

Opening Doors

A California Connected by 25 Initiative (CC25I) Update



Path to Permanency – Lyssa’s Story

Lyssa Trujillo emancipated from Santa Clara County. For her first few years of college she struggled, as most youth do, in trying to maintain a secure living condition while balancing work, school and other financial issues. As Lyssa explains, *“School was sometimes on the back burner, having somewhere to live took precedence.”* Within the first five months of living on her own, at the age of 18, Lyssa moved three times.

Lyssa’s first living arrangement was her cousin’s cabin in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Half of the cabin had electricity; the other half was Lyssa’s bedroom. Even with the benefit of having attended Independent Living Program (ILP) workshops on budgeting, Lyssa did not have the finances to budget. There were times when in order to get to and from class Lyssa borrowed money from friends to purchase gas. Sometimes gas was more important than eating.

While struggling to keep a good academic standing Lyssa was forced to leave her cousin’s cabin and moved in with a friend to sleep on her couch. Lyssa reflects on this choice, *“It was probably the most unrealistic move I could make. I was always distracted and my friend was a source of procrastination. I felt like I was waiting to move again.”*

When asked why she did not move back with her former foster parents (an aunt and uncle) Lyssa replied, *“I think it was a sense of pride. I didn’t*

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The California Connected by 25 (CC25I) Initiative is a California Family to Family strategy helping public child welfare agencies and their communities build comprehensive services and supports for transitioning foster youth.

Lyssa's Story: continued

want their help. I wanted to do it on my own. I wanted help, but not from them. I would rather starve and stumble on my own than have them help me and have a debt I could not return or repay. I was ashamed of my failure. I saw struggling as failing. I know it seems foolish, but that was my thinking." After having slept on her friend's couch for a few months and being placed on academic probation, she decided to move out. During this time, she worked two jobs and attended school at night to stabilize her living situation. Financial aid just was not enough.

It was not until her last two years of college at University of California, Santa Cruz did she become a recipient of Transitional Housing Program-Plus (THP+). Through a mentorship Lyssa was able to gain the stability she had been striving for. *"It was a great relief. I knew I was going to be ok. I would have a safe a secure place to stay the rest of my undergraduate experience."*

After graduation the summer of 2008 and her contract with THP+ ended, Lyssa searched for employment in the realm of foster care reform. It was her mentor who informed her of the Youth Alumni Technical Assistant (TA) position for CC25I. Lyssa's mentor remains an important part of her life. *"She stretched me to think outside of the now or even near future. She was preparing me for life after THP+ and how to be truly independent."*

Lyssa was hired in October 2008 as the new Youth Alumni Technical Assistant for the CC25I and F2F sites. Her major source of motivation has been her younger twin siblings, who emancipated over a year ago. Lyssa's sister is currently a recipient of the THP+ program while attending San Jose State University. Lyssa still sees herself as a source of positive encouragement, not only for her siblings but also for all foster youth, and hopes to provide this support through her work. As a Youth Engagement Technical Assistant for CC25I Lyssa will have the opportunity to help counties develop and organize events; help counties develop Youth Advisory Boards; help to bring focus on youth voice, youth experience, and youth leadership; as well as collaborate with other initiatives.

Although Lyssa now holds a job she could only have *"dreamed"* of having, she is still in a state of transition. After the THP+ opportunity ended and she



no longer received financial aid, Lyssa was not able to afford her own apartment. Shortly after graduation Lyssa moved in with the friend she had lived with at the age of 18. *"It was really hard. I felt like in these five years, nothing had changed. I was in the same position."*

Lyssa's aunt and uncle had offered her the option of returning to live with them. When asked why she hesitated on the offer her response was, *"Up front it was my pride. But really deep down, I was afraid. I was afraid of ruining my relationship with them. That it would be like it was when I had been in their care, I would be a 'child' again, and it would end bitterly."* However after sleeping on her friend's couch for a few months, she decided to accept her aunt and uncle's offer. How is it going? *"It's been great. I have come into the situation older, understanding what it means to be respectful and they return the respect. I have a living situation that honors my work life, as well as two individuals who are more than willing to be supportive and provide guidance. A part of my job has been to attend trainings about various topics, a recurring one being permanency. And one day I realized, 'goodness, I HAVE permanency!'"*

For Youth Engagement Technical Assistance:

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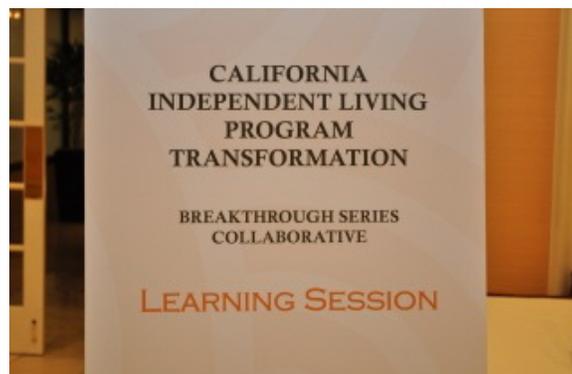
A New Way for ILP

The ILP Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC) Framework highlights a comprehensive set of changes that when packaged together will result in a system that achieves dramatically improved outcomes for foster youth. This represents a new vision for California's permanency and transition programs:

- Young people are at the heart of the planning and decision-making process.
- Permanency, Education, and Employment preparation is integrated into every aspect of a youth's daily life, rather than offered as training in single session workshops and activities.
- All youth receive a broad array of services, supports, and opportunities that are integrated, relevant, developmentally appropriate, and tailored to meet their individual needs.
- Transition services are community based, and integrated across a range of public and private systems maximizing leverage of resources and opportunities.

In January the first of four, in-person, 2 day Learning Sessions was conducted in which all the teams gathered for training, identifying small tests of changes in practice and the development of an action plan. Implementation activities will occur through June 2010. For more information please contact:

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The Inaugural ILP BSC Learning Session on January 7-8, 2009

Five of the ten ILP Breakthrough Series Collaborative counties also participate in CC25I – Fresno, Santa Clara, San Francisco, Orange and Solano.

CC25I Youth Alumni Technical Assistant, Lyssa Trujillo, is a member of the State BSC Team: representatives from state agencies and initiatives are working together at a state level to promote promising practices and facilitate local teams to achieve BSC goals.

CC25I Honing and Strategic Planning

The third year of the Initiative is now complete and the CC25I Project Team is actively engaged in a process of reflection and self-evaluation in an effort to sustain and position the Initiative long term to reach the needs of transition age youth across the state. Some initial themes being considered in CC25I's honing work include:

- Permanent connections are of primary importance
- Youth as leaders and decision makers
- A coordinated continuum of community partnerships around critical focus areas
- Data/Outcome driven decisions

On March 17th CC25I will host a Development Institute for all sites and topics for discussion will include confirming the key values of the Initiative, honing key focus areas and strategies that have taken hold and achieved most success, and opportunities for integration with other initiatives (Family-to-Family, California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP) and BSC on ILP), technical assistance opportunities to move the work forward. CalSWEC will host the March 17th Institute on the UC-Berkeley campus.

Public Health Institute Study on Sex Education and Reproductive Health Needs of Foster and Transitioning Youth

Young women who have been in foster care are more likely to have been pregnant than same-aged peers who have not been in foster care. Foster and emancipated youth are at increased risk for pregnancy, HIV, and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) due to high-risk sexual behaviors such as unprotected sex and sex with multiple partners. Youth in foster care also tend to change schools frequently due to changing foster care placements and thus may experience lapses in school attendance, falling behind not only in academic subjects, but also missing sex education sometimes delivered in traditional schools. Foster youth are therefore less likely to have access to sex education classes despite their increased risk for pregnancy, HIV and other STDs.

To bring the issues of foster youth's sexual and reproductive health into focus for CC25I, the Walter S. Johnson Foundation contracted with the Public Health Institute to conduct a sex education and reproductive health needs assessment for foster and transitioning youth in **Fresno, Orange and San Francisco Counties**. The needs assessment asked the following questions:

1. What are the sexual and reproductive health needs and challenges of foster youth?
2. What barriers stand in the way of assessing these challenges?
3. What suggestions regarding needs, barriers and challenges?
4. What should be done to promote sexual and reproductive health?

An important recommendation that developed from this assessment is that all youth should have one or more trusted adults with whom to discuss sexual and other issues they face as they deal with life's increasingly complex challenges. In the long term sex education and reproductive health services should be interwoven with other child welfare improvement efforts to holistically address issues such as absence of trusted adults, low expectations, and the need to belong that many foster youth feel, all of which can contribute to risky sexual behaviors and pregnancy.

Nine specific policy recommendations are included in this PHI report, derived directly from findings in the study. **The full report and executive summary can be found at <http://crahd.phi.org>**



2008 CC25I Technical Assistance Update

The themes and trends of CC25I technical assistance in the past year have been to support effective use of peer-to-peer TA between local and national Connected by 25 sites. Drawing on their experiences and best practices, counties have shared openly and generously. TA this year focused on providing concrete tools and transfer of learning models that could be adapted and replicated. There was a strong emphasis on education and youth and community engagement. The year's technical assistance efforts illustrated a truly collaborative spirit where exchanging ideas and freely sharing learnings and resources occurred not only between counties and community partners in California but across states and various public and private partners.

Technical Assistance for 2009 will focus on the CC25I Development Institute, utilizing the ETO database for self-evaluation and program improvement, and the Third Annual AVID Convening.

To access CC25I technical assistance, please contact:

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charkness@berkeley.edu
 510.643.9845

Introducing Deborah Moss – Stuart Foundation Associate Director for Child Welfare

Please welcome our newest member to the CC25I Project Team, Deborah Moss, Associate Director for Child Welfare at Stuart Foundation. Debi plays a connective, collaborative and facilitative role in fueling the advancement of the Stuart Foundation's child welfare initiatives and contributes to their program's key components of building powerful partnerships, using data to inform decision-making, and implementing practice to inform public policy.

Debi has over 20 years experience in the field of child welfare, the past 17 ½ years with Contra Costa County. She played a key leadership role in many of the County's child welfare initiatives including Family to Family and Child Welfare Redesign. She has worked extensively to improve and enhance services for children in foster care and urges all stakeholders to join together to provide the support that youth emancipating from foster care need and deserve.



Deborah Moss joined Stuart Foundation in December 2008.

Welcome to Solano and Glenn Counties!

Solano County joined the Initiative in September of 2008, and is currently engaged in a formal workgroup structure to develop and implement activities around the seven CC25I focus areas. Solano brings to the initiative strong community partnerships around housing and permanency, and also has influential support from the Juvenile Court Bench.

Glenn County joined in February 2009. Glenn is a smaller sized rural county and will provide opportunities to build comprehensive services and supports around a cluster of transition aged youth over the course of the three-year grant period. Glenn is also the first site to embrace a fully integrated CC25I and CPYP work plan.

For more information about CC25I, visit:
<http://www.f2f.ca.gov/California25.htm>

We Value Your Input!

Do you have comments, feedback or future article suggestions for this newsletter?

Do you have ideas for the overall CC25I?

Please let us know!

Contact:

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Coming in the Summer 2009 Edition:

- Update on CC25I Honing and Strategic Planning
- County Highlights
- Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) Pilot