

Fall 2009

First Edition

Welcome to *THP-Plus News*, a periodic newsletter of the Statewide Implementation Project. The Project is a partnership between the John Burton Foundation, the California Department of Social Services, and the Corporation for Supportive Housing. Our goal is to expand access to THP-Plus, California's only housing program for former foster youth. THP-Plus provides former foster youth with affordable housing and a rich array of supportive services, including job training, educational advocacy, mentoring, and case management.

To submit a question to a practitioner or to comment on the newsletter, e-mail simone@johnburtonfoundation.org

Visit the website at
<http://www.thplusplus.org/>



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THP-Plus News

Expanding Housing Options for Youth in Transition

Rally to Oppose Child Welfare Cuts

On Thursday, September 10, 2009, a crowd of roughly 150 people, angered by Governor Schwarzenegger's decision to cut \$124 million from the State's child welfare budget, gathered on the North Steps of the State Capitol in Sacramento. The crowd, which included 40 current and former foster youth, urged the Governor to reverse his July 28th line item veto and restore the funding. When Governor Schwarzenegger signed legislation to protect foster youth in 2006, he stated that he planned to "make the foster system stronger for birth parents, foster, parents, and especially our youth."

Rally attendees expressed particular disappointment with the Governor's failure to follow through with his previous commitments and displayed signs proclaiming:

"Don't break your promise to California's children...The veto endangers children...The Governor is not a man of his word...\$124 million vetoed, we want it back...and, Don't risk our kids' futures."

Continued on page 2

Art Contest for Children, Youth, & Elders with Experience in California's Child Welfare System or Courts – Submissions due October 16th

The California Child Welfare Co-Investment Partnership, in collaboration with the Administrative Office of the Courts, is holding an art contest titled "A Lifetime of Love: The importance of friends, family, and belonging." Current and former foster youth and alumni of any age are encouraged to submit an art piece inspired by the theme.

Entries will be reviewed by a panel of judges, and winning submissions will be published in a 2010 calendar for dissemination during California Adoption and Permanency month in November. The purpose of the contest is to compile a meaningful calendar that communicates the significance of permanency from a foster child, youth and alumni perspective through art, and increases understanding of the urgent need to create and sustain permanent connections for children and youth in care. Submissions are due October 16, 2009. For additional information and links to the application, please visit <http://www.co-invest.org/> and look under "What's New."

CDSS Clarification Provided to THP-Plus Questions

As THP-Plus has continued to expand, a number of issues have repeatedly surfaced related to implementation and effective practice guidelines. In the All County Information Notice (ACIN No. I-40-09) issued on August 10th, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) provided important clarification on a number of these issues. A summary of key points and implications is included below.

Continued on page 2

Third Annual THP-Plus Institute Draws Hundreds, Builds Knowledge

The third annual THP-Plus Institute was held on July 28th at the California Endowment's Center for Healthy Families in downtown Los Angeles. Attended by over 250 county administrators and THP-Plus providers, the purpose of the THP-Plus Institute is to provide educational workshops to improve the quality of THP-Plus programs and educate attendees about relevant policy developments.

According to Michele Byrnes of the John Burton Foundation, the THP-Plus Institute is an important opportunity to bring the statewide THP-Plus community together each year. "This program has been successful because of our shared commitment to ending homelessness among former foster youth," said Byrnes. "Each year at the Institute, we reflect on what progress we have made towards that goal and set our agenda for the next twelve months."

Former State Senator John Burton kicked off the morning's program by highlighting the excellent work of the state's counties and contracted THP-Plus providers. Senator Burton was followed by Greg Rose, Deputy Director of the California Department of Social Services, who framed THP-Plus in the larger state budget context. A highlight of the Institute was a noontime panel of youth who participate in THP-Plus around the state. Twelve educational workshops were held, covering a range of topics such as harm reduction, fair housing, and financial aid for former foster youth.

Recordings of each workshop, along with the presentations, are available at the THP-Plus website at <http://thplusplus.org/tpi.html>.

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"Rally" continued from page 1

Directly following the speeches, approximately 50 people delivered advocacy letters to Governor Schwarzenegger, Assembly Speaker Karen Bass, and Senate President pro Tempore, Darrell Steinberg. Karen Bass enthusiastically greeted the crowd and spoke about her commitment to California's foster youth. Senator Steinberg's Chief of Staff, Kathryn Dresslar invited a group of foster youth into her office for a discussion, where she listened carefully, answered questions, and said that Senator Steinberg was also disappointed with the budget cuts and is committed to restoring the child welfare funding.

As a result of the Governor's line item veto, Child Welfare Services will be cut by \$90 million in state funding, and \$34 million in federal funding. The Child Welfare Services budget area includes 57 different line items subject to cuts, including THP-Plus. For an already overburdened system, such a drastic cut in financial support will devastate Child Welfare Services, leading to a diminished quality of life for California's children, youth, and families. The California Department of Social Services is currently determining how to allocate these cuts, which could result in a second cut to THP-Plus.

The THP-Plus community has come out in force against the cuts. In addition to attending the rally, dozens of THP-Plus supporters from across the state submitted letters to California Health and Human Services Secretary Kim Belshé opposing any additional cuts to THP-Plus. According to John Burton, former Senate President pro Tempore and founder of the John Burton Foundation, "THP-Plus has already been subject to a \$5 million cut. Any decision to take additional funds from the state's only homelessness prevention program for former foster youth places an undue burden on our state's most vulnerable and represents a huge step backwards for our state. It also ignores the evidence that supporting foster youth past the age of 18 prevents future criminal justice involvement."

The legislature convened at 6 a.m. on Saturday, September 12th without taking any formal action against the child welfare cuts. The John Burton Foundation continues its work with a statewide coalition to restore the child welfare funding. To get involved or for additional information, please contact Amy Lemley at amy@johnburtonfoundation.org.

"CDSS Clarification" continued from page 1

- *Question 5:* In order to be eligible for THP-Plus, a foster youth aging out of a detention facility must have a court order indicating an intent to move the youth to a foster care placement prior to the youth's 18th birthday.
- *Questions 6 and 7:*
 - Currently 52 counties have approved THP-Plus plans. The remaining six counties not participating in THP-Plus are strongly encouraged to submit a county plan to CDSS (due by February 1st of each year) to fulfill the county's participation requirement. By completing a plan, counties unable to participate in THP-Plus will enable youth emancipating from these counties to access THP-Plus in participating counties. A county plan template is available through the THP-Plus Statewide Implementation Project and can be accessed at www.thpplus.org, listed under "Resources".
 - Youth who move from one county to another may participate in THP-Plus, as long as their county of dependency has an approved THP-Plus plan, as outlined above. If a participant moves from county to county, the 24 month cumulative program eligibility still applies.
- *Question 14:* One of the most significant developments is the clarification that a youth's former foster parent or any other licensed foster family may serve as a THP-Plus provider, as long as they meet all requirements for THP-Plus certification. Therefore, licensed foster parents may serve as host families for THP-Plus participants, allowing youth to continue to live in the home of a family with which they have already developed a close relationship.
- *Question 17:* Youth who are Absent Without Leave (AWOL) at the time of emancipation from foster care are still eligible for THP-Plus.
- *Question 19:* THP-Plus programs are required to develop policies for disciplinary measures, which may ultimately include termination from the program. However, all policies and procedures must be consistent with the Transitional Housing Misconduct Act and all applicable Fair Housing laws. A podcast of the Fair Housing training conducted at the 2009 THP-Plus Institute is available at www.thpplus.org, under "Trainings."

The complete ACIN is available at http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/lettersnotices/entres/getinfo/acin/2009/I-40_09.pdf. For additional questions related to the ACIN, please contact CDSS Transitional Housing Coordinators Lyn Stueve or Vebra Switzer at (916) 651-7465.