

CWI's Youth Employment Initiative:

*A Child Welfare, Workforce System,
and Youth Partnership*

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Child Welfare Initiative



Our Mission

The Child Welfare Initiative implements programs and practices that produce measurable improvements in the lives of children and families involved in child welfare systems.

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National research shows that when foster youth exit care at or around age 18, half of them are unemployed; one third are dependent on public assistance; a quarter are incarcerated; and over a fifth are homeless. A United States Department of Labor study of transition age youth in five states, including California, concluded that few youth leave the foster care system prepared for work. At age 18, 75% of foster youth have little to no work experience.

For the first two years after age 18, 24% of foster youth have absolutely no earnings, and earnings remain below the poverty threshold for these youth well into their twenties. By age 24, the average former foster youth earns \$690 per month, far less than the \$1,535 per month earned by his or her non-foster peers. Wage earnings for former foster youth are strongly correlated with employment experience and job preparation while in care. By age 24, the only former foster youth who are consistently employed, earning wages near the national average, are those who had a job while in the foster care system.

California has the nation's largest foster care system, with over 50,000 children in the direct custody of local departments and thousands more dependent on services and support from those departments. Approximately one third of California's foster youth reside in Los Angeles County; in 2013, 1,154 of those youth reached age 18 while still in the foster care system. Over the last three years, 3,693 foster youth were allowed to reach 18 while in care, entering the community without a family to help them navigate the struggles of independence and young adulthood. Thankfully, foster youth in California may qualify for extended support under California State Assembly Bill 12, the Fostering Connections to Success Act.

Youth qualifying for extended support may need a job or assistance in removing barriers to employment to maintain their eligibility and to support themselves adequately. However, in a September 2012 review of older foster youth in its care, the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), reported that of the 705 youth who enrolled in Extended Foster Care under AB12's provisions, only 9 youth (2%) had jobs and only 19 youth (4%) were receiving job training.

Despite available employment and job training services and funding targeted specifically toward older and former foster youth, these youth continue to encounter a range of employment obstacles – obstacles that often originate from the foster care and workforce investment systems. Low employment rates among both pre- and post-18 youth in child welfare systems underscore the longstanding difficulties that existing programs, including those funded by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), have had in assisting them. Foster care departments have historically been unsuccessful in helping

youth find and retain jobs, preventing foster youth from gaining basic employment skills critical to securing and maintaining employment after age 18. WIA programs and foster care departments have struggled to coordinate their services for youth, coordinate case planning, and develop approaches that complement and build up supports that each bureaucracy offers independently.

The results are clear and disappointing. Employment programs often reach only a limited number of youth, tend to focus on placing youth in temporary employment opportunities rather than high-demand/high-wage career pathways, and are ineffective in addressing the unique needs and strengths of youth in child welfare.

In response to the high rates of unemployment, low wages, absence of employment and job training opportunities, and the absence of coordinated strategies and practices to improve the situation, the Child Welfare Initiative (CWI) established its Youth Employment Initiative. Through this initiative, CWI is leading a cross-systems effort to offer, prepare, and connect youth to jobs and training opportunities in high growth industry sectors across Los Angeles County. CWI's Youth Employment Initiative focuses on the development of effective and sustainable service delivery partnerships between child welfare and workforce systems that result in 1) an increase in the number of foster youth and probation youth with jobs or job training, and 2) policy and practice changes at the systems level that improve the effectiveness and efficiency of providing employment services to foster and probation youth.

CWI's partners in this initiative include DCFS, Probation, and Community and Senior Services (CSS), along with three of the largest workforce investment boards (WIBs) in Los Angeles County, plus a larger group that includes housing, education, and employment providers, foster family agencies, kincare providers, and foster youth. CWI's work includes the implementation, assessment, and ongoing evaluation of three workforce programs designed to provide employment and job training to youth in foster care, including foster youth who have crossed over into the juvenile justice system. Through this work, CWI aims to establish the workforce system that is a more integrated and inclusive resource for youth in foster care, that allows service coordination across systems, raises awareness of WIA services among child welfare partners and employers, and identifies and removes barriers in both the child welfare and workforce systems that prevent youth from accessing jobs and vocational training.

Barriers to Foster Youth Employment

Personal Barriers

Former foster youth attain lower levels of education than other young people and face higher rates of psychological and developmental disorders. Both outcomes make employment a challenging prospect for former foster youth.

Without a high school diploma, higher education, or career training, foster youth confront enormous disadvantages when competing for jobs. Just over half of older foster youth in Los Angeles County receive a high school diploma by their nineteenth birthday and less than 6% attend a four-year university. While a quarter of foster youth enroll in community colleges and vocational programs, most do not complete them.

CWI has found that planning for foster youth's employment future is often insufficient. CWI's Court Lab partnership with the Los Angeles Edelman Children's Court, DCFS, the Children's Law Center, and the Alliance for Children's Rights reviewed nearly 700 files to evaluate transition planning for youth. CWI found that only 37% of court reports addressed job training skills and/or future career goals, while only 29% included information about the youth's employment, internship, and/or volunteer history. The Court Lab partnership has since identified and begun to implement best practices and improvements in transition planning for older foster youth and progress has begun to emerge. However, removing systemic barriers to foster youth employment has required work outside the foster care system alone.

Despite these barriers, youth in foster care have a desire to enter the workforce to establish relationships with caring and supportive people, and earn income for food, clothes, gas, and entertainment. For many foster youth, employment is a critical opportunity to improve interpersonal skills that will allow them to engage with and live in their communities as equals, to learn responsibility, to develop a good work ethic, and to explore career paths.

Youth in foster care, like youth outside the foster care system, possess many personal attributes that can be valuable to businesses. By hiring youth in care, organizations gain employees capable of generating new ideas, improving the efficiency of daily operations; and with adequate support, foster youth can offer a highly motivated addition to an employer's workforce. Additionally, employers can benefit from tax incentives for hiring youth that are in the foster care system.

Institutional Barriers

Institutional barriers to foster youth employment include organizational structures that complicate the collaborative efforts between public agencies serving foster youth.

The complex organizational structures of public agencies make collaboration and communication difficult. While DCFS is responsible for the care of all foster youth in Los Angeles County, other agencies that serve foster youth are broken up into various geographical areas that make it challenging to streamline services. For example, the workforce system in Los Angeles County is divided into seven regions, each of which is governed by a different workforce investment board and individual youth councils that are responsible for creating the services that help youth prepare for employment.

As described by Los Angeles County's Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection, the fractured structure of Los Angeles County's foster youth services, and the departments and agencies, continues to create significant barriers to their ability to serve youth meaningfully. Employment is no exception. Despite the positive outcomes that employment experience offers foster youth in future earnings, educational achievement, and other areas, the Los Angeles County Civil Grand Jury reports that the County underspends federal and local funds prioritized for foster youth employment programs by approximately \$2.1 million each year in large part due to the absence of cross-departmental and agency planning and service coordination.

Employment Services Offered to Youth in Child Welfare through Los Angeles County's Workforce System

In 1998, Congress passed the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), the guiding legislation behind workforce development services, to create a national workforce development system and establish a comprehensive customer-driven strategy and market-based approach for employment services directed toward adults and youth, including youth in child welfare systems. The federal Department of Labor allocates WIA funding to each state to provide workforce development services to adults and youth.

In 2012, the Department of Labor launched the American Job Center, a national network of employment centers where individuals can access integrated employment services from a single location. Foster youth may visit an American Job Center and/or partner youth employment center to access a variety of services, including skill assessments, information about employment-related services, career counseling, directed job search, job placement assistance, and updated labor market information.

Youth that require additional assistance are encouraged to enroll in WIA-funded programs to access intensive employment services, which include an assessment to

identify employment barriers, individual employment counseling and case management, and prevocational services, such as life skills and leadership development, career exploration classes, work readiness training, and work experience opportunities. In addition to employment services, WIA providers may also connect youth to classroom-based educational services, including reading and math remediation, and tutoring.

For youth to be eligible for WIA services, they must be from a low-income household, be between the ages of 14 to 21, and face one or more of the following challenges to employment attainment: 1) homeless, runaway, or foster child; 2) basic skills deficient (usually reading and/or math below a ninth grade level); 3) school dropout; 4) pregnant or parenting; 5) involved in the juvenile justice system; or 6) need help completing an educational program or securing and holding a job. All youth currently in foster care, including extended foster care, qualify immediately for WIA services once they present documentation of their foster care status.

WIA Youth Performance Measures

WIA Youth programs are required to use the following core performance measures to ensure programmatic accountability, reduce inconsistencies across states and among individual employment service providers, and maintain objectivity in measuring outcomes across WIA Youth programs:

1. *Placement in Employment or Education:* All youth who do not have a job or are not enrolled in postsecondary education before enrollment should have a job or be placed in postsecondary education when they exit the program.

2. *Attainment of a Degree or Certificate:* Youth who were in school for anytime while receiving WIA services must receive a degree/certification. Degrees/certificates can be obtained while the youth is receiving WIA services or within nine months after leaving the WIA program. WIA recognizes high school diplomas, GEDs, and industry-recognized training certificates as degrees and certificates.

3. *Literacy and Numeracy Gains:* Youth who are out-of-school and below ninth grade level in reading comprehension or math should improve their functioning level before exiting the program.

The above performance measures are designed to ensure that employment service providers administer programs that prepare foster youth to enter educational and/or career tracks that will help them lead closer to economic self-sufficiency.

The Los Angeles County Workforce System

Local Workforce Investment Area (LWIA) service regions oversee the provision of WIA employment services. The State of California is divided into 49 regional LWIAs, seven of which are located in Los Angeles County and administered by seven independent WIBs:

- **Los Angeles County WIB**, administered by the County's Department of Community and Senior Services;
- **Los Angeles City WIB**, administered by the City's Economic and Workforce Development Department;
- **Foothill WIB**, administered by the City of Pasadena;
- **Pacific Gateway Workforce Investment Network**, administered by the City of Long Beach;
- **Southeast Los Angeles County WIB**, operated by an independent consortium;
- **South Bay WIB**, administered by the City of Inglewood; and
- **Verdugo WIB**, administered by the City of Glendale.

In partnership with nonprofit service providers, the WIBs above operate over 40 youth employment centers throughout Los Angeles County and are part of the national network of American Job Centers. Youth employment centers offer a range of employment and education related services, including 1) work readiness training, 2) career exploration, 3) tutoring services, 4) directed job search assistance, 5) job placement services, and 6) case management services for youth. Youth employment centers also offer youth access to computers, telephones, fax machines, and copiers to facilitate their transition to employment. Youth who also enroll in the youth employment center's WIA program are eligible for additional services.

Youth, social workers, group home providers, foster parents, kincare providers, as well as housing, employment, and educational service providers and others, may locate their local youth employment center by visiting www.servicelocator.org.

Additional Employment Services for Youth in Child Welfare

The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program

The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program provides states with funding to assist youth in foster care make the transition to adulthood and help them become self-sufficient adults. Among others services, the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program funds assistance in obtaining a high school diploma, life skills training, career exploration and job placement, substance abuse prevention, housing support, and educational/training vouchers.

In Los Angeles County, DCFS's Youth Development Services Division, in partnership with the Probation Department, administers a Chafee-funded Independent Living Program for youth in child welfare. The program offers supportive services to assist youth with transportation, housing, food, and clothing costs. Independent Living Program Coordinators provide housing referrals, and connect youth to life skills, mental health, transportation, educational, and employment resources.

Assembly Bill 12 – California Fostering Connections to Success Act

The September 2010 passage of California State Assembly Bill 12, which took effect in January 2012 and extended foster care services to youth between the ages of 18 and 21, makes it more imperative to support youth self-sufficiency. To become and remain eligible for AB12 services, youth must meet one of the following requirements: 1) Completing a high school or equivalent program; 2) Enrolling in part-time or full-time postsecondary education; 3) Participating in a program or activity designed to remove employment barriers; 4) Working at least 80 hours a month; or 4) Unable to do one of the above requirements because of a medical condition, as verified by a health practitioner. Youth not enrolled in school or employed must participate in an employment activity aimed at removing a barrier to their employment, such as work readiness training or career exploration classes.

Independent of AB12 extended foster care support, without a job or income, former foster youth may also be ineligible for housing and educational assistance programs that have been established for them and that require youth to be employed to enter or to remain in the program. Studies report that one in five former foster youth in Los Angeles experience a period of homelessness during his/her first year of adulthood.

Assembly Bill 1913 – Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act

In 2000, the California State Legislature passed the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA), which provides funding for county programs that target youth on probation, including foster youth with crossover or dual supervision cases, and those under traditional probation supervision who are assessed as "high risk" by probation and other law enforcement agencies.

The Los Angeles County Probation Department's High Risk/High Needs program, funded by JJCPA, provides gender-specific services for youth on probation, including youth with crossover/dual supervision cases, with a focus on skill development activities and the monitoring of peer associations. Through the High Risk/High Needs program, the Probation Department partners with employment service organizations, including some WIBs, to provide services such as career and skill assessments, case management, work readiness, and job placement/retention services.

CWI's Evaluation of the Los Angeles County Workforce System and Its Impact on Youth in Child Welfare

Beginning in 2012, CWI led an assessment of Los Angeles County's workforce system, specifically Los Angeles County's System Involved Youth (SIY) project, which at the time, was the county's largest employment program for youth in foster care and/or probation. CWI worked with DCFS, Probation, and CSS, which acts as the administrative agency over the Los Angeles County WIB, to identify barriers preventing youth from accessing job training and employment, and to work with each public agency to change programs, practices, and policies to eliminate those barriers. SIY's original pilot data demonstrated that only 10% of foster youth who were referred by DCFS to county-contracted employment centers were ultimately being enrolled or receiving job training or employment services.

Following the implementation of CWI's initial recommendations during the second-half of the SIY program in fiscal year 2012-13, the number of youth receiving job training or employment increased to over 153, nearly triple the number that were being served. Since then, the number of youth receiving jobs or employment services has continued to rise dramatically. Working with its child welfare and workforce system partners, CWI's Youth Employment Initiative connected 253 youth in foster care and probation to employment and job training opportunities in 2013.

CWI, CSS, and DCFS redesigned the SIY project to implement CWI's recommendations for cross-agency training of frontline and supervisory staff, coordinated case planning between DCFS and the Los Angeles County WIB, and improved identification and referral of youth from DCFS to the Los Angeles County WIB. Recognizing these fundamental changes in programs, policies and practices, the project is now First S.T.E.P. (Successful Transition to Employment Program) and utilizes a regional-based referral system in which allocations (or 'slots') are given to regional DCFS offices located in CWI's partnering WIB service areas. Employment specialists at WIB employment centers are connected to pre-identified points of contact, usually frontline social workers or unit supervisors at regional DCFS offices.

With CWI's support, employment specialists and social workers are introduced to one another at program launch meet and greet sessions, and then trained by CWI to implement the Youth Employment Initiative's shared case management model. The training covers roles and responsibilities across systems, along with cross-systems program goals and outcomes. CWI provides ongoing technical assistance to both workforce investment employment specialists and DCFS social workers for individual youth cases, as well as broader practice and policy changes that arise from those individual cases.

CWI's Implementation of Improved Employment Practices for Youth in Child Welfare

CWI's recommendations were developed following its evaluation of ongoing program failures, interviews with key stakeholders, including social workers, probation officers, Independent Living Program coordinators, and frontline employment specialists across 17 sites contracted by the Los Angeles County Community and Senior Services Department (CSS). The CSS acts as the administrative agency of the Los Angeles County WIB, the largest of Los Angeles County's seven WIBs, and provides employment services to youth in foster care and probation. Among other areas, CWI's recommendations included:

1. Provide cross-education to line staff about child welfare and workforce systems.	
Recommendations	Outcome
Educate DCFS and Probation staff on WIA and other workforce programs.	Develops familiarity of external services, resources, and processes
Educate and support employment specialists on needs and challenges of foster youth.	Employment specialists will better understand how to communicate with youth and resources available to youth.
Provide guidance on WIA and program—specific target population (i.e., explicitly define the term “work ready”).	Strengthens suitability and eligibility tools that help service providers and the workforce system appropriately match youth to employment opportunities and offer necessary job training services.
Include child welfare and workforce frontline staff in program planning and development.	Direct work with target population makes frontline staff most knowledgeable about effective services and program models. Staff from different organizations will benefit from the experience of other service providers.

2. Improve communication between stakeholders about WIA and other employment services for youth in child welfare.	
Recommendations	Outcome
Hold open houses at employment centers for frontline staff.	Develops familiarity of workforce system's services.
Improve promotional materials about WIA and workforce system services.	Youth and child welfare staff will better understand industry fields for potential employment opportunities and available support programs.
Hold information sessions about employment center services at child welfare service providers.	Youth can learn about the workforce system and resources before age 18.
Hold meetings about WIA with child welfare and workforce staff.	Staff can discuss the effects of WIA on child welfare cases and identify commonalities and trends.

Educate employers in the community about the employment needs of youth in child welfare and find employers who are willing to offer employment and training.	Employment and on-the-job training will be better tailored to meet the needs of youth in child welfare.
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3. Encourage referrals from child welfare service providers to ensure employment centers are knowledgeable about and working with housing providers in the community.

Recommendations	Outcome
Increase utilization of referrals from transitional housing programs.	Transitional housing programs have strong support systems, which lead to greater youth success in employment centers, since employment center workforce staff can communicate regularly with transitional housing program staff.
Engage frontline child welfare staff for employment referrals for youth living in independent living programs.	Independent living program staff indicate that they do not always know youth well, and thus employment center referrals from frontline staff will better reflect the interests and skills of the youth.

4. Provide flexibility to employment service providers, including WIBs, to meet the needs of youth in child welfare.

Recommendations	Outcome
Adopt waivers on performance standards for WIA Adult to address the employment and educational needs of older and former foster youth.	Employment providers reported that the adult outcome standards for full-time employment at a certain wage are not always reasonable for transition age youth with little to no work experience.
For youth between the ages of 14-21, encourage enrollment in WIA Youth programs instead of WIA Adult services to allow employment providers to serve youth more effectively in child welfare who are in school and/or seeking part-time employment.	Many employment providers reported that programs with services focusing on both employment and education were most successful in finding employment for youth.
Remove self-imposed local policies that reduce the length of WIA services and place additional residency and eligibility requirements.	Extends WIA services, allowing youth to reach educational and employment goals in a realistic timeframe.

Remove policies that exclude youth in child welfare from workforce programs due to stringent out-of-school/in-school eligibility criteria.	Encourages service providers to serve youth in child welfare despite current educational status.
Engage the federal Department of Labor and the California State WIB to develop performance and eligibility waivers.	Encourages the enrollment of greater numbers of child welfare youth in WIA services.
Encourage the adoption of a countywide case management system, such as CalJOBS.	Allows for the transferability of WIA cases across Local WIA Regions, including individual employment centers.
Develop more effective means of engaging and communicating with youth through social media and no-cost telecommunication services (e.g., Google Voice, Viber, Skype).	Allows easier means of distributing information and obtaining feedback about services.

5. Prepare youth in child welfare for employment before they turn 18 years old by increasing work experience and employment training opportunities.

Recommendations	Outcome
Provide and support youth in child welfare with volunteer opportunities while in care.	Provides pre-18 youth with work-related experience, which better prepares them for employment.
Increase summer youth employment opportunities for youth in child welfare.	Provides pre-18 youth with work experience, which better prepares them for employment.
Expand fast-track employability certification opportunities for youth in child welfare.	Enables youth to obtain certificates without having to go through a longer-term education program.
Use workforce system training tools and curriculums in Independent Living Program services.	Prepares pre-18 youth for employment.
Encourage youth to meet with employment service providers to discuss their plans and goals before turning 18.	Employment service providers can better tailor career services to each youth's interests and needs.
Remove existing public assistance policies that sanction families with youth between the ages of 14-21 who work and/or participate in employment programs.	Encourages youth to find employment and encourages their families to help them.
Enforce Los Angeles County policy that requires transition planning to start at age 14.	Helps youth identify and create pathways to achieve their short-term education and employment goals.

6. Leverage existing funding sources to support the sustainability of employment services targeting youth in foster care and/or probation

Recommendations	Outcome
Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (Probation) and Chafee (DCFS) dollars should be allocated across workforce investment boards to supplement existing WIA resources and connect the business community to hiring and tax incentives.	Generates more employment opportunities for youth and incentivizes businesses to hire youth in foster care and/or probation.
Local municipalities should invest Community Development Block Grants and/or general funds in youth development programs and/or business incentive programs.	Generates more employment opportunities for youth and incentivizes businesses to hire youth in foster care and/or probation.

**An Overview of CWI’s Youth Employment Initiative:
The Implementation of Cross-Departmental and Agency Employment Partnerships**

Youth in foster care are very likely to lack information about employment and educational services available for them. Among other key objectives, CWI began its Youth Employment Initiative to heighten awareness among foster youth of employment services offered through the workforce system, and to increase the number of youth that are employed and/or accessing job-training opportunities. Through the Youth Employment Initiative, CWI has worked with employment service providers and the child welfare system to improve case planning and practices to allow youth the opportunity to learn the necessary skills to enter the workforce and remain employed.

CWI’s assessment of the Los Angeles County workforce system, including the evaluation of program materials and data and stakeholder interviews, has informed the design and implementation of three cross-system programs. CWI’s recommendations incorporate additional activities and supportive services to meet the needs of both foster youth and business partners and to capitalize on the individual expertise of frontline DCFS social workers and individual WIB employment specialists.

Christopher, 20, AB 12 Foster Youth, Long Beach

After graduating from Wilson High in June 2012, Christopher enrolled at Cerritos College, where he studied Health Administration for one semester before dropping out. According to Christopher, he had difficulty focusing on his studies while worrying about his living situation and the financial well-being of his younger brother, who was also in foster care.

Christopher soon enrolled in Building Connections to Success, where he completed the program's classroom-based National Work Readiness Credential training. He began working as a Restaurant Assistant at Watson Republic in Long Beach and found the restaurant's fast-paced environment overwhelming. He felt unsupported by his coworkers and internalized complaints from upset customers. Despite the restaurant owner's high opinion of Christopher's performance Christopher felt the pressure of the job was too much and quit after three months.

CWI, employment staff notified Christopher's DCFS social worker about his decision to leave his job. After meeting with his employment specialist and social worker, Christopher realized that he had made the wrong decision. Christopher then met with his former supervisor, who offered him his job back the next day. As of June 2014, Christopher has worked at Watson Republic for nearly eight months, and is planning to re-enroll in school and earn a degree in hospitality.

Under CWI's Youth Employment Initiative, employment specialists and other staff at WIB employment centers prepare youth for employment through academic enrichment services such as tutoring, English and Math remediation, occupational skills training, and soft skill development through a variety of work readiness training activities. Partnering with education, business, social services, and community-based organizations, local WIB staff build youths' preparedness to enter high-growth/high-demand industries through work readiness activities as well as advancement to postsecondary education or vocational and apprenticeship training.

CWI's Youth Employment Initiative unites the Los Angeles County child welfare and workforce investment systems to meet the job training and employment needs of foster

youth. This endeavor currently includes the following cross-system partnerships:

First S.T.E.P. (Successful Transition to Employment Program) – CWI's Partnership with Los Angeles County's Child Welfare System and the Community and Senior Services Department

Through a partnership between CWI, DCFS, CSS, and the LA County WIB, First S.T.E.P. provides youth in foster care and probation between the ages of 16 and 21 with training that addresses life skills and leadership development, financial literacy, and goal setting. First S.T.E.P. is the successor program to the System Involved Youth project described above, which has incorporated CWI's recommended policy and practice changes. The program ensures youths' academic and employment preparation through basic skills upgrading, occupational skills training, and work readiness training. Throughout their participation in the program, youth receive individualized case management services that

support their transition into the working world, and help them reach program and personal self-sufficiency goals.

Youth are engaged in activities that build self-confidence and reinforce educational and employment goals. Activities and services include: life skills preparation; career exploration; interview preparation; on-the-job training; vocational assessments; and job search assistance. Youth are linked to permanent employment opportunities and provided with follow-up services to promote retention. To address the needs of crossover youth (foster youth who move from the foster care system to the juvenile justice system) and reduce the risk of recidivism, First S.T.E.P. incorporates strategies identified by the Department of Labor for successful reentry, including case management, educational, employment, and mentoring services.

First S.T.E.P. will connect a minimum of 200 youth in child welfare to employment and job training during the 2014-2015 fiscal year by braiding federal, state, and local funding across the child welfare and workforce investment systems. The First S.T.E.P partnership is the largest, coordinated, countywide employment program for foster and juvenile justice youth.

Bridge to Work: Foster Youth Preparation and Employment Program – CWI’s Partnership with Los Angeles County’s Child Welfare System and the South Bay WIB

In February 2013, CWI, DCFS, Probation, and SBWIB launched the Bridge to Work program, modeled on SBWIB’s successful employment program for individuals receiving CalWORKs benefits. Bridge to Work utilizes a youth-specific curriculum, the Blueprint for Workplace Success, to prepare foster and probation youth for employment. The Blueprint places youth in subsidized employment, provides case management and supportive services to youth while they are employed, and then provides ongoing job placement services to ensure youth advance to high-wage careers.

Nicole, 17, Foster Youth, Gardena

Currently a senior at Gardena High School, Nicole was referred to the Bridge to Work program last summer by her DCFS social worker, who was attending CWI’s social worker trainings at DCFS’s Torrance office. Nicole’s participation in the program helped her build a strong work ethic and remain committed to her goals in spite of family issues and barriers to her education.

Initially, Nicole became a peer role model for foster youth at the regional WIB and completed work-readiness training. She then obtained a position as a Clerical Aide at Inglewood Courthouse’s Unlimited Civil and Family Department, where she learned critical workplace skills and began establishing a professional network. Nicole will attend El Camino College next fall then plans to transfer to a four-year university to pursue a bachelor’s in Early Childhood Development. She credits her experience at the courthouse for strengthening her passion to pursue a career that will allow her to help other individuals.

Bridge to Work's goals are to 1) improve the employment outcomes of youth in child welfare; 2) leverage WIA and Chafee employment and training dollars; and 3) improve service delivery coordination between employment service providers, including American Job Centers and DCFS regional offices. The program employs a two-tier strategy in order to address the distinct educational and employment needs of in-school youth between the ages of 16-17 (Tier I) and out-of-school/post-high school young adults between the ages of 18-21 (Tier II).

The program provides incentives to encourage youth to reach their self-sufficiency goals. Services for youth ages 16-17 are based on a Learn and Earn approach, which connects youth to paid on-the-job training opportunities designed to build and strengthen workplace skills, and develop a connection between what youth are taught in school and their workplace experiences. Tier I youth may work up to 25 hours per week and a maximum of 150 hours and are encouraged to complete their paid work experience assignment during the summer to focus on academic enrichment services during the school year.

Andre, 19, AB 12 Foster Youth, Hawthorne

Andre enrolled in Bridge to Work in March 2013 as a referral from the DCFS Wateridge office. He was assigned an employment specialist who helped him practice his interview skills and refine his job search techniques. After one month, Andre was referred to a job at LAX.

A few months later, Andre informed his employment specialist that he was considering quitting his job due to the long hours and heavy workload. Under CWI's Shared Case Management Model, Andre met with his employment specialist and social worker to evaluate his decision and to examine alternative employment opportunities. Andre's social worker and employment specialist also spoke with him and his caregiver about services he could access to help him overcome issues at work.

During the course of these meetings, Andre admitted that he was nervous about his work performance, but that talking with his supervisor had reassured him that he was meeting his employer's expectations. After nearly a year, Andre is still working at the airport and is exploring other career opportunities in the aviation industry.

Meanwhile, services for Tier II participants (ages 18-21) focus on preparing them for entry-level employment opportunities in high-growth industry sectors. Tier II participants may work 30-35 hours per week, up to a maximum of 600 hours, and participate in Blueprint Job Retention Workshops that teach young adults the skills needed to be successful in the workplace. Youth also receive referral services for adult schools, high school completion programs, or postsecondary opportunities.

In a 2½ year, three-phase rollout, Bridge to Work will serve at least 215 youth in child welfare between the ages of 16 to 21. CWI will provide implementation and evaluation services of the Bridge to Work program to connect youth to jobs and employment training and to develop a sustainable program to serve future youth.

Building Connections to Success – CWI’s Partnership with Los Angeles County’s Child Welfare System and the Pacific Gateway Workforce Investment Network

Since October 2012, CWI and Pacific Gateway have worked together to establish the Building Connections to Success Program. Working with Pacific Gateway and DCFS regional offices, CWI is piloting a service delivery model that delivers coordinated, shared case management services to youth in foster care between the ages of 16-18 to help them reach their self-sufficiency goals through the delivery of individualized, transition planning services from staff across systems. CWI and its partners are establishing and measuring youths’ progress in achieving self-sufficiency standards across a range of educational and employment domains.

CWI designed the Building Connections to Success shared case management framework and performance measures with Pacific Gateway and DCFS. The program provides individualized educational and employment services that may include, but are not limited to 1) educational and employment-related guidance and counseling; mentoring and leadership development services; access to supportive services; and follow-up services for up to 12 months after program exit; 2) high school completion services, including tutoring, study skills training, alternative secondary offering, and dropout prevention strategies; 3) skills training through the National Work Readiness Credential program; and 4) employment opportunities linked to academic and occupational learning.

C & R Deutsch Foundation’s Transition-Aged Youth Collaborative

The Transition-Aged Youth Collaborative is a partnership among five agencies that includes Hathaway-Sycamores Child and Family Services, Hillsides/Youth Moving On, Los Angeles Youth Network, Pacific Clinics, and St Anne’s. Since 2011, these agencies have come together to improve programs and policies that support youth in the foster care system in obtaining and retaining employment.

Working together, CWI and the Collaborative are broadening relationships and coordinating services between child welfare, workforce, direct service partners, and educational institutions by raising awareness of WIA and other employment services.

CWI is providing technical assistance on the workforce system’s procurement process and encouraging its child welfare partners to apply to become subcontractors to local WIBs and provide direct WIA services to foster youth. Access to WIA dollars gives housing partners an opportunity to supplement existing employment services offered through Chafee and private philanthropic support. CWI’s partnership with the Collaborative has allowed the engagement of other housing, education, and employment providers outside the Collaborative to foster closer relationships among providers, in and outside the Collaborative, in supporting employment services.

Soft Skill Development Training in Employment Programs for Youth in Child Welfare

In each of the cross-agency and departmental partnerships above, soft skill development is critical to youths' workplace success. The following training programs and curricula provide youth with assistance on how to manage conflicts with coworkers or supervisors, to be punctual, and to demonstrate professionalism. Programs that place youth into jobs must ensure basic soft skill development, and that attitudes toward work are addressed at a personal level. While the duration and setting of each training program varies, they all share an approach that reinforces positive attitudes and behavior through group activities, role-play, and classroom discussion. Students that complete the following work readiness programs receive certificates of employability that are often recognized by local employers. Regional Chambers of Commerce and the workforce system's business services divisions endorse these certificates to employers.

Training programs are also tailored to address the workforce needs of each Local WIA region's business community. As a result, WIBs and youth councils usually decide to adopt or develop training curriculums that are best suited for their clients.

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teenagers

The Los Angeles County Department of Community and Senior Services, which administers the Los Angeles County WIB and its employment service contractors, teach youth how to communicate their personal stories and process feelings while developing resiliency skills that improve self-perception and empower them to take responsibility for their skill development and employment goals. As part of this effort, youth complete 13 lessons based on Sean Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teenagers*. The 13-week training addresses goal setting, accountability, prioritization, a positive mindset, effective communication and collaboration, building self-esteem, and resisting peer pressure.

Blueprint for Workplace Success

Under the South Bay WIB, youth in the Bridge to Work program complete 30 hours of in-class work readiness training based on the Blueprint for Workplace Success curriculum. From this training, youth learn workplace essentials, including time management, problem solving, effective communication, job interview preparation, job retention, budgeting, and dealing with coworkers, supervisors, and customers. It also teaches skills identified by the Department of Labor as essential for job success in a global market. Youth are tested pre- and post-program to indicate their level of progress and work readiness. Youth with specific needs are offered additional skills remediation and on-the-job training tailored to each case. In addition, the South Bay WIB encourages the

community's business leaders to provide employment opportunities to youth, and to play an active role in the program's employability certification process.

National Work Readiness Credential

The Pacific Gateway Workforce Investment Network has incorporated the National Work Readiness Credential into the Building Connections to Success program to enhance skill development and prepare youth for entry-level positions. The 25-hour training is based on learning standards recognized by the Department of Labor and industry leaders as effective in preparing youth to enter the workforce. The training curriculum has a contextualized approach that strengthens youths' retention of learning and encourages them to apply their skills in different situations. Instruction is focused on real world, workplace contexts that develop skills for youths' successful entry into the workforce. Work readiness lessons are designed to motivate youth to make connections between their education and job training, and their lives as students, citizens, and workers.

The National Work Readiness Credential program has a variety of instruction delivery methods to meet the needs of individual youth without compromising the program's quality and content. Lesson plans include strategies for English Language Learners, and students with learning disabilities. These strategies include: 1) options of activities for youth to choose from based on their learning style or interests; 2) learning labs where students may work at their own pace; 3) one-to-one service delivery matching youth with tutors and employment specialists who can teach the material at the youth's preferred pace; 4) remediation training to facilitate the learning of new material; and 5) opportunities to share their workplace-related ideas, backgrounds, and knowledge with their peers to foster respect for cultural, ethnic, and gender differences.

The C & R Deutsch Foundation Workforce Development Curriculum

The C & R Deutsch Foundation, in partnership with the Columbia University School of Social Work's Workplace Center, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, and the Stuart Foundation, has developed a workforce development curriculum that features adaptable learning modules. The curriculum's flexible design allows agencies to serve youth at all stages of career development. The modules are organized into three levels: 1) *Core level*, which presents career exploration activities that introduce youth to high-demand pathways in emerging industry sectors; 2) *Intermediate level*, which includes information for young adults searching for a job along their identified career path; and 3) *Advanced level*, which contains information and teaches skills important for job retention.

The curriculum is designed for both group and individual instruction, and facilitators set the pace appropriate for each user or group. The curriculum is unique in that it focuses on the needs and skills of young adults who have connections with the child welfare system.

Peer support is a key element of the curriculum, and technological elements to increase youth engagement – such as phone applications and virtual work environments – are in development.

The curriculum and facilitator’s guide have been tailored to the Los Angeles context and are currently being piloted by the five Collaborative agencies. During the pilot, the Workplace Center will review the curriculum. Over the next two to three years, the Collaborative seeks to position the finalized curriculum as an evidenced-based, best practices model with the capacity for widespread adoption.

CWI’s Shared Case Management Model for Youth in Child Welfare

CWI, in partnership with its workforce partners, has developed and implemented a service delivery model that provides intensive, shared case management by social workers and employment specialists to youth in foster care.

Under this model, DCFS staff work with their workforce system counterparts to coordinate case management services and activities for youth, and share any pertinent case information, at least once every two weeks with employment staff on case planning goals and the services and activities needed to help youth achieve permanency, safety, well-being, and self-sufficiency outcomes. DCFS facilitates the enrollment of youth into WIA and other employment programs by sharing, or helping find and collect, any necessary paperwork or documentation required for WIA enrollment and retention in services.

CWI, DCFS, and local WIB staff meet monthly with youth and their caregivers, during which CWI provides technical assistance on individual cases and identifies broader, emerging trends that signal practice successes or barriers to youth accessing employment services. The shared case management model aligns the workforce system’s Individual Service Strategy (ISS) and the child welfare staff, who work with older youth to identify individualized educational and employment goals and develop service plans recorded in each youth’s ISS form. DCFS staff are kept informed and engaged in this process and receive regularly updated copies of the ISS for inclusion in court reports and youths’ written transitional plans. Through the Court Lab project and CWI’s partnership with the Edelman Children’s Court, DCFS, children’s advocates and their attorneys, transition-planning has begun to include fuller assessments, reviews, and updates of older youths’ career and educational pathways as they approach age-18.

CWI’s Shared Case Management Model has three core principles: 1) Coordinated, individualized transition planning services between child welfare and workforce systems, with an emphasis on achieving education and employment outcomes for foster youth in care, age 16 or older; 2) Measurement and tracking of youth progress in achieving

universally accepted (i.e., across child welfare and workforce systems throughout Los Angeles County) self-sufficiency standards for older foster youth; and 3) Leveraging of public child welfare and workforce service funding to serve foster youth effectively with employment preparation and services.

To implement each of these three principles, the Shared Case Management Model establishes the following roles and responsibilities between CWI and its partners:

The Division of Roles and Responsibilities in CWI's Shared Case Management Model

1. CWI Responsibilities:

- a. Lead and partner with WIBs, DCFS, and Probation to develop the programs, goals, short- and long-term outcomes, activities, and timelines for each program.
- b. Provide necessary technical assistance and/or training to DCFS, Probation, and WIB staff on coordination of their case planning and services:
 - i. Assess the services provided to individual youth and youth as a whole through the project, and analyze the outcomes for program participants pertaining to employment services and placement.
 - ii. Convene meetings with DCFS, Probation, and WIBs to discuss project data and trends.
 - iii. Conduct regular program evaluations, including recommendations for ongoing project improvements.
 - iv. Develop a coordinated outreach and recruitment plan targeting youth served by private child welfare providers, including group homes, and foster family agencies.
 - v. Evaluate programmatic data trends, issues, or barriers, and provide recommendations to WIBs, DCFS, and Probation to ensure successful implementation and improve systems policies and practices related to youth employment.
 - vi. Determine improvements to both the program design of each cross agency employment project and the child welfare system as a whole, utilizing lessons learned through ongoing evaluations on programmatic and policy areas, such as cross-training of child welfare and workforce system staff; coordinated case planning across systems; improved communication mechanisms between child welfare and workforce system staff, as well as with youth and private youth service providers; improved referral system that screens eligibility and targets appropriate youth; data tracking and sharing mechanisms across systems related to youth employment services and outcomes; and expanding systems capacity to ensure prioritization of training and employment placements for youth in the workforce system.

2. WIB/Employment Service Provider Responsibilities:
 - a. Commit agency and staff support to implement the following activities of CWI's shared case management model:
 - i. Working with DCFS to provide coordinated, individualized transition planning case management and supportive services with a focus on educational attainment and employment to youth enrolled in the program.
 - ii. Tracking milestones and working with DCFS, youth, and their caregivers toward achieving the following outcomes:
 - Youth are on track to obtain a high school diploma or GED;
 - Youth attain educational and/or employment skills;
 - Youth participate in work experience and/or obtain part-time employment;
 - Youth are educated on the workforce system's resources and services;
 - Caregivers are engaged and educated about youth's educational, employment, and self-sufficiency needs and goals.
 - iii. Providing individualized educational and employment services that may include, but are not limited to:
 - Enrollment in WIA Youth programs and services;
 - Case management including educational and employment-related guidance and counseling; mentoring and leadership development services; access to supportive services (e.g., food/clothing vouchers, training supplies and materials, transportation assistance); follow-up services for up to 12 months after program exit;
 - High school/GED completion services including tutoring; study skills training; alternative secondary school offerings; dropout prevention strategies;
 - Work readiness and experience services including skills training; summer employment opportunities linked to academic and occupational learning; paid and unpaid work experience.
 - b. Meet regularly with youth and their caregivers, if possible, once every two to three weeks, based on the individual youth's needs;
 - c. Participate in DCFS's transitional planning with older youth and their caregivers, and be responsible for providing case planning and supportive services to youth around any education and/or employment-related goals identified in the transitional planning for older youth.
 - d. Align the workforce system's Individual Service Strategy with DCFS's transitional planning for older youth and share pertinent case information on youth with DCFS staff.

- e. Communicate regularly and often with DCFS staff on case planning goals and the services and activities needed to help youth achieve permanency, safety, well-being, and self-sufficiency outcomes.
- f. Participate in CWI's monthly case review meetings with DCFS program leadership to assess progress, issues, barriers, or trends, and their implications for systemic improvements.

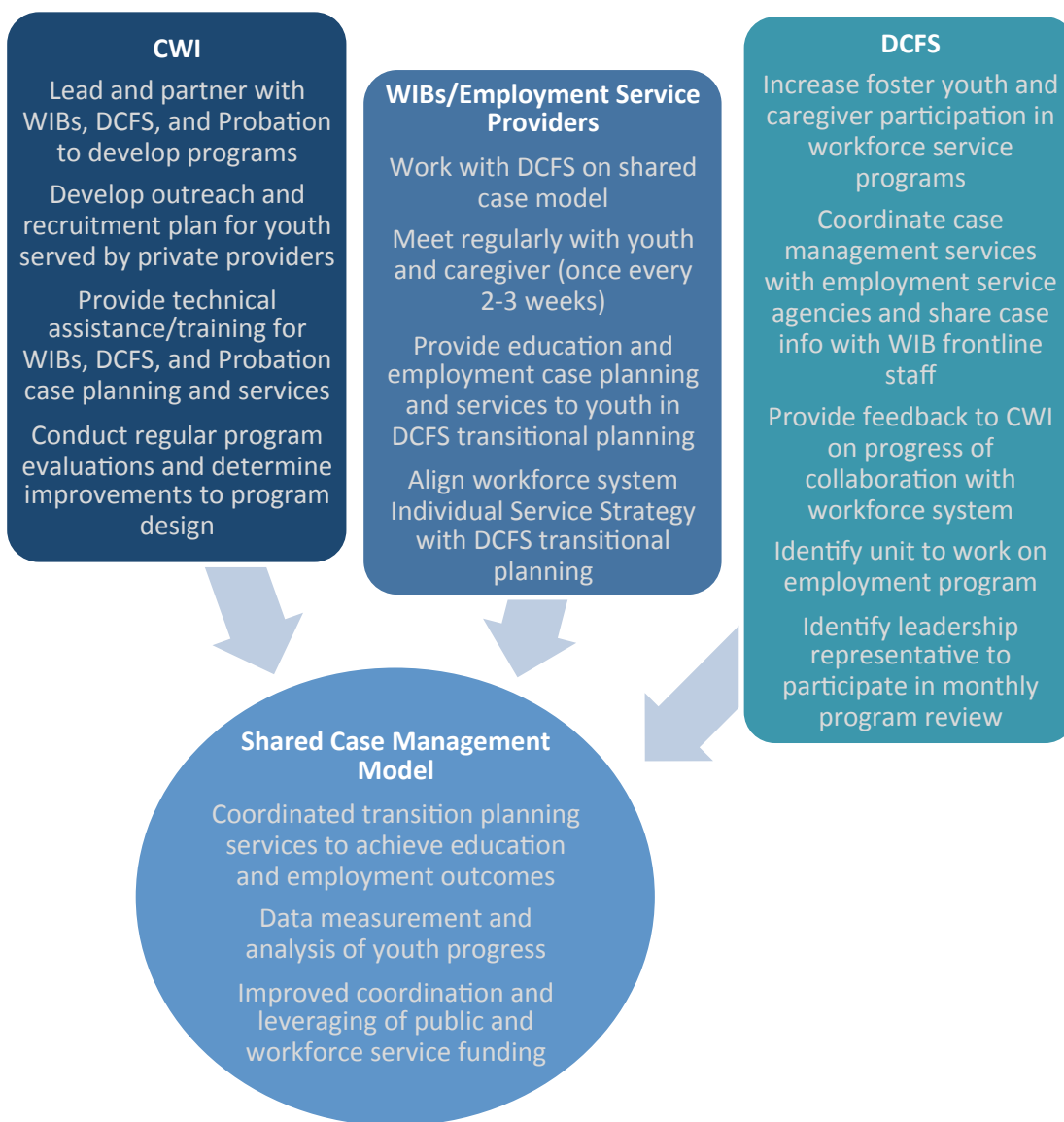
3. DCFS Regional Office Responsibilities:

- a. Identify one unit willing to work on the employment program with CWI, DCFS, and a respective WIB or employment service provider.
- b. Contact selected foster youth and their caregivers about participation in respective programs in order to enroll youth in workforce services for at least one year to achieve individualized educational and employment goals.
- c. Work with counterparts at the employment service agency to coordinate case management services and activities for youth employing the core principles of CWI's shared case management model and share critical case information on youth with WIB frontline staff by:
 - i. Communicating regularly and at least once every two weeks with employment staff on case planning goals and the services and activities needed to help youth achieve permanency, safety, well-being, and self-sufficiency outcomes;
 - ii. Sharing necessary paperwork or documentation to facilitate youth enrollment and retention in workforce services;
 - iii. At least once every quarter, including employment staff in monthly DCFS visits and transitional planning with older youth and their caregivers with youth/caregiver consent;
 - iv. Assigning employment service agencies to provide case planning and supportive services to youth related to education and/or employment-related goals identified in the transitional plan; ensure that program goals are written into transitional plans for older youth.
- d. Provide feedback to CWI, as requested, on progress of collaboration with workforce system.
- e. Identify one leadership representative, such as an Assistant Regional Administrator or unit supervisor, to participate in monthly program review meetings with DCFS and employment staff, facilitated by CWI, to discuss progress, issues, barriers, or trends, and their implications for systemic improvements.

To support the implementation of the Shared Case Management Model, CWI has entered into memoranda of understanding and other agreements with DCFS, Probation, CSS, LA County WIB, Pacific Gateway Workforce Investment Network, and South Bay WIB. These

agreements grant CWI access to aggregate level demographic data, employment placement reports, case management reports, outcome attainment data, case notes, and activity summaries.

Cross-System Responsibilities for CWI's Shared Cased Management Model



Lessons Learned and Their Application to Other Systems

Job experience is vital to a foster youth's transition into adulthood. CWI's Youth Employment Initiative—through its Shared Case Management Model and implementation of that model in partnership with local WIBs, DCFS and other Los Angeles County agencies, along with direct service providers, individual youth, their foster parents, kin care providers, and group homes—offers youth in child welfare the financial and emotional support necessary to pursue their life goals and begin learning vital self-sufficiency skills.

The Youth Employment Initiative's Shared Case Management Model can be used as an adaptable framework for other regions to increase access to the workforce system and connect youth to employment opportunities. As described above, implementation and adaptation requires partnerships with child welfare and workforce development systems, and support from both their topline management and frontline staff.

An open assessment of both child welfare and workforce system barriers to youth employment is essential. CWI's workforce partners and DCFS provided critical information and access that informed the development of innovative policy and practice changes across systems. Findings from this evaluation allowed CWI to work directly with agency providers to improve cross-systems collaboration, accountability, data sharing and tracking, and the standardization of effective employment practices for foster youth. Interviews and open discussions with policymakers, providers, and youth to identify solutions for removing barriers to youth employment are equally critical.

A single organization's or group of organizations' implementation of improvements, such as the Shared Case Management Model, requires commitment from child welfare and workforce leadership, most effectively in the form of Memoranda of Understanding and/or Letters of Agreement that 1) provide the organization or group access to management, frontline staff, youth, and data to monitor and assess the ongoing establishment of the service delivery model, develop recommendations for improvements to service models, and assist in the implementation of practices and policies that improve the quality and effectiveness of employment services for foster youth; and 2) establish data sharing and tracking of employment services and outcomes for foster youth, including demographic data, employment placement reports, case management reports, outcome attainment data, case notes, and program activity summaries.

Agreements and memoranda of understanding should also outline the division of roles and responsibilities among public and private partners related to program leadership and evaluation services, including cross-training child welfare and workforce system staff; coordinating case planning across systems, and with youth and other service providers;

developing and implementing an improved referral system that screens eligibility and targets appropriate youth for workforce programs; and data tracking and sharing mechanisms across systems related to youth employment services and outcomes.

The sustainability of cross-system partnerships with the workforce system and child welfare departments depends on the active inclusion of foster family agencies, group homes, kincare providers, other service providers and others who work with youth daily and conduct youth case planning. Foster youth service providers are responsible for ensuring the safety and permanency of foster youth, but preparing youth to enter the workforce and adulthood requires a different expertise that many organizations may not possess on their own.

Cross-training efforts should communicate the importance of employment in relation to transition planning, teach professionals outside of the child welfare system how to work with youth in foster care, and affirm the strengths and positive attributes that youth in foster care possess. Once youth are enrolled in a cross-systems program, shared case management meetings should provide youth opportunities to enter the working world and promote success by alleviating general workplace anxieties and addressing youths' other needs.

Child welfare experts must collaborate with the workforce system to strengthen partnerships with employers, educating the business community of the needs of foster youth and how employers can help foster youth learn to navigate a work environment. Workplace supervisors should be provided information on how to create supportive working environments that encourage the development of leadership skills and give youth an opportunity to demonstrate proper work habits. Supervisors should also be instructed on how to become advocates for youth by allowing room for growth, monitoring work performance, and sharing constructive advice.

Together, these partnerships can create coordinated, cross-agency programs and practices that do not penalize youth for their background in the child welfare system, and instead connect youth to a network of resources that maximizes their strengths, and brings them closer to a secure and productive adult life.

Acknowledgments

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