

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES IN THP-PLUS:

**PROVIDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND SUPPORTIVE SERVICES TO
YOUTH FORMERLY IN THE FOSTER CARE AND JUVENILE PROBATION SYSTEMS**



**A TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE DOCUMENT DEVELOPED BY THE
THP-PLUS STATEWIDE IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT**

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THE JOHN BURTON FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN WITHOUT HOMES**

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This guide is the product of the Transitional Housing Placement-Plus (THP-Plus) Statewide Implementation Project, a two-year collaboration between the John Burton Foundation, the Corporation for Supportive Housing, and the California Department of Social Services. The goal of the Project is to reduce homelessness among former foster youth by expanding access to THP-Plus, the only fully state-funded housing program targeting this growing population. In order to achieve this goal, the Project is facilitating the development and expansion of THP-Plus programs in counties across California.

The project consists of efforts at the state, county, and local levels to promote the development, management, oversight, and evaluation of THP-Plus. These activities include:

- Refinement of THP-Plus program development guidelines
- Training and technical assistance for THP-Plus providers and county agencies
- Development of monitoring and evaluation policies

Through these activities, the THP-Plus Statewide Implementation Project is working toward three important outcomes:

- 1. Decreased homelessness among former foster youth.** The Project is working to increase statewide capacity to serve approximately 1,000 homeless former foster youth by the 2008-2009 fiscal year. At this service level, approximately one in four young adults ages 18 to 24 in need of housing will be able to access the program.
- 2. Established network of THP-Plus practitioners and supporters.** The Project is developing an organized coalition of nonprofit organizations, county administrators, young adults, foster care providers, THP-Plus providers, families of origin, and others who are informed and engaged in the policy-setting process as it relates to housing for homeless former foster youth. The development of this coalition is vital to ensure ongoing public funding of THP-Plus and the creation of programs that embody youth development principles.
- 3. Expanded knowledge of effective housing approaches for former foster youth.** The Project places a high priority on the quality of housing, not simply the quantity of it. Toward that end, the Project is expanding the knowledge base among practitioners and supporters about the housing and service needs of homeless former foster youth and effective practices to meet those needs. This information will be used to strengthen programs and program oversight by counties and the state. It will be disseminated through a publication documenting the status of THP-Plus statewide.



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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The purpose of this guide is to assist community-based organizations and county child welfare agencies in the development of high quality housing for young adults formerly in the foster care and juvenile probation systems that meet THP-Plus eligibility criteria. It will also provide helpful information to county administrators who are responsible for monitoring local THP-Plus programs, and to advocates committed to the well-being of former foster and probation youth.

The guide is organized according to the 15 supportive services that are required of all THP-Plus programs. It also provides recommendations for eight additional supportive services, which are not required but are strongly recommended. Depending on the nature of the service, these recommendations explain required provider activities, explore alternative approaches, and offer a comprehensive explanation of service components. For most services, the guide also outlines special considerations for certain populations, including pregnant and parenting participants; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) participants; and participants with disabilities. THP-Plus providers also certify that they do not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, or disability.



Throughout the document, you will seek links both within the text and in the left-hand column alongside the text, like the ones you see here. The computer icon refers to related websites that may assist you in various aspects of implementation. A list of websites for interviewed providers, along with other helpful websites, is included in the **Resources** section of the guide. The paper stack icon refers to documents you can use as templates in the development of your THP-Plus program. Templates are available at www.johnburton-foundation.org.

PRACTITIONER INTERVIEWS

The recommendations in this guide were developed based on the extensive interviews with practitioners that currently provide housing and supportive services to youth formerly in the foster care and probation systems. These practitioners include:

- Bill Wilson Center (Santa Clara County)
- First Place for Youth (Alameda County)
- Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services (Los Angeles County)
- Hillside Youth Moving On (Los Angeles County)
- Larkin Street Youth Services L.E.A.S.E. Program (San Francisco)
- Rising Tide Communities, Orangewood Children's Foundation (Orange County)
- St. Anne's (Los Angeles County)
- Stanislaus County Community Services Agency (Stanislaus County)
- Tri-City Homeless Coalition's Project Independence (Alameda County)
- United Friends of the Children (Los Angeles County)

Together, these practitioners have provided safe, affordable housing for over 300 young adults annually for an average of six years. Of these providers, six are currently utilizing THP-Plus funding. The other four are experienced practitioners in housing for older youth and offer valuable recommendations in that area.

Recommended practices were selected for their supportive nature, creativity, and practicality, as well as their ability to build self-sufficiency and advance participants' transition to independence. We hope the guidance provided is helpful as you begin or continue the THP-Plus development process.

YOUNG ADULT INTERVIEWS

In addition to extensive practitioner interviews, young adult participants in THP-Plus were interviewed to share their perspectives on various features of current THP-Plus programs. The perspectives gathered here will be valuable in helping to develop new programs. However, it is essential to engage young adults in your own community in the THP-Plus development process.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THP-PLUS

The Transitional Housing Placement-Plus (THP-Plus) program was established as a statewide program by the California State Legislature in 2001 to address the needs of a growing yet largely overlooked group of at-risk young adults: those who “age out” or “emancipate” from the state’s foster care system. Each year in California, approximately 4,200 young adults exit foster care when they turn 18 or 19, depending on their educational status. Of this total, two out of three have an “imminent housing need,” according to a 2002 study by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS).

The THP-Plus program provides affordable housing and comprehensive supportive services for up to 24 cumulative months to help former foster care and probation youth ages 18 to 24 make a successful transition from the child welfare and probation systems to independent living. The program is administered and regulated by CDSS, which distributes THP-Plus funds to the county child welfare agency. The county agency then provides these services and/or contracts for services with private, nonprofit organizations, which are certified by the county agency.

THP-Plus providers contract with the county child welfare agency to provide rental subsidies and all supportive services for a pre-approved THP-Plus rate. Experienced practitioners in some of the highest cost areas of the state receive a rate of \$1,800 to \$2,250 per youth, per month, which allows them to fully cover their costs and provide optimal supportive services.

2001

Assembly Bill 427 established THP-Plus, California’s first investment towards ending homelessness for emancipated foster and probation youth.

2002

Assembly Bill 1119 de-linked THP-Plus from the Supportive Transitional Emancipation Program (STEP), removing a key barrier to implementation.

2004

THP-Plus was changed from a one-time allocation to an annual appropriation.

2005

Assembly Bill 824 extended the THP-Plus age limit from 21 to 24.

2006

Senate Bill 1808 removed the 60% county match requirement, making the program fully state-funded, removing another key barrier to implementation.

2007

THP-Plus moves toward full implementation with 46 counties with approved THP-Plus plans

THP-Plus is grounded in four key principles. These principles provide a framework toward an overarching goal of THP-Plus: to prepare youth for independent living and self-sufficiency. Each THP-Plus program should be designed so that at the completion of the 24-month program, participants have the skills and resources they need to live on their own.

KEY PRINCIPLES OF THP-PLUS



Age appropriateness: THP-Plus programs must recognize that emancipated foster youth are legal adults and should be subject to fewer restrictions than those who are younger.



Distinct from foster care: THP-Plus programs must have program rules that are distinct from those that apply to youth currently in the foster care system.



Greatest amount of freedom possible: THP-Plus programs must allow young adults to have the greatest amount of freedom possible in order to prepare them for self-sufficiency.



Strong emphasis on supportive services: THP-Plus is not solely a housing program. Instead, it is a supportive housing program, which regularly provides young adults a wide range of supportive services.



YOUTH DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

Experienced THP-Plus practitioners highlight the importance of utilizing a youth development framework in the provision of THP-Plus services. The framework outlined below was created by the Community Network for Youth Development and highlights five programmatic features to help young adults achieve successful long-term outcomes.

In developing your THP-Plus program, consider how to integrate these features into each of the 15 supportive services:

1. Safety, so young people feel:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physically and emotionally secure.
2. Supportive Relationships, so young people can experience:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance, emotional and practical support. • Adults and peers knowing who they are and what's important to them.
3. Meaningful Youth Involvement, so that young people can:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be involved in meaningful roles with responsibility. • Have input into decision-making. • Have opportunities for leadership. • Feel a sense of belonging. • Experience expectations for success.
4. Skill Building, so that young people can have:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging and interesting learning experiences which help them build a wide array of skills. • Experience a sense of growth and progress.
5. Community Involvement, so that young people gain:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An understanding of the greater community. • A sense of being able to make an impact in their community.

The system has barriers for youth so when they emancipate from foster care, they have to learn things for the first time that non-system youth have already learned from their families.

– Howard Jacobs, GLASS

Good case management is the cornerstone of a successful THP-Plus program. THP-Plus participants are at an important stage in their development, straddling the worlds of teenager and adult, and case management will need to reflect an understanding of this unique transitional stage. It is important to remember that most young adults are not financially independent from their parents until the age of 26, and many continue to live at home well beyond that age. THP-Plus participants will benefit from a combination of services that includes an emphasis on support and guidance while also treating them with the expectations and respect appropriate for a young adult.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

Interactions With Participants

- *Utilize a youth development framework.* This approach emphasizes supportive relationships, meaningful participant involvement, and skill building to support participants in achieving positive outcomes. Case managers using this approach work with participants to develop a set of goals and priorities, including independent living, educational, and vocational goals.
- *Maintain a low case-manager-to-participant ratio.* THP-Plus guidelines recommend a ratio of one case manager to 12 non-parenting participants. For pregnant and parenting participants, the recommended ratio is one case manager to eight participants. This low ratio allows for adequate case planning and service provision while also protecting against case manager burn-out. It also allows case managers to work closely with each participant in an individualized way, and to determine the most effective way to foster their success.
- *Meet with participants frequently.* In the first six months of the program, youth require a minimum of four to six hours of assistance per week. Much of this assistance is provided by the case manager, but it may also include the assistance of the housing or employment specialists. The need for support is most intense in the beginning of the program, as youth get established in their new homes, go shopping for groceries and basic household items, enroll in appropriate public benefits, and become familiar with the program expectations and services. Over the course of the program, providers

may find that participants do not have the same need—or the time—for this level of case management. However, even as participants become more self-reliant and are able to manage on their own, they will benefit from regular meetings (at least one to two hours weekly) with their case manager for counseling and support.

- *Utilize an appropriate assessment tool collaboratively with youth.* With the right assessment tool, THP-Plus providers and participants can work together to understand the educational, employment, and health status of the youth and develop meaningful goals based on that status. In addition to utilizing the required STEP-TILP, a number of providers use the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment.



We call our case managers “youth advocates” to restore some humanity to the situation—these are not cases, these are people.

– Deanne Pearn,
First Place
for Youth

Hillsides Youth Moving On uses a customized 15-component life skills evaluation that includes money management and consumer awareness; food management; emotional and physical health; the development of an educational plan; and job seeking skills.

- *Offer mobile case management.* Meetings are more productive and more likely to occur when they are held in a location that is easily accessible and comfortable for the participant, such as his or her apartment. Additionally, meeting in participants' apartments will give case managers an opportunity to see how well participants are managing daily living tasks and maintaining their apartments. In a scattered-site model, weekly home visits are essential for consistency and monitoring participants' progress with independent living skills.
- *Assign separate case managers to each roommate.* In the case of conflict between roommates, separate case managers can facilitate mediation. At First Place for Youth, for example, separate case managers discuss roommate conflicts individually with participants before meeting together, thereby diffusing tension and ensuring that individual participants feel their concerns are being addressed. Facilitating weekly house meetings for roommates provides an effective way to proactively address concerns and foster strong communication. At the beginning of the program, case managers can establish the structure and tone for the meetings, with the idea that the participants ultimately conduct the meetings themselves (see Roommates: Selection, Training, and Support section for related recommendations).
- *Maintain regular, youth-friendly hours.* Clearly established work hours ensure that case managers are accessible to participants at predictable times. Set work hours should be based on the typical schedules of participants in the program, often 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. rather than 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. This approach includes establishing clear protocols for phone communication in programs; providing participants with emergency contact information for their case managers; and clarifying the rules for contacting case managers during the off-hours (see 24-Hour Emergency Crisis Intervention and Support section for related recommendations).

Hiring and Supporting Case Managers

- *Give case managers titles that emphasize the program's utilization of a youth development framework.* Titles such as Youth Advocate, Parenting Advocate, Youth Services Coordinator, or Advocacy Counselor indicate that THP-Plus is distinct from the child welfare and probation systems. These titles also suggest that the relationship between participants and their case managers will be a partnership focused on support and opportunity. Participants expressed their support for those job titles that indicate a greater level of respect and understanding of their status as young adults.
- *Hire highly-qualified and experienced case managers.* Successful practitioners typically hire case managers with a master's degree in social work or psychology and at least three years of experience working with transition-age youth. Case managers with a bachelor's degree and more than five years of experience are also effective. Successful case managers have a strong understanding of adolescent development, prefer extensive field work over office-based work, and enjoy providing hands-on instruction in basic living and financial skills.
- *Offer competitive compensation.* To attract and retain highly qualified case managers, experienced providers offer competitive wages and benefits. To determine what is competitive in your region, consult the California Wage and Benefits Survey. Financial compensation can also be provided through comp time, flexible working schedules, and progressive family leave policies. Additionally, THP-Plus providers that offer case managers a clear career path report higher rates of retention.



By gaining a commitment from the residents to work directly with us on their finances, grades, and job commitments, we are able to indirectly identify and assist residents with the underlying personal issues that are integral to their success.

– Paul Eberly, MFT, Rising Tides Communities

CASE MANAGEMENT

Relationships beget relationships. Staff members need to model respectful relationships with each other, create positive relationships with participants and, in this way, teach youth how to form good relationships.

– Toni Heineman,
A Home Within

- *Maintain consistency in staffing.* Because THP-Plus providers are working with a population that has typically experienced many placement changes, it is beneficial when participants can rely on case managers to stay with them over the course of the program. Good pay and benefits, professional development, and opportunity for advancement help to attract and retain well-trained, experienced, and passionate staff.
- *Offer professional development training.* Continuing education on at least a monthly basis will help case managers improve their skills and promote a culture of professionalism. Staff members should have input on the training curriculum, which can be adapted to address specific issues that arise within the program.
- ➔ *Offer clinical supervision:* Good clinical supervision will put case managers in the best position to deal with common psycho-social problems among former foster youth. A recommended strategy for clinical supervision involves working with a highly qualified consulting therapist who can provide clinical training and support to case managers on an individual or group basis. At times, case managers may suffer from “secondary trauma,” in which they internalize the experiences communicated to them on a regular basis by participants. Secondary trauma may manifest itself in a variety of ways, including staff frustration and disappointment with participants, burnout, a sense of emotional numbness and/or an inability to process the information they receive in a constructive way.

At the start of a program, case managers will benefit from a half-day to full-day training focused on complex trauma. Complex trauma refers to the repeated trauma that occurs within the care giving system, whether by parents, foster parents, or group home staff, and/or lack of a consistent caregiver. After the initial training, the consultant holds a weekly meeting with all case managers to identify specific issues that have arisen among participants, and identify a case management strategy that is non-

judgmental and constructive. Providers have found that over time, these meetings can be held every other week and eventually monthly. Meetings can be conducted via conference call, combined with periodic face-to-face meetings.

Effective clinical supervision also includes training on how to distinguish between situational stresses and those related to more intense mental health issues. Understanding this distinction will assist case managers in identifying situations in which participants will benefit from formal mental health services. Case managers will benefit from consultation to assist participants with adopting health-promoting behaviors and positive coping strategies.

- *Take care of the caretakers.* Burnout is a common problem among case managers. Following are suggested steps that experienced providers have taken to help case managers maintain a healthy work-life balance.
 - ➔ *Supervision:* Good, consistent supervision to discuss their frustrations and accomplishments can help case managers reduce the day-to-day stresses of the job.
 - ➔ *Teamwork:* A team model helps to spread the workload. For example, case managers can work together to create and evaluate case plans, rather than having to address every issue on their own.
 - ➔ *Networking:* Providers can create opportunities for THP-Plus case managers to make contact with their counterparts in other supportive housing programs and agencies serving emancipated foster youth so that they can check in and “compare notes.”
 - ➔ *Recognition:* Many case managers have experienced a feeling that they always receive the “hand-me-downs.” Providing regular staff recognition will help case managers feel appreciated.
 - ➔ *Breaks:* Providers should arrange and accommodate regular “protected time” for case managers who are not on call. Rotating on-call responsibilities also limits long hours (see 24-Hour Crisis Intervention and Support section).

The transition to adulthood is a critical time for young adults to learn how to manage their finances and pay bills in a timely fashion. While these skills are essential, the means to accomplish them in a THP-Plus program are sometimes overlooked in an effort to address seemingly more important issues such as education and employment. However, the development of strong personal financial management skills is one of the key objectives of the THP-Plus program and one from which participants will benefit their entire lives.

The challenge THP-Plus providers face in assisting participants in the development of these skills is striking the balance between promoting self-sufficiency and providing a safety net. The most effective approaches are those that simulate the financial responsibilities participants will take on once they leave the program, but also offer a programmatic “back-up” in case participants experience financial challenges. Approaches that gradually increase a participant’s responsibility for payment of utilities, telephone, and rent are also effective. The least effective approach is one in which all bills are paid by the THP-Plus program in the name of convenience for the participant and/or the program. When this approach is employed, THP-Plus participants are denied the opportunity to develop their personal financial management skills and will be ill-equipped at the conclusion of the program.

RENT PAYMENT

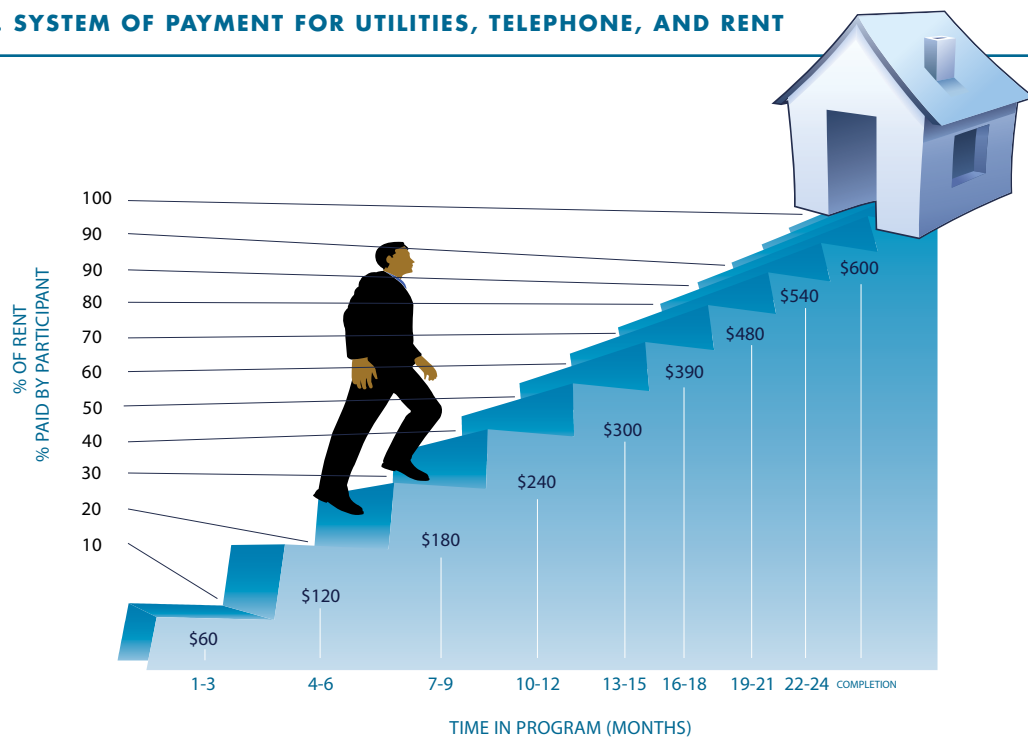
At its heart, THP-Plus is a housing program, and educating participants to pay rent on a consistent and timely basis is one of the program’s most important outcomes. A participant who masters this skill may live in a variety of different housing settings, but he or she will be far more likely to retain stable housing.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

- *Build youths’ capacity to pay rent over time.* A number of THP-Plus programs utilize a graduated rent payment, where participants pay an increasing share of the rent over time. This approach to rent payment has a number of strengths:
 - *Provides deep rental subsidy when youth need it most:* First, it provides a very deep rental subsidy when participants need it most: in the beginning of the program, when many may be unemployed or marginally employed. As their participation in the program continues, THP-Plus participants receive vocational training, employment assistance, and financial aid advocacy, and their capacity to pay rent increases. During this same time, the rent payment required by the rent schedule also increases.

- *Is a regular reminder of time-limited nature of THP-Plus:* A graduated rent payment schedule creates upward pressure on participants to pay an increasingly higher level of rent. It is essential that the rent schedule is provided to participants at the beginning of the program and is regularly discussed in case management meetings. As rent increases approach, hard realities, such as the need to secure additional income by working extra hours, securing a higher wage job, accessing additional financial aid, or pursuing short-term training to move out of low-wage, service sector employment can be addressed.
- *Is easy to administer:* Programs that base rent on a percentage of a participant’s income report spending a considerable amount of time tracking down pay stubs, calculating rent, communicating the rent level, and then collecting rent. In addition, when a participant has received extra income in one month, they are often unprepared for the resulting rent increase the following month, long after the additional income has been spent.





→ *Clear to participants:* Under a graduated rent payment schedule, the amount of rent required over the 24 months of the program is clearly delineated at the beginning of the program and does not need to be repeatedly calculated or communicated. Participants are informed of the rent schedule at the start of their program, and receive regular reminders and preparation in the weeks leading up to each rent increase.

The most important step to making implementation of a graduated rent payment schedule a success is selecting rental units for THP-Plus that are “ultimately affordable” to the participants. By ultimately affordable, we mean that a participant who receives intensive, high-quality THP-Plus services over 24 months is able to pay the rent through a combination of financial aid, earned income, and public benefits at the completion of the program.

The ultimate affordability of the rent, along with access to public transportation, retail shopping, and community safety, are the key criteria for a THP-Plus provider to consider when deciding where to locate its apartments. If the rental units that are secured are not ultimately affordable

to the THP-Plus participant, then the participant will not be successful in gradually moving towards payment of market rate rent. If the THP-Plus model employed is one where the participant assumes the lease after completion of the program, it is particularly important that the rental unit is ultimately affordable or the participant will not be able to maintain the rent payment and will need to move from the housing. Regardless, participants should be educated about the model so that they can use these same criteria when finding housing on their own in the future.

- *Expect non-payment of rent.* It is important for THP-Plus providers to be prepared for participants to have problems paying rent and

to be patient as they develop the necessary skills. As first-time tenants, this behavior is age-appropriate and often not an indication of their commitment to the program, but rather a step on their path towards economic stability. And just as young adults who are late with dorm fees are not made homeless, neither should a participant in THP-Plus.

The challenge in addressing late rent payment is balancing the individual needs of the participant with a commitment to educating young adults about the norms of tenancy (e.g. timely rent). An important tool in this process is the rent payment agreement (see opposite page for more information about the rent payment agreement).

Regular job loss may be the result of specific problems the participant may be experiencing and not the typical job switching of a young adult. It is important for case managers to determine whether or not this is the case and to address these problems with the participant.

- *Provide parents extra rental support.* Maximum efforts should be made to locate THP-Plus units for parenting participants in permanent, affordable housing so that the amount paid by the participant by the conclusion of the program is achievable. When participants are living in market-rate apartments, a good alternative is to employ a model where parents are not required to move at the conclusion of the program, allowing them to avoid the costs of setting up a household again. Participants will also be well informed at the beginning of the program about the amount of rent they will be required to pay at the end of the THP-Plus program.
- *Remember loss of income due to parental leave.* Some participants may be unable to work for a period of time due to a pregnancy-related disability and all participants who give birth will require time off work to bond with their child and acclimate to their life as a parent. Both scenarios will likely result in a reduction in income, potentially making rent harder to pay. THP-Plus programs should support new parents by having a rent payment system in place where rent is either waived or reduced. Providers should also work closely with parenting participants, whose ability to pay rent may be severely impacted by infant childcare costs.

Rent Payment Agreement

The rent payment agreement, which provides an effective tool in addressing late payment of rent, includes several important features.

It should be:

- *Realistic.* The process used to deal with late rent payments needs to be realistic and provide participants with enough time and assistance to repay their late rent. For example, a common and age-appropriate scenario is when a participant is unable to pay rent after losing a job. The time frame for the rent payment agreement may need to extend over several months in order to provide the participant with enough time to secure a new job, get a first paycheck, pay the next month's rent, and make back-payments on the late rent. Setting too short a time frame will cause the participant to panic, leading to rash decision-making.
- *Specific.* Good rent payment agreements are specific and outline exactly what is expected of the participant in order to be in compliance when rent payments are late. The agreement is revisited at each case management meeting and integrated into the case management plan. For example, the rent repayment agreement may name specific vocational training programs that the participant will participate in or job search activities that the participant will conduct, and the participant's and others' specific responsibilities in accomplishing these goals. The assistance provided to the participant in this time of crisis should also be made explicit, so that the participant is clear about what will be provided and what will not.
- *Time-limited.* While most THP-Plus participants will develop a rent payment agreement and comply with it, a small number will either be unable or unwilling to do so. In this scenario, it is important to re-assess the participant for a disability or condition which may be preventing the participant from successfully complying with the agreement. If this is not the case, it is important to have a maximum amount of rent that the participant can owe before requiring the participant to exit the program. For some current practitioners, this amount is the equivalent of six months rent. The rationale behind this requirement is that as the outstanding rent mounts, participants often become more desperate and compromise their decision-making skills.

- *Accommodate needs of youth with disabilities.* Programs assisting young adults with serious mental or physical disabilities should consider locating their programs in permanent, affordable housing and implement a graduated rent schedule based on the rent charged by the affordable housing property operator. While the rent is technically affordable at the beginning of the program, it still poses challenges for participants with disabilities, many of whom are on a fixed income. A graduated rent schedule provides them with the time to develop this financial management skill.
- *Offer an initial grace period.* Some THP-Plus providers waive rent for the first month or two, while the participants are securing jobs and getting oriented to their new surroundings.
- *Refund rent.* Some THP-Plus programs deposit all or a portion of the rent paid by participants into a savings account to be refunded to participants at the conclusion of the program. Other THP-Plus programs use the rent paid by participants to help fund the program. Both options have strong rationales. Contributing all or a portion of the rent payment to participants' savings accounts ensures that participants complete the program with a reserve of funds available to them. Funds saved for the participant may also be used in the case of a financial emergency. Conversely, THP-Plus providers report that using participants' rent payments for program costs allows the program to maintain a lower THP-Plus rate and thereby serve more young adults. Additionally, this practice makes the rent payment more "real" to participants. It also makes it easier to collect rent from participants when they know that their rent is helping other young adults.
- *Recognize timely rent payment.* Some THP-Plus providers offer incentives when participants pay rent on a timely basis, such as an additional deposit into their emancipation fund. However, the primary message to send to participants is to pay rent on time because that is required in the "real world" outside of THP-Plus. Incen-

tives and disincentives can add variety to a program, but the goal of THP-Plus is to educate participants about how to live outside the world of a program, where bonuses for expected behavior (such as timely payment of rent) are not provided.

UTILITY AND PHONE PAYMENTS

Utility and telephone payments provide an excellent opportunity for participants to develop personal financial management skills. As with rent payment, the importance of teaching participants how to manage utilities can be overlooked in the quest to address issues such as education, employment, and health. However, participants who have mastered the ability to manage their utility expenses and make timely payments will be much more likely to have a well-lit, warm house, with a phone to receive and return calls about jobs.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

- *Require participants to pay some or all of their utilities and telephone bills.* When possible, it is advisable for participants to have utilities in their name. In the case of roommates, one roommate will open the gas and electricity account and the other roommate will open another account, such as cable. This approach requires a high level of support by the THP-Plus program and while it can be challenging, the educational opportunities it affords participants make it well worthwhile. Strengths of this approach include:
 - *Provides real-world experience:* Allowing participants to have utilities in their name creates a direct relationship between the participant's use of the utility and the amount the participant pays for it, providing them with the opportunity to learn how to control both. This relationship models the "real world" and prepares participants for life after the completion of the THP-Plus program.

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The California LifeLine Service offers low-income households a discount on their local telephone bill.

- *Establishes credit:* Participants who have utilities in their name also benefit by building their credit through timely payment of bills.
- *Brings to light credit problems:* Participants whose Social Security numbers have been unknowingly used to open utility and other accounts are made aware of it, and the THP-Plus program can work with the utility and the participant to correct the situation. The time to address this problem is when the participant has the support and advocacy of the THP-Plus program.
- *Builds communication skills:* Requiring youth to work collaboratively in the payment of their utilities is challenging. However, with the support of well-trained staff members, it builds essential communication skills and teaches responsibility.
- *Support youth through case management and roommate meetings.* In order to take full advantage of the benefits participants gain by paying their own utilities, the THP-Plus program will need to offer its participants strong, consistent case management. During the first six months of tenancy, reviewing utility bills will be a regular component of the case management meeting. Programs that do not stay on top of utility use and bill payment will do their participants a disservice by potentially allowing bills to grow out of control. Utilities are also a regular topic in roommate meetings, where they can be a source of friction. Working with roommates to manage their utilities together is challenging, but provides an excellent training opportunity for life after the program.
- *Maintain an emergency utility fund.* A number of THP-Plus programs maintain an emergency utility fund, to which participants may apply to receive assistance if necessary. As with rent, participants benefit when providers determine clear rules for using the emergency fund and articulate them to participants.
- *Simulate bill-paying experience.* It is important to note that depending on the configuration of the THP-Plus housing, it is not always feasible to put utilities in the participant's name. A THP-Plus program that master-leases an entire building may receive a single utility bill, making it impossible for participants to have utilities in their name. In situations such as these, programs can replicate the bill-paying experience by issuing their own utility bills and requiring payment, either as part of rent or in a separate payment.
- *Help manage cell phones.* It is also important to work proactively with participants in the management of their cell phone expenses. In today's environment, young adults commonly forgo the expense of land lines and communicate exclusively with their cell phones. This raises the importance of the cell phone considerably, as it becomes an essential tool in the job search process. THP-Plus programs can assist participants in their job search process by working collaboratively with them to ensure their cell phone plans are competitive and that their service stays connected. Regularly disconnected service undermines the job search process and impedes communication with THP-Plus program staff members.

The social security numbers of many foster children have been used illegally to open credit accounts of all kinds, leaving those youth with bad credit through no fault of their own. AB 2985, signed in September 2006, requires county child welfare agencies to conduct credit checks for all California foster youth after turning 16. THP-Plus programs can confirm that program participants have had credit checks and help them clear up any problems that may appear in the credit report.

One of the most important goals of THP-Plus is to assist participants with developing job skills, securing meaningful employment, and increasing their earnings over the course of the program. Participants will be responsible for fully supporting themselves at the completion of the housing program, and will benefit from supportive services and training to build their capacity to earn a living wage.

In developing their job readiness and training component, THP-Plus providers will need to determine if these services would best be provided in-house, through collaboration with another organization, or through a hybrid model. Regardless of whether a program decides to contract the services, they should still plan to partner with other organizations that provide job training services so participants have as many options as possible.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

- *Put youth in developmental context.* It's important to remember that it is normal for young adults to hold a number of jobs and often benefit from the opportunity to try out different employment opportunities. Many college students have a different job every school year and every summer, without serious consequences. The challenge is to support THP-Plus participants during routine job changes while also helping them to understand how to do so professionally and the real-life impacts of these decisions. Consistent job loss may be the result of specific issues that case managers will need to address with participants.
- *Consider capacity of the local One-Stop Career Center.* California State One-Stop Career Centers offer job training, placement, and retention services. Traditionally, their services have been geared toward adults seeking to enter or re-enter the workforce. In recent years, however, the Employment Development Department has made a concerted effort to make one-stop centers more youth-friendly. The results of these efforts vary by community: some cities have vibrant one-stop centers that attract large numbers of young adults, while others may seem intimidating or unwelcoming to young adults. If these or other off-site services will be used, THP-Plus participants may benefit from staff traveling with them to the first several appointments or classes.



At Larkin Street Youth Services, participants with little or no job experience apply to attend a three-week, 45-hour Job Readiness Class. Larkin Street offers a weekly stipend that increases with regular attendance: \$50 after completion of the first week, \$75 after completion of the second, and \$100 after completion of the third week and a final project. If participants are late to class or miss a day, their stipend is reduced. If they miss more than two classes, participants are asked to re-apply for the next class series.



- Consider partnering with community-based employment programs. Providers have the option of collaborating with a local youth employment agency that specializes in providing training, support, and retention services to transition-age youth. A good example of this type of program is the California Gateway Initiative, which operates on a number of California community college campuses. This one-semester learning community includes educational counseling, social support, and intensive math and English skills training to prepare participants for meaningful employment and postsecondary education. The Gateway Initiative assists participants in moving into high-growth, high-wage career pathways, certificate, and college degree programs. Job Corps is another option that frequently allows participants to live on- or off-site, and offers health care, meals, job preparation and GED training, vocational training, and job placement services.



- *Offer extensive job readiness training.* To adequately prepare participants for success in the workplace, several existing practitioners offer a comprehensive job readiness class. A job readiness class that mirrors an employment experience will be the most helpful in preparing participants for the world of work. A recommended curriculum includes:
 - ➔ Vocational goal setting and skills assessment, including basic literacy skills. Basic computer skills training can be provided during a job readiness class, or in a separate technology training.
 - ➔ Basic job-seeking skills training, such as how to search for a job, resume writing, and application completion (even handwriting improvement). Mock interviews will assist participants in preparing for job interviews.
 - ➔ Workforce expectations training, such as employer expectations, professional dress standards, timeliness, and workplace conflict resolution training. .
 - ➔ A stipend for work clothes or a community work-clothes closet. Some providers offer a complete work outfit at the completion of their job readiness program.
- *Ensure adequate staffing.* An educational and employment specialist can help THP-Plus participants to develop and pursue their educational and employment plan. Because this job is very specialized and doesn't involve a specific caseload, this staff person can work with more participants, possibly up to 25 participants at a time.

- *Offer an internship program.* For participants who are not yet ready to enter the workforce full-time, existing providers have established internship programs that provide on-the-job training. After classroom preparation, internships provide a valuable opportunity for participants to try out their new skills and to get a better understanding of workplace expectations. Paid internships are the most effective and allow participants to build their capacity to support themselves. Stipends can be provided by the employer, by the THP-Plus provider, or arranged through another specialized employment program, such as the San Francisco Mayor's Youth Employment Program. The internship program at St. Anne's in Los Angeles makes a great effort to place participants in positions with career advancement possibilities, emphasizing a career track over a job.
- *Develop jobs with potential employers.* "Job development" refers to the process of fostering relationships with local employers and working with them to establish jobs for specific populations. This can be an entrepreneurial process, driven by the creativity and motivation of the staff person. In a THP-Plus program, job development can be done by an employment specialist or job developer.
- *Provide job placement services.* THP-Plus provides a perfect opportunity for participants to build their job experience and increase their wages over time. Providers can work with participants to identify jobs that pay a living wage (at least \$10 per hour in most communities) and offer benefits. Helping participants recognize the importance of health and retirement benefits is a service that will assist them well into adulthood. Developing a transportation plan and traveling on public transit with participants to interviews and to their first day at work can alleviate anxiety and can assist them in developing an effective and reliable transportation strategy.
- *Provide job retention services.* Retaining a job for any length of time is one of the greatest challenges for former foster youth. Effective retention services involve revisiting many of the same topics that were originally addressed during job readiness training, with a specific focus on immediately addressing any issues that have arisen on the job. The employment specialist may assist participants with conflict resolution with co-workers or employers. Because many foster youth do not have the opportunity to develop consistent relationships while in foster care, their first reaction to conflict may be to quit the job. Providers can help them to understand the importance of fostering professional relationships and understanding the differences between casual and workplace communication. Even with preparation, participants may be surprised by some unspoken workplace rules, such as not answering personal calls on a cell phone or inviting friends to socialize with them while on the job.
- *Celebrate milestones.* Graduating from a job readiness class, applying for a job, obtaining a job, and retaining a job are all important milestones in a young adult's development. Recognizing and honoring these successes will foster self-esteem and a greater level of investment in their own future. Graduation ceremonies for a job readiness program may be the first time a participant has been recognized for completing something positive and meaningful.

"For many youth, receiving their completion certificate from the Job Readiness Class is their first time graduating from anything."

– Toby Eastman,
Larkin Street
Youth Services

- *Plan for childcare.* Participants with children will need to arrange for childcare while they are at work.



Some practitioners, such as St. Anne's in Los Angeles, offer childcare on site. Parenting participants are eligible for subsidized childcare through Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF). It is important for providers to work collaboratively with TANF to ensure that parenting participants secure high-quality, affordable childcare that is located close to their home or workplace. The specific names of local programs supported by TANF will vary by community. Participants will benefit from learning how to find and choose childcare arrangements that meet their needs as well as those of their children. Participants will also need assistance ensuring that they are aware of TANF requirements for maintaining eligibility and are following through so they don't suddenly lose childcare services.

- *Educate participants about their rights.*



Participants will benefit from education and training about their rights in the workplace, and the fact that they cannot be discriminated against on the basis of their race, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or disability. For example, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) young adults may be unfamiliar with their rights in the workplace, and will benefit from training and counseling around issues of coming out to co-workers and supervisors.



- *Consider the needs of participants with disabilities.* Participants with disabilities may have a limited capacity to hold certain jobs and may be unfamiliar with their rights in the workplace. Providers can collaborate with community-based organizations that focus on independent living and job services for the disabled to ensure that participants receive the services and support they need. Possible supports include assistive technologies, personal assistance services, and assistance obtaining benefits.

It is important for THP-Plus programs working with disabled participants to be knowledgeable about Supplemental Security Income, a federal benefit that provides disabled individuals with a monthly income of approximately \$800. The SSI program has program rules that specify the amount an individual may work without reducing their benefits. THP-Plus staff members should be well informed about these program rules and work closely with the participants to develop employment strategies that are in their best financial and developmental interests.

Participants who receive SSI may also be eligible for additional vocational and rehabilitative services. To learn more about these services, THP-Plus programs may contact local representatives of the California Department of Rehabilitation.

- *Help participants seal juvenile delinquency and/or adult criminal records.* THP-Plus providers can significantly improve participants' employment opportunities by ensuring that their juvenile delinquency records are sealed. Sealing juvenile records is a straightforward but important process that can be coordinated through the local Office of the Public Defender. Participants with adult criminal records will have more limited job opportunities. Case managers, job developers, and/or employment specialists should be familiar with employers who are amenable to working with young adults with a criminal background, and must work closely with participants to prepare them for questions that will arise during the interview process.

4. FOOD AND NECESSITY ALLOWANCE

Providing participants with the skills to purchase and prepare healthy food for themselves and their families is an essential part of THP-Plus programs. While all THP-Plus programs must provide food or food vouchers for participants, there are a number of different ways to incorporate this service so that it also serves as a valuable and fun teaching tool. Food plays a central role in all cultures and taking the time to shop, cook, and learn about food together can help form lasting friendships between participants and strong collaborative relationships between THP-Plus staff members and participants.

In addressing the issue of food in the context of THP-Plus, it is important to remember that participants are young adults, who may or may not have had the opportunity to develop shopping and cooking skills. Some participants may have lived in a residential setting where someone else did the shopping and cooking, while other participants may have exited a placement where they were regularly responsible for these duties. As a general practice, start with the working assumption that these skills are not in place and, when certain participants demonstrate their culinary talent, enlist their assistance in educating other participants.



WIC will offset food costs, particularly for high cost items such as dairy products, cereal and formula for babies. WIC also provides education on prenatal and child nutrition and breastfeeding to pregnant and parenting youth, breastfeeding support, and support with breastfeeding continuation for mothers returning to work. There are several other organizations that provide support for breastfeeding mothers. Visit their websites for more information.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

- *Provide monthly food vouchers.* A number of programs offer participants monthly food vouchers of \$50 to \$75 to be redeemed at grocery stores convenient to their apartment. Voucher amounts may vary based on the needs of the participant. While this level of support will not meet the full food needs of a participant, it can go a long way if a young adult is educated about how to shop wisely. Restrictions may be placed on grocery vouchers to prevent the purchase of alcohol or tobacco.
- *Hold trainings about food stamps and WIC.*

 Both food stamps and the Women, Infants, and Children's program (WIC) are very important resources to supplement the food needs of THP-Plus participants. Food stamps are a highly underutilized resource in California and THP-Plus programs can promote utilization by requesting a local food stamp eligibility worker to conduct trainings or take applications at the program site. Efforts have been made to make both programs more consumer friendly, and to reduce any stigma related to the programs. THP-Plus case managers can contribute to this by shopping with participants the first time they use the vouchers that accompany either program.
- *Develop relationships with a local food bank.*

 THP-Plus providers are often approached by well-intended supporters about starting a food pantry that participants may access on a regular basis. While providing this service is sometimes feasible, it can drain limited program resources and is best left to the county food bank and its partners, whose sole mission is food distribution. To promote utilization of local food banks, THP-Plus staff members can organize periodic visits, where participants learn about how to access the food bank's services. Programs can also establish set times each month when a staff member will take participants to the food bank and deliver them back to their apartments with their food. Case managers can provide participants with resource lists for places and times to secure emergency food if necessary.
- *Conduct shopping trips with participants.* Perhaps the most valuable activity that a THP-Plus program can provide participants in this arena is periodically taking the time to go grocery shopping together. It is an excellent opportunity to teach participants how to read labels, comparison shop, assess nutritional content, and generally make their food dollar go as far as possible. It could also allow participants to purchase more food than they would normally, if the case manager is providing transportation by car.
- *Hold periodic community-building dinners.* Another fun way to educate participants about food and food preparation is to hold a regular community dinner, where a participant or group of participants is given extra funds from the THP-Plus program to prepare a meal for fellow participants in his or her apartment. This activity is conducted with the support of a case manager and teaches a variety of skills, including menu planning, food selection, food budgeting, and basic math principles related to food preparation. It is also a fun way for a participant or a group of participants to share their favorite food with fellow THP-Plus participants and to build community among participants.

We provide food stipends to all THP-Plus participants. Food is a basic need, not an incentive.

**-Sam Cobbs,
First Place
for Youth**

Obtaining a high school diploma, General Educational Development (GED), or High School Proficiency Certificate is essential to the long-term success of young adults. This can be challenging, given the educational experiences of many youth in foster care. Sixty-five percent of foster youth experience seven or more school changes from elementary through high school. School changes, combined with many other factors, result in low rates of educational attainment: nationally, less than 50 percent of foster youth have graduated from high school on the day they emancipate.

THP-Plus programs can address low rates of educational attainment by encouraging and supporting participants through the process of completing their secondary education.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

- *Coordinate with Foster Youth Services.*



THP-Plus requires providers to coordinate with the Foster Youth Services (FYS) program serving their school district or county. FYS is a program of the California Department of Education that provides stability and educational support services to all current and former foster youth ages 4 to 21. FYS can provide a valuable service for foster youth who have changed schools a number of times. Their services include tracking down high school records and transcripts and calculating credits. Providers can use this information to determine credit requirements and facilitate high school completion.

- *Consider educational testing.* It is important



to determine whether or not a participant has a learning disability and their current educational level prior to developing an educational plan. The participant may already

know this and have previously participated in specialized courses. If not, a THP-Plus program can refer participants for educational testing, either through FYS or through the local community college.

- *Offer individualized support.* Case manag-



ers or educational specialists should assess participants' educational status, address participants' concerns, and work with participants to identify goals and next steps towards high school completion. High school requirements for community and four-year colleges should be carefully reviewed and discussed. One-on-one support in navigating the school system and consistent encouragement are key components of this service. Some THP-Plus providers have hired educational specialists to provide additional support to participants. Participants who are behind in their work may feel embarrassed to reveal this to a tutor or new mentor, and may feel more comfortable working with THP-Plus staff members with whom they have an established relationship.

School has historically been a difficult place for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth, many of whom have been verbally, physically or emotionally abused by peers and school personnel. They are at high risk for being behind in school work and for dropping out. LGBTQ participants will benefit from training with respect to their rights and coming out to peers and/or school staff. Case managers will also need training on how to advocate within the schools on behalf of LGBTQ participants.

In Stanislaus County, an educational liaison works with participants without a high school diploma to ensure that they have or obtain the appropriate credits to secure their degree.

- *Provide a GED curriculum.* Easy access to an on-site GED curriculum and test preparation is another option for participants who have not completed their high school diploma. Some THP-Plus programs, such as the Bill Wilson Center in Santa Clara County, provide this instruction directly. Other programs work closely with local adult schools, community colleges or adult education programs to provide this curriculum. THP-Plus programs that do not provide this instruction directly must communicate regularly with the program providing GED prep courses in order to monitor their participants' progress and participation in the program.



- *Offer basic literacy and numeracy skills training.* Due to frequent moves and educational disruptions while in foster care, many former foster youth may have gaps in their learning. Participants who are considerably below grade level may require remedial instruction in math and reading. This is a specialized service that is offered by community colleges and adult literacy programs, as well as by the Gateway Initiative. As mentioned in the Job Training section, Gateway programs operate on community college campuses and provide educational counseling, social support, and intensive math and English skills training to prepare youth for meaningful employment and postsecondary education. THP-Plus programs assisting participants with educational challenges should develop a partnership with a program offering remedial instruction and complement this instruction with individualized tutoring. By offering basic literacy and numeracy skills training, providers can ensure that participants have the skills to be successful in their future educational and employment endeavors.


- *Help parents select schools for their children.* For young parents, trying to select an appropriate school for their children can be overwhelming. Assisting participants with identifying, assessing, and researching scholarship and financial assistance options and selecting schools for their children represents an important layer of support provided by case managers. Case managers may assist participants with researching online community bulletin boards for recommendations, calling the school district directly, and contacting local community based organizations that specialize in childcare and school referrals.




Former foster youth are underrepresented in college and post-high school training. With the right supportive services, THP-Plus programs can provide the foundation on which young adults can pursue their academic goals. Through college visits, application assistance, and other activities, THP-Plus providers can encourage and assist participants in pursuing opportunities for further education.

THP-Plus programs can also assist participants with preparing for the workload in college. There is a big difference in expectations and workload between high school and community college, which requires at least two hours of homework for every hour of class. Some THP-Plus providers have elected to hire an education and employment specialist to provide specialized services to youth in school. This staff person should be well-versed in the range of financial and material supports available to former foster youth in college, and available to assist participants in navigating the new and often confusing landscape of postsecondary education.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

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19 *Assist with applications.* Numerous grants and scholarships are available to current and former foster youth who wish to pursue college and post-high school training, but applications can be daunting. Providers should assist participants in completing all necessary application paperwork in a timely manner in order to maximize opportunities for enrollment and financial support. Current and former foster youth under the age of 22 who are pursuing career/technical training or college courses are eligible for the California Chafee Grant.
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20 *Establish partnerships.* THP-Plus providers should make connections with local community, state, and private colleges offering campus support services for former foster youth. In some cases, local colleges may be willing to visit program sites and arrange special campus tours for program participants. In order to link former foster youth to financial and academic resources on California community college campuses, providers should also contact their local Foster Youth Success Initiative (FYSI) Liaison. Sponsored by the California Community Colleges Systems Office and participating financial aid offices, FYSI is a statewide program supporting the educational achievement of current and former foster youth in community college.
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21 *Support participants in college.* Although more than 70 percent of foster youth want to attend college, only 10 percent of former foster youth enter college and less than 5 percent graduate. Many former foster youth are the first in their family to attend college and don't have a clear understanding of the basic operations of a college or university. Helping participants understand the enrollment process and financial aid deadlines, as well as housing and meal selection, will ensure that they have the support and encouragement they need to succeed in higher education. There is an increasing awareness of the importance of supporting former foster youth in college, as demonstrated by the development of on-campus support programs for this group of students. Often called Guardian Scholars, Renaissance Scholars, and Promises Scholars, their services include priority registration, year-round housing, case management, and assistance in navigating life on a college campus.

- *Connect Participants with EOP or EOPS and CARE.* All former foster youth qualify for Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)



and Extended Opportunity Program and Services (EOPS) programs that operate in two- and four-year state colleges and universities. EOP and EOPS programs provide additional support services to low income at-risk college students, including academic, personal, and career counseling, orientation, and mentoring and financial support such as book vouchers and transportation funding. Parenting former foster youth are likely also eligible for the Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE) program. CARE provides support services such as single-parent counseling and support groups, childcare grants and referrals, transportation assistance, and community resource referrals. By connecting participants with these services, THP-Plus providers can help participants build a wider network of academic and personal support.

- *Oversee progress.* Once participants are enrolled in a post-high school program, they may need additional assistance in scheduling classes and earning the necessary credits to graduate. Providers may decide to request that participants submit reports on their progress in school. This may include reviewing and discussing grades on individual assignments, tests, midterms, and final report cards. Such oversight should only be used to encourage responsibility, create an opportunity to air concerns, and celebrate achievements.

- *Offer additional financial assistance.*

Providers may decide to offer their own financial assistance in addition to federal and state aid to encourage participants in their educational endeavors. Financial aid frequently lags behind the start of the school year, making it difficult for former foster youth to stay enrolled in school. Programs can work proactively with participants to ensure that they are well supported in their studies by providing financial assistance in the form of stipends for books and supplies, special activities, commute costs, and other immediate expenses.

United Friends of the Children offers an educational stipend to support participants pursuing a college degree.



Emancipated foster youth typically have a high need for quality mental health services. However, use of this service tends to be low among transition-aged young adults, many of whom spent years in mandatory therapy during foster care. Participants often have concerns about confidentiality and the quality of the therapy being offered. In addition, they may face transportation, time, childcare, and other logistical challenges. However, experienced providers indicate that utilization of this service increases as participants get older. A focus on financial, relationship, or other specific problems can bring participants to therapy and provide an opening to begin work on larger problems.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

- *Reassess participants who come into the program with diagnoses and prescriptions.* Former foster care and probation youth may leave the system with inaccurate or unnecessary diagnoses and psychotropic medications. Reevaluating their mental health diagnoses and medication regimens once they enter a THP-Plus program and are in a stable living situation can help participants start out on the right foot and reinforce the principle that THP-Plus is different from foster care.

United Friends of the Children contracts with private, culturally-competent therapists who have a regular therapy schedule offered on-site. Participants can sign up for therapy on a one-time or regular basis and receive services on-site in a discreet location that allows for privacy.

- *Collaborate with mental health services outside of the program.* Confidentiality is a primary concern for participants in therapy, especially when their therapist is employed by the THP-Plus provider and works with other participants in the program. Collaborating with an outside provider for free or low-cost mental health services improves participation rates by increasing access and affordability for participants.

- *Ensure affordability.* Emancipated foster youth in California are eligible for Medi-Cal until the age of 21.



Case managers can help participants locate mental health providers who accept Medi-Cal while also providing high quality, consistent services. After the age of 21, many participants will continue to income-qualify for Medi-Cal. In situations where this is not the case, formal collaborations such as those noted above with community mental health providers will allow participants to maintain access to therapy.

- *Employ a one participant-one therapist model for individual therapy.* Finding different therapists for each participant is a way to provide therapy that is noticeably different from foster care. According to mental health experts, therapists who are highly qualified and familiar with issues faced by emancipated foster youth, including legal and ethical issues and state and federal regulations, will have the greatest success. Assigning one participant to one therapist helps participants develop deeper, more continuous connections with their therapists. For example, A Home Within, a national organization with local chapters, provides foster children and former foster youth with lasting, confidential, and therapeutic relationships at no cost.

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Project Independence has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Yume Center, a local mental health agency. They have also developed a partnership with Fred Finch Youth Center, which specializes in working with youth with more serious mental health issues. Through the STAY program (Supporting Transition Aged Youth), Fred Finch provides more intensive case management and support to Project Independence participants. Frequent home visits, mental health services, and medication support are provided to participants in one-bedroom apartments, allowing them to thrive in a scattered-site setting with multiple layers of support.

- *Offer support groups.* Support groups are a good way for participants to help each other work out common problems and concerns. Groups are not strictly therapeutic but targeted to specific issues, such as conflict resolution, drug and alcohol addiction, parenting, or the experience of foster care. Program staff or other trained professionals can facilitate the groups, but the participants themselves should run the sessions. This arrangement encourages participants to develop not only problem-solving and decision-making skills, but also the confidence and ability to resolve their own problems.
- *Offer clinical supervision for staff using highly qualified consulting therapists* (see Case Management section for related recommendations). Good clinical supervision will put program staff in the best position to deal with common psycho-social problems among former foster youth. This supervision can also ensure that THP-Plus staff members have the support and training to model appropriate coping, conflict resolution and communication skills for participants, and to receive and provide hands on support in addressing issues that arise.



In the past five years, child welfare professionals have increasingly recognized the importance of establishing permanency among foster youth. Permanency is achieved when a current or former foster youth establishes a lifelong connection with a caring adult who commits to stay in the young person's life for the long term. THP-Plus programs present an opportunity to continue to work with youth to achieve permanency, pursue familial connections, and establish themselves in their community.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

- *Consider the host family model.* The host family model of THP-Plus is one strategy to sustain and support a relationship between a young person and a caring adult in his or her life. Stanislaus County supports permanency by employing the host family model, in which participants live with an adult who has made a mutual commitment to a youth to be a lifelong connection and provide love, guidance, and support. Regardless of the housing model, these positive long-term relationships are essential to ensuring that participants have the safety, security, and unconditional support they will need to thrive as adults.
- *Learn about family finding.* THP-Plus programs can play an important role in supporting permanency for participants. A number of California social service agencies and Independent Living Programs are participating in "The Family Finding Program," which uses computer technology to locate relatives for current and former foster youth. The results of these efforts have been quite effective, and have allowed youth and young adults to build connections with immediate and extended family members and, in many cases, establish lasting relationships. In communities where family finding is already underway, providers may want to partner with their local social service agency to identify additional permanent connections for THP-Plus participants. Contact your local ILP or county department of social services to see if this service is available in your community.
- *Support participants in their efforts to build relationships with their families.* Participants may express interest in contacting immediate, extended, and foster family members. Providers should offer support throughout the process of locating and meeting with family members, while being aware of particular emotional and financial issues that may arise during this process. Participants will benefit from working with case managers to identify their definitions of a family; hopes for their family life; and expectations for their family relationships. Case managers will want to help participants develop a healthy and realistic view of what their family relationships might look like.
- *Allow home visits.* Providers may decide to organize family events or visits to the program site. Depending on the housing model, providers may choose to establish rules for overnight family visits, such as passes for siblings and younger relatives to stay overnight for a specified time period at the participant's THP-Plus housing location. Rules governing this practice should be made clear from the beginning of the program. Long-term stays are discouraged, as they are likely to be a lease violation, and may legally result in an eviction. They are also likely to place a burden on roommates and complicate the provision of services and payment of rent and utilities. Case managers should also be prepared to support participants in developing a plan when they have siblings in crisis situations, such as homelessness or a failed foster care placement.

Former foster youth repeatedly state that a lifelong connection and a relationship with a supportive and committed adult, related by blood or not, is one of the key factors associated with their resilience and the single greatest impact on their ability to navigate the transition to adulthood.

-California Permanency for Youth Project

- *Facilitate healthy peer relationships.* Programs that are based on healthy, positive relationships between and among THP-Plus participants and staff provide an effective teaching opportunity. After building a strong, trusting relationship with their case managers, participants may be more willing to develop a strong support network with their peers.
- *Encourage participant leadership and positive role modeling within the community.* Encouraging former participants to play roles as motivational speakers, volunteers for specific projects, and peer support for youth in the program can foster self-esteem and continued connections with participants and staff.
- *Use a cohort model.* Providers may accept participants into the program in groups or classes. For example, participants may begin the program with a two-week independent living skills or economic literacy class. This orientation period may be followed by weekly or monthly cohort meetings throughout the program. While participants should be encouraged to establish relationships outside of the program, this cohort may provide a unique form of peer support as participants share the THP-Plus experience.
- *Organize community building events.* Organized field trips to museums, dance performances, lectures, and other community events can be educational and fun, and can help participants form new interests. Posting or distributing a calendar of community events informs participants of planned voluntary activities sponsored by the THP-Plus program. Case managers at GLASS in Los Angeles, for example, regularly organize community-building events and make an extra effort to identify those that correspond with participants' specific interests. In addition to exposing participants to new experiences, this individualized attention also communicates the value staff members place on each participant. At the start of the program, providers may want to offer incentives, such as small gift cards, to encourage participation.
- *Consider a scattered-site housing model.* Leasing apartments, often in small clusters, to participants throughout the community can enhance community integration efforts. This housing model increases contact with community members and non-program neighbors, creating opportunities for participants to establish their own community relationships. It also helps to dispel some community stereotypes about former foster youth, builds trust among neighbors, and more closely resembles living independently. As with all THP-Plus models, the scattered-site model includes intensive case management and other supportive services to assist participants in their transition to independent living.
- *Cultivate a culture of tolerance and inclusivity.*

African American and Native American children are over-represented in California's child welfare system. Although approximately 7% of California children ages 0-17 are African American, over one in three emancipating foster youth is African American. Research indicates that upon leaving foster care, youth of color are less prepared for adulthood than other foster youth. THP-Plus case managers should be prepared to provide culturally-competent services that take into account participants' differences in sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, gender, religion, and disability.

By familiarizing themselves with specialized services in the community, case managers can provide more targeted support to participants. For example, parents of LGBTQ participants may benefit from additional support in creating environments that are safer and more supportive for their children. Some providers make efforts to identify more affirming community organizations and congregations to support parents in accepting their children's sexuality and gender identity.

We make a concerted effort to teach parents about accepting and affirming their lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender children, particularly in preparation for home visits.

– Howard Jacobs,
GLASS

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The Independent Living Program (ILP) is a federally-mandated program that provides life skills training and services to assist current and former foster youth ages 16-21 in preparing for independent living. In California, each county has an ILP program operated by the county child welfare agency or contracted with a community-based organization(s) with funding from the federal and state government. A number of counties have elected to start serving youth as young as age 14.

ILP is a natural source of referrals to THP-Plus, and integrating THP-Plus with ILP is essential to providing optimal services to emancipated foster youth. Through effective coordination and collaboration, existing programs work closely with their local ILP programs to identify participants, coordinate service provision, and support the continued progress of participants.

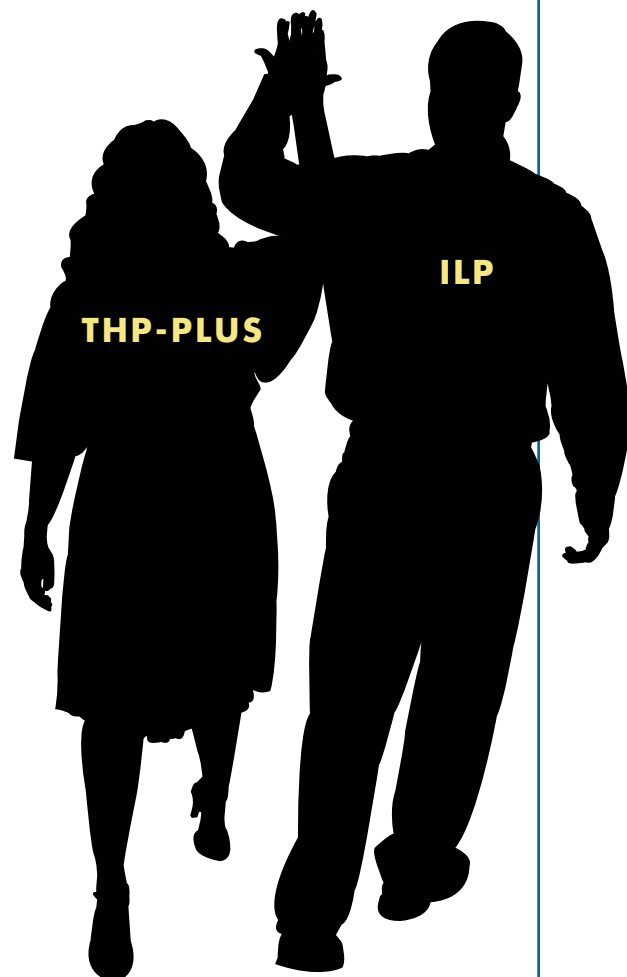
RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

- *Conduct regular team meetings.* Establishing weekly meetings from the start can help the THP-Plus provider and ILP to begin their partnership with open communication and collaboration. Identifying roles, responsibilities and shared expectations before participants have moved into housing can be particularly helpful. These meetings create a forum to discuss the progress of entering and continuing participants, address invoicing or administrative issues, and create plans for the future.
- *Utilize the STEP-TILP.* THP-Plus regulations require that ILP and THP-Plus providers work collaboratively in monitoring the Supportive Transitional Emancipation Program-Transitional Independent Living Plans (STEP-TILP) for all participants. The STEP-TILP is a case management tool typically completed by foster youth and their social worker or ILP case manager in preparation for the youth's emancipation from foster care. Programs can use the STEP-TILP to assess participants' status at the beginning of the program and to help case managers monitor progress throughout participants' tenure in the program. The form can be used to collect information about the current status, goals, and service needs of THP-Plus participants, including their education, health, employment, housing, support network, and income.
- *Identify a single point of contact.* Having one consistent ILP staff person and one consistent THP-Plus staff person coordinate referrals, eligibility, case management, and housing openings between meetings can enhance communication between the two programs.
- *Identify referral and intake process.* In some THP-Plus programs, all participant referrals are directed through ILP, while other programs take referrals directly. One benefit of directing all referrals through ILP is that it streamlines the eligibility determination process. However, some young adults who have never participated in ILP may be intimidated if they are required to enter the THP-Plus program through ILP. To prevent this, some providers accept referrals directly, and then coordinate with ILP to ensure eligibility and service provision for the potential participant.
- *Use ILP orientations and classes to conduct THP-Plus outreach.* Most ILP programs offer regular classes and orientations for new ILP participants. These classes are a natural venue for conducting outreach to potential THP-Plus participants. However, providers should keep in mind that many youth, particularly those most at risk for homelessness, do not participate in ILP, and will not be reached through this recruitment strategy. THP-Plus programs may also want to establish regular visits to local youth homeless shelters and drop-in centers.

- *Coordinate with ILP through co-located staff.* THP-Plus providers may consider holding regular office hours at ILP offices to answer young adults' questions about THP-Plus and build relationships for future referrals.
- *Conduct specialized outreach.* Experienced practitioners recommend targeting outreach efforts to young adults who may have experienced previous discrimination based on sexual orientation, race or ethnicity, gender, religion, disability, or housing status. For example, some providers conduct outreach at Gay and Lesbian Centers and homeless shelters.
- *Consider needs of participants ages 21-24.* ILP serves young adults up to their twenty-first birthdays, while THP-Plus providers serve young adults up to age 24. After age 21, certain material supports are no longer available from ILP and THP-Plus providers are encouraged to offer optional independent living skills curricula and financial resources to older participants. For example, ILP may provide clothing vouchers to assist participants in dressing appropriately for work. After participants reach the age of 21, THP-Plus providers will want to provide these vouchers to ensure that participants have appropriate work attire.

History of ILP

In 1986, the federal government launched the Independent Living Program to enable state child welfare agencies to meet the needs of youth preparing to emancipate from foster care. The initial federal funding allowed Independent Living Program (ILP) services to be made available to youth ages 16-18 who were dependents or probation wards placed out of home by the juvenile court on or after their 16th birthday. In 1999, the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act doubled the federal budget for ILP from \$70 million to \$140 million and allowed states to extend services to eligible young adults between the ages of 18-21, utilize the funds for room and board, and to extend Medicaid benefits up to age 21.




After a participant has been involved in the program for six months, we revisit the Independent Living Assessment, which allows us to tailor our services to meet his or her needs.

**– Nicole Nardon,
Hillsides Youth Moving On**

MENTORING

Effective mentors can have a lifelong impact on the lives of participants. However, operating a successful mentoring program takes time, dedication, and well-trained, committed staff. Poorly-run mentoring programs run the risk of harming, rather than helping, participants. For example, one study indicated that mentoring relationships that lasted less than three months left mentored young adults worse off than their counterparts who had never entered into a mentoring relationship. Given these risks, many experienced practitioners have elected to partner with successful mentoring organizations that specialize in identifying, training, matching, and supporting mentors and participants.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

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27 *Collaborate with established mentoring organizations.* Establishing and operating a mentoring program requires a considerable time and staff commitment. Effective mentoring programs require a dedicated staff member, a full training curriculum, and ongoing support for the mentor and the participant. Many effective young adult housing providers have decided to collaborate with organizations that specialize in mentoring and have the capacity to screen, match, and support mentors and participants.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IN-HOUSE MENTORING PROGRAMS

- Support participants in identifying their own mentors.* Many THP-Plus participants have existing relationships with caring adults who can serve as formal or informal mentors. Natural relationships that participants form themselves are frequently the most useful and successful. By encouraging and supporting these relationships, case managers can further support a participant's ability to develop and sustain positive relationships and promote permanency. THP-Plus programs can support permanent connections in the lives of its participants, and encourage these individuals to play a lifelong mentoring role.
- Select older, well-trained mentors.* Older mentors may have more flexibility, experience, and wisdom than younger mentors. Mentors who have some familiarity with the experience of foster care or are trained to work with former foster youth tend to make more successful mentors.
- Include program alumni or more experienced participants as mentors.* Recruiting program alumni or more experienced participants is an effective strategy to provide targeted help to new participants. They can offer insights gleaned from their own experience in foster care and THP-Plus to help participants gain access to services, learn about the experience of work and school, and understand the emotional and psychological issues facing former foster youth.
- Help participants find a mentor with shared interests.* Case managers can help participants meet people with shared interests by connecting them to sports, arts, career, student, religious, and other communities of interest.

Guidelines for Designing and Planning a Mentoring Program

THP-Plus providers who choose to operate a mentoring program in-house may want to consider the following guidelines developed by MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership:

1. Define the young adult population that the program will serve.
2. Identify the types of individuals the program will recruit as mentors (i.e. seniors, businesspeople, members of local faith-based groups, former foster youth).
3. Determine the type of mentoring that the program will offer:
 - Traditional one-to-one mentoring.
 - Group mentoring (one adult to a maximum of four participants).
 - Team mentoring (several adults working with a group of participants, with a maximum adult: participant ratio of 1:4).
 - E-mentoring (mentoring via e-mail and over the Internet).
4. Determine how the program will screen/match mentors with young adults.
5. Structure the Mentoring Program (as part of the THP-Plus program).
6. Define the Nature of the Mentoring Sessions:
 - School-to-Career.
 - Academic Success.
 - Character, social, and leadership development.
7. Determine what the program will accomplish and what outcomes will result.
8. Determine when the mentoring will take place.
9. Determine how often mentors and mentees will meet and how long the mentoring matches should endure.
10. Decide where mentoring matches primarily will meet.
11. Decide who your mentoring program stakeholders are and how to promote your mentoring program.
12. Decide how to evaluate mentoring program success.
13. Establish a case management protocol to assure that the THP-Plus program has regular contact with both mentors and mentees to monitor their relationship.

One thing I mention in the welcome letter to new participants is the old Chinese proverb: feed a person a fish and feed them for a day.....teach a person to fish and feed them for a lifetime. Our job is to teach and support, to provide what they may still need to be self-sufficient members of our community forever.

**– Marybeth McCarthy,
Project Independence**



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Additional information is available at <http://www.mentoring.org>.

Imagine living for much of your childhood with no furniture that you personally selected or considered your own. That is the experience of many young adults who emancipate from foster care, who have lived in multiple placements in multiple homes, and who have never had the chance to surround themselves with furniture or personal belongings that reflect their personal tastes and preferences.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

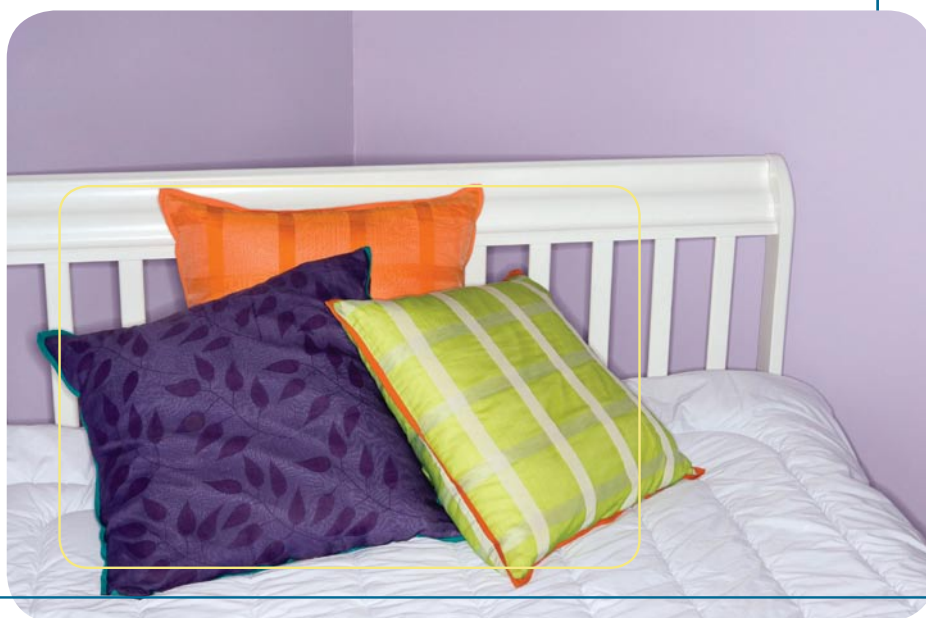
- *Provide furniture stipends, and help participants use them wisely.* THP-Plus can provide participants with a fun and educational opportunity to create a household as a young adult by allowing them to select their own home furnishings. This approach has a number of positive effects. Most importantly, it resembles life outside a “program” where young adults moving into their first apartments get the experience of picking out furniture for life on their own. Secondly, apartment furnishings selected by the participant are often better maintained by participants because they have personally selected them and consider them their own. Finally, the experience of selecting and purchasing furniture provides participants with practical knowledge about what furnishings cost and what furnishings are required in a new apartment.
- *Provide basic apartment furnishings.* Another option is to provide participants with basic apartment furnishings (i.e., kitchen table, desk) and then give them a smaller stipend to personalize the apartment.
- *Respect participants’ feelings about their new apartment.* It is important to remember that THP-Plus participants are moving into their first apartments, and how they feel about their apartment is more important than how it looks. This does not mean that participants should accept shabby or second-rate furniture. It does mean, however, that the household a THP-Plus program helps a participant assemble will not resemble that of a 40-year old adult. It is more important that participants feel at home and have a genuine attachment to the apartment and the items in it.
- *Develop a voucher program with a furniture donation agency.* A number of THP-Plus programs have developed partnerships with furniture donation organizations, such as Goodwill or St. Vincent De Paul. In these partnerships, community members donate furniture to the donation organization in the THP-Plus program’s name. This allows the THP-Plus program to earn credit, which can be used by youth participants to shop for furniture.

One THP-Plus program offers each entering participant a new bed and a \$200 furniture stipend. It also receives donations from a local church to supplement furniture needs.

- *Provide participants with their own new beds.* Providers repeatedly noted that participants prefer a new bed when entering the program, after often having slept on a bed used by many youth before them while in foster care.
- *Allow participants to take furniture.* Growing up in the foster care system, youth rarely have a chance to accumulate belongings. Allowing participants to keep purchased furniture after leaving the program is emotionally beneficial, and it will ease the financial transition into independent living.
- *Remember furniture for children.* Assist pregnant and parenting foster youth in obtaining furniture for themselves and their child that is child-safe. Staff members will want to educate participants about buying certain items such as a proper crib and to consider the risks of certain pieces of furniture such as glass tables.



It can be useful to provide new participants with a checklist of what they will need to furnish their new apartments.



In the transition to adulthood, young adults must learn how to address emergencies and crises on their own. By establishing emergency protocols for crisis intervention, THP-Plus providers can ensure that participants have reliable access to necessary support mechanisms. This service ensures the safety of participants and promotes a feeling of independence and security.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

- *Create emergency and crisis intervention protocols.* Experienced THP-Plus practitioners have developed written emergency protocols that are guided by their program philosophy and mission. Asking all staff and participants to review and agree upon these protocols will foster trust and empowerment among participants. A strong set of emergency protocols includes the following components:
 - ➔ *Define what constitutes a medical or personal emergency.* Because the experience of foster care does not prepare participants to manage emergencies on their own, existing practitioners indicate the importance of providing participants with the training and skills to recognize a true emergency. THP-Plus programs can help youth understand this difference by conducting workshops where different scenarios are presented and discussed.
 - ➔ *Delineate appropriate steps to take for specific emergency situations.* In true emergencies, calling 911 will be the fastest, most effective course of action. Informing the on-site or on-call staff person of the situation will be an important next step in order to ensure that participants receive the appropriate support and guidance following the emergency.
 - ➔ *Offer emergency and crisis intervention training.* Both participants and staff members will benefit from participating in interactive training scenarios to deepen their understanding of emergency protocols. This training can build confidence as well as awareness, encouraging participants to assess situations and respond appropriately.
 - ➔ *Provide participants with comprehensive emergency contact information.* While 24-hour hotlines (e.g. domestic violence, rape, suicide) may effectively supplement the services provided by THP-Plus, such hotlines should not replace more immediate support mechanisms.
 - ➔ *Remember limitation of cell phones and 911.* Many participants rely on their cell phones for communication and no longer utilize a landline. However, calling 911 from a cell phone does not connect to the local emergency response dispatcher. Providers can identify the local call-in number for emergency response by calling their local police department and then requiring participants to put this number on speed dial on their phone.

"This is the first time in my life I've had someone to put down as an emergency contact."


-young adult participant,
United Friends
of the Children

The California Foster Care Ombudsman is available to provide resource referrals and address the concerns of current and former foster youth.
www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov
(877) 846-1602

THP-Plus requires providers to deposit a minimum of \$50 each month into an interest-bearing Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC)-insured savings account on behalf of each participant. At the end of the program, participants receive these funds to assist them in their adjustment to independent living and self-sufficiency. THP-Plus programs may deposit the funds in a single account or in individual accounts. If funds for multiple youth are deposited into a single account, the provider must maintain an individual accounting of emancipation funds for each participant to ensure that he or she receives the full amount they are entitled to when they leave the program.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

In addition to the required \$50 per month, providers may choose to augment the fund in one of the following ways:

-  **Create a matched savings program.** The provider matches or partially matches participant savings throughout the course of the program and all funds are paid out upon program completion. Some programs have developed Individual Development Accounts (IDAs). After completing extensive economic literacy training, participants set aside funds that can be used for a number of approved assets. Approved assets usually include education, first and last month's rent or security deposit, and sometimes the purchase of a car. Funds are usually matched at a rate of 1:1, 2:1, or 3:1, with providers setting aside \$1-\$3 for every dollar saved by the participant. IDAs are particularly effective in assisting participants with understanding the value of money and the power of savings. Having a match provides an added incentive to set aside funds each month. IDAs also teach the value of delayed gratification in the form of increased savings at the end of the program.
- Save 100 percent of rent payments.** All of the participants' rent payments to the provider are put into the emancipation fund and returned to participants upon program completion. As noted earlier, the benefit of this structure is that it allows participants to leave the program with more substantial savings.

- Save a portion of rent payments.** Some programs put a portion of participants' rent payments into the emancipation fund and return them to participants upon completion of the program.
- Support participants who exit the program prior to the twenty-fourth month of the program.** Participants who leave the program prior to the twenty-fourth month, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, are still entitled to the funds that were accrued during their participation in the program. The THP-Plus rate includes these savings, which will assist all transitioning participants.



THP-Plus programs are required to assist participants in maintaining or securing housing upon the completion of the 24-month program. If the housing model provided is transitional, THP-Plus programs are required to assist youth in finding or maintaining affordable housing that costs no more than 30 percent of the youth's gross income at the completion of the program.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

- *Operate THP-Plus programs in a permanent housing setting.* In this model, participants receive a monthly rental subsidy and supportive services for the 24-month program period. At the conclusion of the program, the lease to the apartment is turned over to the participant and the THP-Plus participant continues to live in the rental apartment. The apartment remains their home and is no longer connected to the program. Key advantages of this approach include:
 - ➔ *Stability:* THP-Plus may be the first opportunity for participants to experience the comfort of knowing that their housing situation does not have to be temporary. Research shows that stressful life events during transition periods have long-term detrimental impacts. Before they enter THP-Plus, former foster youth have experienced repeated trauma, including removal from their birth families, uncertain and frequently changing living arrangements, and formal discharge from the system charged with caring for them. For parenting participants, a housing move may also mean that parents are forced to disrupt their child's life by changing childcare providers, schools, pediatricians, and losing their community support system. Any of these disruptions can also disrupt a participant's employment or educational progress.
 - ➔ *Opportunity to focus on development:* With the knowledge that they will continue to live in their apartments after the completion of the program, participants can focus on their personal, educational, and skills development and take advantage of the array of services provided by the program. By contrast, if participants know they will be required to move out of their housing after 24 months, they will likely re-experience many of the feelings associated with emancipation from foster care: fear, anxiety, uncertainty, anger, and depression. As a result of this anxiety, participants may appear to "regress" in their behavior and attitude.
- *Provide consistent transition support.* In effective transitional housing models, the transitional nature of the program is clearly communicated at the start of the program, and at regular case management meetings. In this way, the transition will not come as a surprise to participants nearing the end of the 24-month program. At one program, in addition to the regular case management strategies, providers and participants create a contract six months before the completion of the program. The contract includes goals defined by the participant that, when achieved, will allow participants to make a successful transition. Goals include budgeting and savings, employment, and a transportation strategy at the participant's new home. During case management meetings, while continuing to communicate the time limitations of the program, case managers also work collaboratively with participants to identify and secure affordable housing. Consistent planning and case management can help alleviate participants' anxiety about the inevitable transition.

- *Work with participants to identify and secure housing options.* With careful planning, the THP-Plus program can prepare participants



to make their move into post-program housing a successful one. Programs with graduated rent structures will help participants prepare to pay at- or near-market rent. In addition, utilizing leases during the THP-Plus program will help participants understand the rights and responsibilities of this important contract, and increase their confidence as they sign a lease of their own. As participants approach the end of the program, case managers can help participants to determine a realistic level of rent to pay for their post-program housing. Conversations should also include a discussion of the level of income necessary to support a certain rental level, and considerations around the type and cost of housing in different neighborhoods. Assisting participants with identifying housing that they can afford in a location close to transportation and services provides an important teaching opportunity. Case managers traveling with participants on public transportation to visit a potential apartment can raise important considerations about the location, safety, and affordability of the apartment. Looking for another housing situation can be stressful and frightening, and even the most prepared participant may need extra support during this period.

- *Partner with local affordable housing organizations.* Affordable housing organizations develop housing for individuals and families who cannot afford market-rate rent. THP-Plus programs can be located within affordable housing developments. THP-Plus providers using a transitional housing model can develop strong relationships with local affordable housing organizations in order to provide an opportunity for participants to transition into permanent affordable housing. At a minimum, providers can support participants' transitions by ensuring that they are placed on waiting lists for affordable housing well in advance of program completion.



- *Consider housing needs of pregnant and parenting participants.* Participants with children will need extra assistance in locating housing that is appropriate for raising a family. Parents will be especially concerned with housing safety, distance from work, school, and childcare, and affordability. Identifying affordable housing for families will best serve their needs. In the absence of this option, working closely with the parents and their children to identify safe, affordable, and well-located housing will alleviate anxiety and support the family in their transition.

- *Consider providing transitional financial support.* Several housing providers assist participants in locating housing and provide additional financial support to ease their transition from the program. The level of support varies by provider; some provide one month's rent to participants who achieve their independent living goals; others pay 50 percent of the rent for six months; and others have emergency funds available to assist former participants in retaining their housing.

- *Provide support to LGBTQ participants.* To avoid isolation upon program completion, LGBTQ youth should be encouraged to find housing in communities that are near resources and recreation opportunities for them. At the very least, providers should map out these resources so participants can easily access them.



- *Identify housing options for participants with disabilities.* Participants with disabilities may have more restricted incomes and more limited housing options. Identifying housing for people with disabilities, ground-floor units, and housing affordable to individuals on fixed incomes will be critical in supporting participants with special needs as they exit the program.

"Strong relationships with affordable housing developers allow us to assist youth in moving to permanent affordable housing after they complete the program."

**-Tony Walker,
St. Anne's**

High quality, consistent supportive services targeted to meet the needs of individual participants are essential ingredients to a successful THP-Plus program. In many effective programs, these services do not end when a participant graduates from the housing program. Alumni services made available to participants upon exiting THP-Plus ensure that they have a support network to guide them on their path towards independence and self-sufficiency. These continued services support participants during another transition period—from THP-Plus participants to young adults who are fully responsible for supporting themselves.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

- *Continue to provide individualized support.* In effective THP-Plus programs, participants develop strong relationships with case managers and other staff, and may continue to seek out their guidance after the completion of the program. In some programs, case managers continue to meet with former participants on a monthly basis for up to six months after program completion to help them transition into independent living.
- *Offer aftercare emergency funds.* Some providers set aside funds for former participants in the event that they experience crises while attaining self-sufficiency and independence on their own. For example, if a former participant loses her job and is unable to pay her rent after program completion, the provider may want to provide emergency funding to prevent her from becoming homeless. Clear guidelines about the frequency and availability of aftercare emergency funds will establish a boundary for program alumni while also offering a safety net.
- *Maintain an open door policy.* For providers with specialized in-house career and/or educational services, offering these services after the completion of the program will help former participants maintain employment and meet their educational goals. Some providers offer a drop-in center that is available to prospective, current, and previous participants, which provides an opportunity for service delivery outside the context of the housing program.
- *Build an alumni program.* A formal alumni program can help to maintain the sense of community developed during the program. Special events, a website, or an alumni club can help participants stay in touch with each other and with the program.
- *Establish opportunities for alumni to get involved with leadership within the THP-Plus program.* In keeping with the youth development goal of THP-Plus, a number of providers have established leadership positions for program alumni. Positions include serving on the board of directors, participating in recruitment, assisting with fundraising, mentoring new participants, becoming program staff, or helping with program development.

United Friends of the Children in Los Angeles offers an alumni program that includes continued case management, parenting training, and rental and other financial support to program alumni. They also host an annual holiday party at their largest housing site on Christmas Eve. Because alumni are aware that the party will be held on the same day in the same location every year, many former participants return to re-connect with their peers and program staff and to participate in the celebration.

Bill Wilson Center's Alumni Club features regular meetings with former participants for two years following the completion of the program. Another provider offers a weekend retreat for program alumni to reconnect with staff and other former participants, revisit their goals and achievements, and get grounded for the future. The retreat is open to all former participants, regardless of when or how they exited the program.



ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

1. Transportation Assistance
2. Roommates: Selection, Training, and Support
3. Public Benefits Advocacy
4. Regular Housing Advocacy and Tenancy Training
5. Training Curriculum to Prepare Youth for Housing
6. Moving Assistance
7. Ongoing Life Skills Training
8. Security Deposit Assistance

In addition to the 15 supportive services required by THP-Plus, there are a number of additional complementary services that support participants on their path toward self-sufficiency. Each service is described in this section of the document and THP-Plus providers are encouraged to incorporate these services into their practice.

As participants strive toward self-sufficiency, reliable transportation is essential to maintain employment and stay on track educationally. It is especially important for young parents, who must regularly transport their children to and from day care. Without access to reliable transportation, participants will be unable to navigate their community and attend to their many responsibilities.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

- *Subsidize public transportation.* For programs located in areas with reliable public transit systems, the best approach to transportation assistance is either to provide participants with a monthly transit pass or to assist them in the purchase of one. For example, in San Francisco, the Fast Pass costs \$45 monthly, and allows participants to ride on all buses and train lines. The Independent Living Programs in some counties will provide regular public transit assistance to their participants, either under all circumstances or when a participant is conducting a job search. Other programs such as college EOPS or CARE programs, and the Employment Development Department may also provide similar assistance to participants.

- *Help youth manage car-related issues.*



The challenges of transportation are exacerbated in certain areas by poor or non-existent public transportation. For this reason, it is important to understand that some THP-Plus participants will require cars. THP-Plus programs can play a productive role in helping participants manage this often necessary, but potentially troublesome, aspect of their lives. While some providers may regard assisting participants in managing their cars and related services to be beyond the scope of THP-Plus, it is a good example of a practical skill all young adults need to learn.

- *License:* The first critical step is helping participants secure their driver's licenses, a requirement that can easily be overlooked by a young adult desperately in need of transportation.
- *Purchase:* THP-Plus programs can hold periodic workshops on the basics of car purchasing or at a minimum maintain a list of useful resources, such as websites, for participants to use in learning this skill. Participants who want to purchase cars at public auctions should be informed about the lack of warranty that accompanies them. Providers may want to make connections with reputable sources of used cars.
- *Insurance:* Program staff can help participants who are purchasing a car understand the legal requirement to insure their car and assist them in finding the most appropriate coverage for the best price. Insurance for young, inexperienced drivers is extremely expensive, and with the help of the critical eye of a THP-Plus staff member, participants can make an informed choice about which policy best fits their budget.
- *Maintenance:* THP-Plus participants, like many young adults, can easily overlook the importance of car maintenance. While this is the responsibility of the participant, an occasional mention from a caring case manager about car maintenance can make the difference between a reliable car and an engine ruined. Another aspect of maintenance is working with participants to pay tickets they may receive which, when left unpaid, can increase considerably in cost and complicate their financial lives, and may even have legal consequences, such as arrest warrants.

Many THP-Plus programs are structured in such a way that participants live in a two-bedroom apartment with a roommate. This relationship can be a complicated one, particularly for participants who have had a number of unsuccessful roommate relationships in foster care.

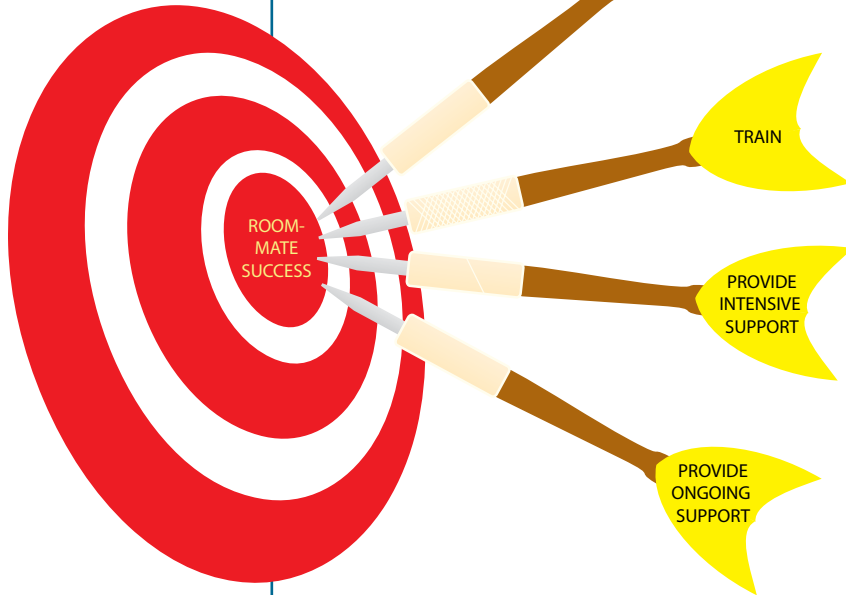
RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

It is important that the roommate relationship is managed proactively. This involves a multi-part process, starting with selection.

- *Develop a roommate selection process.* There are a range of opinions about whether or not a THP-Plus program should allow participants to select their roommates. One strain of thought is that young adults who are not in a “program” have this discretion, and so in an effort to normalize their experience, participants should be allowed to select who they live with. Another perspective is that allowing participants to select their roommates will not necessarily lead to a better roommate match.

Many programs have created a middle ground by developing a roommate selection process that participants go through in an effort to most effectively match roommates. Programs then make a serious effort to meet the needs of the participants when they pair roommates, making certain participants understand the practical program constraints that may prevent them from being paired with their first choice. In many cases, programs may only have one opening at a time, and will therefore place participants at the top of the waitlist into the first available housing slot.

- *Organize roommate trainings.* Prior to participants becoming roommates, it is recommended that they participate in a roommate workshop. The topics covered in the workshop include how the roommate relationship is different from those they may have had in foster care, how each roommate defines “clean,” what items they would like to have in the apartment and how they would like to see their apartment function. Topics also include respecting differences in race, ethnicity, culture, food, music, sexual orientation, and gender identity. It is helpful to develop a series of common roommate scenarios for participants, followed by a discussion about how they would address the issues presented.
- *Provide intensive support.* The first several months of the roommate relationship can be challenging. The relationship often starts with a honeymoon period, where participants consider themselves to be close friends and are focused on things like decorating their apartment. This period often ends when completely normal roommate tensions begin, such as paying utility bills, visitors, and, of course, household chores. When these issues surface and tension mounts, THP-Plus participants can become disillusioned, over-generalizing



ROOMMATES 2

that the program is yet another failure in a long string of disappointments in their life. By scheduling frequent roommate meetings at the start of the program (at least weekly), case managers can help participants to develop strong communication and a set of shared expectations.

When tensions arise, it is critical for the THP-Plus case managers working with both participants to provide intensive support. The goal of this support is not to prevent these tensions, which are normal and commonly experienced by young adults living with their first roommate. Instead, the goal is to provide a productive framework within which roommates can work together to address the challenges they are facing. Additionally, the work of the case manager is to communicate that tensions such as these are normal, and that both roommates have both the ability and the responsibility to overcome them as young adults living in a voluntary program.

This message is very different from the one they may have heard in foster care, which is not voluntary and may have included placement changes without their input. To provide the necessary support during this difficult time, THP-Plus programs should hold roommate meetings on a weekly basis at the minimum. Additionally, support can be provided by peer mentors and participants in the program who have successfully addressed similar roommate challenges.

- *Provide ongoing support.* After the first six months in THP-Plus, the frequency of roommate meetings can decrease, depending upon how well the roommates are managing their relationship. Roommate meetings should continue periodically, however, to proactively address any difficult issues that may arise.

Other Roommate Tips

1. *Assign different case managers for each roommate so both case managers can help mediate roommate conflicts. This option ensures that there is no bias on the part of the mediator, as both case managers are present.*
2. *Focus heavily on utility use and bill payment for the first three months of roommate meetings. This is a common area of conflict and a good opportunity to develop and practice conflict resolution and communication skills.*
3. *Recognize cooperation. Several programs make an effort to recognize roommates who are working well together. For example, First Place awards the apartment that is best maintained with a Golden Broom Award.*



3. PUBLIC BENEFITS ADVOCACY

There are a range of public benefit programs that THP-Plus participants can utilize to assist them in their transition from foster care. Additionally, participants who are informed both about these programs and how to access them will be able to do so in the future as needed.



The following chart outlines public benefit options and their relevance to former foster youth.

PUBLIC BENEFIT	COMMENTS
Medi-Cal	All emancipated foster youth in California are eligible for Medi-Cal until age 21. Recertification requirements following discharge from foster care vary by county and each THP-Plus program should verify that the participant's Medi-Cal is current. THP-Plus participants ages 21 to 24 may also be eligible for Medi-Cal based on their income. Preparation for this transition should be made by the THP-Plus program and the participant well before it occurs in order to evaluate other health care options and to prevent a discontinuation of health care insurance.
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)/CalWORKs	TANF is a valuable program for former foster youth with children and includes a variety of cash aid and support services, such as employment training and access to childcare. THP-Plus benefits and services are not considered assets and do not count against TANF asset limits.
Food stamps	Food stamps provide a valuable supplement to participants' food needs and are largely underutilized in California and the nation due to a lack of familiarity with the program. THP-Plus programs can counter this by providing regular trainings to participants and staff members. THP-Plus is not a cash aid program, and participants are eligible for food stamps.
General Assistance (GA)	GA varies considerably throughout the state and providers should confirm participants' eligibility.
Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI)	SSI is a critical resource for the 15 percent of youth who emancipate from foster care with a serious mental or physical disability, providing approximately \$800 in monthly income for the life of the disability. THP-Plus providers can build their capacity to conduct SSI advocacy by working with local legal aid organizations or contracting with agencies that specialize in SSI benefits for former foster youth, including application assistance and appeals.
Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	All pregnant and parenting participants should be referred to WIC, which provides vouchers for free food essentials, including expensive baby formula. Eligible participants receive benefits for six months to a year, after which they must demonstrate that they continue to meet WIC program requirements.
Tax Assistance and Earned Income Family Tax Credit	A number of THP-Plus programs offer tax clinics and filing assistance in order to access the EITC, which can provide parenting participants with up to \$5,000 in tax refunds. As with food stamps, EITC is under-utilized and effort should be made to promote this important anti-poverty program.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

- *Build participants' capacity.* THP-Plus staff members can work collaboratively with participants to access public benefit programs, which are often confusing and require considerable paperwork. It is important, however, to build the capacity of participants to manage their public benefits on their own over time, as they will be required to do so after the completion of the THP-Plus program.
- *Conduct regular trainings.* THP-Plus providers can work with local social service agencies and advocates to schedule trainings on each of the public benefits both for staff members and for participants.
- *Promote specialization in staff knowledge.* Providers can work with THP-Plus staff members to develop a specialization in one of the public benefit programs and then have that staff member serve as a resource for other staff members and the participants. Given the complexity of the programs, it is better for one staff member to know one program thoroughly than for an entire staff to have limited knowledge of all programs.
- *Offer transportation.* Providers may travel on public transit with participants and/or offer participants transportation to and from public benefits offices as necessary.
- *Maintain essential documents.* Almost all public benefits require certain essential personal documents, including a participant's birth certificate and Social Security card. By maintaining a copy of these essential documents for the participant, THP-Plus programs can provide a helpful role in the application and recertification processes. Program staff can also work with participants to teach them how to manage and store their important documents.

It's important to have high expectations of participants.

We are responsible for giving them the tools for success and being there with them to make their success a reality.

– Polly Williams,
United Friends
of the Children



Former foster youth who move into THP-Plus programs will have little or no experience with being a tenant. Their participation in the program provides an ideal opportunity to gain the experience they will need to be good, informed tenants when they move into regular housing. To help them begin their new role as a tenant on the right foot, providers should require trainings on how to be good tenants as well as how to advocate for their rights as tenants.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

- *Provide formal training about tenants' rights and responsibilities.* When participants enter a THP-Plus program, they will often need to learn such basic things as the difference between who changes burned-out light bulbs and who has the refrigerator repaired. Participants will also need to learn about their legal rights and obligations as tenants, such as the consequences of paying rent late, and tenants' rights if the landlord is not maintaining the apartment. This training should also inform participants about the differences between supportive and regular housing. The combination of training and the hands-on experience of being a tenant in the THP-Plus program will serve participants well when they move into regular housing.

- *Develop partnerships with fair housing organizations.* It is important that THP-Plus programs work with fair housing organizations to have protocols in place for legally handling participant terminations and not wait until a participant has made a claim of unlawful termination against the program. Programs can initiate this process by contacting their local fair housing organization, educating them about the THP-Plus program, and seeking their advice when issues of fair housing arise. The fair housing organization can also conduct trainings with staff members and participants to build their knowledge in this area. In the case of a participant eviction, the THP-Plus program should refer the participant to the fair housing organization to address concerns the participant may have as to whether the process has been conducted in a legal manner. THP-Plus programs may also benefit from developing partnerships with local landlord and realtor associations, through which they can conduct trainings to increase community awareness about former foster youth.

- *Utilize leases.* It is a common practice in THP-Plus programs to utilize a housing lease, particularly for programs that provide permanent housing. The benefit of a lease is that it clearly delineates the role of the tenant and the role of the landlord. Additionally, a lease is the same legal document used by young adults who are not living in housing programs, as well as the same legal document that THP-Plus participants will use in the future. By utilizing a lease, programs will familiarize participants with its essential elements and demonstrate that its restrictions (e.g. not allowing people not named in the lease to live with the tenant) are the same restrictions placed on all tenants.



36 *Corporation for Supportive Housing has published a guide to fair housing in supportive housing, **Between the Lines: A Question and Answer Guide on Legal Issues in Supportive Housing - California Edition.***



In scattered-site, master lease models, building a partnership between the THP-Plus service provider and the landlord is important. This partnership can be established through a regular and consistent forum for communication about issues that may arise for the young adult participants. It will be most helpful to strike a balance between participants advocating for themselves with their landlords and THP-Plus providers providing advocacy and modeling professional interactions with landlords.

Provided below is an overview of the different housing and lease options and considerations to take into account for each. Additional information about each housing configuration, including advantages and disadvantages, can be found in *A Guide to Implementing THP-Plus: Housing California's Homeless Former Foster Youth*, a publication of the THP-Plus Statewide Implementation Project.

Housing Model	Lease or Agreement Type	Considerations
Scattered-Site (tenant-based) Transitional	Master-lease between participant and THP-Plus program	This lease may transfer to the participant at the completion of the program, depending on whether the THP-Plus program allows the participant to take over the apartment at program completion.
Scattered-Site (tenant-based) Permanent	Direct lease between participant and affordable housing provider, with third-party agreement	A standard lease is executed between the participant and the affordable housing management company. A third-party agreement is between the affordable housing management company and the THP-Plus provider, outlining the services to be provided and administration of rental subsidy. A third-party agreement terminates upon program completion.
Single-Site (project-based) Transitional	Usually a program agreement rather than a lease	Because they are transitional in nature, these programs normally outline the expectations of the program in a program agreement rather than a lease. A lease affords a participant more legal rights than a program agreement.
Single-Site (project-based) Permanent	Direct lease between participant and affordable housing provider, with third-party agreement	While this housing configuration is different than a scattered-site model, the same leasing approach is used.
Host Family	Usually a program agreement rather than a lease	In models currently being implemented, program agreements are used. However, participants in host family settings have tenancy rights.

5. TRAINING CURRICULUM TO PREPARE YOUTH FOR HOUSING

It is recommended that young adults preparing to enter a THP-Plus program participate in an educational curriculum that prepares them for the experience they are about to have. Many young adults entering housing may have participated in life skills training while in foster care and they will now have the opportunity to apply that knowledge. Reviewing life skills training in the weeks before they enter housing will refresh their knowledge of the basics of independent living, build participants' confidence as they prepare to enter housing, clarify the expectations of the program, introduce participants to one another, and build the relationship between THP-Plus staff members and participants. Most importantly, providing an in-depth look at the THP-Plus program provides potential participants with the opportunity to answer important questions about what life in the program will really be like, such as:

- What will be expected of me as a participant in the program?
- What are the rules?
- Where will I live and who will I live with?
- What assistance will the program provide?
- How much rent will I pay?
- What happens if I lose my job or quit school?
- Can I have overnight guests?
- If I leave the program, can I come back?

These are questions that should be encouraged and thoroughly answered by a THP-Plus program during the preparation training curriculum. With these questions answered, participants will be able to make an informed choice as young adults about their participation in the program, something that they did not have the legal right to do while in foster care. Potential participants may decide after receiving answers to their questions that the program is not for them and such a decision should be respected.

The recommended number of hours required to cover this material is 20. This information can be provided in a concentrated format, or covered over a series of weeks. It should not go beyond four weeks, as potential THP-Plus participants who are experiencing a housing crisis may have difficulty sustaining their housing situation. It is recommended that housing assistance, food vouchers, individualized case management, and other short-term assistance be available to assist potential program participants experiencing a crisis. To avoid this situation, some providers teach a portion of this training before the THP-Plus program begins, and then complete the training after participants are stabilized in the housing program.



We utilize a youth development approach. We empower participants to make decisions, while teaching them the skills they need to be productive members of the community.

– Lorraine Flores,
Bill Wilson Center



RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

- *Utilize current and former participants in training.* No one says it better than someone who has actually experienced it. Programs that do not have current or former participants to assist can draw on older former foster youth for training purposes.
- *Make training interactive.* Materials should be covered in a manner that is fun and interactive. If it feels like school, attendees will begin to tune out. Some providers have translated materials into games, such as “Tenancy Jeopardy,” or “Who Wants to be A Tenant.”
- *Keep the curriculum basic.* All materials should be accessible to young adults with a variety of reading and math skills. Instructors should have calculators ready, even for basic addition and multiplication. Instructors are encouraged to ask for volunteers when reading out loud, as some attendees may be limited in their ability to do this, causing embarrassment. Accommodations should also be made for training attendees whose primary language is not English.
- *Promote direct dialogue.* The best person to tell training attendees about the “realities” of housing is not another social worker, but an actual landlord. Providers can ask the landlord to review a lease to ensure that potential participants will learn that restrictions of the THP-Plus program are the same as those experienced by most tenants.
- *Allow flexibility for emergency situations.* Since THP-Plus is designed for homeless former foster youth, it may not always be possible for potential participants to safely complete a month-long or even week-long course while living on the street or in an unsafe housing situation. Programs can serve youth most at risk by moving them into safe housing while figuring out alternate ways of delivering the training.
- *Provide logistical support.* Providers can support youth by providing transportation vouchers for youth who are currently homeless and childcare during trainings for parenting youth.

Moving day is an important one, and requires a great deal of planning and emotional support to go smoothly. It will require good logistical coordination as well as support for an excited and often fearful young adult.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

- *Provide emotional support.* Moving can be a very hard time for young adults entering a THP-Plus program, whether they are coming from a group home, foster home, or other living arrangements. This will most likely be their first experience of living in their own apartments. Graduating participants can be quite anxious about the prospect of living on their own, without the support offered by the program.
- *Coordinate furniture delivery prior to the move.* It is important to coordinate furniture delivery to be timed with the move to ensure that the participant's first night in housing feels safe and welcoming. Also, THP-Plus programs should define the minimum of furniture that all participants will have in place prior to the move. For some programs this includes a bed (on a frame, not the floor), bed linens, a dresser, and basic bathroom and kitchen supplies.
- *Utilize movers.* Consider developing an ongoing relationship with professional movers who have the appropriate equipment, insurance and physical stamina for the job. Additionally, utilizing movers allows the THP-Plus case manager to coordinate the move ahead of time (e.g. having keys and furniture ready before the new participant arrives) and focus on providing emotional support for the new participant.
- *Help with the cost of the move.* THP-Plus programs often provide a limited amount of financial support to pay for the movers, usually up to \$150 per move. Many programs also coordinate the movers.
- *Draw on family members or friends to help.* While the support of the THP-Plus case manager will be appreciated, it is important to remember that the relationship between the new participants and staff member is still relatively new. With the

permission of the participant, invite his/her friends and family members to help out on the day of the move.

- *Remain at the apartment.* THP-Plus staff members should plan to remain with the new participants in their apartments as long as necessary to ensure that they feel supported and safe. It is important to send the message that the program is not just dropping them off and they must now fend for themselves. In transitional housing programs, exiting participants may also benefit from the presence of a supportive case manager during the first few hours at their new apartment.
- *Don't leave new participants with an empty refrigerator.* Nothing says home more than a full refrigerator. Consider providing a cooked dinner (or at least some homemade cookies!) or having a small dinner party the first night with the participant's family and friends to provide some emotional support and to celebrate this milestone. Make sure that the new participant has basic food supplies to contribute to a sense of security, safety, and success.



The exciting aspect of THP-Plus is that participants are actually living out the many life skills that they may have learned about in a classroom. Issues such as balancing a checking account, simple meal preparation, and conflict resolution suddenly become much more relevant as participants work to put life skills into practice for the first time.

To assist participants in the successful application of this knowledge, it is important to regularly reinforce it through ongoing training. Youth may not have retained significant knowledge from their previous classroom training since they have never applied it to their own life experiences. Training topics should be developed by participants to ensure their relevance. Additionally, effective training curricula draw on the wisdom and feedback of older former foster youth and/or former THP-Plus participants.

Once topics are addressed in a group setting, case managers can reinforce these messages by working individually with participants. For example, after holding an optional group lesson in simple, affordable meal preparation, case managers can follow up by providing one-on-one meal preparation practice in participants' apartments. As a general rule, practical and experiential learning are most effective.

We have started providing training on nutrition and how to be good consumers.

Participants will learn how to budget and how to comparison shop.

– Nenita Dean,
Stanislaus County
Community Services Agency



7. ONGOING LIFE SKILLS TRAINING

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

Provided below are examples of topics to address in ongoing life skills training.

Tenant-Related Skill Development

- Communicating effectively with your property manager
- Tenant rights and responsibilities
- How to be a good neighbor
- Basic household maintenance
- Strategies to promote roommate communication

Household Skill Development

- The essentials of nutrition
- Simple menu planning
- Grocery shopping
- Comparison shopping
- How to read utility bills
- How to reduce utility expenses
- Tricks and tips for clothes washing and drying

Interpersonal and Communication Skills

- Conflict resolution and non-defensive communication
- Healthy communication with your partner
- Recognizing and addressing violence in relationships
- Parenting education

Health and Mental Health Skills

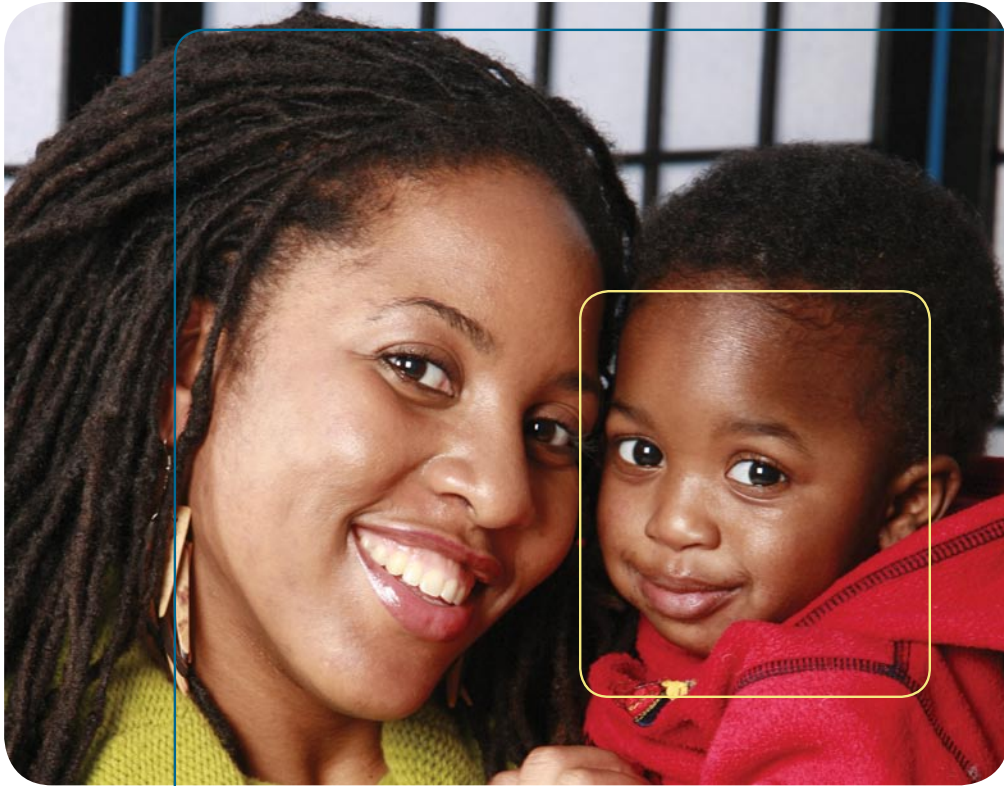
- Discussing mental health issues
- Identifying a primary care physician, dentist, and therapist
- Making appointments for a primary care physical, dental care, and therapy
- Signing up for health insurance
- Selecting a pediatrician for your child
- Sexual health and birth control options
- Drug education and addiction treatment

Employment Skills

- What expectations do employers have of employees
- How to manage conflict with co-workers
- What to expect in an employee evaluation
- How to ask for a raise

Financial Literacy

- How to distinguish between needs and wants
- Tracking expenses to understand your spending habits
- Learning how to read your utility bill
- Paying yourself first: how to build your savings

**RECOMMENDED PRACTICES (CONTINUED)**

Education Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Experiences of former foster youth in higher education• Sources of financial aid• Study skills for higher education
Parenting Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Selecting childcare• Managing parental stress• Stages of child development• Approaches to discipline

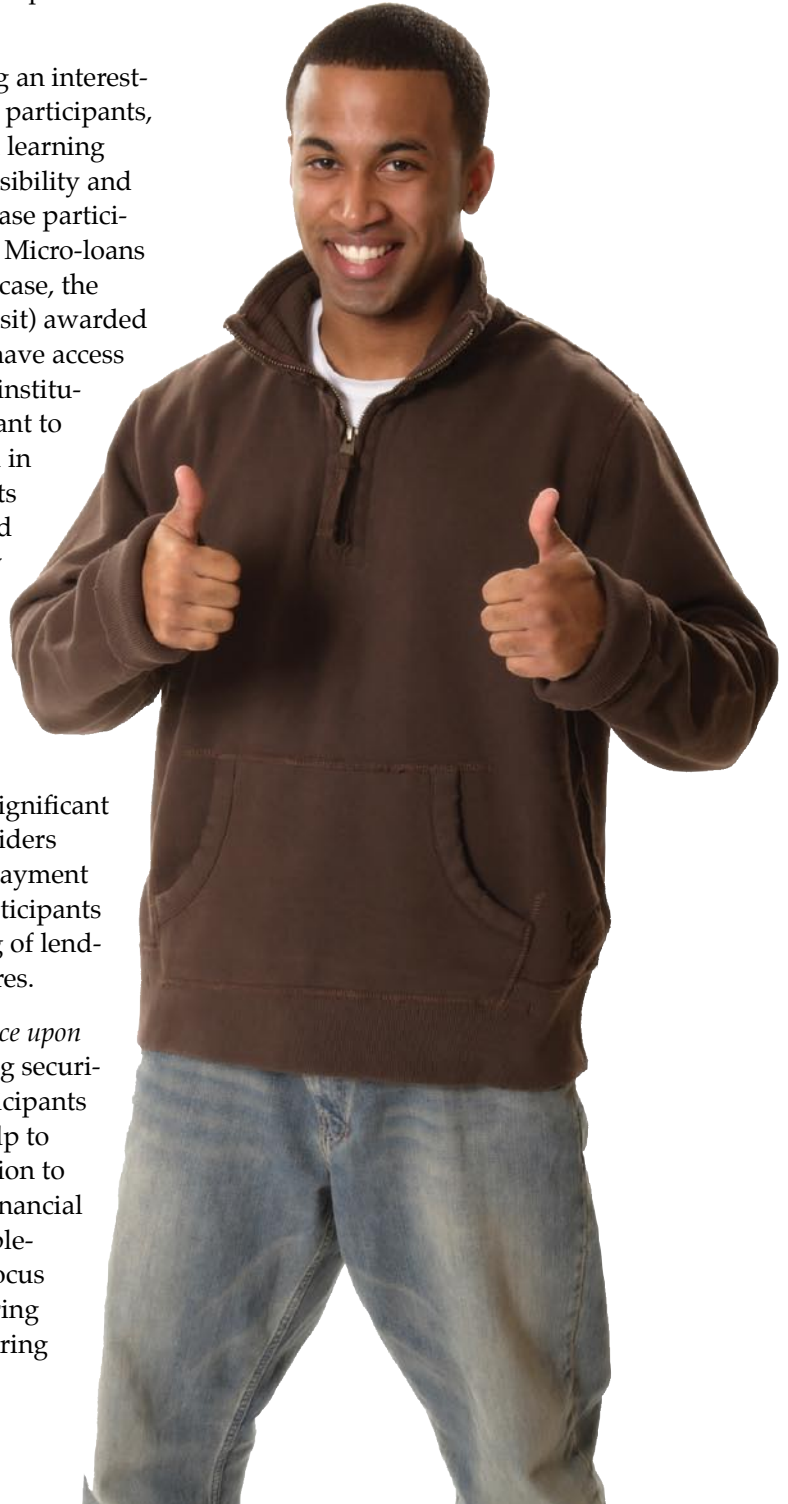
A significant barrier to obtaining housing for former foster youth is often the initial security deposit. Offering security deposit assistance will increase the accessibility of THP-Plus programs and produce rewarding long-term effects.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

- *Offer a subsidy or waive security deposit.* Some providers may heavily subsidize or waive the initial security deposit, thereby lowering the barriers to participation in the program.

- *Offer a micro-loan.* By offering an interest-free micro-loan to participants, providers create a learning exercise in responsibility and financial planning and increase participants' stake in the program. Micro-loans are very small loans (in this case, the amount of the security deposit) awarded to borrowers who may not have access to loans from other lending institutions. Providers may also want to utilize a peer-lending model in which a group of participants cosign each others' loans and take collective responsibility for the repayment of individual micro-loans. This model builds community among participants and encourages them to hold each other accountable. Any micro-loan model requires significant guidance and training. Providers should create an explicit repayment schedule and work with participants to build their understanding of lending and borrowing procedures.

- *Offer security deposit assistance upon program completion.* Providing security deposit assistance to participants exiting the program may help to facilitate a successful transition to independence. Additional financial support after program completion allows participants to focus on school, work, and mastering independent living skills during this period of transition.



THP-Plus is California's only housing program for former foster care and probation youth, and is championed by service providers, county administrators, young adult participants, and advocates. Service providers and county administrators praise the program for its flexible funding, which allows programs to tailor its services to the individual strengths and needs of program participants. Participants cite the importance of living in a safe, stable housing situation while receiving a wide range of supportive services during a critical period of transition. Legislators and advocates have identified THP-Plus as one of the state's most promising practices in meeting the housing and service needs of transitioning foster youth.

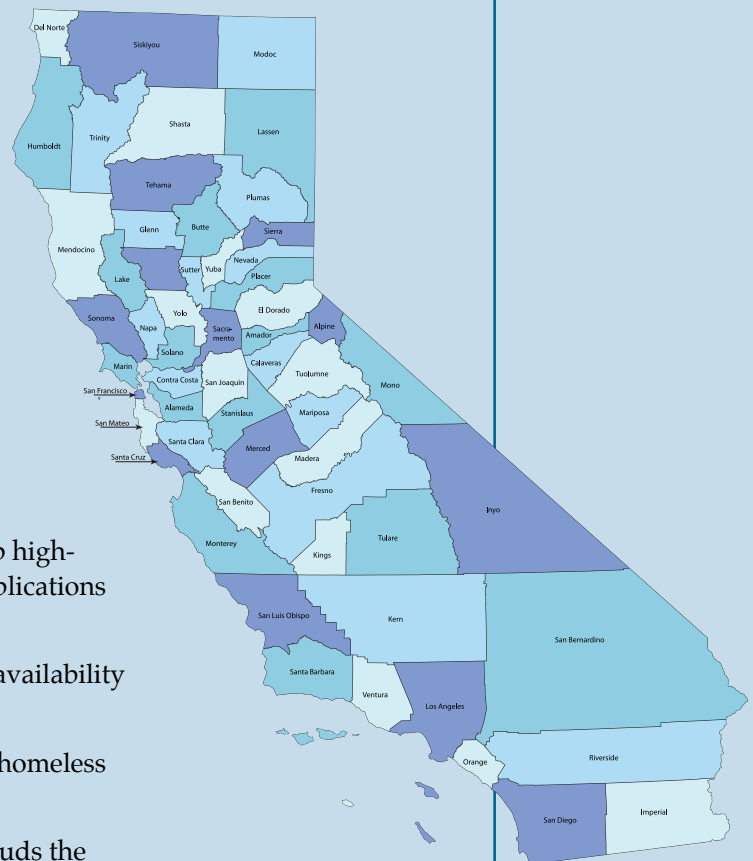
Since its inception in 2001, interest in THP-Plus has grown, implementation barriers have been removed, and state funding has increased. As a result, California is poised to make a significant dent in the gap between the significant demand for housing and services, and the current supply available for former foster youth. The THP-Plus Statewide Implementation Project seeks to ensure that as additional housing programs are established, and as existing programs increase their capacity, the housing and supportive services they provide are of superior quality. This guide represents one component of this effort.

By the end of the 2007-08 fiscal year, based on available funding, the state estimates that approximately 1,200 former foster and probation youth will be receiving THP-Plus housing and services. However, the need for quality housing and supportive services is especially great right now, due to the increasing numbers of emancipating foster youth. Between 1998 and 2006, despite a 26 percent decrease in the overall foster care caseload, California experienced a 41 percent increase in the number of youth emancipating from care. To truly meet this need, the state needs an estimated 5,200 housing units for former foster youth, based on the assumption that 20 percent of emancipated foster youth, ages 18-24, will need safe, stable housing and supportive services.

The THP-Plus Statewide Implementation Project has identified the following priorities for the 2007-08 fiscal year:

- Increase capacity to meet full demand for THP-Plus
- Develop and implement a statewide THP-Plus evaluation system
- Continue technical assistance and training to develop high-quality housing through individual consultation, publications and trainings
- Educate and engage the probation system about the availability of THP-Plus
- Integrate THP-Plus with Proposition 1C housing for homeless youth in transition

The THP-Plus Statewide Implementation Project applauds the coalition of service providers, county and state administrators, young adult participants, legislators, and advocates who have worked together to create and sustain the THP-Plus program, and looks forward to its continued growth and success.



- 1 To learn more about the interviewed practitioners, visit their websites:
 Bill Wilson Center www.billwilsoncenter.org
 California Connected by 25 Initiative www.f2f.ca.gov/California25.htm
 California Foster Care Ombudsman www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov
 California Youth Connection www.calyouthconn.org
 Corporation for Supportive Housing www.csh.org
 First Place for Youth www.firstplaceforyouth.org
 Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services (GLASS) www.glassla.org
 Hillside Youth Moving On www.hillsideyouth.org
 A Home Within www.ahomewithin.org
 Larkin Street Youth Services www.larkinstreetyouth.org
 Rising Tide Communities, Orangewood Children's Foundation
www.orangewoodfoundation.org/programs_risingtide.asp
 St. Anne's www.stannes.org
 Stanislaus County Community Services Agency, Child and Family Services Division
www.co.stanislaus.ca.us/BHRS/child_system.htm
 Tri-City Homeless Coalition's Project Independence
www.tricityhomeless.org/Programs/project_independence.html
 United Friends of the Children www.unitedfriends.org
- 2 For more information about the Community Network for Youth Development, visit:
www.cnyd.org
- 3 For more information about the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment tool, visit:
www.caseylifeskills.org
- 4 For Wage and Benefit Survey information, visit: State of California Employment
 Development Department www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov
- 5 For more information about the California Lifeline Service, visit: www.lifelinesupport.org
- 6 For more information about One-Stop Career Centers, visit: www.edd.ca.gov/one-stop
- 7 For more information about the Gateway Initiative, visit:
www.careerladdersproject.org/projects/gateway.php
 For more information about Job Corps visit: jobcorps.dol.gov
- 8 For more information about TANF, visit www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa
 For more information about considerations when selecting childcare, visit:
www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=96406,00.html
www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/components/7268f.html

- 9** For more information about the employment rights of LGBTQ youth in California, visit:
The Legal Aid Society, Employment Law Center www.las-elc.org/gender.html#lgbt

- 10** To locate community-based employment centers that work with disabled youth, visit:
The California State Department of Rehabilitation
www.rehab.cahwnet.gov/default.htm
For more information about the Disability Rights and Education Fund, visit:
www.dredf.org.
For more information about the SSI program, visit: www.ssa.gov/d&s1.htm

- 11** For information about organizations that provide breastfeeding support, visit: WIC
www.fns.usda.gov/wic/Breastfeeding/breastfeedingmainpage.HTM
La Leche League www.lalecheleague.org/Web/California.html

- 12** To locate local food stamp and WIC agencies, visit: www.fns.usda.gov/wic
www.fns.usda.gov/fsp

- 13** To locate local food banks, visit: www.ciwmb.ca.gov/reuse/Links/Food.htm

- 14** For more information about Foster Youth Services, visit:
www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/fy

- 15** For more information about educational testing programs in the California
Community Colleges, visit: www.cccco.edu

- 16** To locate organizations that support LGBTQ youth, visit: National Youth Advocacy Coalition
www.nyacyouth.org/nyac/membership.html
National Center for Lesbian Rights (serves all LGBTQ youth)
<http://nclrights.org/projects/youthproject.htm>

- 17** For information about California GED programs, visit: www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/gd

- 18** For information about locating and choosing an elementary school, visit:
www.ca.gov/Education/Schools/Kinder-HS.html

- 19** For more information about the California Chafee Grant Program, visit:
www.chafee.csac.ca.gov

- 20** For more information about the Foster Youth Success Initiative visit:
www.icanaffordcollege.com/fysi.htm

- 21** For more information about the Guardian Scholars Program, visit:
www.orangewoodfoundation.org/programs_scholars.asp
For more information about the Renaissance Scholars Program at UC Santa Cruz, visit:
stars.ucsc.edu/renaissancescholars/contact.html

- 22** For more information about the Educational Opportunity Program, visit:
www.csummentor.edu/planning/eop/
 For more information about the Extended Opportunity Program and Services, visit:
www.cccco.edu/divisions/ss/eops/eops.htm
 For more information about the Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education Program, visit: www.cccco.edu/divisions/ss/care/care.htm
- 23** For more information about Medi-Cal eligibility, visit: www.dhs.ca.gov/mcs/medi-calhome
- 24** For more information about the Fred Finch Youth Center's STAY program, visit:
www.fredfinch.org/programs/transition-aged-youth-tay-programs/
- 25** For information about organizations that promote tolerance and inclusivity, visit:
 Anti-Defamation League www.adl.org/
 NAACP www.naACP.org/
 National Youth Advocacy Coalition www.nyacyouth.org/index.html
 Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays www.pflag.com/pages/0016.html
- 26** For the California Department of Social Services list of county ILP coordinators and services, visit: www.childsworld.ca.gov/ILPCountyC_1443.htm
- 27** For information about mentoring programs in California, visit:
 California Department of Education www.cde.ca.gov/ls/yd/mr
 State of California Governor's Mentoring Partnership www.mentoring.ca.gov
 Youth Mentoring Connection www.youthmentoring.org/index.html
 California Mentor Foundation www.calmentor.com/index.fsp
- 28** For information about starting your own mentoring program, visit: www.mentoring.org
- 29** For information about furnishing a first apartment, visit: Rental Decoration Digest
www.rentaldecorating.com/0706/what_items_do_i_need_to_furnish.htm
 My First Apartment.com <http://myfirstapartment.com>
- 30** For more information on IDAs, visit: CFED
www.cfed.org/focus.m?parentid=2&siteid=374&id=374
 Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative www.jimcaseyyouth.org/opportunitypassport.htm
- 31** To find local affordable housing developers in California, visit: State of California Housing and Community Development www.hcd.ca.gov/fa/affrdble-housng.html
- 32** To locate organizations that assist young adults with disabilities find housing, visit:
 State of California Department of Rehabilitation www.rehab.cahwnet.gov/default.htm

- 33** For first time car buying tips, visit: www.carbuyingtips.com/first-time-buyer.htm
<http://auto.howstuffworks.com/car-buying.htm>
- 34** For more information about public benefits, visit the following websites:
EITC www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=96406,00.html
Food Stamps Program www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/
General Assistance www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/GeneralAss_2058.htm
Medi-Cal www.dhs.ca.gov/mcs/medi-calhome/
SSI www.ssa.gov/d&s1.htm
TANF information www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/
WIC www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/
- 35** To locate local fair housing organizations, visit:
Legal Services of California Fair Housing Hotline Project www.lsnr.net/fairhousing.html
National Fair Housing Advocate Online www.fairhousing.com/index.cfm
- 36** To download the Legal Issues Guide from Corporation for Supportive Housing, visit:
www.csh.org
- 37** For a description of how this program works at First Place for Youth, visit:
www.firstplacefund.org/programs/shp-main.html

NOTES

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THP-PLUS STATEWIDE IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING FOR FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

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