

Reaching Out

CURRENT ISSUES FOR CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Fall 2012



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Meeting the Challenge of Extended Foster Care

By Susan Brooks, Director, Northern California Training Academy

Congratulations! By and large the implementation of Fostering Connections After 18 (California's AB 12) has been a huge success. In this issue of *Reaching Out*, we provide an overview of the Fostering Connections legislation and values, as well as a glimpse into some of the early success stories.

Youth in foster care who reach adulthood often do so facing many challenges, educational deficits, limited employment experience, psychosocial problems and unstable relationships. Youth in foster care at age 18 are at high risk of engaging in risky behaviors, experiencing homelessness and involvement in the criminal justice system (Courtney 2010). The Fostering Connections legislation attempts to provide enhanced stability for those youth who would have typically aged out of foster care at age 18 without a safety net.

California is one of the first states in the nation to utilize the federal Fostering Connections legislation to allow for extending care to age 21. The state has been praised across the nation for the careful planning process leading to implementation. Over the past two years, hundreds of individuals worked countless hours on a roll-out plan, and by all accounts implementation has gone smoothly.

The importance of extended foster care at such a key developmental stage in a young person's life has never been more clear. Recent studies have found that parts of the brain needed to perform cognitive operations don't finish developing until much later than prior research had suggested—perhaps as late as age 30. The phrase “emerging adulthood” has been popularized to accentuate the developmental differences between teenagers and young adults, and now encompasses ages 18-29. This is a much later launch into adulthood than previous generations, and

it is essential for the child welfare system to deliver increased age-appropriate and youth-driven services, and provide a network of support in the transition to adulthood (Stein 2012).

When planning for the implementation of extended foster care in California (which went into effect January 1, 2012), it was believed most youth who turned 18 during the first year would *opt-out* of extended care. On the contrary, counties are reporting that as many as 90 percent of qualified youth are taking advantage of extended foster care and are doing so successfully.

The biggest challenge thus far in implementation has been the shift in practice from working with a *minor* in foster care to a *non-minor dependent*. This issue of *Reaching Out* highlights many of the regulations of Fostering Connections and aims to serve as a reference guide for those working with extended foster care.

Just as with youth in the general population, these emerging adults will most assuredly suffer a series of ups and downs. They may make bad choices. They may struggle. They may have setbacks and confront seemingly insurmountable hurdles. And yet, with the safety net now provided by extended foster care, they will have a soft place to land. The challenge is to support child welfare staff as they work to help these emerging adults gain a foothold on true independence.

During these times, remember resiliency: setbacks or failures are not predictive of future failures. Kids rebound. Youth rebound, and thank goodness so do adults! With hope leading the way, and arms open to catch stumbling young adults, our non-minor dependents are now provided with possibilities for a future that they simply did not have one year ago.



AB 12 Fact Sheet

Excerpted from the County of Ventura's AB 12 Fact Sheet and Timeline. Full material available at: <http://portal.countyofventura.org/portal/page/portal/VCHSA/ILP/ExtendedFosterCare/>

About AB 12

Assembly Bill 12 (AB 12), the California Fostering Connections Act, was signed into law by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger on Sept. 30, 2010. This bill takes advantage of several components of the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 to provide federal funding for California's existing Kinship Guardian Assistance Payment Program (Kin-GAP) and extend foster care benefits to age 21.

Extension of Foster Care Benefits to Age 21

Under AB 12, foster care benefits will be extended to youth until they reach the age of 21. Implementation of this provision is challenging from both a fiscal and caseload perspective and will take place over a period of three years for eligible youth as follows:

- Jan. 1, 2012: care extends up to age 19
- Jan. 1, 2013: care extends up to age 20
- Jan. 1, 2014: care extends up to age 21

In order to receive benefits after the age of 18, youth must agree to reside in an eligible, supervised foster care placement and must be:

- Completing high school or an equivalent program (GED); or
- Enrolled in college, community college or a vocational education program; or

- Participating in a program to remove barriers to employment; or
- Employed at least 80 hours a month; or
- Unable to do one of the above requirements because of a medical condition.

Foster youth opting to remain in extended care will have several options for placement which include:

- Remaining in the existing foster home of a relative or non-related legal guardian, licensed foster family home, certified foster family agency home or, with the approval of the juvenile court, the home of a non-related legal guardian
- Group home placement for high school graduates is only available if placement is necessary due to a medical condition
- THP-Plus Foster Care, which provides youth with affordable housing and supportive services that are supervised by Children and Family Services and reviewed every six months by the juvenile court
- Supervised Independent Living, which may include housing in an apartment, room and board arrangements, college dorms or a shared roommate in a supervised living situation

Kin-GAP

Kin-GAP is a California program designed to support foster children who have been placed in long-term foster care with a caregiver who is a relative. The program provides reimbursement to relative caregivers who are unable to adopt the child but can offer permanent placement in the relative's home.

AB 12 makes a number of changes to California's state-funded Kin-GAP program, most significantly by converting it into a federally subsidized program, including requiring only six months rather than 12 months of placement prior to exiting foster care and allowing for benefits to be adjusted periodically. The federal government will now pay half the cost for federally eligible participants. This will save California tens of millions of dollars of state general funds, and beginning in 2012, those savings will help augment the cost of extending benefits to foster youth past the age of 18.



AB 12—Translating Policy into Practice

By Angie Schwartz, Policy Director, The Alliance for Children's Rights (co-sponsor of AB 12)

California's Fostering Connections to Success Act is groundbreaking in its promise to improve outcomes for youth who leave foster care. Enacted in September 2010, AB 12 extends foster care until age 20 (the extension to age 21 requires further legislative approval), allowing young adults to receive support while they attend school, obtain employment and otherwise strive to become self-sufficient.

In order for AB 12's promise to be realized, the practice of child welfare must shift to accommodate the needs of young adults who are anxious to experiment and attempt newfound independence while still receiving the support and safety net of foster care. The California Fostering Connections to Success Act lays the groundwork for this fundamental shift through statutory changes that require the counties, providers, courts and attorneys to recognize and respect the non-minor dependent's status as a young adult and provide the non-minor dependent with a much more prominent role in decision making (Welfare and Institutions Code § 11403). However, statutes and policies are not self-executing, and the real test is how these new policies will be translated into local practice.

California is embarking on a bold experiment distinct from all the other states that have taken the federal option of extending foster care to age 21. Most states that have extended foster care beyond age 18 have simply changed the age at which a young person exits care without rewriting the rules pertaining to foster care for these now young adults. In completing a survey with 29 states, 13 with pending or approved plans, Kate Hanley from the National Resource Center on Youth Development found that "only one state, California, created core values to guide the planning process." California is taking on a much bigger challenge, but stands to get a much larger return on its investment by creating a system that truly supports the development and transition of these young adults to greater self-sufficiency.



"Focus extensively on helping young people find and engage with family. Support young people in creating or re-establishing lasting family relationships and other connections that they will need as adults."

~ Jim Casey
Youth Opportunities Initiative

The Court Experience for Non-Minor Dependents

Many of the decision-making responsibilities of the court will change as AB 12 is implemented. Under AB 12, every non-minor dependent has the right to opt-out of extended foster care, and the non-minor can elect to exit care regardless of whether the court determines that remaining in care is in the non-minor's best interest. However, the fact that AB 12 is structured as an opt-out program provides the court an important role in advising and counseling young people regarding their options at age 18.

Before the court can terminate jurisdiction over any non-minor dependent, the court must hold a hearing (Welfare and Institutions Code § 391). When it is the non-minor who has requested the court terminate jurisdiction over his or her court case, one of the things the court must guard against is the youth feeling forced out of foster care or choosing to exit because the young person failed to understand the benefits available. Not only can the court ensure that the non-minor was fully informed of his or her options, but the court can take the opportunity to continue that dialogue with the young person and explore all potential supports, services and options.

For those youth who decide to remain in care, the six-month review hearing provides an important opportunity for the court to engage with the young person regarding his or her transition plan. For these reviews to be effective, the nature of the hearing itself must “be conducted in a manner that respects the non-minor dependent’s status as a legal adult, be focused on the goals and services described in the non-minor dependent’s transitional independent living



case plan, including efforts made to achieve permanence by maintaining or obtaining permanent connections with caring and committed adults, and be attended as appropriate by additional participants invited by the non-minor dependent” (Welfare and Institutions Code § 366). From a practice standpoint, this could involve the judge conducting the hearing around a table rather than behind the bench. It is also important that each hearing be afforded enough time to allow for a real dialogue about the issues the young adult wants to bring forth. The typical time allotted for a dependency hearing may not be sufficient to adequately engage the young person and ensure that he or she has a real opportunity to raise issues and concerns.

Finally, the attorney-client relationship also changes once a former child client reaches age 18. Non-minor dependents continue to be represented by counsel, but the attorney acts on behalf of the non-minor, as opposed to acting in his or her best interest. This shift means the attorney shares the responsibility of engaging with the client in order to ensure that the non-minor fully understands his or her rights with regard to remaining in foster care, the benefits of extended foster care, and what services or supports the non-minor needs in order to truly benefit from his or her transition plan.

“If mistreated children are not to become criminals or mentally ill, it is essential that at least once in their life they come in contact with a person who knows without any doubt that the environment, not the helpless, battered child, is at fault.”

~ Alice Miller, Resilience Researcher



Placement Options for Non-Minor Dependents

The goal of extended foster care is for young people who are in stable placements to remain in those placements and continue to receive the support, assistance and encouragement of a family as they pursue education and work activities. However, remaining in the same placement does not mean the nature of that placement remains unchanged. One of the core values of AB 12 is to ensure that young adults participating in extended foster care are afforded the same opportunities for experimentation and independence that all 18-year-olds enjoy as a central part of their development. Thus, for both practical reasons as well as policy reasons, the rules governing placements must change to recognize and value the fact that non-minor dependents are young adults.

As a practice matter, the rules governing traditional placements had to be changed for AB 12 so that a foster home could serve as a placement for a young adult without having to lock up medications or report a young adult as AWOL for staying out all night. Young adults clearly have the right to access and administer their own medications and to come and go as they please. However, changing the licensing rules was not enough to change the dynamic of the relationship between the non-minor and the provider to one where the non-minor is valued and treated as a young adult. Thus, in addition to the new licensing rules, the state developed a new tool—known as the Shared Living Agreement—to help facilitate a discussion between the non-minor and his or her provider regarding the house rules and the expectations of both the non-minor and the provider going forward.

The goal is for each Shared Living Agreement to be individualized, reflecting the specific values, concerns and personalities of the caregiver and non-minor dependent who are sharing a household. Social workers play a key role in introducing the concept of the Shared Living Agreement and helping non-minors and caregivers understand the value of the agreement in providing a roadmap for the new relationship.

In addition to redefining existing placement options, extended foster care also offers young adults exciting new placement options such as Transitional Housing Plus (THP-Plus) Foster Care and Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP). The SILP is particularly novel, as this placement allows non-minor dependents to live in a range of different housing settings including “apartment living, room and board arrangements, college or university dormitories, and shared roommate settings” (Welfare and Institutions Code § 11403). As with all placement decisions,

the county child welfare agency has the responsibility under state and federal law to approve each placement. The SILP needs to be an appropriate placement given the youth’s developmental needs, but it should also allow each young person the opportunity to take risks and have increased responsibility over time.

The child welfare agency plays a central role in working with the young person to evaluate the appropriateness of a SILP placement and to further ensure that each youth who is approved for a SILP receives appropriate supports and services. Additionally, social work must continue in an intensive fashion for youth who are approved for SILPs to ensure that the young adult receives the support, services and assistance necessary to make the SILP a success.

THP-Plus Foster Care is also available to youth and is modeled after the existing THP-Plus program for non-dependents. It provides youth with housing and supportive services in an age-appropriate setting. However, it differs from the current THP-Plus (which is available to emancipated foster youth) in that the non-minor dependents will still be under the supervision of the county placing agency, as well as continue to have contact with a social worker, review hearings every six months and, most importantly, it will be a federally eligible foster

care placement. Licensing regulations for THP-Plus Foster Care have yet to be finalized.





Participation Conditions for Extended Foster Care

Upon reaching age 18, a young person is considered an adult with all the accompanying rights and responsibilities of adulthood. For youth in foster care, turning 18 also means the young person has new responsibilities and obligations in order to continue to receive the support and services of the foster care system. The goal was not to limit a young person's ability to participate in extended care, but rather to encourage states to find ways to engage youth in work or educational activities consistent with their development. This guidance is particularly important to consider in light of recent research that indicates there are distinct subgroups of foster youth at age 18 (accelerated adults, struggling parents, emerging adults, and troubled and troubling), and each of these subgroups has very different needs.¹ Accordingly, policy and practice cannot be modeled on a "one-size-fits-all" approach, but rather on the individual young person's needs, attributes and history.

One example of how practice can be targeted to the needs of each subgroup is with regard to young parents who are participating in extended foster care. Local practice can change to address this need by providing focused educational supports and services to this group of young parents. In addition, the child welfare agency must form collaborations with other programs that provide support and services to low-income parents, particularly to ensure that they have child care and other resources necessary to pursue education or work.



Other groups of youth that require focused attention are those exiting group homes and those living in more independent living settings, as both of these populations do not have the extra support and assistance that comes from living in a family structure. Additionally, recent research cautions that both of these subgroups of youth might have more difficulty accessing work.² Social workers may need to provide even more support and services to youth exiting from group homes or living in supervised independent living placements in order to help connect these youth to employment or schooling. It may also be necessary to think creatively about how a youth might engage in activities that remove barriers to employment and help connect youth to robust programs that provide a significant level of training, support and assistance in gaining skills necessary to facilitate employment. Group home providers might consider offering employment services in-house and pay special attention to connecting youth in the program with employment opportunities, internships and/or mentoring programs.

¹ Courtney, M. E., Hook, J. L., & Lee, J. S. (2010) *Distinct Subgroups of Former Foster Youth during the Transition to Adulthood: Implications for Policy and Practice*. Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

² Hook, J. L. & Courtney, M. E. (2010). *Employment of Former Foster Youth as Young Adults: Evidence from the Midwest Study*. Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

Re-Entering Extended Foster Care

A new and exciting feature of extended foster care under AB 12 is the ability for young adults to opt-out of the program and then re-enter if their decision changes. There are no limitations in AB 12 on the number of times a youth can re-enter, nor are there restrictions placed on which youth can re-enter care. The goal is to provide young people participating in extended foster care the opportunity to exit care with the knowledge that, if they experience hardship or hit a roadblock, they can receive the support of foster care again. Additionally, AB 12 was structured to make re-entry as accessible as possible.

First, courts are required to make a finding that a youth has been informed of his/her right to re-enter foster care prior to terminating jurisdiction (Welfare and Institutions Code § 391(c)(2). In addition, in order to re-enter, all the youth has to do is sign a Voluntary Re-Entry Agreement (VRA), and the beginning date of aid is the date that the agreement is signed by the appropriate signatories (Welfare and Institutions Code § 11403(e). The goal is to ensure that youth who are in crisis can immediately re-enter foster care and be provided housing and support on that same day.

As with all the other statutory provisions of AB 12, however, “the fact that state law permits former foster youth to come back into care says nothing about what [will] actually happen in practice. If young people do not know that re-entry is an option, then few, if any, will request permission to come back into care.”¹ In order to make re-entry truly accessible to young people, the VRA needs to be available at the places youth are likely to go when in crisis. This could include homeless shelters, youth centers, or through Independent Living Program (ILP) centers. The VRA could also be available online so that a youth can easily download it from any computer. Finally, social workers could provide copies of the VRA to relative caregivers and other foster care providers.

In addition to making sure the VRA is readily available, the process of getting the agreement signed also needs to be streamlined and easily accessible. This means there should be multiple people designated to sign the VRA on the county’s behalf, and these individuals need to be easily reached during evening and weekend hours. This may include designating someone at the shelters, youth centers, or ILP coordinators as signatories. The VRA could include information regarding the location and address of places where a youth could go after hours to get the agreement signed.

¹ Dworsky, A. & Havlicek, J. (2009). *Review of State Policies and Programs to Support Young People Transitioning Out of Foster Care*. Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.



“A lot of kids are fortunate to have parents to run to in tough situations and come home because they failed out there. Before AB 12, our kids did not have this.”

~ John Harvey, Yuba County Permanent Plan Supervisor



Better Outcomes for Young People Who Remain in Care Until 21

Excerpted from Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative Issue Brief 1: Foster Care to 21: Doing it Right. Full article available at www.jimcaseyyouth.org

Researchers conducting the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth found that most young people who had aged out of foster care were faring poorly compared to other young people in the general population (See table below).¹ Additionally, the 2010 report found that young people who remained in care to age 21 fared far better than those who had to leave care at 18.

- Those who were required to leave care at age 18 were 2.7 times more likely to have been homeless²
- Remaining in care more than doubled the odds that young people would be working or in school at age 19³
- Those remaining in care were twice as likely to have completed at least one year of college by age 21⁴
- Young women remaining in care experienced a 38 percent reduction in the incidence of pregnancy before age 20⁵
- Those remaining in care were more likely to access independent living services⁵

Outcomes for young people formerly in foster care compared to general population of young people

OUTCOME	FOSTER CARE	GENERAL
No high school diploma or GED	24.4%	7.3%
Not employed	52%	24.5%
Average income from employment	\$12,064	\$20,349
Have health insurance	57%	78%
Males who have been arrested	81.2%	17.4%
Females who have been pregnant	77%	40.4%

Source: Courtney, et al. (2010)



Cost benefits

Extending foster care to 21 can yield substantial financial benefits for young people transitioning from foster care and for society. Allowing young people to remain in care until age 21 will double the likelihood of earning a college degree,⁶ thereby increasing their earnings potential. Researchers project that a young person formerly in foster care can expect to earn \$481,000 more over his or her work life with a college degree than with only a high school diploma; attending some college but not completing a degree adds \$129,000.⁶ A cost-benefit analysis conducted in California found that increasing attainment of a bachelor's degree would return \$2.40 for each dollar spent on extended foster care.⁴

Extended foster care also lowers societal costs related to early childbearing because young women who remain in care are more likely to delay parenting.¹ Research indicates that:

- Teen mothers are more than twice as likely to have a child placed in foster care than those who delay child bearing until age 20 or 21;⁷
- Young mothers are twice as likely as older mothers to have a reported case of child abuse or neglect;⁸
- The costs associated with teen pregnancy in the U.S. were estimated at \$9.1 billion in 2004. This figure represents a combination of increased public health care, child welfare and prison systems costs as well as decreased tax revenue from the lower earning potential found in children of teen mothers.⁷

¹ Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., Lee, J., Raap, M., Cusick, G., Keller, T., Havlicek, J., Perez, A., Terao, S., & Bost, N. (2010). Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 23 and 24. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

² Dworsky, A. & Courtney, M. (2010). Does extending foster care beyond age 18 promote postsecondary educational attainment? Emerging findings from the Midwest study. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

³ Courtney, M. (2005). Youth aging out of foster care. Network on Transitions to Adulthood Policy Brief, 19. Philadelphia, PA: Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood and Public Policy.

⁴ Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., & Peters, C. (2009). California's Fostering Connections to Success Act and the costs and benefits of extending foster care to 21. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

⁵ Courtney, M.E., Dworsky, A., Gretchen, R., Keller, T. & Havlicek, J. (2005). Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 19. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

⁶ Dworsky, A. (2009). Preventing pregnancy among youth in foster care: Remarks for a Congressional roundtable with Senator Mary Landrieu, Russell Senate Office Building, July 16, 2009. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

⁷ National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2006).

⁸ Love, L.T., McIntosh, J., Rosst, M., & Tertzakian, K. (2005). Fostering hope: Preventing teen pregnancy among youth in foster care. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

Making the Benefits Last a Lifetime: Improving Educational Outcomes for Youth

By Debbie Raucher, John Burton Foundation

There is great potential for AB 12 to dramatically improve educational outcomes for foster youth, but the challenge ahead is considerable. The methods of implementation will play a large role in determining whether or not the promise of AB 12 is fully realized.

If we intend to expand educational opportunities for foster youth under AB 12, fundamental changes are required. Top among them are the following:

1. Instill the value of higher education in child

welfare: As extended foster care takes effect, child welfare agencies are likely to be primarily focused on the logistics of implementation, as new regulations, forms and procedures must be incorporated into existing structures. What must not be lost in this process is ensuring that frontline social workers, probation officers, caregivers and others who play an integral role in the lives of these young people understand the value of higher education and the knowledge to effectively support foster youth in pursuing it.

2. Encourage and support young people in their goals

for higher education: Many foster youth have felt the pressing financial imperative to obtain employment upon emancipation at age 18, dismissing the notion of attending college as unrealistic. With up to three additional years in care, young adults can more easily attend school and gain skills that create opportunities. In the current system, efforts in this vein have to be emphasized—ensuring that youth complete high school and college preparatory work, encouraging planning for higher education well in advance and ensuring that youth take high school courses and standardized tests necessary to obtain entrance into a four-year institution. This advanced work continues to be fundamental to improving educational outcomes, but with AB 12, a whole new component of service delivery must now be incorporated into the social worker's repertoire directed toward the 18-21-year-olds.

3. Training, training and more training:

Many agencies are working diligently to provide training to support youth in higher education. With the support of the Stuart Foundation, the John Burton Foundation is developing a curriculum specific to supporting foster youth in higher education. Topics covered will include information about how to access financial aid, the pros and cons of different educational choices, the various support programs available at post-secondary institutions for foster youth and the wide range of low-cost educational options available through the state's network of more than 100 community colleges.

It is the promise of AB 12 that youth be supported to maximize their potential and fulfill their dreams. It is now up to each individual along with the collective child welfare system to make that promise a reality.



Roles and Responsibilities in Extended Foster Care

Excerpted from Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative in Issue Brief 1: Foster Care to 21: Doing it Right. Full article available at <http://www.jim-caseyyouth.org>

In order for extended foster care systems to support young people in healthy development and connect them to family, housing, employment, health care and education, all parties involved in these systems must have clearly defined roles and responsibilities:

Young person

- Actively engage in planning for permanence and the transition to adulthood
- Communicate at least once per month with the adult supporter from the child welfare agency
- Uphold conditions allowing access to the extended foster care system by, for example, attending school or working—or notifying the adult supporter/team if something is preventing this
- Attend and participate in judicial reviews

Child welfare caseworker

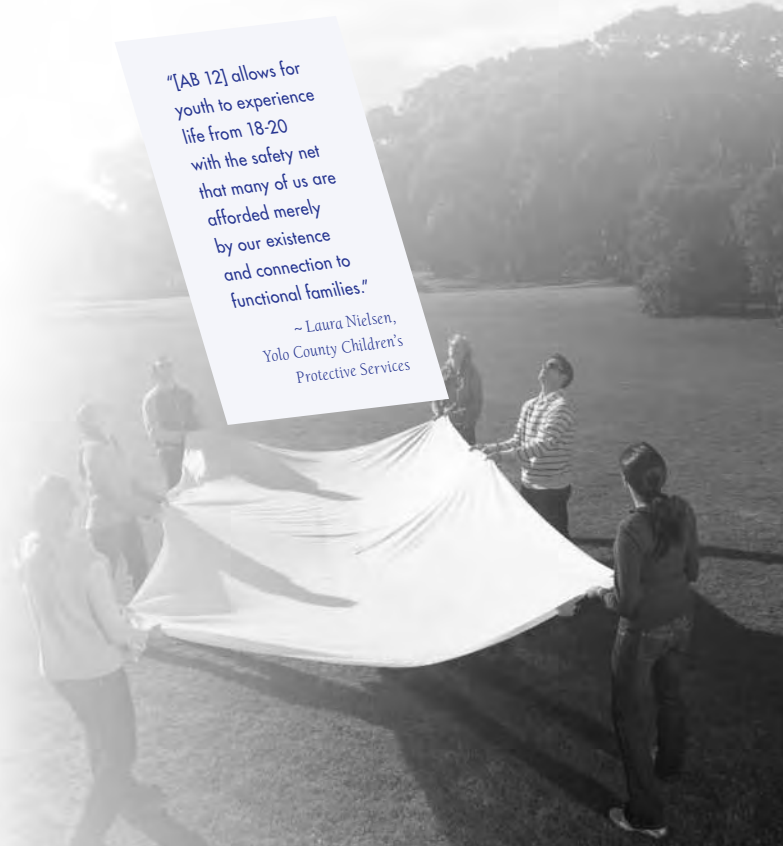
- Involve young people as partners in all aspects of planning and decision making, recognizing them as experts on their lives and giving deference to their voice throughout the process
- Continue permanency planning that is youth-directed; support young people in building vital social capital; and, when appropriate, address the possibility of reconnecting the young person with his or her birth family in a way that is safe and supportive
- Fully engage young people in choosing healthy and supported living options for themselves, including continued placement in a family-based setting or living on their own
- Conduct case management and regular visits in a way that is developmentally appropriate and tailored to the unique needs and circumstances of each young person
- Assist young people in pursuing education and employment, accessing physical and mental health care, and securing safe and stable housing
- Collect data on the experiences of young people ages 18 to 21 in foster care, with an emphasis on capturing the voices of youth

Judicial system

- Provide judicial oversight in a manner that is collaborative and supportive of young people taking the lead in their lives and actively participating in hearings
- Oversee the child welfare agency's continuing efforts to ensure that young people leave care to join a family
- Oversee the child welfare agency's provision of the range of services and supports that young people need to begin the transition from adolescence to adulthood

Young person's legal representative

- Attend judicial reviews and ensure that the child welfare agency is held accountable to its responsibilities under the extended care agreement
- Provide client-directed representation by zealously representing the young person's stated desires and goals
- Support the young person in adhering to his or her responsibilities under the extended care agreement
- Notify young people of the times of court proceedings, support their attendance, prepare them to participate, and debrief with them regarding outcomes after each court proceeding
- Support meaningful youth participation in court proceedings



"[AB 12] allows for youth to experience life from 18-20 with the safety net that many of us are afforded merely by our existence and connection to functional families."

~ Laura Nielsen,
Yolo County Children's
Protective Services

Five Things for Social Workers to Consider When Working with Immigrant Youth

By Yali Lincroft, MBA, Policy Consultant, First Focus

Permanency planning for immigrant youth can be particularly complex and difficult. The youth may be new to the country, have immigration status issues, or may have few or no relatives in the U.S. In many cases the youth may not even speak English.

Considering the importance of communicating the new extended foster care options under AB 12 and the challenges unique to working with immigrant youth, here are a few things for agencies to consider:

1. Be mindful of the “fear factor” and its impact on engaging with immigrant communities

Immigration enforcement and anti-immigrant rhetoric has created palpable fear and much distrust in immigrant communities. Many immigrants came from war-torn countries or countries with corrupt government agencies, resulting in distrust for authority and a reluctance to share information. Consequently, social workers must have a basic understanding of the immigration dynamics and the “fear factor” in today’s politicized climate and how this translates into child welfare practice.

2. Determine immigration status

In many circumstances, a child (or even an adult) does not know or may have wrong information about his or her immigration status. A person’s immigration status will determine what immigration consequences he or she will face under the law, as well as what options, rights and privileges they are entitled to.

Determining the immigration category for an immigrant foster youth may not be as simple as it appears. Some youth may be an unknowing U.S. citizen because of “derivative citizenship” from a U.S. citizen parent or even grandparent. They may also be a refugee or fall under temporary protected status.

3. Screen for immigrant relief options

The most common form of immigration relief for foster youth is the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. It is a form of relief for children currently under dependency court jurisdiction where the court has ruled that (a) the youth is eligible for long-term foster care; (b) the youth cannot be reunited with either parent because of abuse, neglect or abandonment; and (c) it would not be in the youth’s best interest to be returned to their home country. Other forms of relief and categories include the Violence Against Women Act, the U- and T-Visa, and temporary protected status.

4. Relative searches and vital documents

Securing vital documents is critical to the process of providing relative searches for immigrant youth, both living in the U.S. and abroad. Many Latino families have common last names and require the full middle name and surnames for accurate relative searches. The Mexican consulate and other foreign consulates can be particularly helpful in vital document searches, home studies, parent locators, criminal record clearance and other related services. There are also many international child welfare agencies with contracts and experience working with the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) that can assist with international relative searches.

5. Work with immigrant-serving nonprofits and faith-based organizations

One of the most effective ways for child welfare agencies to engage with immigrant communities is to partner with community-based immigrant service providers. This neighborhood-based approach can be invaluable in helping develop culturally and linguistically appropriate service, break down barriers, and facilitate outreach and communication to youth and families. Many of these agencies also have immigration attorneys who can help provide consultation and advice to child welfare staff.

For more information on assisting immigrant youth:

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU): Immigrant Services Directory—A National Guide for Service Providers.
http://www.aclu.org/files/assets/ImServDir_20101229.pdf

American Humane Association (June 2009), A Social Worker’s Toolkit—Immigration Status and Relief Options.
<http://www.americanhumane.org/assets/pdfs/children/pc-migration-sw-toolkit-status-relief.pdf>

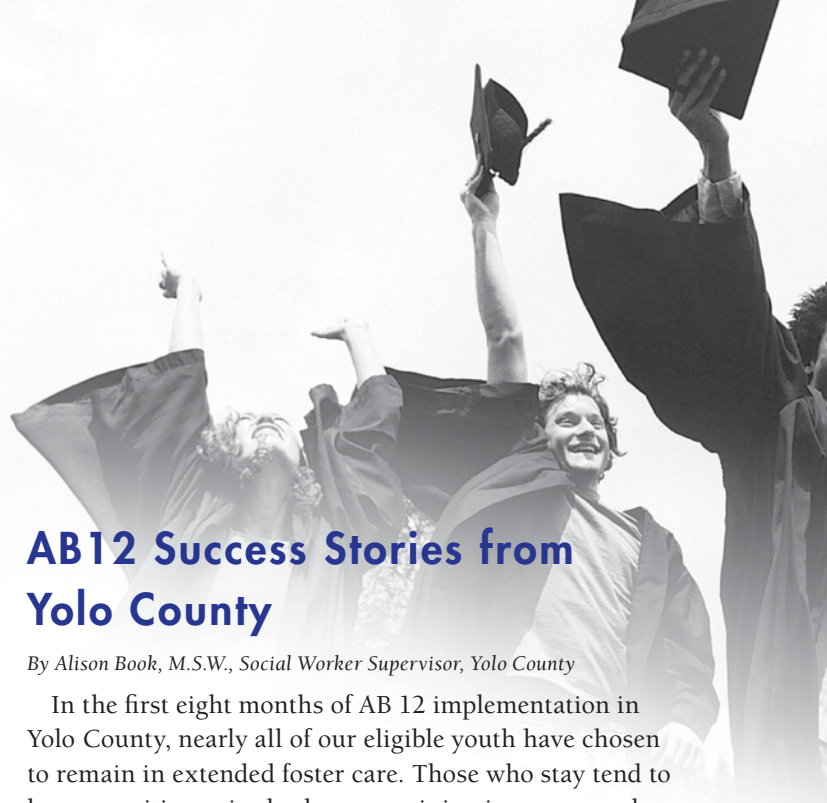
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TIPS FOR SUPERVISORS:

Improving Outcomes for Transitioning Youth

1. Use supervision and the supervisory relationship to promote a positive youth development approach to work with youth/adolescents.
2. Coach staff in the importance of and the skills necessary to support youth in identifying and sustaining permanent connections.
3. Advocate for/allocate resources which respect the diverse needs of youth.
4. Use supervision to assure culturally competent practice with youth.
5. Ensure that DHS is an effective partner on the transition committee.
6. Develop and sustain collaborative community relationships (including foster parents and group care providers) that support youth in transition.
7. Coach workers to incorporate knowledge of adolescent development, characteristics, behaviors and social challenges into assessment and case planning.
8. Recognize indicators of mental illness and developmental disabilities and provide consultation to workers.
9. Supervise workers in implementing policy and programs relevant to adolescents in transition.

Adapted with permission from the University of Iowa School of Social Work, National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice "Improving Outcomes for Youth in Transition."



AB 12 Success Stories from Yolo County

By Alison Book, M.S.W., Social Worker Supervisor, Yolo County

In the first eight months of AB 12 implementation in Yolo County, nearly all of our eligible youth have chosen to remain in extended foster care. Those who stay tend to have a positive attitude about remaining in care now that it is their choice, and, overall, they are making appropriate decisions about where they want to live and successfully meeting their participation conditions. Here are some of their stories:

- Alex had been in a foster home since 2010 and had thrived there, but he no longer wanted to live in a foster placement with so many other kids. He graduated from high school in June and moved into a Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP) with a family from his church as soon as he turned 18. He is now attending community college and serves as an excellent role model for his younger sibling who is still in foster care.
- Sarah was expecting a baby in July and was determined to be in her own apartment before her child arrived. With the support of her social worker, foster parent and local community agencies, she was able to leave her foster family agency placement for an SILP in her own apartment. Sarah's foster mom helped her shop at garage sales and thrift stores to gather affordable items for her apartment and for the baby. The Yolo Youth Project assisted Sarah with furniture and necessities for her new home. She also received financial support from the Yolo Children's Fund. Sarah was able to get settled in her new apartment and gave birth to a healthy baby a few weeks later. She is demonstrating excellent parenting skills and continues to make progress toward completing her GED.
- John had been in group home placements since 2007. He graduated from high school in June and was excited to leave his group home to move in with his adult sister and her fiancé in another city. He enrolled in community college this fall.



TIPS FOR CASEWORKERS:

Improving Outcomes for Transitioning Youth

- Elizabeth, who has significant mental health challenges, chose to leave foster care on her 18th birthday, but realized she was not ready to be on her own. She re-entered care a few weeks later and was placed in a level 12 group home. Elizabeth has been more successful there than she was in previous higher-level placements. The group home is working with her to stabilize her mental health and help her make progress toward completing high school.
- When Julia turned 18, she was placed in a specialized group home program that focuses on supporting non-minor dependents to learn necessary skills for a successful transition to adulthood. Due to Julia's history of serious mental health and behavioral issues, her social worker felt this placement would be an appropriate transition to a less restrictive placement. However, Julia identified her own non-related extended family member (NREFM) placement and engaged in persistent self-advocacy to transition sooner rather than later. She is very excited that she will be moving in with her NREFM in the next few days.

Just as these emerging adults have succeeded in extended care as non-minor dependents, our social workers have done an incredible job of mastering the complexities of AB 12 and working respectfully with these young adults. We are excited to see the benefits of extended foster care that are already visible in the lives of our non-minor dependents, and we look forward to what the future holds for each of them.

1. Involve and support youth in an ongoing process to develop skills, resources, knowledge and attributes that the youth defines as necessary for survival and success.
2. Support youth in establishing relationships and maintaining permanent connections.
3. Understand the unique cultural self-identity of youth and incorporate this understanding into case planning.
4. Effectively collaborate with youth, the youth's support system and with community agencies in developing, implementing and evaluating a transition plan.
5. Advocate for youth's needs with outside agencies (i.e., schools) as warranted.
6. Understand the factors that contribute to placement stability and implement strategies to achieve placement stability (including sensitive management of placement transitions).
7. Apply knowledge of adolescent development, characteristics, behaviors, and social challenges in thoughtful assessment and case planning.
8. Recognize indicators of mental illness and developmental disabilities and initiate evaluation and potential service planning.

Adapted with permission from the University of Iowa School of Social Work, National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice "Improving Outcomes for Youth in Transition."

Running with the Opportunity: Shalei's Success in Extended Foster Care

*By Aaron Quin, Social Worker, and Karen McGettigan, Staff Analyst,
Tuolumne County*



Shalei is a shining example of how a determined foster youth can capitalize on the extended foster care options provided under California's AB 12.

At age 16, Shalei gave birth to a healthy boy. Having lost her father at age 10 and after enduring years of physical and emotional abuse from her mother, the teen made the courageous decision to rescue her newborn son from the abusive environment by placing him with an adoptive family. One day later, she was removed from her mother's care after enduring a beating for not keeping her son in the home. She became a dependent of the Juvenile Court in Tuolumne County and was placed in the Children's Emergency Shelter, and later with a non-related extended family member, whom Shalei remains in close contact with to this day.

Now 18, Shalei has utilized the resources of extended foster care to take hold of her future. With the assistance from the Tuolumne County Independent Living Program she was able to locate housing and receive the necessary assistance to move into and furnish her apartment. The financial assistance she receives from foster care payments has allowed her to pursue an education in an area applicable to her career goals. Shalei receives monthly supervision and access to a caseworker by phone at all times. This keeps her accountable, and gives her the peace of mind that she will always have someone to call.

Despite the challenges her life has presented, Shalei has persevered as an intrinsically motivated young woman. An excellent student involved in many extracurricular activities, UC Davis Medical Center recognized Shalei as a candidate with high potential, offering her a pre-med internship to complete while attending classes. She is also completing a massage therapy and health education program to further her understanding of the human body.

With the motivation to excel and the resources provided by AB 12, the sky is the limit for this promising young woman.

"I was given opportunities," wrote Shalei in a message for foster youth in transition. "I had the choice to A) take them and run with them, B) do nothing, [or] C) let my past tell me I'm weak and cannot change for the good."

Shalei has clearly taken option A, and all of Tuolumne County Child Welfare Services now looks forward to watching her grow into a very successful adult.

Marion's Success with Extended Foster Care

By Jason Borucki, Northern California Training Academy

For Marion McMillan, extended foster care has provided a life-changing opportunity. Taking advantage of that opportunity has made all the difference.

"I wasn't doing so great the first two years of high school," said McMillan, now 18 and nearing 19, "but once extended foster care came to my attention I got more motivation to do good in high school and further my education. It made my attitude towards school improve."

McMillan entered foster care at age 5 and has spent the last 13 years moving from placement to placement. The better placements provided loving, nurturing environments, but when Marion neared adulthood she became all too familiar with the harsh realities facing foster youth who age out of care.

"Everyone has statistics showing how poorly foster kids do after 18," said McMillan, "but help is out there, and you have to take advantage of it."

McMillan entered the San Joaquin County Independent Living Plan at age 16. Through this program she learned about ways to earn funding for higher education and began to develop goals beyond graduating from high school. With AB 12 on the horizon, she would soon have the opportunity to take chances that foster youth aging out of care simply could not have taken before.

"[Extended foster care] has been so helpful," she said. "I have a shoulder to lean on, like when needing help filling out applications for school. It is like having a second or third parent."

When comparing this safety net to the alternatives she faced only two years earlier, McMillan recognized the scope of impact extended foster care has had.

"I probably wouldn't have graduated high school," she said. "I needed someone there to help push me."

McMillan has received that push and now extends her goals toward becoming more self-sufficient.

"I'm trying to figure out what I have to do to be independent," she said. "I want to learn how to pay bills and gain knowledge of what it's like to be an adult before I turn 21."

Currently attending San Joaquin Delta College, it would be easy to consider McMillan's current situation a complete success compared to her outlook only a few years ago, but she is far from finished trying to advance.

"I am dreaming big right now," she admitted. "I want to get out of community college in the next two years, maintain a 3.0 GPA, transfer to a UC, stay in school as long as possible and earn a Ph.D. I want to go into sociology or psychology, and later own my own house and car."

All indications suggest Ms. McMillan is well on her way to achieving those goals, but she remains humble in her knowledge that she needed a little help to get to this point.

"A lot of people might say, 'I don't need help or anything,' and they might be scared to ask for help," she said.

"Everyone needs help, and they need to take advantage of things when they are out there, especially when people are reaching out to you."



"I probably wouldn't have graduated high school," she said. "I needed someone there to help push me."



Writing Policy and Procedure for AB 12, Especially for Small or Rural Counties

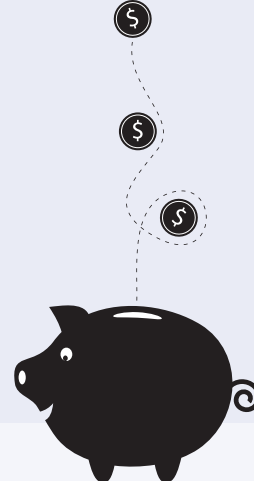
By Joanne M. Brown, J.D., M.S.W, National Child Welfare Resource Center

California's AB 12 requires a shifting emphasis in the relationship between child welfare workers and foster youth. Although both social workers and probation officers are dedicated to the best interests of foster youth, AB 12 now calls for these professionals to apply their skills toward working with young adults as true partners in decision making. Thoughtful county policy and procedure is crucial to making the transitioning of this relationship as smooth as possible.

A few tips about writing policy and procedure

- New policy and procedure, even in a constantly changing environment, must confront the question: "What now?"
- Treat the reader as a partner working through a puzzle, but ensure that the puzzle is solved.
- Explain why more, new or revised policy and procedure is absolutely essential (e.g., conformity with federal/state law; it is a good thing; it represents overdue attention to a well-recognized problem, and/or it reflects good child welfare practice and knowledge).
- Explain how AB 12 truly benefits the social worker and supervisor: it brings targeted funding and services to an underserved population of young adults, and it reinforces many years of hard work with the youth as a child and teenager.

Finally, when writing policy, be honest. AB 12 will not likely make staff life any easier. It will require a lot of interaction, one-on-one time and a significant paradigm shift. Thoughtful policy and procedure writing that is honest with staff and involves them from the start can make all the difference.



Financial Aid for Non-Minor Dependent Students

In addition to AB 12 benefits, non-minor dependents who are participating in post-secondary education are likely to be eligible for student financial aid. In order to receive financial aid, including a Federal Pell Grant and state grants, students must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). When foster youth complete the form and indicate they have been in the foster care system, their financial aid packet will allow them to get the most benefits for which they are eligible.

Because some financial aid programs have limited funding, the earlier a student applies the more aid the student is likely to receive. In some cases, deadlines are as early as March 2 for the fall term, so it is important for the student to get started as early as possible. Students can complete the FAFSA online or print a FAFSA worksheet at www.fafsa.ed.gov/options.htm.

Current and former foster youth who have not reached the age of 22 as of July 1 of the year they are applying may also qualify for up to \$5,000 per year under the Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) grant program. In order to be eligible, the youth must have been a ward/dependent of the court anytime on or after their 16th birthday. In addition to the Chafee ETV grant, most foster youth are eligible to have their California community college course enrollment fees waived through the Board of Governor's (BOG) fee waiver program.

Foster Youth Success Initiative (FYSI) liaisons are available at every community college throughout California to assist current and former foster youth in navigating all academic and student support services and programs. Financial aid officers are also available at California State University and University of California campuses to provide assistance.

Additional information about financial aid for community college is available at www.icanaffordcollege.info. Financial aid information and forms can also be found online on community college, CSU and UC websites. Free financial aid workshops are also offered at many campuses.



Every Young Adult is Fully VALUED

Voices of Young Adults

The voices of young adults truly matter. It's about listening to and really hearing what's important to them—and then helping them to act on that. Every aspect of these young lives counts, including educational goals, meaningful work experiences and permanent, loving and dependable adult relationships.

Assistance and Partnering

Young adults often need active assistance—and real partnerships—to reinforce and support learning as they transition into adulthood. This is an opportunity to support young adults in taking charge of their lives and futures—working with them on relationships, problem solving, personal responsibility and skill building to ensure they will thrive. We may need to transform the ways in which we work, emphasizing supports rather than supervision, to ensure that everyone is truly working together to provide needed guidance and assistance through youth-focused and youth-centered programs.

Love and Belonging

Everyone needs someone. We all need someone who loves us unconditionally and on whom we can depend. Family and loved ones provide a foundation and help enable young adults to realize their potential. Our job is to ensure that every young adult has a family or caring and committed relationships with adults who can support and guide him or her in life.

Unique Needs

Every young adult is unique. Some may require intensive levels of support and assistance, while others may need more guidance and skill building to achieve their goals. Providing individualized attention helps to ensure successful transitions.

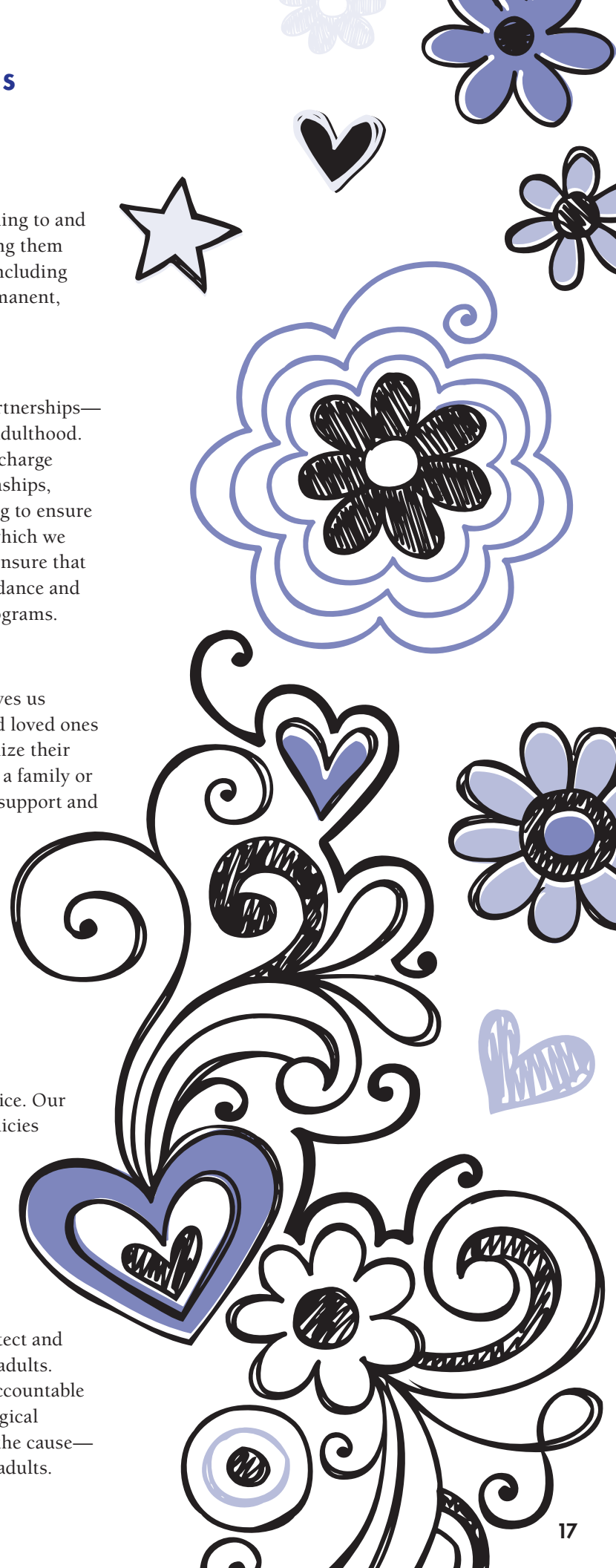
Eligibility is Maintained

Young adults should have access to every available service. Our community is committed to supporting programs and policies that cover all eligible young adults—and helping them secure all needed, allowed and available services and supports.

Development is Supported

Challenges, pitfalls and experimentation are part of the process of becoming an adult. The ways in which we relate to these young adults must balance the need to protect and guide them with their rights and responsibilities as legal adults. Young adults need to explore their own abilities and be accountable for their mistakes. They must be allowed to experience logical consequences, knowing that if they stumble—no matter the cause—they can find help, support and guidance from accepting adults.

To learn more visit www.after18ca.org





The Indian Child Welfare Act and AB 12

By Ann Gilmour and Lisa Molinar

In 2010 California passed AB 2418, which extends the definition of “Indian child” found in the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) up to age 21 for a youth who is a member or eligible for membership in a tribe and remains under the jurisdiction of the state dependency court. This provision provides that Native American youth are eligible for receiving benefits under AB 12/212 and the ICWA applies to these youth.

The Act does not give any guidance as to how important provisions of ICWA (such as the active efforts requirement) would continue to apply; however, it is clear that consultation must occur with both tribes and Native youth over how the ICWA will continue to apply to these cases.¹ If a non-minor dependent elects to have the ICWA continue to apply to his or her case, ongoing consultation with the tribe in the development and implementation of the case plan is required.² It will be important to develop principles and guidelines on these issues in consultation with tribal advocates and the tribal community in order to minimize conflicts and legal appeals. Tribal consultations are currently being scheduled across California to ensure that this important conversation occurs.

¹ Rule 5.707 (a) (4) requires that review reports for an ICWA eligible youth approaching 18 include discussion of the youth's wishes concerning ICWA. Rule 5.707 (c) (1) (D) similarly requires the court to make findings on this issue.

² See Rule 5.902 (d) (1) (H), (3) & (e) (1) (I) etc.

“Youth development is the ongoing growth process in which all youth are engaged in attempting:

1. To meet their basic personal and social needs to be safe, feel cared for, be valued, be useful and be spiritually grounded, and
2. To build skills and competencies that allow them to function and contribute in their daily lives.”

~ Karen Pittman, *The Forum for Youth Investment*

Resources

www.after18ca.org

www.cafosteringconnections.org

www.fosteringconnections.org

California Community College financial aid information

<http://www.icanaffordcollege.com/>

California Connected by 25 Initiative reports

www.californiaconnectedby25.org

CalSWEC Fostering Connections After 18 (AB 12) Training Resources

<http://calswec.berkeley.edu/fostering-connections-after-18-ab-12-training-resources>

Federal Student Aid

www.fafsa.ed.gov/options.htm

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

www.jimcaseyyouth.org

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County Welfare Directors Association of California

John Burton Foundation

Service Employees International Union

The Alliance for Children's Rights

Youth Law Center

We can't publish this newsletter without you.

We received lots of helpful and interesting feedback on our last issue. Please send your comments and any ideas for future issues to me at sbrooks@ucde.ucdavis.edu



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Upcoming trainings

Advanced/Specialized Practice

Grief and Loss

Redding: Nov. 27-28, 2012

Conferences and Special Events

Community of Practice Regional Convening: Adoptions

Redding: Jan. 20, 2013

Community of Practice Regional Convening:

Fostering Connections After 18 (AB 12)

Davis: Feb. 12, 2013

Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment

Webinar: Will be scheduled for January 2013

Coming soon...

AB 12 Webinar Series for Child Welfare Workers

Topics:

1. Basic Overview: What is Fostering Connections (also known as AB12, After 18), and what are the essentials that child welfare workers need to know?
2. Legal Process: Court reports, findings and orders, exit and re-entry, inter-county transfers, Justice/Delinquency issues
3. Eligibility and Benefits: Housing and placement nuts and bolts, updates to the 2012 legislation
4. Post-Secondary Education: How to work with youth to get them enrolled and successfully through programs
5. Internal Policies and Procedures: Protocols, forms, chain of command issues and internal logistics for child welfare workers
6. Supervisor/Program Manager Session: Overview of the above topics listed/open forum
7. AB 12 Worker Forum: Overview of the above topics listed/open forum

This series is slated to begin in late October or early November. For the latest information on our course offerings, please visit

humanservices.ucdavis.edu/academy

In Our Next Issue

Look for more articles, research, success stories and resources in our next issue of *Reaching Out*. The next issue will focus on "Child Welfare and Well-Being."

About the Northern California Training Academy

As part of the Center for Human Services at UC Davis Extension, the Northern California Training Academy provides training, consultation, research and evaluation for 28 Northern California counties. The counties include rural and urban counties with various training challenges for child welfare staff. The focus on integrated training across disciplines is a high priority in the region. This publication is supported by funds from the California Department of Social Services.

About the Center for Human Services

The Center for Human Services at UC Davis Extension began more than 30 years ago as a partnership between the University of California, Davis and state government to address the needs of rural counties in developing skills for their social workers. Through professional training, consultation and research, the Center has grown to serve human services organizations and professionals throughout California and across the nation.

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