



Expanding the San Mateo County Supported Training and Employment Program (STEP)

Created By:

The San Mateo County
Human Resources Department
and
Human Services Agency

Recommendation

We recommend that \$400,000 from Measure A funding be designated to expanding the San Mateo County Supported Training and Employment Program (STEP). The funding will increase the number of foster youth participating in the program and the length of proper job training that they will receive. The goal of the expanded STEP Program is to more comprehensively prepare and train participating foster youth during their transition into adulthood, which will increase their likelihood of becoming successful, self-sufficient members of society. The usage of the funding is consistent with the criteria established by the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors for Measure A funding, specifically (2) “Fills gaps in services for vulnerable populations” and (6) “Utilizes evidence-based approaches to service delivery”.

Background

The transition to adulthood is a stressful time for most young people. Financial self-sufficiency is one of the most important elements to achieving independence. Many foster youth, without the benefit of a stable family, experience crises that the majority of their peers do not. Studies have consistently shown that 50% of former foster youth experience high rates of unemployment within five years of leaving care. If former foster youth are employed, they tend to earn significantly less than their peers. Nationally, youth employed at 24 earn about \$1,500 month; compared to California foster youth who earn about \$700.¹

Some of the more obvious factors that contribute to these outcomes include: lack of employment experience while in foster care; lack of employment training programs (particularly developmentally-appropriate programs); and lack of social support and mentoring that can play an important role in teaching and modeling appropriate work behaviors, as well as open up the “world of work”.

Additionally, while the majority of foster youth (70%) plan to attend college, studies show that the percentage of foster youth who complete a bachelor’s degree is between 3% and 11%,^{2,3} compared to 28% for 25- to 34-year-olds in the general population.⁴

With strong support throughout the County, STEP has been operating since 2009. This comprehensive employment training program, specifically developed for foster youth (ages 18-24), is a partnership between Human Resources and Human Services Agency Children and Family Services. It has proven to be a way to fill the gaps and assist these youth in finding their potential to succeed in the workplace. Just one successful short-term opportunity can have a significant impact by providing a positive work

¹ Macomber, J., Cuccaro Alamin, S., Duncan, D., McDaniel, M., Vericker, T., Pergamit, M., Needell, B., Kum, H., Stewart, J., Lee, C., & Barth, R. (2008). *Coming of age: Empirical outcomes for youth who age out of foster care in their middle twenties*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

² Pecora, P. J., Williams, J., Kessler, R. C., Downs, A. C., O'Brien, K., Hiripi, E., & Morello, S. (2003). *Assessing the Effects of Foster Care: Early Results from the Casey National Alumni Study*. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs, p. 28.

³ McMillen, C., Auslander, W., Elze, D., White, T., & Thompson, R. (2003). Educational experiences and aspirations of older youth in foster care. *Child Welfare*, 82(4), 475-495.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). *Educational Attainment by Sex: 2000*. (Table QT-P20).

http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFPeople?_submenuId=people_5&_sse=on Click on the “Educational Attainment” table.

and job coaching experiences that will help to broaden their employment horizons and ultimately improve their quality of life.

Currently, STEP offers up to 20 internship positions during the summer in various departments throughout the County. The program was originally funded through the San Mateo County Workforce Investment Board (WIB), utilizing American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) funding. Since the end of the ARRA, the Human Services Agency has funded the program each year.

Target Population

In addition to difficulties finding stable and sufficient employment opportunities, many foster youth face other challenges. These challenges include:

- The need for stable, affordable housing
- Below average educational achievement
- Mental and behavioral health issues
- The absence of a stable support system.

While experiencing any one of these barriers could provide a discouraging hurdle in obtaining stable, quality employment, it is not uncommon for many foster youth to experience many of these barriers simultaneously. However, we cannot overlook that foster youth exhibit an unexpected resiliency. This resiliency is strong enough that if paired with the right supports, foster youth can flourish and become productive, contributing members of our community.

Since 2005, the average number of foster youth who transition out of foster care to adulthood in San Mateo County is about 33, and has declined in CY 2013 to 11. With the passage of AB12: The California Fostering Connections to Success Act in January of 2012, youth are opting to stay in extended foster care. Currently 45 non-minor dependents are living in San Mateo County. STEP targets and incorporates foster youth from all areas of the County. Criteria for inclusion are: reside in San Mateo County; age 18-24 years; low income; and emancipated from foster care or are non-minor dependents participating in extended foster care under AB12. The program will also focus on the recruitment of foster youth who can be connected to and benefit from additional specialized programs available, including parenting youth and veterans.

Program Performance

Over the past five years, program participants have reported engagement in positive activities after completing the 12-week session. The statistics below were taken from 2009-2014.

Foster Youth Challenges	STEP Outcomes (self-reported)
Foster youth are at high risk of becoming disconnected young adults	89% of participants have either entered college, employment, or both
It is estimated that 7% to 13% of students from foster care enroll in higher education	76% of interns enrolled/re-enrolled in college or a vocational training program following the program
50% of foster youth are unemployed 2-4 years after leaving foster care	69% of past participants entered employment sometime after completing the program

STEP gives participating foster youth opportunities designed to help them develop into independent and productive members of the community. Compared to national foster youth statistics, STEP participants are significantly more likely to attend college and find employment. Additionally, of the 69% of STEP interns who found employment after completing the program, 22% were hired on as County employees, demonstrating that County departments value the work performed by their STEP interns. STEP interns are an important component to the County's workforce succession plan, as departments can utilize STEP as a source to identify and develop talent.

Project Description

Current STEP Program Structure

The Supported Training and Employment Program (STEP) is a 12-week, paid summer internship program for foster youth 18 to 24 who have aged out of care or are non-minor dependents participating in extended foster care. All participants are residents of San Mateo County. Participating youth are paid \$12 per hour while being trained and coached during the course of their employment with the County. Participants work an average of 20 hours per week.

STEP includes **four primary components** for interns:

- 1) Job readiness skills training: Participating youth will receive comprehensive job readiness training which includes areas such as workplace ethics, professional growth and development, and communication and interpersonal skills. STEP interns will also complete career assessments and explore different career paths. In addition, the Recruitment and Selection Division will provide training on how to successfully seek, apply and interview for County employment. Interns will also be eligible and encouraged to enroll in County offered training classes that meet their individual interests.
- 2) Job shadowing and employment coaching: Each intern will be paired with a County department and coach. Participating youth are not likely to have any work experience and being coached (mentored) will increase the likelihood of their success. Coaches will help prepare the interns for their new job duties by exemplifying and teaching appropriate behaviors and skills, as well as orient them through the process of gaining work experience.
- 3) Hands-on work experience in a County department: Each participant will be matched to an entry-level internship with a County department and will have responsibilities and tasks of their own. Participants will learn and practice new skills in a supportive environment.
- 4) Transition planning: Program staff and interns will create an individual Transition Plan, which will identify lessons learned, set new goals and objectives, delineate steps to take, and identify available resources for employment and career planning including County and community-based career programs, including college enrollment and vocational programs.

An additional element important to the success of the Program is a Coach Training session. Coaches will be trained by qualified mentoring experts on effective mentoring/coaching skills applicable to the special needs of these youth who are learning to be employed. The Program is administered jointly by the Human Resources Department and the Human Services Agency.

Participating Departments have included: Human Services Agency, Parks Department, San Mateo County Libraries, Department of Housing, Health System, County Manager's Office, and the Human Resources Department.

Proposed Expanded Program Structure

The proposed expanded program will offer participating foster youth a 3-month skill building and hands on training/employment program with the possibility of extension. Extended opportunities will be made available for those participants who successfully complete the initial 3-month program. Extension can be up to 9 months or more depending on department need. We will aim to provide extended opportunities to as many of the STEP interns as possible.

The program will offer two enrollment periods each year. Additionally, we will increase the number of youth to be served from 20 to 35 each year. The proposed full-time equivalent positions would be entry-level positions that could lead to future employment with the County.

Rationale for STEP Expansion

Nurturing Future Productive Workers

Many of the youth who have participated in STEP developed valuable work and life skills that helped them find stable and sufficient employment in and around San Mateo County. By expanding the number of positions available, we will be able to help introduce more foster youth in San Mateo County to the workforce. Additionally, by offering a nine-month extension period, STEP interns will have more time to learn from their job coaches, gain meaningful work experience, and hone their job retention skills to make them even more qualified and productive members of the workforce.

Preventing a Long-Run Cost to Society

Studies have shown that when many foster youth reach adulthood, they struggle to make ends meet and often ultimately become a significant financial burden to society. This cost to society has proven to be much greater than if a smaller, up-front investment had simply been made to better prepare and advise foster youth during their transition into adulthood. Children who emancipate from the foster care system face disproportionately higher rates of:

- Unemployment
- Lower Educational Attainment
- Incarceration
- Dependence on public assistance
- Substance abuse
- Non-marital childbirth
- Other high-risk behaviors

In 2011, the California Senate Office of Research (SOR) released a statewide study on the incarceration rate of individuals who had been in foster care during their childhood. The study revealed that 14% of California prison inmates had reported being in foster care during their childhood. Other studies have revealed higher percentages (as high as 30%) of former foster youth have been incarcerated in their adult years, though these percentages typically include individuals who have been jailed for one or two days. The SOR study also showed that of those inmates who have either aged out or run away from their foster care arrangement, 36% of them had been homeless at some point during the first year on their own.

Research suggests that the County of San Mateo will have to bear other significant economic costs such as medical expenses, unemployment insurance, and welfare programs.

Project Metrics (Measured Annually)

- 1) **Outcome:** 75% of youth will demonstrate improvement in core competency work readiness skills.
- 2) **Workload:** The program will serve 35 current and former foster youth each year.
- 3) **Quality:** 80% of program participants will complete the program.
- 4) **Benchmark:** 70% of participants will enroll in college or will be employed within one year.

Budget Description

Resource Request

The resource request includes:

- One 0.25 FTE Human Services Analyst
- One 0.25 FTE Human Resources Analyst
- One 1.0 FTE Intern Coordinator (Intern/Fellow II)
- 34 youth wages (part-time Intern/Fellow I)

Budget Breakdown

Program Staff: The proposed budget includes funding for 25% of a Human Services Analyst salary. This position is responsible for coordinating all youth related program activities including recruitment, orientation and training programs, coordinates activities with the Human Resources Department and responds to any youth-related concerns. The position is also responsible for supervision of the Intern Coordinator. The Human Services Analyst works in conjunction with a Human Resources Analyst in Human Resources. The Human Resources Analyst recruits and supports coaches, oversees the intern onboarding process, and responds to any HR-related concerns.

Youth Subsidized Wages: The proposed budget includes funding for 100% of 35 part-time STEP intern salaries for the initial three-month placement, 75% of 35 part-time (average 20 hours per week) STEP intern salaries for the nine-month extension period, and the salary for an extra-help Intern Coordinator (full-time) who assists in organizing STEP intern events and is responsible for monitoring intern progress. We anticipate anywhere from 20 to 35 youth will be extended each year. Each participating department where the youth are placed will be responsible for any associated employer costs they may incur, plus 25% of the intern salary if they extend past the initial three-month placement period.

Match Funding: The Human Services Agency will continue their annual support for the program \$50,000 to fund the initial three-month placement at 100% of wages. From months 4 to 12, for departments who elect to continue their intern, STEP will subsidize 75% of the cost and the hiring department will match 25% of the cost. An additional 15% match of the Human Services Analyst and Intern Coordinator positions will come from Children and Family Service Revenue/Title IV-E Draw Down. Additionally, indirect costs of program staff are in-kind contributions to the program.

Additional Program Costs: Additional program costs include training for STEP coaches who are responsible for mentoring STEP interns throughout their time with the County, fingerprinting, job skill training that all STEP interns receive, and transportation stipends for those interns who have to make long commutes.

Total Cost: We estimate the total annual budget for this program will be \$400,000. Please see the Estimated Budget below for details.

STEP Estimated Annual Budget

Permanent Program Staff	Staff	FTE	Direct Cost (S+B)
H.S.A Analyst II	1	0.25	\$32,516
HR Management Analyst III	1	0.25	\$40,308
Subtotal			\$72,824
Youth Subsidized Wages	Youth		
Intern Coordinator (Intern/Fellow II Extra Help)	1		\$34,055
Intern/Fellow I (Extra Help) 3 months skill building *	34		\$106,028
Intern/Fellow (Extra Help) extended up to 9 mos**	34		\$318,083
Subtotal			\$458,166
Additional Program Costs	Units	Unit Cost	
Fingerprinting	35	\$71	\$2,485
Transportation Stipends	25	\$70	\$1,750
Coach Training			\$2,000
Youth Job Skills Training			\$1,500
Intern Groups/Events			\$782
Subtotal			\$8,517
Total Program Cost			\$539,507
Less H.S.A Match			-\$50,000
Less Extended Placement Dept Match			-\$79,521
CFS Revenue/Title IV-E Draw Down 15%			-\$9,986
Total Measure A Request			\$400,000

*H.S.A match

**County departments match