



National League of Cities



Institute for Youth, Education, and Families



National League of Cities and New Ways to Work

Engaging City Governments in Supporting Foster Youth Transition Issues Content Conference Call Notes Thursday, July 27, 2006

Many city governments are supporting effective foster youth transitions. The National League of Cities (NLC) and New Ways to Work (New Ways) sponsored this call on engaging city governments to share success stories and practices from people working to strengthen their community's supports for youth transitioning from foster care. **The Audio transcript for the call will be available until October 1, 2006 (see last page for more details).**

The call emerged from two efforts. First was the disconnected youth program of NLC's Youth, Education, and Families Institute, which recently completed case studies of cross-system collaboration in eight cities. The call served as a preview for the forthcoming report, developed with support from the Hewlett and Mott Foundations. Second was the Youth Transition Action Teams initiative, sponsored by Casey Family Programs and the California Department of Social Services and managed by New Ways. New Ways has been producing monthly calls on topics related to supporting youth transitions, designed to provide members of the 12 California Youth Transition Action Teams and other participants with information related to improving transition supports for foster youth.

New Ways' President and Executive Director, Steve Trippe, hosted the call. YEF Institute's Municipal Leadership for Disconnected Youth Senior Consultant, Andrew Moore, moderated a panel of experts familiar with the leadership and support roles that cities can play in areas such as housing, health, and workforce connections for transitioning foster youth. These experts, including agency managers, a non-profit executive, and an employment manager for Casey Family Programs, have focused on making foster youth transitions a catalyst for system reform.

Steve Trippe from New Ways to Work set the context. Andrew Moore moderated a conversation with the panel, organized around the questions listed below. A question and answer period followed, moderated by Steve Trippe.

Panelists

- **Maggie Donahue**, San Francisco Human Services Agency (SFHSA), Mayor's Transitional Youth Task Force, and California Connected by 25
- **Howard Knoll**, Senior Director for ARBOR Employment and Training, which manages the Achieving Independence Center in Philadelphia as well as the Career Preparation Program in New York City. Knoll is also the Chair of the National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC).
- **Laura Cantú**, Assistant Director, Youth Opportunity Program, City of Los Angeles Community Development Department and Los Angeles Youth Transition Action Team
- **Eric Steiner**, Employment Manager for Casey Family Programs

CONVERSATION

What were the factors that got your city involved with foster care transitions?

A need on the horizon

Maggie Donahue of **San Francisco** said that three and a half years ago the city began to collect data on foster youth because many youth were going to be emancipating in 3 to 5 years and the city wasn't ready. The city established a foster youth transition initiative within the San Francisco Human Services Agency (SFHSA) as an extension of the Independent Living Skills Program (ILS), and with the cooperation of other agencies including the mayor's office. As a result, a number of new programs and projects were launched: Transitional housing program for emancipated foster youth (41 units); Individual Development Accounts (IDA) Program, which later became part of the California Connected by 25 effort; and another effort to support youth who were ready to go to college. The SFHSA began dedicating a large portion of their ILS budget last year to promoting college for transitioning foster youth. In 2005, 38% of youth went on to college; this year 47% did. Another impetus came from youth serving on the San Francisco Youth Commission, which asked the Mayor to establish the Transitional Youth Taskforce (TYTF). TYTF is addressing issues affecting the lives of youth transitioning to adulthood. It is also serving as San Francisco's YTAT. To read more about TYTF, read the [article](#) published in the June 2006 issue of *TRANSITION: Teams in Action*, the YTAT newsletter. (www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/transitionmay06/TYTF.pdf).

Opportunity to apply for a Department of Labor (DOL) pilot grant

Howard Knoll reported that **New York City** had 1,200 youth emancipating every year. Eighty percent of them are not reunited with any family, and many end up in homeless shelters or on the streets. New York State Office of Children & Family Services and the New York City Administration for Children's Services applied for and received a DOL pilot project to serve 100 youth to begin. The resulting program, [Career Pathways](http://www.door.org/careerpathways.org) (www.door.org/careerpathways.org), is co-located with a multi-service youth development program called [The Door](http://www.door.org) – A Center of Alternatives. (www.door.org)

A large transitioning foster youth population

The City of **Philadelphia** has 2,500 youth who are transitioning from foster care. These youth require special preparation and support since their families are not able to provide the multiple supports needed. The Department of Human Services–Adolescent Initiative Unit partnered with the Philadelphia Workforce Development Corporation and the Philadelphia Youth Network, which was already managing several successful youth programs, to propose a foster youth One-Stop. The One-Stop, intended to be a gateway to services that meet the individual needs of youth, was named the Achieving Independence Center (AI Center). [ARBOR Education and Training](http://www.arboret.com) (www.arboret.com) applied successfully to become managing partner of the new [Achieving Independence Center](http://www.achievingindependencecenter.org), which now serves more than 1,000 foster youth per year. (http://dhs.phila.gov/intranet/pgintrahome_pub.nsf/ContentPrevention+-+Achieving+Independence+Center).

To read more about Achieving Independence Center, visit the [Powerpoint presentation - Achieving Independence Center](#).
(www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/AI%20presentation.doc.ppt)

Study of out-of-school and out-of-work youth

Laura Cantú said that when the **City of Los Angeles** and **City of Long Beach** Workforce Investment Boards released a study in 2004 on their cities' out-of-school and out-of-work youth, it served as a tipping point for city/county collaboration on supporting youth. The results were first presented in November 2004 at a Youth Summit for Los Angeles Area Youth Councils. Youth presenters shared their stories and ideas. Many foster youth and youth involved in the juvenile justice system participated. Attendees recognized that the study results, which showed high numbers of disconnected youth, were the tip of the iceberg, and became the catalyst for the city to look at its foster youth services and policies. Youth violence was also a catalyst. In May 2005, the City of Los Angeles WIB presented the findings to the wider community, including elected officials, leaders of community-based organizations, and business and other local leaders. To read more about the study, the Youth Summit where it was presented to Los Angeles Area Youth Councils, and the public forum, [click here](#) or visit the YCideas Youth Council index www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/yci/ycideascouncilindex.html and scroll to the City of Los Angeles Youth Council listings.

Since that time, initiatives—including YTAT—programs, and policy changes have been undertaken to support youth employment. Beginning in February of 2006, the City's Community Development Department took the lead in spearheading the YTAT. Cantú said, "We knew that in order to be successful, we would need the County on board," so the city invited representatives from the county to co-convene the YTAT. This has provided city and county with an opportunity to understand "who we were, what each system provides, and what youth each system serves." Cantú noted that there have been challenges. "It's been difficult to work together because we answer to different leaders and political jurisdictions, but the council members and the mayor have gone to the county, . . . but we're really coming together to serve out-of-school youth, older youth, foster care youth, and probation youth."

Where did leadership come from to initiate and to sustain city involvement? What specific actions that a mayor, or city agency head, or child welfare agency head take? Or, did leadership come from foster youth or others not in administrator roles?

High level city leader

Knoll stated that it was the **Philadelphia** Commissioner of the Human Services Department, Alba Martinez, who got change started and kept it going. "In Philadelphia I had never encountered a situation where a commissioner stood up and said we have to do something," remarked Knoll. "You hear something and you don't believe it. But it was for real. She championed without worrying about the political implications." According to Knoll, Martinez provided the vision and focus needed to bring together her department with the Philadelphia Workforce Development Corporation, to initiate focused foster youth transition services.

"Foster youth don't push the social buttons that some other populations do because people don't blame foster youth for their situation," said Knoll. "The commissioner's commitment opened the door for people who want to help but haven't previously. She brought child welfare services together with youth employment. The key is to have someone stand up without worrying about her political career." To read a message from the Commissioner to the DHS staff regarding her vision for their work, [click here](#).
([http://dhs.phila.gov/intranet/pgintrahome_pub.nsf/AttachmentsByTitle/DHS+in+Motion+1/\\$FILE/DHS+Newsletter+1.pdf](http://dhs.phila.gov/intranet/pgintrahome_pub.nsf/AttachmentsByTitle/DHS+in+Motion+1/$FILE/DHS+Newsletter+1.pdf))

State-level intervention

In **New York**, initial leadership came via the state, which realized that 85% of its cases were located in New York City. This helped convince the State to work with the city to seek a role in the DOL pilot project. The state's attitude was "There is a problem here and we're going to help you solve it," Knoll said.

Mayor-city agency collaboration

Donahue reported that in **San Francisco**, the SFHSA and other agencies have been able to work with the mayor because the mayor's office was really paying attention to what was going on for youth. The mayor's main lens was homelessness, and he and his staff saw that 30% of homeless adults had been in foster care. They also knew that 80% of San Francisco's former foster care youth were ending up homeless. These situations prompted the mayor to look more holistically at the problems and solutions, which led to more conversations among the various agencies. Donahue said that prior to the mayor's push for a holistic approach, no one was talking to each other even though they are a combined city-county. "With the mayor behind the effort, there's a now a new leadership body," said Donohue. The SFHSA also received an additional \$431,000 to bolster support programs.

Community leaders working through their Youth Council

According to Cantú, the **City of Los Angeles** Youth Council spearheaded a lot of the youth issues. The Youth Council members are leaders from education and private industry and they are committed to supporting youth. They wanted to bring the need for foster youth employment preparation issue to all the city stakeholders. The Youth Council members met with the mayor who supported their work, and they brought community leaders together to meet with the county board of supervisors. The Youth Council members brought several bills for youth employment programs before the city council, which passed a youth employment motion in April, geared towards having city departments hiring youth. "The Youth Council members and the mayor really got that going," said Cantú. The mayor also committed \$4 million for summer youth employment. The County added \$6 million to increase summer employment and fill in CalWorks dollars that were going to be lost.

The city council has also gotten involved. They are looking at affordable housing; some of the council members are putting into motion the building of affordable housing. "The Youth Council, city council, and mayor leading the way," said Cantú.

What are your key accomplishments to date for transitioning foster youth? How can a city know it is making a difference for these youth?

San Francisco

Maggie Donahue named the following accomplishments:

- A policy for transitioning youth has been developed as a result of the attention and leadership that the mayor, agency heads, and youth themselves have provided.
- A Notice of Funding Application has been issued for programs serving foster youth, probation youth, and youth with special needs. One million dollars is available for the first round.
- Youth are at the task force table.
- The number of youth attending 4-year colleges has increased.
- A transitional housing model—THP Plus —has been developed and implemented. It's a state-funded program.
- Foster youth transition issues are getting a great deal of attention from the board of supervisors and the state legislature.
- Legislation is being put into place at the state level.

Philadelphia

Howard Knoll listed the following accomplishments:

- Youth in foster care view the Achieving Independence Center as part of their system. They view it as a midway step.
- An effort to identify housing for these young people is underway.

New York City

Howard Knoll identified accomplishments in two areas—transitional housing and engaging youth. The New York City Housing Authority is setting aside studio apartments for youth aging out of foster care. “Housing is critical,” remarked Knoll. “If they don’t have housing, the other things we can provide are hard to use.” Engaging youth has been very successful. “We’ve created a buzz among foster care youth. They seem to have found a place where there are people of like minds. Career Pathways is very future-oriented, which is very hopeful to them. [It’s focused on] completing education and finding employment, and that’s what they are looking for as they go through these difficult years of 19, 20, 21.”

Los Angeles

In addition to the youth employment policy, a major accomplishment has been gaining the support of the Los Angeles Community College District. The chancellor has taken on the issue of foster youth transition and made it a priority to support emancipating foster youth. The District has set aside 5,000 spots for transitioning foster youth, and they are looking to develop other programs.

Eric Steiner’s comments on accomplishments around the country

San Diego

Steiner prefaced his remarks on San Diego by saying that most efforts around the country have been led by counties, but that in San Diego, Casey Family Programs State Director Miriam Choca played a central role in establishing a youth friendly One-Stop in partnership with the County’s office of Education, local workforce board, and city’s staff in the late 1990s. Steiner agreed with Cantú that “getting the different jurisdiction to talk together using a unified voice is a difficult road. This work has not been easy. . . .It’s difficult but they’re doing it,” Steiner said.” Steiner also applauded San Diego’s Workforce Investment Board, called the San Diego Workforce Partnership—particularly Kelly Henwood—for conducting a local youth resource mapping project. They also have been asking agencies to identify common natural intersections and prospecting for alternative funds. “Kelly has been very persistent,” said Steiner. “Leadership is personality based [here].” The [Resource Mapping Project](http://www.sandiegocatwork.com/generate/html/Youth/youthmappingpage.html) can be viewed online. (www.sandiegocatwork.com/generate/html/Youth/youthmappingpage.html)

State of Texas

The Texas Workforce Commission, as part of its response to reforms mandated by Senate Bill 6 in the state legislature, has required each of the state’s 28 Local Workforce Investment Boards to have signed Memoranda of Understanding between local workforce jurisdictions and their counterparts in the child welfare system with the Department of Family and Protective Services. The TWC devoted a majority of the May 2006 quarterly workforce training meetings to the topic of foster care and presenters included many leaders in child welfare, state-level experts in Chafee funding, and a prominent family court judge.

Texas is the first Casey state forming a network of foster youth One-Stops being developed within the employment training system, in response to a legislative mandate. Casey is following Texas very closely.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

How are people finding funding to support core program targeted at young people aged out of the system?

Mixing 3 streams

Knoll said New York and particularly Philadelphia are using higher education, Chaffee, and TANF dollars because many youth are eligible and apply for public assistance and WIA out-of-school youth funding. A challenge arises when running multi-service centers because each funding stream has different requirements. The question becomes how to serve young people without the services being bifurcated. It can be confusing to staff.

Mentoring programs

Mentoring programs with volunteer mentors really make a difference, according to Knoll. They are looking to see what portions could be supported in individual programs. Steiner pointed out that Philadelphia is also working with Temple University Social Work and Law schools to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender youth.

Reduced funding from federal government

According to Steiner, many key Federal agencies that fund youth services (e.g., Labor, HHS, Education and Justice) seem to be very interested in collaboration and integration, rather than funding new and discrete programs. "I'm not optimistic about more funds being available," he said.

Two resources were mentioned: [The Finance Project.org](http://www.financeproject.org) (www.financeproject.org) and the Youth [Transition Funders Group](http://www.ytfg.org) (www.ytfg.org).

How can I approach the city so they feel they want to work with County?

Panelists offered the following suggestions:

- Prevention and data are hooks that get the board of supervisors' attention. Remind board members that when youth come out of foster care, they are considered adults, yet the adult system isn't prepared to help them. An investment in these youth prevents homelessness, use of emergency room, violence. It's to the city's benefit to say we want to partner with you in order to keep any more youth from becoming homeless, violent.
- Demonstrate how foster youth transition is an issue that everyone can be invested in. Point out that if they make that investment, they will definitely prevent a lot of bad things.
- The youth themselves are persuasive. Bring youth to the board of supervisors' chambers and let them tell their stories. It is tremendously powerful.

How have you gotten buy-in from front-line staff?

Philadelphia

Knoll pointed out that the Achieving Independence Center involves an effort to move Child Welfare Services (CWS) to a place it had never been before. "[CWS staff] care for [the young people] but don't prepare them," said Knoll. "We are asking what we need to do with/for these young adults once they leave the system. It took a lot of work to get the front line workers to think beyond care."

One of the ways they helped CWS staff see the payoff of preparing youth was to present the benefits of the Achieving Independence Center and to see the successes of their alums.

AIC needed to keep in mind that they were working with two systems, and staff from each don't understand one another. "We need an intermediary not only at high level, but also at a more direct level," said Knoll.

Besides funding, are there specific ways the state legislature can help overcome barriers?

In California, it's been this synergy. Previously, Child Welfare Services were ignored. The state played no role in housing or in transitional support after 18. Then, when California flunked the federal review, all of a sudden the state paid attention, and reforms came from the state Department of Social Services. Also, the state Task Force on Foster Care was able to put together a whole group of advocates to push the state pay attention to foster care. As a result, the state is devoting \$82 million to foster care, with a portion of that money going to transition. "It's a huge victory," said Donahue.

The state of Illinois made an option to extend care to 21.

What are you doing to gather, manage data?

Los Angeles

The ISIS data system in place. The difficulty is in trying to meet dual measurements. Cantú reported that they have successfully used Isis for probationary youth, and they would like to tie it to foster youth also.

San Francisco

California Connected by 25 is working with UC Berkeley to establish a shared data base among the five CC25 counties. Donahue said that "Internally, we've established an annual survey for emancipated foster youth. The base line is set for six months after emancipation. We've established an incentive—gift certificates."

How are you serving this population within larger conversations around the needs of other targeted youth?

San Francisco

Donahue remarked, "The crossover [among targeted populations] is so clear at this point. Part of what we're trying to accomplish is a systems change. How can we build one [system]? Where can we align our efforts? What are the gaps?"