



EMPLOYER
MENTORSHIP
TOOLKIT



PROJECT CONTRIBUTORS:

Pacific Gateway

Child Welfare Initiative

Kidsave

ABSTRACT

As of January 2015, there are over 21,000 foster youth in Los Angeles County (CWS/CMS). To become a ward of the County, foster children have already experienced a life of danger and harm, characterized by a lack of stable adult connections and support, exposure to drugs, and abuse or neglect. Once they enter the system, they are often further traumatized, abused and neglected. Of LA County foster youth, 4,600 are age 16 or older, reaching a point when they are ready to age out of care and are in need of job training and work experience to help them prepare for living independently of public assistance. In addition to satisfying their desire to find a job, employment is a frequent qualifier for older foster youth to access certain services, such as extended housing for several years.

How can employers and the workforce investment system help?

Foster youth with employment experience enjoy better life outcomes than those without it. In 2008, the average foster youth earned \$690/month, far less than their non-foster peers who earned \$1,535/month. The only foster youth who earned wages comparable to the national average were foster youth with employment experience while still in foster care. Despite this relationship, 53% of foster youth in California are NOT connected to employment prior to age 18, and for the 18 - 24 age group, this rate increases to 55%. (DHHS). The workforce investment system and its employer partners can help by serving as professional mentors to foster youth to introduce them to the working world and to teach them soft skills and job skills. In so doing, you will be preparing thousands of disadvantaged youth to succeed in meaningful careers for the betterment of our community.

STATISTICAL DATA

- 35,000+ foster youth and additional youth depend on child welfare services
- In 2013, 1,154 youth reached age 18 while in care
- When foster youth exit care at age 18:
 - ▶ 50% are unemployed
 - ▶ 33% rely on public transportation
 - ▶ 25% are incarcerated
 - ▶ 20% are homeless
- 70% of California inmates have been in foster care at some point
- 46 % of emancipating youth in LA County do not complete high school
- At age 18:
 - ▶ 75 % of foster youth had little to no work experience
 - ▶ 24% of youth had no earnings
- Only 50% will be employed by age 24
- 3% or less will earn a college degree by age 25
(compared to 28% of all 25 years olds)

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS

Start from the Beginning and Make a List

Despite their accelerated life experience and status as “young adults,” for many foster youth, this is their first job! ...And like any labor force rookie, they will inevitably make mistakes. However, foster youth are unique in that they have not had the benefit of consistent role models or oft-repeated maxims that come from stable family situations. Workplace truths that may seem commonsensical to you (like the importance of showing up on time) will need to be explicitly explained. Making a list of the fundamental rules of a professional environment is a good way to brainstorm what to talk about on the first day and to put yourself in the shoes of a first-time employee.

Potential topics:

- ▶ Punctuality and work hours
- ▶ Professional attire
- ▶ Appropriate language
- ▶ Employer expectations
- ▶ Whether or not lunch and/or breaks will be provided and when
- ▶ New hire paperwork (W-2, I-9, etc.)
- ▶ Who to report to and ask questions of
- ▶ Cell phone and internet use policy
- ▶ How payment works



Clear, Consistent Communication


Providing guidance to foster youth through their first week and their initial training will have a major impact on their job performance. Given their experiences, foster youth are highly adaptable and possess elite street smarts, so they will learn quickly. Communicate with them about the expectations of the job, and be specific about what you're looking for. An effective approach is to read through the job description with the youth. This will help them understand workplace boundaries and meet the needs of your company. Regularly (at least daily) check in with the foster youth to make sure they are completing tasks correctly and do not have any questions. If they commit a mistake, be very clear about why it was a mistake and the potential consequences if it happens again. Reiterate any important points, if need be.

Establish a Mentor

Identify someone in the organization who will be supervising the new employee's work to serve as his or her mentor. The mentor's essential duties are to make him or herself available to the foster youth to talk about any questions or issues and to ensure that the foster youth feels comfortable in the new work environment. This person should walk the new employee through the job on the first day and introduce him or her to the staff. The mentor should help the employee collaborate with co-workers in group projects, as foster youth are often unfamiliar with working in team environments. The most effective mentor will understand the youth well enough to identify the youth's behavioral "triggers," or external situations that may distract the youth from his or her job duties. The mentor can then work with the youth to develop strategies for reacting to such situations in a way that doesn't interfere with his or her job performance.

Treat All Employees Equally

Foster youth are very good at reading people, and they will feel uncomfortable if you treat them differently from the other employees, either positively or negatively. Hold them accountable for their actions, but don't be unnecessarily hard on them. It's important for the new employees to always be busy and aware of the tasks in which they should be involved. They are there to learn, and the more experience they receive, the more it will help them succeed in your organization and in their future careers.



TIPS FOR WDBS IN DESIGNING FOSTER YOUTH PROGRAMS

Train Youth in Cohorts

One of the primary obstacles facing WDB youth programs is retaining foster youth program participants. They enter into services, but are often forced to drop out due to a lack of transportation, frequent housing relocations, or foster care obligations, or taking care of a sibling. One means by which programs have encouraged ongoing participation is by cohorting foster youth program groups. As mentioned earlier, foster youth are typically unaccustomed to working in a group, but by cultivating a team atmosphere, one can establish accountability between employees/interns/program participants. For example, if a youth does not show up to work or class, have co-workers or co-participants call the youth and let him or her know that the absence was noticed and that other people care whether or not someone shows up to work.

Connect Employers with Other Adults in Youth's Life

It is vital that one-stop front line staff facilitate relationships between the foster youth's employers, specifically their supervisors, and their child welfare case managers or caregivers (foster parents, group home case managers, or DCFS case workers). These relationships allow caregivers and case managers to strategize with employers about how to create a work environment that will best help the youth succeed in the job and develop job skills. The caregivers/case managers can also notify employers about case developments or behavior triggers that may affect the employee's work performance. In turn, employers can inform the youth's caregivers/case managers about the youth's job performance, and they can connect the youth to support services, if necessary.

CHANGING ATTITUDES: UNDERSTANDING THE BENEFITS OF HIRING FOSTER YOUTH

As our survey results showed, our impressions of people influence how we perceive their job performance. Unfortunately for foster youth, their experience in the foster care system can be perceived as having a negative impact on their work performance. Our survey results also show that these perceptions are unfounded, and that foster youth achieve similar job performance scores when being compared equally to their non-foster peers. These biases reveal that we as a community need to change our perceptions toward foster youth job performance if they are to be accurately seen as valuable additions to the workforce. As a result of their experiences, foster youth possess an incredible set of skills that are useful to any employer, and understanding these strengths and how to tap into them will not only benefit the organizations for whom they work, but will empower foster youth to become meaningful contributors in the labor force and leaders in our community. developments or behavior triggers that may affect the employee's work performance. In turn, employers can inform the youth's caregivers/case managers about the youth's job performance, and they can connect the youth to support services, if necessary

WAYS TO SUPPORT A FOSTER YOUTH

- ▶ Provide a transportation stipend or clothing allowance
- ▶ Tuition for skill building classes
- ▶ Guidance on money management
- ▶ Resume and interview tips
- ▶ Career development

THINGS TO AVOID

- ▶ Gift Items like laptops, iPod, cash
- ▶ Assigning tasks not related to job
- ▶ Lowering expectations
- ▶ Excluding them from work related activities
- ▶ Discrediting their ideas without explanation
- ▶ Overlooking mistakes or low performance

HOW TO BE A FOSTER YOUTH MENTOR-SCENARIOS

Scenario 1

Youth who experience foster care are often resilient problem solvers. Utilize and develop this skill.

Youth: "A customer called upset over her order, I thought we should replace it and offer her a bonus for the hassle."

Employer: "That's a great solution, let's share it with your colleagues so they can use it in the future."

Scenario 2

Youth arrives late for the first time

Youth: "The bus did not come and waiting for the next one made me late."

Employer: "I understand things happen. Try giving yourself extra time to avoid issues, and always call when you are going to be late."

Scenario 3

Youth arrives late for the 2nd time.

Youth: "My bus money was stolen, so I had to figure out how to get here."

Employer: "I'm sorry to hear that. Remember, I can't help provide a solution, if you don't call and communicate the delay."

Scenario 4

Youth arrives for work unprepared

Youth: "I did not get the report done by today's deadline."

Employer: "Let's discuss time management, importance to communicate in advance when you need support versus missing a deadline."

ATTACHMENTS

1. Employer Ad
2. Employer Training Sign-In Sheet
3. Employer Training PPT
4. Employer Survey