



# John Burton Foundation for Children without Homes

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## Policy Brief

### Promising Partnerships between Public Child Welfare Agencies and Homeless Youth Service Providers

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### Abstract

*The runaway and homeless youth population, and the foster and former foster youth population, share common experiences of abuse, neglect, abandonment, and instability. Despite strikingly similar service needs, service provision to these populations is divided, largely due to funding constraints and fragmentation in service delivery. Case studies in this report outline successful partnerships, both formal and informal, between public child welfare agencies and homeless youth-serving organizations. Significant benefits can result from collaboration between these two youth-serving sectors. Providers can be an invaluable resource to Child Welfare, supplying differential response to youth at risk of entering care and in need of services. Public child welfare agencies can be advocates for their local homeless youth providers. Emergency shelters can serve as a “safe middle ground” for runaway foster youth to reconnect with their social workers. Homeless youth providers’ services can both help prevent placement of youth in care while providing them necessary services, as well as serve as a necessary point of entry for those youth who must be removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect. What is most evident: at the core of these successful partnerships are strong relationships at all levels—between line staff and social workers, and between managers and directors. This report is intended to inspire partnership amongst providers and county agencies that serve our runaway, homeless, foster and former foster youth, despite the systemic fragmentation in funding and policy that exists for these populations.*

# Overview of the Homeless Youth Capacity Building Project

The Homeless Youth Capacity Building Project is a two-year partnership between the John Burton Foundation for Children Without Homes and the California Coalition for Youth, funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Strengthening Communities Fund. The Project seeks to reduce homelessness among economically vulnerable transition-age youth (ages 16 to 24) in California by (1) organizing homeless youth providers to advocate for better local, state, and federal policies, and (2) establishing a cohesive statewide network of nonprofit providers serving homeless youth, and expanding their organizational capacity.

In March of 2010, 63 nonprofit homeless youth-serving organizations were selected to participate as Network Members from seven California counties: Alameda, Fresno, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Francisco, and Santa Clara. More than 100 nonprofit organizations and county agencies from counties across California participate in the Project as Network Affiliates.

The Project provides Network Members and Affiliates with: opportunities to advocate on local, state, and federal levels to reduce youth homelessness in California; topical trainings, educational web seminars and an annual statewide convening; leadership and policy roundtables; and technical assistance publications. Network Members are also eligible to participate in high-quality, individualized technical assistance to build organizational capacity and to apply for up to \$15,000 in competitive financial assistance to support capacity building.

The Project seeks to improve access to information about funding opportunities, policy developments and practice statewide. As part of the Project's publication series, *Promising Partnerships* is designed to highlight existing partnerships between child welfare agencies and homeless youth-serving organizations. These partnerships have enhanced the ability of communities to serve current and former foster youth, and homeless and runaway youth. *Promising Partnerships* draws on current and emerging opportunities for collaboration, and emphasizes the need for increased collaboration between these sectors to better serve our youth.

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The Homeless Youth Capacity Building Project is funded through the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009* (ARRA). The *Recovery Act* has allocated funding to the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Strengthening Communities Fund to build the capacity of nonprofit organizations, whether secular or faith-based, to address the broad economic recovery issues present in their communities, including helping low-income individuals secure and retain employment, earn higher wages, obtain better-quality jobs, and gain greater access to state and federal benefits and tax credits, including *Recovery Act* benefits.

# Why is a Partnership between Child Welfare and the Homeless Youth-Serving Sector Necessary?

The overlap between runaway and homeless youth and the current and former foster youth population is considerable, with common experiences as children, adolescents, and young adults. In California, foster youth comprise less than 0.3% of the state's population, but 40% of persons living in homeless shelters are former foster youth<sup>i</sup>. The Center for Social Services Research reports that the number of California foster youth on "runaway status" has more than doubled in the last decade, from 466 in 1999 to 1,116 in 2009<sup>ii</sup>.

Frequently, youth on the street have experienced abuse or neglect deeming them eligible for removal from their homes by the Child Welfare System, but have not entered the foster care system. According to a 2007 Congressional Report on youth homelessness, 28% of runaway youth who entered shelters cited abuse or neglect as a critical issue<sup>iii</sup>. This is particularly true for older youth, who are not only less likely to enter the system, but are also at an age when running away is more feasible than for their younger counterparts. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, "homeless youth often flee homes where they experience physical abuse, and between 17% and 35% experience sexual abuse."<sup>iv</sup> Even if the abuse is reported, quite often reports do not result in youths' removal from home because they lack substantiation. (In other words, the problem is far more pervasive than these numbers suggest.)

Despite the similarity of service needs for these populations, partnership between public child welfare agencies and the network of homeless youth providers is limited. This is due in part to different funding streams available to provide housing and services to these young adults. As wards of the court, foster youth are eligible for Title IV-E funding, a federal entitlement program that provides housing and a broad range of support services to help foster youth adjust and transition to adulthood.\* Homeless youth not in the foster care system can access some of these services through agencies that serve homeless youth, but services are not guaranteed, vary widely from county to county, and depend largely on the resources available to and accessed by homeless youth-serving organizations. Most commonly, homeless youth providers access *Runaway and Homeless Youth Act* (RHYA) funding, but unfortunately California has not been granted its fair share of this federal money, further contributing to our difficulties in adequately serving runaway and homeless youth not in the child welfare system.

This fragmentation in funding inhibits our ability to serve these populations efficiently and effectively. However, successful partnerships do exist, and have resulted in expansion of resources and programs, and optimum use of available funding, accruing great benefits for young adults and for the homeless youth and child welfare sectors.

*\*With the recent passage of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act (Assembly Bill 12), housing and supportive services will become a foster care entitlement for youth up to age 21 once the legislation is fully implemented. In nearly every state, including California, current foster care entitlements end at age 18.*

## What's Happening Now?

Existing partnerships between homeless youth-serving organizations and public child welfare agencies take a number of forms, ranging from informal collaboration to formal contracts, and may include:

- **Differential Response**, in which a youth is referred to child welfare services, remains living with his or her family, but is provided with services such as counseling;
- **Emergency and Short-Term Placements** for runaway or homeless youth (including youth in foster care who have run away from a foster care placement), foster youth who are awaiting a new placement, youth awaiting transitional housing after being discharged from foster care, or foster youth who lack a viable placement option; and
- **Family Unification Program (FUP)** vouchers, which provide rental subsidies for families at risk of having their child(ren) placed in the custody of Child Welfare due to a lack of adequate housing.

Regardless of the type of services being provided, homeless youth providers serving both foster and non-foster youth can benefit from a collaborative relationship with Child Welfare, and homeless youth providers have proven to be an invaluable resource to local child welfare agencies.

## How Will the Passage of AB 12 Influence Current and Future Partnerships?

Once fully implemented, the *California Fostering Connections to Success Act* (Assembly Bill 12) will extend foster care to age 21. The implications of this legislation on the current homeless youth population are great. Not only will we see an increase in the availability of housing and supportive services to youth ages 18 to 21, but we will likely see a greater number of older youth enter service who would have been formerly considered too old to be placed in care.

Currently, it is rare for an older youth to enter the child welfare system, partly because of how soon they would age out of care. Now that housing and supportive services will exist for youth beyond 18, there may be more incentive for social workers and the youth themselves to consider entering care as a sensible and beneficial option.

Child Welfare may need the future support of homeless youth providers to work more effectively with youth who choose to opt out of foster care before turning 21. Although there are considerable benefits to youth who choose to remain in care to age 21, youth at this age are often eager to be independent from the foster care system. Emergency shelters and drop-in centers for homeless youth will likely play an important role in linking these youth back with services once they are ready to access them.

While we will not know the true impact of AB 12 until it's fully implemented (which is projected for 2014), it is clear that the partnership between homeless youth providers and Child Welfare will continue to be a critical element in providing services to older youth both in and out of care.

## **Three Case Studies**

This Issue Brief outlines three case studies of partnerships between nonprofit homeless youth service providers and their local child welfare agency. Each case study includes an overview of the partnership, including a history of how the partnership was formed and how it is maintained on an ongoing basis; the services provided by each organization or agency; and a discussion of how these partnerships benefit both the homeless youth being served as well as the collaborating organizations.

The case studies presented in the following pages feature Redwood Community Action Agency in Humboldt County; San Diego Youth Services in San Diego County; and Huckleberry Youth Programs in San Francisco and Marin Counties.

## **Humboldt County**

### ***Redwood Community Action Agency, Youth Services Bureau***

***The Youth Services Bureau (YSB) was established in 1984, and is a division of Redwood Community Action Agency (RCAA), a private, community-based nonprofit organization in Humboldt County that provides services to low- and moderate-income residents. The Youth Services Bureau currently partners with Humboldt County Child Welfare Services (CWS) in a number of ways. YSB's services are largely preventative, recognized by CWS as a resource for families at risk of removal of their children, and for families in crisis who are not being served by the public child welfare system. In addition, YSB serves as a resource for CWS and as a safety net for current foster youth, particularly older teenagers for whom appropriate placements can present challenges, as well as for youth transitioning out of foster care.***

**The Youth Services Bureau's "Our House Crisis Shelter,"** established in 1991, offers short-term and emergency shelter to youth between the ages of 12 to 17 who are homeless, runaways, or experiencing problems at home. For youth seeking shelter services, Our House provides 24-hour per day supervision; food, clothing, and transportation; case management services; and crisis intervention and mediation. Humboldt County CWS recognizes the emergency shelter as a critical community resource for some of the youth on their caseload, as well as for youth at risk of entering the foster care system.

In the event that a youth runs from his or her home as a result of family conflict, Our House serves as a safe alternative to the street. Youth are offered up to two nights of respite care while YSB simultaneously works with the family for up to two weeks to reconcile issues and prevent placement into foster care. This "cooling off" period, coupled with family counseling or other family-preservation services, can ultimately prevent family conflict from resulting in a child welfare case. If YSB is unable to reunite a youth with his/her family due to the severity of the problem, YSB works with the family and CWS to determine an alternative service plan. Similarly, in situations where a youth would ultimately enter care because their parent or guardian is in the hospital, Our House helps the youth avoid entering the system by providing a temporary option until the parent or guardian is able to again care for their child.

Our House also serves as a resource for youth currently in the foster care system. The shelter is able to function as a short-term placement for "floaters" who repeatedly experience failed placements, for youth in-between placements who would otherwise be homeless, and for youth who have run away from their foster care placements and are at risk of juvenile hall. When a youth runs from a placement, Our House is a safe place to go. This emergency or short-term placement option is valuable to CWS because the youth view it as a non-coercive alternative to CWS system placement, and are often less resistant to working with the staff. This safety net is particularly helpful with older youth, both because of the developmental issues associated with adolescence and the difficulties in placing older teens in foster or adoptive care. Many older teens in foster care have been in the system for a considerable time, and have experienced hardships and lack of permanency that can also complicate placement options. YSB is known for their exceptional ability to work with this older age group. The voluntary nature of YSB's services makes Our House an appealing option for foster youth who are struggling with asserting their independence in a system where they feel decisions are being made for them.

**The Youth Services Bureau's Transitional Living Program, the "Launch Pad,"** is available to homeless and runaway youth ages 16 to 20, and is designed to assist clients in attaining self-

sufficiency as young adults. Launch Pad is a viable placement option for youth not in the foster care system, foster youth who are close to or currently transitioning out of care, or for those foster youth who are already emancipated. In addition to an apartment unit, food, and supportive staff, YSB provides case management for Launch Pad residents, as well as life skills and group therapy. Residents are able to stay at Launch Pad for up to 18 months with the goal of moving on to independent living. Launch Pad primarily serves non-system youth, but holds two beds for foster youth, which are differentially funded through the child welfare system.

## **The Partnership History**

Redwood Community Action Agency's partnership with Humboldt County Child Welfare Services developed as a response to shifts in state funding that occurred in the early 1980s. Runaway and homeless youth in California were previously served through the county's Probation Subsidy Department via "prevention programs," which were at that time mandated across the state. When policy changed and probation was no longer mandated to provide these services, the programs dissolved.

As a result, relationships developed between private agencies and the County Probation Department to serve runaway and homeless youth. RCAA first formed a relationship with Probation based on a contract that deemed runaways who had not been ticketed by the police eligible for services at RCAA, which were federally funded. YSB would contact parents to gain permission to temporarily house their children in the emergency shelter.

***According to Peter LaVallee, the director of the Youth Services Bureau of Redwood Community Action Agency, it is the development and maintenance of strong personal relationships that creates a great partnership between YSB and Humboldt County Child Welfare Services. He reports that CWS staff are in YSB's crisis shelter on a daily basis. They coordinate services and work closely, both administratively and at the line-staff level. LaVallee believes that "a referral is only as good as the relationship that exists with the agency making the referral." He sees these relationships as the "nuts and bolts" holding the partnership together.***

As more foster youth appeared at the shelter and were served effectively, CWS began to see the Youth Services Bureau as a key element in the system of care for this population. This public/private partnership improved service outcomes and reduced system cost. At first, collaboration was challenging and took adjustments for both agencies. Over the years, a strong partnership developed and the two entities have learned to work in a complementary and reciprocal manner to serve the youth.

Currently, Humboldt County CWS and RCAA's Youth Services Bureau fulfill different roles in the case management of youth with whom they come into contact. As CWS is responsible for long-term case management and permanency, YSB often steps in to provide short-term intensive support. On a day-to-day basis, CWS and YSB staff have significant contact. At a typical Team Decision-Making Meeting (TDM) for a foster youth who has received services from YSB or is a resident of YSB's transitional housing program, a number of staff are present from each agency. At a more formal and institutional level, CWS and YSB maintain contact through their participation in various commission meetings, such as the Juvenile Justice Prevention Commission. YSB and CWS both have standing items on the agenda. Another source of collaboration is their partnering on federal grants, which requires that YSB and CWS meet frequently for program planning, to identify metrics and to clarify respective roles.

# San Diego County

## *San Diego Youth Services*

*San Diego Youth Services (SDYS), founded in 1970 as one of the first youth shelters in the country, is now a large nonprofit providing a wide range of services for homeless, runaway, abused, and at-risk youth. SDYS operates shelters, group homes, foster homes, community centers, and transitional housing. Through both formal and informal partnerships with San Diego County Child Welfare Services, SDYS serves current and former foster youth, as well as youth who have never been in care.*

**The Storefront Emergency Shelter for Youth** operates a 20-bed emergency night shelter for homeless and runaway youth. In addition to basic services, e.g., shelter, food, clothing, and medical care referral, a wide range of mental-health support services are provided at Storefront, including case management, drug and sexual exploitation education, arts programming, and family mediation and counseling. Storefront staff work to reunite youth with their family if safe and appropriate, and make referrals to longer-term residential programs or transitional living programs when reunification is not possible. This program is funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Federal Youth Services Bureau (FYSB), and private foundation funding. SDYS's Storefront Emergency Shelter does not have a reimbursement rate for CWS placement, so they do not house foster youth at Storefront. They do, however, offer their group homes or Foster Family Agency (FFA) as a placement alternative, if appropriate, to the social workers of any foster youth who come to Storefront.

**Angel Home** is designed to meet the needs of youth who come to Storefront who are not part of the foster care system and have nowhere to go for long-term housing. Angel Home places these youth in a certified foster home that is supervised by SDYS's FFA. This type of timely intervention for youth who are ineligible for county-funded foster care or other public services also serves to divert at-risk youth from entering the child welfare system. These youth are then eligible for services from the Storefront Day Program until they reach 18. The program is voluntary, and if a parent or guardian can be identified, SDYS must gain consent. Angel Home is a small program, usually consisting of a few beds, and is entirely privately funded.

**The Cool Bed Program, located at the Spring Valley and East Communities Center,** provides respite care for youth ages 12 to 17 who are in need of a "cooling off" period from home. While the majority of the services provided at the Spring Valley and East Communities Center are largely geared toward diverting youth from juvenile probation, the Cool Bed Program is a preventative resource for families at risk of the removal of their children. The program provides a short "cooling off" period during which time SDYS, with parental consent, temporarily places youth in certified foster homes where they can benefit from structured supervision, counseling, independent living skills training, and 24-hour emergency response. SDYS also offers in-home preventative support services for families at risk of entering the child welfare system.

**Young Adult Affordable Housing** is the transitional housing program of San Diego Youth Services. The program provides affordable housing for otherwise homeless youth. Most transitional housing programs serve former foster youth, and utilize THP-Plus (Transitional Housing Placement-Plus) funding and HOME Funds (a program of HUD) to subsidize the cost of rent. Youth who do not have a foster care history cannot be served using these funds. SDYS

purchased their apartment building, significantly reducing overhead cost and as a result, is financially able to serve both foster and non-foster youth.

**San Diego Youth Services' Intensive Foster Homes and Group Homes** are designed to provide options for foster youth in need of a higher level of care due to severe emotional disturbances and mental illness. SDYS offers four different levels of foster care, and placement is determined depending on the needs of the youth.

## **The Partnership History**

San Diego Youth Services began their relationship with San Diego County Child Welfare Services (CWS) in 1976, with the recognition that there were many foster youth not being adequately served by traditional foster homes. SDYS also saw high-risk "street youth" not being served by the foster care system who needed a range of services that were unavailable. In response, SDYS opened a foster family care treatment program. The partnership has since grown, with increased funding and new services, into a formal partnership centered around SDYS's FFA, and THP-Plus program.

***Walter Philips, chief executive officer of San Diego Youth Services, believes that "the advocacy piece is equally as important at the local level as it is on a legislative level in Sacramento." Philips has sat on several councils and committees related to child welfare, and makes it a priority to maintain these important external relationships.***

SDYS's chief executive officer ensures that the agency's program managers, social workers, and staff maintain frequent and sound communication with their peers at CWS, including involvement in Team Decision-Making meetings (TDMs). CWS and SDYS work together on service plans for foster youth who are referred to SDYS group homes or FFA, and SDYS contacts CWS when foster youth show up at their emergency shelter, however, they consider their partnership as not fully integrated. CWS and SDYS do not have the close daily contact that you may find in a smaller county or agency.

At the management level, the SDYS chief executive officer has developed a relationship with the director of San Diego CWS, and maintains contact with CWS leadership through his involvement in councils and committees, such as the Commission on Children, Youth and Families. Lastly and critically, SDYS works at the policy level by maintaining strong relationships with local elected officials in order to advocate for homeless youth.

# San Francisco & Marin Counties

## *Huckleberry Youth Programs*

*Huckleberry Youth Programs began in 1967 in response to the many runaway teens that remained in the Haight-Ashbury District after making their way to San Francisco in the late 1960s. Utilizing a continuum-of-care service model, Huckleberry has since provided homeless, runaway, and otherwise at-risk youth and their families with a broad spectrum of services in San Francisco and Marin Counties. Huckleberry's partnership with San Francisco Family and Children Services (F&CS) is most recognized through their relationship with the Child Protective Services (CPS) division. CPS recognizes Huckleberry for the respite care they provide for youth at risk of entering the child welfare system, and for their family reunification efforts. Huckleberry also maintains a strong relationship with the juvenile justice system and offers status offender rehabilitative services.*

**Huckleberry House** is a 24-hour crisis and emergency shelter in San Francisco, designed for high-needs youth ages 11 to 17. Although a large number of the youth who enter the shelter are reported to CPS for suspected abuse, Huckleberry's respite care, coupled with counseling and other supportive services, results in an 88% rate of family reunification, or placement in other safe environments when abuse, neglect, or abandonment preclude reunification. Huckleberry House provides an invaluable service to San Francisco F&CS in preventing placement of youth in care, while still ensuring that the youth and/or their family have access to the services they need. If a youth staying in the shelter is taken into CPS custody, Huckleberry and San Francisco F&CS work together to provide continuity for the youth by maintaining access to the **Huckleberry Counseling Program** after placement.

Huckleberry House is funded through the federal RHYA Basic Center Grant, and does not have a contract with CWS for reimbursement of shelter costs for foster care youth. Thus, Huckleberry does not house foster youth in their shelter.

**Huckleberry Transitional Age Youth Services** provides outreach and mental health education for youth ages 16 to 24 in Marin County. This is an important resource for youth aging out of foster care. In San Francisco, Huckleberry has partnered with other organizations to create a Multi-Service Network—a highly coordinated referral system to ensure that transition-age youth in San Francisco connect to existing services and make a successful transition to adulthood. As youth in Marin and San Francisco prepare for emancipation from foster care, their social workers often refer them to Huckleberry for these services.

### **The Partnership History**

After years of reporting suspected abuse cases to CPS, and being visited by whoever happened to receive the report, Huckleberry began to advocate for a consistent CPS liaison in order to improve case coordination. This began Huckleberry's long-time relationship with San Francisco F&CS. Although in most cases CPS was unable to find cause to remove the child from the home, they recognized that the child and/or family was in need of services, and would rely on Huckleberry to provide them.

Over the years, San Francisco F&CS and Huckleberry have engaged in both formal and informal partnerships. Direct service provision is not the only area in which they have worked together.

F&CS played a role in advocating for Huckleberry when they lost their juvenile justice funding. At various points they developed Memoranda of Understanding to define roles and provide guidelines on what to report. Not every attempt at partnering on services has been successful; some have provided useful learning experiences. The partnership in both Marin and San Francisco Counties is dynamic and evolves as service needs and resources change.

***Genny Price, director of programs and operations at Huckleberry Youth Programs, stresses the importance of recognizing what people do and acknowledging their work. "It's important to understand the pressures that the child welfare workers are under. Work with their staff—don't make the other person wrong. Be advocates for one another, and ultimately for the youth."***

Huckleberry's current partnership with F&CS is an informal one. Huckleberry files more adolescent abuse reports than any other private agency. Huckleberry's partnership with F&CS lies in the strong relationships they maintain with the front-line workers of CPS. Huckleberry staff are frequently involved in Team Decision Making meetings (TDMs) and they often work as a team with CPS staff when intervening with youth and their families. Although the presence of child welfare workers at Huckleberry has decreased in recent years as a result of budget-related staff cuts, the relationship remains strong because of its history and effectiveness.

# Promoting Partnerships

## *Why Should We Work Together?*

- Homeless youth providers' services can help prevent placement of youth in foster care through differential response and a range of supportive services.
- Providers are a resource for runaway foster youth.
- Providers can be a critical point of entry into CWS when a home environment is unsafe; CPS steps in when abuse is substantiated to ensure continued safety.
- Providers can be a resource for emancipated / former foster youth facing homelessness or other obstacles while transitioning to independent adulthood.
- CWS and homeless youth providers can be advocacy partners in their communities.
- Providers can re-connect foster and former foster youth with services or provide mediation, "a safe middle ground" for runaway foster youth to re-connect with their social workers.
- Providers can contract with CWS to provide services to foster youth in their communities while still serving non-system youth.
- AB 12 extends support for foster youth in California to age 21, expanding the window during which abused and neglected homeless youth may access services.

## *How Can We Work Together?*

### **STEP 1: Establish a Relationship**

- Become educated about the child welfare community.
- Identify your agency as a resource for county child welfare services.
- Make contact with the Director or another individual to discuss opportunities for collaboration.
- Request a liaison, single point-of-contact, or staff person to be assigned to your agency.
- Coordinate service plans and interventions, participate in TDMs, seek contracts with your county to provide services.

***According to Lisa Spinis of Humboldt County Child Welfare Services, "As each agency maintains transparency, the collaboration on service delivery gets stronger."***

### **STEP 2: Conduct Training**

- Have social workers from Child Welfare present to both staff and clients about their services or provide training in your shelter/drop-in center/etc.
- Assign staff to make presentations to county CWS about your agency's services.
- Directors and managers participate in coalitions, committees, planning groups, and projects that involve the child welfare community.

### **STEP 3: Make Referrals**

- Know the resources, how to access them and then follow up to assure successful referrals.
- Utilize shelter and drop-in center staff as mediators between child welfare workers and their clients.
- Don't cut ties: if a productive relationship has developed in a community-based agency, actively support that relationship after the youth moves to a long-term placement.

- Be advocates for one another in the community, with elected officials and with state agencies.

#### **STEP 4: Pursue Funding**

- Shelters can establish reimbursement rates and be used as short-term and emergency placements for foster care youth.
- Be strategic, not careless, when serving mixed populations (non-system and system youth)\*
- Opt into THP-Plus if you serve eligible populations.
- Future planning: become an AB 12 placement.

*\*Serving a mixed population of both foster and non-foster youth can be challenging when it comes to funding. However, youth shelters, which are most frequently funded through RHYA Basic Center Grants, have the ability to access Child Welfare funding for beds they hold for foster youth. Once the organization has established a monthly reimbursement rate for the bed, the shelter can pro-rate the cost of the stay for a foster youth who uses their shelter as a short-term placement. This funding can help offset staffing costs for the shelter, as Child Welfare funding is an entitlement and more robust than RHYA funding.*

## Conclusion

The alarming data on at-risk transition-age youth in California demonstrate the need for improved collaboration and partnership between Child Welfare and homeless youth service providers. The current system capacity for partnership is limited by structural obstacles, funding constraints, and fragmented service delivery. *There are, however, significant opportunities for collaboration; and in the current fiscal climate, the need for it is greater than ever before.* These case studies demonstrate how youth can be served through collaborative relationships between Child Welfare and homeless youth-serving organizations.

The capacity for collaboration between a public child welfare agency and its local homeless youth providers depends largely upon the service needs and resources of that community. This includes the size and demographics of the homeless and at-risk youth population, and the resources that exist within both the county and private nonprofit sectors. The manner in which each entity provides services will vary from provider to provider and from county to county. There is no single model for successful collaboration, but *the first step always involves establishing a relationship based on common system goals and objectives, and then exploring how each entity can enhance and complement the other's capacity for serving youth in need of their services.*

Child Welfare and homeless youth providers can establish these relationships at all levels. Direct service workers, once acquainted, can be resources for one another in achieving positive client outcomes. For example, staff at a shelter, a drop-in center, or through street outreach, are often able to reach older teenagers who are resistant to working with their county social workers. It is not uncommon for foster youth to associate the foster care system with a lack of choices and freedom. A shelter, which is not a mandated placement, is sometimes a more desirable and non-coercive choice for a young person in care. Some would compare it to dealing with a family friend as opposed to a parent. This environment sets a different tone for a teen in crisis, and can be a way in for a social worker trying to engage a reluctant client.

Executive directors can forge official partnerships and collaborate with the community through coalitions, committees, or joint projects. Child Welfare can be a strong ally, and an advocate in the event that a local homeless youth-serving agency loses funding or needs support on an issue. As with any relationship, communication, mutual benefit, and give-and-take are at the core of a healthy partnership between Child Welfare and homeless youth providers.

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<sup>i</sup> Nixon, R. (1999). Testimony before the House Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources: Hearing on challenges confronting children again out of foster care [as cited in Packard, T., Delgado, M., Fellment, R., McCready, K. (2008). A Cost-Benefit Analysis of Transitional Services for Former Foster Youth. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30(11), 1267-1278].

<sup>ii</sup> Needell, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Glasser, T., Williams, D., Zimmerman, K., Simon, V., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Frerer, K., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Lou, C., Peng, C. & Holmes, A. (2009). Child Welfare Services Reports for California. Retrieved 9/1/2009, from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. Available at [http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb\\_childwelfare](http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare)

<sup>iii</sup> Promising Strategies to End Youth Homelessness. (May 2006). National Alliance to End Homelessness.

<sup>iv</sup> National Alliance to End Homelessness Fact Sheet: Youth Homelessness (June 2007). National Alliance to End Homelessness. <<http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/1659>>