



FOSTER YOUTH DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

Los Angeles, California Project Profile¹

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¹ Please see the main report <http://www.casey.org/doleval> or <http://www.iel.org/programs/casey.html> for more information.

Los Angeles, California Project Profile

State Grantee:

California Employment Development Department (EDD)

Local Awardee and Project Name:

Foothill Workforce Investment Board, in consortium with Community Build, Inc.

Youth Self-Sufficiency Program

Pasadena, CA; Los Angeles, CA

Background

The California Employment Development Department office (EDD) was the recipient of \$400,000 in grant funds from the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (ETA) for the first year of the Foster Youth Demonstration Project. The Foothill Workforce Investment Board, on behalf of a consortium that included Community Build, Inc. of Los Angeles, submitted the award-winning proposal to EDD in late January 2005. The state EDD required that a successful proposal demonstrate the capacity to serve youth in two Service Planning Areas (SPAs). This project serves SPA 3, which encompasses the San Gabriel Valley area, and SPA 6, which encompasses the South Central region of Los Angeles. The original period of the grant was from March 1, 2005 through February 28, 2006. Second-year funding increased the DOL investment to \$800,000 and extended the grant period to June 2006, and later to June 2007. Matching funds provided by the state came from an equal combination of Wagner-Peyser and Chafee funds.

This project is unique among the DOL demonstration grantees in that it operates in two distinct locations. The first location, managed by the Foothill Workforce Investment Board (WIB), was originally located at the Jackie Robinson Center, 1020 North Fair Oaks Ave. in Pasadena. During the second year, the project relocated to the Foothill One Stop Career Center at 1207 E. Green St., about three miles away. The second location is Community Build, Inc., 8730 South Vermont Ave., located in the heart of South Central Los Angeles, across the street from a high school and on a main thoroughfare of the community. Both locations are reasonably accessible

to the youth the program serves. Both sites are referred to by the common name of the Youth Self-Sufficiency Program.

Program Design

The Youth Self-Sufficiency Program was originally designed to provide a range of services to transition-age youth from foster care between age 17 and 21, with the goal of promoting self-sufficiency and helping these youth connect with their communities in meaningful ways. The program was to serve 100 youth. As of June 30, 2007, however, the two sites had enrolled just over 200 youth. Even though they share a common title, the sites operate distinct programs.

The program design is called “the California Model.” It originally consisted of five modules (a sixth, on financial literacy, was added later), stemming from the theory that self-sufficiency requires more than just a job, and that an approach to developing the assets and human capital of the youth must be implemented. The California model grew out of a model developed for work within the probation and parole arena over a period of several years.

Each module includes several components and strategies. The five original modules were:

- Intake/Eligibility
- Employment
- Academic/Educational
- Training
- Retention

The youth served by the Community Build program have access to the full range of services provided at that location, not just those funded under this grant. Community Build has an active development program and is continually seeking and obtaining grants and other funding sources for ongoing programs as well as special activities.

Although based on the same underlying model, curriculum, and philosophy, the program services and activities have evolved to look quite different across the two locations. In both locations, youth receive one-on-one and group activities related to each module, with particular

focus on the employment and educational components. Because the differences are fairly significant, we discuss each location's approach to the program and services separately below.

Program Implementation (including highlights of practice and challenges)

Both sites officially launched their programs in June 2005. Most of the outreach has been through "word-of-mouth" from current participants, who refer their friends, roommates, and other residents in their group homes, and in some cases, siblings. In the past year, Foothill has run a few newspaper advertisements to publicize their services in the local community, but it found that this was not an effective approach for attracting new youth. Staff members from both locations have participated in larger community events—such as education, employment, or health fairs—particularly those that focus on youth in foster care. They have created colorful Self-Sufficiency Project brochures and flyers for use in these events. One of the flyers was designed by a Foothill youth program participant.

Both sites have continued to enroll youth; Community Build more so than Foothill. Foothill reached its capacity early on, and enrollments slowed. Thus, the youth population served at Foothill have remained fairly stable. This has afforded Foothill staff the opportunity to really get to know the youth in much more depth and provide them with a greater menu of services.

The primary differences in the populations served between the two locations relate to the youth's foster care history and experiences. Most of those served in Pasadena are not originally from Pasadena but have been placed in group homes in Pasadena. Most of these youth continue to reside in group homes. Most of the Los Angeles youth served by Community Build program grew up in the community. Their foster care placements were less likely to involve group residential placements and more likely to involve placement in a foster family home or a kinship care setting (placement with a relative upon removal from parents) or other foster care arrangement in an individual home.

Both locations noted that the youth have more deficiencies in basic skills, such as reading and math, and more complex, multisystem needs than originally anticipated. In response, Community Build has moved to a more intensive case management model of service delivery. In terms of readiness for employment, postsecondary education, and independent living, the Foothill youth seemed to have greater deficiencies than their Community Build counterparts.

There have been some changes in staffing over the life of the program, although most of the original staff remains. Each location has added staff since the program began. Specifically, over the last year, Foothill added two staff members, a peer advocate and an additional youth worker with a background in psychology. These staff members were necessary because the youth have so many barriers to success and so many needs. Youth are now getting more opportunity to interact with staff. Community Build added a peer advocate during the first year but has not made any staffing changes since then.

Foothill

Of the two sites, Foothill has experienced the most change. The biggest change occurred in the second year when the project changed locations. The Foothill program moved from the Jackie Robinson Center to the WIB-operated One-Stop Career Center, about three miles away. The move was precipitated in large part by the uncertainty of the continuation of funding. Staff feels that the change was positive for the youth, as it exposes them to the “adult world.” Youth now participate in the One-Stop workshops and avail themselves of the services provided to all job seekers in the Pasadena area.

Late in the first year (2005), a memorandum of understanding was finalized and signed with the Casey Family Programs’ Pasadena field office. This strengthened the relationship between the two organizations and allowed youth to be dually enrolled in both programs while reducing duplicated services. Casey Family Programs (Casey) is now an active partner and has paid for items not covered by the grant, such as \$500 for a graduation party.

Foothill and Casey staff meet monthly, specifically to discuss the progress and needs of the co-enrolled youth, so that adjustments or enhancements can be made to their respective programs and approaches. Foothill staff believes that this partnership has made it possible for the youth to avail themselves of a greater array of services, and for a true wraparound approach to ensure that the full complement of services needed by each young person are provided. “Youth are less likely to slip through the cracks now,” they stated. Casey staff further highlighted the importance of this holistic approach to services. “If one part of a youth’s system fails, their whole life can begin to come apart,” one staff member said. He illustrated this with a story of a young man whose car broke down. This resulted in his being frequently late for work (due to unreliable public transportation), losing the job, and then losing housing. Another youth who was in the

focus group said, “I never had people care about me this much. I would definitely not be in college if it were not for this program.”

In the second year, the programming moved away from a cohort approach where all youth complete modules in the same sequence. Although the modules still frame the flow of services, the process now uses a more individualized approach. Another change is in the timing of work experience, particularly paid work experience. “We have found that not every young person is immediately ready for work,” one staff person noted, adding that “they have to prove themselves now first by completing some of the other activities and earning the right to obtain a paid work experience.” One of the pre-work experience activities is now a “job club” with four days of activities related to work ethics, job search, and skills needed to keep a job. Some of these sessions are in groups and others are one-on-one.

The paid work experience program component has been modified in the last year. Originally, it provided youth with a full-time job. Now it provides youth with 20 hours of employment per week, but the rate of pay has been increased from \$7.50 to \$9.83 per hour, the level considered a living wage in Los Angeles. Staff feels that this is a positive development, as many youth were not ready for paid work experience and providing part-time rather than full-time work experience allows youth to also look for permanent work.

Because of the many and complex issues the youth are facing (including mental health challenges, substance abuse, and dangerous sexual activity like prostitution or abusive relationships), the staff is engaging in more “crisis management” than anticipated. Partly in response, Foothill has established a contract which they and the young person jointly sign laying out each party’s roles, responsibilities, and the benefits that will accrue when the youth follows the rules and completes specific program activities.

Foothill has also found that the majority of youth are coming in with very low basic skill levels, with reading levels as low as second grade, for example. This extreme level of skill deficiency creates a major hurdle to job placement and retention. Foothill staff was concerned that the DOL-required data collection did not adequately capture this situation, and that it needs to be captured. They also believed that the data did not capture all of the outcomes of youth, particularly around part-time employment.

For a while, it appeared that Foothill had “zero” retention of youth, but staff realized this was due to an error in the way they were entering the data in their MIS system and on the DOL forms. This error has now been corrected, and future reports should more accurately capture their retention data. With regard to retention, Foothill has a policy of making sure that at least one staff member talks to each youth every two weeks (although contact is often more frequent). Some youth have temporarily left, but as a result of this intensive communication and outreach, they have come back—a few after a hiatus of 6 months.

In addition to the Casey MOU, Foothill continues to work with other community agencies as referral sources in both directions. For example, the partnership with local transitional housing programs has strengthened in the past year. As a result, Foothill can “almost guarantee housing” for youth who are enrolled in the Youth Self-Sufficiency Program. Hillside Alliance for Children’s Rights provides legal services; Young and Healthy in Pasadena and Planned Parenthood are referral sources for health care needs; Pacific Clinics is the mental health provider; and Pasadena Community College has a specific staff member who works with the project youth.

All Saints, one of Pasadena’s largest churches, has a support group for youth from foster care. The support group has been very involved with and supportive of the Youth Self-Sufficiency Project, and Foothill is in the process of developing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with it to strengthen this connection. The group provides food and volunteers for special events, fundraising activities (including a fashion show where the youth were allowed to keep the clothes they modeled), a youth council retreat, and a strong mentoring program. Mentoring is initially provided in a group setting, where potential mentors and youth come together for a particular activity. Once the youth feel comfortable with these adults, more individualized mentoring is a natural outgrowth. This approach has been successful and creates a feeling of safety and trust, as well as opening doors for potential lifelong relationships.

The Self-Sufficiency youth are also taken on regular field trips to community sites to broaden their experience in the community as well as to expose them to a range of potential career paths and employers. Recent trips have included the Museum of Tolerance, the Getty Museum, Los Angeles Zoo, and tickets to a performance of the *Lion King*. They have also made arrangements for participating youth to enroll in a local driving school, and, to date, four youth have obtained driver’s licenses as a result.

Two program gaps are apparent. The first is the need to have a “petty cash” resource available for the unexpected, immediate needs that tend to crop up. This is a reminder that, as youth from care, these young people do not have family to fall back on, so a seemingly small financial need can become their undoing if there is not a resource to assist. The second gap is in services to youth at ages just below those served by the Youth Self-Sufficiency Project. There is a belief that if youth had access to some pre-vocational readiness services before they turn 17, a project like this would be more successful.

Other than the services provided to youth by Casey’s Pasadena field office, this program does not place much emphasis on linking educational and employment plans to youth’s permanency plans or on strengthening connections with permanent family members or other caring adults.

Community Build

Like Foothill, Community Build also saw a need to reduce the structured nature of the modularized approach to services and move to a more fluid, individualized approach. The modules are now seen as checkpoints to help staff make sure they are “covering all the bases” with each youth, rather than as a linear program that youth have to pass through.

As part of this more individualized approach, the staff itself has become “less compartmentalized” and functions more as a team, with each member sharing in the responsibilities for engaging, motivating, and retaining youth in the program. Where youth begin in the program often depends on their own identified needs when they enroll. Some come with a strong desire to go to college, and they have heard that this program helps youth get into college. For these youth, preparing for college becomes the starting point, and as time passes, they move on to other needs, such as stabilizing their housing, seeking employment, and setting career goals. Other youth come in when they find themselves suddenly homeless, often as a result of being “thrown out” of the last home they were staying in. They express an immediate need for a job and some income to support themselves, and they are less able to focus on long-term goals or future-oriented planning.

Thus, the enrollment and assessment process provides an opportunity to gauge where youth are at entry and what their personal goals are. Nearly all the youth served at Community Build have their sights set on college, and many are currently enrolled. Several of them have to take

remedial (no credit) courses or participate in “bridge programs” to prepare them for a full college load. During this time, they face the challenge of meeting the criteria for typical college financial aid programs, which often require that students carry a minimum number of credits, so the Community Build staff often has to find creative avenues to helping the youth finance their education. The staff has also seen that work experience can serve as a distraction for youth in college and can derail them from achieving the academic success needed to reach their long-term personal and career goals. A lot of effort goes into helping the college students stay focused and on track. As a result, Community Build has developed relationships with colleges to provide specific internships and work-study experiences for Self-Sufficiency Project youth.

Staff has tried to enroll the youth in a number of programs concurrently to maximize their access to services and financial resources. Thus, any particular youth may be in a work experience or paid internship while also taking college classes and, at the same time, taking workshops or participating in support groups at the Community Build center. The “customer service” staff and peer advocate (an alumnus of foster care) are heavily involved in retention efforts by continually reaching out to the youth—phoning them, encouraging them to stay connected to the program, etc. “It really helps to know that some of the staff has been through what we have been through,” one young person noted. “They don’t give up on you.”

Community Build staff expressed a concern that the DOL outcome measures are not sufficiently holistic to capture the true nature of the work with each youth. “If we help a youth complete high school, enroll in and stay in college, AND get and keep a job, why can’t all of these outcomes be counted?” There was a feeling that the current approach to the performance and outcome measures contributes to an either/or mentality: education or employment, for example, rather than a holistic approach to ensuring that all of the youth’s needs are met and opportunities provided.

Most of the youth served by Community Build have some level of relationship with family members, often kin. These relationships are often fraught with conflict, so part of the role of the Community Build staff is to help the youth discern which relationships in their lives are healthy and supportive and how to manage those that are not. Although Community Build tried to pilot a mentoring program, there currently is no staff person focused on this. Community Build is seeking to help the youth learn how to identify their own mentors from their networks of support or within the community, however.

In terms of links to other services, Community Build has many other services available in the building as well as staff from other programs who come to the building on a regular basis to provide support to the youth. This includes the child welfare agency's Independent Living program specialists, a psychologist who is on-site two days a week, and a teen health clinic just up the street. Over the past year, staff has been working to sign a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the county mental health agency to provide additional services to all transition-age youth. Even though the MOU hasn't been signed, additional staff is operating from Community Build to provide staff training and increased mental health services.

Program progress and continuing issues

Both sites report success in finding the young people jobs. The Foothill WIB operates a One-Stop Career Center and therefore has the capacity to connect youth with employer recruitment activities. However, the overall approach to employer outreach and recruitment at both locations has shifted since the project was initially conceived. "Some youth are not ready for the responsibility of work," one staff person noted. Several times throughout the site visit, interviewees highlighted the need for the youth to mature, to develop more job-readiness skills, and to learn basic work ethic.

"The economy (in Pasadena) is good," one provider commented, "so it is not hard for the youth to find jobs; the more difficult task is keeping jobs." Several of those interviewed pointed out that the life experiences inherent in foster care are not conducive to job maintenance and success. For example, many youth have experienced multiple moves. This contributes to a view that the appropriate or logical response to problems is to leave and move on. Clearly, in a job setting, this is not a helpful strategy. Youth placed in group homes often have fewer opportunities to develop and practice independent living skills than their peers in more normalized living situations. Several of the focus group members generally felt that the foster care system does not provide them with the knowledge or skills needed for the transition to the labor market, so they agreed that this project fills an important need.

While paid work experience was offered as a "given" in the Foothill program early on, it is now an opportunity that must be earned after completion of several job-readiness activities (as previously noted). Once youth begin the paid work experience, however, they sometimes find

they have to use this option as an income maintenance program. Because their job retention skills are still evolving, youth are still not ready for unsubsidized employment at the end of 6 or 12 weeks, and yet they need to have a job in order to retain their housing. Thus, the paid work experience is extended. Retention has improved as a result of allowing these extensions, and this provides the added time needed to develop more maturity and skills.

Paid work experience, or paid internships, is also a staple of the Community Build program, where the employment and economic picture is not as bright. Because of the high college enrollment rate and the goal of keeping these youth in college, work-study and paid internships provide the best option for developing employment skills and experience while furthering their education. "My internship was the most helpful thing this program gave me," one youth stated, noting that he went on to be hired full-time for the company where he interned.

Beyond these employment links, Foothill has developed a strong relationship with the Los Angeles County government. This relationship has yielded employment opportunities for several of the participating youth. Los Angeles County launched a program that connects disadvantaged youth with County agencies through a full-time internship and guarantees full-time employment upon successful completion. Out of 300 area youth who took the test required for participation in this program, only 11 passed; 6 of those 11 were from the Self-Sufficiency Project. No youth from the Self-Sufficiency Project who took the test failed. This is not only a success for these particular youth but is also a door-opener for future employment opportunities for project youth with Los Angeles County.

Additional outreach to area employers has met with mixed success. The City of Pasadena continues to hire several of the project youth. Sears and Pep Boys were both open to hiring youth from the project, but so far these contacts have not yielded successful employment outcomes.

Community Build has developed unique outreach programs with the entertainment industry, one of the largest avenues to employment in the area. There are many "behind the scenes" career paths, some of which are very well paid, within the movie industry. However, there are also strong networks of people filling these, often involving multiple generations of large extended families.

Another significant employer in the area is the Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), but tightening security standards mean that youth with delinquency or other criminal histories are not eligible to apply. Strict drug screening policies also create challenges for some of the youth. Yet these problems are also seen as motivators, opportunities to teach the youth how their behaviors can directly affect their future job and career options. One problem that both Foothill and Community Build have run into involves youth who have had juvenile delinquency records as minors; these records are supposed to be sealed when they reach adulthood, but a lack of legal representation for the youth has resulted in these cases remaining open, thereby creating a hindrance to employment.

Substance abuse and mental health issues are significant problems. The lack of appropriate referral services was a significant service gap, but the problem is now being addressed through the new relationship with the mental health agency. Gang activity, while changing in nature somewhat over the last year, continues to be a problem.

Community Build noticed that many of the youth coming to their program were showing symptoms of learning disabilities, and staff members felt ill-equipped to serve these youth without additional expertise. Thus, the staff development program in the last several months has focused on how to recognize, assess, and respond to youth with learning disabilities, as well as how to help employers create work environments where these youth can thrive and contribute their strengths rather than being labeled solely for their deficits.

Both Foothill and Community Build acknowledged challenges with the data tracking and MIS systems. Confusion around changes in the data collection forms resulted in errors on key data elements, particularly in terms of retention. Correcting this problem was time-intensive, involving multiple meetings and many hours of work. Staff at both locations expressed frustration with this process, although Foothill expressed appreciation for the help received from the state workforce agency, EDD, in making these corrections.

In spite of these glitches, both Foothill and Community Build strongly believe that the youth are meeting most of the desired project outcomes. Both sites have developed a stronger focus on education than initially anticipated, as is reflected by the number of youth both graduating from high school and enrolling in college. The staff was also surprised to learn the extent to which the

youth were not work-ready and so have found that it takes longer to reach the desired employment outcomes than anticipated.

Community Build has expressed a particular concern that the performance measures are not designed to capture and give credit for youth who achieve multiple outcomes. Foothill adds to this concern by noting that, when youth work full-time and go to school, they are not engaged in workshops or other activities, so the only “activity” they are receiving is case management, which is not tracked as an activity. Thus, the often long hours of work with these youth are lost, and success appears limited.

In terms of other outcomes, both locations agree that participation in this project has reduced criminal activity and teen parenting among participants. The week before the site visit, however, one of the Community Build youth died under circumstances that the police consider suspicious, and the staff and youth were still coping with that loss. On another note, leadership training was tested at Foothill and later dropped when it seemed that the youth were not ready for it, whereas Community Build believes that the leadership development outcomes is one of the site’s strengths.

Program Data

As seen in Table 1, Foothill and Community Build enrolled a total of 207 youth through June 30, 2007. Of these, nearly two-thirds were 17 and older, while over one-third of the youth were under 17. A little over 72 percent of youth were black, 20 percent were Hispanic, and the remaining youth were white or of another race. Fifty-six percent of the participants at the site were female.

Over half of the participants were in high school at the time of program entry, one-fourth were high school graduates, and the remaining youth were high school dropouts. Over two-thirds of the youth lived in stable housing at intake, and slightly more of the remaining youth lived in independent living at entry than lived in temporary housing or were homeless. We do not have participant-level data for parenting status at intake for Los Angeles. Nearly half of participants have been in the program for 7–9 quarters, 30 percent have been in the program 1–3 quarters, and just over 20 percent have been in the program 4–6 quarters.

The most commonly received service was job preparation; over 70 percent of youth received this service. The other most commonly received services were other services (46%) and life skills (42%).

Around one-third of youth in the Los Angeles program achieved a positive outcome, approximately one-fourth attained an employment outcome, and nine percent entered postsecondary school while in the program.

Table 1. Youth Characteristics, Services, and Outcomes

Characteristics, Services, and Outcomes	Category	Los Angeles	Total for All Sites
Age	Under 17	35.4%	19.0%
	17 & older	64.6%	81.0%
Race/ Ethnicity	White	2.9%	9.5%
	Black	72.3%	71.3%
	Hispanic	19.9%	14.4%
	Other	4.9%	4.8%
Sex	Male	44.4%	41.6%
	Female	55.6%	58.4%
School status at entry	In high school	54.9%	42.3%
	In postsecondary	0.0%	8.6%
	Dropout	19.4%	22.9%
	High school graduate but not enrolled in postsecondary education	25.7%	26.2%
Housing at entry	Stable housing	68.3%	51.9%
	Independent living	18.5%	29.0%
	Temporary/homeless	13.2%	19.2%
Foster care at entry		74.8%	56.3%
Adjudicated or Incarcerated		17.2%	21.9%
Parental status	Not a parent	No data	80.6%
	Non-custodial	No data	5.9%
	Custodial	No data	13.5%
Received public assistance and not in foster care		1.9%	7.1%
Quarters in program	1–3	30.0%	22.3%
	4–6	21.3%	31.9%
	7–9	48.8%	45.8%
Services and Participation: Received the Following			
Job prep		71.5%	76.3%
College prep		32.9%	31.3%
GED/Basic Education		15.5%	20.2%
Life skills		42.0%	41.1%

Characteristics, Services, and Outcomes	Category	Los Angeles	Total for All Sites
Parenting		12.1%	6.8%
Health		4.8%	34.8%
Income support		8.7%	33.0%
Substance abuse		1.9%	4.1%
Other		45.9%	45.9%
Attained the Following Outcomes			
GED or diploma		15.0%	23.0%
Postsecondary		9.2%	16.8%
Employment		24.2%	35.0%
Any positive outcome		32.4%	44.8%
	Number of youth	207	1058

Note: Variable definitions can be found in Table 2 of the main report.

Collaborations and Partnerships

Many of the collaborative partnerships were outlined in the section above because the partners are so integral to the overall provision of services at both locations. This is particularly true regarding the relationship, in Pasadena, with the Casey field office.

The relationship with the county child welfare agency (DCFS) has remained stable but somewhat peripheral to the project. The agency continues to provide referrals, but more importantly, it verifies eligibility for all participants and provides funding for the match. State and county leaders in both the child welfare and workforce agencies believe that this project has fundamentally changed the way the two agencies relate to each other all the way from the management to the line staff level. As a result, DCFS is pursuing similar formal relationships with other WIBs in each of the 8 service provision areas (SPAs) in the county. Both groups are quite certain this would not have happened had it not been for this demonstration project.

The Foothill location has the advantage of a strong relationship with the City of Pasadena. The relationship has helped boost outreach and recruitment of youth, public awareness of the needs of youth, attracting volunteers and mentors, and employment opportunities for the youth. A representative from DCFS felt that the Foothill program “has the city behind them” in ways that Community Build does not and that this has particularly helped to attract and retain youth for the project. For their part, staff at both Foothill and Community Build indicated that the role of DCFS

has been minimal, more related to providing eligibility information and funding, and that they have been “slow” in both of these areas. The relationship is characterized as amiable but not heavy on services or other resources.

There is minimal involvement with secondary schools in either location. While Community Build has, at times, co-located one of its staff at a local high school, this was more useful for some of its other programs than the Self-Sufficiency Project specifically. One of Foothill’s activities last year was to increase awareness among the youth of the regional occupational training programs offered by area high schools. The Monrovia Adult School has been a resource for providing GED preparation for Pasadena youth. Connections with postsecondary schools are strong in both locations. In Foothill, Pasadena Community College is most closely affiliated with the project, whereas in Los Angeles, youth are enrolled at several area colleges. In the youth focus group, students reported attending Santa Monica, El Camino, and Southwest Colleges. The Community Build staff maintains close and frequent communication with the colleges that the Self-Sufficiency youth attend to help coordinate academic support, housing, transportation, financial aid, internships, and work-study opportunities.

Most of the youth served by Foothill live in group or residential settings while in foster care, and when they “age out” of these settings, they need transitional housing. Strong partnerships with several providers, including Hillside Homes, Five Acres, and Rosemary’s Cottage, have ensured that all of the youth have access to safe transitional housing. The benefit of this approach to their housing needs is that these programs provide an array of other services including transportation, counseling, and referrals for physical and mental health care. At Community Build, many of the youth continue to live with the relatives or foster families they lived with while in foster care, and some have obtained their own apartments through the assistance of the child welfare agency’s Independent Living program. These arrangements can be problematic, often unstable, and at times challenged by problems with roommates or safety concerns. Nevertheless, the youth interviewed all like the notion of having their own apartment, and several were aspiring to move away from their current settings into independent apartments. The Community Build staff continues to see the lack of safe, affordable, and accessible housing as one of the biggest challenges working with this population. A coalition is building four projects (each at different stages of completion) with nearly 30 new housing units. By partnering with the coalition, Community Build can help youth from foster care gain access to these units.

The staff at both Foothill and Community Build believe that enrollment in the Self-Sufficiency Project has “greatly increased” the youth’s access to needed services in nearly all domains. In particular, the project has helped youth build their own self-advocacy skills and develop the ability to discern the difference between quality, effective services, and those that are not as helpful. Both sites also noted that confidentiality requirements, or perceptions of those requirements, is the major hindrance to further developing and strengthening collaborations with partner organizations. This has resulted in some youth being “inappropriately placed” when the providers and employers or others involved with the youth can’t communicate about the youth’s background and needs.

Program Legacy and Sustainability

There has been a great deal of child welfare system reform activity at the state level in California. A legislative “select committee” on foster care is chaired by Assemblywoman Karen Bass, and a Blue Ribbon Commission on Foster Care, modeled after the recommendations of the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care, was formed under the leadership of the California Supreme Court and Administrative Office of the Courts. These activities have generated a number of legislative hearings on foster care, a slate of proposed foster care reform legislation, and numerous media reports, including an ongoing series of editorials in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The result has been a heightened awareness on the part of state government and the public of the needs of youth in foster care. These activities, however, have had no tangible effect on the Self-Sufficiency Project, nor has the project seemed to inform the state reform efforts.

During 2007, California passed six bills related to youth in foster care. Several relate specifically to improved access to health care and to youth in foster care with disabilities. These are potential new revenue sources for youth enrolled in the Self-Sufficiency program.

“Getting from emancipation to self-sufficiency is a big leap,” noted one Foothill staff member. This leap requires support from multiple systems and providers. Project staff, particularly at Community Build, believe that this project has played a significant role in helping other institutions and organizations understand how to recognize and accommodate the needs of the significant numbers of youth transitioning out of foster care. Many of these young people are now being served by adult-serving agencies. Los Angeles has the highest number of youth in

care in the state, and the state has the highest number of youth in care in the nation. This means that every adult-serving social services agency in the area—from employment, to housing, to domestic violence, mental health, and substance abuse—needs to expect large numbers of these youth to show up in his or her work. This project has created opportunities to provide awareness, training, and a knowledge base throughout the community about these youth.

As a result of their role in this project, the Foothill WIB has become a part of a larger community effort focused on helping youth successfully transition into adulthood. Convened by Casey Family Programs, this coalition has not been active recently, due to staffing changes at Casey, but the feeling is that it will resume and it will continue beyond the life of this demonstration project.

Community Build has also used its role with this project to jump start work in other coalitions, including the Coalition on Responsible Community Development and the Corporation for Supportive Housing. It has also provided space for a unique kinship support project funded by Casey, which is expected to continue beyond the life of this demonstration.

Foothill staff is quite clear that the WIB cannot sustain or support this program as a discreet, standalone program without an infusion of new money. In the staff's view, however, the primary sustainability plan involves infusing the lessons learned from this project into all of the work and programs at the WIB. Foothill staff members hope they will remain connected to Casey and other partners within the child welfare community.

Community Build staff saw this project as an opportunity to test new ideas with a distinct and often older youth population than their previous experience had included. As a result, staff members feel that many of the lessons learned from this program will be sustained within the context of their larger program. It should be noted that this organization served a number of youth from foster care before participating in the demonstration project. Community Build expects to continue to keep a DCFS transition specialist on site as well as the Casey Kinship program.

DCFS is very enthusiastic about the ways this project has demonstrated that partnerships between the child welfare agency and the workforce system can benefit transition-age youth. As

a result, DCFS is committed to replicating this project, or a version of it, in all the regions within the county. In its view, this project has “fundamentally changed” the way the two systems work together on behalf of this population of youth, and this shift will be sustained after the project ends.

Lessons Learned

While youth in foster care need extensive and intensive services, the one-stop concept appears to work well for them and provides links to a variety of resources and opportunities throughout the community. It is critical to connect to the local WIA programs and WIBs around the state and country as well as to the child welfare agencies to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Involvement with the WIB is also critical to successfully moving the youth from a place where they are not job-ready, through the various stages of job-readiness, and into job placement and retention. It is also important to recognize the significant educational gaps these youth are likely to present, and to expect low levels of literacy and math skills, which need to be recognized and addressed, but which are often difficult for youth to acknowledge.

In both locations, youth appreciated the opportunity to engage with needed services in a setting and with a program not typically perceived as part of “the system.” Giving youth exposure to many different potential career paths and cultural opportunities through field trips, internships, and partnerships with local organizations helps retain youth in the program and demonstrates a positive developmental approach to meeting their needs. Providing leadership opportunities for youth is a necessary and core component of success.

These youth need opportunities to develop more future-oriented thinking and goal setting. In many cases, they have not had opportunities to do so while in foster care. Thus, they are likely to focus on immediate needs, immediate desires for independence, and getting a few dollars in their pocket rather than long-range personal goals and the steps required to get there. They need extra time to reach various milestones, and during the process, both their educational and employment needs require attention. There needs to be recognition that these youth are often “heads of household” at a very young age, and they need to be treated as such. They need specific training in crisis management and problem solving and other general coping skills.

Both the Foothill and Community Build staff felt that this group of young people needs more “champions”; when city and state budgets, policies and programs are developed, the unique needs of youth from foster care should be part of the equation.

Appendix—Additional Data on Los Angeles

Table A. Services Received Based on Youth Characteristics at Entry and Quarters Enrolled in Program

Characteristics at Entry	Category	Job Prep	College Prep	GED/ Basic Ed	Life-Skills	Parenting	Health	Income	Substance Abuse	Other
Age	Under 17	74.0%	34.2%	--	50.7%	No data	--	--	--	41.1%
	17 & older	69.9%	31.6%	23.3%	36.8%	No data	--	--	--	48.1%
Race/ Ethnicity	White	--	--	--	--	No data	--	--	--	--
	Black	73.2%	39.6%	20.7%	41.6%	No data	--	8.1%	--	52.3%
	Hispanic	65.9%	--	--	41.5%	No data	--	--	--	24.4%
	Other	--	--	--	--	No data	--	--	--	--
Sex	Male	67.0%	23.1%	--	39.5%	No data	--	--	--	35.2%
	Female	74.6%	39.5%	25.0%	44.0%	No data	--	9.6%	--	54.4%
School status at entry	In high school	68.1%	33.6%	10.6%	41.6%	No data	--	12.4%	--	43.4%
	In postsecondary	--	--	--	--	No data	--	--	--	--
	Dropout	75.0%	27.5%	42.5%	30.0%	No data	--	--	--	60.0%
	High school graduate not enrolled in postsecondary education	75.0%	34.0%	--	50.9%	No data	--	--	--	39.6%
Housing at entry	Stable housing	73.6%	40.7%	19.8%	41.4%	No data	--	10.7%	--	47.9%
	Independent living	63.2%	--	--	36.8%	No data	--	--	--	31.6%
	Temporary/ homeless	70.4%	--	--	51.9%	No data	--	--	--	55.6%
Foster care	In care at entry	76.0%	35.7%	18.8%	45.5%	No data	--	9.1%	--	48.1%
	Out of care	57.7%	23.1%	--	30.8%	No data	--	--	--	38.5%
Incarcerated Adjudicated	Yes	65.7%	--	--	34.3%	No data	--	--	--	34.3%
	No	72.2%	34.5%	18.4%	43.2%	No data	--	9.5%	--	47.9%
Parental status	Not a parent	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

Characteristics at Entry	Category	Job Prep	College Prep	GED/ Basic Ed	Life-Skills	Parenting	Health	Income	Substance Abuse	Other
		data	data	data	data	data	data	data	data	data
	Non-custodial	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
	Custodial	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
Quarters in program	1-3	53.2%	31.1%	--	19.4%	No data	--	--	--	43.5%
	4-6	72.7%	27.3%	--	56.8%	No data	--	--	--	50.0%
	7-9	82.2%	35.6%	20.9%	49.5%	No data	--	--	--	45.9%
Number of Youth		207	206	153	207	No data	207	207	207	207

Notes: a) Variable definitions can be found in Table 2 of the main report; and b) cells containing fewer than 10 participants are suppressed, and marked with --.

Table B. Percentage of Youth with Specific Characteristics Who Attain Different Outcomes

Characteristics at Entry	Category	Attained the Following Outcomes			
		Employment	GED or Diploma ^a	Postsecondary ^b	Any Positive Outcome
Age	Under 17	24.7%	23.8%	--	34.2%
	17 & older	23.3%	13.3%	9.0%	30.8%
Race/ Ethnicity	White	--	--	--	--
	Black	25.5%	19.8%	10.1%	34.2%
	Hispanic	--	--	--	26.8%
	Other	--	--	--	--
Sex	Male	20.9%	17.4%	--	29.7%
	Female	26.3%	17.9%	9.6%	34.2%
School status at entry	In high school	23.0%	20.4%	--	33.6%
	In postsecondary	--	--	--	--
	Dropout	--	--	--	25.0%
	High school graduate not enrolled in postsecondary education	28.3%	--	--	34.0%
Housing at entry	Stable housing	25.0%	20.7%	10.0%	35.7%
	Independent living	21.1%	--	--	--
	Temporary/homeless	--	--	--	--
Foster care at entry	Yes	26.0%	21.4%	9.1%	36.4%
	No	--	--	--	19.2%
Incarcerated/ Adjudicated	Yes	--	--	--	--
	No	24.3%	20.0%	10.1%	34.3%
Parental status	Not a parent	No data	No data	No data	No data
	Non-custodial	No data	No data	No data	No data
	Custodial	No data	No data	No data	No data
Number of youth		207	153	206	207

Notes: a) Variable definitions can be found in Table 2 of the main report; and b) cells containing fewer than 10 participants are suppressed, and marked with --.

^a Only youth who were in high school or were high school dropouts at enrollment were considered for this outcome.

^b Only youth who were not in postsecondary school at enrollment were considered for this outcome.

Table C. Percentage of Youth with Various Services Who Attain Different Outcomes

Quarters in Program and Services Received		Attained the Following Outcomes			
		Employment	GED or Diploma ^a	Postsecondary ^b	Any Positive Outcome
Quarters in program	1-3	--	--	--	--
	4-6	--	31.4%	--	40.9%
	7-9	40.6%	23.9%	12.9%	47.5%
Outcomes by Service Area and Number of Quarters Served (0-9)					
Job preparation	0	--	--	--	--
	1-3	29.3%	19.8%	10.5%	38.3%
	4-6	--	--	--	67.6%
	7-9	--	--	--	--
College preparation	0	15.8%	16.3%	7.2%	25.9%
	1-3	40.6%	21.7%	--	45.3%
	4-6	--	--	--	--
	7-9	--	--	--	--
GED/ Basic Education	0	21.7%	16.1%	8.6%	29.7%
	1-3	35.7%	--	--	46.4%
	4-6	--	--	--	--
	7-9	--	--	--	--
Life skills	0	15.8%	10.6%	--	21.7%
	1-3	36.6%	29.1%	13.4%	47.6%
	4-6	--	--	--	--
	7-9	--	--	--	--
Parenting	0	23.1%	15.7%	8.8%	30.2%
	1-3	--	--	--	50.0%
	4-6	--	--	--	--
	7-9	--	--	--	--
Health	0	24.4%	18.6%	8.6%	32.5%
	1-3	--	--	--	--
	4-6	--	--	--	--
	7-9	--	--	--	--
Income support	0	21.2%	16.5%	6.9%	29.1%
	1-3	--	--	--	--
	4-6	--	--	--	--
	7-9	--	--	--	--
Substance abuse	0	23.6%	17.9%	8.9%	32.0%
	1-3	--	--	--	--
	4-6	--	--	--	--
	7-9	--	--	--	--
Other	0	13.4%	12.0%	--	--
	1-3	56.8%	38.7%	22.7%	20.4%
	4-6	--	--	--	70.5%
	7-9	--	--	--	--
Number of youth		207	153	206	207

Notes: a) Variable definitions can be found in Table 2 of the main report; and b) cells containing fewer than 10 participants are suppressed, and marked with --.

^a Only youth who were in high school or were high school dropouts at enrollment were considered for this outcome.

^b Only youth who were not in postsecondary school at enrollment were considered for this outcome.