

County of Santa Clara
Social Services Agency
Department of Family and Children's Services



CSFC SSA06 051006

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DATE: May 10, 2006

TO: Supervisor James T. Beall, Jr., Chairperson
Supervisor Don Gage, Vice-Chairperson
Children, Seniors & Families Committee

FROM: 
Will Lightbourne
Agency Director, Social Services Agency

SUBJECT: Foster Youth Initiative Recommendations

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Accept Foster Youth Initiative recommendations.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no fiscal implications associated with the recommended action.

CONTRACT HISTORY

Not Applicable.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

The Children, Seniors and Families Committee requested recommendations for the Foster Youth Initiative.

BACKGROUND

The Social Service Agency's Department of Family and Childrens' Services is working with two simultaneous processes to lead to enhancements and improvements in programs to assist foster youth transition successfully to independent living. The two processes are the Foster Youth Employment Task Force (FYETF), convened by Supervisor Beall and Deputy County Executive Nathan, and the California Connected by 25 Initiative (CC25) that Santa Clara and seven other California counties are participating in. The FYETF is developing overall guiding principles that will be used to establish broad goals for the effort, while the CC25 process involves multiple workgroups of subject matter experts and stakeholders that are developing specific multi-year action steps that will begin implementation in Fiscal Year 2008. The FYETF guiding principles are anticipated to be completed by the end of May, at which point the Agency will integrate them with the emerging CC25 action steps described below, and return to the Committee in August with a detailed implementation plan.

One action step that has already been identified as consistent in both the FYETF and CC25 deliberations is the need for a dedicated employment support unit within DFCS, and as a consequence the Agency is working with the Employment Services Agency (ESA) to reclassify three vacant social work positions as employment positions.

The following, for the Committee's information, are the tentative first year actions identified by the CC25 workgroups:

1. Continuum of Care Housing Workgroup

Recommended Actions:

- a. Submit application for Transitional Housing Program-Plus (THP+) in Santa Clara County.

- b. Establish linkages to the Foster Youth Housing Initiative providers for 20 youth.
- c. Develop housing needs assessment for 17 year old foster youths.

2. Training and Employment Workgroup

Recommended Actions:

- a. Establish a Career Pathways Project with Mission Community and San Jose City Community Colleges to serve 40 youth.
- b. Increase foster youth involved in One-Stop Centers and the DFCS Work Experience program.
- c. Develop outreach strategies for emancipated foster youth.
- d. Develop a single training and employment assessment tool for foster youth that would be consistently administered by SVWIN and a pre-assessment screening process to identify youth with different training or employment needs.
- e. Establish an Employment Counseling Unit within DFCS.

3. Financial Literacy Workgroup

Recommended Actions:

- a. Develop a youth mentor program.
- b. Develop a financial literacy curriculum.
- c. Develop an Individual Development Account (IDA) program and create 30 accounts for younger foster youth.
- d. Establish partnerships with banks, former and existing foster youth, and community boards.
- e. Identify "door opener" opportunities for youth (e.g., discounts, preferred access to services, etc.).
- f. Conduct survey to identify foster youths' needs in regards to financial literacy.
- g. Request Board of Supervisor approval to allocate \$30,000 (\$10,000 a year for 3 years) to match the grant previously approved by the Walter S. Johnson Foundation in the amount of \$30,000 (\$10,000 a year for 3 years) for Foster Youth Savings Accounts.

4. K-12 Education Workgroup

Recommended Actions:

- a. Develop partnerships with the Eastside Union High School District to assist 30 foster youth in a pilot program to improve math and reading skills.
- b. Develop educational rights training.
- c. Develop, test and implement educational needs assessments for foster youth ages 14–24 years old.
- d. Develop a literacy and math skills plan for foster youth ages 14–24 years old.
- e. Partner with School Linked Services to maximize services to foster youth in certain schools.
- f. Implement DFCS policies and procedures to improve CWS/CMS educational data for foster youth.
- g. Request standing court orders and develop Memoranda of Understanding to address confidentiality issues and to facilitate communication about students between schools and DFCS.
- h. Develop policies and procedures to facilitate the timely transfer of students' records when foster youth move and a student transfer notification system to ensure prompt enrollment of foster children and youth.

5. Resource Utilization and Development Workgroup

Recommended Actions:

- a. Develop an Early Independent Life Skills Education and Outreach Program for existing foster youth ages 14–15 years old.
- b. Strengthen integration of services and communication among present Independent Living Program service providers, youths' social workers and caregivers.
- c. Develop education and training for caregivers of existing foster youth ages 14–18 years old.
- d. Examine and modify as necessary the content of the current Independent Living Program curriculum and activities to ensure that the program supports relevant skills for all existing foster youth ages 16 to 18 years old.
- e. Assess all foster youths' needs ages 14–18 years old to ensure the availability of critical support services to enable youth to maximize their participation in educational, employment and housing opportunities (e.g., counseling, childcare, and legal services).

6. Joint Decision–Making Workgroup

Recommended Action:

- a. Require an Emancipation Conference Plan to ensure that all foster youth have periodic conferences beginning as young as age 14 to help the youth successfully acquire life skills required for productive adulthood, including accomplishing educational and career objectives, within the context of a stable living environment and necessary supportive services.

7. Family Finding Workgroup

Recommended Actions:

- a. Identify best practices to ensure permanency for youth.
- b. Link foster youth ages 14–18 years old with caring committed adults.
- c. Develop permanency and resiliency training for DFCS staff and other CC25 partners.

8. DFCS Initiatives Data

Recommended Action(s):

- a. Maximize use of the current data system CWS/CMS to track data concerning education, employment and housing for all foster youth ages 14–18 years old.
- b. Implement new data system to be used by the five participating CC25 counties to enter more comprehensive data concerning education, employment and housing on emancipated foster youth up to age 25.

CONSEQUENCES OF NEGATIVE ACTION

The Children, Seniors and Families Committee would not accept recommendations for the Foster Youth Initiative.

STEPS FOLLOWING APPROVAL

The Clerk of the Baird will follow the usual procedures for a report of this type.