

***California Child Welfare Council***  
***Child Development and Successful Youth Transitions Committee***  
**Foster Youth Employment**  
**Best Practices for Priority Hiring at the County & State Levels**

**Background**

The transition from adolescence to adulthood can be difficult and intimidating. Current and former foster youth are at a significant disadvantage, especially those without the proper support or guidance who must navigate multiple systems during and after care. Studies of former foster youth who age out of care find that youth may experience high unemployment, unstable employment patterns, and earn very low incomes in the period between ages 18 and 21.<sup>i</sup> Early connection with a caring adult and gainful employment is key and provides lasting benefits. With employment comes independence, self-worth, and confidence in their economic future.

Findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CalYOUTH) shine a light on the employment crisis for current and former foster youth. CalYOUTH is an evaluation of the impact of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act on outcomes during the transition to adulthood for foster youth. The CalYOUTH study demonstrates that older youth in foster care and those who have recently aged out of care face poor employment outcomes in terms of rates of employment as well as earnings. Older and former foster youth have an extremely challenging time earning wages that raise them above the poverty line. In addition to lower earnings, older and former foster care youth are less likely to be employed than their peers in the general population.<sup>ii</sup> Nationally, close to 30,000 foster youth will age out of care every year and have to be self-sufficient at age 18, 19, 20 or 21. Within four years of emancipation 50% of former foster youth will be unemployed or homeless.<sup>iii</sup>

The California Child Welfare Council Child Development and Successful Youth Transitions Committee has been focusing on the employment crisis for foster youth and has compiled a set of recommendations around best practices at the county and state level. Counties across California can increase access to workforce development and employment opportunities for current and former foster youth by hiring eligible, current or former foster youth into open entry-level jobs that are already available. Various state and local agencies across the country have successfully implemented policies to prioritize employing foster youth; the state of Texas and many counties within California including Santa Clara, Los Angeles, and others.

Other practices such as internships have increased employment amongst this population. Within the private sector, the iFoster jobs program works directly with current and former foster youth to seek and maintain meaningful employment, in addition to working directly with employers to provide a pipeline of potential hires.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Develop programs that offer internship, part or full-time employment for current and former foster youth, using current models as a guide.**

A statewide survey to county child welfare directors was conducted regarding priority employment for foster youth. Eight counties responded to the survey and indicated they provide programs that offer internship, part or full-time employment for current or former foster youth that could serve as a model for new programs. The existing programs fall into three main categories:

- a. Short Term Paid Internships (Los Angeles)  
These short-term (i.e. 120 hour, 300 hour) internships offer current and former foster youth the opportunity for paid work experience in county departments, non-profit, public and private companies. While positions are typically for summer employment, these work experience internships can exist throughout the year and are paid for by county child welfare, department of education, individual disability education act funding, workforce investment boards, or other youth serving programming. Interns are hired after an interview and may be provided a job coach or additional training during the program to develop the core competencies they need to succeed in the workplace. County departments participate voluntarily in the program, and there is not a dedicated path to permanent county employment at the end of the internship. Youth who wish to apply for permanent county positions must go through the normal competitive hiring process and meet those eligibility criteria. This type of internship is generally open to youth ages 16 and up.
- b. Longer Term Paid Internships (San Diego, San Mateo, Los Angeles)  
These internships offer current and former foster youth the opportunity to work in an entry-level position in a county department for 6-18 months. Positions may be part or full-time. Interns are hired after an interview and may be provided a job coach or additional training during the program to learn professional and interpersonal skills. County departments participate voluntarily in the program, and there is not a dedicated path to permanent county employment at the end of the internship. Youth who wish to apply for permanent county positions must go through the normal competitive hiring process. This type of internship would be open to youth ages 18 and up who have already completed high school or equivalent.
- c. Pathway to permanent, full-time employment (Santa Clara, Los Angeles)  
This type of program offers current and former foster youth a pathway to permanent, full-time employment in a number of county departments. Youth are hired into the  
  
program after an interview for an entry-level position in a county department.

Once hired through the program, youth are eligible to apply to a permanent county position by successfully passing an employment examination within a set period of time (3 months in Santa Clara and 24 months in Los Angeles). In Santa Clara, participating youth are hired as permanent employees as long as they pass their employment exam. In Los Angeles, participating youth must go through the competitive examination process (which includes a ranking of exam scores), but they compete only against other participating youth, not the general public.

Both programs offer supportive services to youth as they apply for the program, and Los Angeles's program provides job coaching and life skills training to youth during the program. In Los Angeles, each county department is required by the Board of Supervisors to host a youth from the program, but in Santa Clara, participation by county departments is voluntary.

In addition to the above opportunities, county HR departments may want to collaborate with the Independent Living Program (ILP) to provide job skills training to current/former foster youth who are hired for county jobs/internships. This allows HR to tap into an existing resource, instead of re-inventing the wheel. LA County has done this and could advise other counties on doing so.

- d. A limited number of semi-permanent, full-time positions within the Child Welfare department (Los Angeles, Riverside, Merced, Mariposa, San Bernardino)

Five counties have programs that hire former foster youth as full-time employees in the Child Welfare department to serve as peer advocates for foster youth or assist social workers with case management. The number of positions tends to be limited (most counties have no more than 7 employees in this role), and the employees work only within Child Welfare. While the position is not time-limited, it is also not supposed to be permanent and employed youth are expected to transition to other employment in 3-4 years. Youth are typically hired through an interview and need not take an employment exam for this position. There is not a dedicated path to other county employment through this position.

## **2. Implement Strategies to Remove Barriers to Success in Employment Programs.**

- a. Assist current and former foster youth to have their juvenile records sealed and inform them that employers cannot ask them about juvenile court records.

Judges, attorneys, social workers, counselors, and others who have contact

with youth in the dependency system should advise youth of their rights regarding juvenile records under current law and any changes to law that occur over time. These professionals should be prepared to assist current and former foster youth in sealing their juvenile records where possible and expunge their non-sealable juvenile and adult records. These professionals should make available Judicial Council forms to complete the sealing process. These professionals should inform all current and former foster youth of the importance of sealing and/or expunging their records and the impact that an unsealed record may have on their ability to earn gainful employment. These professionals should also be available to answer questions a youth or young adult may have about record sealing.

Employers are not permitted to ask applicants for employment to disclose information concerning an arrest or detention that did not result in a conviction. This provision was recently expanded with the addition of Labor Code Section 432.7 (AB 1843) that prohibits an employer from asking an applicant for employment to disclose, or from utilizing as a factor in determining any condition of employment, information concerning or related to an arrest, detention, processing, diversion, supervision, adjudication, or court disposition that occurred while the person was subject to the process and jurisdiction of juvenile court law with specified exceptions for employment at health facilities.

However, since most corporate and government employers conduct background checks and requests as a condition of employment a candidate to voluntarily submit to such a check, a juvenile and/or adult record can be uncovered. It is paramount that counties have processes in place to ensure that current and former foster youth understand the impact having a record may have on their ability to earn gainful employment and provide them with guidance on how to ensure their records are sealed and/or expunged. If neither can be accomplished, counties should advise their youth of alternative employment opportunities including, but not limited to, employers who do not conduct background checks and employers who work with recidivism candidates.

- b. Inform current and former foster youth that they must be given preference by state agencies hiring interns and student assistants.

Effective January 1, 2017, Government Code Section 18220 requires: “(a) State agencies, when hiring for internships and student assistant positions, shall give preference to qualified applicants who are, or have been, dependent children in foster care. The preference shall be granted to applicants up to 26 years of age. (b) For purposes of this section, ‘preference’ means priority over similarly qualified applicants for placement in the position.” All counties

should advise youth in foster care regarding this provision of the law. The California Human Resources Department (CalHR) is developing guidance for state agencies to implement this statute.

**3. Prepare foster youth for employment and success in the workplace with comprehensive job skills development that focuses on critical soft skill development in addition to the hard skills of interviewing, resume writing and job search.**

Within current Independent Living Program practices, counties should implement comprehensive job skills training leveraging evidence-based and evidence-informed curriculum tailored to foster youth that are and focus on soft skill development (e.g., work ethic, effective communication, dealing with critical feedback, integrity, teamwork, critical thinking).

a. Temporary Services Registry Pilot Program

In April 2017 the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors expanded the Temporary Services Registry pilot project. The pilot project creates a registry that connects residents facing barriers to employment to clerical service jobs in county departments. The pilot requires 51 percent of program participants to be “target workers” – 25 percent of which must be current or former foster youth.<sup>iv</sup> The purpose of this program is to develop soft skills and practical job skills in addition to assisting with job finding. After two years this program will be evaluated based on the rate of participant retention and level of career advancement.

b. The U.S. Department of Education (ED), in partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), and youth and practitioners involved in the child welfare system have developed an easy to read toolkit to assist youth in accessing the resources needed to successfully transition into adulthood, continue on to postsecondary education, and meaningful careers. The toolkit specifically addresses how youth can seek and interview for a job, job skills, and life skills such as how to manage money.<sup>v</sup>

**4. Public/Private Partnership**

There are many public/private partnerships that are working hard to enhance public employment opportunities for current and former foster youth across sectors.

a. iFoster <sup>vi</sup>is an incredible online resource for both employers and youth. The iFoster Jobs Program is a public / private partnership that matches employer partners with entry-level positions to foster youth who are specifically trained, appropriately resourced, and effectively supported to succeed in their jobs. iFoster currently works with 12 large employers with thousands of entry-level career opportunities. iFoster and its training partners assist foster youth by

providing job skills training, necessary concrete resources, job coaching, scholarships / tuition reimbursement opportunities, and first-in-line access to jobs with career advancement potential. iFoster helps employers by providing a pipeline of pre-qualified potential hires that helps reduce the cost and time associated with hiring and employee turnover. The program is working effectively, with over 150 youth hired in the first year and 90% retention rate after 6 months on the job compared to a 30% average industry retention rate. The iFoster Jobs Program will grow substantially in its second year, expanding to new areas and new Employer partners.

The iFoster Transition Age Youth (TAY) Assistant is an online personal assistant that helps youth manage their life. They can store documents in a secure, data encrypted locker, find resources, apply for programs, and keep track of it all so they are in control of what they need to get ahead.

iFoster has launched its iFoster Jobs Program for TAY in many communities across the United States. The jobs program provides TAY with the training and supports they need to earn liveable wage jobs. iFoster partners with national and regional Employers like Starbucks, Krogers, and CVS to ensure that youth are first in line for job opportunities and interviews. iFoster is actively seeking child welfare partnerships across the country to bring this program to your community.

- b. Foster Coalition is a fantastic resource for employers and youth that works to elevate the national consciousness about foster care through PR, social media & articles. Foster Coalition has built a central repository of resources & best practice programs related to foster care through research and crowdsourcing and features a progressive list of companies and organizations that hire current and former foster youth.<sup>vii</sup>

Silicon Valley Children's Fund (SVCF) invests in high impact programs that help the foster youth of Santa Clara County become successful and self-sustaining adults. The SVCF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit committed to improving educational and life outcomes for foster youth. SVCF has provided over \$3M in scholarship dollars to foster youth in Silicon Valley. Their coaching model provides high school and college foster youth continuous mentor support, education planning, tutoring, career exploration and an unconditional commitment to help youth define and achieve their life dreams. SVCF scholars are 10x more likely to graduate from college, compared to only 3% of foster youth nationally.<sup>viii</sup>

- c. Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)

On September 8, 2016 iFoster announced that H.R.5947, the "Improved Employment Outcomes For Foster Youth Act of 2016" was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Congressmen McDermott (D-WA), Reichert (R-WA), Davis (D-IL), Reed (R-NY), and Doggett (D-TX). A Senate companion

will also be introduced by Senator Casey (D-PA). This bill amends the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to include transition age foster youth as categorically eligible for purposes of the WOTC. Employers may be eligible to receive a credit of up to \$2,400 annually for each foster youth hired.

The WOTC is a federal tax credit available to businesses when they hire employees from a specified list of target groups that experience significant employment challenges. The credit is designed to provide incentives to employers to hire individuals who might otherwise struggle to find employment. Under current law, the WOTC target groups include veterans, individuals with disabilities, TANF and food stamp recipients, the long-term unemployed, ex-felons, and others. Historically, foster youth have not yet been identified as a target group under WOTC. The Improved Employment Outcomes for Foster Youth Act is working to change that by adding transition age youth as a target group. The Improved Employment Outcomes for Foster Youth Act will provide a major incentive to private sector businesses to hire eligible foster youth in the form of an annual tax credit of up to \$2400 per hire. This can be an incredible resource for current and former foster youth when entering the workforce.

### **Strategies for Implementation**

Government Code Sections 19800-19810 require counties and the state to establish personnel standards in regulatory form necessary "to assure state conformity with applicable federal requirements." These standards are broad, flexible guidelines reflecting generally accepted personnel practices that provide for meeting the federal and state requirements by local agencies and are applicable to both Approved Local Merit Systems and the Interagency Merit System directly administered by the State Personnel Board.

Counties that operate under an Approved Local Merit System can work with the Board of Supervisors, County Human Resources, and various county departments to create a policy that gives preference to former foster youth for employment in any county run department (not exclusive to Social Services). There are at least eight counties that can serve as models for implementation, as well as numerous other districts across the country.

Counties can develop specific job classification specifications that can be used as a mechanism for hiring permanent, full-time, foster youth. The same job classifications and specifications may also be used to develop county jobs for former foster youth that are in other departments. County Administrators, Board of Supervisors, and County Human Resources will need to work together to prioritize resources, develop policies and implement a structure for hiring and giving preference to former foster youth.

### **Conclusion and Policy Recommendation Summary**

Seeking employment can be a daunting task for foster youth and can be especially challenging when navigating the workforce alone. Providing employment support to young people transitioning out of foster care can connect them to meaningful employment and can

also develop the skills necessary to succeed in the workplace and ensure lasting economic self-sufficiency. Hiring current and former foster youth into available entry-level jobs for which they are eligible requires no new jobs or additional funding, and can increase their access to workforce development and employment opportunities.

1. Hire current and recently-emancipated foster youth into already available entry-level county/state/city jobs for which they are eligible; necessitating no new jobs / budget.
2. Implement policies and processes that explicitly give hiring preference to current and former foster youth, and require youth be informed of their right to be given this preference by state agencies for internships and student assistant positions.
3. Provide opportunities that align with Independent Living Program (ILP) requirements for foster youth to lead to permanent employment. This includes but is not limited to paid internships, Work Experience Program (WEX) positions, and part-time, semi-permanent positions across county departments.
4. Require that foster youth be informed of their rights pursuant to sealing juvenile records and prohibitions on being asked about their juvenile records, during the transition plan development.
5. Engage in public/private partnerships to enhance access to public employment for current and former foster youth.

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<sup>i</sup> Urban Institute (2008) Coming of Age: Employment Outcomes for Youth Who Age Out of Foster Care Through Their Middle Twenties. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation

<sup>ii</sup> Courtney, Dworsky, Brown, Cary, Love, Vorhies (2011) Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 26. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.ifoster.org/the-problem/>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news-2/temporary-county-jobs-offer-former-foster-youth-pathway-to-employment>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/foster-care/youth-transition-toolkit.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> [www.ifoster.com](http://www.ifoster.com)

<sup>vii</sup> <http://www.fostercoalition.com/companies-that-hire-foster-youth>

<sup>viii</sup> <http://svcf.org/>