

## **Humboldt County Transition Age Youth Collaboration Policy Recommendations for the Children's Center**

Youth placed at Humboldt's Children's Center are experiencing instability and trauma, thus need a temporary safe, nurturing, therapeutic family environment. Unfortunately, many youth report that the current environment in the Children's Center can be institutional, restrictive, insensitive to the needs of transition aged youth, and the cause of further trauma. Youth have identified the following concerns and proposed solutions to assist the Children's Center in becoming a home-like environment that utilizes a strengths-based approach to assist youth in transitioning to a stable placement.

### **A. Responding to Youth's Basic Needs**

A1. Require Children's Center to put aside meals and have adequate food available for youth who miss scheduled mealtimes for any reason.

A2. Involve youth in selecting, buying and preparing food and meals. A3. Modify the physical environment to make youth feel welcome and valued by making changes such as placing dressers in all bedrooms, using real curtains, and designating storage containers/space for all resident belongings.

### **B. Eliminating Institutional Environment**

B1. Eliminate inappropriately restrictive and institutional rules within Children's Center such as restrictions on phone use, access to outside food, laundry, medical clearance, lock up of clothing and personal items that won't fit in a cubby, restrictions on stuffed animals, and use of contracts for behavioral modification.

B2. Develop alternatives to the existing level system in partnership with HCTAYC and others to ensure that the environment is a therapeutic family one that supports the needs of transition aged youth. B3. Create more activities for youth to do, such as allowing youth to go off grounds unsupervised for longer than an hour and having regular outside time to help youth deal with the stress and isolation of being placed in the Children's Center.

a. Develop process for soliciting youth involvement in planning programming and activities within the Children's Center.

b. Ensure all youth have access to outings, regardless of level and whether they have their own money to pay for the outing.

B4. Ensure Children's Center allows youth to attend Independent Living Skills events, programs that support positive youth development and religious services, regardless of their behavior, level, or points. B5. Create consistent computer and internet access for youth at the Children's Center so that youth are able to maintain connections, complete schoolwork and gain experience.

### **C. Developing a Safe Place**

C1. Create a former foster youth ombudsman position to help youth who are having a problem with services, staff or placement issues at the Children's Center that staff can't resolve or don't believe.

C2. Require staff to receive training from former foster youth on how to interact respectfully with youth and talk with youth who are having problems.

C3. Eliminate calls or threats to call law enforcement on youth, unless youth are experiencing an actual emergency.

### **D. Creating Opportunities for Youth Feedback**

D1. Develop ongoing mechanisms for youth to provide feedback to the Children's Center about the quality of care, program strengths and/or issues.

### **E. Addressing Bigger Picture Issues**

E1. Create separate shelter placements for children aged 4-9, 10-13 and 14-18 so children are not placed inappropriately with youth of different age groups and needs.

E2. Address licensing issues so that teen mothers don't have to be separated from their children at the Children's Center.