

EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION PLAN FOR FOSTER YOUTH: A COLLABORATIVE  
MODEL OF PRACTICE

A Thesis submitted to the faculty of  
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Master of Social Work

In

Individuals, Families, and Groups

by

Keby Sheree Reese

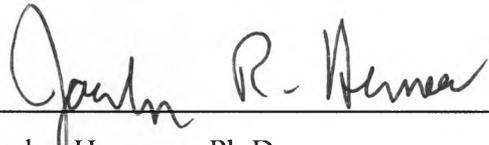
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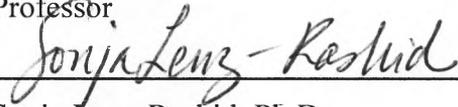
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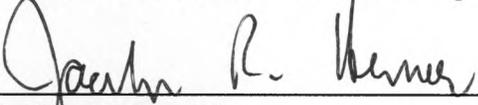
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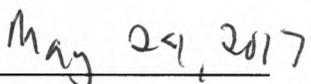
EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION PLAN FOR FOSTER YOUTH: A COLLABORATIVE  
MODEL OF PRACTICE

Keby Sheree Reese  
San Francisco, California  
2017

Carter & Lunsford (2005) report former foster youth enter adulthood with higher rates of unemployment, underemployment, and homelessness, in comparison to adults that do not have a foster care background. How can youth service providers better prepare transition age youth (TAY) for the workforce? A collaborative, person-centered model of practice has been created for TAY to complete with youth service providers. This model of practice is an amended employment transition plan used to help older adolescents in care obtain full time, long term jobs that offer a living wage. It will ensure empowerment and self-determination, processes promoted by social workers and included in the National Association of Social Worker's Code of Ethics. The employment transition plan will be created based on what existing literature identifies as a need from youth service providers and TAY. It will also be created based on the student's professional and academic experience.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.

  
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Chair, Thesis Committee

  
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Date

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Lastly, to my mother, Shery Johnson. Thank you for all the sacrifices you have made to create better opportunities for your children. I hope I can continue making you proud.

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## Chapter One: Problem Statement

Carter & Lunsford (2005) report former foster youth enter adulthood with higher rates of unemployment, underemployment, and homelessness, in comparison to adults that do not have a foster care background. Several studies show former foster youth depend on public assistance at higher rates than the general population. Relatively recent studies show that former foster youth's mean earnings were below the federal poverty line for two to five years after aging out of care, based on unemployment insurance claims data (Courtney, 2009). In a paper based on The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth, Courtney & Dworsky (2006) collected responses from 603 19 year old former foster youth showing that they were twice as likely to report not being able to pay their rent or mortgage, twice as likely to report being unable to pay a utility bill, and 1.5 times as likely to experience having their phone disconnected, than their 19 year old peers in a nationally-representative group. Later versions of this longitudinal Midwest study showed approximately 50% of these former foster youth, ages 23-24, were employed, compared to 75% of their low-income peers who were demographically similar. Additionally, their median outcome was about \$10,000 less than what their non-foster peers earned (Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, & Rapp, 2010; Graham, Schellinger, & Vaughn, 2015). By age 26, 45% of these respondents reported being employed, in comparison to the 80% employed 26 year old comparison group (Courtney et al, 2011).

In a secondary data analysis (2014), information from three administrative sources (public assistance, child welfare, and unemployment insurance) in California, North Carolina and Minnesota, were used to track the employment outcomes of three groups. These groups included: youth that were 17 years old by December 31, 1998 and exited out of care, low-income youth from the same three states who were 17 by December 31, 1998, and nationally selected youth that had turned 18 by December 31, 1998. These groups were tracked up until the age of 24; up to the age of 30 in the state of North Carolina. In this study, fifteen percent of former California foster youth did not report any earnings between ages 18 to 24. Sixty-two percent of former CA foster youth worked at age 24 (earning \$690/month) in comparison to 74% low-income/working class Californians (earning \$970/month) and 92% 24 year olds nationwide (earning \$1535/month). These compared groups were tracked up until the age of 30 in North Carolina, where researchers found that 30 year old former foster youth earned \$525/monthly in comparison to the 30 year old low-income/working class group that earned \$690/month. Researchers also found that the income disparity between former foster youth and non-former foster youth, increased as they reached their mid-twenties and continued until they were 30 years old (Stewart et al, 2014; Graham et al, 2015).

In a study conducted by Reilly (2003) that analyzed information from the state of Nevada's Division of Children and Family Services database; 55% of responding former foster youth had been terminated from a job at least once since exiting care, 24 % reported dealing drugs to support themselves, and 11 % participated in sex work.

Moreover, of the 63% that reported working, the average hourly wage received was \$7.25; which was more than the state's minimum wage at that time.

In addition to their lower rates of employment and earnings, former foster youth experience less employment stability over time when compared to their peers (Stewart et al, 2014). This financial and employment instability of former foster youth contributes to them experiencing homelessness once they age out of care (Courtney et al, 2010; Graham et al, 2015). Twenty-two point two percent of participants in a study by Pecora et al (2005) and 13.8% of former foster youth in Courtney and Dworsky's (2006) study, reported experiencing homelessness after exiting care. Moreover, 32% of the youth in a national study conducted by Cook et al (1991) reported having lived in six or more places within the 2.5 to four years of aging out of care.

Transitional age youth have been abandoned, abused, and/or neglected by their caretakers, and typically lack the consistent presence of an adult they could model. As a result, they tend to lack the skills necessary to prepare for work, apply for jobs, and retain work once employed. In addition, their mental health struggles, financial illiteracy and underdeveloped social skills become barriers to their ability to be economically successful (Courtney, 2009). How can youth service providers better prepare transitional age youth (TAY) for the workforce? This thesis will present an amended employment transition plan for transitional age youth to use with their youth service providers as they prepare for full time, long term employment. This model of practice is collaborative, person-centered, and ensures self-determination, one of the ethical responsibilities of

social workers to clients, as enshrined in the National Association of Social Worker's Code of Ethics (NASW, 2008). Meaning, the model is designed in a way that requires child welfare workers and employment service providers to work together by synthesizing their professional styles while they prioritize the self-identified employment goals of the youth they work with.

Not only will this employment plan better prepare youth for employment, it will also strengthen or create collaboration between child welfare workers and employment service providers. Currently, there is a lack of well-evaluated, best practice models of collaboration between child welfare workers and employment service providers (Courtney, 2009). Drawing on literature, and the researcher's professional and academic experience, this thesis will analyze the implications for practice with transitional age foster youth.

Chapter one describes the context of this study. In chapter two, a review of the relevant literature informing the research question will be conducted. Chapter three describes the theoretical framework of this model. In chapter four, the concepts in which this model of practice is based on will be defined. Chapter five lays out the components of the model and the description of the process used to develop it. In chapter six, an explanation is provided to show how the problem described in chapter one is being addressed. Lastly, chapter seven will identify the limitations of this model and suggestions for future research.

## Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

### **Background**

It has been reported that transitional age youth are moderately to not well prepared for most life skills. Therefore, they are ill prepared to become self-sufficient, interdependent adults. The literature identifies an array of needs and recommends different ways to address them. This chapter will briefly describe what foster care is and the different challenges older adolescents in care face. Additionally, it will list out the specialized policies that have been created to respond to these challenges and end with identifying a model of practice intended to address the negative employment outcomes of transitional age youth.

#### Child Protective Services

The White House 1909 conference, hosted by President Theodore Roosevelt, paved the way for succeeding White House conferences to have issues related to children and youth appearing on their agenda; the last being held in 1970 by President Nixon (Holt, 2010). In fact, seven national White House Conferences were devoted to raising public awareness as well as passing laws and initiatives to improve the well-being and rights of dependent children and youth in America (Michael & Goldstein, 2014). Their end resulted in the federal government being more involved in child-related issues, outside of legislation and funding (Holt, 2010). In 1912, the Department of Labor established the U.S Children's Bureau. The Children's Bureau began paying more

attention to child maltreatment and, through the Social Security Act, more money was provided to expand child welfare services (Courtney, 2009).

The county/state administered child welfare agency provides services to children and families experiencing difficulties at home. Foster care is a temporary arrangement for children who are placed into a substitute home, outside of their own, after a child welfare agency, upon review and supervision of the juvenile court, substantiated abuse or neglect allegations against their parents. The expectation, is that the child will re-enter the home, once reasonable efforts have been made to support the family, and the difficulties precipitating the foster placement have been corrected (Webb, pp.234). However, when a child's family is unable to show the court and the child welfare agency that the child can safely reunite with them, a permanency plan is created for the child to remain in care or be placed in the most family-like out-of-home setting. The state is then expected to provide the support and care the child needs until they are able to provide a permanent living situation by way of adoption, or the child completely ages out of the system by becoming an adult (Webb, 2011). In some states, foster youth age out of care at 18 years old. In the state of California, they have come to understand foster youth benefit from receiving services past the age of 18, and thus extended care to the age of 21 (AB 12, 2010).

#### Long Term Foster Care

Once a child enters foster care, the state becomes what Courtney (2009) describes as the "corporate parent", given the moral and legal duty to provide the care and support

children would need to develop into healthy adults (pp.1). There are different levels of care available for children in the state of California, these include: foster care (children living with non-kin), kinship care, group homes, and the independent living program. In spite of reasonable efforts made to find permanent homes for the older adolescents, it may not be possible, and as a result, they age out of care after they reach the age of eighteen, entering into the independent living program. In California, the independent living program serves foster youth, from the age of sixteen to twenty one. Historically, due to lack of funding, not a lot of states allowed youth to remain in foster care after their 18th birthday. Once a young person aged out of care, the state was no longer liable to provide support (Courtney, 2009).

### Challenges of Transition Age Youth

Children in care have experienced some form of abuse and neglect by their caregivers, typically their parents. This has led to them moving from place to place, and moving in and out of homes. They are forced to adapt to change, getting accustomed to new people and new rules, without promise that they will not move again. Research shows the impact neglect, abuse, inconsistency, change, and broken relationships have on the child's brain. There is a negative impact on the brain, physical, physiological, cognitive and behavior development; causing children to struggle with social skills, and regulating their feelings and behavior. This disruption to healthy development and trauma reverberates into adolescent and adulthood, correlating with the unfavorable outcomes of

TAY, such as educational and socioemotional challenges (Graham, Schellinger, & Vaughn, 2015).

Literature shows, youth who age out of foster care are less likely to complete high school, obtain a degree, have health care, or a secure support network. Instead they are more likely to experience homelessness, unstable housing, substance abuse, early pregnancy, involvement with the criminal justice or legal system, mental health issues, physical problems, and psychological distress, than their non-foster peers (Daining & DePanfilis, 2007; Graham et al, 2015; Reilly, 2003). Youth preparing to transition out of foster care are a vulnerable sub-population of the foster care system. Youth from impoverished communities and young persons of color are over-represented demographics in this population. These subgroups, as well as LGBTQ youth transitioning into adulthood, are at risk of experiencing racism, discrimination, oppression, and inadequate support from service providers, including the child welfare system. This makes it difficult for them to secure community resources and gain access to opportunities that lead to a stable, productive life (Daining & DePanfilis, 2007).

Graham et al (2015) described foster youth as needing the same kind of care as non-foster youth, such as “supportive, loving, genuinely caring adults who can help positively guide them and continue to support them during hard times” (pp.75). Yet, these basic human needs were inconsistently met. Due to the preexisting circumstance that got them placed in foster care, inconsistent adult models, in addition to the challenges they deal with while in care, TAY also need extensive services for education. These services

include: housing, employment, mental health, daily living skills, money management, decision making, self-esteem building, and financial assistance with college or vocational schools, educational resources, housing and employment (Graham et al, 2015). Child welfare workers (CWW) work to connect youth to the adults in these programs who can provide the individual support they need, with high expectations and will teach them how to maneuver through life's challenges as well as their own educational and/or employment endeavors.

#### Employment Outcome of Transition Age Youth

There are many benefits and opportunities that come with meaningful employment, including earning income, establishing relationships, and contributing to an agency, organization, or business in addition to one's own community. Financial gain improves housing, health, quality of life, self-sufficiency, and educational opportunity (Carter & Lunsford, 2005). Child welfare workers are aware of the significant impact employment has on TAY, which is why they work to connect them to community resources that prepare them for the workforce.

Studies report TAY and foster care alumni do not experience enough positive employment outcomes. Most encounter unemployment, underemployment, and job instability. A 2011 thesis reports 62% former foster youth exited care unemployed, the few who are employed are underemployed, working unskilled jobs, resulting in unstable income (Netzel & Tardanico, 2014). It also reports household income levels of foster care alumni being lower than the general population. This economic instability is what leads

to homelessness among foster youth who have exited foster care. Additionally, the study showed 29% of former foster youth reported having food insecurities as young adults. One third of foster youth men and 3/25 of foster youth women between 23-24 years old reported having to use government assistance after leaving care (Netzel & Tardanico, 2014). Moreover, transition age youth lack money management skills and are financially illiterate. This leaves youth transitioning into adulthood unprepared to be self-sufficient (Carter & Lunsford, 2005). It also puts them at risk for unstable housing, homelessness, and experiencing poverty.

Reilly (2003) notes reports of TAY disclosing participation in illegal activity to get money, putting them at risk of criminal justice involvement, obtaining debt, or being sexually or physically victimized. Daining & DePanfilis (2007) mention studies of reports indicating TAY identifying employment as one of the most critical services needed. They also note findings suggesting concrete employment resources contribute to better employment outcomes. TAY reporting higher levels of social support and program services demonstrated higher resilience (Daining & DePanfilis, 2007). However, although most youth report exposure to training on independent living skills related to employment, Reilly (2003) mentioned, some believe their services were not satisfactory enough to have them feeling prepared for the workforce. Furthermore, programs are not adequately funded enough to properly address the needs specific to adolescents aging out of care (Lenz-Rashid, 2006).

## **Specialized Policies for Transitional Age Youth**

### Independent Living Skills Program

The Independent Living Initiative (ILI) was established in 1985 under the Social Security Act, Title IV-E, to give the states service options that could be provided to foster youth ages sixteen to twenty-one ( e.g., life skills training, counseling, education and employment support). The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (FCIA) amended Title IV-E, giving states the ability to operate independent living programs by doubling the funding. Only foster youth ages 18-21, were eligible for FCIA services. The 2008 Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act is the most recent Title IV-E amendment, and it allows for foster youth to receive services related to housing, education, health, and employment up until the age of 21 (Courtney, 2009).

These amendments to the Social Security Act came about after the public's understanding of the transition to adulthood had evolved and reports on the challenges foster youth face during this transition informed legislators; causing the state to change their views on their role as a corporate parent (Courtney, 2009). These Acts exemplify how the U.S policy went from not providing services to former foster youth at all, to supporting their transition to adulthood and independence, and extending care.

The Independent Living Program in California was authorized by the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999. It provides benefits, services, and training to foster youth between the ages 16-21 and former foster youth. This group of eligible foster youth are sometimes called transitional age youth or TAY. The program's goal is to help foster

youth achieve self-sufficiency prior to and after leaving foster care. In California, each county has their own implementation style of the Independent Living Program, making it a county administered program (ILP, 2007)

Contra Costa County's Children and Family services has an Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP) which serves foster youth up until the age of 21, preparing them for emancipation. The youth could have grown up in foster care or entered as adolescents. Through ILSP, laws like ILI and FCIA (and their amendments), are implemented. The youth can be currently in care or foster care alumni. Contra Costa's ILSP provides individual and group services on health and well-being, housing, employment/vocational training, and education. Some of the workshops listed on their website include: life skills, money management, resume development, young parent's workshop, scholarships, SAT/ACT, college application, housing, and cooking (ILSP, 2015). They also imply providing individualized services for foster youth with challenges that hinder their abilities to be successful in a classroom (Independent living skills program, n.d). Their purpose is to support youth into becoming self-sufficient adults, prepared for adulthood. The program is rich with resources; providing hands-on experiences with their youth and maintaining relationships with community organizations (Graves, 2017)

#### Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and Transition Age Youth

Under the Obama Administration in 2014, the Department of Labor (DOL) collaborated with the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services to provide leadership in the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity

Act (WIOA). WIOA was signed by President Obama in 2014 and took effect on July 1, 2015. In short, the Act is designed to improve America's workforce system, by helping workers and job seekers find "high-quality" jobs/careers and employers find and retain qualified workers (Pub. L. 113-128). One way the legislation plans to achieve this, is by the creation of one-stop American Job Centers where job seekers can go to seek access to employment, education, career services, supportive services and training; and where employers can go to find or recruit workers that are best matched for their business (Employment and Training Administration, 2017).

While providing leadership in WIOA's implementation, it is written in the Public Law that the Department of Labor has committed to collaborating with the child welfare system to "improve coordination of employment and training activities" and "improve coordination of workforce investment activities with economic development activities" for children and youth (pp.99). The Department of Labor has also identified youth with disabilities as a sub population deserving of specialized services; creating opportunities for these youth to have access to high quality workforce services that prepare them for "integrated employment" (Pub. L. 113-128). There are transition age youth that may qualify for these special services.

### **Responses to Need**

#### Working Relationships Between Youth Service Providers

Graham et al (2015) identifies appropriate work attire, "job search correspondence, interview techniques, money and time management, networking, work

ethic, motivation, actual work experience, and general job-skills training” (pp. 75) as some of the skills TAY need to be successful in the workforce. Lenz-Rashid (2006) reports in her study that TAY building employment history while in care and maintaining employment when they exit care as a result of employment training, may improve their ability to survive independently as young adults. Doing so could also reduce the chances of TAY being vulnerable to employer exploitation, unemployment, or low wage jobs that could prevent them from functioning as self-sufficient adults (Lenz-Rashid, 2006).

Reilly’s (2003) research supports the idea that receiving employment training and services increases successful outcomes, leaving TAY feeling more satisfied with their foster care experience and prepared to live on their own. His research also shows how crucial positive support systems are to the successful transition of TAY into adulthood and the community, with employment service providers (ESP) being a part of that support network. ESP act as resources TAY can come back to later on in life if they encounter more obstacles or unexpected circumstances (Reilly, 2003). Graham et al (2015) study along with Reilly (2003) also note a need for better communication and ongoing collaboration among CWW and employment service providers so that the information transferred can be both correct and consistent.

Literature consistently suggest that stronger collaborative effort between CWW and ESP could help better prepare TAY for a healthy, productive adulthood, and improve their experience in extended foster care. The relationship between child welfare workers (CWW) and employment service providers (ESP) can model to TAY relationship

building skills they would need to acquire to improve their personal development before entering the workforce (Graham et al, 2015). Foster youth in extended care do not always have the skills to build or maintain relationships, and some do not recognize their importance. TAY developing interpersonal relationships with community service provider's lead to more encouraging outcomes, including decreasing the rate of homelessness (Graham et al, 2015). Connecting TAY to ESP broadens their social network and broad social networks can lead to better life outcomes overall (Lin, 2001; Carter & Lunsford, 2005). If they are not already aware, ESP will come to realize, due to the past experiences and often times trauma of TAY, they cannot provide the same type of services as they would non-foster care participants in their program.

Graham et al's (2015) research notes community service providers unaware of issues foster youth face or have faced, may have negative stereotypes that weigh on foster youth. CWW can help them understand, minimizing the youth's chances of experiencing that. TAY services need to be more individualized due to their unique circumstances. CWW can help ESP identify the youth's strengths, interests, experiences, goals, and other stakeholders in the youth's natural support system (i.e., family, friends, and faith community members); and use this information to provide TAY with the best support they need. Carter & Lunsford (2005) suggests this as an approach that will be effective with TAY.

Employment Service Providers play an important role in the transitioning process and the collaboration between them and CWW has been proven to lead to successful

outcomes of TAY and their feelings of satisfaction. It is a collaboration that is suggested and preferred in the literature (Reilly, 2003; Graham et al, 2015; Courtney, 2009).

However, currently, there is not a curriculum or evidence based method to ensure these collaborations are happening and that they are effective. In Contra Costa County, there is no such tool available for the CWW and the employment service providers. They tend to check-in with each other via phone call, emails, or communicate through the youth they work with (D. Graves, personal communication, 2017).

There are not studies discussing the perspectives and experiences of CWW and ESP, however, Michaels & Ferrara's (2005) article lists the challenges that occur during the process of planning for transition from school to adulthood for students with disabilities. They note: time and resources constraints; competing goals, and balancing process and outcomes; diverse beliefs about disability; policy and community; and dignity of risk versus health and safety concerns (Thoma, 2005). Graham et al (2015) notes research indicating high turnover rates of CWW and child welfare departments with stretched resources as challenges CWW deal with on their end. Large caseloads and required documentation can be added. In their study, Carter & Lunsford (2005) mention that agencies cannot be expected to meet the complex needs of every TAY alone. Therefore, child welfare workers and employment service providers need to support each other by working together to facilitate change with these employment outcomes.

### A Collaborative Employment Transition Plan

In California, It has been thirty years since the Independent Living Initiative has been implemented, however, more challenges remain in the way for significant progress. Foster youth are ill-prepared for employment and thus unprepared for adulthood. This can be due to a variety of factors. Potential factors include: The effects of trauma or childhood adversities on the brain; inadequate services from the child welfare agency and/or employment service agencies; disadvantaged communities; poor collaboration among youth transitioning child welfare workers, and employment service providers; and the internal struggles of the youth (e.g., mental illness or disorder, low self-esteem, lack of motivation, high levels of stress). Furthermore, in spite of the nation's increased attention on the plight of transitional age youth and the advances in federal and state policies that have led to more funding for housing, employment, education, and independent living services for TAY, these policies and their resulting programs still lack the funding needed to adequately address the needs of these youth (Lenz-Rashid, 2006).

The literature suggest transitional age youth need an array of services, from housing, to education, to counseling and mentors. Studies show, that former foster youth attain lower levels of education, deal with more mental health problems, are more involved with the criminal justice system, have greater housing issues, and more of a difficult time obtaining financial stability than their non-foster care peers despite the government's efforts to help them make the connections they need to successfully transition into adulthood. Programs like ILSP connecting transition age youth to the

employment services in their community with hope that they obtain a steady job, are looking to combat some of these adversities.

Sound empirical evidence showing the effectiveness of employment services serving youth are hard to come by and there is a lack of best practice models of coordination between child welfare agencies and these services. When a curriculum and well-evaluated models of coordination are created to inform policymakers and practitioners, regulations can be developed to ensure adequate employment services are being provided to transitional age youth. Until then, the state efforts as a corporate parent to effectively support foster youth in transitioning to adulthood will remain limited. More research and evaluation of employment services and their collaboration with child welfare agencies are needed to ensure foster youth have enough support and services to maximize their success (Courtney, 2009).

Studies show some former foster youth end up unemployed, underemployed, homeless or experience poverty once the state removes care. One way to combat this is to look into how employment agencies engage foster youth as well as how child welfare agencies collaborate with these employment agencies once their youth sign up to participate (Courtney, 2009). This thesis focuses on developing a model of coordination for transitional age youth, child welfare workers, and employment service providers, with hopes that it can better assist TAY with being economically stable, specifically in Contra Costa County, California. With the commitment from the Department of labor to improve the employment outcome of TAY, it is suggested that the individual

employment plan they use with youth, integrate child welfare and transition planning best practices such as Safety Organized Practice and Person-Centered Planning.

Chapter three describes the framework of this person-centered, collaborative employment model.

### Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework and Subjectivity

The literature shows that there are a wide range of services available to transitional age youth to address their economic challenges, however there is a lack of well-evaluated best practice models available to ensure these services are being implemented effectively by youth service providers. This chapter explains why a collaborative model of practice that centers youth, is being created for child welfare workers and employment service providers to adopt in their work.

#### Positionality: Why Youth Engagement and Provider Collaboration is Valued

Youth service providers have access to a lot of resources. However, with high caseloads, heavy monitoring of the state, and fast approaching deadlines, it can be challenging to make time to collaborate with those who are not in the same office space. As a result, providers miss out on opportunities to exchange resources and get support when responding to youth needs.

Child welfare workers have experience working with youth of different backgrounds and experiences. They have the ability to refer them to a wide array of services, including, but not limiting to: individual therapy, therapeutic behavioral services, housing, education, physicians, community organizations, Domestic Violence support, treatment programs, and parenting programs. Child welfare workers may have access to legal aid as well as county mental health, substance abuse, education, and domestic violence liaisons. They may receive training on how to support commercially exploited youth, victims/survivors of domestic violence, and trauma-informed care.

Moreover, child welfare workers have practice in assessing the need and strengths of the youth they work with, and tend to have access to most of the members in the youth's support network.

Employment service providers, although aware of community resources, may not have access to all these trainings and resources. Considering their scope of practice, they may not be aware of how to respond to issues such as trauma and its effect on the brain, community violence, young adult pregnancy, or intimate partner violence. Yet, these are issues their participants could potentially deal with and issues that can get in the way of economic advancement and program engagement. So it is important for child welfare workers and employment service providers to collaborate with each other when providing support to transitional age youth.

“It takes a village to raise a child” is a great expression when describing the kind of support foster youth in transition need. Employment service providers can look at this plan and see a list of people who can be contacted to provide support. This alleviates the stress of not knowing what to do, who to call, and how to help. It also challenges child welfare workers and employment service providers to be committed in the services they provide to the youth. It takes effort to keep the other informed on youth participation and progress and send invitations to participate in the provision of services when possible.

As Carter (2005) noted, one agency cannot support the complex needs of every youth. That is because the needs of transitional age youth can be exhaustive. Which means, it is going to take collaborative efforts from child welfare workers and

employment service providers to ensure youth are receiving the adequate services they deserve and need.

Additionally, a person-centered collaborative employment plan may improve youth engagement and their investment in goal completion. Employment service providers have their own set of agency goals related to helping youth obtain employment or at least, work experience. For child welfare workers, it is about keeping youth safe, helping them maintain well-being, and preparing for adulthood. Transitional age youth are in, what could be perceived as, a conflicting position, considering that they must still abide by the rules and expectations of the agencies involved in their life, while also being expected to grow up fast in an effort to be ready for adulthood. They may be taught or expected to prioritize the goals of the agencies, while minimizing or rejecting their own goals. One way to improve youth engagement and increase participation, is to have the youth identify their own goals and plans for their future, and incorporate that in the employment plan. This could potentially make them more invested with the work that they are doing, which increases participation. Even with resources available to them, and having a supportive team, it can be disheartening to follow a plan one did not create for their own life.

### Theoretical Framework

This model of practice is about strengthening the collaboration process of transitional age youth (TAY), child welfare workers (CWW) and employment service providers (ESP) of Contra Costa County (CCC) with hopes that it improves the

employment outcome of their foster youth. If successful, child welfare agencies and employment agencies throughout California can adapt this tool in their programs. In addition, the tool can be used to collaborate with other youth service providers as well.

Employment service providers play an important role in the youth's transitioning process and their collaboration with child welfare workers has been proven to lead to successful outcomes of TAY and their feelings of satisfaction. As a result, the literature suggest strengthening collaboration to improve employment outcomes for TAY. However, currently, there is not a curriculum or evidence based method to ensure effective collaboration is happening. The investigator will synthesize the components of Safety Organized Practice and Person Centered Planning, onto the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act's Individualized Employment Plan for youth, to create a plan that can be used by child welfare workers, transition age youth, and employment service providers to strengthen their collaboration efforts.

Safety-Organized Practice (SOP) was developed in the late 1990's by Steve Edwards and Andrew Turnell. It is an approach to child welfare casework that pushes child welfare workers to think critically about their cases and enhance partnerships with all the key stakeholders (e.g. child, family, worker, supervisor, lawyers, judges, etc.) involved with the child (ren) (Albers & Meitner 2012). SOP encompasses: Cultural Humility, Structured Decision Making, Signs of Safety, Multicultural Process of Change, Partnership-Based Collaborative Process, Trauma Informed Practice, Appreciative Inquiry, and Solution Focused Interviewing (Scudder, 2016).

Person-centered planning is an ideal system for transition planning, in that it promotes collaboration and problem solving to ensure that the goals created are purposeful and student centered. It was originally designed to assist students with disabilities to transition out of school, often used in IEP (individualized education plan) meetings (Michaels, Ferrara, Denise, 2005).

Lastly, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act's (WIOA) Individualized Employment Plan (IEP) for youth is a plan used to improve the youth's employability after assessing their level of education, interests, work related assets, barriers, support network, and goals. The IEP is part of the eligibility packet provided by any workforce provider funded under the WIOA (WIOA, 2016).

The collaborative employment transition plan will ask for the names of the child welfare worker, employment service provider and youth completing the document. That way members can track attendance at collaborative meetings. The researcher will adapt five of the six practice principles of safety organized practice (Turnell & Edwards, 1999):

- Understand the position of each member- Explaining roles and expectations
- Discover youths strengths and resources
- Focus on goals- Elicit youth's goals and compare it to the agency's' goals (both child welfare and employment related)
- Scale safety and progress-Throughout the process and assessment, identify the youth's sense of progress.

- Assess willingness, confidence, and capacity of collaborators. SOP stresses the importance of the stakeholders to have a common language so that communication happens effectively.

Additionally, the collaborative tool will emphasize the youth's self-determination which is highlighted in person-centered planning, making sure there is room for their voice to be heard in the planning process. This allows the youth to practice and develop their decision making skills, help with self-management, setting goals, and advocating for themselves. Lastly, child welfare workers, employment service providers and the youth will assist in creating the document to ensure their concerns can be addressed at every collaboration meeting or monthly review. A collaborative tool with these features could possibly help teach youth how to set realistic employment goals, decide which workforce development program is most useful, and evaluate their own progress toward the goals they set for themselves. As a result, this could make them feel and actually be better prepared for the workforce.

This model was formed from the following theories: Ecological Systems Theory, Empowerment Theory, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and Self-Determination Theory.

#### Ecological Systems Theory

The purpose of Ecological Systems Theory is to focus on how the individual interacts with their environment. Systems are interrelated and looked at as a whole. With the collaborative employment transition plan, we are looking at three systems and how they all relate to one another; the child welfare system, employment services, and

the youth. Ecological systems theory explains how these interactions can be viewed holistically and identifies the strengths and weaknesses of each system. Focusing on the youth as a system, means looking at them from a biopsychosocial perspective; evaluating the internal structure. For the child welfare and employment service providers, it is important to look into the goal and mission of these systems, evaluate how goals are met and their ability to effectively meet those goals (Greene & Schriver, pp. 19). As an example, if the employment service program is too impacted to serve the youth due to budget cuts, the child welfare system is forced to create their own employment related-program. This can overwhelm the child welfare system, leading to overworked child welfare workers struggling to engage with and support youth who are struggling with their own internal and external challenges. For the youth to be and feel prepared for the workforce, it is the duty of child welfare workers to connect them to appropriate employment service providers who have the capacity to support them, and for those providers to be honest about their ability to support, prepare, and provide opportunities for transitional age youth.

### Empowerment Theory

Having a person-centered, collaborative employment plan, ensures the person being served holds power. Between the youth and service providers (child welfare workers and employment service providers) there is already an innate power imbalance, where most, if not all, power is held by the professional. The youth are expected to accept rules and regulations, which may feel more like restrictions, from these providers.

This can lead to them feeling powerless and or dependent of these systems. It is important for CWW's and ESP's to help the youth tap into their strengths, natural healing processes, and use their voices to advocate for themselves (Greene & Schriver, pp. 56). Not only will it prepare the youth for the workforce, but also help them reach self-actualization, the fifth and final need addressed by American Psychologist, Abraham Maslow (Prince & Howard, 2003). Employment is more than just having the ability to support oneself, it leads to financial security and builds resilience; increasing TAY's capacity to reach their self-identified personal goals. This is especially essential if the youth are a part of marginalized communities.

#### Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, for a person to achieve their full potential, their physiological, safety, social, and esteem needs must be met. Once these needs are attained and maintained, the individual experiences self-actualization. One way for TAY to ascend these level of needs, is to achieve sustainable income. When they have long term, full time employment, that exceeds the living wage in their respective city, TAY will be able to fulfill their basic needs. They will be able to enhance safety by not falling victim to debt collectors or scammers, finding residence outside of communities with high levels of violence and low resources, and not participating in risky ways of making money that make them vulnerable to victimization and/or involvement in the criminal justice system (Carter, & Lunsford, 2005; Prince & Howard, 2003).

Employment will expand a youth's social network as they learn to engage in and build relationships inside the work environment. Having the ability to support themselves will improve or build self-esteem, as the youth develop a sense of pride in being able to support themselves and their families, as well as achieve their goals. It will also lead to feelings of connectedness that come from belonging to an agency/organization. Finally, obtaining sustainable employment will give TAY the freedom and power to achieve personal desires such as traveling or exploring their own creativity (Carter, & Lunsford, 2005; Prince & Howard, 2003).

#### Self-Determination Theory

If the youth feels centered and empowered during the collaborative process, they are potentially more likely to feel motivated to use this employment transition plan and pursue their goals. It is important for TAY to get into the practice of identifying their own needs and goals. When they age out of care, self-determination will help the youth address their own needs and give them the ability to self-advocate, problem solve, and expand their own support network (NASW, 2008), or what Safety Organized Practice describes as "safety network" (Albers & Meitner 2012). Social workers value and respect the youth's right to self-determination, only restricting it if a youth plans to harm themselves or others.

The WIOA individual employment plan amendments were made with Ecological Systems Theory, Empowerment Theory, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and Self-Determination Theory in mind. Additionally, elements from best practice frameworks

such as Safety Organized Practice and Person-Centered Planning was incorporated into the plan. These amendments were made to help ensure youth self-determination, youth empowerment, interagency collaboration and youth obtainment of sustainable income.

The next chapter will define these terms.

## Chapter Four: Variable Definition

This employment plan incorporates elements from Safety Organized Practice and Person-Centered planning. It is being designed to improve the employment outcomes of transition age youth, based on the concepts of self-determination in social work practice, empowerment, sustainable income, and interagency collaboration. One objective in Safety Organized Practice explains using shared language to build good, working relationships among stakeholders (Albers & Meitner 2012). So, this chapter provides definitions explaining the meaning behind self-determination, empowerment, sustainable income, and interagency collaboration for employment service providers and child welfare workers to refer to as they use the employment plan.

### Self-determination

When youth transition out of care and enter the workforce, they are expected to have some level of independence. No longer fully dependent of the child welfare system, they must be able to show how they will manage their own social and work behavior. Carter & Lunsford (2005) describes self- determination as a youth's ability to "self-manage, make decisions, problem solve, set goals, and advocate for oneself" (pp.65). With this person-centered plan, the youth are encouraged to practice these skills while collaborating with child welfare workers and employment service providers. They will learn how to set realistic employment-related goals, evaluate their own progress toward these goals, advocate for more support or resources to obtain these goals, and lastly, learn to hold themselves accountable. The child welfare worker and/or employment service

providers can guide the youth by providing them with the tools they need to successfully self-manage themselves and their finances (Carter & Lunsford, 2005). When the youth learn what successful work performance looks like, and how to properly maintain it, they would then be able to practice it for themselves.

Foster youth with disabilities, or those who may experience micro-aggressions due to their race, sexual orientation, immigration status or religious affiliation, will need guidance on how to manage their identities in the workplace while also understanding their rights. Even if the youth do not identify with how they are perceived by others, it is important for them to learn how to manage their own behavior while protecting themselves; such as advocating for self in an assertive, non-aggressive manner. Child welfare workers and employment service providers must teach the youth how to monitor and evaluate their participation in completing the plan as well as their own work performance. Self-Determination increases the chance of the youth being fully engaged and intentional during their career planning process. By the time the plan is complete, the youth will be able to demonstrate these skills to an employer or clients (if self-employed) and enhance their job performance. Practicing self-determination skills will help the youth learn how to balance being independent and interdependent of people or outside resources (Carter & Lunsford, 2005)

### Sustainability

What is meant by sustainability? It is similar to how child welfare workers view permanency for children in care. Child welfare workers work to obtain permanent

placement for children because many studies show multiple placements have important ramifications for a child's development (Leathers, 2002). In a similar sense, child welfare workers and employment service providers should work together to help youth in care obtain a permanent or sustainable income, what the World Commission on Environment & Development (1987) defines as "development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their economic needs" (pp. IV). In other words, the ability to maintain income over a long period of time, without reducing the incoming amount of income, therefore receiving the same amount of money year after year (Stallworth, Harris, & Wise, 1997)

Youth that have aged out of care face a difficult time achieving financial independence due to job instability, unemployment and being underpaid at their jobs (Courtney, 2009). Transition age youth need a permanent plan after they age out of care, that means they need sustainable income; a permanent, reliable job that will help them meet their basic needs, create opportunities for advancement and generate wealth. Such a job needs to pay a living wage, not a minimum wage (unless minimum wage matches the living wage). Additionally, it will provide good benefits and offer fair work hours. If the youth are employed by an agency paying the living wage, working full time, and practice good money management skills, they are more likely able to support themselves, reducing the need for outside assistance (Carter & Lunsford, 2005; Courtney, 2009; Lenz-Rashid, 2006). There is a need for Child welfare workers, employment service

providers and transition age youth to collaborate with other members in their community who are advocating for a living wage or higher minimum wage.

### Interagency Collaboration

According to the National Child Welfare organization, interagency collaboration is defined as a process of bringing critical stakeholders together in a “coordinated” and “integrated” effort to problem solve and improve services to children and families (Interagency collaboration, 2008; Page, 2004). That is what transitioning age youth need, for their supporters from different agency’s to come together and help them achieve their employment goals and prepare them for the workforce. In this case, the critical stakeholders are those representing the child welfare system and employment agencies. These agencies need to join together, sharing their expertise and resources, for their shared clients; that being the youth in care. According to Page (2004), knowing who to contact in partner organizations for ideas or information enhances the collaborators ability to problem solve, thus enhancing their ability to improve outcome.

As CWW and ESP use the employment plan, they should look for gaps in their own services and supports, as well as, ways they can exercise their expertise. Where CWW fall short in support, ESP should see that as an opportunity to offer their own expertise, and vice versa. Not only does this help service providers’ work within their own scope of practice, but it also prevents them from duplicating services.

Perkins & Zimmerman (1995) explain that collaboration efforts among multiple ecological forces (e.g., community, agency, culture, religion, housing, and government)

lead to youth in care being empowered. Child welfare workers and employment service providers must focus on the strengths of youth and value self-determination as they use the employment plan, in order for them to facilitate empowerment.

### Empowerment

Perkins & Zimmerman (1995) defines empowerment as “a process that facilitates increased influence over one’s life circumstances, influence in the community in which one lives, and greater awareness of the demands of one’s environment and skills for negotiating these demands”. Empowerment for transitional age youth was compromised the moment they became dependent of the child welfare system; as they are taught to rely on and trust the adults around them making decisions on their behalf (Kaplan, Skolnik, & Turnbull, 2009). It is important for CWWs and ESPs to facilitate empowerment throughout the employment planning process in an effort to help instill a sense of confidence in the youth’s ability to navigate their own lives. Mastering self-determination skills, obtaining sustainable income, and having confidence in their abilities, will empower the youth and make them feel ready to transition into adulthood.

Understanding and agreeing to these concepts is the first step to appropriately and successfully completing the amended WIOA employment plan. Chapter five provides an example as to how these concepts can be applied while working with transitional age youth on the collaborative, person-centered plan.

## Chapter Five: Methodology

This collaborative, person-centered employment plan is important and necessary in the field of child welfare and human services. Far too often, transitional age youth leave service programs feeling unprepared and/or unsatisfied. Their participation in these youth service programs could potentially be the last time they can receive the specialized services needed to be self-sufficient adults. This amended employment plan was created to challenge youth service providers and child welfare workers to base the success of their agency goal achievements on their collaboration efforts and commitment to youth engagement; not only employment outcome. We have the opportunity to impact these young minds on a deeper level. Improving self-esteem, confidence, learning life skills, and maintaining safety are just as important as obtaining employment. In fact, without these abilities, transitional age youth are less likely to achieve their economic goals. Which makes these agency goals superficial. In this chapter I will introduce and describe my model of practice, which I hope will better assess and address the financial needs of TAY.

Employment Service Providers and Child Welfare Workers have different professional goals, experiences, and training. In spite of differences in approach and skill set, there are subtle ways in which they can serve their shared youths in a synthesized manner. After understanding and agreeing to the concepts of this plan (i.e. self-determination, empowerment, sustainable income, and interagency collaboration), ESP

and CWW can move forward with combining different elements of their assessment tools and engagement strategies as they use this plan.

The WIOA individual employment plan is used by contracted agencies receiving WIOA funds to assess needs, identify employment and education-related goals, and track progress of the agency's program participants. It is the only assessment tool for employment service providers, therefore, its completion is crucial to successful program completion. On the original WIOA individual employment plan, in the sections "Work Related Skills", "Barriers", "Supportive Service's Needs", there are not any specific questions listed for the ESP to ask the youth. There is only blank space. Are we to assume that all employment service providers have been trained on how to appropriately assess and interview youth? Using questions from safety organized practice, "What Are We Worried About?" "What is Working Well" and identifying complicating factors, can help youth providers identify strengths and needs. These questions are solution-focused and open-ended, and can be changed to be more specific to employment. What are the youth's employment-related concerns, strengths, needs, and goals? That is what this collaborative employment plan is attempting to address. Below I will discuss how elements from safety organized practice, person-centered planning, and the addition of a financial literacy assessment have been incorporated into the amended WIOA individual employment plan.

## Explore Employment Past/ Work Related Skills and Strengths/ Barriers/ Employment

### Goals

When going through the process of completing this plan with youth, ESP should ask solution-focused, open-ended questions that has been described as the best way to assess youth according to the safety organized practice model and person-centered planning.

### Supportive Services Needs

Typical WIOA support services include gas cards, bus tickets, and paying for identification cards/drivers licenses. However, employment service providers may not know how to appropriately respond to depression, pregnancy, domestic violence, or fight versus flight behavior, in the same way a child welfare worker will. As a result, CWW can provide psychoeducation to ESP and share resources if needed. The CWW will also have the ability to refer the youth to additional services if needed, or contact other service providers on file for support.

Employment service providers can help keep youth safe by collaborating with the youth's employer to implement a safety plan that was created by another service provider. For example, creating security for the in the parking lot as they wait to get picked up from work or walk to the bus stop; or ensuring the safety of the youth by asking staff members to not disclose the youth's work schedule or contact information to others. These collaborative efforts are deemed essential in safety organized practice, person-centered planning, and interagency collaboration.

### Economic Literacy Assessment

The youth using this plan are being helped in one-stop career centers where the employee may not be social workers, and therefore will have a different kind of professional style than the youth may be used to. Moreover, these centers are about helping them become more work-ready, not necessarily preventing poverty. This is a huge problem considering reports from the literature showing a significant percentage of youth experiencing homelessness and receiving mean earnings below the poverty line. In the last decade, social work scholars have increasingly become committed to helping oppressed people through anti-poverty strategies. One of these strategies include the development of a financial literacy assessment (Economic Literacy, 2017; Strier, 2008).

Adding the Financial Literacy Assessment is a way to help the ESP identify need, resources, and readiness of the youth. It was created by social workers who incorporated social work roles, values, style, and professional standards in the assessment. Despite its social work foundation, the assessment is still applicable for Human Service practitioners such as employment service providers, to use (Economic Literacy, 2017). Adding an assessment tool like this could make it comfortable for all parties involved to participate by synthesizing social work and economics.

### Child Welfare Worker Signature

Employment service providers will need a signature from the child welfare worker as a way to confirm that they have informed them of the employment plan and know who to contact if special services are needed. Moreover, child welfare workers

need to make sure they are keeping in contact with employment service providers; inviting them to team meetings related to the Independent Living Program, such as youth Team meetings. Best practice is for the child welfare worker and the employment service provider to be present in person with the youth during the initial completion of the plan and the last review of the plan. Times in-between, the CWW and ESP can communicate via email or phone, while collaborating in-person during youth team meetings.

#### Stakeholders Contact Page

When issues arise, this plan will inform the ESP of those that can be contacted to provide support to them and the youth. The more people involved in their lives, the more likely the youth will obtain and maintain employment (Carter & Lunsford, 2005). These changes to the WIOA employment plan makes it more of a collaborative tool that is person-centered, with hopes that it will help improve the employment outcome of transitional age youth. Below readers can see how amendments have been applied to the original WIOA employment plan.

Figure 5.1 Original WIOA Individual Employment Plan

----- INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYMENT PLAN (Individual Service Strategy) -----

=====  
Academic Skills Level and Goal:

School Drop Out: Yes or No  
 High School Diploma: Yes or No  
 High School Equivalency: Yes or No  
 GED: Yes or No  
 GED Prep Class:  
 Date:  
 HiSET: Yes or No  
 HiSET Prep Class:  
 Date:

Academic Goal:

Short-Term Academic Goal:  
 Long-Term Academic Goals:

=====  
ACADEMIC ASSESSMENTS & RESULTS: CASAS

Reading (Pre-Test):  
 Basic Skills Deficient: Yes or No or N/A (Disability)  
 Score:  
 EFL:  
 Math (Pre-Test):  
 Basic Skills Deficient: Yes or No  
 Score:  
 EFL:  
 Requires Remediation (pick the lowest score): Yes or No  
 Math: Yes or No or  
 Reading: Yes or No

=====  
Career Exploration tool used:

Interest Profiler Results:

Career Pathway Choice: \_\_\_\_\_

Indicate the category career choice falls

(WEX): (check all that apply):

- Administrative and Support Services  
 Construction/Clean Energy  
 Healthcare Services (Life Sciences)  
 Information and Communication Technology  
 Installation, Maintenance and Repair  
 Agriculture, Food and Hospitality  
 Transportation and Production

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Employment Goal:

Short Term Employment/Educational Goal:

Long-Term Employment/Educational Goal:

- Post-Secondary: Yes or No
- Advanced Training: Yes or No
- Military: Yes or No
- Apprenticeship Program: Yes or No
- Occupational Skills Training: Yes or No

=====

WORK RELATED SKILLS:

=====

BARRIERS:

=====

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES NEEDS:

=====

GOALS:

- a. Short Term:
- b. Long Term (check required performance measures):
  - \_\_\_ Placement in EMP/Training/Education (Q2 Post-exit)
  - \_\_\_ Placement in EMP/Training/Education (Q4)
  - \_\_\_ Median Earnings
  - \_\_\_ Credential Rate
  - \_\_\_ Measurable Skills Gain

=====

Planned Service / WIOA Program Elements. Check the Appropriate activity (\*Required Activity):

- \_\_\_ \*Alternative Secondary School
- \_\_\_ \*Paid and Unpaid Work Experience
- \_\_\_ \*Leadership Development Opportunities
- \_\_\_ Labor Market/Employment Information
- \_\_\_ Supportive Services
- \_\_\_ Adult Mentoring
- \_\_\_ Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling
- \_\_\_ Occupational Skills Training
- \_\_\_ Financial Literacy Education
- \_\_\_ Entrepreneurial Skills Training
- \_\_\_ Post-Secondary Education and Training
- \_\_\_ Education offered concurrently with workforce preparation activities and training
- \_\_\_ \*Follow-Up Services

Participant Concurrence

- I have participated in the preparation of this Individual Service Strategy IEP (ISS)
- I understand and agree with IEP (ISS) program elements established for my participation in the program
- I agree to participate in program activities as assigned by my case manager to achieve program objectives
- I understand WIOA is not an entitlement program, and this ISS does not guarantee receipt of any services
- I understand that this IEP (ISS) and/or information in it may be released to appropriate WIOA and School personnel
- I understand that I have the right to obtain a copy of my IEP (ISS) at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Age at Program Participation

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Case Manager Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**SETA 7/1/2016 BH**

***IEP (ISS) must be reviewed Bi-monthly for WIOA Participants  
Case Manager must initial and date upon review***

- Monthly review:*** \_\_\_\_\_

### Figure 5.2 Amended Individual Employment Plan

Name  
 Age  
 Academic Skills Level and Goal:  
   School Drop Out: Yes or No  
   High School Diploma: Yes or No  
   High School Equivalency: Yes or No  
   GED: Yes or No  
   GED Prep Class:  
     Date:  
   HiSET: Yes or No  
   HiSET Prep Class:  
     Date:  
 Academic Goal:  
   Short-Term Academic Goal:  
   Long-Term Academic Goals:  
 \*Economic Literacy Assessment used:  
<http://ecolitsocialwork.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/unit201.pdf>

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***\*Economic  
 Literacy  
 Assessment***

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- Assesses economic well-being, stress, need, motivation; e.g. wanting to know if youth needs support with food and housing, wanting to know how the youth is coping in the current economic environment.
- Inclusive and culturally relevant; considers youth's race, ethnicity, age, immigration status, and if youth is a parent

## EXPLORE EMPLOYMENT PAST




---

*What Are We Worried  
About?  
(Example Questions)*

---

- What has prevented employment obtainment up until this point?
- What has prevented you from retaining employment?
- Why do you think you are here today?
- What are you worried about happening in the future as it relates to employment?

## WORK RELATED SKILLS AND STRENGTHS:




---

**What is working well?  
(Example Questions)**

---

- Identify Skills (Bilingual, Craftiness, Artist, Technological Literacy, STEM)
- Strengths:
  - What has worked well for you in the \*workplace (\*classroom if never employed before)? Why were you hired in the past?
  - Identify financially-related accomplishments, or activities that make you proud

---

BARRIERS:



---

**Complicating Factors  
(Examples)**

---

- Did not obtain diploma/GED
- Transportation
- Community Violence (e.g. gang, sex trafficking)
- Discrimination

---

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES NEEDS:




---

*Supportive Services  
(Examples)*

---

- Driver's License/ID Card
- Safety Plan
- Interview Clothes
- Bus Passes/Gas Cards
- Phone
- Community Involvement  
(Mentors)
- Therapy
- Safety Plan

---

Career Exploration tool used:

Interest Profiler Results:

Career Pathway Choice: \_\_\_\_\_

Indicate the category career choice falls

(WEX): (check all that apply):

- Administrative and Support Services
- Construction/Clean Energy
- Healthcare Services (Life Sciences)
- Information and Communication Technology
- Installation, Maintenance and Repair
- Agriculture, Food and Hospitality
- Transportation and Production

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Employment Goal:

Short Term Employment/Educational Goal:

Long-Term Employment/Educational Goal:

Post-Secondary: Yes or No  
 Advanced Training: Yes or No  
 Military: Yes or No  
 Apprenticeship Program: Yes or No  
 Occupational Skills Training: Yes or No




---

*Employment Goals*


---

- In 1 year...where would you like to be employed, how would you like your life to look?
- 10 years from now...where would you like to see yourself work? On what employment level (entry-level, manager, director)? Where would you like to see yourself living? What would Transportation look like?

## GOALS:

- a. Short Term:
- b. Long Term (check required performance measures):
  - Placement in EMP/Training/Education (Q2 Post-exit)
  - Placement in EMP/Training/Education (Q4)
  - Median Earnings
  - Credential Rate
  - Measurable Skills Gain

Planned Service / WIOA Program Elements. Check the Appropriate activity (\*Required Activity):

- \*Alternative Secondary School
- \*Paid and Unpaid Work Experience
- \*Leadership Development Opportunities
- Labor Market/Employment Information
- Supportive Services
- Adult Mentoring
- Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling
- Occupational Skills Training
- Financial Literacy Education (credit fraud check, emergency funds, budgeting)
- Asset Development Training
- Entrepreneurial Skills Training
- Post-Secondary Education and Training
- Education offered concurrently with workforce preparation activities and training
- \*Follow-Up Services

Participant Concurrence

- I have participated in the preparation of this Individual Service Strategy IEP (ISS)
- I understand and agree with IEP (ISS) program elements established for my participation in the program
- I agree to participate in program activities as assigned by my case manager to achieve program objectives
- I understand WIOA is not an entitlement program, and this ISS does not guarantee receipt of any services
- I understand that this IEP (ISS) and/or information in it may be released to appropriate WIOA and School personnel
- I understand that I have the right to obtain a copy of my IEP (ISS) at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Age at Program Participation

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Case Manager Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Child Welfare Worker Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

***IEP (ISS) must be reviewed Bi-monthly for WIOA Participants  
Case Manager must initial and date upon review***

***Monthly review:*** \_\_\_\_\_

STAKEHOLDERS

Name  
Relationship to Youth  
Email  
Phone

\*\*\*The questions/ options listed are just used to give service providers an idea of what to ask. These are not required questions. It is important for questions to be open-ended, specific to employment, and solution-focused.

Figure 5.3 Amended Individual Employment Plan

----- INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYMENT PLAN (Individual Service Strategy) -----

*FINANCIAL LITERACY ASSESSMENT*Assessment and the Economy

## The Psychosocial: Utilizing an Economic Lens in Assessment

- Identifying Information: Name, age, gender identity, racial or ethnic identity
- Current source(s) of income.
- Employment Status: Full-time, part-time, temporary, freelance.
- If employed: Employer, occupation, and industry. Any major changes in career, occupation or employment status in the past (six months/year)?
- Any downward occupational change in salary or status?
- Employment history:
  - Any significant financial changes? If so, are these changes related to the presenting problem, including but not limited to, substance abuse, depression, anxiety, anger outbursts
  - Number of persons dependent on youth's income?
  - If unemployed, length of time. Is the youth seeking employment?
  - Unemployment benefits? If yes, length of time in secure work environment (I.e.-threat of layoff or downsizing).
  - Financial assets (i.e. public benefits, tax credits, savings).
  - Homeowner?
  - Threat of foreclosure? If renting, threat of eviction?
  - Debt? If so, level and source of debt (i.e. credit card debt, student loan, medical expenses).
  - On fixed-income (SS, SSI, public assistance)?
  - Immigration status?
  - Undocumented?
  - Health Coverage: If yes, estimated out-of-pocket health care costs. If no, is this part of the presenting problem or concern? Does the youth have outstanding medical expenses?

## Reason for Referral

- Did economic distress such as job loss, food or housing insecurity lead to referral for services?
- Youth's Presenting Problem/Want/Need: Youth's Initial Expectation of Agency
- To what extent does youth present or perceive his/her problems to be caused or exacerbated by economics?
- What type of help is the youth seeking from your agency?
- Is the youth seeking financial assistance, housing, or food? Does the youth want the agency to assist him or her to achieve greater economic security?

#### History of the Problem/Want/Need

- If economic insecurity is identified, what are the contributing factors? When did financial problems begin? What previous efforts have been made to resolve them?
- Is there any involvement with other agencies that provide economic relief (i.e. food pantry, HRA, HUD?) Any previous contacts with these agencies?
- As the problem developed, were there changes in the youth's financial circumstances (i.e. change in job or assets, special expenses, etc.)?
- Economically risky behaviors (i.e. gambling, impulse buying)?

#### Bio-Psycho-Social Assessment

##### Current Functioning.

- How does the youth function with respect to his or her economic situation?
- Do factors exist that negatively affect the youth's ability to achieve economic stability?

##### External Factors.

- How does the current economic environment affect the youth? For example, does he or she work in an industry that is vulnerable?
- Is the youth a member of a demographic group that is especially vulnerable to poverty, such as Black, Hispanic, older adults, young adults, or single mothers? Indicate how the availability of the youth's financial resources, affect his or her ability to cope currently and in the foreseeable future.

##### Hope/Discomfort/Opportunity.

- Is the youth optimistic about his/her economic outlook?
- To what extent does the youth believe that change is possible?
- How challenging will it be to achieve economic security? For example, is the youth a single older adult on a fixed-income without savings, friends, or family?

##### Agreed Upon Goals and Plan.

- What goals and objectives for promoting greater economic security/increasing financial resources have been agreed upon?
- Who is going to do what task?
- Be specific and steps that will be taken.
- When, where and how will the tasks be performed?

*Assessment- Individuals & Families* (Holody, Herche, Mellor, Perez, & Wang, n.d)

Academic Skills Level and Goal:

School Drop Out: Yes or No  
High School Diploma: Yes or No  
High School Equivalency: Yes or No  
GED: Yes or No  
GED Prep Class:  
Date:  
HiSET: Yes or No  
HiSET Prep Class:  
Date:

Academic Goal:

Short-Term Academic Goal:  
Long-Term Academic Goals:

=====

ACADEMIC ASSESSMENTS & RESULTS: CASAS

Reading (Pre-Test):  
Basic Skills Deficient: Yes or No or N/A (Disability)  
Score:  
EFL:  
Math (Pre-Test):  
Basic Skills Deficient: Yes or No  
Score:  
EFL:  
Requires Remediation (pick the lowest score): Yes or No  
Math: Yes or No or  
Reading: Yes or No

=====

EXPLORE EMPLOYMENT PAST:

<p>What has prevented employment obtainment up until this point?</p> <p>What has prevented you from retaining employment?</p> <p>What are you worried about happening in the future as it relates to employment?</p>
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WORK RELATED SKILLS AND STRENGTHS:

Identify Skills: Bilingual? Craftiness? Artist? Technological Literacy? STEM?

Strengths: What has worked well for you in the \*workplace (\*classroom if never employed before)?

Why were you hired in the past?

Identify financially-related accomplishments, or activities that make you proud:

Please identify other work related skills:

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BARRIERS:

Did the youth obtain diploma/GED?

Are their transportation needs?

Is youth at risk of community Violence (e.g. gang, sex trafficking)?

Is youth at risk of discrimination?

Please identify other complicating factors:

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SUPPORTIVE SERVICES NEEDS:

Driver's License/State ID Card

Safety Plan (for intimidate partner violence or commercially exploited youth)

Interview Clothes

Bus Passes/Gas Cards

Phone

Community Involvement (Mentors)

Therapy

Safety Plan

Have youth identify other kinds of support they may need:

---

Career Exploration tool used:

Interest Profiler Results:

Career Pathway Choice: \_\_\_\_\_

Indicate the category career choice falls

(WEX): (check all that apply):

Administrative and Support Services

Construction/Clean Energy

Healthcare Services (Life Sciences)

Information and Communication Technology

Installation, Maintenance and Repair

Agriculture, Food and Hospitality

Transportation and Production

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

=====

Employment Goal:

Short Term Employment/Educational Goal:

In 1 year where would you like to be employed?

How would you like your life to look? (2-3 sentences)

Long-Term Employment/Educational Goal:

10 years from now, where would you like to see yourself work?

On what employment level (entry-level, manager, director)?

Where would you like to see yourself living?

What would Transportation look like?

Post-Secondary:                    Yes    or    No  
 Advanced Training:            Yes    or    No  
 Military:                            Yes    or    No  
 Apprenticeship Program:    Yes    or    No  
 Occupational Skills Training: Yes    or    No

=====

GOALS:

- a. Short Term:
- b. Long Term (check required performance measures):
  - Placement in EMP/Training/Education (Q2 Post-exit)
  - Placement in EMP/Training/Education (Q4)
  - Median Earnings
  - Credential Rate
  - Measurable Skills Gain

=====

Planned Service / WIOA Program Elements. Check the Appropriate activity (\*Required Activity):

- \*Alternative Secondary School
- \*Paid and Unpaid Work Experience
- \*Leadership Development Opportunities
- Labor Market/Employment Information
- Supportive Services
- Adult Mentoring
- Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling
- Occupational Skills Training
- Financial Literacy Education credit fraud check, emergency funds, budgeting
- Asset Development Training
- Entrepreneurial Skills Training
- Post-Secondary Education and Training
- Education offered concurrently with workforce preparation activities and training
- \*Follow-Up Services

Participant Concurrence

- I have participated in the preparation of this Individual Service Strategy IEP (ISS)
- I understand and agree with IEP (ISS) program elements established for my participation in the program
- I agree to participate in program activities as assigned by my case manager to achieve program objectives
- I understand WIOA is not an entitlement program, and this ISS does not guarantee receipt of any services
- I understand that this IEP (ISS) and/or information in it may be released to appropriate WIOA and School personnel
- I understand that I have the right to obtain a copy of my IEP (ISS) at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Age at Program Participation

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Child Welfare Worker Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Case Manager Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

***IEP (ISS) must be reviewed Bi-monthly for WIOA Participants  
Case Manager must initial and date upon review***

***Monthly review:*** \_\_\_\_\_

**STAKEHOLDERS**

Name  
Relationship to Youth  
Email  
Phone

#### Role of Employment Service Provider

- Take lead in employment plan completion
- Ensure youth complete a literacy assessment
- Learn the best way to contact the youth (e.g. txt, call, email)
- Use solution-focused, open-ended questions to assess strengths, barriers, and employment-related goals
- Share supportive services available and community referrals
- Incorporate Youth preferences and interests with agency goals
- Get signature of Child Welfare Worker
- Collect contact information of stakeholders
- Share worries, concerns, and resources with child welfare workers
- Provide copy of employment plan to the youth
- Provide a document laying out the “next steps”, that identifies, in 3-5 bullet points, the tasks in need of completion by the youth after every review
- Work with youth to select time and place of the monthly reviews

#### Role of Child Welfare Worker

- Attend initial completion and last review of employment plan
- Provide information on youth’s barriers, strengths, and needs
- Review employment plan and sign
- Invite employment service provider to attend (in-person or conference call), team meetings/ transition meetings
- Invite employment service provider to participate in the youth transition plan
- Provide contact information of stakeholders
- Share worries, concerns, and resources with employment service provider
- Remain in contact with employment service provider via phone or email

In this chapter I was able to introduce and describe my model of practice. I used elements of safety organized practice and person-centered planning to formulate assessment questions that allow the youth to identify their own strengths, needs, and goals. Moreover, stakeholder contact information and a requirement of the child welfare worker's signature was added with hopes that it encourages the act of interagency collaboration. A document explaining the role of the ESP and CWW was created to help providers understand their position in successful, employment plan completion. The youth service providers are expected to incorporate the youth's preferences and interests into their agency goals as a way to promote youth engagement, self-determination, and center youth voice. I will analyze my model of practice further in the next chapter.

## Chapter Six: Analysis & Discussion

The collaborative, person-centered employment plan was not created to address the types of employment-related resources available to transitional youth or measure their impact. Rather, it was created to address the need for stronger working relationships among employment service providers, youth, and child welfare workers. This chapter provides an analysis on this model of practice.

### **Analysis**

There is existing, consistent evidence that state resources represented as helpers (i.e., stakeholders) with strong ties, positively affect the outcome of job searching and job advances (Lin, Cook, & Burt, pp. 15). There is also existing literature recommending for the agencies providing services to youth, to develop agreements and work collaboratively in an effort to connect TAY to individualized support services and employment experiencing that offer living wages (Carter & Lunsford, 2005; Courtney, 2009; Graham, Schellinger, & Vaughn, 2015; Lenz-Rashid, 2006; Reilly, 2003). However, collaboration efforts are threatened if TAY are not using resources available to them due to lack of engagement; threat of safety; low self-esteem; weak working relationships (i.e. low intensity, interaction, and/or reciprocity) among youth service providers and the youth; the size of the youth's support network; and the amount, range and/or type of resources available to the youth. A youth's perceived lack of capability, in addition to the structural holes and constraints in agencies, have effects on them obtaining full time, long

term employment that pays a living wage, and completing employment related programs (Lin et al, 2001).

Lin et al (2001) describes three elements to social capital (i.e. resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions) that intersects structure and action. They report, social capital as a concept must be measured by the resources embedded in institutionalized social relations, the accessibility of these resources by individuals, and the use of these resources by individuals (pp. 12). Most scholars believe these elements are expected to benefit both the collective and the individual in the collective. Their model of social capital theory was created to make the use of resources more purposeful for and by the individual receiving services. This plan focuses on the element pertaining to the use of resources by individuals. I consider it an appropriate way to analyze the effectiveness of empowerment, self-determination and interagency collaboration in practice.

### **Discussion**

The desired outcome of the use of this employment plan is to empower youth to engage in their transitional planning process, as required in person-centered planning, and realize their optimal potential to achieve self-identified goals (Daining & DePanfilis, 2007). There is an inherent power dynamic between youth and service providers, which allows providers to hold power over those dependent on their services. Youth may experience youth service providers overtly endorsing their expert power over their own preferences and interest (Michaels & Ferrara, 2005). After asking solution focused,

open-ended questions, it is important for youth service providers to incorporate the youth's self-identified into their agency goals, or else the resources available to the youth become at risk of being ineffective. If a youth makes it clear that they are interested in becoming a nurse for example, encouraging and connecting them to corporations outside of Health and Human Services will less likely be significant to utility to that youth (Lin et al, 2001). I hope this employment plan will help shift some of that control from the service providers to the youth receiving services.

This plan was also made with the intent to keep youth service providers mindful of the youth's right to self-determination. Giving TAY the opportunity to manage their own social and work behavior will prepare them to exercise a level of independence typically required in most work places, and thus increase their chances of achieving success on the job (Carter & Lunsford, 2005). Additionally, the use of this plan promotes economic well-being by requesting for employment service providers to connect youth to full time, long term employment that pays a living wage whenever possible, in addition to preparing the youth for the workforce. The enhancement of their services are likely to empower transitional age youth by optimizing their economic and social outcomes, thus decreasing their chances of experiencing poverty (Kaplan, Skolnik, Turnbull, 2009).

The literature states that there is a need for more collaborative models, because studies show, youth do better and report higher levels of satisfaction when their team of service providers communicate and collaborate with one another. The general expectation is that the better the collaboration efforts, the more likely youth will use and

participate in the employment related resources available to them. This increases their chances of obtaining full time, long term employment that pays a living wage. A collaborative, person-centered employment plan will make it so that every service provider is on the same page by remaining informed of the progression or regression of the youth. It gives the service providers multiple opportunities to model collaboration and team work for the youth and shows the youth that they have a supportive, dedicated team that wants to help them achieve their personal goal.

The plan addresses strengths, needs, concerns, motivation, and goals. It is laid out in a way that makes deep rooted issues known, so that they can be addressed. Additionally, it expects providers to work collectively to share resources and address needs that act as barriers to economic advancement. After the initial completion of the plan, it would help the employment service providers and the youth decide whether or not that particular agency is a good fit for them. An employment service plan like this, keeps ESP and CWW honest about how involved they are with the youth. If the plan is appropriately completed, monthly reviews are made, youth team meetings are attended, youth voice is centered, and phone/email contacts are made; the ESP and CWW can say they have done their due diligence by providing adequate employment-related services to transitional age youth. Success of this model should be measured by comparing the completion of this plan to the level of the youth's engagement and own acquired goals, not entirely on the goals of the employment or child welfare agencies.

Here I was able to provide an analysis of the amended WIOA employment plan, based on elements of the social capital concepts and explained how it relates to reports from the literature. I also identified the anticipated outcomes and impact of this plan as well as provided a recommendation on how to measure its effectiveness. The concluding chapter will offer a summary of my research findings and how it is linked to the field of social work. I will also address the limitations of this plan.

## Chapter Seven: Discussion

In chapter six I identified the desired outcomes of this model of practice and discussed how the principles and elements of my plan will help those who use it achieve those desired outcomes. In this chapter, I will conclude my report of this employment transition plan by summarizing my research findings, identifying the limitations of the plan, discussing the implications of my research on the field of social work, and sharing my plans to present this model to service providers.

### **Summary of Research**

Transitional age youth represent a vulnerable population in our society. Over time, the American government has come to understand the value in investing in our youth who continue to overcome their own challenges and barriers. The advancement of policy has occurred on the federal, state, and local level, leading to more capital used to fund work related resources for transitional age youth. In doing so, legislatures have indirectly improved TAY's ability to maintain or obtain their physical health, mental health, and increase overall life satisfaction (Lin, Cook, & Burt, 2001).

Despite advancement in policy, transitional age youth face a hard time obtaining financial advancement and stability. The literature states that if the agencies providing supportive services to the youth can create or strengthen their collaborative efforts, it could lead to TAY feeling and being better prepared for employment. As a former youth employment service provider, I have experience working with the WIOA Individual Employment Plan with young adults. I decided to build on that plan to create a model

that is more collaborative and person-centered. The expectation is that when these youth can help personalize their own plan and see the collaborative efforts of their service providers, it will motivate them to be and remain committed to pursuing their self-identified employment-related goals. The level of dedication, collaboration and commitment required from ESP and CWW to complete the plan, is the kind of support foster youth need and sometimes have never experienced from the adults in their lives.

This collaborative, person-centered employment plan will better prepare transition age youth for the workforce because it encourages collaboration by requiring signatures, service provider involvement and contact information from various stakeholders. Self-determination and empowerment is promoted by asking the youth to identify their own goals, and for those goals to be incorporated into the employment plan. The monthly reviews give youth the opportunity to reflect on the plan, make changes as needed, and take the lead on their future. Workforce outcomes will improve due to the youth's level of engagement and collaborative efforts among their service providers.

#### **Limitations**

One of the many limitations of this amended WIOA employment plan is that it has not been used by child welfare workers, employment service, or transitional age youth in practice. A pilot study is needed to measure the effectiveness and feasibility of this model. Additionally, these amendments were based on my limited experience as an employment service provider at a One Stop center in Sacramento, CA and a child welfare

worker in training in Contra Costa County. By no means, is it meant to reflect the experiences of all employment service providers and child welfare workers.

Furthermore, according to the feedback from a one of the ILSP supervisors in Contra Costa County, youth providers may prefer this plan be facilitated online rather than on paper (C. Nishi, personal communication, 2017). In this day and age, technology can be more engaging to youth and more convenient for youth service providers trying to work efficiently. Moreover, after looking over the financial literacy assessment, there was a request to make it youth-friendly. There are issues raised in the assessment that typically do not pertain to the youth, such as foreclosure.

This employment plan does a great job assessing the financial need of transitional age youth. However, it may not be realistic for all the needs to be addressed. That is dependent on the types of services offered by the child welfare agency and employment agency, as well as the amount of funding they receive to create resources. For example, there may not be workshops available in the community that will teach youth about credit checks and credit fraud. This would be an unfortunate problem if patterns over time are showing that TAY are being victimized by credit fraud (C. Nishi, personal communication, 2017). A recommendation for this potential issue is to use the employment plan to track the need of the youth using this model. This collected data could be presented to agency directors and policy makers to show what is not being addressed, with hopes that funds can be provided to respond to need.

For youth that are able to successfully meet their employment goals, they still may not be able to obtain full time, long-term jobs that pay the living wage within their community as suggested. This can be due to the state of the economy on a national, state, and local level. If possible, employment agencies can again use this plan to track the employment outcome of transitional age youth, then report it to legislators to show a need for higher pay and job availability for the young adults in the community.

The literature pointed out a significant percentage of foster youth struggling with mental health. As a result, they may also struggle with substance abuse/dependency in an effort to alleviate their pain or stress, or in an attempt to self-medicate. Child welfare workers and employment service providers will need to collaborate on the different ways they can help transitional age youth get sober for work. This should start with them scaling for the youth's readiness and willingness to be sober. A suggestion is for the employment service provider to allow interested candidates to enroll in their program and give them time to sober up before drug testing (i.e. up to three months). The child welfare worker can provide psychoeducation to the youth related to substance abuse/dependency and its effects on employment, assess their substance abuse needs and/or refer them to additional services that can introduce them to healthier coping methods (Lenz-Rashid, 2006).

Be mindful that this employment transitional plan will not guarantee youth cooperation and involvement. Employment service providers and child welfare workers should be prepared for transitional age youth to challenge their authority and test

boundaries, which is a part of youth development and self-determination. As long as it does not put the youth's safety at risk, the behavior should be encouraged, as it is a natural part of the process of moving toward adulthood. Youth service providers should not see boundary testing necessarily as lack of engagement or disinterest in employment plan completion. Instead, when possible, it should be used as an opportunity to guide the youth to use their experiences with their development of self-determination as learning opportunities for decision making which can increase insight and strengthen personal autonomy (Michaels & Ferrara, 2005).

### **Implications for Social Work**

NASW Code of Ethics Preamble (2008) states:

The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. (NASW, 2008)

Transitional age youth are a vulnerable group that deals with the reality and/or threat of oppression and poverty. Providing them the adequate level of support they need to be prepared for the responsibilities and challenges of adulthood, enhances their human well-being, safety, and ability to achieve personal goals. This plan will ensure self-determination and empowerment, processes promoted by social workers and included in the National Association of Social Worker's Code of Ethics (NASW, 2008).

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 was created in an effort to improve the outcomes of foster youth transitioning out of care. The act included planning provisions to help improve TAY's transition to adulthood and would reinforce this model of practice. The Fostering Connections Act (FCA), requires the personalization of the transitional plan to be based on the direction of the youth. Additional mandates include, collaboration among TAY and their selected representatives, and a description of the programs and services recommended in their case plan. Employment service providers and child welfare workers can use the creation of case plans as an opportunity to provide trainings or presentations explaining agency roles and goals (Working with youth to develop a transition plan, 2013). The U.S. Department of Education, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the U.S. Department of Transportation, the U.S. Department of Labor, and youth and practitioners involved in the child welfare system, developed a toolkit that implements the FCA's planning provisions, to help youth access the resources needed to successfully transition into adulthood and obtain meaningful employment (Foster Care Transition Toolkit, 2016).

Child welfare workers are trained to know about the effect trauma has on a developing brain. They must also be aware of how a person's identity, level of resilience, behavior, mental health, and physical capability can impact their ability to obtain and retain employment. The role of the child welfare worker during the completion of this transition employment plan, is to ensure the safety and well-being of transitional age

youth by assessing their strengths and needs, helping youth maintain relationships with stakeholders, facilitating youth-centered team meetings, and making referrals for individualized support services when issues outside of the employment service providers scope of practice arise. The role of professionals working with people living in poverty and experiencing economic inequality should be to implement anti-poverty strategies that direct effective, accessible, resources to poor people and granting them control over their own living standards. That is what this employment plan intends to do. Social workers must also be aware of the limitations of community-based programs like those receiving WIOA funds. They can help them develop supportive strategies that better reflects the condition, desires, and aspirations of youth living in, or at risk of living in, poverty (Strier, 2008). Social work schools should infuse financial literacy curriculum in their classes so that Title IV-E students will feel comfortable and competent enough to provide employment support to disenfranchised transitional age youth, in an effort to help them obtain and retain employment. Additionally, students should study case management, which will give them the opportunity to practice service delivery, interagency collaboration, and identifying interventions aimed at meeting the specialized needs of TAY. Case management should be based on comprehensive strengths and needs assessments, person-centered planning, and youth empowerment.

As they use this plan, youth service providers are expected to be mindful of youth empowerment and self-determination as well as the importance of interagency collaboration. However, the idea of measuring collaboration efforts and commitments to

this plan can be challenging since those behaviors are subjective and the use of this plan is under the discretion of youth service providers. Which brings up the need for youth service providers to be held accountable for their collaboration efforts in a way that leads to information gathering, instead of placing more demands and punitive action on workers that already deal with high caseloads and documentation (Page, 2004). I hope providers agree to use this plan in its entirety because it could potentially be used to track and improve results appropriate to employment and child welfare agency goals.

### **Plan for Reporting**

This plan has been discussed with and presented to Contra Costa County's Independent Living Services Program leadership team. Feedback and suggestions were provided (C. Nishi, personal communication, 2017; D. Graves, personal communication, 2017). I have plans to present this model of practice to employment specialists that work with transitional age youth and Administrators in One Stop centers. I am interested in their suggestions and feedback based on the efficiency and effectiveness of this plan.

This concludes my presentation of a collaborative, employment transition plan, which was created with transitional age youth, child welfare workers and employment service providers in mind. If successful, this plan could potentially be of use to all youth and youth service providers. As the nation continues their commitment to helping older adolescents obtain meaningful employment, more collaborative models need to be created and evaluated in an effort to help prepare foster youth for their transition into a positive adulthood experience.

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