



## Youth Transition Action Teams

*Community Resources to Ensure Successful Transitions for Foster Youth*

### Connecting Youth to Employment in Rural Settings Call Summary

On May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2008 New Ways to Work hosted an audio conference on “Connecting Youth to Employment in Rural Settings.” During this call Glenn and Humboldt Counties spoke about their *YES* and *Step Up* Programs. They discussed their challenges and successes working with youth, connecting them to employment, and the special complications that arise when providing these services in rural areas including:

- Geographic Isolation
- Lack of public transportation
- Limited numbers of programs available
- Not a lot of opportunity for youth to pick and choose programs that meet their needs
- Hard to develop opportunities in these areas

The Power Point for this call can be found on our website:

<http://www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/AudioCall52708.ppt>

The Work Readiness Assessment tool used by *Step UP* can also be found on our website:

[http://www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/StepUpcommonassessment\(2\).doc](http://www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/StepUpcommonassessment(2).doc)

#### **Speakers at a Glance:**

##### **Glenn County- *YES***

*YES* is a multi-agency collaboration addressing the overlapping services and goals among all of the agencies and programs in Glenn County that care about foster youth. Funding changes forced them to look at how they could better serve youth in their area, and business partners were getting confused by all of the different competing programs. Now Businesses just interface with *YES*. The program consists of a 16-week ROP classroom. The first 8 weeks are classroom training, career planning, decision making, work attitude; and the second 8 weeks are paid work experience.

##### **Humboldt County-*Step Up***

Humboldt partners came together to create private/public partnerships that match kids to jobs. They do not provide or promise jobs. They match kids with specific skills and interests to employers with specific needs. A youth's work readiness is assessed and matches are made based on testing and one-on-one case management. Transition-age foster youth are their priority though all youth are eligible.

#### **Answering Your Questions**

During the call there were more questions than we could answer. Below we've provided a briefing of panelist responses to your inquiries about how these programs work with rural youth.

#### **Geographic Issues**

- **Spread Out:** The key to dealing with rural geography is to have multiple program locations so that youth don't have to travel far to participate. For example, Jose Quezada



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from Humboldt County suggests that if you have funds for 1 or 2 FTE employees but you have 4 major areas to cover then split them up into four .5 FTE coordinators.

- **Attainable Goals:** Make realistic goals at each site for employment matches and business partnerships based on actual staff and client capacity.
- **When in Rome:** Modify your program structure to fit the culture of each site.
- **Streamline to the Employer:** Linda Joseph from Glenn County suggests coordinating your youth so that case managers are assigned by the job site, this way business partner communications are streamlined.
- **Transportation:** Use WIA and other sponsored funds to supplement the cost of bus passes in order to aid youth in work transportation.

#### Business and Community Partners

- **Time is Money:** The biggest issue with businesses and employers is time. Joe Quezada from Humboldt County says that even though face to face meetings are best, employers have little time to talk with program staff. So, any meetings scheduled with them need to be promised and delivered as short.
- **Reaching Your Audience:** While panelists use a wide variety of methods to contact community partners from creating networking opportunities to cold-calling to organized breakfast meetings, Joe Quezada from Humboldt County also had this creative tip: Attend the monthly mixers for your local Chamber of Commerce. For a \$1 they will often let you have 1-minute to inform people about a program or talk about an issue. Often letting them know about how to access youth employees that are ready to work is a fresh, new subject matter for this public service announcement platform.
- **The Windup and the Pitch:** The other issue especially critical in rural areas is word of mouth. Word of mouth can travel fast, and in a rural community it has less distance to travel. Jose Quezada from Humboldt suggests that a good pitch can go far in attracting additional employer participation. The best pitch is often to address the skills gap between available entry-level employees and the needs and expectations that employers have for their entry-level workforce and how your program bridges that gap.

#### ILP

- **Communication:** When working with ILP our panelists say that communication is key. Keep ILP informed of your recruitment schedule.
- **Get on the Same Page:** Linda Joseph from Glenn County says that a key step in working with ILP is to develop a common vision with program and ILP staff. Work to delineate clear roles within the programmatic process so that program and ILP staff are working together rather than against each other.

#### Programmatic Issues

- **Funding Sources and Youth Eligibility:** Our panelists say that you should make your organization the starting point for all youth that want to participate in your program that do not have an IEP or have been identified through Probation. If you determine that you



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can't serve a youth with current funding you can "roundtable" the application to see if there are other fund sources available. In some counties probation funds are looser than others. Sometimes probation is as happy if their money is being used to help youth coming out of the justice systems as it is with helping you be kept out of the justice system. However, if the youth is not eligible for a paid work experience WIA funds can often be used to give them the option of attending a work training class for credits.

- **The Matching Process:** Our panelists' programs have the youth identify their 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> choice in a career field. They arrive at this after completing various career assessments and/or a 1:1 interview. Appropriate "fit" is determined. Child labor laws, history of both the youth and worksite and other factors that may impact the success of the placement are considered. Interviews are set-up and the worksite supervisor makes the final decision. This approach gives businesses more of a "buy-in." Programs often have more full-time job orders than kids willing or able to work 40-hours a week.
- **Competing With Adult Programs:** Linda Joseph from Glenn County says that the best approach is to coordinate between the adult programs and your own. This is in the best interest of both parties so that businesses are not bombarded with requests. This may mean that in sectors where your programs overlap, most frequently the public sector, that programs work together to share placements and make appropriate "fits" between them.
- **Subsidizing Worker's Compensation With WIA Funds:** According to our panelists, sometimes youth in work experience programs are treated as employees of the county and the related insurance is sponsored through county employment benefits. Having WIA funds subsidize the worker's compensation insurance for youth employees is a good method for increasing employer buy-in.

#### **Save the Date! Upcoming Conference Calls:**

"Youth Involvement in Case Planning"

Wednesday, September 17, 2008: 11 AM – 12 PM

"School-Based Career Technical Education Preparation"

Wednesday, November 5, 2008: 11 AM – 12 PM

"Marketing Youth Career Development and Employment Programs"

Wednesday, February 11, 2009: 11 AM – 12 PM

Do you have questions about upcoming conference calls? Contact Heidi Peyser, [hpeyser@newwaystowork.org](mailto:hpeyser@newwaystowork.org).