emphasized the importance of supporting the well-being of foster care and ILSP is an available mechanism to provide this intervention. The ILSP staff are trained in an approach called Positive Youth Development. This approach enables them to engage youth and motivate them to strive to improve their lives. (See Table 2 and 4)

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

Youth who emancipate from foster care are expected to become self-sufficient by 21 years of age. 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.

Child Welfare programs have implemented ILS programs in order to help prevent these negative outcomes. The Contra Costa County ILSP serves upwards of 500 youth each year. Despite a reduction in staff and funding over the past several years, ILSP continues to strive to improve the lives of at risk foster youth. Much of the work of the ILSP staff is to cultivate collaborative partnerships with community-based organizations and other foster youth serving groups. ILSP Staff have expertise in engaging youth and motivating them to stay in school, graduate, and get life sustaining employment. These services are critical right now. With the Board's continuing support and commitment to the ILSP,

foster youth will continue to be provided quality skill building workshops, social skill development, financial support and improved transitions into adulthood.

Table 1 - Workshops Pillars: Housing, Employment, Education

| Number of Times Workshop/Activity Offered | Workshop/Activity Name | Number of Youth Served |
|--|--|-------------------------------|
| Online (on-going) | Study Less, Study Smart | 13 |
| Online (on-going) | 50/30/20 Rule for Budgeting | 12 |
| Online (on-going) | 7 Money Mistakes that are easy to make | 15 |
| Online (on-going) | How to take Notes | 11 |
| 4 | Employment | 45 |
| 1 | Employment Interviewing | 16 |
| 2 | Foster Youth College Programs | 23 |
| 2 | Senior Scholarship Workshop | 23 |
| 3 | Senior Financial Aid/Chafee Workshop | 16 |
| 9 | Money Management | 123 |
| 1 | Vocational/Technical Training | 14 |
| Ongoing | Transitional Housing NMD | 126 |
| Ongoing | THPP/THP Plus Housing Services | 5 |

Table 2 - Workshop Pillar: Well-Being

| Number of Times Workshop/Activity Offered | Workshop/Activity Name | Number of Youth Served |
|--|--|-------------------------------|
| Online (on-going) | Anger Management | 8 |
| Online (on-going) | How to be more Disciplined | 3 |
| Online (on-going) | 3 ways to get to out of an unmotivated rut | 9 |
| 1 | Wellness/ | 8 |
| 12 | Interpersonal Skill Development | 91 |
| 3 | Using Social Media for Positive Change | 24 |
| 6 | Onward & Upward | 11 |
| 6 | Art Expression | 39 |
| 1 | Sexual Health/Healthy Relationships | 17 |

Table 3 - Leadership Development/California Youth Connection Activities

| Meetings and Events | Number of Youth Who Attended |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 2 CYC Meetings held | 13 Youths per meeting |
| CYC Day at the Capital | 4 |
| City of Richmond Foster Youth Focus Group | 12 youth |

Table 4 - Positive Youth Development Activities

| Activity | Number of Youth Who Attended |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Virtual Network Event | 110 |
| Family Harvest Apprenticeship | 12 |
| FHF-Entrepreneurship Event | 2 |