



# Mentoring Emancipated Foster Youth

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## Issue

Are the youth aging out of foster care informed about and receiving the services available to them through San Mateo County?

## Summary

Emancipated youth need a safe place to live, a high school diploma, health care, access to higher education, and quality employment in order to become self-sufficient and productive adults. In addition, and perhaps most important, emancipated youth need a long-term commitment from a loving, safe, and supportive adult or family to help them face the complexities of early adulthood. San Mateo County Human Services Agency Adolescent Services encourages foster youth to seek out an adult to serve as a mentor before and after they emancipate from foster care.

The County contracts with Youth and Family Enrichment Services (YFES), a private, non-profit agency, to provide services for emancipated foster youth. These services, designated *After Care*, provide emancipated youth with assistance in housing, education, health care and employment. The youth are *not* required to participate in these programs nor are they required to maintain contact with the County.

The Grand Jury recommends that the Human Services Agency continue working with community organizations and agencies to recruit and train adults so that each foster youth has a permanent connection with a caring, safe adult. Ideally, mentors should be established prior to the youth emancipation and continue in that capacity after emancipation.

## Background

Certain children come under the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court and are placed in foster care due to parental abuse or neglect; their parents can not or will not care for them. Federal and state laws mandate that counties provide for the care of these children. San Mateo County Department of Human Services Agency, Adolescent Services (Adolescent Services) provides services for youth prior to and after they emancipate from foster care. Before emancipation, the children, ages 14-18, participate in an Independent Living Program (ILP) with classes in: goal setting, health, hygiene, household management, cooking, money management, educational and vocational planning and employment.<sup>1</sup>

Foster youth who have not been placed with a permanent family by their eighteenth birthday will age out or “emancipate” from foster care. The County, however, provides for an extension of

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<sup>1</sup> San Mateo County Children and Family Services website, [www.co.sanmateo.ca.us](http://www.co.sanmateo.ca.us) .

foster care to the youth's 19th birthday so long as they are making progress towards their high school graduation and will obtain their high school diploma or equivalency before that date. County funds are used for this purpose.

On September 30, 2010, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed into law AB 12, the *California Fostering Connections to Success Act* that reads, in part:

. . . effective January 1, 2012, AB 12 extends foster care to eligible youth up to 19 years of age; effective January 1, 2013, extends foster care to eligible youth up to 20 years of age; and, effective January 1, 2014, extends foster care to eligible youth up to 21 years of age. In order to be eligible the youth must meet one of five criteria:

- a) Is completing secondary education or an equivalent credential;
- b) Is enrolled in a postsecondary or vocational education institution;
- c) Is participating in a program designed to promote, or remove barriers to, employment;
- d) Is employed for at least 80 hours per month; or,
- e) Is incapable of doing one of the above due to a medical condition, and that incapability is supported by regularly updated case plan information.<sup>2</sup>

As of 2014, under AB 12, the youth may opt out of foster care any time after the age of 18 but may petition the Court to reinstate them until the age of 21.

Federal and state mandates require a *Transition Plan* to be developed within the 90-day period prior to youth aging-out of foster care.<sup>3</sup> The Juvenile Court must approve this plan for each dependent youth. When granting emancipation, the Court issues a certificate to the youth authorizing their entitlement to *After Care* services comprised of: crisis management, alcohol and substance abuse counseling, education, employment, health, and housing assistance. It is anticipated that 30-40 of the County's foster youth will emancipate from foster care by the end of 2011<sup>4</sup>.

Emancipation is one of the two most critical times for children who are placed in foster care. The first critical time is when the youth is taken from his or her home to be placed in foster care. The second is the time when youth, who have not been placed in a permanent home, emancipate from foster care. Outcomes for youth emancipating from foster care are poor. One out of five foster youth in California ends up incarcerated and one in four becomes homeless within two years of aging out of the foster care system<sup>5</sup>.

There are Federal, State and County programs to assist emancipated foster youth with the transition from foster care to adulthood. The County contracts with a private, non-profit agency, Youth and Family Enrichment Services<sup>6</sup> (YFES) to provide *After Care* services for emancipated

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<sup>2</sup> AB 12 Assembly Bill – Bill Analysis Summary

<sup>3</sup> February 2010 Directive for the 90-day Transition Plan, State of California Department of Social Services, letter from John A. Wagner, Director.

<sup>4</sup> Interview of Human Services personnel.

<sup>5</sup> Fostering Educational Success: Legislation and Policies to Promote Positive Educational Experiences for California's Foster Youth John W. Gardner Center, November 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Youth and Family Enrichment Services will change its name to "Star Vista" on July 1, 2011.

foster youth. These services include: housing; case-management; utilities; phone and rental assistance; job readiness; food allowance; educational advocacy and support; post high school training; individual and group counseling; connections to family and community; an Independent Living (ILP) program; mentoring; apartment furnishings; manage emancipation fund for each foster youth; and post program/alumni assistance.<sup>7</sup> Some of these services are available to emancipated youth until they reach the age of 24.

YFES Case Managers attend Adolescent Collaborative Action Team meetings with the County, at least monthly, to provide information about: a) outreach result numbers; b) the services youth are participating in; and c) other agencies providing services to youth. YFES also encourages the other service providers to identify emancipated foster youth in their programs, for referral to the Case Managers. YFES is required to provide five hundred (500) youth outreach contacts per year. Contacts may be through mail, in person, or by telephone communication. Some youth may be contacted multiple times, others not at all. Recently, narrative accounts of contacts with emancipated youth have been initiated by Adolescent Services to maintain continuity when Case Managers change.

Studies show that emancipated youth need a safe place to live, a high school diploma, health care, access to higher education, and quality employment in order to become self-sufficient adults.<sup>8</sup> In addition, and perhaps most important, emancipated youth need a sustained commitment from a loving, safe and supportive adult or family to stay involved in their lives as long-term mentors.<sup>9</sup> Former foster youth, who can rely on an ongoing, committed relationship with an adult fare better in navigating the challenges of early adulthood. They tend to persist in education, remain employed, and participate more fully in their communities as adults.<sup>10</sup> However, merely knowing an adult to go to for support, advice and guidance does not provide an adequate safety net for youth aging out of care.<sup>11</sup> The youth must have a “stable relationship with an adult who is proactive in their commitment to provide long-term support”.<sup>12</sup> The public child welfare system alone cannot ensure that every youth will exit with a lifetime mentor. The California Youth Permanency Project study indicates that counties need to collaborate with all the parties who have a stake in ensuring the youth have this type of connection<sup>13</sup>. San Mateo County works with various agencies to assist foster youth in finding adult mentors. These include Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), a private, non-profit organization that educates adults to be mentors for foster youth and the National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness (formerly known as the California Youth Permanency Project, a pilot program to help youth find a long-term, committed, and caring adult).

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<sup>7</sup> Resolution No 070870, Agreement between the County of San Mateo and Youth and Family Enrichment Services, signed, June 22, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> California Connected by 25, *Efforts to Address Permanency Needs of Transitioning Foster Youth*, page 2.

<sup>9</sup> Expanding Transitional Services for Emancipated Foster Youth, Children’s Advocacy Institute, University of California, San Diego School of Law, January 2007, page vii.

<sup>10</sup> California Connected by 25 Efforts to Address Permanency Needs of Transitioning Foster Youth, page 3

<sup>11</sup> Understanding Outcomes for Youth Aging out of Foster Care, California Child Welfare Co-Investment Partnership, *Insights*, Vol. III, 2010

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*

<sup>13</sup> National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness, Seneca Center, [www.senecacenter.org](http://www.senecacenter.org)

## Investigation

The 2010-2011 San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) contacted organizations that advocate for children and youth to find out how San Mateo County assists emancipated youth in obtaining help when needed. The Grand Jury interviewed key personnel at those organizations, reviewed their programs, and examined internal documents and tracking mechanisms. Those organizations were:

- San Mateo County Adolescent Services Agency
- Youth and Family Enrichment Services Agency (YFES)
- Silicon Valley Community Foundation

In addition, the Grand Jury:

- Attended an informational meeting for Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)
- Reviewed research studies regarding the outcome for emancipated youth in the United States, California and San Mateo County
- Reviewed information from the National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness
- Composed and mailed surveys to ten (10) emancipated youth soliciting feedback about post-emancipation services. Surveys included an addressed and stamped return envelope. No responses were received.

## Findings

1. Before emancipation, San Mateo County's Human Services Agency Adolescent Services (Adolescent Services) informs foster youth of the services available to them through its *After Care* program.
2. Adolescent Services requests foster youth before emancipation to identify "People who can help me with my (transitional) plan."<sup>14</sup> The designated mentors may not have the ability or training to help the youth.
3. Adolescent Services works with Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and the National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness, Seneca Center to attempt to find permanent mentors for emancipated foster youth.
4. Adolescent Services does not have a formal recruiting or training program for mentors of emancipated foster youth,
5. Adolescent Services does provide some outreach to emancipated youth not currently participating in services through YFES. YFES reports only the number of contacts made for these youths.
6. Though not required, Adolescent Services *After Care* Case Managers have begun keeping their own narrative record of conversations whenever contact is made with emancipated youth.

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<sup>14</sup> Adolescent Services binder "Stepping Stones to My Future"

7. Adolescent Services has a pilot program that provides young people in foster care with a binder, “Stepping Stones to My Future,” containing information on how to obtain housing, employment, and education after emancipation. This binder includes pages for the youth to record the mentor’s contact information and to store all legal documents. The County also has a Facebook page that provides useful information for emancipated youth.
8. Youth who emancipate from foster care are not obligated to maintain contact with Adolescent Services or provide updates of their contact information.

## **Conclusions**

1. Quality programs are available to emancipated youth; however, convincing them to enroll is challenging.
2. Adolescent Services has difficulty remaining in contact with all emancipated youth since some are not interested in continuing any contact with county agencies.
3. YFES only provides Adolescent Services with statistics on their outreach contacts. This lack of narrative doesn’t provide Adolescent Services with enough information about the needs of the youth in order to help them.
4. It is critical for the future success of the foster youth that they have a permanent, committed and qualified mentor prior to their emancipation from foster care.
5. Without a formal training program, mentors may not have the right information and tools to fulfill their responsibilities.
6. Adolescent Services, despite budget constraints and a limited number of social workers and case managers, is commended for the work it does in assisting young people who age out of foster care.

## **Recommendations**

The 2010-2011 San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors direct the San Mateo County Human Services Agency Director to:

1. Develop and implement a program to recruit and qualify mentors with the goal of providing a mentor for every foster youth who emancipates from foster care. For example, hold a Youth Mentor Fair; speak at PTA meetings, religious organizations and sporting events.
2. Develop and implement a training program for mentors about the services that are available to the youth.
3. Determine if the youth-designated mentors are qualified and understand their responsibility in that role.

4. Amend the contract with Youth and Family Enrichment Services (YFES) to require YFES to provide qualitative as well as statistical information on outreach to emancipated youth who are not receiving services.
5. Ensure that Adolescent Services Staff maintain logs and narratives of all contacts made with emancipated foster youth to ensure continuity if personnel change.
6. Evaluate the pilot *Binder Program* to determine if it is an effective method to assist the emancipated youth in obtaining the services that are available.
7. Evaluate Conclusions 1 through 5 listed above and the above listed Recommendations and determine if any additional actions are necessary to address the concerns that have been identified.



**COUNTY OF SAN MATEO**  
Inter-Departmental Correspondence  
County Manager's Office



**DATE:** August 25, 2011  
**BOARD MEETING DATE:** September 13, 2011  
**SPECIAL NOTICE/HEARING:** None  
**VOTE REQUIRED:** Majority

**TO:** Honorable Board of Supervisors  
**FROM:** David S. Boesch, County Manager  
**SUBJECT:** 2010-11 Grand Jury Response

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Accept this report containing the County's response to the following 2010-11 Grand Jury report: Mentoring Emancipated Foster Youth.

**BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION:**

The County is mandated to respond to the Grand Jury within 90 days from the date that reports are filed with the County Clerk and Elected Officials are mandated to respond within 60 days. To that end, included is the County's response to the Mentoring Emancipated Foster Youth issued on June 16, 2011.

Acceptance of this report contributes to the Shared Vision 2025 outcome of a Collaborative Community by ensuring that all Grand Jury findings and recommendations are thoroughly reviewed by the appropriate County departments and that, when appropriate, process improvements are made to improve the quality and efficiency of services provided to the public and other agencies.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

There is no Net County Cost associated with accepting this report.

## Mentoring Emancipated Foster Youth

### Introduction:

Assembly Bill 12 (AB12), the California Fostering Connections to Success Act, was signed into law in September, 2010, and its provisions are to be implemented effective January, 2012. AB12 requires that California counties extend foster care services for eligible youth beyond the age of eighteen years of age and, at full implementation, until the age of 21 years. Children and Family Services (CFS) will begin a planning process to implement AB12 for San Mateo County's emancipated youth and consideration of the Grand Jury's recommendations will be incorporated into this process. It is estimated that approximately 100 emancipated youth at any point in time could benefit from mentoring services. The Human Services Agency will be in compliance with AB12 by January 1, 2012, as mandated by the State of California.

### Findings:

*Please note: The Grand Jury Report uses "Adolescent Services" broadly to refer to Children and Family Services' (CFS) Long Term Foster Care Unit (LTFC), Independent Living Program/After Care (ILP), and/or StarVista After Care.*

**Grand Jury Finding Number 1.** Before emancipation, San Mateo County's Human Services Agency Adolescent Services (Adolescent Services) informs foster youth of the services available to them through its *After Care* program.

**Agree.** Through collaboration between the ILP and LTFC units, youth in foster care placements both in and out of county are informed of services available to them following emancipation.

**Grand Jury Finding Number 2.** Adolescent Services requests foster youth before emancipation to identify "People who can help me with my (transitional) plan." The designated mentors may not have the ability or training to help the youth.

**Agree** with the first sentence. **Disagree partially** with the second sentence as mentors may have the ability or training to help the youth if they are from one of the formalized mentoring organizations such as Friends for Youth, the CASA Program, and Jeremiah's Promise.

**Grand Jury Finding Number 3.** Adolescent Services works with Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and the National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness, Seneca Center to attempt to find permanent mentors for emancipated foster youth.

**Disagree partially.** LTFC and ILP staff does work with CASA to find long term



mentors for emancipated youth, but is not currently working with the National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness, Seneca Center. LTFC and CASA are in agreement that collaboration and communication can be improved between the two agencies.

**Grand Jury Finding Number 4.** Adolescent Services does not have a formal recruiting or training program for mentors of emancipated foster youth.

**Agree.**

**Grand Jury Finding Number 5.** Adolescent Services does provide some outreach to emancipated youth not currently participating in services through YFES. YFES reports only the number of contacts made for these youths.

**Disagree partially** with the first sentence. ILP does provide some outreach, but it is not consistent and there is no clear protocol as to when to do the outreach. Emancipated youth are not obligated to maintain contact with staff, but if youth contact the Human Services Agency, primarily ILP, they are referred to StarVista for Aftercare Services (HSA contracts with Star- Vista to provide the aftercares services). Before youth emancipate, LTFC and ILP staff spend time ensuring that the youth are aware of post-emancipation resources and services. **Disagree partially** with the second sentence as StarVista collects and submits both data and qualitative narratives in their reports to HSA.

**Grand Jury Finding Number 6.** Though not required, Adolescent Services *After Care* Case Managers have begun keeping their own narrative record of conversations whenever contact is made with emancipated youth.

**Agree.** StarVista Case Managers, who provide aftercare services, have been (for a period of time) documenting narratives regarding contacts with emancipated youth on an ongoing basis.

**Grand Jury Finding Number 7.** Adolescent Services has a pilot program that provides young people in foster care with a binder, "Stepping Stones to my Future," containing information on how to obtain housing, employment, and education after emancipation. This binder includes pages for the youth to record the mentor's contact information and to store all legal documents. The County also has a Facebook page that provides useful information for emancipated youth.

**Agree.** However, it is no longer a pilot and has been implemented for transition aged youth.

**Grand Jury Finding Number 8.** Youth who emancipate from foster care are not obligated to maintain contact with Adolescent Services or provide updates of their

contact information.

**Agree.** However, effective January 1, 2012, through implementation of AB12, we will be maintaining contact with all eligible youth requesting to continue foster care services and will be providing an array of services to them.

**Recommendations:**

**The 2010-11 San Mateo Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors direct the San Mateo County Human Services Agency Director to:**

- 1. Develop and implement a program to recruit and qualify mentors with the goal of providing a mentor for every foster youth who emancipates from foster care. For example, hold a Youth Mentor Fair; speak at PTA meetings, religious organizations and sporting events.**

**Response:**

**Requires further analysis.** Youth may have multiple adults in their lives who occupy mentoring roles, such as social workers, therapists, group home staff, educational liaisons, tutors, teachers and extended family members. More formal mentoring programs are available to San Mateo County youth such as Friends for Youth, the CASA Program and Jeremiah's Promise. Formal mentors with these formal organizations are screened and adequately trained. Informal mentors in less formal relationships may need training and support.

These formal mentoring programs currently have waiting lists of both youth and potential mentors, so recruitment of adults who are interested in formal mentoring is not an issue. The challenge in meeting the need is a lack of adequate funding to provide both the training and the 24/7 supervision that are required to provide this service to emancipated foster youth. Within 90 days, CFS will further analyze this recommendation to explore strategies and the fiscal impact of ensuring that all emancipated foster youth have access to a mentor if they choose to have one. Access and connection to a mentor is recommended to begin prior to emancipation from the foster care system. Currently all foster youth do not have access to a formal mentor.

- 2. Develop and implement a training program for mentors about the services that are available to the youth.**

**Response:**

**Requires further analysis.** Currently there are formal training programs, e.g. Friends for Youth, CASA that are familiar with services for youth. Within 90 days, HSA will develop a program to train informal mentors, not only in the area of

available resources and services, but also specialized trainings such as how to address mental health issues and strategies for working with young adults ages eighteen and older.

**3. Determine if the youth-designated mentors are qualified and understand their responsibility in that role.**

**Response:**

**Requires further analysis.** Formal mentors through established programs, e.g. CASA, Friends for Youth, currently receive background checks and training and their qualifications are reviewed on an ongoing basis. Informal mentors may understand their roles and responsibilities, but are less likely to be aware of available resources. By January 1, 2012, for non-minor dependents who wish to receive AB12 services (additional services to be provided to emancipated foster youth beginning January 2012), HSA will design and implement a program requiring that informal mentors have a background check and screening; and will develop an orientation and training for these mentors regarding their responsibilities and roles. These services would be dependent upon the agreement of the informal mentors.

**4. Amend the contract with Youth and Family Enrichment Services (YFES) to require YFES to provide qualitative as well as statistical information on outreach to emancipated youth who are not receiving services.**

**Response:**

**Recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented within 90 days.** StarVista (previously YFES) currently provides aggregate data on outreach efforts as well as qualitative data in quarterly reports. HSA will either amend the contract or notify StarVista by letter regarding: the need for a formal protocol for outreach to emancipated youth who are not receiving services (the required number and frequency of contact efforts); the need for more individualized reporting; a procedure for a collaborative approach to sharing updated contact information between the two agencies; and the need to refer any emancipated youth who contacts them to a mentoring program to determine the number of emancipated foster youth requesting mentoring services.

**5. Ensure that Adolescent Services Staff maintain logs and narratives of all contacts made with emancipated foster youth to ensure continuity if personnel change.**

**Response:**

**Requires further analysis.** Currently LTFC/ILP services are chronicled, documented and followed for each emancipated foster youth receiving services. In addition, services provided by the Employment Services Specialists' staff are also inputted into the Child Welfare Service Case Management System (CWS/CMS),

which is a permanent record that provides continuity even if personnel change. Within 90 days we will revise our procedures to insure that reviews are completed periodically to confirm documentation of contacts.

**6. Evaluate the pilot *Binder Program* to determine if it is an effective method to assist the emancipated youth in obtaining the services that are available.**

**Response:**

**Requires further analysis.** Given that the Binder Program was piloted in regional offices beginning January 2011, it has not been in place long enough to evaluate its effectiveness. The binder will be introduced to all youth at their initial transitional conferences (senior year of high school) and we will obtain feedback from the youth to determine its usefulness at the youths' 90 day transitional conferences (90 days before the youth emancipates from the foster care system). Its goal is to assist the youth/young adults in having one coordinated resource to both store their documents and acquire relevant resource information

Given that youth/young adults are often technologically adept, it has been noted that the binder may be just one form to engage youth in developing a way to organize their important information. Suggestions have been made and will be explored to provide youth with a technological method for accessing the information currently contained in the binder, whether with a flash drive, on a website or as a download on the laptop the Agency provides to each ILP graduate.

Within 90 days, HSA staff will survey current ILP graduates to find out if they still have the binder; if the binder has proven useful to them; and if there is a technological method for conveying the information that they would find to be more useful.

**7. Evaluate Conclusions 1 through 5 listed above and the above listed Recommendations and determine if any additional actions are necessary to address the concerns that have been identified.**

**Response:**

Conclusions 1, 4 and 6 seem true as stated.

Conclusion 2: HSA and contractor will look into providing additional outreach to the young adults who may no longer be connected with services.

Conclusion 3: StarVista does provide qualitative information in monthly meetings that occur between contractor and HSA as well as in their reports to the County. HSA would need to explore how that information can be inputted in the current CWS/CMS system.

Conclusion 5: It is difficult to assess as there are various types of mentors for emancipated foster youth and some of these young adults may have more than one person in their lives that provide mentor-like services and supports. Those that are in formal programs receive information about resources; however, informal mentors may not have such information so it would be useful for them to have contact information to refer young adults for assistance.