# A GUIDE TO IMPLEMENTING THP-PLUS:

## HOUSING CALIFORNIA'S HOMELESS FORMER FOSTER YOUTH



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

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## FACT SHEET: THP-PLUS STATEWIDE IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT

This document is a product of the 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 THP-Plus Statewide Implementation Project is to reduce homelessness among former foster youth by expanding access to THP-Plus, the state's only housing program targeting this growing population.

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
- Development of monitoring and evaluation policies
- Creation of standardized application materials at the state and county level
- Training and technical assistance for THP-Plus providers



**FACT SHEET**

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

- **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 1 in 4 youth in need will be able to access the program.

- **Established network of THP-Plus practitioners and supporters:** The Project is developing an organized coalition of non-profit organizations, county admin-istrators, youth, 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.

- **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. Towards that end, the Project is expanding the knowledge base about the housing needs of homeless former foster youth and effective practices to meet those needs. This information will be used to strengthen programs and program over-sight by counties and the state. It will be disseminated through an annual publica-tion documenting the status of THP-Plus statewide.

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## DOCUMENT OVERVIEW

This document is meant to be a guide to help county social services agencies and nonprofits organizations develop THP-Plus programs throughout the state. It outlines eight sequential steps, from initiating a planning workgroup to evaluating the program's effectiveness. Some of the steps are performed by the county social service agency, others by the THP-Plus provider(s), and many require collaboration between the county and provider.

Many counties have already begun the process of developing their THP-Plus program but may need assistance on a particular topic; feel free to skip ahead to that particular step. The eight steps are:

1. Form the Working Group
2. Conceptualize the Program
3. Choose the Housing Model
4. Develop the County Plan
5. Design Program and Develop Provider Plan
6. Certify and Execute a Contract
7. Implement and Evaluate Program
8. Provide Ongoing Oversight

Throughout the document, you will see links both within the text and in the left-hand column alongside the text, like the ones you see here. The check-mark icon refers to documents you can use as templates in the development of your THP-Plus program that are included in this document. The house icon refers to related websites that may assist in you in various aspects of implementation.

## "FIELD NOTES"

Throughout the report, practical advice is shared by programs that currently provide housing and supportive services to former foster youth. These "field notes" can be found in boxes throughout the document and are drawn from eight different programs, which include:

• The First Place Fund for Youth (Alameda County)
• Larkin Street L.E.A.S.E. Program (San Francisco)
• Tri-City Homeless Coalition Project Independence (Alameda County)
• Napa PLACES (Napa County)
• Bill Wilson Center (Santa Clara County)
• United Friends of the Children (Los Angeles County)
• Orangewood Children's Foundation's Rising Tide Program (Orange County)
• Hillsides Youth Moving On (Los Angeles county)

Of these providers, the first three listed are currently utilizing THP-Plus funding. The other five are experienced practitioners in housing for former foster youth and offer valuable recommendations in that area. We hope the guidance provided is helpful as you begin or continue the THP-Plus implementation process.

## YOUTH INTERVIEWS

In addition to examples from current THP-Plus practitioners, youth participants in THP-Plus were interviewed to share their perspective on various features of current THP-Plus programs. The youth perspectives gathered here will be valuable in helping to develop new programs. However, it is also essential to engage youth in your own community in the THP-Plus development process.
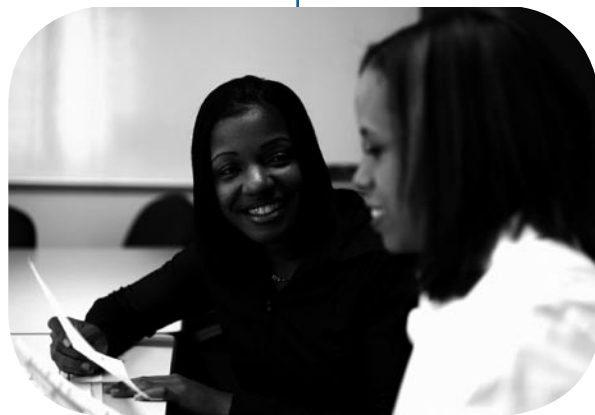
## OVERVIEW OF THP-PLUS

*Running this program is hard work. We deal with one crisis after another. But often these crises have to happen before progress can occur. We're here to act a bridge for these young people, and hopefully they'll be able to cross the bridge and succeed as young adults.*

– Marybeth McCarthy, Director, Tri-City Homeless Coalition Project Independence
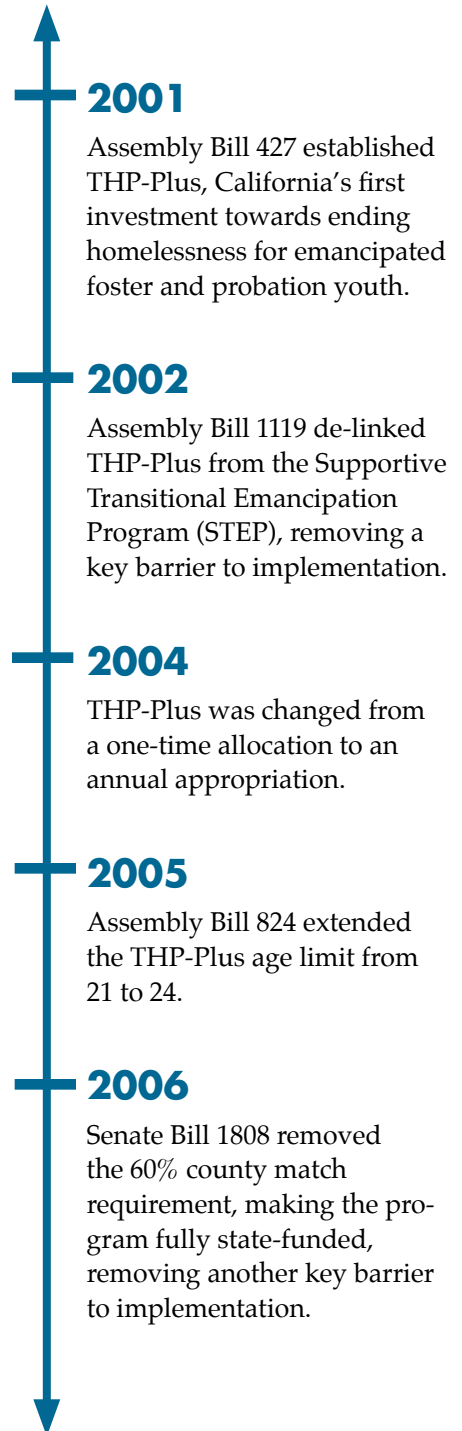
### BRIEF HISTORY & OVERVIEW

The Transitional Housing Placement - Plus (THP-Plus) program was established by the California State Legislature in 2001 to address the needs of a growing yet largely overlooked group of at-risk youth: 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, 2 out of 3 have an "imminent housing need," according to a 2002 study by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS).

This need for housing is of particular concern given the increase in youth emancipating from foster care. Between 1998 and 2005, the number of youth emancipating from foster care in California increased 38%, from 3,076 to 4,249 despite a 26% reduction in the overall foster care case load in California during the same period.

The THP-Plus program provides affordable housing and comprehensive supportive services for up to 24 months to help former foster care and probation youth ages 18 to 24 make a successful transition from out-of-home placements to independent living. The program is administered and regulated by CDSS, which distributes THP-Plus funds to counties. Counties then contract for services with nonprofit THP-Plus providers.

*Anyone who wanted to start a new THP-Plus program has to have a lot of patience – both with the youth and with the entire process.*

–Zairon Frazier, Project Independence youth participant

The timeline below illustrates how THP-Plus has developed over time:

### 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.

## PROGRAM INTENT

The original legislation that created THP-Plus was sponsored by the California Youth Connection, a statewide organization of current and former foster youth that promotes the participation of foster youth in policy development and legislative change to improve the foster care system, and strives to improve social work practice and child welfare policy.

THP-Plus is grounded in four key principles, which are codified in statute:

1. **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.

2. **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.

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

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

Each youth exiting the foster care system is an individual and has unique needs. The goal of THP-Plus, however, remains the same for each participant: that each young person has secure, stable housing by program graduation and is progressing with his or her life goals, marked by educational attainment or employment achievement, physical and mental well-being, and connections to community.

## INVOLVING YOUTH

Just as the original sponsor of the THP-Plus legislation promotes the involvement of young people in youth-related policy, THP-Plus practitioners repeatedly cite the value of engaging current and former foster youth in the development, implementation and evaluation of the program. Throughout this document, the reader will be reminded of opportunities to gather youth input. Methods for incorporating youth perspective at different stages in the development process include:

**Initial Planning Phase:**

- Recruit youth participants in planning workgroup

- Form youth focus groups or sub-committees to determine what the youth would like the program to look like

- Solicit youth input and feedback on program policies and procedures

**Ongoing Program Implementation:**

- Involve youth in interviewing and hiring program staff

- Offer peer counseling and mentoring

- Conduct youth-led research projects, such as the Alameda County Youth-Led Evaluation Project

- Provide ample opportunities for youth to express concern or suggest improvements to program policies

- Include youth on the THP-Plus provider's Board of Directors

**Promising Practices for soliciting young people's input:**

- Ensure logistical arrangements are made so that youth can participate (e.g. transportation to and from meetings, adjusting meeting times to match youth availability)

- Offer training to develop youths' critical thinking and advocacy skills

- Prepare adults for facilitating youth participation

- Listen and take action on youths' concerns and recommendations so they know they are making a difference and that their participation is meaningful.

- Offer a stipend for participation

- Identify a pool of youth to fill committees rather than just a few youth for long-term commitments

- Encourage the pursuit of individual interests and strengths

- Post recruitment flyers at locations where transitional youth congregate

- Involve youth in various stages of transition (pre- or post-transition in addition to transitioning)

- Host meetings where youth are already located to facilitate participation

- Collect feedback upon graduation and make changes based on this feedback; unhappy participants will have a lot to say

## WHO'S INVOLVED

The first step in developing a THP-Plus program is to convene a THP-Plus planning workgroup. The needs of foster youth in transition are diverse, and the best workgroups consist of a wide range of stakeholders with insight about the needs of foster youth in transition, knowledge of existing community assets, and expertise in program development. The workgroup may be convened by a community-based organization, the county social services agency or an intermediary group.

Provided below is a recommended list of stakeholders to participate in the THP-Plus workgroup:

- Current and former foster youth
- Independent Living Skills Program
- California Department of Education Foster Youth Services Program
- County Social Services Agency
- Health Services Agency, Public Health, Mental Health
- Probation Department
- School District
- Community College
- Housing Authority
- Nonprofit housing organizations
- Youth Advocacy Group(s)
- Workforce Investment Board

## TIMELINE

- The time required to implement a new THP-Plus program will vary based on a number of factors, including:
  - size of program
  - profile of youth served
  - availability of nonprofit providers to operate program
  - availability of housing

- Prior to passage of Senate Bill 1808 in 2006, THP-Plus required a 60% county match. With that requirement, new THP-Plus programs required approximately 1 to 1.5 years from project planning to implementation.

- Given the recent policy change and the availability of templates included in this document, THP-Plus workgroups can expect an implementation timeline of approximately 6 months.

## LETTER OF INTENT

- Once formed, the working group should send a Letter of Intent to Cynthia Guilford, Statewide Transitional Housing Coordinator at CDSS to advise her that the county is beginning its planning process and intends to submit a THP-Plus Plan.

- The following information should be included in the Letter of Intent:
  (1) Estimated number of youth to be served
  (2) Projected budget
  (3) Estimated implementation date
  (4) Projected provider or process to select provider.

- The deadline for the Letter of Intent to be submitted to CDSS is December 1st.

## EVALUATE DEMAND

THP-Plus programs are meant to serve a need in the community – the need of former foster youth for support on their journey to independence. Therefore, the demand for THP-Plus in each community will depend on the characteristics of the population of young people emancipating from care.

Provided below is a list of key questions for the workgroup to answer in determining the demand for THP-Plus in your community:

• How many youth age out of foster care and probation out-of-home placements in the county annually?
• How many youth emancipating from foster care and probation are in need of affordable housing?
• How many youth are emancipating from group homes versus foster family or kinship placements?
• How many youth are pregnant or parenting?
• How many youth have mental or physical disabilities?
• How many youth are in need of substance abuse treatment?
• How many emancipating youth have permanent connections?
• What percentage of your county's youth are placed out-of-county and how many out-of-county youth will emancipate from care in your county?

## ASSESS COMMUNITY ASSETS

It is essential that new THP-Plus programs are developed as part of a continuum of existing community resources for two key reasons. First, no single program will adequately serve the diverse needs of foster youth in transition. Secondly, a continuum of resources provides young people with choice, which is so often lacking in their foster care experience.

Both youth and THP-Plus practitioners repeatedly cited choice as an important factor in developing effective programs. To offer emancipating foster youth choice, THP-Plus programs should be developed to complement existing community resources and assets.

Provided below are key questions for the workgroup to address in assessing the existing assets of your community:

• What types of affordable housing already exist in your community?
• Does your community have a housing provider with the capacity to serve young adults?
• Is there a strong collaborative relationship between that housing provider and the county social services agency?
• Are there local youth service providers that could expand services to include housing, and do these organizations have strong collaborative relationships with the county social services agency?
• What types of continuing education opportunities are available in your community?
• What types of jobs can young people get in your community?
• Are there educational and employment assistance services available to youth in your community?
• What is the geographic distribution of emancipating youth in your county? (i.e. urban or rural)
• Does your community have affordable, reliable public transportation? What assistance is available to former foster youth in case of a crisis or to meet their emergency housing needs?
• What mental health services and supports are available in your community?

## STEP 2 OF 8:

Determine Service Levels and Implementation Schedule

*San Francisco Human Services Agency sent out a needs assessment to child welfare workers to understand where foster youth were planning to live when they turned 18, and learned that out of 273 preparing to emancipate, 101 foster youth did not know where they would live.*

STEP 2
OF 8:

Determine
Service Levels
and
Implementation
Schedule

2

*The process of
emancipation is
emotionally
overwhelming,
and can often lead to
major depression.
One day they're
in foster care,
and the next day
they're in their own
apartment with a
pot and a pan and
have no idea
what to do –
it's just totally
overwhelming.
All those abandonment
feelings come back
when they leave
their foster family.*

– Polly Williams,
Pathways Program,
United Friends
of the Children

## DETERMINE TARGET POPULATION

People often underestimate the diversity of experience of foster youth. Different sub-sets of foster youth will have varying needs and will require different types of services. Programs can be targeted to specific subsets of emancipating youth, including the groups described below:

• **Youth exiting group homes:** Eight percent of foster youth who emancipate do so from a group home. While this figure is small relative to other placements, these youth are disproportionately at risk for home-lessness due to limited opportunities to practice independent living. They are an important group to consider when devel-oping THP-Plus programs.

• **Pregnant and/or parenting youth:** In California, 67% of young women eman-cipating from foster care had given birth within 5 years of exiting care. While less common, young men are also custodial parents. Given the additional financial and emotional responsibilities of parenthood and the increased risk of involvement with the child welfare system, these youth are particularly in need of support. They also require a more intensive service model that also meets needs of youths' children.

• **Youth on probation:** Approximately 10,000 youth in California are in probation-super-vised foster care. A significant challenge faced by these youth is an increased rate of out-of-county placement, increasing the difficulty of maintaining connections with friends, family and support networks. Out-of-county placements can also create difficulties for youth accessing services.

• **Currently homeless youth:** Given THP-Plus's upper age limit of 24, some youth who participate in THP-Plus will have already experienced homelessness, pos-sibly for a protracted period of time. The perspective of these youth will be differ-ent than those youth transitioning directly from care and may require more intensive outreach efforts.



• **"Older" Youth:** Once again, because of the upper age limit of THP-Plus, there may be up to a five-year difference between youth entering the program (18 vs. 23). This poses both challenges and opportunities, which programs should consider when developing their policies.

• **College-bound youth:** This group of youth is sometimes overlooked because it is as-sumed that their housing needs are met by student housing. Depending on their circumstances this may not be the case and their housing needs should be considered.

• **Youth with mental or physical disabili-ties:** While estimates vary, a significant number of youth with disabilities age out of the foster care system annually and are in need of housing and supportive ser-vices. Strong referral relationships with area Regional Centers, private and public mental health agencies and Supplemental Security Income (SSI), among others, are vital for these youth.

• **LGBTQ youth:** Special consideration should be given to ensure THP-Plus pro-grams accommodate lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth. Poli-cies should be developed with the needs and priorities of this group of youth in mind in order to proactively create a hospi-table environment and prevent implicit or explicit discrimination.

## DETERMINE SERVICE LEVELS

After considering the target population, the workgroup can decide how many emancipating youth might be served by THP-Plus. This number typically starts smaller than the overall demand, and grows over time. One source to consult when determining demand for housing is the annual report to the CDSS by county Independent Living Skills Programs.

Factors to consider when developing this figure include:

• Need for affordable housing among emancipating youth

• Capacity of existing or new providers

• Existing housing stock in your community

• Availability of state funding

## DETERMINE THE THP-PLUS RATE

According to the California Welfare and Institutions Code 11403.3, a THP-Plus program "shall be paid a monthly rate that is 70% of the average foster care expenditures for foster youth 16 to 18 years of age, inclusive, in group home care in the county in which the program operates as of June 30, 2001."

This rate was developed in 2001 with the creation of THP-Plus. With 5 years of implementation experience, we now know that the amount allowed by statute is higher than the amount generally required to operate THP-Plus, even in counties with high housing and labor costs such as San Francisco. Given this differential, counties currently operating THP-Plus programs have invoiced the state at a rate below that which is established in statue.

For the purposes of clarity, this document will refer to the THP-Plus rate as follows:

• **Base Rate:** this is the rate established in statute: 70% of the average foster care expenditures for foster youth 16 to 18 years of age, inclusive, in group home care in the county in which the program operates as of June 30, 2001. It is the maximum amount that the state will reimburse the county for THP-Plus. This rate does not fluctuate annually. Instead, it is fixed to the 2001 rate.

• **Actual Paid Rate:** This is the rate that the workgroup will develop, based on their individual THP-Plus program. Existing THP-Plus providers have a monthly actual paid rate of $1,800-$2,400 per participant. This cost is inclusive of all housing subsidies and required supportive services.

## DEVELOP IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

Once the THP-Plus actual paid rate is developed, the implementation schedule can be used to determine the time frame for introducing new participants to the program, and to plan for the number of youth to be served over the coming year. This schedule will also help determine the program's monthly and annual budget. For the purposes of budgeting, the program year coincides with the state's fiscal year, which starts on July 1.

• For planning purposes, factor in a turnover rate of 15% (the turnover rate is the number of youth who exit the program prior to 24-months)

• Determine how many youth the program will admit in which months

• Determine the number of youth scheduled to enter the program in subsequent months

• Approximate the program's monthly and annual budget by multiplying the number of youth served each month by the monthly Actual Paid Rate determined above

*One of the great things about THP-Plus is the flexibility around how you're able to spend the funds. You can adjust your service levels to meet the needs of any type of young person who comes through the program. Young people with severe mental and emotional health issues, for example, will require more staff time just to help them navigate everyday life.*

–Sam Cobbs,
Executive Director,
The First Place
Fund for Youth

3

*My predecessors
discovered that housing
plus minimal services
and little structure
didn't work – these
young people really
need more structure
and more services,
especially if they're
coming out of group
home care.*

–Linda Levshin,
Program Manager,
Orangewood Chil-
dren's Foundation's
Rising Tides

## IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

THP-Plus housing should strengthen the existing continuum of housing options already available in the community, including permanent housing provided by nonprofit developers, transitional housing options, emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters, and other homeless programs.

While housing is an important aspect of THP-Plus, practitioners interviewed repeatedly expressed the opinion that too much emphasis is placed on picking the "right" housing model and too little is placed on developing supportive services.

*High quality, consistent supportive services targeted to meet the needs of individual youth are essential ingredients to a successful THP-Plus program.*

Without them, no housing model, no matter how sophisticated, will help foster youth make a successful transition. Supportive services are discussed at length later in this document.

There are three important considerations in determining the best THP-Plus rental housing model: housing type, density, and lease type. The housing type and density are both factors that can be chosen, while the lease type is often dictated by those two choices. The matrix below illustrates the different combinations of housing type, density, and lease type for THP-Plus rental housing:

| | HOUSING TYPE | |
|---|---|---|
| DENSITY | Permanent Housing | Transitional Housing |
| Scattered-Site | Master Lease Direct Lease | Master Lease |
| Single-Site | Master Lease Direct Lease | Master Lease |

1. **Housing type.** Housing for former foster youth can be permanent or transitional. The housing type refers to the length of time a youth participant may live in the apartment.

**Permanent housing** provides former foster youth with a valuable opportunity to end the transience which too frequently is a primary feature of their foster care experience. In permanent housing, THP-Plus participants receive a monthly rental subsidy and regular supportive services for the 24-month program period. At the conclusion of the program duration, the lease to the apartment is turned over to the youth (if it isn't already in the youth's name) 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.

This model promotes housing stability and increases the tenant's sense of ownership, which can improve program compliance. Most importantly, it eliminates the stress that youth commonly experience as they near the end of the program and must secure housing again. Without a full housing search process to conduct, the last six months of THP-Plus can focus on case management goals in education and employment.

**Transitional housing** is defined as housing for homeless persons which includes a comprehensive social service program and a tenancy term of at least 30 days but no more than 24 months. Transitional housing requires tenants to move out after the 24-month program is complete. THP-Plus programs that elect transitional housing as their model are required to help youth secure housing where the rent is no more than 30% of their income. Transitional housing is leased or owned by the provider. In the best circumstances, transitional housing acts as a stepping stone to independence, allowing tenants to get a taste of what it's like to live in their own apartment. Without a strong transition component, transitional housing can also result in further homelessness.

2. **Density** refers to concentration of housing, either within a housing development or within a community. Housing programs for former foster youth can be single-site or scattered-site.

   **Single-site housing** refers to one apartment building or complex, owned or leased by the THP-Plus provider, where all of the program participants live. A single-site THP-Plus model houses foster youth within the same building, forming a community of young people who share the experience of foster care. This sense of community poses both benefits and challenges. For example, the benefits of forming a community of young mothers might facilitate the sharing of child care duties, or the formation of support groups. On the other hand, an apartment consisting exclusively of former foster youth may result in supervision requirements that do not model independent living.

   **Scattered-site housing** refers to leasing apartments in various locations throughout the community, often in small clusters. This model allows youth tenants to be integrated into the community and thus simulates independence more closely. It requires youth to abide by standard social norms, since they are surrounded by non-program neighbors. This proximity to non-program neighbors heightens the importance of the THP-Plus property management function. Additionally, this model requires mobile case management.

3. **Lease type.** Leases can be either master leases or direct leases. The lease type is usually determined by the ownership of the rental unit – private ownership typically means a master lease while nonprofit ownership typically means a direct lease.

   A **master lease agreement** means that the THP-Plus provider leases apartments from a property manager and then sub-leases the units to youth tenants. Property managers at privately-owned apartment complexes will generally provide the master lease agreement for the THP-Plus provider to sign. The master

lease arrangement helps youth who otherwise might not be accepted as tenants build a tenant history that will help them secure housing in the future. By master-leasing apartments, the provider may be required to pay rent on the rental units if they are vacant between tenants. Also, as the master lease holder, maintenance requests generally come through the provider, and the provider is ultimately responsible for any damage to the unit.

A **direct lease agreement** is when a property manager leases directly to a youth tenant. In this scenario, the provider and the property manager often sign a third party agreement that acts as a rent guarantee. This lease type is typically executed when the program utilizes apartments at affordable housing developments that have funding restrictions requiring units to be rented to individuals of a certain income level. Even rental units that are "affordable" are not affordable to newly-emancipated foster youth, so the provider subsidizes the monthly rent for the individual youth tenant in the apartment. When the 24-month program subsidies provided by THP-Plus is over, the youth assumes responsibility for the full amount of the rent and continues to live in the rental unit.

*An important aspect of scattered-site housing is that we're trying to integrate these young people into their community. But we want to avoid isolating them. That's why they have roommates, and are part of a cohort of youth entering housing at the same time.*

–Sam Cobbs,
Executive Director,
The First Place
Fund for Youth

*Affordable Housing Associates in Berkeley has set aside 20 units in its new 79-unit affordable housing project, Madison Apartments, for former foster youth. Through THP-Plus, The First Place Fund for Youth will provide a rental subsidy and supportive services for these youth for up to two years, but they can remain in the housing as long as they remain income-qualified.*

## PERMANENT HOUSING

Permanent housing can be single-site or scattered-site. Examples of permanent, single-site housing include Fred Finch in Oakland, and the Larkin Street Youth Service's Ellis Street Apartments in San Francisco, developed in partnership with Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation. Examples of permanent, scattered-site housing include The First Place Fund for Youth in Oakland, and the Madison Street affordable housing development by Affordable Housing Associates, in conjunction with The First Place Fund for Youth.

### Single-site permanent model

**Benefits:**

- Permanent housing
- High level of investment and program participation because youth keep apartment
- Peer engagement
- High service utilization
- Efficient service delivery for provider
- Lower staff travel expense
- Fair housing requirements offer tenants more protection
- Return on investment for ownership properties

**Challenges:**

- Dynamics of single population housing
- Youth forgo benefits of being integrated into the community
- Shifting population profile over time
- Program expansion requires additional capacity
- Higher building & operations costs
- Less responsive to housing market
- Challenges regarding fair housing requirements

### Scattered-site permanent model

**Benefits:**

- Permanent housing
- Community integration
- High level of investment and program participation because youth keep apartment
- High level of independence
- Knowledge of community
- Responsive to housing market
- Lower building maintenance & operations costs
- Efficient service delivery (for youth)
- Fair housing requirements offer tenants more protection

**Challenges:**

- Program expansion requires additional capacity
- Less opportunity for peer engagement
- Lower level of supervision
- Issues related to mobile case management
- Requires higher independent living skills
- Challenges regarding fair housing requirements

# PERMANENT HOUSING LEASE TYPES

The lease type for permanent housing will most often depend on whether the property manager is a private organization or a nonprofit organization. With private property owners, the THP-Plus provider will execute a master lease. With nonprofit property managers of affordable housing, the lease type will be a direct lease with youth participants. These lease types are explained in more detail below:

1. **Master-lease with private property:**

    The THP-Plus provider signs a master lease for one or more apartments with a private property manager. Usually this lease is supplied by the manager of the building. The provider then sub-leases units to youth participants, using a sub-lease agreement.

    The THP-Plus provider pays the full amount of rent to the private property owner each month. This task is most frequently managed by the THP-Plus Housing Specialist, who serves as an internal property manager and fulfills all noticing, leasing and inspection responsibilities. In turn, the youth participant pays his or her rent to the THP-Plus program. The amount paid by the youth participant varies from program to program, however most programs gradually increase the amount of rent over the 24-month program duration to build the youth's ability to pay market rate rent upon completion of the program.

    In permanent housing, the master-lease can be transferred to the youth participant upon completion of the program, which can be the full 24 month duration or a shorter period of time, depending on the progress of the youth participant. This expectation is communicated to the property owner upon initiation of the original lease and is subject to their approval at the youths' completion of the program.

    When implementing this model, strict rent caps must be in place to ensure that the youth participants will be able to pay the market rate rent upon completion of the program. For example, to ensure the "ultimate affordability" of the unit to the youth, First Place limits the amount that it will lease a two-bedroom to $1,000 and a one-bedroom to $800.

2. **Direct lease with nonprofit developer:**

    In this scenario, the THP-Plus program builds a relationship with local nonprofit developers, who build and often manage affordable housing developments. Rather than executing a master-lease, the youth leases directly with the nonprofit developer based on their eligibility as a low-income individual. This is necessary because master-leases are not normally allowed under regulations that govern affordable housing financing.

    Once the youth leases directly with the nonprofit housing developer, the THP-Plus program and the nonprofit developer execute a third-party agreement, which specifies that the THP-Plus program will guarantee the youth's rent for the 24-month duration of the program and provide specified supportive services.

    This may seem confusing, since the rental property is technically "affordable." Despite this designation, most newly-emancipated youth will not be able to afford the rent charged for the unit. Most nonprofit housing developments are targeted to assist residents that earn some percentage of the Area Median Income (AMI). This is not the same as basing the rent on a percentage of the tenant's monthly income. For example, a one-bedroom rental unit in an affordable housing development in Oakland may have a monthly rent of $500. This is far less than market-rate rent, but still unaffordable for youth immediately after their exit from foster care.

    Once the direct lease with the nonprofit developer and the third-party agreement are executed, the youth moves into the rental unit and begins paying rent and receiving regular supportive services. As with the master lease arrangement, the full amount of rent is paid monthly by the THP-Plus program to the nonprofit developer or its management company and the youth's portion of the rent is paid to the THP-Plus program.

    As with the previous model, the amount of rent paid over time can vary by program. However, most THP-Plus programs gradually increase the rent paid over time to prepare the youth for the rent they will be paying at the completion of the program. Once this time arrives, the THP-Plus participant may remain in the permanently affordable rental unit and begin to pay rent directly to the management company. At the completion of the program, the rental subsidy and supportive services are no longer provided.

> *The program is an opportunity for the youth to learn the real world consequences of their actions, but with a safety net. Each month they have to pay their rent on time, and although we don't evict them, we educate them about the consequences in the real world.*
>
> –Ivan Hernandez, Case Manager,
> LEASE Program, Larkin Street Youth Services

## TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Transitional housing, too, can be single-site or scattered-site. An example of single-site transitional housing is the Pathways program of the United Friends of the Children in Los Angeles. An example of scattered-site transitional housing is Project Independence in Alameda County.

The major difference between transitional and permanent housing is that at the end of the 24-month program, participants vacate the apartments and move to non-THP-Plus apartments or other living situations.

### Single-site transitional model

**Benefits:**

- Knowledge of community
- Peer engagement
- High service utilization
- Efficient service delivery
- Lower travel expense
- Higher level of supervision
- No need to regularly add housing capacity

**Challenges:**

- Temporary housing solution
- Youth forgo benefits of being integrated into the community
- Dynamics of single population housing
- Higher building maintenance & operations costs
- Less responsive to housing market
- Tenants have fewer rights in transitional housing than in permanent housing

### Scattered-site transitional model

Benefits:

- Integration into the community
- Higher level of independence
- Responsive to housing market
- Lower building & maintenance costs
- Efficient service delivery (for youth)
- No need to regularly add housing capacity

Challenges:

- Temporary housing solution
- Lower level of supervision
- Less opportunity for peer engagement
- Issues related to mobile case management
- Tenants have fewer rights in transitional housing than in permanent housing
- Requires higher independent living skills

## TRANSITIONAL HOUSING LEASE TYPES

Transitional housing may be owned by the THP-Plus provider, in which case the provider would lease the unit directly to the tenant. However, in most cases, the THP-Plus provider master leases rental apartments from a private property manager, and subleases the units to youth participants. The THP-Plus provider pays the full monthly rent to the property manager, and the youth participants pay graduated monthly rent to the THP-Plus provider. At the completion of the 24-month program period, the youth tenant vacates the unit, and the THP-Plus program subleases the unit to a new program participant. Transitional housing does not use the direct lease arrangement, where property managers lease directly to youth tenants.

## HOST FAMILY MODEL

In the host family housing model, participants continue to live in their foster family placement or with another caring adult with whom they have a permanent connection. This adult receives a monthly THP-Plus subsidy for up to 24 months, during which time the youth participant receives supportive services. Youth who participate in the host family model receive the same supportive services as those participating in other housing models.

One of the benefits of this housing model is that it is consistent with experience of youth who are from intact families and has the potential to either establish or strengthen a permanent connection to a caring adult. This housing model works well for youth who are living successfully in their foster care placement, for youth who want and/or need the support of a family or in communities that lack adequate rental housing stock.

The key to success with the host family model, as with the apartment style housing models, is that the youth are provided comprehensive supportive services. With the host family housing model, support services can be provided by the THP-Plus provider or can be delivered collaboratively in conjunction with county mental health agencies, public health, the Independent Living Skills Program and Workforce Development Boards, among others.

**Benefits:**

- Promotes permanency
- Consistent with experience of youth who are from intact families
- Potentially lower cost
- Youth live in family setting

**Challenges:**

- Negotiating expectations between youth and family
- Promoting independence
- Promoting service utilization
- Possibly a temporary housing solution
- Less opportunity for peer engagement

Host families must be approved to be safe, supportive environments for transitioning foster youth. The approval process requires a host family screening, which is conducted by the county or its contracted THP-Plus provider. This screening satisfies the state's criminal background check requirement. The host family and the youth are also required to sign a shared housing agreement, which clearly establishes the roles and expectations of the youth participant and host family.

## INTEGRATING THP-PLUS WITH OTHER FUNDING SOURCES

Senate Bill 1808 eliminated the county match for the THP-Plus program, meaning that the program is now 100% state-funded. Outside funding is no longer a pre-requisite for THP-Plus implementation.

However, other sources of funding are available for permanent affordable housing, which can be utilized to expand local THP-Plus programs beyond what is available through state funding. THP-Plus funds can be used as a source of services and support for permanent affordable housing funded by:

- Mental Health Services Act (Proposition 63)
- Section 8 housing vouchers
- Community Development Block Grants
- Private foundations

## WRITE COUNTY PLAN

At this point, the THP-Plus planning workgroup has assessed local demand and community assets, planned service levels and developed an implementation schedule, determined the THP-Plus rate, and chosen the housing model(s) it wishes to pursue. The workgroup is now ready to incorporate these elements into the County THP-Plus Plan that will be submitted to CDSS.

A CDSS-approved template for the County THP-Plus Plan is provided, and includes all of the key elements required for approval by CDSS. The closer your County Plan matches the template, the more easily it will be processed by CDSS. Key elements of the County Plan include:

- THP-Plus base rate
- Actual paid rate
- Target population and services offered
- Housing model(s)
- Referral and screening process
- Provider selection criteria
- Assessment, outcome, and evaluation measures
- County contact person

## SUBMIT TO CDSS FOR APPROVAL

The County Plan is submitted for state approval to Cynthia Guilford, Statewide Transitional Housing Coordinator at CDSS.

- The Plan must include the above required elements for approval (see template provided).
- Be sure to include a county contact person for efficient communication. This person will be responsible for communication and correspondence with CDSS, and for notifying CDSS if there is a change in the THP-Plus county contact person.
- For state planning purposes, County THP-Plus Plans for the upcoming fiscal year should be submitted no later than February 1st.
- CDSS allocates THP-Plus funds to counties on an annual basis.

## DESIGN PROGRAM

Step 5 provides guidance to THP-Plus providers as they design their program. In developing the program, the THP-Plus provider must make decisions regarding:

- Outreach and recruitment
- Supportive services
- Staffing structure
- Policies and procedures

In designing their THP-Plus program, providers are reminded to involve youth as often as possible.

Once these program elements have been determined, the THP-Plus provider will develop a budget and write the Provider Plan to be submitted to CDSS. The Provider Plan is a distilled version of the provider's policies and procedures.

## OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT

Many THP-Plus providers will begin outreach efforts at their county Independent Living Skills Program and at local foster care group homes. After making presentations about the program's offerings, current or former foster youth interested in learning more can submit a simple program application. It is recommended that this application remain short, asking only for the name, contact information, and some identifying information about the interested individual. This way, young people will not be discouraged from applying by a lengthy application.

There are many different approaches to outreach and recruitment. However, one aspect recommended by practitioners is the value of engaging current and former participants. Youth exiting foster care have often participated in many different programs, some of which have not lived up to their promises. This results in "program fatigue" and can lead some youth to be skeptical (often rightly) of the value of a THP-Plus program as outlined by a social worker or case manager. Practitioners cite the value of recruitment efforts that are led by youth who are current or former participants that provide prospective participants with a balanced description of the program's benefits and challenges.

*You have to truly believe in the young people sometimes before they can believe in themselves. You have to keep your expectation high – don't dumb down your expectations. And if they fail once, or fail twice, or even three times or more, you have to keep the door open to them and truly believe that they will be successful on their next try.*

–Sam Cobbs, Director, The First Place Fund for Youth

## STEP 5 OF 8:

Design Program and Develop Provider Plan

*Case management services are provided either at the Center or in the youth's apartment. Staff have offices so youth have a choice as to where to access the services available to them.*

– Lorraine Flores, Associate Director, Bill Wilson Center

## SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

THP-Plus practitioners repeatedly emphasize that the key to the success of THP-Plus programs is intensive services provided by qualified, well-supported staff members. In developing services, remain mindful that these supportive services are for youth who are legally adults, but who still require youth-focused services. Some supportive services are required by THP-Plus statute; while others are recommended services if the provider has the capacity.

**Required Supportive Services:**

- Coordination with the Independent Living Skills Program to meet the goals outlined in the Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP)

- Case management

- 24-hour crisis intervention and support

- Individual and group therapy, provided either directly or through referral

- Educational advocacy and support, including linkages to Foster Youth Services with the goal of each youth obtaining a high school diploma, GED, or High School Proficiency prior to graduation from the program

- Assistance to pursue college or other post-high-school training

- Job readiness training and support including linkages to Workforce Investment Act (WIA) partners, One-Stop Centers, the Mentor Program, and other appropriate employment resources

- Mentoring

- Services to build and support relationships with family and community

- System of payment for utilities, telephone and rent

- Allowance to be provided to each participant adequate to purchase food and other necessities

- Apartment furnishings, provided directly or through a stipend

- If the housing model selected is transitional, assistance to youth in finding or maintaining affordable housing that

costs no more than 30% of the youth's gross income at the completion of the program

- Aftercare services including support groups and referrals to community resources

- FDIC insured savings account for funds retained by the provider on behalf of the youth

- Emancipation fund into which $50 is deposited monthly by the THP-Plus provider

**Additional Supportive Services:** In addition to the services required by statute, the following services are recommended to further support youth's transition to independence:

- Life skills training

- Roommate mediation

- Economic literacy training

- Transportation assistance

- Public benefits advocacy (assistance with General Assistance (GA), Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF), food stamps, Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI), MediCal, etc)

- Security deposit assistance

- Moving assistance

- Regular housing advocacy and tenancy training

The CSH Supportive Services Planning Worksheet is a checklist of supportive services developed by the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH). The worksheet can be used as a tool to think about what services THP-Plus providers offer and whether they are provided on-site, off-site, or by a service partner.

## SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARENTING YOUTH

Pregnant and parenting youth require a higher level of supportive services than single youth. Parenting youth are most successfully housed in their own apartments instead of sharing with other youth. Special services to consider for pregnant or parenting youth include:

- Assistance securing child care
- Domestic violence concerns
- Parenting education and support
- Public benefits advocacy
- Maternity provisions
- Specialized services for children, such as assistance with immunizations, well child visits and school enrollment

## INTEGRATION WITH ILSP

Independent Living Skills Programs (ILPs) vary across counties, but they all serve as an important point of contact for emancipating youth. Given this, ILSP is a natural source of referrals to THP-Plus programs. After referral, ILSP and the THP-Plus provider collaboratively develop and review youth participant Transitional Independent Living Plans (TILPs). Additionally, ILSP continues to provide direct services to youth, such as life skills training, up to age 21.

Recommendations and considerations for integrating THP-Plus with ILSP include:

- Maintain good communication and sense of partnership for effective relationship.
- Clearly delineate roles and responsibilities of both the THP-Plus provider and ILSP.
- Consider who will keep the waiting list and what criteria will be used for priority placements (ILSP and provider may have different criteria for who gets housing priority).
- ILSP orientation or classes can serve as receptive THP-Plus program recruitment venues.
- If THP-Plus provider offers one-stop center, consider having full-time ILSP coordinator on-site.
- If ILSP has a one-stop or youth center, consider scheduling regular visits by the THP-Plus provider staff.
- Keep in mind that regulations regarding age limits for ILSP are different than those for THP-Plus. ILSP is restricted to age 21, while THP-Plus providers are required serve youth up to age 24.

## STAFFING STRUCTURE

Existing THP-Plus providers repeatedly cite the important role that staff members play in the success of their programs. THP-Plus staff members have both the privilege and challenge of helping former foster youth navigate their first independent living experience. It is an incredibly exciting time for young people, full of "firsts."

Key staff positions in THP-Plus programs include case managers, housing specialists, and additional support staff. THP-Plus regulations require that housing management and case management functions be distinct. Existing THP-Plus providers have accomplished this by the creation of a Housing Advocate or Housing Specialist position that serves as the internal property manager for THP-Plus participants.

**Case Manager Responsibilities:**

- Time spent with each youth per week varies based on the needs of the youth and how long they've been in the program
- Recommended case manager to youth ratio of 1 to 12
- Case managers with parenting youth typically work with fewer youth (1 to 8 ratio)
- Regular individual and group clinical supervision is a valuable tool to reduce burn-out and strengthen skills

**Case Manager Attributes:**

- Experienced and effective with target population
- Among current THP-Plus practitioners, case managers have both Bachelor's and Master's degrees and have an average of 5 years of direct experience working with transition age youth
- Best case managers are those that can form real, meaningful relationships with youth
- Staff turnover can threaten program quality; most case managers can be expected to stay 2-4 years, if paid well, appropriately challenged, and afforded opportunities for advancement
- Staff should enjoy and be effective in a community-based setting (they are out of the office 75% of the time, often meeting with youth at their apartments)

> *A new provider needs to have strong case managers above all else. The needs of the young people will be more intense than you predict, and they will need more services than you anticipate.*
>
> - **Sherilyn Adams, Director, Larkin Street Youth Services**

STEP 5
OF 8:

Design
Program and
Develop
Provider Plan

*First Place Fund
youth advocates
(case managers) help
youth participants
pack and shop for their
new apartment.
This allows the case
manager and youth to
build a natural,
meaningful
relationship that will
serve both well
in the long run.*

*85-90% of the youth
in Project Independence
were referred there
by the Alameda
County ILSP.
Project Independence
participants make
presentations about the
program at ILSP
orientation to recruit
new participants.*

**Housing Specialist Responsibilities:**

• Leasing housing

• Maintaining housing records

• Managing THP-Plus provider's relationship with property manager

• Forwarding maintenance requests from youth

• Collecting rent

• Inspecting rental units

• Managing security deposit

• Tracking progress of youth from housing perspective

**Housing Specialist Attributes:**

• Experience managing housing

• Knowledge of federal, state and local fair housing laws

• Good communication skills to facilitate communication between THP-Plus provider and property manager

**Additional support staff:**

• Educational and employment specialist positions are often provided by the THP-Plus provider, but can also be referred out to existing community providers. Whether provided internally or through referral, these are essential services to provide THP-Plus participants.

## ADDRESS FAIR HOUSING CONCERNS

THP-Plus is a housing program, and as such it is subject to different regulations than foster family placements and group homes. Permanent housing providers are subject to federal, state and local fair housing regulations, intended to protect tenants. Transitional housing providers are subject to a different set of regulations, which offer fewer protections for tenants. The provider's policies and procedures manual must demonstrate compliance with applicable laws. Although these programs may not be subject to the same tenant protections as permanent housing, transitional housing policies should be based on the principles laid out in statue around age-appropriateness, homelessness prevention and inclusion.

The following overview of fair housing law is from an easy-to-understand manual called *Between The Lines* (California Edition), a question and answer guide to legal issues in supportive housing, produced by the Corporation for Supportive Housing. Each THP-Plus program should designate at least on person, usually the Housing Specialist, to become educated about fair housing law and to ensure that the THP-Plus program is operating within the law.

Fair Housing laws are found in the U.S. Constitution, presidential executive orders, federal statutes and regulations, state constitutions and statutes, and local anti-discrimination ordinances. There are also many federal and state court decisions interpreting these laws that direct their application. Most of the fair housing laws were originally developed to prevent housing providers from discriminating against protected groups of people.

### FEDERAL

• The Equal Protection Clause (the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution) guarantees equal protection of the laws for groups of people, such as different races or ethnicities, or non-citizens.

• The Fair Housing Act (a part of the Civil Rights Act) passed in 1968, prohibits discrimination in the sale, rental, financing, or advertising of housing based on race, color, religion, national origin, gender, handicap, family status, or pregnancy status. This Act applies to all publicly funded projects, and also to the private housing market.

• Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in housing and service programs receiving federal funding, including CDBG, HOME, HOPWA, Section 202, Section 811, Section 8, and McKinney Act programs, but not including low income housing tax credits or tax-exempt bond financing.

• The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), adopted in 1990, extends broad civil rights to people with disabilities.

• Three fair housing Executive Orders by Presidents Kennedy, Carter, and Clinton further prohibit housing discrimination at the federal level.

## STATE

- The California Fair Employment and Housing Act, adopted in 1980, prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, familial status, disability, marital status, ancestry, sexual orientation, or source of income. The Act is similar in many ways to the federal Fair Housing Act but is more extensive in that it protects against discrimination based on sexual orientation. It applies to all housing accommodations except owner-occupied single-family homes with one roomer or boarder.

- The Unruh Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination in business establishments, and has been extended to protect homosexuals, persons with less than desirable character, students, individuals of a particular occupation, and children.

- California AB 2972, effective January 1, 2003, is of particular interest to THP-Plus providers. The legislation declares that the provision of housing for homeless youth is authorized and shall not be considered unlawful age discrimination. Homeless youth are defined as those between the ages of 18 and 24 who are homeless or at the risk of becoming homeless, are no longer eligible for foster care due to age, or have run away from home or someone under 18 who has been legally emancipated. Housing for homeless youth means emergency, transitional or permanent housing tied to supportive services that assist homeless youth in stabilizing their lives and developing the skills and resources they need to make a successful transition to self-sufficient adulthood.

- Similarly, another new law (AB 1354, effective May 21, 2002) permits California Emergency Housing Assistance program (EHAP) funded emergency shelter and transitional housing programs to restrict occupancy exclusively to persons 24 years of age or younger without violating age discrimination laws.

## LOCAL

- Local Housing Discrimination Ordinances vary by jurisdiction. Cities and counties can adopt ordinances prohibiting discrimination in housing for categories not protected by federal or state law, such as gender identity, or source of income. Local ordinances may also provide additional tenant protections, such as "just cause" ordinances which identify specific justifiable causes for eviction and impose a penalty if a tenant is evicted without cause.

*THP-Plus participants are not dependent minors and have the full rights and responsibilities of adults living in housing.*

## POLICIES & PROCEDURES

The document that encases all of a provider's decisions about supportive services, staffing, and other program considerations is the Policies and Procedures manual. This document directs how the program will be run on a day-to-day basis, and how the provider will handle unforeseen circumstances. Important considerations when developing the policies and procedures include:

- It is important to solicit input from former foster youth in the development of the program's policies and procedures.

- Throughout the policies and procedures manual, clarify the roles and responsibilities of the provider, the participant, and county agencies.

- Excerpts of the program policies and procedures will be required to document proof of compliance when obtaining certification from the county.

- County officials may perform site visits to verify compliance, which may involve a review of the organization's policies and procedures.

## WRITE PROVIDER PLAN

The provider budget is an important part of the Provider Plan, and will demonstrate to the county how THP-Plus funds will be used by the provider. This budget is more detailed and program-specific than the county's THP-Plus base rate developed in Step 2. To date, THP-Plus practitioners have developed actual paid rates of $1,800 to $2,400 per program participant per month, which is below the allowable base rate established in the statute that established THP-Plus.

The Provider Plan includes the provider budget and a distilled version of the provider's Policies and Procedures manual. The Plan is developed by the provider and submitted to the county social services agency, which in turn submits it to CDSS. The Provider Plan informs the State as to what type of program the THP-Plus provider will offer, who it will serve, and what the cost will be. The closer the Provider Plan matches the template, the more easily CDSS will be able to review and approve the provider. The Provider Plan is submitted to CDSS for state approval after the provider has been certified by the county (Step 6).

**STEP 6
OF 8:**

Certification
and
Contracting

## PROVIDER SELECTION

The county has the discretion to select THP-Plus providers, and may elect to do so through a competitive bidding process. Competitive bidding requires a Request for Proposals (RFP).

Alternatively, some counties may have developed their THP-Plus programs in collaboration with a specific provider, and will not need to go through the RFP process. Instead, these counties will sole source the THP-Plus contract with its previously selected provider.

## CERTIFICATION PROCESS

To provide services and access THP-Plus funds, THP-Plus providers must be certified by the county on an annual basis. This is an entirely different process than foster care group home licensing with CDSS.

Counties can certify providers in one of two ways:

1. If the county issues an RFP the issuing county can request enough information from each potential provider to fulfill the THP-Plus certification requirements. This process allows counties to select providers and certify them simultaneously.

2. In counties that do not issue an RFP, providers submit documentation to the county that demonstrates compliance with THP-Plus regulations. A simple certification framework is provided, which includes all of the required categories.

The county certifies providers based on documentation of provider policies and procedures that demonstrate compliance in each of five categories:

1. Complying with Welfare and Institutions Code
2. TILP Requirements
3. Tenant Rights
4. Housing Statutes
5. Employee Regulations

## 1. COMPLYING WITH WELFARE AND INSTITUTIONS CODE

To comply with Welfare and Institutions Code, the THP-Plus provider must demonstrate that:

- The program serves only eligible participants (eligible participants are 18 to 24 years old, have emancipated from foster care or probation, and have completed or are pursuing the goals of a county-approved TILP)
- The program will not discriminate based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or disability, and youth receiving psychotropic medications will not be automatically excluded
- The functions of property management and service provider are separated
- The provider plan includes a description of the participant application process and selection criteria
- The provider has a plan for monitoring placements

Additionally, the provider must have policies regarding:

- Education requirements
- Work requirements
- Saving requirements
- Personal safety
- Visitors
- Emergencies
- Medical requirements
- Disciplinary measures
- Child care
- Pregnancy
- Curfew
- Apartment cleanliness
- Budgeting
- Care of furnishings
- Cars
- Lending or borrowing money
- Dating
- Ground rules for termination

## 2. TILP REQUIREMENTS

The provider must demonstrate that:

- The provider will assist each participant to complete his or her TILP goals and activities
- The participant's TILP will be updated at least annually and as needed to reflect changes
- The provider will evaluate the participant's progress with TILP goals

## 3. TENANT RIGHTS

To respect the rights of adult program participants, the provider must demonstrate that:

- Services for participants are not discontinued without due process
- Participants are free from arbitrary and capricious rules
- Participant's right to confidentiality is respected
- Participant's right to privacy is respected
- There is a contract between provider and participants that sets out specific responsibilities of each

## 4. HOUSING STATUTES

The provider must demonstrate compliance with:

- State and federal fair housing laws
- All federal, state, and local housing laws and fire clearance requirements

(Included is a link to the Corporation for Supportive Housing legal assistance document Between the Lines: A Question and Answer Guide on Legal Issues in Supportive Housing – California Edition)

## 5. EMPLOYEE REGULATIONS

To ensure the safety of program participants, the provider must demonstrate that it will:

- Perform criminal background checks of all employees
- Adhere to strict employment criteria, including consideration of employees' age, drug or alcohol history, and experience working with persons in this age group
- Provide a training program to educate provider's employees who work directly with participants

## OBTAINING STATE APPROVAL

After the provider is certified by the county to be in compliance with all the above regulations, the Provider Plan and proof of certification are submitted to CDSS for state approval. Once approved, the state will assign a unique provider number to each THP-Plus provider.

## CONTRACTING

After the provider is certified (or re-certified, on an annual basis) by the county to be in compliance with regulations, the provider enters into a contract with the county as a provider of services. The contract is typically reviewed annually, pending annual re-certification of the provider. Key elements of the contract include:

- Budget/rate
- Number of youth participants to be served
- Supportive services to be offered
- Evaluation measures to be tracked
- Measurable objectives to be achieved

**STEP 7 OF 8:**

Implement and Evaluate Program

## COUNTY INVOICING

Once the THP-Plus program is operating, the provider will need to be reimbursed by the county for its expenditures. There are two methods for THP-Plus invoicing current being used:

1. **Fee for services based on the THP-Plus actual paid rate.** Under this method of invoicing, the THP-Plus provider invoices the county social services agency based on the number of youth in the THP-Plus program that month multiplied by the actual rate paid. The amount reimbursed to the provider per youth is pro-rated based on whether or not the youth participated in THP-Plus for the full month. For example, if a youth moves into the THP-Plus program on the 15th of the month, the provider would be reimbursed half of the monthly actual paid rate for that participant.

2. **Invoice based on program budget.** This method means that the provider will invoice the county social services agency based on actual program expenditures for the month, not based on the THP-Plus actual paid rate. The number of youth served by the THP-plus program is monitored by the contract manager, but it does not determine the amount of the monthly invoice.

Both approaches have advantages and disadvantages. In a fee-for service invoicing system, fixed costs for the THP-Plus provider, such as staffing, may be not be covered if the program is below the targeted housing census for the month. When invoices are based on reimbursement of actual expenses, the costs of the THP-Plus provider are reimbursed without being directly linked to the number of youth in housing, requiring careful oversight by county social service agencies to ensure contract goals are met.

Whichever method is chosen, the THP-Plus provider forwards the invoice to the county THP-Plus point person, who reviews it before submitting it to the county fiscal department.

## THP-PLUS EVALUATION

Consistent and thorough program evaluation yields valuable information to refine program delivery. Evaluation is also an essential part of program oversight on the state and county level, as well as a valuable tool for advocacy.

One of the most challenging aspects of evaluation is limiting the outcome measures collected. Too frequently, the list of indicators becomes long, overwhelming staff members and resulting in poor data collection. It is better to collect a limited number of indicators consistently than an exhaustive list sporadically.

Provided below is a simple, yet comprehensive four-part evaluation framework. If utilized consistently, it will provide valuable information about the performance of THP-Plus participants while they are in the program and after they complete the program. With this minimal collection of information, powerful conclusions can be made. These conclusions can often be used in THP-Plus advocacy work.

## PART 1: DETERMINING THE BASELINE

It is essential that the "baseline" for each youth is established in order to determine whether or not the youth is making progress in the program. Program intakes may include a wide range of information, some of which is collected for case planning. For the purposes of evaluation purposes, the list does not need to be extensive. (See right.)

This information will provide an understanding of the youth as they enter THP-Plus. Provided below are examples using hypothetical data:

- **Housing Status:** 25% of entering youth are either homeless or living in a shelter.
- **Education:** 45% of entering youth have a high school diploma; 55% do not.
- **Employment:** 25% of entering youth are employed; 75% are not
- **Living Wage:** The average hourly wage of employed youth entering the program is $6.25.
- **Permanency:** 14% of entering youth reported a consistent connection with a caring adult.

| Indicator | Measurement | Data Input |
|---|---|---|
| Housing | Where is the youth currently living? (Select one only) | a. Foster care placement<br>b. Family member<br>c. Friend<br>d. Transitional housing program (not THP-Plus)<br>e. Shelter<br>f. Homeless |
| Education | What is the last grade completed? | Grade level |
| Employment | Is the youth currently employed? | Yes/No |
|  | If the youth is employed, what is the hourly wage? | Hourly wage |
|  | How many hours does the youth work in an average week? | # of hours per week |
| Physical and Mental Health | Is the youth pregnant or parenting? | Yes/No |
|  | Is the youth covered by health insurance? | Yes/No |
| Permanency | Does the youth have a consistent connection with a caring adult? | Yes/No |

## PART 2: MONTHLY PROGRESS MEASUREMENT

Once a youth has entered the THP-Plus program, it is important to regularly measure their progress (for example, monthly.) Once again, in an ideal world, providers could collect a wide range of indicators. However, time constraints on staff members mean that you will achieve better consistency with a short, targeted list of outcome indicators. Also, it is valuable to measure the "dosage" of the program to determine whether more participation results in better outcomes.

In this step of the process, collect the same measures noted above, with the exception of the housing indicator. In the area of housing, the most important indicator to measure is housing maintenance.

By collecting this information you will be able to gauge the progress of THP-Plus participants at various participation levels. Provided below are examples using hypothetical data:

- **Education:** Upon entering the program 45% of entering youth have a high school diploma; within 12 months 75% of participants have a high school diploma.
- **Employment:** Upon entering the program, 25% of entering youth are employed; within 12 months 70% of participants are employed.
- **Living Wage:** Upon entering the program, The average hourly wage of employed youth entering the program is $6.25; within 12 months, the average hourly wage of youth in the program is $7.50
- **Permanency:** Upon entering the program 14% of youth reported having a consistent relationship with a caring adult; within 12 months, 40% of youth report having such a relationship.
- **Housing:** Within 12 month of enter the program, 85% of youth have retained their housing.

## PART 3: PROGRAM COMPLETION

Program completion is a crucial time to measure the same set of indicators. It is important to note that for many youth, program completion will occur before month 24. This can be due to accelerated progress or an involuntary exit. Either way, it is important to capture data at this program juncture. The question under consideration is: has the participant made measurable progress in the 4 indicator areas?

In this step of the process, collect the same measures noted above, once again with the exception of the housing indicator. Substitute that question with the following:

| Indicator | Measurement | Data Input |
|---|---|---|
| Housing | Upon completion of THP-Plus, where does the youth live? (Select one only) | a. Continue to live in THP-Plus apartment<br>b. Shared housing with friend or family (over-crowded)<br>c. Shared housing with friend or family (not overcrowded)<br>d. Self-leased apartment (shared or not)<br>e. Transitional housing program (not THP-Plus)<br>f. Shelter<br>g. Homeless |

*An important distinction is whether youth move into a housing arrangement that is overcrowded or not. Overcrowded is generally defined as more than 2 persons per bedroom.*

It is also important to define what a successful housing outcome is for the program. For example, a successful housing outcome may be if the exiting youth achieves outcomes (a), (c), or (d).

By collecting this information you will be able to gauge the success of the THP-Plus program in helping participants reach self-sufficiency. Provided below are examples using hypothetical data:

• **Education:** Upon entering the program 45% of entering youth have a high school diploma; within 12 months 75% of participants have a high school diploma. At the time of program completion, 85% of participants have earned their high school diploma.

• **Employment:** Upon entering the program, 25% of entering youth are employed; within 12 months 70% of participants are employed. At the time of program completion, 85% of participants are employed.

• **Living Wage:** Upon entering the program, the average hourly wage of employed youth entering the program is $6.25; within 12 months, the average hourly wage of youth in the program is $7.50. At the time of program completion, the average hourly wage is $10.50.

• **Permanency:** Upon entering the program 14% of youth reported having a consistent relationship with a caring adult; within 12 months, 40% of youth report having such a relationship. At the time of program completion, 70% of youth reported having such a relationship.

• **Housing:** At the time of program completion, 85% achieved a successful housing outcome.

## PART 4: PROGRAM FOLLOW-UP

Program follow-up measurements are essential to determine whether or not the impact of the program was sustained. A second question you will be able to answer is whether or not the THP-Plus participant has fared better than similar youth who have not participated in THP-Plus. In a rigorous scientific study, this comparison would be determined through the creation of a control group of non-THP-Plus participants, who share the same attributes of the THP-Plus participants. In the absence of a control group, there are several studies of former foster youth that can be used as a comparison group.

A recommended framework for follow-up evaluation is at six months, one year, and two years after program completion. It is important to conduct follow-up surveys with youth who exit the program both voluntarily and involuntarily.

Information collected after program completion should be similar to the data that was collected throughout the youth's participation in the program and should focus on the areas of education, employment health, housing and permanency. Important questions to ask include:

- Have you experienced homelessness since you completed the THP-Plus program?

- If yes, how many times and how long was each time?

By collecting this information you will measure whether or not the gains achieved by youth who participated in THP-Plus were sustained. Provided below are examples using hypothetical data:

- **Education:** Upon entering the program 45% of entering youth have a high school diploma; within 12 months, 75% of participants have a high school diploma. At the time of program completion, 85% of participants have earned their high school diploma. One year after completing the program, 35% of participants are enrolled in higher education.

- **Employment:** Upon entering the program, 25% of entering youth are employed; within 12 months 70% of participants are employed. At the time of program completion, 85% of participants are employed. One year after completing the program, 85% of participants continued to be employed.

- **Living Wage:** Upon entering the program, the average hourly wage of employed youth entering the program is $6.25; within 12 months, the average hourly wage of youth in the program is $7.50. At the time of program completion, the average hourly wage is $10.50. One year after completing the program, the average hourly wage is $11.00.

- **Permanency:** Upon entering the program 14% of youth reported having a consistent relationship with a caring adult; within 12 months, 40% of youth report having such a relationship. At the time of program completion, 70% of youth reported having such a relationship. One year after completing the program, 75% of youth reported having a consistent relationship with a caring adult.

- **Housing:** Upon entering the program, 25% of entering youth are either homeless or living in a shelter. Within 12 months, 85% of youth have retained their housing. At the time of program completion, 85% achieved a successful housing outcome. One year after completing the program, 85% of youth are living in stable housing.

Several established THP-Plus programs have developed strategies to promote participation in the follow-up evaluation. These strategies include offering cash incentives, grocery voucher incentives, promoting participation through a program alumni club, and making evaluation surveys accessible on the Internet.

It is important to note that many more indicators can be collected, both qualitative and quantitative. The THP-Plus Statewide Implementation project will be developing a statewide web-based evaluation framework to assist programs in their assist programs in their data collection efforts.

*The THP-Plus Statewide Implementation Project will be developing a statewide database to measure the impact of the program.*

**STEP 8 OF 8:**

Provide Ongoing Oversight

## COUNTY OVERSIGHT

Ensuring that THP-Plus programs consistently achieve the goal of providing safe, affordable housing and comprehensive supportive services requires a clear, consistent oversight framework. Provided below are six recommended elements:

1. **Rental Unit Inspection:**
   - Purpose: Periodically inspecting individual units will ensure that rental units meet safety standards and are located in good neighborhoods with community amenities, such as access to public transportation and retail.
   - Frequency: Rental unit inspection is conducted on an annual basis for 25% of leased units selected on a random basis with 24 hours prior notification.

2. **Client Satisfaction Survey:**
   - Purpose: This gauges the level of satisfaction of youth participating in THP-Plus and is an important complement to quantitative measures collected in the monthly program report. A sample client satisfaction survey is included in the template section of the document.
   - Frequency: At least annually

3. **Youth Focus Groups:**
   - Purpose: Focus groups provide a valuable opportunity to hear directly from youth about their program experiences, both positive and negative. To encourage candor, program staff members should not be present for the focus group. The focus group should include a diverse set of youth representing various perspectives and be led by an experienced youth facilitator.
   - Frequency: At least twice annually

4. **Program Reports:**
   - Purpose: County staff members should review monthly program reports carefully and critically. Additionally, each county must submit an annual THP-Plus report to the CDSS.
   - Frequency: Monthly

5. **THP-Plus Collaboration Meeting:**
   - Purpose: THP-Plus providers should meet monthly with ILSP to discuss administrative concerns, program progress, and individual clinical issues as necessary. THP-Plus programs provide ample opportunity for "splitting staff" and maximum effort should be made to ensure that both programs are communicating the same message to participating youth.
   - Frequency: Monthly

6. **Audit:**
   - Purpose: The completion of an annual financial audit is a regular requirement for most county contracting processes. When used in combination with other oversight strategies, it ensures the appropriate use of THP-Plus funds and the maintenance of accurate records.
   - Frequency: Annual

## STATE OVERSIGHT

In addition to counties overseeing THP-Plus providers, the state will oversee county expenditures on THP-Plus programs. Each county with THP-Plus fund disbursements must report on the use of funds to CDSS on an annual (or as requested) basis. An example annual THP-Plus report is provided.

## THP-PLUS TEMPLATES

**THP-PLUS TEMPLATES**

**THP-PLUS STATEWIDE IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT**

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING FOR FORMER FOSTER YOUTH