

LINKAGES AND TRANSITION AGE YOUTH

Key Words and Definitions Used in this Document:

- **Linkages** refers to coordination among Child Welfare and Self-Sufficiency (e.g., CalWORKs) staff to provide coordinated services to families to prevent child maltreatment and support reunification
- **Transition Age Youth (TAY)** refers to youth transitioning out of the child welfare system (typically at age 18 - 21)
- **Adult Serving Systems** refers to services available to adults to meet basic needs (income, housing, medical care, etc.). This is used in contrast to services TAY have received via the Child Welfare System.
- **Primary Prevention** refers to services intended to strengthen families with no current child welfare concerns to avoid future child maltreatment.
- **Early Intervention** refers to services offered to strengthen families or address existing risk factors to avoid future child maltreatment.
- **Self-Sufficiency Staff** refers to staff assisting individuals or families to access income supports, housing, Medi-Cal, or other public benefits outside the Child Welfare System.
- **CalAIM (California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal)** is a Medi-Cal improvement effort in California

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to offer guidance to county Self-Sufficiency (CalWORKs and other adult serving programs) and Child Welfare programs who want to provide Linkages coordinated support for Transition Age Youth (TAY) during and after their transition out of foster care. Please note, because terminology varies across the state we are using the phrase "Self-Sufficiency staff" to refer to staff in adult serving systems that provide income support, MediCal, CalFresh, housing and other services to adults in need.

Linkages counties know the value the Linkages collaboration brings to families with mutual involvement in CalWORKs and CWS. There is an opportunity to bring that same engagement, collaboration and support to young adults during and after their transition out of foster care. This coordination can help young adults with a warm hand-off and provide someone they can turn to after they exit care to make sure they have access to:

- Future economic stability through programs such as WIC, General Assistance, CalWORKs and CalFresh
- Housing supports
- Medi-Cal or other healthcare supports
- Social connections in the community e.g., FRCs, parent support groups, and other community-based supports)
- Childcare and other services that support expecting and new parents
- Behavioral health and SUD services outside the foster care system
- Support for educational attainment

These guidelines are intended to complement existing policy and procedures. Rather than providing explicit directives, this document offers best practice guidance for engagement, coordination, and collaboration intended to support youth in transition.

Why this Support is Important:

In their study, Findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CalYOUTH): Conditions of youth at age 23, Courtney et al (2020) found that young people who exited foster care at adulthood experience more hardships compared to same age youth who did not experience foster care. These findings cross multiple measures of well-being including food security, stable employment, economic self-sufficiency, physical and mental health, and involvement with the criminal justice system. The CalYOUTH study authors note that more work is needed to support young adults after they exit foster care.[1]

A recent report from the Urban Institute identified that former foster youth need specific assistance to access services – in particular they need help navigating application processes and they need assistance to restart services when their circumstances change.[2]

Further, recent findings from Font et al (2020) confirm that children born to parents who experienced Child Welfare System involvement have an increased likelihood of also experiencing system involvement.[3]

As Transition Age Youth have been identified as a population with more hardships, a need for help to access services and increased risk of future Child Welfare System involvement, it is imperative that we identify best practices for connecting Transition Age Youth with concrete supports that can decrease their stressors and thereby prevent future child maltreatment.

Benefits of Linkages Participation

Self-Sufficiency and Child Welfare programs both promote wellbeing. As we have seen with families involved in CalWORKs and Child Welfare, Linkages teams can work together to support youth exiting care by providing information and services to help young adults increase their economic stability and avoid future involvement with the Child Welfare System (CWS) as a parent.

Linkages coordination can provide young adults an easier pathway to the services they need outside the foster care system and simpler processes along the way while also engaging them with a supportive team of people. Working together, the Linkages team can address the immediate transition needs of the young adult while also working to build long term economic stability. This coordinated support will help the young adult understand what is available and give them a sense of agency for their own future. Whether the young person learns a new job skill or discovers a new way to safely discipline their child, their Linkages team can help them celebrate these gains. Likewise, if either worker observes the young person deviating from their plan, the team can be brought together to re-engage and find new ways to meet the young person's needs.

[1] Courtney, M. E., Okpych, N. J., Harty, J. S., Feng, H., Park, S., Powers, J., Nadon, M., Ditto, D. J., & Park, K. (2020). Findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CalYOUTH): Conditions of youth at age 23. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

[2] <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/four-ways-better-support-young-adults-transitioning-out-foster-care>

[3] Font S, Cancian M, Berger LM, DiGiovanni A. Patterns of intergenerational child protective services involvement. Child Abuse Negl. 2020 Jan;99:104247. doi: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104247. Epub 2019 Nov 9. PMID: 31715518; PMCID: PMC6984680.

In addition to making service access easier, using a Linkages approach with young adults in transition, allows counties to provide specific prevention and early intervention services:

1. **Primary Prevention with Young Adults Planning their Exit from Foster Care:** Collaboration during this transition provides a warm-hand-off to adult serving systems for Transition Age Youth and supports a smoother and safer path out of foster care via resources and services that facilitate stability and access to housing, income supports, healthcare and food resources. This collaboration also reduces risk of future harm by connecting young adults to income supports, services, and other resources they need before they become parents or before circumstances in their family require CWS involvement.
2. **Early Intervention with Expecting and Parenting Youth and Young Adults in Foster Care:** Collaboration supports expecting and parenting youth by providing services, supports and resources immediately via specific referrals (e.g., Family Stabilization Services and Family First prevention Services) that are aimed at addressing risk factors and meeting basic needs and extend beyond exit from foster care.
3. **Managed Care Plans (MCPs) are essential partners in providing comprehensive support for Transition Age Youth (TAY) as they exit foster care.** CalAIM's enhanced services present significant opportunities for MCPs to address both immediate transition needs and long-term health stability for this vulnerable population. Counties and MCPs should establish formal warm hand-off protocols that include in-person meetings between the youth, their child welfare team, and their future MCP care team before exit from care.

Linkages Strategies to Support TAY

Linkages teams seeking to expand services to young adults transitioning out of care can consider the following strategies:



Teaming

Child and Family Team (CFT) meetings are used for transition planning as young adults prepare to exit foster care. Self-Sufficiency staff participation in the CFT can help address the young adult's support needs including sharing information about income supports and specialized services (e.g., mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence, family stabilization and home visiting) to which the young adult may be eligible. By joining the CFT, the Self-Sufficiency staff person can become a touchpoint for the young adult – someone they can turn to for guidance as they seek to access services outside the child welfare system. The CFT structure can also provide a warm-hand-off between the Child Welfare System and adult serving systems.

For youth in an MCP, the MCP Child Welfare Liaison could be invited to attend CFT/Transition meetings for youth 6-12 months before their exit from care to begin planning for healthcare continuity and make sure the youth knows who to contact to access assistance from the MCP. The teaming interaction should include informing the youth about their MCP benefits, focusing on services most relevant to their needs as well as the importance of remaining on a Medi-Cal MCP. If the youth is already receiving any Enhanced Care Management (ECM) or other services, then these providers should be included in any transition planning meetings as well to ensure continuity of care.



Coordinated Planning

Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP) development is a process that actively engages youth in defining their strengths and identifying resources that will help them transition to adulthood. Working with young adults to collaboratively develop coordinated TILPs will support their smooth transition out of foster care. Strategic partnership with Self-Sufficiency staff can help by explaining eligibility for economic resources that will support future economic stability and sharing information about how to access services that will be available to the young adult after they exit care.

The MCP representative or MCP Child Welfare Liaison should be actively involved in developing the healthcare components of the youth's Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP), ensuring that specific managed care resources and CalAIM services are incorporated into transition goals. These could include ECM which youth would qualify for under the Child Welfare Population of Focus. In addition, there are several Community Supports that youth would qualify for and should be assessed and referred to before exiting care. These may include housing, food security, and transportation services.



Brokering Services

For eligible young adults, Self-Sufficiency staff can help them access resources for meeting complex and/or specialized needs through future participation in Welfare to Work activities such as barrier removal services (e.g., housing assistance, mental health services) and work activities (e.g., job search, vocational assessments). Additionally, connections can be made to community-based prevention services for expecting and parenting youth and CalAIM services such as ECM can be available for youth who are on a Medi-Cal MCP.



Outreach

Self-Sufficiency and CWS staff (along with MCP representatives and FFPS service providers) can work together on outreach plans to connect young adults with services throughout the transition. Having an identified Self-Sufficiency connection can remove barriers to service access that young adults may face if they try to access services on their own.



Accessible Transition and Aftercare via Identified Connection and No Wrong Door

Providing ongoing support via a tangible connection and a “No Wrong Door” approach to ensure that young adults have access to services after leaving foster care is essential to long-term stability. The connections that Self-Sufficiency and Child Welfare programs establish and maintain with community-based organizations, specialized service providers, and other resources are key benefits that a young adult can gain through this Linkages approach. Having a positive service experience while supported by their team can help them gain confidence to utilize these community resources on their own in the future. This is where collaboration with Self-Sufficiency to help young adults gain economic stability can become a protective factor against future risk of maltreatment during the stressful times that young adults inevitably face.