

**California Child Welfare Council**  
**Child Development and Successful Youth Transitions Committee**

**Foster Youth County Employment – Model Policy for Priority Hiring**

Updated 07/27/2016 by Rochelle Trochtenberg

Updated 08/16/2016 based on feedback from Nisha, Len and David

The results of a statewide survey to county child welfare directors indicate that at least eight counties have programs which offer part or full-time employment for current or former foster youth. The programs fall into four main categories:

**1. Part or full-time temporary internships** (San Diego, San Mateo, Los Angeles)

These internships offer current and former foster youth the opportunity to work in an entry-level position in a county department for 6-18 months. Positions may be part or full-time. Interns are hired after an interview and may be provided a job coach or additional training during the program to learn professional and interpersonal skills. County departments participate voluntarily in the program, and there is not a dedicated path to permanent county employment at the end of the internship. Youth who wish to apply for permanent county positions must go through the normal competitive hiring process.

**2. Pathway to permanent, full-time employment** (Santa Clara, Los Angeles)

This type of program offers current and former foster youth a pathway to permanent, full-time employment in a number of county departments. Youth are hired into the program after an interview for an entry-level position in a county department. Once hired through the program, youth are eligible to apply to a permanent county position by successfully passing an employment examination within a set period of time (3 months in Santa Clara and 24 months in Los Angeles). In Santa Clara, participating youth are hired as permanent employees as long as they pass their employment exam. In Los Angeles, participating youth must go through the competitive examination process (which includes a ranking of exam scores), but they compete only against other participating youth, not the general public.

Both programs offer supportive services to youth as they apply for the program, and Los Angeles's program provides job coaching and life skills training to youth during the program. In Los Angeles, each county department is required by the Board of Supervisors to host a youth from the program, but in Santa Clara, participation by county departments is voluntary.

In addition to the above opportunities, county HR departments may want to collaborate with the Independent Living Program (ILP) to provide job skills training to current/former foster youth who are hired for county jobs/internships. This allows HR to tap into an existing resource, instead of re-inventing the wheel. LA County has done this and could advise other counties on doing so.

**3. A limited number of semi-permanent, full-time positions within the Child Welfare department** (Los Angeles, Riverside, Merced, Mariposa, San Bernardino)

At least five counties have programs that hire former foster youth as full-time employees in the Child Welfare department to serve as peer advocates for foster youth or assist social workers with case management. The number of positions tends to be limited (most counties

have no more than 7 employees in this role), and the employees work only within Child Welfare. While the position is not time-limited, it is also not supposed to be permanent and employed youth are expected to transition to other employment in 3-4 years. Youth are typically hired through an interview and need not take an employment exam for this position. There is not a dedicated path to other county employment through this position.

**4. Advise former foster youth to have their juvenile records sealed** (Unknown number of counties)

Under current law employer are not permitted to ask applicants for employment to disclose information concerning an arrest or detention that did not result in a conviction, and there is pending legislation that would also prohibit employers from asking applicants about sealed juvenile records. All counties should advise youth of their rights regarding juvenile records under current law and any changes to law that occur over time.

**Strategies for County Implementation: Hiring Former Foster Youth**

Government Code Sections 19800-19810 require counties and the state to establish personnel standards in regulatory form necessary "to assure state conformity with applicable federal requirements." These standards are broad, flexible guidelines reflecting generally accepted personnel practices that provide for meeting the federal and state requirements by local agencies and are applicable to both Approved Local Merit Systems and the Interagency Merit System directly administered by the State Personnel Board.

**Approved Local Merit System Counties**

In Approved Local Merit Systems (ALMS), the State Personnel Board Executive Officer reviews each system for sufficient conformity with applicable Federal requirements. If sufficient conformity is found, the approval will be continued. There are 31 counties in California that have Approved Local Merit Systems: Alameda, Butte, Contra Costa, Fresno, Kern, Kings, Los Angeles, Marin, Mendocino, Nevada, Orange, Placer, Riverside, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Francisco, San Joaquin, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Shasta, Solano, Sonoma, Stanislaus, Tulare, Ventura, Yolo, and Yuba.

Each of these counties can work with the Board of Supervisors, County Human Resources, and various county departments to create a policy that gives preference to former foster youth for employment. There are at least eight counties that can serve as models for implementation, as well as numerous other districts across the country.

**Interagency Merit System Counties**

The departments administering state and federally funded programs in local agencies which have not met the criteria for Approved Local Merit System status constitute the Interagency Merit System, administered through the State Personnel Board and California Department of Human Resources (CalHR). CalHR contracts with CPS HR Consulting to provide the requisite services to counties that receive federal funds in their Social Services, Child Welfare, and Child Support Service Departments to ensure compliance with state and federal hiring requirements. The service provided by CPS HR Consulting is named *Merit System Services (MSS)*.

<http://www.mss.ca.gov/>

There are currently 27 counties in California that are part of Merit System Services: Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Colusa, Del Norte, El Dorado, Glenn, Humboldt, Imperial, Inyo, Lake, Lassen, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, Modoc, Mono, Monterey, Napa, Plumas, San Benito, Sierra, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, and Tuolumne.

Counties referenced above use *Merit System Services* for job recruitment and selection process, appointments/promotions/demotions, discipline and appeals, layoffs, seniority, position classification, probationary periods, reinstatements/transfers, and appeals processes. The Merit System Services has a “Peer Coach I” and “Peer Coach II” job classification that can be used by these counties as one mechanism for hiring permanent, full-time, foster youth.

While the Peer Coach classifications do not specifically call out preference to former foster youth, it does require “current or previous experience as a client who received social or health and human services.” Counties can also work with MSS to develop a specific job classification for foster youth similar to the MSS position Foster Parent Liaison to specifically identify and prioritize preference for former foster youth.

MSS positions may be limited to Child Welfare, Social Services and Child Support Services, but the same job classifications and specifications may also be used to develop county jobs for former foster youth that are in other departments. County Administrators, Board of Supervisors, and County Human Resources will need to work together to prioritize resources, develop policies and implement a structure for hiring and giving preference to former foster youth.

### **Summary**

Counties across California can increase access to workforce development and employment opportunities for former foster youth by providing public sector, entry-level job opportunities that give preference to this vulnerable and economically disadvantaged population.

1. Develop and implement policies that explicitly give hiring preference to former foster youth.
2. Create multiple opportunities for foster youth to gain critical job skills to lead to permanent employment including, but not limited to, paid internships, Work Experience Program (WEX) positions, and part-time semi-permanent positions across county departments.
3. Hire Former Foster Youth for Entry-level, Full-time, Permanent, and Benefitted positions throughout county departments.
4. Inform youth regarding their rights pursuant to sealing juvenile records.