

**"THEY ARE ALL OUR KIDS":
CREATING SUPPORTED, INTEGRATED SERVICES FOR ADOLESCENTS
IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY
Beverly Dekker-Davidson *
Executive Summary**

BACKGROUND AND FOCUS

Three years ago San Mateo County regionalized its Child Welfare Long-term Placement Unit. What had been a centralized function was now dispersed to five cities throughout the county, making the services more accessible to youth in the surrounding communities. It became apparent, however, that the services to child welfare adolescents needed to be, at the same time more focused, and more integrated with other services throughout the county. As a result the Adolescent Services Manager position was created to address the needs of dependent youth as well as those of adolescents countywide.

RATIONALE

The scope of the new position mandated an array of activities that included the development of a Collaborative Action Team, the development of a plan for adolescent services, and the creation of closer links for foster youth to employment services. At the same time federal mandates from the Chafee legislation required that each emancipating youth be trained in life skills competencies, and that services be provided both during the period of dependency and after the exit from the foster care system.

Santa Cruz County had an integrated Supported Adolescent Services Unit that had established formal linkages between the Employment staff, Mental Health clinicians, and the Child Welfare Department. The county had also evolved two transitional housing programs for emancipating foster youth by creatively using Redevelopment and Medi-Cal funding sources. They had made these changes in a smooth transition that created staff buy-in and commitment. As a result, this research includes not only the programmatic ideas but also the staff change model that was employed by Santa Cruz County.

FINDINGS

Santa Cruz County has explored processes and funding opportunities that could be adapted for use in San Mateo County. Of interest is the referral and crossover process developed by staff to create accountability for emancipating foster youth. After receiving a clear mandate from their director that every youth should have an Employment case manager in addition to a Child Welfare case manager, staff spent time blending the cultures of Social Work and Employment to work together toward the self-sufficiency of the minor. This team development included defining of language and terminology, training in the practices and philosophy of the other department, and a formal, written referral process for how cases should be shared. Once in place, the Employment and Child Welfare staff began to meet monthly to discuss the goals and progress of each foster youth in the Independent Living Program.

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Further mutual accountability was created in the continuum of care for transitioning ILP youth.

Monthly crossover team meetings are held with representation from the residential facilities, Child Welfare, Employment, County Management, and Mental Health. Each youth in transitional housing is discussed and transition plans evaluated and updated. A field visit to one of the transitional homes revealed a well run and attractive facility.

Further collaboration was created in Santa Cruz County through an approach to WIA (Workforce Investment Act) funding. In Santa Cruz County the Careerworks Division joined with the County Office of Education and a private non-profit agency to propose a collaborative grant. This grant was recently awarded to them. The grant will provide employment and assessment services to youth in the Southern Region area of Watsonville. In this area are a large number of low-income youth as well as foster youth.

The accountability of these systems was an appealing model as was the creation of a collaborative team effort. Staff interviewed possessed a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and voiced commitment and enthusiasm for the mandates that had been stated by management.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- San Mateo County will explore previously untapped sources of funding through EPSDT (Early Prevention Screening Diagnosis and Treatment) MEDI-CAL funding. In Santa Cruz this provides two clinicians and a supervisor in the Child Welfare Adolescent unit, and staff in the transitional housing program. Redevelopment funding will also be explored.
- Establish closer links to existing WIA Programs by co-enrolling every emancipating foster youth in WIA programs, thereby creating an additional layer of accountability.
- Develop closer linkages between Child Welfare and Employment staff, creating crossover teams which evaluate the progress of each youth in the program and ensures attainment of independent living skills and competencies.
- Develop internal crossover teams in monthly meetings between the ILP Coordinator and the Social Work staff to increase accountability for each youth that is emancipating.

ANTICIPATED RESULTS IN SAN MATEO

Instituting the cross over teams will require buy-in from Child Welfare supervisors and line staff. The first reaction may be that they do not have time for "one more meeting" when staff is already taxed by heavy workloads. A better way to approach this is to include it in an existing forum, such as the Longterm Placement meeting. These meetings occur monthly and could be used to staff youth. Mental health may have some resistance to the exploration of EPSDT funding, as in the past this has been their sole purview. It will be necessary to reassure them that this will be sought as additional funding, and will not divert existing funding. Finally, the WIA enrollment

has already begun via the current providers. This is a win-win situation as they are seeking additional enrollments and it provides an additional layer of service for ILP youth.

Staff in Santa Cruz County exhibited a high level of enthusiasm and commitment to their work together. Staff commitment and enthusiasm was best summarized by Employment Supervisor Bridgett Kuhn, who stated: "How can we not help these youth? How could we do otherwise? They are all our kids" This level of commitment went beyond buy-in and into ownership and responsibility for the best service to youth. It is a hallmark of successful change in the interest of better services to youth.

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BACKGROUND

San Mateo County Human Services Agency made a decision three years ago to create a more integrated system of care for adolescents in San Mateo County. This decision was made in part because the county had undergone organizational restructuring, creating accessible multidisciplinary regional offices, which regionalized Child Welfare Long-term Placement cases throughout the County. This decentralized a long centralized placement and ILP (Independent Living Program) Unit into five offices throughout the county. While this created more involvement in the local community and more client access, it also created a need for countywide management of adolescent issues. In addition, the county was increasingly collaborating with other youth serving agencies, both within the county and in the non-profit sector. In March 2001, the state-mandated inclusion of the federal Chafee Foster Care Independence Act was enacted, which required more services for adolescents, both during their dependency/wardship and after their court cases were dismissed. It placed particular emphasis on employment skills and job readiness as well as health, independent living skills, computer literacy, and survival skills. At that time the position of Adolescent Services Manager was created to manage the Independent Living Program and to collaborate on a larger scale for services to all adolescents.

The scope of the position includes the following tasks:

- Develop a strategic plan for all adolescents served by government and nonprofits countywide
- Increase participation and competencies in the Independent Living Program
- Create a closer link between ILP and employment services
- Develop a WIA (Workforce Investment Act) Youth Council which is co-administered by Adolescent Services and the WEB (Workforce Investment Board) Manager
- Provide a system for transitional housing and aftercare for adolescents leaving the foster care system Create an Assessment Center for adolescents entering the juvenile justice system for the first time Integrate and more closely link services between Children's Services, Mental Health, and Juvenile Probation.

HISTORY

The focus of this research is primarily the link that has been created in Santa Cruz County between employment and social services for adolescents in all programs, both dependent and non-dependent. A second area of research was the system of care provided to foster youth as they emancipated and became former foster youth.

INTERNAL STAFF/STRUCTURAL ISSUES

A third focus was that of creating a smooth staff transition with changing mandates and philosophies. Traditionally, employment and social work are two different cultures. When San Mateo County revised its philosophy of employment for welfare adults from an emphasis on social work, to a Work First approach in 1994, debates between the two approaches ensued. The shift was a bold change at the time, and was accomplished relatively quickly. The Santa Cruz County process, on the other hand, appears to have happened gradually, over time.

At the heart of this debate is the question: Does a supportive, therapeutic approach, or one that is more motivational, serve the client better? On the social work side is the fact that abused and neglected youth have often experienced severe trauma and deprivation, which require special services. This population has an increased incidence of high-risk behaviors as well as a high incidence of learning disabilities and conduct disorders. Often the youth are in specialized classroom settings and have had multiple placements, which result in a shortage of school credits. All of these issues require additional intervention. Social workers, by training and professional culture, are oriented toward a therapeutic and case management model. They are expected to develop case plans that order mental health therapy, drug treatment, special school programs, and other programs to address barriers to employment and independent living.

Job programs are less "barriers" based and more "strength" based; that is, they develop the strengths and choose to sidestep the barriers to wait and see if they interfere with performance. This is done with the assumption that all individuals have barriers to overcome and the best way to mainstream a client is to build on the positive attributes and skills, supporting the client's efforts in the workforce through appropriate placements, mentoring and feedback.

In San Mateo County, this motivational approach caused a dramatic increase in employment of the welfare population. The GAIN Welfare to Work program had 109 placements in 1994. The cost per placement exceeded \$20,000, as clients primarily sought independence via long-term educational remediation. In 1995, a more motivational group approach resulted in over 1,400 placements as a result of a "work first" philosophy, with a cost per placement of \$1,500. Welfare rolls, which had swelled to 7,000 in 1986 and remained at about 5,000 in 1994, were reduced to about 750 families by the year 2000. The question was, were families going off welfare able to sustain self-sufficiency or did they remain in poverty post welfare. A San Francisco Chronicle article, dated April 16, 2002, indicates that about fifty percent of former welfare recipients nationwide remain in poverty. Data specific to San Mateo County indicates more positive outcomes; still, the cost of living creates a high standard for achieving basic living costs.

FINDINGS: INTEGRATING STAFF GOALS FOR BETTER OUTCOMES

I wanted to learn from the Santa Cruz County experience how to create a more integrated approach between social work and employment, and determine if there was a way to reduce the role dissonance between the two approaches and create a positive team approach to the client. Secondly, how could the system be reorganized to create better outcomes for youth in the long run? How could we avoid the pitfalls that are common to former foster youth that have a difficult transition to adulthood? Some estimates put homelessness of this population at over 50%; drug addiction and imprisonment rates are equally disproportionate, though data is difficult to validate. How could prevention measures be put into place so former foster youth do not go on to become "floundering families" in the future? How could transitional services for housing and case management better bridge the transition, so that youth do not end up with severe social problems?

THE ILP MANDATE

In March 2001, the California Department of Social Services issued a letter which mandated each county to develop plans for the transition from foster care for fiscal years 2001-2004. This mandate was the result of federal legislation that is known as the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act (1999). The state-administered Independent Living Program assists foster youth ages 16 and older in their transition to self-sufficiency by providing services that address:

- Career and Employment Development
- Vocational Training
- Job Placement and retention
- Development of daily living skills
- Substance abuse prevention
- Preventive health and safety activities
- Housing and household management
- Consumer and resource use
- Interpersonal skills
- Survival skills
- Computer and Internet skills

Additionally, the state established the Transitional Housing Placement Program for 17-18 year olds who are still in foster care. It promoted the preparation for post-secondary education, adult mentorships, and aftercare. While it also allowed counties to spend up to 30% of their ILP allocation on housing for former foster youth, counties are currently reporting the inability to utilize this provision because ILP allocations do not cover existing costs, let alone additional housing costs. In addition, all former foster youth are eligible to receive services from the WIA One Stop Employment Centers and to receive Medi-Cal.

While each county is mandated to provide these services, additional allocations of funding were minimal. The STEP aftercare-housing program, for example, provides additional housing post foster care but requires a 60% county match for the 40% provided by the state. The challenge to counties was how to do more with less, how to blend funding in creative ways to provide a more

supportive transition from foster care to adulthood, and how to best collaborate between programs to maximize service and accountability. The Santa Cruz County model provided new ideas that can be employed in San Mateo County.

ILP SAN MATEO AND SANTA CRUZ: A SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

San Mateo

Currently the ILP program is managed under the Adolescent Services Manager who serves countywide. This position supervises an Independent Living Program Coordinator and a Benefit Analyst. ILP classes are taught by Benefit Analysts and Employment Services Specialists. In addition, contract staff provides educational planning and teaching. The five Long Term Placement Workers who case manage the youth are regionalized throughout the county and meet monthly with the Adolescent Services Manager to discuss policy and procedure issues. Some workers carry blended caseloads, that include both Long-term Foster Care and Family Maintenance/Family Reunification cases. The number of Child Welfare and Probation foster youth between ages 16-18 is about 140. Roughly 60% are placed out of county. Of those in county, 47 are participating in ILP programs. In addition, about 21 youth from out of county are participating in the San Mateo ILP program because they are placed in San Mateo County.

ILP curriculum consists of a series of age appropriate classes named after Eagle themes: Fledge, Flight and Solo. Each series of classes is intended to build core competencies as outlined by the Chafee Legislation and needed by the youth to live independently.

Transitional and Aftercare Services are operated under contract with a local youth-serving nonprofit, Youth and Family Assistance (YFA). The Transitional Housing Program has a case manager, a case aide, and a part time supervisor. Currently, the program operates two apartments, housing 1718 year old youth that are preparing to emancipate from the foster care system. Currently, there is no housing program after the age of 18, but a new housing voucher program has promise; as does a recently submitted joint grant proposal that would create housing via a multidisciplinary approach with Human Services, Mental Health, and Probation. A goal of San Mateo County is to evolve into a more complete aftercare system within the next fiscal year.

Santa Cruz

Santa Cruz County has a centralized Supportive Adolescent Services unit in its Children's Services Ongoing Division. Within this unit are a Social Work Supervisor, four Senior Social Workers carrying Long Term Placement cases (no blended Family Reunification/Family Maintenance cases), two ILP Coordinators that are classified as Employment Training Specialists, a Mental Health Supervisor, and three Mental Health clinicians. Two Social Worker I level staff serve part time.

Within this construct is an interdisciplinary protocol for serving teens, called the Supportive Adolescent Services Program (SAS). In this protocol, each teen is assessed for mental health services. A mental health clinician is assigned along with the case manager for Long-term Placement/Child Welfare. It is a clinical service delivery model that has been in place for three

years and funded through Early Prevention, Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) Medi-Cal "rehabilitation" claiming procedures. While this claiming procedure is intensive in its time study and record keeping requirements, it yields positions that would not otherwise be funded and are not currently being claimed in San Mateo County.

According to the Santa Cruz County Child Welfare Program Manager, the multidisciplinary team approach targets this population with intensive services and engages in successful planning to solidify the transition plan for each youth. The stakeholders meet monthly to discuss cases as a team. The crossover team consists of Mental Health, Child Welfare, and Community Based agencies involved with the youth, the Department of Probation, and the THPP and Aftercare staff.

THE LINK TO EMPLOYMENT

Santa Cruz County has spent the last year developing a more formalized link between the Career Works employment division and the Child Welfare Adolescent Unit. According to their Program Manager, this link was encouraged as a priority from their agency director who envisioned more goal oriented and accountable systems of vocational planning. As a result, a formal referral and follow up agreement was developed between the two divisions.

Additional crossover meetings are held monthly between the County's Careerworks Division and the Child Welfare staff. The model used blends the two cultures by supporting cross training between divisions and monthly crossover meetings in which every ILP youth's vocational plan and progress is discussed.

Interviews with the employment supervisor reveal a high degree of commitment and enthusiasm in their mission. The employment supervisor states: "We have ownership of these youth, we call them our kids. How could we not have passion for this work?" The goal of the program is to ensure that all youth have a connection to the One-Stop Career Centers, and make sure that they are using it to find a job. Each youth is also enrolled in the WIA Program. This step adds another layer of accountability to the process, as WIA is performance based. Every youth enrolled in WIA is tracked for their performance in the employment and follow up measures, and money is tied to that performance. The One-Stop Centers are multidisciplinary, housing Welfare to Work Programs, Workforce Investment Act staff, Employment Development Division, AARP, the Department of Rehabilitation, and Community Colleges. OneStop Centers exist in both North County Capitola, and South County Watsonville offices.

One year ago, the Director asked the question "How can these youth be better served?" and laid out a clear expectation of a more formally linked system of care. In meeting together, the staffs from Employment and Children's Services had to begin to blend their cultures. Terminology had to be explained so that the two systems could speak a commonly understood language. The new Child Welfare Supervisor was supportive of the process and open to expanded options for service.

At first the process bogged down, so a decision was made to create a smaller group, known as the steering committee, to begin outlining the framework. Once outlined, the staff began a cross

training series in order to understand and appreciate the other staff members' work. Performance and accountability were emphasized with the expectation that youth entering the center would be fully utilizing the center, while looking for work. The goal is "Economic Independence" which the staff sees as more comprehensive and a step beyond self-sufficiency. It means more than "getting by". It means being successful in their chosen career.

In creating buy in, the group asked, "How can we really get all youth involved?" thereby defining a common mission. One way was to develop a summer program in which youth received training in the morning and worked in the afternoon. They received stipends for their summer activities and the schools received Average Daily Attendance (school funding based upon attendance).

The Employment Supervisor stated a desire to create collaboration wherever possible. The attitude of this pivotal position contributes to the success of the integrated services. There is also an extensive mentoring program that pairs youth with adults in business and non-profits.

COLLABORATION: INNOVATIVE INGREDIENTS

In February 2002, the Careerworks Division spearheaded a collaborative grant effort to obtain \$1.3 million from WIA over a two-year period to provide youth with integrated employment services. The grant was recently awarded to them. The proposed program offers "Work Readiness Skills, Work Experience, Occupational Skills Training, Summer Employment, and Supportive Services." The proposal services include guidance counseling, basic skills instruction, after school tutoring/study skills, instruction leading to secondary school completion, alternative school offerings, leadership development, and adult mentoring. To that end, a partnership collaborative was formed called SUENOS (Dreams). SUENOS had representation from the County's Careerworks Division, the County Office of Education, and the City of Watsonville Enterprise Community. The overall intent of the project is to organize services over a developmental continuum among service providers in an effort to create a work identity in the youth that is intertwined with the school and community experience. The developmental goal is to develop academic and life skills competencies, which enable responsible adulthood.

In the program, youth are assessed up front to establish goals for work readiness, educational achievement, and support services. Youth are rewarded for positive participation with modest financial stipends. Youth are continually evaluated along the way, and their customer satisfaction is measured utilizing a Baldrige model that uses continuous improvement and stakeholder satisfaction to motivate the youth. The program uses a "Preparing for and Succeeding at Work" model based on best practices for Work Readiness learning models. Youth are then placed in a Work Experience site and monitored for success. Post employment, the youth are followed up via the City of Watsonville and their subcontractors. Under supporting youth the program also offers Leadership opportunities and adult mentoring through a well-established subcontractor called Your Future is Our Business. Both dependent and non-dependent youth will be enrolled in this program.

THPP AND AFTERCARE: A SMOOTH TRANSITION

A second area of need for San Mateo County is the provision of a smooth transition for youth leaving the foster care system, particularly in the area of supported housing. Santa Cruz County was able to develop such a model and this research allowed for observation of the team meetings to staff the youth involved as well as a field visit to one of the transitional homes.

Rather than viewing foster care as a before and after paradigm, Santa Cruz County looks at a continuum of care labeled Phases I and II. For youth getting ready to emancipate they have a Transitional Housing Placement facility, which provides case management and housing for youths ages 17 and 18 who appear to have some ability to live autonomously. This is operated through a Foster Family Agency (FFA), which provides case management, social worker supervision, and linkages to the multidisciplinary team that meets monthly. This project included attending that team meeting. In the staffing, each youth is discussed in terms of progress towards defined goals. Funding is primarily from foster care payments and EPSDT (Medi-Cal/Federal) funding. Attending the meeting are Therapists, Social Workers from Child Welfare, FFA staff for Phase I, Education, Probation, Employment and any other needed service provider. Phase II, while not operated under an FFA, is the aftercare house for youth post foster care. It is funded through EPSDT, Redevelopment funds, and youth rent on a sliding scale. It is operated by the Santa Cruz Community Counseling Services. The County provided some initial funding for the start up of the program.

In San Mateo County, the THPP Program is operated through a local youth service agency, Youth and Family Assistance. The program provides apartments for two youth in each apartment in various locations in the county. The social worker for the agency (YTA) meets with the individual CWS social worker, the ILP coordinator, and the Adolescent Services Manager to discuss the youth. There is not a multi-disciplinary meeting in place on a monthly basis. In San Mateo County, the greater need is the development of a Phase II program, as youth completing THPP do not have a subsequent program to enter and housing has to be "patched together" in each individual case.

APPLICATIONS

Internal Staff Issues

Santa Cruz County staff appeared, on the whole, to be well integrated, working together across departments and disciplines in the best interest of the child. There did not seem to be territoriality issues regarding job mission or tasks. It is presumed this resulted from careful planning over a period of time. It also began as a clearly articulated vision from the Director that mandated a collaborative approach to more integrated services. While management stated the outcome, it also empowered staff to work out the process on the line and supervisor level, thus creating ownership and buy-in.

Financial Issues:

While San Mateo County also has a high degree of collaboration among its partners, clear and supportive management, and a strong desire to serve the client in the best possible way, there is always opportunity to look for more ways to create programs that are mutually beneficial. In light of the present funding reductions, new sources of revenue and new matrixes of services are beneficial. In the WIA grant process Santa Cruz County demonstrated ways in which the County can be a fair applicant to internally administered WIA funding if proper "fire walls" and safe guards are in place. That is, the county worked in partnership with the City of Watsonville and the County Office of Education as well as with the subcontractor Your Business is Our Future to create the SUENOS Collaborative. In San Mateo County this is strictly an external process, and tighter linkages need to be explored.

In the collaborative effort between CWS Longterm Placement Social Workers and Employment and Mental Health, there appears to be an unexplored vein of funding to be mined. This is the MEDI-CAL EPSDT money that is harvested via a claiming process through Mental Health. Explorations with the San Mateo County Mental Health Division need to ensue quickly as this could transform the present staffing pattern into one that is more resource rich, therapeutically sound, and provides more individual youth attention. Creating multi-disciplinary teams regarding transitioning youth is another construct to develop in San Mateo County. With a system that is regional and more generic in nature, a system of youth accountability both prior to emancipation and after should be instituted to make sure each youth is being tracked in his/her progress toward emancipation goals. In addition, aftercare dollars in Santa Cruz County utilized the county redevelopment agency, which is another avenue of funding, which might be explored for San Mateo County.

LESSONS LEARNED

Lessons learned include the importance of creating ownership of new approaches by clear vision and then "getting out of the way of the process"; that is, to entrust line staff to know, in detail, how to deliver service in the best, most collaborative, fashion. This requires that staff be allowed time to develop the process, and time to develop an internalized mission and sense of purpose regarding their work. This is difficult in bureaucracies where every action causes a reaction, and where procedure is often emphasized over more illusive goals such as commitment, passion for the work, and dedication. While bureaucracies try to emphasize conformity to achieve outcomes, the internal motivation that comes from taking pride in one's work and participation in a team are often secondary.

A second lesson learned from Santa Cruz County is the use of language and how it determines identity and attitude. By renaming their Longterm Placement Unit "Supportive Adolescent Services" Santa Cruz County was stating its intent with every dependent teen. This commitment is carried out in the pursuit of creative funding, the joining together of multi-disciplinary teams, and the inclusion of accountability through crossover meetings held at regular intervals.

As a result of this information and experience, San Mateo County would benefit from further exploring the following options:

- Explore EPSDT funding and the option of adding internal Mental Health staff to the Long-term foster units
- Develop a system to link all foster youth to WIA funding via current contractors, thereby creating an additional layer of accountability and youth employment services.
- Work with employment staff and employment management to create crossover teams and increased involvement of employment staff in accounting for the progress of each emancipating foster youth.
- Explore more collaborative funding with community partners for future WIA grant funding opportunities.
- Develop crossover teams between ILP and Long-term Placement Workers to create a more collaborative approach to transition planning.

Learn from the organizational change model observed in Santa Cruz County on the creation of ownership and commitment to the youth served. Combine both the mandate of accountability with the more illusive goals of pride and passion in working with youth.

CONCLUSIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While San Mateo and Santa Cruz Counties each provide extensive youth services, their mechanisms for funding and collaboration vary. Both Counties acknowledge difficulty providing coordinated service to emancipating foster youth. Their traumatic family past, unstable placement histories, and repeated school disruptions all create a prescription for difficulty in later life. No system can create the natural commitment and ability to see youth through the difficult adolescent years like a family of origin. It is all the more imperative, therefore, that innovative ways be sought to increase communication among the professionals involved with these vulnerable youth, and to share a common language, vision, and commitment to their long-term well being beyond the years of foster care and court dependency. Santa Cruz County has created innovative ways to maximize dollars, improve accountability, increase team cooperation, and keep the well being of the youth first and foremost. It is a commitment shared by San Mateo County, and their ideas and approaches can only enrich the San Mateo County programs.

Special thanks to the staff in Santa Cruz County, who shared generous amounts of time, information, expertise and advice. Jan Pocolrich, Director of Career Works, and Bridgett Kuhn, Employment Supervisor, were especially helpful. Their commitment and passion for their work are apparent. As Bridgett Kuhn says, "How can you NOT be passionate about this work? They are all our kids!"