

# Chapter III

## Developing Strategies: The Pacesetters

This chapter highlights programs and practices launched across the country by state and local governments, often supported by foundations as well as specific program strategies that appear to have specific merit for foster care youth in transition. Three overarching themes appear to be key drivers in these emerging efforts: 1) a focus on how to achieve economic self-sufficiency, 2) building the necessary fiscal and emotional assets, and 3) making connections.

It is clear that many promising approaches are emerging and there is no question that there are a growing number of effective practices with this population. Experts from a variety of fields concur that the work with transitioning youth is moving in a positive direction. Still, there is no gold standard or best practice based on available research and a period of sustained research and evaluation needs to continue. Connectedness, therefore, is of primary importance to the successful transition of foster care youth, including those with disabilities.

### STATE STRATEGIES

States frequently function as incubators for emerging effective practices for foster care youth. Through changes in law, regulations, and processes, a number of states, as detailed below, are changing and refocusing their systems of service delivery to better address the transition-related needs of youth in foster care.

### North Carolina

**NC LINKS** is North Carolina's foster care independent living program offering services to teens and young adults, ages 13 to 20 who are currently or were previously in foster care as teenagers. A youth and his or her caregiver complete an objective assessment of the youth's strengths and needs. The agency and youth develop a plan based on the assessment, which includes his or her goals, interests, and responsibilities as well as suggested support services. These services may include employment, volunteer activities, one-on-one instruction, group and community activities, specific life-skills training, and/or exposure to educational and vocational resources. All NC LINKS program activities aim to help participants move toward achieving one or more of the following goals:

- sufficient academic and/or vocational training for the individual's needs;
- connections to and emotional support from adults in addition to those working within the public child welfare system;
- avoidance of high-risk behaviors;
- postponement of parenthood until the participant is emotionally and financially capable of parenting; and
- access to routine health, mental health, and dental health care.

North Carolina allocates \$2.1 million of federal and state Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) funds to finance the services provided by each county's department of social services. In addition, \$400,000 is set aside to provide additional funding to reimburse counties for eligible expenditures on behalf of individual youth. These funds, called LINKS Special Funds, are administered at the state level to ensure that each county, regardless of size or child welfare program allocation, can access sufficient funding for needed items or services that help to fulfill the purposes of the program. See <<http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/links/index.htm>>.

## Texas

**The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS)** provides CFCIP services through its **Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Program**, which was implemented in 1986 to help foster care youth prepare for their transition to adulthood. PAL staff or contractors conduct an initial assessment of each PAL participant's general readiness to live independently when the youth reaches age 16. The results are used to develop specific plans and training to prepare each youth for adult living. A post-assessment is conducted around the time of the youth's discharge from substitute care. Staff or contractors provide training on independent living skills that include health, job skills, money management, personal and interpersonal skills, housing and transportation, and planning for the future. PAL also provides support services based on need and available funds, including counseling, driver education, volunteer mentoring, vocational assessment and/or training, GED preparation and preparation for college entrance exams, and reimbursement for high school graduation expenses. In addition, if young people meet certain eligibility guidelines, they may receive a transitional living allowance up to \$1,000 once they leave care. Young adults between the ages of 18 and 21, who have aged out of the foster care system, are eligible for aftercare room and board assistance based on need. Financial assistance up to \$500 per month may be used for rent, food, utilities, and rental deposits. There is a per-client lifetime cap on total assistance of \$3,000; exceptions are made for special or emergency situations. In 2005, DFPS received approximately \$5.5 million in Foster Care

Independence Act 1999 (Chafee) funds, supplemented by an additional \$1.4 million in state and local matching funds or in-kind matches. DFPS has partnered with Casey Family Programs, a Seattle-based national foundation to improve transitional services for youth aging out of foster care. Through this effort, called the Texas State Strategy (TSS), Casey Family Programs will help DFPS implement best-practice models, approaches and training tools for foster parents and foster care staff on independent living skills. DFPS has adopted the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment as part of this initiative. In addition, DFPS and Casey Family Programs worked on an outcome assessment effort in 2004 and 2005 that enables DFPS to track what happens to youth after they leave foster care for adult living. See <[http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child\\_Protection/Preparation\\_For\\_Adult\\_Living/default.asp](http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/default.asp)>.

## Maine

**Maine's First Jobs** is a youth staffing initiative that provides initial and transitional employment opportunities for youth who have experienced abuse and neglect, have never held a job, and many of whom have learning and other disabilities. With initial leadership funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, First Jobs began as a Maine pilot demonstration project in the summer of 2004. First Jobs combines a contract staffing model with intensive onsite job coaching support to create initial and interim skill building employment opportunities in a variety of business sectors. Currently, the program is structured around several elements that have helped to ensure its continued success: 1) Job Coaches who are on site at all times and who provide support and assistance when needed; 2) Employability Development Curriculum which provides interactive sessions in which youth are able to knit together their own individual workplace experiences with structured learning about employment; 3) Corporate Partnerships which facilitate the hiring of young people, investing in employees and focusing on retention; 4) Collaboration and Partnership with Casey Family Services and the Muskie School which is invaluable for recruitment efforts and facilitating communication with Maine's Department of Health and Human Services; 5) Individualized Job Placement which ensures that each

First Jobs associate is placed in a job that best fit his/her skills, interests and each entity's business needs; and 6) Customized support to help overcome barriers to job success. For more information see <[http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/casy\\_winwin.pdf](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/casy_winwin.pdf)>.

### **New Mexico**

**Adolescent Transition Groups (ATGs)** were developed by the State of New Mexico in 1994 to support the most vulnerable youth transitioning from out-of-home care into adulthood. ATGs are comprised of representatives from state and local child welfare, juvenile justice, education, and mental health agencies, as well as youth advocates, attorneys, and other community stakeholders. ATGs exemplify a systems management approach that utilizes the experiences of individuals to identify systemic barriers for youth in transition. The primary goals of ATGs are to help youth access services that they are eligible for as adults, to identify and address barriers to services and service gaps, and to raise awareness and promote dialogue between child and adult systems of care. Currently, there are five ATGs throughout New Mexico. Each ATG utilizes existing agency resources to support staffing and to provide technical assistance and training to communities interested in forming an ATG. Child welfare and juvenile justice agencies refer their hardest-to-serve youth to ATGs. Typically, the youth referred have dual or multiple diagnoses including a mental health condition with substance abuse and/or developmental disorders. ATGs hold monthly half-day meetings, during which professionals, family members, and youth present information about transition-related issues and problems they encounter. After identifying the youth's needs, the group discusses possible solutions and refers the family, youth, and/or caseworker to untapped resources and services. The groups regularly report to state agencies to increase interagency awareness about the needs of youth transitioning out of care. For more information see <<http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/1122/>>.

## **LOCAL STRATEGIES**

All delivery of services is local. Below are examples where communities have taken the lead in improving transition services to foster care youth, often as a part of a foundation's program of work.

### **Baltimore, Maryland**

**The UPS School-to-Career Partnership** in Baltimore, Maryland teaches workplace skills in a hands-on environment to foster care youth. The Maryland Department of Human Resources partnered with the state independent living program, the United Parcel Service (UPS), the Living Classrooms Foundation (a local youth development agency), and the Annie E. Casey Foundation to develop and promote the program. Applicants complete work-readiness training and most are then referred for interviews at the UPS shipping facility in Burtonsville, Maryland, Marriott Hotels, Bank of America, or other local employers. If hired, UPS pays youth participants for their part-time work and provides health benefits. UPS also reimburses youth for tuition at colleges or vocational training programs. Living Classrooms provides transportation to work at the Burtonsville site for up to 40 youth on a weekly basis. Retention services are provided at the job site to help the youth maintain a consistent work ethic. Since its inception in 1999, the UPS School-to-Career Partnership has helped more than 300 youth find employment. The current average length of stay on the job for participants exceeds nine months. UPS and the Annie E. Casey Foundation have replicated this program in seven other cities. See <[http://www.livingclassrooms.org/employ\\_workforce.html](http://www.livingclassrooms.org/employ_workforce.html)>.

### **Hartford, Connecticut**

**Casey Family Services** in Hartford, Connecticut is a nonprofit child welfare agency providing programs to meet the changing needs of vulnerable children and families. The agency is the direct services arm of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The program has a strong emphasis on participants' academics and college attendance. It provides information to youth in transition about college opportunities and helps them make connections to colleges and universities. Youth receive college counseling, including individualized personal education plans; career counseling, which

includes the aid of consultants in identifying well-suited careers; tutoring and mentoring through an alumni association; financial aid through grants, scholarships, and the Casey Foundation; and employment training and work experience. See <[http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org/ar\\_hct\\_trans.html](http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org/ar_hct_trans.html)>.

## Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

### Philadelphia Department of Human Services

**Achieving Independence Center (the AIC)** was established as part of the Department's more integrated approach to service delivery. The AIC was designed to serve the special needs of this population of young people. It has been developed in cooperation with the Philadelphia Workforce Development Corporation and the Philadelphia Youth Network. It is a One-Stop Center, serving as a "gateway" to meet the multiple needs of youth in transition. The Center itself is open during non-traditional hours and provides flexible scheduling and individualized plans for each youth. The staff at the Center concentrate on the enhancement of employment, housing and educational opportunities for youth who are between the ages of 16 and 21 years of age, who have been in placement at or after the age of 16 years and who have been adjudicated dependent or dependent/delinquent by the courts. See <[http://dhs.phila.gov/intranet/pgintrahome\\_pub.nsf/Content/Prevention+-+Achieving+Independence+Center](http://dhs.phila.gov/intranet/pgintrahome_pub.nsf/Content/Prevention+-+Achieving+Independence+Center)>.

## San Francisco, California

**The San Francisco Department of Human Services (SFDHS)** is involved in several initiatives that promote cross-system collaboration for older disconnected youth in San Francisco. As of this writing, San Francisco's Mayor has appointed and will initiate a citywide Transitional Youth Task Force to address a number of issues affecting San Francisco's disconnected youth. The following are some of SFDHS' current initiatives.

- **Permanent Supportive Housing** which will target emancipated foster youth, ages 18-24;
- **The Guardian Scholars Program**, modeled after Orange County, California's successful program model—the program enables emancipated foster

youth to successfully engage in attending a college, university, or vocational school that fits their educational preparedness, degree objectives and long-term goals—program services include financial aid, life coaching, mentoring, counseling, and housing;

- **Connecting Foster Youth to the Labor Market**, which will foster locally driven strategies that support foster youth development and successful transition to adulthood via employment and training;
- **The LEASE Program** which provides 31 individual units of housing with wrap-around services, including economic literacy classes, vocational and employment training, on-the-job support and retention services, mental health services, mentoring, tutoring, life skills and GED classes for youth in transition;
- **Incorporating Youth into the City's One-Stop Career Link System** which is a new initiative designed to identify, develop and implement recommendations on making current One-Stop Centers youth-friendly and connected to youth service providers; and,
- **The San Francisco Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP)** which continues to implement several new initiatives including 1) an Individual Development Account (IDA) program for 90 ILSP youth which can be used for education, job training, and housing security deposits; 2) an early ILSP for youth ages 14-15 in order to bring these youth into ILSP early enough to help them take advantage of what ILSP has to offer as they prepare to emancipate when they turn 17; and 3) GOALS (Growth Opportunities Achieve Lifelong Success) meetings for foster youth ages 17-18 which better prepare youth for emancipation.

For more information on the San Francisco Department of Human Services' initiatives see <[http://www.sfgov.org/site/mayor\\_page.asp?id=30334](http://www.sfgov.org/site/mayor_page.asp?id=30334)>.

## Corpus Christi, Texas

**Youth Opportunities United's (YOU) Comprehensive Strategy Program** focuses on research, data analysis, and planning as core elements of its program which is led by the City of Corpus Christi, TX, in partnership with the school district, United Way, and other government and private partners. The long-term

strategic plan that has resulted from this collaborative effort uses research and data analysis to reduce the number of youthful offenders and support healthy youth development. The coalition collects data from local programs and works to increase the quality and capacity of services in five key areas:

- after school,
- early childhood,
- a juvenile assessment center,
- a safe communities program, and
- a mentor network.

Through its planning and data collection, the community has successfully leveraged over \$14 million in state, federal, and private dollars in four years to fund continuing community youth efforts. For more information see <<http://www.cctexas.com/?fuseaction=main.view&page=271>>.

## PROGRAM STRATEGIES

Explicit intervention strategies are important. Clearly one of the most ambitious targeted intervention models is one created by **The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative** called **The Opportunity Passport™**, an asset development tool to help foster care alumni and youth in care open doors to financial, educational, vocational and entrepreneurial opportunities. The project seeks to help youth in transition develop financial literacy; gain experience with banking; build assets for education, housing, transportation, and other expenses; and gain entry to training, educational, and vocational opportunities. The Opportunity Passport™ has three components: a personal debit account to be used for short-term expenses; a matched individual development account to be used for specific assets such as education expenses and housing down payment deposits; and benefits to be designed and negotiated on the local level called “door openers.” Door openers could include pre-approval to register for community college courses or expedited access to job-training or adult-education courses. To be eligible, one must be between 14 and 23 years of age, have been in the foster care system at age 14 or older, complete financial literacy

training, provide personal information for project evaluation, and live in one of the eligible sites. The Opportunity Passport™ is currently being pilot-tested in 13 sites nationwide. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Programs, and the Marguerite Casey Foundation fund this project, which is being evaluated as a model to help foster youth transition successfully to adulthood. See <<http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org/opportunitypassport.htm>>.

**The Carrera Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program** was founded in 1984 by Dr. Michael A. Carrera, a renowned scholar and educator. The Program, in collaboration with the California Children’s Aid Society (CAS), has been helping young people living in severely underserved communities achieve a better future for themselves by learning, among other things, how to avoid engaging in sex early on in their lives. In contrast to many other pregnancy prevention programs, the Carrera model focuses on the “whole teen,” not just on their sexual behavior, by combining sexual literacy with in-depth learning opportunities regarding future life choices. The program’s success is based on recognizing and addressing reasons why adolescents growing up in low-income communities decide to engage in risky sexual behavior: poor housing, poor health care, school failure and few job prospects all conspire to tell youth that they have no meaningful future. The program model focuses on showing youth that they can have a better future. Ultimately, when youth in the program are given the opportunity to believe they have value and a real chance for success, they start to see a future in which teen pregnancy has no part. Over the years, this program has been implemented in 20 states throughout the country, and currently serves over 900 youth annually. Another 5,000 individuals (including parents, siblings, peers, and alumni) also benefit from the program. For more information visit the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation Youth Development Website at <<http://www.emcf.org/programs/youth/carrera.htm>>.