

# SOCIAL WORKER TRAINING PILOT

## BACKGROUND

While education is a key pillar of achieving self-sufficiency, just 11% of foster youth in California receive a 2-year or 4-year degree by the age of 23.

In recognition of this disparity, in 2018, the legislature passed Senate Bill 12, requiring social workers to identify a postsecondary education support person to assist with college and financial aid applications and document this person in every foster youth's case plan, the central planning document that drives the services provided to foster youth. Given this recent law and the essential role of the social worker, it is crucial that social workers have knowledge on college preparedness. Despite this, social workers currently receive no formal training on how to support youth into postsecondary education and how to integrate key educational milestones into their case planning.

## INTERVENTION

Beginning in April 2018, JBAY partnered with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to launch a pilot with a cohort of 50 social workers and 10 supervisors in the Palmdale and Lancaster offices who had youth on their caseload in 8th grade and above. Participants in this pilot received a four-hour intensive caseworker training with information on how to support youth in foster care to achieve postsecondary education goals, whether that be career and technical education, a 2-year or 4-year degree. The initial training was developed in partnership between DCFS, JBAY and UNITE-LA. Next, participants in the pilot study were strongly encouraged to attend nine case consultations that were offered periodically through June 2019. These case consultations provided additional training that expanded upon topics covered in the initial training and provided opportunities to apply the information to current cases. The DCFS Independent Living Program and the Los Angeles County Office of Education also participated by bringing their expertise to the consultations.

## TRAINING TOPICS INCLUDED, BUT WERE NOT LIMITED TO:

- Using a trauma-informed lens to engage youth in foster care in early college planning
  - Understanding unique barriers that youth in foster care face in higher education
  - Understanding postsecondary pathways, including career and technical education
  - Identifying grade-appropriate college planning milestones
  - Support resources on K-12 and college campuses as well as the Independent Living Program
  - Incorporating higher education planning into CFT meetings and TILP planning
  - Application and matriculation processes for the CSU, UC and community college systems
  - Financial aid application processes and resources
  - Educational Planning Checklist tool, a quick reference guide for key milestones in grades 8- 12
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## EVALUATION AND NEXT STEPS

The pilot concluded in June 2020, and an external evaluator, Hope Education Research Solutions, was hired to formally evaluate the pilot's impact on social workers' knowledge and behaviors as well as develop recommendations for scaling this intervention across Los Angeles County. The evaluation found strong evidence that training on postsecondary education planning is desired by social workers and supported by supervisors. In addition, the intervention was found to be helpful in important ways, such as increasing awareness for postsecondary education planning. Furthermore, the evaluation strongly supports expansion of the intervention with some modifications in its delivery to improve integration of the content in social workers' case management routines.

In collaboration with DCFS, JBAY is currently partnering to enhance the initial social worker training and develop a plan to scale these interventions countywide.