

## AB12: Recommendations Related to Participation in Post-Secondary Education (Part 2)

It is well documented that access to higher education leads to improved long term income prospects as well as financial stability. A 2008 *Current Population Survey* by the Bureau of Labor Statistics demonstrates this clearly with the following data:

Level of Education Completed	Unemployment rate in 2007	Median Earnings in 2007
Less than high school diploma	7.1%	\$22,256
High school graduate, no college	4.4%	\$31,408
Some college, no degree	3.8%	\$35,516
Associate degree	3.0%	\$38,480
Bachelor's degree	2.2%	\$51,324
Master's degree	1.8%	\$60,580
Doctoral degree	1.4%	\$77,844
Professional degree	1.3%	\$74,204

Unfortunately, foster youth are among America's most disadvantaged in terms of opportunities for higher education. The rate at which foster youth complete high school (50 percent) is significantly below the rate at which their peers complete high school (70 percent). The rate at which foster youth who successfully complete high school attend postsecondary education (20 percent) is substantially below the rate at which their peers attend (60 percent). If foster youth completed high school and attended postsecondary education at the same rate as their peers, nearly 100,000 additional foster youth nationwide in the 18 to 25-year-old age group would be attending higher education. In addition, the rate of degree completion is dramatically lower for foster youth compared to their peers: only 5 percent or less of foster care youth who enter higher education receive a degree compared to 20 percent for their peers.<sup>1</sup>

The passage of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act (AB12) provides a tremendous opportunity to positively impact these dismal statistics for foster youth in California. Research has clearly demonstrated the potential benefits that extending care for foster youth can have on successful participation in post-secondary education. Mark Courtney and Amy Dworsky's pivotal 2007 study on extended benefits and postsecondary education concluded that former foster youth from Illinois were nearly twice as likely to have attended college and more than twice as likely to have completed at least one year of college as their peers in Iowa and Wisconsin. They attributed this difference in educational attainment to the fact that Illinois is one of the few states in which young people can and routinely do remain in foster care until their 21st birthday, whereas Iowa and Wisconsin exit youth from care at age 18.<sup>2</sup>

It is the hope of the John Burton Foundation that the implementation of AB12 will fulfill the promise of increased access to higher education for foster youth. The incorporation of the

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<sup>1</sup> Wolanin, Thomas R. 2005. *Higher Education Opportunities for Foster Youth: A Primer for Policymakers*. Washington, DC: The Institute for Higher Education Policy.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Courtney and Amy Dworsky, *Does Extending Foster Care beyond Age 18 Promote Postsecondary Educational Attainment*, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2007

recommendations detailed below by the California Department of Social Services (DSS) and local child welfare agencies into AB12 implementation will help to ensure that this promise is met.

#### **A. SUPERVISED INDEPENDENT LIVING PLACEMENT**

AB12 creates a new placement option known as a Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP). A SILP is defined as “a supervised setting, as specified in a non-minor dependent’s transitional independent living case plan, in which the youth is living independently.”<sup>3</sup> The legislation goes on to say that the supervised independent living setting “shall include, but not be limited to, apartment living, room and board arrangements, college or university dormitories, and shared roommate settings.”<sup>4</sup> It is anticipated that in many instances those who will be residing in this new placement option will be students and therefore the regulations related to the approval of a SILP are directly related to supporting an AB12 participants’ access to higher education.

The following recommendations are specific to the Supervised Independent Living Placement option:

- 1. Health and safety approval requirements should be adequate to ensure that participants are living in appropriate and safe settings but should be relatively limited in scope so as to not exclude housing options that may be suitable for someone in the 18-21 year old age range.** AB12 requires that DSS define how the SILP setting meets health and safety standards suitable for non minors.<sup>5</sup> Approval standards should take into consideration the developmental stage of this age group and ensure that standards do not include requirements that go beyond what is age appropriate. For example, some standards for housing require that each individual have a private bedroom, whereas for the transitional age youth population the sharing of a bedroom is common and not inappropriate. Similarly, while it is necessary to ensure that a housing unit meet basic livability standards such as having access to a working bathroom and not exhibiting obvious safety hazards, standards regarding cleanliness and sanitation should take into consideration the norm for the 18-21 age group. Health and safety standards should also be constructed so as to not exempt Single Room Occupancy (SRO) settings as in some urban areas, these are often an affordable option for some young people.
- 2. Students living in college or university owned housing or housing owned or operated under contract with a college or university should be subject to a simplified approval standard.** Colleges and universities implement comprehensive inspection requirements in order to ensure that campus housing options meet basic health and safety requirements. In order to avoid redundancy, remove potential barriers for AB12 participants and to save local child welfare agencies both time and money, further approval of these sites by child welfare should not be required.
- 3. Housing that is required to undergo an inspection by another government entity should be subject to a simplified approval standard.** In some cases a comprehensive

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<sup>3</sup> WIC 11400 (w)

<sup>4</sup> WIC 11403 (i)

<sup>5</sup> WIC 11403 (i)

physical inspection of the unit is already required and therefore avoiding a duplicative approval requirement will help to remove barriers and conserve resources.

4. **Background checks of other adults living in the household should not be required for non-minor dependents.** While it is appropriate to conduct background checks for adults residing in a home with a dependent minor, continuing this requirement for those residing in a SILP could potentially create a significant obstacle for a young person. In particular if a person is residing with roommates or renting a room within a larger household it is not a reasonable expectation to require those individuals to submit to background checks and will limit the housing options that a young person has available to them. In addition, such a requirement would require that a young person reveal their foster care status to others living in their household and would violate their rights to confidentiality and privacy.
5. **As required by AB12, regulations must include provisions that allow nonminor dependents to move into a SILP site prior to approval of the site and receive payments retroactive to the date of the placement. Further, payments must be maintained while approval of the site is pending.**<sup>6</sup> Obtaining housing that is affordable and close by to campus can be particularly challenging for students. Once a housing unit is identified by a young person, the need for approval by the child welfare department should not create an additional obstacle or hinder the participant's ability to obtain the housing. No student should lose a viable housing option or experience a break in payments due to an inability by the child welfare agency to approve the placement in a timely manner.
6. **Standards for the approval of a Supervised Independent Living Placement should allow for approval of settings where the participant does not have a formal written agreement with the landlord with Social Worker<sup>7</sup> approval.** In some cases a young person may be residing in a shared apartment with one or more roommates where the non-minor dependent is not named on the lease or rental agreement. If the Social Worker is able to confirm that this is a stable housing situation and can obtain written verification of the arrangement that provides some degree of protection to the young person, approval of the placement should be allowable.
7. **Social Workers should be instructed to respect the privacy of young people and be as non-invasive as possible when conducting home visits, in particular in settings where others residing in the home, such as roommates or dorm mates, may not be aware of the youth's foster care status.** This may include advising Social Workers to refrain from wearing a visible identification badge while in the home and not revealing information about a young person's foster care status in front of others who may be in the home during a visit. Social Workers should also be advised that in general, visits to a youth's home, school or work place should be arranged in advance with the youth. Social Workers should be proactive in initiating conversations with participants about

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<sup>6</sup> W&I Code 11402.2

<sup>7</sup> Note: The use of the term "Social Worker" here and throughout the document refers to either the Social Worker assigned by the County Child Welfare Department, the Probation Officer or the Indian Tribal representative.

privacy needs including ascertaining the young person's preferences regarding privacy and engaging with the youth around these issues in a respectful manner.

## **B. TRANSITIONAL INDEPENDENT LIVING PLANS**

The Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP) can be a valuable tool for articulating clear expectations for youth and helping them to clarify their goals. In order to ensure that the potential of this tool is fully realized and that the TILP planning process supports youth who are pursuing educational goals, the following recommendations should be incorporated into the TILP format as well as the guidance provided to Social Workers.

- 1. The standardized TILP form used by Social Workers should be modified to reflect the inclusion of longer term post-secondary education goals.** Specifically, the examples given of goals that a youth may choose to incorporate into a TILP on page 1 of the form should include "Obtaining a 2-year AA degree from community college"
- 2. Social Workers should encourage youth who express an interest in post secondary education to identify the steps needed to be successful and build specific goals into the TILP in order to support youth to achieve success.** The development of the TILP should at a minimum include a discussion about:
  - Budgeting and financial management.
  - The different educational options available and the benefits of touring local college campuses to obtain more information.
  - A description of financial aid options, eligibility requirements for financial aid and assistance to complete the financial aid application (FAFSA).
  - A review of services at local post secondary institutions such as EOP&S, EOP, Guardian Scholars, campus counseling services, career planning services, tutoring services and student disability services and how these services can be accessed.
  - Services available to assist students to complete an educational plan and how to access these services.
  - Housing options

In addition, although the recommendation for the minimum eligibility requirement for participation under the post-secondary education requirement is enrollment in one class, when possible Social Workers should encourage students to attend school at least half time, or more if feasible, in order to ensure that students can reach higher education goals in a timely manner, maintain eligibility for financial aid and be adequately prepared for the transition to independent living.

- 3. Courts and Social Workers should play an active role in supporting youth to meet higher education requirements.** Social Workers should monitor progress on an ongoing basis so that they can intervene and provide additional support when necessary to help a youth stay on track towards their goals. For example, a Social Worker may request that a student voluntarily provide mid-term progress updates to identify if problems are arising and if so, make appropriate referrals to on-campus services that can provide the youth with additional support. Progress evaluations should never be used punitively to deny eligibility

but instead should be used to identify red flags and help participants to maintain eligibility and move in a positive direction.

### **C. COLLABORATION**

Effective collaboration between child welfare systems and institutions of higher learning is key to supporting the success of AB12. The presence of higher education in the lives of those participating in the child welfare system will, for the most part, be a new experience for those working in the child welfare system. New mechanisms for collaboration and communication will need to be developed to facilitate this new partnership. To further this aim there are a number of steps that can be taken to support this type of collaboration.

- 1. The Department of Social Services and local child welfare agencies should consider the co-location of Independent Living Support Programs on college campuses or other mechanisms for collaboration between ILSPs and colleges.** Several institutions already have co-located services or regular visits by ILSP workers to campuses and the benefits to foster care youth who are students are enormous. This also can provide an opportunity for youth who are participating in ILP services to visit a college campus and become more familiar and comfortable with the campus environment.
- 2. School personnel and Social Workers should actively engage with each other to support each individual youth who is attending college, university or a vocational program.** A Release of Information (ROI) form should be developed by each institution that can be used to allow sharing of information, with permission from the participant, in order to support the youth to be successful in school. The ROI should specify the following:
  - The types of information can be shared (e.g. personal identifying information, contact information, high school transcripts, educational records, educational plan, financial aid records, child welfare status, mental health information, transitional independent living plan, court records, etc.);
  - With whom the information can be shared;
  - The purpose of the information sharing practices; and
  - The date that the authorization expires including a provision that the ROI is revocable by the student at any time.
- 3. Each local child welfare agency should identify one individual to serve as the primary liaison to the local higher education systems.** While each individual Social Worker will still be expected to interface with higher education to support those on their caseload, the liaison would have responsibility for coordinating with higher education around larger policy issues, staying abreast of developments within higher education and communicating relevant information to others in their department. This person could serve as a point of contact for troubleshooting issues that may arise related to the interaction between the two systems as well as a point person for Social Workers from other counties who have participants attending school out of their home county. It is recommended that this individual hold regular meetings with higher education representatives, in particular with the community colleges and Cal State Universities in

their local area, to ensure regular communication and provide a consistent forum for discussion.

- 4. Local jurisdictions should explore the establishment of education partnerships that incorporate at a minimum child welfare and probation agencies, dependency courts, ILP programs and local post-secondary institutions (in particular community colleges and CSUs).** These partnerships can also include local community based organizations, the County Office of Education and representatives from local K-12 systems. Existing models for this type of collaboration include the following:

- *Santa Clara County Juvenile Court Education Partnership:* This group meets monthly and addresses a range of issues related to education spanning from pre-school through post secondary education. Representatives from local colleges and universities are active participants along with the child welfare and probation systems. Sub-committees are created to conduct activities in between regular monthly meetings on specific topic areas.
- *Placer County College Transition Support Team:* This group includes faculty and staff from Sierra Community College along with representatives from the Child Welfare and Probation Departments, Placer County Court Systems, County Office of Education, ILP service providers and a range of other entities and organizations. The group meets twice a month and its purpose is to address the needs, concerns, and issues that affect the success and retention of former foster youth attending Sierra College.

#### **D. SOCIAL WORKER TRAINING**

Current training requirements for Child Welfare Social Workers mandate that certain core topics be included in training received by all Social Workers. These trainings are offered through five regional training academies around the state. The current requirement for new social workers consists of a Primary Core Training curriculum which provides instruction on seven foundational issues along with a secondary training curriculum that includes twelve additional more specialized topics such as mental health and educational advocacy. In addition the training academies offer other advanced specialized training modules that Social Workers can access on a voluntary basis. The Statewide Training and Education Committee (STEC) is the body that develops and/or recommends standards for statewide public child welfare training and coordinates their implementation.

- 1. Social Workers should be trained to understand their role in assisting youth who express an interest in post secondary education to access a program suited to their interests and goals as well as to support them to be successful in this endeavor.** This training should be provided to both existing Social Workers and new Social Workers entering the field and should emphasize the value of providing support for participants' post secondary educational goals. This support includes providing appropriate services to aid youth to remain in school such as referrals to campus based services, life skills training, and assistance with housing, transportation and educational needs. This support also includes the ability to respond with flexibility when participants make mistakes, identify new interests or decide to adjust their plans. Training materials should encompass this understanding and

include practical training such as how to create a TILP that includes specific higher education goals.

2. **Basic information regarding higher education should be incorporated into the Competencies and Learning Objectives for the existing “Supporting Educational Rights and Achievement” training.** This should include both knowledge and values learning objectives related to higher education. The values learning objective should focus on enabling the trainee to value his/her role in assisting youth to access post secondary education and supporting improved educational outcomes for non-minor dependents. The knowledge based learning objectives should focus on the resources available at post-secondary institutions (such as Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS), Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), Foster Youth Success Initiative (FYSI) programs, Guardian Scholars, financial aid advisors and academic counseling services) and information regarding financial aid (including the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), financial aid deadlines and Chafee grants).
3. **Social Workers currently working in child welfare systems should receive training on the topics described in topic #1 and #2 described above.** In addition to incorporation of new training elements in the curriculum prescribed for new social workers, existing staff will need to receive information related to AB12 implementation. This training should not focus solely on regulations but should also include specific content relevant to working with nonminor dependents. This should include a discussion about the role of the Social Worker to support participants’ higher education goals as well as basic information regarding on-campus resources and financial aid.
4. **The Department of Social Services should direct the STEC to develop an advanced training for child welfare Social Workers specific to issues related to nonminor dependents’ participation in higher education so that Social Workers can effectively support youth in meeting education related goals.** The training should be of a minimum duration of half a day and should be made available by all five Regional Training Academies. Successful completion of the training would count towards a Social Worker’s continuing education requirement. Resource materials, including a higher education desk guide, should also be made available on-line for easy access. Counties should strongly encourage all Social Workers who will be working with youth aged 14 and older to access the course.

Examples of potential values learning objectives could include enabling trainees to value the following:

- a. Their role in assisting youth to access post secondary education and supporting improved educational outcomes for non-minor dependents.
- b. Their role in fostering high academic aspirations among foster youth.
- c. Their role in encouraging youth to engage in long term planning and adequate preparation for higher education.

The skills and knowledge aspects of the training could include a general overview of each item below along with a comprehensive overview of available student services that can provide more detailed assistance.

- a. Student services including EOP&S, EOP, Guardian Scholars, financial aid advisors, campus counseling services, career planning services, tutoring services, health services, campus CalWORKs programs, FYSI, Youth Empowerment Strategies for Success programs, student disability services and other campus specific student retention programs.
- b. Financial aid, including how to complete the FAFSA application, crucial financial aid deadlines, types of grants and scholarships available to foster youth, Chafee grants, satisfactory academic progress requirements and appeals processes.
- c. College readiness – an understanding of coursework requirements and basic skills necessary to gain entrance into higher education institutions, in particular the Cal State and UC systems. This should also include information about the “ability to benefit” tests for community college.
- d. Overview of higher education options including the three California public higher education systems (Community College, Cal State University and University of California), vocational programs, private institutions and for-profit colleges. This should include admissions standards, application and enrollment timelines, transfer requirements and financial aid options.
- e. The potential pitfalls of attendance at some private for-profit schools with high costs and low job placement rates and the pros and cons of different choices.
- f. Post admission requirements and deadlines (e.g. turning in transcripts, applying to housing, completing documentation and paperwork, connecting with guardian scholars).
- g. Educational plans – what are they, how students can benefit from creating one and how to access campus personnel who can assist students with the creation of an educational plan.
- h. Enrollment cycle – registration, orientation, drop deadlines, and impact of withdrawing from and/or failing classes on institutional standing and financial aid.
- i. Skills needed to be successful in college, e.g. budgeting, money management, time management and study skills, and how to assist youth to access support in attaining these skills.
- j. Overview of campus housing options, housing application processes and how to access information regarding housing options at specific campuses.
- k. Privacy and confidentiality restrictions under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

**5. Probation Officers who will be working with youth under AB12 should receive similar training to that described above for Social Workers.** In some cases, youth will remain under the jurisdiction of the juvenile justice system rather than the child welfare system. Probation Officers will be charged with many of the same responsibilities and Social Workers in these cases and they should therefore also have access to the information described in recommendations one through four above.

**6. Both relative caregivers and non-related foster parents should have access to training regarding higher education resources.** In a survey done by The Alliance for Children’s Rights of relative caregivers regarding AB12 implementation it was clear that respondents were committed to the youth in their care but felt they lacked the information needed to assist nonminor dependents. In particular, 73% of respondents indicated a need for help connecting youth with education programs.

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