

**Title:** Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project Child Welfare Supervisor Training; Site Visit Report  
**Award #:** 90CW1129  
**Cluster:** Training of Child Welfare Agency Supervisors in the Effective Delivery and Management of Federal Independent Living Service for Youth in Foster Care  
**Grantee:** San Francisco State University  
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**Project Website:** [www.youthtrainingproject.org](http://www.youthtrainingproject.org)  
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## SUMMARY

A new curriculum from the Bay Area Academy of San Francisco State University increases child welfare supervisors' understanding of the unique needs of youth in foster care. Developed by a team of former foster youth using input from supervisors and youth, the training is delivered by current and former foster youth ages 16 to 24. It focuses on four core principles to improve services for youth: positive youth development, collaboration, cultural competence, and permanent connections.

Offered as part of the Bay Area Academy's Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project, the training is geared toward child welfare supervisors and key managers and directors in order to encourage commitment to improving youth services at all levels of an organization. Community-based social work organizations are also invited to reach a wider audience of professionals serving youth. The all-day training includes keynote addresses, workshop sessions, a foster youth panel, and a "giving back panel" for supervisors to receive the youth trainers' feedback on a current case. The training exercises are designed to help strengthen supervisors' ability to support their staff in seven areas:

- Assessing youth readiness for independent living services
- Increasing cultural competence
- Involving youth in decision-making and implementing programs and services
- Identifying areas of stress and the impact of stress on foster youth
- Helping youth deal with crisis situations
- Developing and maintaining permanent connections for youth
- Improving inter- and intra-agency collaboration among youth-serving organizations

In addition to the workshops and panels, attendees participate in several other activities that enhance their understanding of issues from a foster youth perspective. First, attendees are asked to carry "foster care luggage" all day by putting their belongings in a trash bag. Also, attendees view the Museum of Lost Childhoods and of Foster Youth Empowerment, which includes artifacts from foster youth that represent their sometimes difficult experiences growing up in foster care, as well as their accomplishments. Attendees report that these experiential activities, along with receiving the training directly from current and former foster youth, greatly contribute to the overall effectiveness of the training.

The project has delivered 13 conference-style training sessions in 3 years, reaching a total of 520 child welfare workers and supervisors in California as well as other States that have requested the training. Youth delivering the training receive special instruction on training skills and are mentored by project staff to ensure their success. In addition to

being paid for their involvement in the project, youth also benefit by learning from the curriculum development process and developing strong leadership and facilitation skills.

As part of the original project plan, staff also have assisted workers and youth from Hawaii who are developing a similar curriculum for use in their State. Staff hope to continue responding to other States' training or assistance needs as requested. The project recently completed an organizational impact study that documented the success of positive youth development training for youth trainers.

The project's website offers biographies of their staff and youth trainers, training materials, best practices, and digital stories created by youth to share their personal experiences:

[www.youthtrainingproject.org](http://www.youthtrainingproject.org)

Reprinted from *Children's Bureau Express*, "Youth Train Child Welfare Supervisors" (<http://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/>).

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

**Abstract** (from the online *Children's Bureau Discretionary Grants Library* at <http://basis.caliber.com/cbgrants/ws/library>)

The project will develop curriculum and train at least 345 child welfare supervisors from targeted public child welfare agencies and their key child welfare managers and directors. Given the need to be efficient and effective, the Bay Area Academy\* will use a training model based on transfer of learning theory and research. The project will focus on the critical relationship between the caseworker and his/her supervisor and its pivotal role for public child welfare agencies to achieve Federal outcome standards around permanency, safety, and child well-being. The primary cohort of trainees will be supervisors, but child welfare managers/directors will be included to ensure "top" to "bottom" understanding of and commitment to a youth-focused approach to Independent Living Services.

*\*The Bay Area Academy is part of the School of Social Work at San Francisco State University and has received two federally funded child welfare training grants over the past 10 years. The Academy is in its eighth year of operation. Services consist of 1-day or multiple-day training classes and summits, as well as mentoring, facilitation, and consultation services.*

### **Need for This Service**

In the words of the Program Announcement for this cluster of grants, "Older youth in foster care need special help and support. As of September 30, 2002, there were an estimated 533,897 children in substitute/foster care. Of these children, an estimated 39 percent were identified as being 13 years of age or older (AFCARS- Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System- data as of October 2003). Approximately 20,000 youth age out of the system every year. These young people often have histories of significant abuse, neglect, and multiple foster care placements. They often find themselves completely on their own after discharge, with few, if any, financial resources;

limited education, training, and employment options; no safe place to live; and little or no support from family, friends, and community.”

Studies across the nation are finding that a large percentage of emancipating foster youth facing these limitations experience homelessness, incarceration, single parenthood, and unemployment. In California alone, for example, there are more than 80,000 youth in foster care, about 20 percent of the foster youth in the nation. Each year, between 2,300 and 4,000 youth emancipate from the California foster care system, and, as is the case nationally, research predicts grim outcomes for many of them. Fifty percent of the homeless in California are found to be former foster youth. These statistics support the need for the child welfare system to improve in the area of supporting, empowering, and enabling emancipating foster youth to make successful transitions to adulthood.

Again, in the words of the Program Announcement, “Specialized skills are essential to work effectively with older youth. Child welfare supervisors need training to understand youth development principles and strategies, to focus on giving young people age-appropriate opportunities to exercise leadership, build skills, and become involved in the decision-making about their future.”

**Goals of Project** *(adapted from information and materials provided by the grantee during and following the site visit)*

The Y.O.U.T.H Training Project has always had two overarching goals:

- To improve the child welfare system through training
- To improve the lives of the current and former foster youth who are the trainers

## **SITE VISIT HIGHLIGHTS**

On July 22, 2008, the site visitor had the opportunity to participate, along with approximately 50 California child welfare supervisors, in the day-long training entitled “Through the Eyes of the Youth: How Child Welfare Supervisors Can Positively Impact the Lives of Foster Youth” in Santa Cruz, CA. This is definitely not the typical academic or clinical training provided to child welfare caseworkers and supervisors. Instead it is designed to give participants the opportunity to walk a mile in the shoes of foster youth. The strengths of the youth trainers lie in their ability and their willingness to share their personal stories and to teach from their own real experiences.

### **The “Foster Care Luggage” Experience**

Upon entering the training room, participants were given a case consultation form to provide the trainers with information on a challenging case on which they would like recommendations from a “Giving Back Panel” later in the day. This is an optional exercise that provides an opportunity for supervisors to consult about any case on which they would like youth input. We were each also given a large garbage bag and a sheet of paper with the following “Story of the Garbage Bag” printed on it:

It was four days after Christmas and I was sitting on the couch idle, channeling through my new Walkman, which was my only outlet from the blues of foster care. I had AWOL'd a couple days before, looking for the perfect stranger to share the holiday with. With no luck I returned to the group home and the next

morning is when it happened. Mr. P walks in and says “pack your stuff buddy, you’re moving.” I knew it was coming. This was not the first or the last time I had to move. But there is nothing that quite prepares you enough for the garbage bag experience. Usually when people take trips they transport their things in suitcases or even boxes. I had to transport all my stuff in garbage bags. Mr. P wants me to rush, he says, “Just scoop it all up and put it in the bag! You can separate it when we get to where we’re going.” But I was taking my time scanning and memorizing all my stuff. Keeping closest the items I loved the most. I didn’t care that he looked at me sideways because I keep my most precious stuff such as my pictures, jewelry, shoes, and baseball cards on my lap or in my arms. Little did he know that putting my stuff in those trash bags meant there was a higher risk of me losing my stuff. Because he was not there when my brush mysteriously came up missing and it took me four months to get another one. The worst of the bags were the clear bags, because everyone could see exactly what you had....

*Today we invite you to “walk in the shoes of a foster youth” – just one aspect for just a few hours... Please place all of your things in the attached bag and carry all of them around throughout the day. Think of how it feels. What does it bring up for you? You’ll have the opportunity to share those feelings throughout the day...*

As trainees, we moved from room to room and from building to building throughout the day, and the site visitor found that her bag became progressively heavier as the hours passed. She also found herself reluctant to place items that she would need to use again soon or items that were important to her in the bag because they would be too difficult to find or they might get lost altogether. She also found herself wishing the bag would disappear (but not its contents) when we met strangers who appeared to be staring at our strange “luggage” in our travels across the campus. Other participants in the training reported similar thoughts and feelings as the day progressed.

### **The Museum Experience**

After packing our belongings in our garbage bags, trainees were given time to explore the Museums of Lost Childhoods and of Foster Youth Empowerment. These collections of artifacts of foster youth culture, many of which were actual items from former foster youth’s lives, contributed to the museum in the hope of making an impact on the child welfare system, were exhibited on clear plastic risers or in cases and placed on tables that had been draped in black cloth. Each item was accompanied by a description of the item in the context of foster care and the experience of the person who contributed it.

Participants first came to the Museum of Lost Childhoods, which was introduced by the following statement displayed on an easel at the head of the table on which the artifacts were displayed:

Childhood years are most influential for a person’s cognitive, social and emotional development. There are teachable moments in learning to ride one’s first bike, in being read a story at bedtime, in celebrating a birthday with family. The Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project reminds us that these and countless other teachable moments are just that, moments – glimpses of time where the present affects the future. The Museum of Lost Childhoods, conceived by members of the Y.O.U.T.H Training Project, offers a starkly contrasting look into childhoods

where developmental moments were in essence lost, and replaced with the memories laid out before you.

The memorabilia displayed on the table included the following and many similar items:

- A box of the powdered milk provided by the foster parents who refused to purchase “real milk” because it was more expensive
- Motel soaps and shampoos from which group home residents had to choose two items at a time for personal hygiene use
- Multiple prescription bottles to represent the overmedication of so many foster youth
- Liquor bottles and drug paraphernalia to represent the substance abuse so many foster children and youth resort to in order to escape from their pain
- A baby book in which nothing had been entered except the baby’s name
- The toothbrush given to an African American youth to use as a hairbrush by group home staff when the youth’s brush was lost because “Black hairbrushes were not available”
- The unsightly hospital gown that was almost transparent from age and wear that had been issued to a youth in an inpatient mental health facility for 24-hour wear
- Dental floss to represent the lack of attention to dental hygiene for foster children and the resulting serious dental problems that so many of them develop

Then one comes to the Museum of Foster Youth Empowerment, introduced by the following statement:

In contrast to the Museum of Lost Childhoods, we present the Museum of Foster Youth Empowerment. Presented here are examples of the many forms of success of foster youth and the multitude of people which are a part of that process. Ultimately this museum exists as a testament to the unwavering perseverance, strength, and amazing spirits of foster youth who have become empowered in their own lives and who strive to create change for others.

The artifacts on this table reflect the resiliency of so many foster youth and the beneficial impact of a positive youth development approach in child welfare. They include such items as:

- Examples of one youth’s journaling, her method of lending voice to her feelings, experiences, and choices
- High school diplomas and GED certificates of foster youth
- Pictures of a former foster youth with her young daughter, an obviously healthy and happy child of approximately two years of age
- The business cards of former foster youth who are now working in the human services and other professional fields
- College diplomas and graduation pictures of former foster youth who have obtained their undergraduate and their graduate degrees
- Community service award certificates reflective of the very significant contributions youth are making to their communities
- Y.O.U.T.H Training Project awards presented to youth trainers
- Y.O.U.T.H. Trainers – pictures of youth trainers in action
- Youth advocates (former foster youth) meeting with Governor Schwarzenegger and members of the California General Assembly to advocate for foster care reform

## **The Training**

### **Introduction and Background**

The actual training began with a former foster youth sharing the background of the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project and introducing herself and the five other youth trainers who would be working with us throughout the day. The project began in 2000 with the award of a Federal discretionary training grant for Training of Child Welfare Practitioners to Work Effectively with Youth Transitioning out of Foster Care through the Federal Independent Living Program, followed in 2005 by a second discretionary grant program for Training of Child Welfare Agency Supervisors in the Effective Delivery and Management of Federal Independent Living Service for Youth in Foster Care (the second grant is the one that made this training possible and was the reason for the site visit). Between grants the Bay Area Academy of San Francisco State University and Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project staff were successful in obtaining funding from local foundations, the California Permanency for Youth Project, and the California Social Work Education Center in order to keep the project going. They also responded to an invitation to train child welfare caseworkers and foster parents in Hawaii on a fee for service basis just as they are now receiving similar invitations to train in other States throughout the country.

In its efforts to improve the child welfare system through training, the curriculum developers and the trainers are all foster youth or former foster youth. Since 2000 the project has trained and empowered more than 60 such youth to develop curricula and deliver training to professional child welfare staff and other human service professionals. Approximately 5,000 child welfare caseworkers, supervisors, and managers throughout California, Hawaii, and the numerous other States have received training from these youth.

### **Keynote Address**

This introduction to the training was followed by a keynote address on The Foster Care Culture (the collection of shared experiences that influence the beliefs, understandings, and behavior of foster children and youth), delivered by a 22-year old former foster youth. This young man described himself as a product of group homes and alternative schools where the curriculum consisted of Blockbuster videos, crossword puzzles, and other remedial activities designed to keep him busy and out of trouble, but with little concern for his cognitive development. As a result, when he was asked to make this presentation, he had no idea how to go about preparing for it. He did not know how to write an essay or to create an outline to organize his thoughts. This lack of preparation and of experience is a part of the foster care culture, as is the experience of being removed from one's family of origin, friends, school, community, and, in many cases, from one's original culture as well. Other examples of foster youth culture include a shared language full of acronyms (CPS, ILP, CASA, etc.), and being separated from family in a culture where living with biological families is the norm. Foster youth become like family to each other and build their own support system because they have had similar experiences and understand each other in ways that mainstream youth do not. They know that "foster care hurts and that hurting and finding ways to cope with that hurt are a part of the culture."

### **Workshops**

This keynote address was followed by two concurrent workshops entitled “Positive Youth Development: Pooling Resources” and “Stress and Crisis: Crisis Consensus.” Trainees were divided into two groups to attend the workshops, which were repeated in the afternoon so that trainees would have the opportunity to participate fully in both of them.

- Positive Youth Development: Pooling Resources: The first activity in this workshop was a matching game similar to the childhood matching game, Memory. Participants were divided into small groups and instructed to match the 11 elements of Positive Youth Development, or PYD (bonding, resilience, social skills, emotional competence, cognitive ability, principles and values, self-determination, spirituality, opportunity, appreciation, and youth engagement), with their definitions. The winning group was awarded prizes. Participants then watched a digital story and discussed the PYD elements they had identified in the story, as well as the missed PYD opportunities. Next was an activity called “Pooling Resources” where participants were divided into small groups and given a box filled with questions written on slips of paper. Questions such as, “What is a program to which you can refer youth to make them feel like they are changing the world?” dealt with PYD issues and resources. Each group recorded its answers to each question on post-it notes and posted them on a group (pool) poster, thus creating a “pool” of the county’s resources for youth. Trainers committed to typing the pool of resources and emailing it to participants, as well as to making it available on the project’s website at [www.youthtrainingproject.org](http://www.youthtrainingproject.org).
- Stress and Crisis: Crisis Consensus: Designed to encourage supervisors to assess crises in foster youth’s lives through different perspectives, the first activity in this workshop was to watch three movie clips of potential “crisis” situations involving youth. The clips were from the full-length motion pictures “John Tucker Must Die,” “Freeway,” and “Girl Interrupted.” Each clip had a corresponding worksheet to be filled out afterwards. Participants were divided into small groups and instructed to come to consensus about the urgency level (very urgent, somewhat urgent, or not very urgent) of each situation presented. The reasons for the chosen urgency levels were discussed within the large group. After the third film clip was discussed in this manner, it also was used for the final activity, in which the small groups were asked to conduct a mock team decision-making meeting dealing with the situation presented in the film clip. A youth trainer sat at the table with each group to ensure that the youth perspective was included in these discussions.

### **Independent Living Skills Readiness Exercise**

The morning workshops were followed by lunch and another opportunity to visit the Museums of Lost Childhood and Foster Youth Empowerment. After lunch we participated in an Independent Living Skills Readiness exercise. This activity was designed to pick up the energy of and to reengage the group. The activity started with a demonstration of the varying ages at which youth are ready to learn independent living skills. First, trainers held up posters, one of a piggy bank, one of a lemonade stand, and one of a bank, complete with ATM, using these examples of money management skills of varying degrees of complexity to illustrate the point that youth are always ready to learn independent living skills in ways that are developmentally appropriate. Participants were then asked to respond to statements such as, “Stand up and remain standing if you did your first load of laundry before the age of 12, before the age of 15, before the age of

18.” Several members of the group stood as each age was called, again illustrating that youth are ready to learn independent living skills at all ages.

Next the trainers asked for three volunteers from the audience. In this simulation of a foster youth going through an Independent Living Program (ILP), the volunteers were challenged to perform a list of ILP-related tasks in three minutes. The task list included tying a tie, sewing a button on fabric, finding an apartment that met certain criteria, filling out a college tuition assistance application, mapping a bus route between specified points, and collecting ten business cards and getting three letters of recommendation from audience members. The volunteers performed these tasks with Charlie Brown’s “Linus and Lucy” as background music, which added to the frenetic pace of trying to achieve so much in such a short period of time. Afterwards, the volunteers showed what they had achieved (none had completed all of the assigned tasks) and received prizes for their participation. The exercise illustrated how stressful it is for youth to try to cram all of their independent living skills training in the few years immediately before they emancipate.

The final ILP readiness activity broke supervisors into four groups. Each group was then given one of four youth descriptions and asked to design ILP recommendations for that youth. Each group then shared its youth description and its recommendations with the large group, after which it was revealed by the trainers that the “four youth” were really four very different descriptions of the same youth that had been developed by different caseworkers. The exercise highlighted the point that youth and the services they need are often viewed through the lens of case notes rather than being reviewed directly with the youth. It is important to remember that case notes reflect the bias of the person writing them, rarely offering a holistic picture of the youth.

### **Keynote Address and Youth Panel**

The Independent Living Skills Readiness exercise was followed by a second keynote address, this one on permanency, grief, and loss and delivered by the Project Director who also is a foster care survivor. She began by sharing her digital story (found under “Jamie” at [www.silencespeaks.org](http://www.silencespeaks.org)) and then spoke of the loss and grief issues of the foster care experience and of the sorrow and attachment issues that foster children and youth experience as a result. Grief work has to start at the moment a child leaves home. When a child is grieving the loss of mother, father, siblings, neighborhood, and culture, that grief needs to be addressed. Left to their own devices, children and youth express their grief through their behavior, and it is often not nice behavior. When a child acts out, they want containment, love, and connection, not abandonment. Yet foster children, when they show their grief through their behavior, are frequently faced with rejection, abandonment, and more losses, leading to more grief and more acting out behavior. The system often tries to control the symptoms (the undesirable behavior) rather than to treat the causes (the grief and loss the youth has experienced).

This keynote address was followed by a panel of three youth trainers, moderated by the person who gave the keynote. The youth shared information and answered questions about their personal experiences with permanency, grief, and loss.

### **The “Giving Back Panel”**

The Giving Back Panel was to have followed this second workshop session. This would have been another moderated panel of youth trainers convened to give feedback about the situations on the completed case consultations forms. The Project Director reported

that youth trainers typically give recommendations in thoughtful, self-reflective, and strength-based ways. On this day, however, for the first time in the history of this training, no case consultation forms had been turned in. Therefore, the panel instead responded to general questions such as, “What makes a good social worker?”

The day ended with participants completing their evaluations, which were exchanged, along with our “foster care luggage” (our used garbage bags) for Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project tote bags.

## LESSONS LEARNED

**Unique and Innovative Features** *(adapted from information and materials provided by the grantee during and following the site visit)*

- The Y.O.U.T.H Training Project is a multiyear collaboration between current and former foster youth, social work professionals, social work training academies, foundations, and others committed to the empowerment and improved futures of California foster youth. While the project is a part of San Francisco State University’s Bay Area Academy, a social work training academy for the 12 Bay Area counties, the project’s work is unique in that it extends beyond those counties to reach child welfare supervisors in all of California and, by invitation, in Hawaii and numerous other States.
- The curriculum is developed and delivered entirely by foster youth and former foster youth. The project works with current and former foster youth ages 16 to 24. These youth receive training on adult learning styles, adolescent development, the daily life of a child welfare supervisor, evaluation principles, and transfer of learning theory, among other topics, as a part of their preparation to develop curricula and deliver training to child welfare professionals and members of the greater child welfare community. Child welfare caseworkers and supervisors alike are saying that hearing from the youth directly, being reminded of the importance of good practice on a daily basis and of the impact that they, as supervisors and caseworkers, have on the children and youth they serve, makes the training extremely powerful for them. Having now had the opportunity to participate in three trainings developed and delivered by these youth, this writer can certainly attest to the power that they bring to the message.
- Participation in the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project enables the youth trainers to develop and implement leadership and facilitation skills in a unique way. Delivering a dynamic and complex training to a large group of professionals can be a difficult task. Providing training requires youth trainers to demonstrate and take on leadership roles and to develop and practice group facilitation skills such as engaging, informing, involving, and planning.
- The project also empowers youth trainers by giving them the opportunity to develop and create the training curriculum. The process of creating youth-developed curriculum is a lengthy one. Professional curriculum developers say that to create one hour of polished curriculum takes eight hours of work. Project staff report that this has proven true in their experience with curriculum development as well. Collectively developing curriculum for a day-long training takes them at minimum five weekends of development work, with a team of four to five youth, staff, and subject matter experts as necessary. This time does not

- include the staff work on editing, formatting, and gathering required supplies for the implementation of the curricula.
- The curriculum development team for this grant consisted of six former foster youth who now hold professional jobs within and outside of foster care. The team included a nonprofit lawyer, a graduate student, an undergraduate student, a businesswoman, a university administrator, and a child welfare supervisor.
  - Curriculum developers on the team had varied experiences in foster care. Some were in kinship care, one had an excellent relationship with her foster parents, several were in group homes, one had experienced a disrupted adoption. One had been placed in several psychiatric facilities and was a child prostitute. Several had mental health diagnoses. Some agreed with their diagnosis and others did not. One curriculum developer was already a parent, all were doing well in their fields, and all struggled at least occasionally from trauma related to foster care.

**Challenges** (*adapted from information and materials provided by the grantee during and following the site visit*)

- Obtaining valid email addresses in order to administer the follow-up surveys with child welfare supervisors and select members of their staffs and encouraging the training participants they could reach to complete the surveys was a challenge for the project evaluators. The grantee did not give up, however, and used their strong relationships in the larger counties in California to attempt to increase follow-up survey participation.
- The majority of child welfare supervisors surveyed in northern and southern California in preparation for developing this curriculum had stated that they would like to experience regional trainings with multiple counties in order to increase peer-to-peer learning, and the curriculum was developed accordingly. Since the training was offered in a large “conference format,” the project was dependent on the counties to provide the training space and accommodations. Some counties were unwilling to or otherwise restricted from sharing resources (pay for meals and training space) with other counties.
- Transporting the museum items and display cases and stands has presented several challenges. Learning the most efficient – and the safest – way of packing these materials for transporting was a test in and of itself, with several pieces being broken during transport in the early days. Additionally, since the museums were not a part of the original planning, the budget did not include a line item for transporting or shipping them. The project was successful, however, in acquiring additional funding to cover these unanticipated costs, just as they were able to locate private funding to cover the cost of art work and supplies that also had not been included in the original budget.
- Recruitment of child welfare supervisors to attend the training initially proved to be a challenge. Each targeted county was struggling in its own way to meet State and local training and other requirements in the face of staff shortages, large caseloads, and budget cuts, and found it difficult to prioritize this particular training. Project staff learned the importance of developing several points of contact within the counties in order to ensure participation. In some counties they needed to make presentations at local unit meetings and to solidify the commitments of managers and county directors in order to increase participation.

- In one large county in particular, two trainings had to be cancelled because of low enrollment. Investigation revealed that a number of supervisors had not signed up for the training because they thought the youth trainers would “just yell at them and complain.” Project staff responded to this feedback by clarifying the purpose of the training, explaining that it was not about blaming or shaming child welfare staff, but about supporting child welfare supervisors in their work and helping them to see their work “through the eyes of the youth.” They did specific outreach to child welfare supervisors, highlighting the training’s strengths-based approach, emphasizing what child welfare is doing well in addition to making critical recommendations for areas of improvement and offering best practice approaches to working with youth. The name of the training (but not the content) was changed from “Y.O.U.T.H.Full Intelligence for Child Welfare Supervisors” to “Through the Eyes of the Youth: How You Can Positively Impact the Lives of Foster Youth,” in an attempt to address any concerns that training delivered by former foster youth would include unfair criticism of child welfare supervisors or their staff. Project staff also spent time training and sensitizing youth trainers to supervisor concerns. After this repackaging and remarketing approach, supervisors from that county registered for the training and responded very positively to the experience.

**Successful Strategies and Keys to Success** *(adapted from information and materials provided by the grantee during and following the site visit)*

- Before developing the curriculum, project staff held three focus groups with child welfare supervisors and four youth focus groups throughout the State and asked what was needed in terms of training and how the training should be delivered. Information gathered during those focus groups helped to inform the curriculum and the process gave supervisors a sense of ownership when it was time to take the training.
- It is important to pay youth for the work and the expertise that they contribute to professional programs such as this one, including compensating the artists for their contributions to the curriculum. The project had not budgeted for the latter but was successful in acquiring outside funding to cover the cost of art supplies and youth artist fees.
- The project decided to invite community-based social work organizations to attend the training with child welfare supervisors and found this to be an important step in reaching the widest audience possible and having the greatest impact on the entire child welfare system.
- It is important to “meet the youth where they are” and not to ignore the many challenges facing transition-aged youth (homelessness, educational issues, lack of work experience, etc.). Project staff recognized the importance of making clear working task lists for youth interns and temp workers and implemented one-on-one coaching and regular, sometimes daily, supervision to ensure youth success on the tasks they were assigned.

**OUTCOMES**

- The Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project has developed a full-day training curriculum for child welfare supervisors entitled “Through the Eyes of the Youth: How You Can

Positively Impact the Lives of Foster Youth.” The curriculum was developed and the training is delivered entirely by former foster youth and focuses on four core principles:

- Positive youth development
- Collaboration
- Cultural competence
- Permanent connections

With those principles as its foundation, the training emphasizes the following seven areas of competency in working with foster youth. Supervisors should be prepared to support their staff in developing these competencies:

- Assessing a youth’s readiness for Independent Living Plan services, support, and training
  - Identifying culturally competent program services and activities
  - Utilizing positive youth development principles for involving youth in decision-making, implementation, and evaluation of training and program activities
  - Identifying areas of stress and the impact of stress on youth in foster care
  - Working with youth to help them deal with crisis situations and to assess the results of the intervention
  - Working with youth to develop and maintain permanent connections
  - Collaborating with both inter- and intra-agency resource people to achieve positive outcomes for youth transitioning to adulthood
- By September 30, 2008, the project had trained 520 caseworkers and supervisors at 13 training sessions, including a couple of conference presentations as well as trainings in California and Hawaii. Additionally, they have received a no cost extension and will be presenting a training in Northern California on December 8 to finish off the grant.
  - The project has developed two traveling museums displaying artifacts donated by foster youth and former foster youth with the goal of impacting the child welfare system. Entitled “Museum of Lost Childhoods” and “Museum of Foster Youth Empowerment,” these museums are designed to help the viewer experience the emotional impact and the culture of foster care as well as the resilience of many of the youth who have had that experience.
  - The project has created numerous digital stories addressing issues and experiences facing foster youth and former foster youth, including education, therapy, juvenile hall, cultural struggles, homelessness, substance abuse and addiction, grief and loss, as well as the positive impact of supportive relationships and programs in their lives, etc. Digital stories are short video autobiographies created by current and former foster youth. The youth spend 3 and a half days creating their digital stories at the Center for Digital Storytelling in Berkeley. During that time they learn how to use the computer programs designed to create the stories, how to write and record their own narration, how to include their own pictures, and how to select their own soundtrack. The youth control every aspect of the creation of their personal stories. The stories are then used for teaching from the foster youth’s perspective. Creating their digital stories – thinking about their story, telling their story in their own way, and having it produced and used for the purposes of improving the child welfare system – has proven to be an empowering experience for youth.
  - The Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project has launched a website at [www.youthtrainingproject.org](http://www.youthtrainingproject.org). The website provides a wealth of information,

including bios of all the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project trainers and staff, many of the materials used in the various trainings developed by the project, a number of the digital stories produced by the project, and a section on Best Practices and Other Useful Handouts. The Best Practices section addresses such topics as kinship care, youth recommendations on mental health treatment, working with pregnant and parenting teens, with LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning) youth, etc. The site also includes a listing of upcoming training events, descriptions of the trainings available through the project, and a section on Pooling Resources where the resource information collected during the Pooling Resources workshop in the training is posted. Finally, the website includes a Legislative Update page, reflective of the strong advocacy arm of the project.

- In 2004, the Project Director was contacted by the State of Hawaii with a request for some of the digital stories developed by the project. The director said she would be glad to share the stories, but wouldn't they rather have the "real thing?" The director of the Hawaii Foster Parent Association agreed and found funding to support the Y.O.U.T.H Project's first year of work in Hawaii that continued over the next 4 years with funding from this grant. The project has served the islands of Oahu, Maui, Kauai, and the big island of Hawaii, working with child welfare staff, foster parents, and the Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition. The first year of ACF funded work in Hawaii, they held a 4-day leadership/facilitation development training for the youth and surveyed child welfare supervisory staff to determine their training interests. The second year, they trained three Hawaiian youth to cotrain supervisors in Oahu and Kauai with project youth. The project team also participated in the Hawaiian youth conference where they spent a day and a half teaching curriculum development and helping them develop two training modules to be used in their youth and adult conferences. Last year, in addition to training child welfare caseworkers in Oahu and Maui, project youth trained a group of Hawaiian youth in a 2-day facilitation skills training and supported them in rewriting modules of their curriculum on runaway prevention.
- In 2007, the project was invited to provide a plenary presentation for a Housing Forum with more than 100 housing developers, youth service providers, foundations, and local government staff, including housing, redevelopment, social services, and public health professionals. Youth trainers delivered an educational presentation and detailed design recommendations and testimony about the need for housing for emancipating foster youth. As a result of the presentation, the county made a commitment to build foster youth-specific housing and invited the youth to be on the design committee.

**Evaluation** (*adapted from the Mid-year Evaluation dated April 2008, and a one page description of the evaluation design prepared by Korwin Consulting*)

- The Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project contracted with Korwin Consulting to evaluate the progress of its Child Welfare Supervisor Training toward achieving short-, intermediate-, and long-term outcomes. Four evaluation methods were employed:
  - *Retrospective Pre-test Survey*: Training participants completed an evaluation form at the end of the conference to measure training satisfaction and changes in knowledge, attitudes, and intended practice.
  - *Follow-up Survey (with trained and untrained supervisors and managers)*: Supervisors and managers completed an online survey 3 months

following the training to learn whether and how participation in the training had resulted in changes in a department's approach and achievement of successful outcomes for transition age foster youth (as compared with departments whose supervisors were not trained).

- *Child Welfare Frontline Workers Survey*: Frontline caseworkers completed an online survey 3 months following their agency's supervisors' and managers' participation in the training to discern any changes in the training, direction, and support they received from their supervisors as it pertained to their work with transition age foster youth.
- *Interview Agency Directors*: Korwin Consulting plans to interview agency directors to determine their perspective on benefits of training to the organization and its ability to improve child welfare outcomes.

The preliminary evaluation data shows that participating trainees gain new skills and insights into transition age foster youth. Those gains are particularly evident in the areas of understanding foster youth's experience with grief and loss and their behavioral responses to that grief and loss, the factors that contribute to positive youth development, the importance of permanent connections for foster youth, and the positive impact of caring, concern, and attention from caseworkers on foster youth's development. A full evaluation of the program, including achievement of long-term outcomes and an analysis of qualitative data, such as training participants' comments, will be conducted once the grant has ended.

**Dissemination** (*adapted from information and materials provided by the grantee during and following the site visit*)

- The Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project was selected to give a workshop at the 2006, 2007, and 2008 Pathways to Adulthood Conferences. During these years, 10 current and former foster youth presented on topics such as restorative justice, adolescent development, and positive youth development. They also premiered digital stories that had been developed by youth. In 2007, the project took the museums for general display at the Pathways conference. Project youth gave the keynote plenary at the California Social Work Education Center's annual Fairness and Equity Conference at the University of California at Berkeley. They also were invited to make several presentations at the Child Welfare League of America's local conferences in southern and northern California and to make presentations on marginalized groups of foster youth (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning) to child welfare caseworkers in Alameda County, CA.
- In 2007, the Field Director and the Project Director were invited to submit an article for inclusion in a book published by *Columbia University Press* entitled *Childhood, Youth and Social Work in Transformation: Implications for Policy and Practice*. The article focuses on the approach and the unique practice of the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project and is expected to be released in January 2009.
- That same year, the project made a plenary presentation at the California Mental Health Advocates for Children Conference and delivered a keynote address at the California State Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Conference. Project youth also presented a workshop on Restorative Justice with foster youth at the California Institute of Mental Health Annual Rose Jenkins Conference.

- In 2008, Jamie Lee Evans, Project Director, received the California Mental Health Advocates for Children and Youth “Youth Advocacy Award” for excellence in supporting youth in their movement to create child welfare system change.
- The project completed an organizational impact study measuring the long-range impact one organization (the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project) using positive youth development as a strategy can have on a system. The study, entitled “Creating Positive Outcomes for Foster Youth...One Agency at a Time” (Korwin Consulting, May 2008), found that the project does, in fact, have a positive impact on the child welfare system, on the youth trainers, and on youth who come in contact with youth trainers.

**Sustainability** *(adapted from information and materials provided by the grantee during and following the site visit)*

- From the beginning, the project has been successful in obtaining outside funding from the State, from various counties within the State, and from private foundations and organizations to continue, to enhance, and to expand the training for child welfare caseworkers and supervisors. The reputation of the work of the project and of the Y.O.U.T.H. trainers has spread to the point that they are now receiving requests for training on a fee-for-service basis from across the country.
- The project has received requests to provide this same training, with slight adaptations, to child welfare caseworkers in California once the grant has ended. Project staff will be seeking State and foundation support to adapt the curriculum for that purpose. They also will provide the supervisor training on a fee-for-service basis to counties throughout California, Hawaii, and other States as requested, as well as exploring with California’s regional child welfare training academies the degree of interest and the availability of funds to continue to provide the training to child welfare supervisors. Finally, they hope to continue presenting the museums as a stand-alone traveling exhibit, as well as in conjunction with the training.

**ATTACHMENTS**

- Youth Descriptions

## **Youth Descriptions**

Youth 1: This youth who will emancipate soon is considered high risk and vulnerable. He experiences mental health challenges such as depression and trouble managing anger, and often has difficulty feeling hopeful about the future. He is on psychotropic medications. He has no permanent connections to any adult. He frequently has difficulty making good decisions and being responsible for his actions.

Youth 2: This youth who will emancipate soon has the potential to be very successful in college. He is smart and resourceful, but needs specific guidance on getting ready for higher education and the options available. He lacks information on scholarships, financial aid and timelines for application.

Youth 3: This youth who will emancipate soon has very little work experience and skills. He has never had any job training, and has no soft job skills. He has no clothing appropriate for employment or interviews, and lacks transportation to get a job. He does not have the documents he needs for employment such as a birth certificate, social security card and ID card. He is parenting, and will also need childcare in order to obtain employment.

Youth 4: This youth who will emancipate soon is struggling to complete high school and receive a diploma. He has attended non-public schools and special education classes, and lacks credits and basic academic knowledge. He is behind several grade levels, and needs special assistance catching up. He has no clear idea of what kind of work he wants to do as a career or a job he'd like to hold in the short term.