



- Project HOPE also conducted other strategic outreach campaigns to inform the foster care system and related services about WIA services. Working with Casey Family Programs and other community partners, HOPE staff strategically targeted existing foster care youth related collaborations and services such as the Foster Youth Alliance, First Place Funds for Youth, Project Independence, Fred Finch transitional services, and others to recruit foster youth. Outreach and recruitment efforts also extended to group homes and additional community referrals were made by clients who exited the HOPE pilot project were effective.
- Simultaneously, Project HOPE also developed a Youth Employment Referral Guide designed to provide instructions to child welfare workers, group home providers, foster parents, transition housing programs and other foster youth caregivers to connect current and former foster youth to employment development programs and services in Alameda County. This referral guide is posted on the Alameda County Online Practice Guide, a web-based resources guide for child welfare workers to access the county's internal and community services.
- The level of referral activity continue to increase with the implementation of several recruitment strategies:
  - a. Three Peer Educators (former foster youth) were hired and placed into three One Stops. The Peer Educators ensured connection of emancipated foster youth to project services and to the array of services offered at our One Stop Centers. They continue to facilitate job readiness workshops for current and emancipated foster youth.
  - b. Project staff visiting homeless housing projects for youth in the area, to promote services.
  - c. Flyers, brochures and a link to Youth web pages through Alameda County WIB (Teen411.Info – website).

#### **IV. What role did any partners play in recruiting clients and the provision of services?**

Under the leadership of ACWIB and Children & Family Services (CFS), HOPE was a combined broad-based partnership of social services organizations to work together on a monthly basis to plan employment and housing opportunities to current emancipated foster care youth. During the grant period, the planned program with the assistance of Pivotal Point Youth Services Inc screened and assessed approximately 100 youth and enrolled a total of 40 WtW and 41 WIA 15% eligible youth. The pilot project activities helped establish permanent linkages between the County's CFS, ILSP and ACWIB.

Both ACWIB and CFS played a major role in this effort. From the beginning, both departments decided that the child welfare and workforce investment departments would have to be integrated into a single entity. With this aim, both departments invested in hiring an Employment Consultant, whose job was to figure out the institutional barriers and common goals of both systems and to develop service delivery infrastructure that would seamlessly connect child welfare workers to WIA case managers. This work and approaches have altered the disconnected landscape between county's child welfare services and its workforce investment community. Whereas prior to Project HOPE, child welfare workers were not aware of WIA services, now they are beginning to access WIA services for youth in their caseloads. WIA services providers on the other hand are beginning to serve foster youth and they are also learning about the child welfare system. Although, more needs to be done in solidifying this connection, we have made a tremendous progress in bringing the importance of employment preparedness services into the child welfare system. For example, since November 2004, our Employment Consultant Mr. Thou Ny has made approximately 5-6 presentations to group homes and the permanency units of the county child welfare system. Four more unit presentations have been scheduled for the months of February and March 2005. In this regard,

there has been a definite shift in demand for more information about HOPE and employment services. Whereas, prior to November 2004, we had to make phone calls to unit supervisors to offer our presentations, now, unit supervisors are requesting for us. Project HOPE is now being considered a household employment program for Alameda County child welfare system.

**V. What project implementation barriers did you encounter? What steps did you take to overcome them?**

Initially, Project HOPE faced many institutional and cultural barriers with both child welfare and workforce investment systems. Historically, employment development is not one of the main focuses of the child welfare system. Likewise, foster youth has not been a target population for WIA service providers either. To overcome these barriers, work will have to be done around introducing the two systems to each other. Time and energies were spent on understanding the service delivery mechanisms of the two systems, their policy and institutional challenges, and then come up with a communication procedure that will fit into the two systems without detract or adding more barriers. As described earlier, staff developed a Youth Employment Referral Guideline that is now integrated into the child welfare web-based resource center. The referral guideline not only highlights the benefits of working together, but also shows how the two systems compliment and enhance each other.

Our information sharing campaign also helped to reduce the institutional and cultural barriers. In this regard, staff conducted unit presentations on employment services to child welfare units and presentations on the child welfare system to WIA service providers. However, prior to being able to access these systems to offer information, Project HOPE knew that having the support from leaders of these communities would be key to our effort. Project HOPE employed numerous strategies to galvanize support from child welfare and workforce development administrators. Although, galvanizing support from top administrators was difficult and required navigating bureaucratic processes and systems, Project HOPE took on the challenges and succeeded. Today administrators of both departments play key roles in supporting and promoting Project HOPE, particularly with its goals to connect foster youth to more opportunities in employment and education. As we will highlight later in this report, the ACWIB has continued to allocate formula funding for foster youth and children and family services has integrated Project HOPE as one of its household transitional programs.

Other barriers include certification and enrollment of youth into WIA portion of the grant. Unlike other youth populations, foster youth are often unstable in their home life situations. Instability enhances when they age out of the system. Programmatically, the social and economical realities of foster youth do not often meet the documentation requirements of WIA. For example, many of the former foster youth (emancipated) do not keep copies of important documents such as birth certificates, social security cards, etc. Also, foster youth are often transient, and it is often difficult to obtain “hard” documentation from them. Obtaining supporting documentation from family and friend to establish residency and income for older foster youth can be time consuming and often times lead to no results.

Overcoming these barriers Project HOPE established an MOU between CFS and our service contractor was needed to enable intake specialists to access the ALACO (case load management system), for verification of past foster care dependency status and obtain necessary printouts needed to comply with eligibility process. Also, include in the Youth Employment Guideline, Project HOPE urges child welfare workers to help consolidate these important documents for youth, not only for WIA services, but also for their life in general. (This worked for Project HOPE because of the special relationship developed between ACWIB and CFS. For other programs facing the same barriers, without that special relationship, obtaining documents of proof can be an obstacle to serving foster under WIA.)

## **VI. Describe some of your most outstanding achievements.**

- Project HOPE is considered one of model programs for its design on integrating WIA services into the child welfare system. Among the few in the nation, Project HOPE took on the challenges of consolidating and streamlining the needs of pre and posted emancipated youth into WIA services. Its program design offers a valuable framework for child welfare administrators and policymakers the possibilities for improving the lives pre and post emancipated foster youth through WIA. Since inception, Project HOPE has conducted numerous presentations at state conferences such as the California Workforce Association annual youth conferences, the State's Independent Living Program Institutes. Elements of Project HOPE program design was used as part of EDD's RFP program elements for other counties to engage in serving foster youth under WIA.
- Among others, one of Project HOPE's objectives is to introduce foster youth to the One-Stop career center concept and services. The One-Stops hold valuable resources, especially for emancipated foster youth with low job skills and little family or community support. However, for foster youth or youth in general, One-Stops can be intimidating, because most services offered at the One-Stop are designed for adults. To make the One-Stops less intimidating and more youth friendly to foster youth, Project HOPE employed an innovative strategy to inform them about the One-Stop career centers. In doing so, Project HOPE integrated three Peer Educators at three One Stops in Alameda County. The Peer Educators responsibilities are to help foster youth accessing the career centers navigate the array of services at the One-Stop as introduce them to One-Stop concept for future needs. Working with the County ILSP, more than 70 foster youth are registered and exposed to the One-Stop services. Today, our Peer Educators facilitate job readiness workshops for current and emancipated foster youth, as well as connecting youth to other resources in the community.
- Other achievements include being able as a program to inform child welfare workers and other foster youth practitioners about the importance of including employment services in foster youth transitional plans – Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP). Independent Living Program (ILP) regulation requires that all child welfare workers/probation officers working with transitional foster youth ages 15 or over to develop a TILP with their youth. It also requires child welfare workers to assist these youth with obtaining employment services from the One-Stop career centers, WIA youth services, or other community employment programs. HOPE program staff addresses this regulation in the various unit presentations to foster care social workers.
- Highlighting one of the many success stories of this project is with our Contractor Pivotal Point Youth Services working with one of their participants Michael. In June 2003, Michael was homeless, unemployed, without a high school diploma. Once enrolled in Project HOPE, Michael started construction pre-apprenticeship training with the J. Alfred Smith Training Academy offered at Allen Temple Baptist Church. He successfully completed the program and was then hired with East Bay Roofing Company at \$10/hour. Pivotal Point was able to assist Michael in securing supportive housing that provided subsidized rental assistance for one year. They also assisted Michael with services that helped him preparing for his GED. In June 2004 Michael received his GED, in July he moved into his own apartment and in August he received certification for foster parent placement and now has custody of his younger brother! Currently, Michael is working in the glaziers union for glassmaking and has been able to advance his skills and his pay. When he took the test for the union he scored 100% and placed fifth on the waiting list for the entire East Bay.
- As described earlier, Project HOPE has enrolled 81 youth for WTW and WIA services under its direct service contract with EDD. As for its systems integration and capacity building component of the program, Project HOPE has registered more than 70 foster youth at the One-

Stops for universal services as well as exposing the youth the One-Stop career center concept for future usage when the need arise. Today Project HOPE continues its works to strengthen the bridge between WIA and child welfare services. Its program design and framework do offer a possibility to reduce tremendous barriers for both the child welfare system and its foster youth.

**VII. Were there any specific activities you found to be the most beneficial in assisting clients?**

The issue of housing is vital to the support services of the youth. Several of the youth on caseload were in need of housing while participating in their pre-apprenticeship training program. Program staff was able to secure and pay rent for those participants. Also, the opportunity of paying for "driver license" instruction fees for several youth on caseload who needed this service to help with job applications and requirements of having a valid driver's license.

**VIII. What percentage of your clients do you feel attained self-sufficiency? For those clients that were unable to obtain self-sufficiency, describe any significant gains that may lead to self-sufficiency in the future.**

Approximately 98% of our participants under the WtW program attained self-sufficiency. Under the WIA portion of the grant (20) 91% enter employment and 30% received a credential.

**IX. What did you learn from this experience and will it change how you do business?**

The goal for ACWIB is to build on the success of the pilot project. ACWIB has set aside funds to continue our partnership with Alameda County Children and Family Services and their youth contractor Pivotal Point Youth Services Inc. They will continue to provide educational and employment services to foster youth for PY2004-05 and PY 2005-06. Another goal is to develop an Employment Referral and Resource Binder for foster care social workers and probation officers that profile each ACWIB One-Stop Career Center and the Youth Contractors, on how to access WIA services.

The HOPE meetings and the important linkages initiated by the HOPE project that was jointly funded with State Discretionary funding with WIA youth funds over the past two years. The Project has generated countywide attention. The County is committed to collaborative approaches to serve the foster care populations and strengthen the family of providers that provide those services. The relationship between Children and Family Services, their contractor, and the WIB Department is the primary example. It is intended that with the investment of ACWIB WIA funding, additional foundation funds will be available to expand services beyond employment and education. Based on the success of foster care pilot project, staff will 1) continue to support meaningful program linkages, 2) inter-departmental employment policies and processes for serving youth in their employment planning, and 3) funding to community based organizations that have expertise in serving this population with demonstrated success.

**X. Additional comments:** None.

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