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Many foster youth exit to find themselves unemployed, with neither high school diploma nor marketable skills. Self-sufficiency skills are best modeled by foster parents who have been provided extensive training, resources and supports. These skills are learned and acquired over time.

The Grand Jury sampled parent training classes for content and group interaction. Curriculum appeared overly broad and lecture-style. Group interaction and skill-building activities were not readily observable. Instruction must encompass Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), coping behaviors, critical thinking and conflict management. Skills practice must emphasize values, communication, behavior management, financial literacy, time management, peer pressure, nutrition and exercise. Filling in paperwork during valuable training time must be minimized. Scope and sequence of curricular outcomes must be standardized.

Training for Evidence-Based Foster Parenting

Foster parent training needs to follow evidence-based concepts. Casey Family Foundation and California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare, for example, provide research for child welfare professionals and policy makers to make decisions based on supported evidence.¹⁷

Required annual training must equip parents with hands-on strategies to handle trauma, attachment, bonding, mental health and behavioral issues. Interactive training, based on research and evidence, builds on parents' personal knowledge and experience.

DCFS approves and oversees all services required by foster care youth. It provides direct service and contracts with government and nonprofit agencies to provide mental health and physical health services. Many foster children move from one out-of-home placement to another.¹⁸ Qualified, proactive parents may reduce the number of placements—keeping the promise of permanence to a child. A well-matched, nourishing foster home is the critical intervention needed by foster youth. As one former foster care participant recently wrote in the Los Angeles Times:

Los Angeles County needs to take immediate steps to monitor and improve the care that children receive in individual homes... The county also needs to develop strategies for identifying families with the parenting qualities needed and eliminating those who don't have them. If a particular foster home repeatedly asks that children in its care be relocated, or if children in a particular home are more likely to fail at school or aren't taken to doctors when they need to be, then the county should no longer place children in those homes. This seems like basic logic; yet according to the report,¹⁹ the county lacks the means to track outcomes from individual homes.²⁰

¹⁷ Casey Family Foundation; California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare

¹⁸ Interviews with current foster parents and professional staffs of DCFS and FFAs

¹⁹ A confidential report available on Los Angeles Times website, commissioned by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, 2012

²⁰ "A Safer Foster System," Andrew Bridge, Op-Ed page, Los Angeles Times, March 24, 2013

DCFS Strategic Plan's Implementation—Timely

The Grand Jury commends DCFS for simply refusing to do more of the same. The Department's transformative planning process will effectively change its operation. This process unfalteringly questions what DCFS is about and how it should accomplish its mission. The Strategic Planning Process is the engine that will move DCFS forward.

DCFS must expand foster parent training and support because so much is expected of parents in today's world. This upgrade must encompass evidence-based training practices, a uniform practice model and an accessible, inter-agency data system.

Strategic Plan objectives point to foster parents as fundamental to quality foster care. DCFS prioritizes foster parent recruitment, selection, preparation and required annual training. DCFS will *recruit an additional 10% of qualified, committed foster homes in proportion to the needs of each community; and provide these caregivers with training to promote child safety and address the needs of abused and neglected children.*²¹

The above objective (I.2.2) is a required strategy to reinvigorate foster parent training. Increasingly, foster parents are expected to deal with children's traumas. Ongoing research, transmitted as teachable modules, provides an essential skill hierarchy. In real life, a professional is required to complete defined, annual professional development. Initially and yearly thereafter, foster parents must complete rigorous parent development classes. Quality assurance requires training above and beyond what is now mandated. Commitment to parent training and development will yield positive applications when foster parents are full-fledged participants. Such training should be delivered through the DCFS Inter-University Consortium Project.

DCFS Monitoring and Oversight: Reveals the Reality

Foster children are cared for in licensed homes. DCFS Strategic Plan Objective I.2.3 calls to *enhance monitoring/oversight of Foster Family Agencies (FFA), licensed foster homes and other out-of-home providers by coordination with Child Social Workers.* While out-of-home placements often require services by contract, DCFS is ultimately responsible for the safety and well-being of foster children. **This responsibility cannot be delegated.** Monitoring and oversight fulfills its promise of child safety, well-being and permanence. Enhanced monitoring and oversight benefit all foster youth and foster parents. It serves as the looking glass to evaluate, highlight and improve foster parenting practice.

DCFS Strategic Plan Objective I.4.2 calls to *ensure relevant contracted services include outcomes which assist and support shortened timelines to permanence.* Monitoring and oversight require measurable outcomes. DCFS must obtain timely performance data to track case management and successful outcomes. Data systems must be readily accessible and useable.

²¹ DCFS Strategic Plan Objectives/Foster Parent Recruitment: I.2.2

In Conclusion

For quality assurance, foster parents need professional level training delivered by expert teachers. Foster parents must be valued members of the foster care system and the multidisciplinary team. Ready and willing—they have every right to expect the most current evidence-based training—meeting the best practice standards set by DCFS.

Foster parents are their child’s passport to a successful life.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Recommendation	Responding Agency
5.1-5.5	Department of Children and Family Services

**FOSTER CARE
TRANSITIONAL AGED YOUTH
VOCATIONAL TRAINING**



COMMITTEE MEMBERS

**Gilbert Zeal
Barry Rubens**

6. FOSTER CARE TRANSITIONAL AGED YOUTH VOCATIONAL TRAINING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aging out foster care youth are being shortchanged by the current education system. According to the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), in 2011, there were approximately 2,400 youth between the ages of 16 and 18 in the Los Angeles County Foster Care system. DCFS estimates approximately 50% of foster youth who exit from high school are without a diploma or GED certificate. Youth who are aging out of foster care receive instruction in life skills that are necessary for day to day functioning as a responsible citizen. This training does not address all of the needs of the foster child who ends up unemployed, homeless or incarcerated. These youth need to be encouraged to complete high school, obtain their diploma and receive vocational training so they have additional skills to help qualify and obtain employment.

The 2012-2013 Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) has identified several programs that provide vocational training and offer academic courses to obtain a diploma or GED certificate. Based on our findings, the following recommendations would accomplish this most important goal:

RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 DCFS should assess all foster care youth under its jurisdiction, 16-24 years old who do not have a high school diploma to determine whether a dual track approach is beneficial. This would combine academic and vocational training in order to enhance opportunities for employment.

6.2 DCFS should assign a coordinator to begin a pilot program to encourage a significant number of foster youth to participate in the YouthBuild Charter School of California (YouthBuild) or similar program.

6.3 DCFS should strive to enroll more students in the Los Angeles Unified School District's (LAUSD) Alternative Education and Work Center Program (AEWC). The foster parent, guardian or DCFS case worker should work directly with the AEWK consultant at each location to enroll youth in the AEWK program.

6.4 DCFS should begin training classes for case workers, group home supervisors, counselors and especially the foster parents to assure that all youth aging out without a high school diploma are on track to benefit from exposure to a vocational approach.

6.5 The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) should evaluate the construction skills training at the Los Angeles County Probation Department's Challenger Camp in Lancaster to determine if similar training could be offered at AEWK locations that do not have easy access to skills centers.

6.6 LAUSD should expand the AEWK programs to include more students, teachers and locations.

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury met with the Los Angeles Probation Department staff at the Challenger Camp in Lancaster to discuss the use of video guided training in the construction trades. They also visited construction sites where contractors were using high school students at the sites and saw contractors instructing high school students, both male and female, in classrooms at some of the YouthBuild schools. The committee visited all twelve YouthBuild sites in Los Angeles County and nine of the 26 AEW C schools. It found highly dedicated instructors at both. It also interviewed students, graduates, contractors, counselors and transition coordinators. All were highly dedicated to their work and told many success stories. The committee met with staff from DCFS, LAUSD AEW C, LA Conservation Corps and a wide variety of teachers and youth.

BACKGROUND

Harvard University's School of Education published a 2011 study, "Pathways to Prosperity"¹, which projected that only one-third of the 47 million jobs expected to be created between 2008 and 2018 will require a bachelor's degree, upending the traditional notion that success is strictly defined by graduating from a four-year college. Also, the study pointed out that the nation's high schools have extraordinarily high dropout rates. Every year some one million students leave before earning a high school diploma. Many drop out because they struggle academically. But large numbers say they dropped out because they felt their classes were not interesting and that high school was unrelentingly boring. Students drop out of high school and college for many reasons – a major reason is that too many are not able to see a clear, connection between their program of study and tangible opportunities in the labor market. Many students are frustrated by an education they often find irrelevant and removed from the world of work. As a result, approximately 50% of students drop out of school or fail to obtain a diploma.²

A significant difference between the United States secondary education system and other countries is that most advanced nations place far more emphasis on vocational education than the United States. Most other countries have an educational program that typically combines classroom and workplace learning. This culminates in a diploma or certificate, a "qualification" as it is called, with real currency in the labor market.³

¹ Pathways to Prosperity Project by Harvard Graduate School of Education, Feb. 2011

² Ibid, pp. 20

³ Ibid, pp. 15

Two reports by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and as noted in the Harvard Study provide “compelling evidence that a vocational education that integrates work and learning is a superior way to learn. The current system in the U.S. places far too much emphasis on a single pathway to success: attending and graduating from a four-year college after completing an academic program of study in high school. Yet only 30% of young adults successfully complete this preferred pathway.”

Students who are bored and at risk of dropping out need to be engaged more effectively. Many of these are foster care youth who have been moved from home to home and school to school and in this chaotic process have had their education seriously disrupted; thus they have become disillusioned. They eventually drop out of school. According to DCFS senior Staff, the average foster youth has been placed eight times or more in a home by the age of 18. Each placement change contributes to being four to six months further behind in school. All students should have plentiful opportunities to participate in work-linked learning, ranging from job shadowing to internships. Due to present economic conditions, many school programs have been cut back or eliminated, including vocational training. Some school programs still function on a scaled back schedule. The Grand Jury believes that vocational training at the high school level is extremely important and can be accomplished on a wide-spread basis. This training will have a positive impact on foster youth who may become unemployed, homeless or incarcerated.

FINDINGS

Challenger Probation Camp

The Los Angeles County Probation Department’s Challenger Memorial Youth Center in Lancaster is now utilizing a unique instruction method that appears to be extremely effective according to teachers and counselors who were interviewed by members of the Grand Jury. This method utilizes a video-guided step-by-step instructional approach in 20 areas in the construction trades. Each 10-day construction module begins with tool and material identification and an overview of the activity for the 10 days. The video then guides the students through the work and explains the best practices necessary to produce excellent results. Completion of this program provides the student with basic knowledge which may qualify the student for employment in the construction trades. According to the teachers and counselors interviewed, students at the Challenger Center prefer the electrical, plumbing and tile-setting modules but there are 17 other courses offering the same basic approach using video. If this program is instituted on a wider basis at other locations, instructors and physical space must be provided according to Challenger Center staff.

Alternative Education and Work Center

LAUSD has developed the Alternative Education and Work Center (AEWC), which is a dropout recovery program administered by the LAUSD Division of Adult and Career Education for youth 16 to 18 years of age. The Grand Jury met with senior staff of the AEWC program and then visited with outreach consultants at several school locations. The mode of instruction is independent study. Students must report to school one day each week to turn in homework and get assignments for the next week. Students can work towards a high school diploma or GED while employed or caring for children.

AEWC consultants emphasized that it is very important that a parent, foster parent or guardian become involved in monitoring the necessary homework and maintaining contact with the instructors. This may be a concern if the foster parent works more than one job or lacks the necessary educational skills. Instructors strive to have the students complete the program to obtain a high school diploma or GED before the student loses interest in the program and drops out. The AEWC graduation rate is 20% to 40%. With many more high schools than AEWC locations, there are waiting lists at some locations.

Some of the schools do not have occupational skills centers on site, requiring students to travel some distance to a skills center. All AEWC graduates must meet all district and state requirements and pass the California High School Exit Exam. The outreach consultant at each site is the contact for enrollment in AEWC.

The following chart compiled by the Grand Jury lists the locations of the twenty six (26) AEWC schools and the phone number of each of the outreach consultants at each location. It is not meant to be exhaustive as other resources may exist.

Los Angeles Unified School District
(AEWC) Alternative Education and Work Center

SCHOOL	ADDRESS	OUTREACH CONSULTANT	TELEPHONE	SCHOOL	ADDRESS	OUTREACH CONSULTANT	TELEPHONE
ABRAM FRIEDMAN OC	1646 S. Olive St. Los Angeles	B. Baylis	(213) 765-2407 Fax(213)765-2408	GARFIELD CAS-BRANCH	3355 Michigan Avenue	Carlos Gabaldon	(323)729-1800 (323)223-8622
BELMONT CAS – BRANCH	1510 Cambria St. Los Angeles	Sonia Arguelles	(213)483-0488 Fax(213)483-8727	HOLLYWOOD CAS BRANCH	5936 Santa Monica Blvd.	Kathleen Petrini	(323)871-8957 Fax(323)871-8760
LOS ANGELES TECHNOLOGY CENTER	3721 West Washington Blvd.	Gerry Gomez	(323)732-0153 Ext. 223	JEFFERESON CAS BRANCH	2830 S. Central Av Los Angeles	Joe Alvarez	(323)235-6125 (323)233-9964
EAST LOS ANGELES OC	2100 Marengo St. Los Angeles	Dan Arrula	(213)223-1283 Ext. 132/136	FRANKLIN CAS BRANCH	820 N Ave 54, Bldg. 29	Suzanne Limbird	(323)982-6804 Fax(323)982-6805
EAST LOS ANGELES SKILLS CENTER	3921 Selig Place Los Angeles	Mac Velazquez	(323)224-5970 Ext. 6221	HUNTINGTON PARK CAS	2945 Belgrave Huntington Park	Dan Reyes	(323)826-2419 Fax(323)826-2426
SAN PEDRO SKILLS CENTER	920 West 36 th St. Building 945	Matt Matich	(310)221-4651 Fax(310)221-4659	HARBOR CAS BRANCH	1123W. 223 rd St. Torrance 90502	Barbara C. Milling	(310)320-2419
METROPOLITAN SKILLS CENTER	1018 Mohawk St. Los Angeles	Darin Gray	(213)353-5330 Fax(213)353-5338	VAN NUYS CAS BRANCH	15810 Saticoy St. Lake Balboa	Ramon Alaniz	(818)988-7297
NORTH VALLEY OC	11450 Sharp Ave. Mission Hills	Vladimir Tigno	(818)365-9645 Ext. 330/438	GEORGE KIRIYAMA CAS – BRANCH	18120 S Normandie	Bryan Hunter	(310)354-4966 Fax(310)354-4956
PACOIMA SKILLS CENTER	8604 Arleta Ave. Sun Valley 91352	Stephanie Angel-Gilliard	(818)759-5840 Ext. 5845	WESTCHESTER CAS BRANCH	8701 Park Hill Dr. Room S-15	Monica Medina	(310)338-2510 Fax(310)338-2513
VENICE SKILLS CENTER	611 Fifth Avenue Venice 90291	Moises Gomez	(310)664-5824 Fax(310)392-3461	BELL CAS – BRANCH (BELL HIGH SCHOOL)	4328 Bell Ave. Bell 90201	Alma Rubio	(323)560-7198
MAXINE WATERS E.P.C	10925 S Central Avenue	Dorthea Flenoil	(323)564-1431 Ext. 125	ROOSEVELT CAS BRANCH	456 s. Mathews Street	Tony Manriquez	(323)261-2837 (323)261-5275
WEST VALLEY OC	6200 Winnetka Av	Michele Stiehl	(818)346-3540 Ext 254	RESEDA CAS	18230 Kittridge Street	Chris Petrini	(818)758-8018 Ext. 8019
MANUAL - ARTS CRENSHAW-CAS	3741 Stocker St. Room 110	Robert Mason	(323)292-7313 Fax(323)292-0064	FREMONT-WASHINGTON CAS BRANCH	501 East 66 th St. Los Angeles	Tracey Walker	(323)758-7593 Fax(323)758-8120

CAS – COMMUNITY ADULT SCHOOL OC – OCCUPATIONAL CENTER

(THIS LIST WAS COMPILED FROM DATA PROVIDED BY OUTREACH CONSULTANTS AT SOME AEWK SCHOOLS. IT IS NOT MEANT TO BE EXHAUSTIVE).

YouthBuild Charter School of California

Another very successful program the Grand Jury has identified is the YouthBuild Charter School of California. The Grand Jury met with the founder of YouthBuild California and his staff to evaluate the status of the YouthBuild program. YouthBuild USA was started in the Harlem section of New York in the 1960's for youth 16-24 years of age who had dropped out or aged out of high school and failed to obtain a high school diploma. The YouthBuild program has since spread to several other states and is supported by YouthBuild USA. YouthBuild Charter School of California was started in 2008 with support from YouthBuild USA and now has 12 sites in Los Angeles County with three more planned over the next 12 months. As stated before, youth between the ages of 16-24 enroll at YouthBuild after having dropped out, aged out or otherwise failed to graduate in the traditional school system according to YouthBuild staff. Unlike traditional schools that employ standardized curriculum and classroom practices which can often discourage and alienate marginalized students, YouthBuild's project-based approach allows young adults to take ownership of their education by pursuing meaningful academic and professional studies. An interesting and effective technique employed by the schools is a code of conduct which stresses respect, responsibility, equal treatment for all and the importance of timeliness. Some schools require a simple uniform (which may be provided by the school). Most of the schools have a drug testing program to promote safety while working with tools.

Both male and female students participate in this program which generally takes 6 to 24 months for a student to graduate with a high school diploma. YouthBuild staff state the graduation rate for students who complete the program is approximately 85%. While being exposed to the various construction trades, the students also take traditional high school courses such as English, math, science, social science and technology (computers and related areas). In addition to classroom work and the training in the construction trades, students also work with independent contractors such as Habitat for Humanity, They are constructing and remodeling buildings for low income housing.

The value of this program is that it enables youth 16 to 24 years of age to obtain their high school diploma and learn vocational skills. This may be the last chance for their success. The program also extends past the age of 24, if the student is enrolled by the age of 24 and working towards a diploma. The Grand Jury believes that this approach would be very beneficial for foster youth who are at risk of future failure.

The following chart lists some of the vocational training classes offered at all 12 Los Angeles County YouthBuild high schools. This dual track approach allows students to study traditional high school courses such as English, math, science and technology while at the same time learning vocational skills that could lead to employment. The chart was compiled by the Grand Jury from information provided by YouthBuild staff. It is not meant to be exhaustive as other resources may be available.

YOUTHBUILD CHARTER SCHOOL OF CALIFORNIA

School	Address	Phone	Academic					Counseling/Life Skills						Vocational Skills							Off Site Work							
			Math/English	Science/Social	Technology	Leadership	Health/Nutrition	Cultural Information	Anger Management	Mental Health	Substance Abuse	Resume/Interviews	Scholarship/Apps	Job Placement Aid	Power Tools	Construction	Osha-10 Certification	Forklift Certification	Hazardous Materials	CPR/First Aid	Solar Energy	Nursing	Culinary	Community Service	Graffiti Removal	Construction	Habitat for Humanity	Low Income Housing
Antelope Valley YouthBuild	37230 37 th St. E Palmdale, CA	661 266-8900	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	
Boyle Height YouthBuild	202 N Saratoga St. Los Angeles	323-261-2800	X	X	X	X	X				X	X	X	X	X								X					
Y.E.S. YouthBuild	357 E Palmer St. Compton	310-631-2000	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X							X				X					
Compassion Care YouthBuild	2614 Crenshaw Blvd. Los Angeles	310-230-5574	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X						X			X	X	X					
LA CAUSA YouthBuild	5400 E. Olympic Blvd. Los Angeles	323-887-2500	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X					X				X	X	X		X	X
CCOE YouthBuild	5021 Lennox Bl. Lennox	310-225-3060	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Long Beach YouthBuild	690 North Studebaker Rd. Long Beach	562-431-0203	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	X	X	X	X	X
Field of Dreams YouthBuild	15014 Studebaker Rd. Norwalk	562-409-5567	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X						X					X					
San Fernando YouthBuild	11076 Norris Av. Pacoima	818-794-5700	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X		X	X	X		X					X					
San Gabriel Conservation Corps.	3903 N Tyler Av. El Monte	626-444-5337	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X					X	X	X		X	X
Slauson Home Sweet Home	1512 W Slauson Ave, Los Angeles	323-750-7035	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X										X					
CRCD Academy	400 W Washington Bl Los Angeles	213-763-5562	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X			X	X	X	X	X	X

THIS CHART LISTS VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR YOUTH, AGE 16-24, AS OF 2-1-13. CONTACT SCHOOL FOR ENROLLMENT AND OTHER CLASSES OFFERED.

THIS CHART WAS COMPILED BY THE GRAND JURY FROM INFORMATION PROVIDED BY YOUTHBUILD STAFF. (OTHER RESOURCES MAY BE AVAILABLE)