



California Pursues Reforms Made Possible by the Federal Fostering Connections to Success Act

As we reported in the Winter edition of THP-Plus News, on October 7, 2008 then president George W. Bush signed HR 6893, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 into law. Now, California is crafting legislation to take advantage of the many new options for federal financial participation in the support of foster youth. Introduced on December 1, 2008 by Assemblymember Jim Beall, Jr. (D-San Jose), the California Fostering Connections to Success Act will ensure that California takes advantage of these and other important provisions of the federal legislation. The John Burton Foundation is part of a coalition of child welfare stakeholders and advocates working to craft the specifics of the bill, and will ensure that the community of THP-Plus providers and stakeholders are kept up to date on the design and implementation of the bill, and any impacts it might have on the THP-Plus Program.

On February 13th, the John Burton Foundation launched its new coalition building website to educate California child welfare stakeholders and to support the eventual passage of AB 12, www.cafosteringconnections.org. The website contains links to research contributing to the growing evidence base that supports the provisions of AB 12, as well as numerous means by which Californians can join the coalition and express their support.

2009 THP Plus Institute to be held July 28th in Los Angeles

The THP-Plus Statewide Implementation Project is pleased to announce that the 2009 THP-Plus Institute will be held on Tuesday, July 28th at the California Endowment's Center for Healthy Communities in Los Angeles. Please note the date change.

According to Nenita Dean, THP-Plus program supervisor in Stanislaus County, "The 2009 THP-Plus Institute will be an excellent opportunity to get valuable information on innovative strategies, tools, resources, and best practices in the area of housing for youth transitioning from foster care. In addition, the Institute brings together community partners and county staff and providers to share successful outcomes and lessons learned."

As in the past, the Institute will include a series of workshops and a dynamic plenary session. We are currently developing the slate of workshops and roster of presenters in consultation with stakeholders statewide. If you would like to suggest a workshop topic, or would like more information, please contact Reed Connell at reed@johnburtonfoundation.org.



Photos from the 2008 THP Plus Institute by: Howard Pasamanick



NEWS

Welcome to *THP-Plus News*, a quarterly newsletter of the THP-Plus 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.

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

This is a publication of the John Burton Foundation for Children Without Homes— a non-profit organization based in San Francisco, California dedicated to improving the quality of life for California's homeless children and developing policy solutions to prevent homelessness.

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Expanding Housing Options for Youth In Transition

THP-Plus Holds Steady in California Budget



After months of negotiation, Governor Schwarzenegger signed a \$130 billion spending plan on Friday, February 20th. The budget package, which addresses a \$42 billion shortfall through June 2010, includes \$40.8 million for THP-Plus in Fiscal Year 2009-10. At this budget level, nearly 1,400 former foster youth will receive housing and supportive services in 46 counties. Funding is also preserved for payment rates for foster care, Kin-GAP, and wraparound.

Overall, the budget includes nearly \$15 billion in spending cuts, \$12.5 billion in increased revenues, \$7.9 billion in federal funding from the economic recovery bill, \$5.4 billion in new borrowing, and \$957.2 million from the Governor's line-item vetoes. A statewide special election will be held on May 19, 2009 to allow voters to consider several measures that were included in the budget agreement, including authorizing the sale of bonds and making changes to the lottery.

Additional information is available at the California Budget Project's website, www.cbpp.org, and at the Department of Finance website at www.dof.ca.gov.

PRACTITIONER'S CORNER

Practitioner's Corner: Credits-Based System Supports Skills Development



San Diego County has the largest THP-Plus capacity in the state. THP-Plus News sits down with Klea Galasso, Program Director for San Diego's largest provider, New Alternatives.

our program. Youth earn credits by complying with basic program expectations regarding their leases and the care of their apartments, but also for pursuing continuing education goals. Employment goals are also reinforced with the credit system. If youth should have a period of unemployment they can earn credits by attending job workshops or trainings and by participating in skill development activities.

When youth amass credits, they can use them as part of their budgeting process. They can redeem credits for justifiable self-sufficiency needs, such as making a bill payment, car maintenance, or a plane ticket to visit a family member. For most of our youth, earning credits is a significant motivator.

Q: What are some of the most pressing challenges that New Alternatives faces in supporting its participants?

A: We have tremendous challenges getting youth jobs in this economy. We have taken steps to put together a jobs development program and have hired a full time Job Developer. We've created a three-month internship program in partnership with some 20-30 local employers. We pay our youth minimum wage during that time; the employers don't pay anything. We troubleshoot along the way, working with both the youth and the employer to ensure a meaningful and productive experience. After the three-month internship period, we encourage the employers to hire our youth as regular employees.

We encourage our youth who are having difficulty securing a job to participate in skill building and employment development services, and reinforce that participation with credit. Our job developer also tries to work with youth individually to explore their interests and find a passion that can lead to a career - to find employment possibilities that keep

them engaged and motivated. For instance, we have several youth who are very passionate about working in the animal shelters, others with an interest in auto mechanics and customization, and yet others who enjoy working with children in our group home and residential treatment programs.

The job situation certainly has gotten more difficult over the past couple of years. Now youth are competing with a stronger workforce as professionals flood the market and are willing to compete for the same jobs as our youth. Our participants used to be more competitive for some entry level jobs, but it seems there are a lot of individuals in the community willing to accept underemployment. Ironically, the situation has helped the agency in recruiting employees, as our pool of applicants for staff is broader and stronger than ever before.

Q: Can you tell us about your board of youth residents?

A: The THP-Plus Executive Board is an inspiring group in action. While these young adults may have faced severe struggles early on in life, their unwavering mission is to give back to their community. They plan and run events, oversee the THP-Plus Newsletter and help to develop programs and policies that directly impact the participants. Amanda, the secretary of the board, notes, "The Executive Board has given me the opportunity to have my voice heard and my ideas brought to life." Most recently, the board organized the THP-Plus Holiday Party for over 100 participants and their families. Their goal was to bring everyone together and create a sense of community and hope. In the next few months the board will hold a charity event which will directly benefit young children in the foster youth system and will embark on an outreach program, where members of the board will be traveling to group homes across San Diego to tell their personal stories, inform the youth of available resources and inspire them to reach beyond their circumstances and work to create meaningful futures.

Klea Galasso is the Program Director for New Alternatives in San Diego County. For more information, please contact her at (619) 615-0701 or Kleajg@aol.com.

THP-Plus Participant Tracking System Collects Vital Data from Around the State

The THP-Plus Participant Tracking System officially went live on December 3, 2008. Since then, THP-Plus providers and county representatives have demonstrated a widespread commitment to using the system.

As of February 1st, the system is being used by 57 service providers in 29 counties. All have committed to entering information about their youth participants into the database, thereby supporting program evaluation and documenting the effectiveness of their work. The system currently contains information on 743 participants from around the state. Additional system features will be available in March, and will be announced on the THP-Plus listserv. System training materials and a user manual are available at www.thpplus.org.

The John Burton Foundation will conduct an analysis of data from the Participant Tracking System in the spring. The Foundation will also draw on data from counties participating in the California Connected by 25 Initiative, tracked through the Efforts to Outcomes database. The analysis will include an overview of participant outcomes and demographic information, with a particular focus on older youth in THP-Plus. Findings will

be published via www.thpplus.org, and in a printed policy brief to be distributed this coming summer.

Thank you to all who are currently using the system. Providers and counties not yet signed up are encouraged to join the effort. Interested parties may contact

Reed Connell (reed@johnburtonfoundation.org) or Michele Byrnes (michele@johnburtonfoundaiton.org).

