



understand that so many former foster care kids don’t have savings and don’t have the skill set to get the kind of jobs you need to pay for housing when they turn 18. But PLACES works with you to find a job, and allows you some time to get on your feet with a system of rent payment subsidies that decrease every month for the two years you are in the program so that by the end of the 24 months you fully pay your own rent.

When I first heard about PLACES I could not believe that there was a program where I could get housing with a rental payment program that actually lets me save money. Between the budgeting skills I learned, the subsidized rent, and working a lot, I finally feel secure in my finances. I even saved up enough money to buy myself a computer, which is so important for my future if I want to pursue music production.

The people in PLACES put a lot of trust in us, which I think is important to the success of the program. There are inspections, and there are always people to talk to if you are having problems with your apartment or your roommate, but I feel really independent living in my own apartment that I take care of and pay for. The apartments are really nice too! In this housing market, it is such a gift to have an apartment that is not only clean and safe, but affordable.

Being independent has also brought me closer to my biological mother. Now that I am living on my own and am in control of the direction I want to take my life, our interactions are much healthier.

Without V.O.I.C.E.S., I would probably be a statistic like so many of my peers that went through the foster care system. The transition into adulthood is much more difficult than just not having the necessary tools to climb the steps; it’s as if you can’t even FIND the steps. Now I have this community that not only showed me how to succeed, but remains with me throughout the process. That’s one of the best parts about V.O.I.C.E.S.; they are all about building community, so it’s a lot of fun to be involved with the program.

As one of the first participants of the THP-Plus program, I volunteer at PLACES to educate foster care kids about their options once they leave the system. THP-Plus helped to make me the person that I am today, and my hope is that every former foster care kid has the same opportunity.

Petey Burns, 20, was the first participant in PLACES, NAPA. Besides attending a local junior college and maintaining two jobs, Petey spends time as a volunteer for PLACES. For more information on Progress Foundation’s housing program, PLACES, please contact Program Director Tes Salvatore at (707)257-9732.

UPDATE THP-PLUS PARTICIPANT TRACKING SYSTEM UPDATE

The recently developed THP-Plus Participant Tracking System is designed to collect consistent demographics and outcomes about THP-Plus participants statewide, to be used for program self-evaluation and state-level program advocacy. A secure online database, the Participant Tracking System was developed by the John Burton Foundation and will be available for counties and providers to use free of charge. To date, more than 30 counties across the state have indicated they plan to participate in the system. Statewide participation will ensure that consistent data about the impact of THP-Plus is available to help protect the program from budget cuts, so we are strongly encouraging all counties to join! (Note that Family to Family counties participating in CC25I can use ETO to collect compatible data and participate in THP-Plus tracking.)

Counties that have already signed up will be receiving use agreements and more information soon. For more information about the THP-Plus Participant Tracking System, you can download an online “webinar,” which includes a system demo, from the THP-Plus website at www.thplusplus.org under Trainings - Past Trainings. Further questions can be directed to Sara Kimberlin, sarak@johnburtonfoundation.org or 415-693-1326, or Michele Byrnes, michele@johnburtonfoundation.org or 415-693-1323.



Welcome to **THP-Plus News**, a quarterly newsletter of the THP-Plus Statewide Implementation Project. The Project is a partnership between the John Burton Foundation, the California Department of Social Services, and the Corporation for Supportive Housing. Our goal is to expand access to THP-Plus, California’s only housing program for former foster youth. THP-Plus provides former foster youth with affordable housing and a rich array of supportive services, including job training, educational advocacy, mentoring, and case management.

INSIDE:

- Youth Perspective
- Practitioners Corner
- Participant Tracking System Update

To submit a question to a practitioner or to comment on the newsletter, e-mail nicole@johnburtonfoundation.org

This is a publication of the John Burton Foundation for Children Without Homes – a non-profit organization based in San Francisco, California dedicated to improving the quality of life for California’s homeless children and developing policy solutions to prevent homelessness.

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Expanding Housing Options for Youth In Transition

YOUTH PERSPECTIVE INTERVIEW WITH PETEY BURNS, THE LONGEST STANDING PARTICIPANT OF PROGRESS FOUNDATIONS' PLACES

My name is Petey Burns and I am 20 years old. I entered the foster care system when I was sixteen years old. I transferred foster care homes three times before I settled into the home I stayed in until I was eighteen.

I eventually moved to Napa, California, where I hooked up with a program for foster care kids in the county called V.O.I.C.E.S. V.O.I.C.E.S. is like a onestop center of support for both foster and emancipated youth. The staff introduced me to the PLACES THP-Plus housing program that was about to open. I was set up with a Life Coach, a mentor whose goal is to help you get the skills to live independently. My Life Coach helped me map long-term goals for school and my career, and helped me work on my interpersonal relationships. Before I met with my Life Coach I had no intention of going to college; since then I have completed four semesters at a community college, and plan on applying to some UC’s where I want to study business and maybe music production.

All of these life skills are tied into the THP-Plus housing program within V.O.I.C.E.S, called PLACES. It’s hard for a lot of people to



PETEY BURNS

CONTINUED ON BACK

PRACTITIONER'S CORNER

INTERVIEW WITH SUSAN PARADISE OF SANTA CRUZ COMMUNITY COUNSELING CENTER AND DEBORAH BRESNICK FROM SANTA CRUZ COUNTY FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Let's begin with a brief history of the Santa Cruz County THP-Plus Program

Between 2001 and 2005 Santa Cruz County developed a variety of housing programs in an effort to accommodate the various needs of our foster care youth. The need for a THP-Plus program has been apparent to us for years, and the John Burton Foundation was integral in helping us determine what needed to be done to finish the process.

We have been working with Santa Cruz Community Counseling Center as the county ILP provider since 2001. This collaborative relationship proved to be invaluable as we have evolved our transitional housing program from THPP (serving in-care youth) to THP-Plus (serving former foster youth). Having worked with the same provider since 2001, there was a real shared vision between county and provider.

What factors played a role in your decision to become THP-Plus Certified?

Funding has always been an issue for our transitional housing programs. When there was a county match required for THP-Plus, we couldn't get the buy-in at the county level. However, Senate Bill 1808, which eliminated the county match and made the program 100% state funded, was a transformative moment for our county to really go for THP-Plus certification. For both the county and our provider, THP-Plus emerged as a thoughtfully designed, well developed, and highly researched program with the right options and flexibility to really work for the emancipated youth in our county. The variety of housing models combined with the statewide support solidified our decision to implement the program.



SUSAN PARADISE (LEFT) AND DEBORAH BRESNICK (RIGHT)

Can you describe the process of implementing THP-Plus in your county? What were the greatest challenges?

Because of the unique relationship that has evolved over years of collaboration between the county and the housing provider, our transition into THP-Plus was relatively seamless. The greatest challenge for us was understanding the specific requirements and figuring out exactly what the state needed to know, and then what was included in the various required documents according to these stipulations. The John Burton Foundation made the pertinent certification materials and templates readily available. Furthermore, any questions we had were addressed with informed and accessible people within the Foundation.

For both the county and the provider it was important that we thoughtfully design the program, and not just write down a letter of intent for the sake of satisfying the requirement. We deliberated extensively on all aspects of the program we wanted to implement, such as addressing the participants as legal adults. We wanted to be sure that the program we were proposing lined up with the THP-Plus regulations and also stayed true to what we knew would work for the youth in our community.

Your county nearly doubled its capacity in February 2008. What was it like absorbing twice as many young people into your program in such a short period of time?

Since the program started we knew we could easily have at least 20 participants, but we started with 10 housing slots. We wanted to ensure sufficient funding and build a program that would be sustainable.

We will definitely have 20 participants by the end of February. There was never any doubt that there would be sufficient social service resources, and again this goes back to our long term collaboration with the provider. Securing the housing is a challenge and will always be a challenge, given the housing situation in our county. However, the flexibility of housing options available within THP-Plus has made this issue a little easier to contend with as we have a greater pool of units to choose from. Our increased capacity enabled us to offer a young man a slot in the program the same day he came in to interview.

The results of the participant survey conducted for the THP-Plus 2006-07 Annual Report bears testimony to the participants' high degree of satisfaction with the level of independence afforded by this program. What challenges, if any, do you encounter when negotiating between participant autonomy and full subscription to THP-Plus regulations?

The structure of THP-Plus is framed by a principle of maximum tenant autonomy as a strategy for preparing the participant for complete self-reliance. In our experience this principle is not just a productive teaching device for participants, but also exactly what they want out of a housing program. If the program were more restricted, there probably would be more issues. Our provider meets with each participant once a week, as is the protocol. The county does provide some oversight and checks in with our provider at regular intervals, but we do not get overly involved. Like most aspects of our program, this is largely a result of the confidence and trust built between the county and provider over the past several years. There is no need to obsessively check on one another to make sure the rules are being followed, because we know they are. Trust and collaboration between the county and the provider is key. All of this would have been a lot harder and taken a lot longer if we weren't able to rely on each other the way we can.

Please describe the housing models you chose to implement. How was your choice a reflection of the specific young adults you are serving?

In the beginning, our focus was strictly on providing housing options where the youth would live on their own, so we currently provide both single- and scattered-site housing. In addition, through our specialized teen unit in child welfare, we have been able to see over the years that there is a definite group of youth in our county who would benefit from a host-family model housing structure. So we plan on doing some assessment to better determine the need and will issue a Request for Proposals to find the right provider.

We learned from THPP that we will never again do group housing situations where a single house has four to six units. It is working much better for the participants to have studios and apartments, even if they are in the same building as other THP-Plus participants. Some of the youth in our program express a desire to have a roommate, others don't. We have one youth who has recently chosen to live by herself. At the beginning of the program this wouldn't have been as successful, but now she has realized that she wants even more privacy and independence. Having the option to move people around as they transition in their own lives is key to providing the best arrangement for all our youth.

What advice would you give to county organizers currently in the certification and start-up stage of their THP-Plus program?

I can't stress enough the importance of a close relationship between the county and provider, which has a lot to do with the trust that comes over time. We have built a shared vision together and still do not always agree. However, we are able to resolve any disagreements easily by always keeping in mind the shared vision we have. Bottom line, we both truly care about the youth we are serving and enjoy working together to provide the best program we can.

If you would like additional information about Santa Cruz County THP-Plus Programs please contact Susan Paradise at (831)-459-0444 x 202 or susan.paradise@sccc.org and Deborah Bresnick at (831)-454-4285 or deborah.bresnick@hra.co.santa-cruz.ca.us