THP-Plus & THP-Plus Foster Care

ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16

Providing Affordable Housing and Supportive Services to Youth Transitioning from California’s Foster Care and Juvenile Probation Systems

A report by the THP-Plus Statewide Implementation Project published by the John Burton Foundation
“Without THP-Plus, I don’t know where I would be right now. I know for a fact that I would not be a year away from graduating and earning my bachelor’s degree.”
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On behalf of the John Burton Foundation, we are pleased to share the Fiscal Year (FY) 2015-16 Annual Report for the Transitional Housing Placement-Plus (THP-Plus) and THP-Plus Foster Care (THP+FC) programs.

This report highlights both the achievements and challenges of the programs in helping youth in the foster care and juvenile probation systems make a safe, supported transition to adulthood, and provides practice and policy recommendations for the future.

Over FY 2015-16, 1,695 youth were served by THP-Plus and 3,048 youth were served by THP+FC, both across 48 different counties. On June 30, 2016, THP-Plus had a bed capacity of 1,361, and the number of youth in a THP+FC placement stood at 1,737.

Participants in these programs continue to see gains in income and employment, and those in need are accessing public benefits. Most importantly, the THP-Plus program is addressing homelessness among former foster youth. Over FY 2015-16, while 29 percent of youth entered a THP-Plus program directly from homelessness or unstable housing and 46 percent reported having experienced homelessness between foster care and THP-Plus, a full 89 percent exited the program to stable housing.

However, not all youth in need are able to access these programs and in the midst of a housing crisis, youth homelessness persists.

Not all youth in need of housing are able to access THP-Plus and in the midst of a housing crisis, youth homelessness persists.

Other challenges remain for youth in both programs, including staggering rates of college attendance and retention, and an increasing rate of youth becoming parents both prior to entrance and during their time in the program. Of youth who exited a THP+FC program over FY 2015-16, the percentage of youth enrolled in college actually dropped between entrance and exit, from 23 to 21 percent. The percentage of youth who were custodial parents more than doubled between entrance and exit for both THP-Plus and THP+FC.

The report offers recommendations for addressing these and other challenges, and outlines how THP-Plus, which, as a statewide program is underspent, can be better utilized to meet the needs of the population and to address youth homelessness.
REPORT METHODOLOGY

Information for the 2015-16 THP-Plus/THP+FC Annual Report was drawn from a number of different sources. The John Burton Foundation conducted a survey of all nonprofit organizations that operated a THP-Plus program or held a THP+FC license during FY 2015-16. Of the state’s 81 THP-Plus and THP+FC providers, 79 responded to the survey, and for the two that did not respond, the providers’ county was able to provide the key data. Input was also solicited from county administrators in counties with THP-Plus programs and THP+FC placements.

Data was drawn from the THP-Plus and THP+FC Participant Tracking Systems, which are online databases that collect demographic and outcome data about youth in the two programs. The data included in the report was provided by running two different types of reports in each system. First, entrance to exit progress reports were run on all youth who exited a THP-Plus program and all youth who exited a THP+FC program over FY 2015-16. These reports include data from a sample of 516 (38%) THP-Plus participants and a sample of 129 (7%) THP+FC participants. Second, entrance snapshot reports were run on all youth who entered a THP-Plus program and all youth who entered a THP+FC program over FY 2015-16. These reports include data from a sample of 593 (44%) THP-Plus participants and a sample of 441 (25%) THP+FC participants.

Additional information about THP+FC placements was drawn from the California Child Welfare Indicators Project,¹ which provides customizable information on California’s entire child welfare system.

Information was derived from the April 2016 Child Welfare Services & Adult Protective Services Realignment Report,² which provides a summary of outcome and expenditure data that allows for monitoring of changes over time that may have occurred as a result of the 2011 Realignment of the child welfare services and adult protective services systems. Additional information was drawn from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study.³

Finally, individual interviews were conducted with the providers and young adults who were profiled in the report.

¹ California Child Welfare Indicators Project. http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/
³ Mark Courtney, et al, Findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study: Conditions of Youth at Age 19 (Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2016).
Lucerito Tirado has big dreams for the future. As a rising senior at San Diego State University majoring in criminal justice, Lucerito hopes to attend law school one day and start a bright, promising career in law representing foster youth.

For Lucerito, however, the path for accomplishing these dreams has not always come easy. Lucerito is a single-mother to a six-month old child, a former foster youth, and someone who has experienced several bouts of homelessness as a result of family members unwilling and unable to care for her.

With the pressures of child care and housing insecurity mounting for Lucerito at a very young age, she realized that her life presented few options and opportunities for upward mobility. As she described, “I knew I had to do something fast if I wanted my daughter to have a good future. I wanted to go back to school, but I was not stable enough to make it happen. I needed help with getting a place to live for my daughter and myself, but I didn’t have the funds to do it.”

Fortunately for Lucerito, she came across the Imperial Valley Occupational Program, a THP-Plus provider in Imperial County. It was there where she got the help she needed. “THP-Plus helped me financially to get a place to live,” she said. In addition to that, “they also helped me find a studio big enough for my me and my daughter and helped me with things that I needed like a couch, kitchen essentials, and other necessities.” From here, Lucerito found it easier to fulfill her educational aspirations. She enrolled at Imperial Valley College, where after two semesters, was able to transfer to San Diego State University – Imperial Valley Campus.

But once in college, Lucerito encountered further troubles as a single-mother in college. “Managing college and raising a child was a challenge, to say the least,” she said. “It was hard because I didn’t have family to go to if I needed someone to take care of my daughter in order to do homework.”

Since entering THP-Plus, Lucerito has seen dramatic improvements in her life. From access to daycare for her daughter to learning new life skills such as budgeting, Lucerito feels that things are trending positively.

“I can definitely say that I am back on my feet. I now live in a one-bedroom apartment with my daughter and I am aware of the people I need to talk to if I have any questions regarding school or life in general.”

“Without THP-Plus, I don’t know where I would be right now. I know for a fact that I would not be a year away from graduating and earning my bachelor’s degree.”
FINDINGS: THP-PLUS

The Transitional Housing Placement Plus (THP-Plus) Program was created by the California State Legislature in 2001 in response to the alarming rates of homelessness among former foster youth. The program was first implemented in 2005. Fifteen years after its inception, THP-Plus has provided safe, affordable housing and supportive services to over 18,000 former foster youth, age 18 to 24. Following are the major findings for Fiscal Year (FY) 2015-16.

**FIGURE 1** Participant Characteristics at Entrance to THP-Plus

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>58%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age 18 to 20</td>
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<td>41%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>42%</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILP-Eligible probation wards as a minor</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The demographics of THP-Plus participants remain largely consistent, with a slight drop in the percentage of probation youth.

In FY 2015-16, there were not significant changes in who is participating in THP-Plus. As shown in Figure 1, there continues to be a larger percentage of young women, and approximately 1 in 10 participants have identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning over each of the last five years. Participants continue to be older (85% age 21 to 24), which reflects the implementation of Extended Foster Care to age 21 in 2012. One notable change in the demographics of THP-Plus participants is a slight, consistent decrease in the percentage of participants who are referred from the juvenile probation system, which has drifted down incrementally from 15 percent in FY 2012-13 to 9 percent in FY 2015-16.
Although THP-Plus bed capacity has increased, annual number of youth served remains unchanged.

As shown in Figure 2, over the course of FY 2015-16, THP-Plus served a total of 1,695 youth, down just one youth from the year prior (1,696), but down from the program’s peak of 2,314 youth served over FY 2008-09. While the decrease from FY 2014-15 to FY 2015-16 is miniscule, it represents the seventh straight year of a decrease in number of youth served annually by THP-Plus.

On the contrary, over FY 2015-16, the THP-Plus bed capacity actually increased eight percent, from 1,257 to 1,361. The bed capacity is the total number of beds that counties contract with their non-profit service providers to operate, or in some cases that counties operate themselves. The THP-Plus bed capacity is the maximum number of youth that can be served across the state at a moment in time, if all beds are filled.

Since FY 2009-10, THP-Plus bed capacity remained relatively unchanged, with the exception of a slight drop over FY 2014-15. Changes in bed capacity between FY 2014-15 and FY 2015-16 were due to an increase in the number of contracted beds in seven counties: Mendocino, Merced, San Diego, Santa Cruz, Solano, Sonoma and Yolo.

While bed capacity increased by eight percent, the number of youth served over the course of FY 2015-16 was nearly unchanged, meaning there was less turnover in the program. This was reflected in data reported in the THP-Plus Participant Tracking System, which showed that the average duration of program participation for THP-Plus participants was 389 days, up from 362 days over FY 2014-15, a 7.5 percent increase.
Spending on THP-Plus continues to decrease.

Forty-eight counties reported having THP-Plus programs over FY 2015-16. This is consistent with the number of implementing counties since FY 2008-09, which has ranged between 48 and 51 counties. Small, rural counties with very low populations of foster youth continue to be the counties that do not have THP-Plus programs.

While the number of implementing counties remains consistent, the amount that these counties are spending on THP-Plus has decreased by more than 25 percent between FY 2011-12 and FY 2014-15, from $32.4 million in FY 2011-12 to $25.6 million in FY 2014-15, the latest available data (Figure 3). This is the fourth consecutive year of reductions in spending on THP-Plus.

Additionally, providers report that former foster youth in need of housing attempt to access their THP-Plus programs, but are not eligible under current THP-Plus eligibility criteria. Current eligibility criteria for THP-Plus requires youth to have been in foster care on their 18th birthday.

Twenty-four (46%) providers reported they had denied youth admission to the program because they exited foster care to adoption, guardianship or reunification after age 16, but before age 18, making them ineligible. When asked how many youth were denied admission due to this constraint, providers who collect this data reported that 117 were denied admission. Overall, this trend took place in 46 percent of the counties in the state with THP-Plus programs (22 counties). It is important to note that these numbers represent an under-reporting of this trend because many providers do not maintain data on youth they deny admission to.

Despite being underspent at the state level, many eligible homeless youth cannot access THP-Plus.

Of the state’s 52 THP-Plus providers, 27 (51%) reported having a waiting list as of the fiscal year-end. The program locations where these providers reported waiting lists span across exactly half (24) of California’s 48 counties with THP-Plus programs.

Nearly three-quarters (74%) of the individual THP-Plus programs with waiting lists reported less than 20 youth on their list and over a quarter (26%) had over 25 youth waiting to access their program. This significant demand for THP-Plus was not specific to any one geographic region. Alameda, Fresno, Kern, Los Angeles and Santa Clara Counties each had programs with waiting lists of over 25 youth.
For the third straight year, more than 1 in 4 youth entered THP-Plus directly from homelessness.

Of youth who entered THP-Plus over FY 2015-16, 29 percent entered the program directly from homelessness. As shown in Figure 4, this is up just slightly from FY 2013-14 and FY 2014-15, with 28 percent of youth entering THP-Plus directly from homelessness both years.

In addition, the percentage of youth who entered a THP-Plus program over FY 2015-16 that had experienced homelessness at any time between foster care and THP-Plus stood at 46 percent. Despite a 2 percentage point drop from FY 2014-15, this proportion remains high compared to the time period prior to the implementation of Extended Foster Care, when THP-Plus served younger youth who more frequently entered the program directly from foster care. In FY 2008-09, just 16 percent of entering participants had experienced homelessness.

Nearly 9 out of 10 youth exited THP-Plus to stable housing.

While 29 percent of youth who entered a THP-Plus program over FY 2015-16 entered the program directly from homelessness, a full 89 percent of youth who exited a THP-Plus program over FY 2015-16 exited the program to stable housing. Of those who did not exit to stable housing, eight percent exited to an emergency shelter, homelessness or other unstable situation (street, car, couch-surfing), and three percent were incarcerated.

Forty-six percent of youth who entered a THP-Plus program over FY 2015-16 had experienced homelessness between foster care and THP-Plus.
FINDINGS: THP+FC

FY 2015-16 marked the fourth full year of implementation of THP-Plus Foster Care (THP+FC), a new placement option created through passage of the California Fostering Connections to Success Act (Assembly Bill 12). Like THP-Plus, THP+FC provides participants with safe, affordable housing and supportive services. Unlike THP-Plus, THP+FC is a title IV-E reimbursable foster care placement where youth are provided court oversight and child welfare supervision. Following are the major findings for FY 2015-16.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE 6</th>
<th>THP+FC Participant Characteristics as of April 1st</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>42%</td>
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The demographics of THP+FC participants remain largely consistent, with a slight increase in the number of probation youth.

In FY 2015-16, there were not significant changes in who is participating in THP+FC. The one notable change is the slight incremental increase in the percentage of participants who are supervised by the juvenile probation system, which has increased from 13 percent in 2013 to 18 percent in 2016.

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Assembly Bill 12 (Beall, Bass) was signed into law September 30, 2010 and took effect beginning January 1, 2012.
http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/09-10/bill/asm/ab_0001-0050/ab_12_bill_20100930_chaptered.pdf
THP+FC continues to grow, in the number of youth served and service providers.

As shown in Figure 7, the total number of NMDs placed in THP+FC increased 19 percent from 1,436 on June 30, 2015 to 1,737 on June 30, 2016. The total number of youth served over the fiscal year increased 26 percent, from 2,410 in FY 2014-15 to 3,048 in FY 2015-16. This growth came from an increase in THP+FC providers, and some existing providers increasing the number of youth they serve.

Thirty-three THP+FC providers increased the number of youth they served between FY 2014-15 and FY 2015-16, with seven providers more than doubling the number of youth they served the previous year. Eighteen THP+FC providers decreased the number of youth they served between FY 2014-15 and FY 2015-16, however most by 6 or fewer youth.

The number of licensed THP+FC providers increased from 52 providers on July 1, 2015 to 58 providers on July 1, 2016, representing a 12 percent increase. Of the 58 THP+FC providers over FY 2015-16, 29 (50%) also provided THP-Plus services.

Foster youth sometimes experience homelessness prior to entering THP+FC.

Of youth who entered THP+FC over FY 2015-16, 23 percent had experienced homelessness prior to entering THP+FC, and 6 percent entered THP+FC directly from homelessness. This indicates that youth are experiencing homelessness while in Extended Foster Care, a finding that is consistent with the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study, which found that 13.6 percent of 19 year-olds in foster care had been homeless since age 17.5

When asked about this issue, counties and providers reported that foster youth sometimes experience homelessness due to a lack of suitable placements for older youth with risk factors such as mental illness, involvement with the criminal justice system and victims of commercial sexual exploitation. This is particularly acute in counties being affected by the affordable housing crisis where identifying safe and affordable apartment units already poses a significant challenge.

5 Courtney, et al, Findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study: Conditions of Youth at Age 19, 29.
FINDINGS ABOUT BOTH PROGRAMS:
THP-PLUS & THP+FC

Most youth in THP-Plus and THP+FC live independently, in semi-supervised settings in the community.

Of the 1,737 youth placed in THP+FC on June 30, 2016, the most common housing model was remote-site housing. As shown in Figure 8, over FY 2015-16, remote-site accounted for 85 percent of all housing sites in THP+FC programs. The second most common was the single-site housing model (14%) followed by the host family model (1%). This is similar to program participation in THP-Plus. Of the 1,372 THP-Plus housing slots, the most common housing model was scattered-site (73%), followed by single-site (11%) and then host family (16%).

FIGURE 8 THP-Plus Housing Capacity and THP+FC Placement by Housing Model

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6 The THP-Plus and THP+FC programs consist of three types of housing models with only slight differences between the two programs. The “single-site model” refers to one apartment building or complex, owned or leased by the THP-Plus or THP+FC provider, where all of the program participants live. In the THP+FC program, the single-site requires on-site staffing; in THP-Plus it does not. The “scattered-site model” in THP-Plus, referred to as the “remote-site model” in THP+FC, refers to leasing apartments in various locations throughout the community, often in small clusters. Finally, the “host family model” refers to an arrangement where caring, supportive adult(s) host the youth in their home, providing room and board.
The divide continues to widen between THP-Plus rates and THP+FC rates, with THP+FC rates being significantly higher.

The average THP-Plus rate is significantly less than the statewide THP+FC rate, which, like other foster care rates, is adjusted annually according to the California Necessities Index to account for increases in the cost of living.

The THP-Plus rate is set locally in the contract between the county and the provider, and varies greatly across the state. Single-site rates range from $3,698 in Orange County to $1,819 in Tuolumne County. Scattered-site rates range from $3,841 in Napa County to $1,064 in Butte County. Host family rates range from $3,841 in Napa County to $500 in Ventura County.

Unlike THP+FC rates, THP-Plus rates are not required to be adjusted annually to account for increases in cost of living. As shown in Figure 9a, over FY 2015-16, the average THP-Plus single-site rate was $2,524. The average THP-Plus scattered-site rate was $2,302, and the average THP-Plus host family rate was $1,728.

As shown in Figure 9b, over FY 2015-16, the THP+FC single- and remote-site rate was $3,007, a full $483 more than the average THP-Plus single-site rate, and $705 more than the average THP-Plus scattered-site rate. The THP+FC host family rate was $2,393, $665 more than the THP-Plus host family rate. While the THP+FC rates slowly climb, the THP-Plus rates remain relatively flat, with small variability throughout the years.

A high proportion of youth in both programs entered as custodial parents, and many more had children while in the program.

Of youth who exited a THP-Plus program in FY 2015-16, 14 percent were custodial parents. Upon exit, this figure more than doubled to 29 percent (Figure 10). This trend
was also present in THP+FC. Of youth who exited a THP+FC program in FY 2015-16, 15 percent were custodial parents. Upon exit, 31 percent were custodial parents. The rate of parenthood increases when examining the experience of young women: of those young women who exited a THP-Plus program over FY 2015-16, exactly 50 percent had one or more child in her custody at exit. Of those young women who exited a THP+FC program over FY 2015-16, 42 percent had one or more child in her custody at exit.

For the THP-Plus program, this represents a 56 percent change since FY 2011-12 when only 32 percent of THP-Plus participants were exiting as custodial mothers. This increase in part, is due to the increase in age of THP-Plus participants since the implementation of Extended Foster Care in 2012.

**THP-Plus participants made gains in income and employment; THP+FC participants just made gains in income**

Youth who exited a THP-Plus program over FY 2015-16 on average experienced a 19 percent increase in their monthly income from entrance to exit, from $840.26 to $1,002.40 per month ($10,083 to $12,029 per year). They also experienced an increase in their rate of employment, from 37 percent at entrance to 45 percent at exit.

The percentage of THP+FC participants that were employed remained unchanged from entrance to exit, at 29 percent. However, at entrance, THP+FC participants had an average monthly income of $906.87, and exited with an average monthly income of $1,189.20 ($10,882 to $14,270 per year), a 31 percent increase.
THP-Plus and THP+FC participants increased utilization of public benefits.

The percentage of participants who received some form of public benefits increased for both programs from entrance to exit. For THP-Plus participants who exited the program over FY 2015-16, 38 percent received at least one form of public benefit at entrance, compared to 54 percent at exit. For THP+FC participants who exited the program over FY 2015-16, 17 percent were receiving at least one form of public benefit at entrance, compared to 42 percent at exit. These public benefits include Supplemental Security Income (SSI), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women Infant Children (WIC), and California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs).

THP-Plus and THP+FC participants are not making the transition from high school to college and are experiencing high rates of college drop-out.

At entrance to the program, 77 percent of THP-Plus participants and 74 percent of THP+FC participants had graduated from high school or had earned their General Equivalency Degree (GED). A total of 19 percent of youth in THP-Plus were enrolled in college or had earned a degree. At exit, this figure increased to just 21 percent.

Youth in THP+FC are making even less post-secondary education progress. At entrance to THP+FC, 23 percent of youth were enrolled in college. At exit, this figure actually drops, with just 21 percent of THP+FC participants enrolled at exit.

In addition to low enrollment rates, are low rates of persistence. At entrance to the program, 10 percent of youth in THP-Plus indicated that they were enrolled in post-secondary education and had dis-enrolled. At exit, this figure rises to 14 percent. For THP+FC participants, the drop-out rate more than doubles from entrance to exit from 10 percent to 26 percent.

While the majority of providers offer training to their staff on post-secondary education, few programs have staff members dedicated solely to post-secondary education counseling.

A total of 46 (88%) THP-Plus providers and 46 (79%) THP+FC providers offer training to their staff on post-secondary education knowledge and resources to assist their youth in pursuing college. However, only 18 (35%) THP-Plus providers and 22 (38%) of THP+FC providers have staff members dedicated solely to education counseling, such as an education specialist.

Providers report serious challenges associated with the state’s affordable housing crisis.

While the number of youth served in THP+FC increased over FY 2015-16, providers report serious challenges in securing rental units, particularly in THP+FC. When asked if they lost any apartment units as a result of the housing crisis via evictions, displacements, landlord disputes, or rent increases, 23 THP+FC providers (40%) indicated they lost rental units. When asked, providers reported that these losses in housing stock occurred in 26 counties (53% of the counties where THP+FC is located). Alameda, Butte, and Los Angeles Counties each had multiple THP+FC providers in their county lose apartments because of lack of affordable housing options.
POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS FOR THP-PLUS AND THP+FC

 Counties and providers must work together to ensure THP-Plus funding is fully utilized.

As noted previously, there has been a reduction in annual spending on THP-Plus for three straight years. While the reduction in annual spending on THP-Plus may be partially explained due to the extension of foster care, this alone cannot account for the full decrease. In over half of the counties across the state there are waiting lists of youth in need of THP-Plus housing. Additionally, as shown by the significant portion of THP-Plus participants entering the program directly from homelessness, many youth in need of THP-Plus are not as easily connected to services as youth who enter a program directly from foster care.

There are a number of strategies counties and providers can employ to fully utilize their THP-Plus allocation. These include:

**INCREASE RATE:**
A county can increase their THP-Plus rate for all youth in order to deepen the level of services provided to youth by enabling the provider to hire additional support staff, or to account for the increased costs assumed by providers as a result of soaring rent in many counties. An increased rate can also enable a provider to develop new services available to THP-Plus participants that may assist them in being better equipped for self-sufficiency upon exit from the program. This may include a scholarship program for youth attending college, tutoring services, or mental health services not otherwise covered or funded. Over FY 2015-16, 5 programs (20%) reported that their single-site rate had increased, ten programs (17%) reported that their scattered-site rate had increased, and 3 programs reported that their host family rate had increased since the previous fiscal year.

**DEVELOP TIERED RATE STRUCTURE:**
A county can increase their THP-Plus rate for a subpopulation of youth (i.e. parenting youth, youth with exceptional mental health needs, etc.), establishing a tiered rate structure. Providers often must spend beyond what is provided by the THP-Plus rate to serve their youth, particularly for those who are high-needs, in order to accommodate alternate living arrangements (i.e. single apartments for parenting youth) or address crises that require immediate intervention (i.e. emergency on-call staff to tend to mental health crises, safety concerns, or interruptions in living arrangements). Santa Clara County, for example, utilizes a tiered rate structure, providing a standard rate of $2,400 per youth per month, and a rate of $2,800 per youth per month for youth who are custodial parents.

**SERVE “OUT-OF-COUNTY” YOUTH:**
A county may also consider making an effort to serve youth who exited foster care in other jurisdictions. Sometimes youth relocate and do not live in their county of origin (where they exited foster care). Youth may choose to relocate for various reasons, including to attend college, for a job, for safety reasons, or to live in a community where they may have family or social ties. Across the state, at least 34 counties accept out-of-county youth in their THP-Plus programs.

**OPT INTO THE THP-PLUS EXTENSION FOR PARTICIPANTS ENROLLED IN SCHOOL:**
A county who opts into the THP-Plus extension established by Senate Bill 12527 may serve youth who are in school for up to 36 months as opposed to 24 months, and up to age 25 as opposed to age 24. The purpose of this extension is to increase the number of youth who are able to reach their educational goals, such as a college degree or training certification prior to exiting THP-Plus. Currently, 19 counties have opted into the THP-Plus extension.

**ENSURE SUFFICIENT OUTREACH IS BEING CONDUCTED:**
Prior to the extension of foster care to age 21, the majority of THP-Plus participants were 18, 19 and 20 years old. Now that 85 percent of THP-Plus participants are between the ages of 21 and 24, some providers report that it is more challenging to identify these youth, many of whom are not entering THP-Plus directly from

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7 Senate Bill 1252 (Torres) was signed into law September 29, 2014 and took effect January 1, 2015. 
https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140SB1252
foster care, and many of whom have experienced or are experiencing homelessness. In order to reach this more marginal population, providers may have to reconsider their outreach plans, which may include significantly more information sharing about their THP-Plus programs throughout their community; ensuring they have direct connections to homeless shelters; and in some communities, conducting street outreach.

**THP-Plus eligibility should be revisited to serve additional populations in need.**

The THP-Plus program is underspent as a state, yet youth homelessness remains and waiting lists grow. In addition to ensuring THP-Plus is available to youth currently eligible, the eligibility criteria should be modified to allow additional youth access to the program.

Currently, youth are eligible for THP-Plus if they were in foster care on or after their 18th birthday. With 46 percent of providers reporting that collectively over 117 youth inquired about their THP-Plus programs but were not eligible as a result of exiting foster care to adoption, guardianship or reunification within just two years prior to reaching age 18, it is evident that current THP-Plus eligibility criteria needs to be modified to accommodate this small, but vulnerable population.

Also in serious need of housing and services are homeless youth, many of whom, like former foster youth experienced abuse and neglect, but who never became formal dependents of the foster care system. The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act funding which funds housing for homeless youth, is inadequate in addressing the level of need in California, and pales in comparison to the state’s THP-Plus allocation.

**Current and former foster youth require sexual health education and pregnancy prevention services.**

Over FY 2015-16, half of the young women who exited a THP-Plus program and 42 percent of the young women who exited a THP+FC program were custodial parents. At the current time, there is no statewide plan or effort to address these soaring rates of pregnancy among current and former transition-age foster youth.

Chapin Hall’s CalYOUTH Study, which looks at the experiences of older youth in foster care, found that at age 19, of those young women who had been pregnant, only about a quarter (26%) definitely wanted to become pregnant at that time. Of those young men who had gotten someone pregnant, only 15 percent definitely wanted their partner to become pregnant at that time.

The time is ripe for a coordinated state plan for how to address unplanned pregnancy that includes:

- training for social workers, probation officers, caregivers and providers on how and when to address topics of sexual health and pregnancy prevention with foster youth, and on the reproductive rights of youth in foster care; and
- protocol that ensures youth have access to medically-accurate, age-appropriate education on topics of sexual development, reproductive health, relationships and pregnancy prevention; and access to age appropriate sexual and reproductive health services and screening.

**California is missing the opportunity to improve post-secondary educational outcomes for current and former foster youth.**

While the extension of foster care to age 21 has motivated an increase in foster youth enrolling in community college, the number still remains very low. Only 21 percent of youth were enrolled in college upon exit from a THP-Plus or THP+FC program over FY 2015-16. The number of current and former foster youth that persist to the next year or continue on to pursue a certificate or degree is even smaller.

There have been recent efforts to better support current and former foster youth in their pursuit of post-secondary education such as the opportunity for counties to extend their THP-Plus programs an extra year for youth enrolled in school, the establishment of additional campus support programs at the community college level, the recent $3 million expansion of the Chafee Education and Training Voucher in California, priority registration for former foster youth and a number of local collaborative efforts. However, it is clear that additional efforts are required at the state and local level. These may include required screening for financial aid eligibility for foster youth, adjusting the THP+FC rate so that it allows for providers to hire an education specialist, or better connecting providers and youth to local resources to support youth with their education such as tutoring and campus support programs.

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8 Mark Courtney, et al, Findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study: Conditions of Youth at Age 19 (Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2016).
The impact of the affordable housing crisis calls for creativity and innovative programming.

While it is difficult to create structural change to address the affordable housing crisis, providers and counties must consider what resources they have or can make available. Providers must consider how they can engage landlords in their community to develop strong, long-term relationships, such as launching an informational campaign to better educate landlords on their programs for current and former foster youth. Additionally, given the high cost of renting an apartment for youth, providers and counties should consider whether utilizing a host family model would be successful in their community.

Counties should consider raising their THP-Plus rate to account for the increase in cost of living, particularly in counties with particularly high rent costs. At the state level, a regional rate should be considered for THP+FC according to regional trends in cost of living.

It is also important that providers ensure that youth are leaving their program as well-positioned as possible to navigate the state’s high cost of living. More participants continue to see gains in income, employment, and public benefits. While this growth is positive, it is important to note that on average, participants are still living below the federal poverty level, which in 2016 is $11,880 for a one-person household and $16,020 for a two-person household.

Increased support for youth obtaining their college certifications and degrees and connections to long-term employment opportunities are critical. Additionally, safeguards like SSI, WIC, and CalWORKs are more important than ever for former foster youth. Providers should ensure they are assisting eligible youth in need with connecting to these benefit programs prior to leaving their program.

Homelessness among youth in foster care must be addressed.

Youth are experiencing homelessness while in foster care. As reported by counties and providers, this is in part, a result of a lack of suitable placements for this population. NMDs are most frequently placed in Supervised Independent Living Placements (SILPs), which provide the least amount of support and supervision of all placements. Additional understanding is required about how NMDs are becoming homeless, and what practice and policy solutions can be developed to address it. These may include:

- **Increasing the availability of the THP+FC placement:** The THP+FC placement is currently the most supportive placement for NMDs, outside of a well-supported foster home (which are not commonly available for this population). THP+FC is not available across the whole state, and its accessibility varies across counties. Counties should consider expanding their THP+FC placements, and providers should consider whether they are able to expand the number of the youth they are serving in this placement.

- **Developing additional supportive placement options:** Older youth with mental health needs, and youth with other risk factors such as involvement with the criminal justice system and victims of commercial sexual exploitation prove to be the most challenging youth to identify placements for. While California’s Continuum of Care Reform is underway, the focus has been solely on placements for minors, with no discussion of reforming foster care placements for NMDs.

- **Standardizing the SILP Readiness Assessment:** Although required by law, not all counties utilize a SILP Readiness Assessment, and of those who do, it varies widely. Without a standardized assessment tool, youth who are unprepared to live independently are being placed in SILPs. This can result in loss of housing, and even harm to the youth.

- **Addressing administrative barriers to approving SILPs:** In cases where a SILP is an appropriate placement, it is important that youth are able to get their housing approved in a timely manner so that they can access their housing. Certain barriers exist as a result of using interim licensing regulations amended from the transitional housing program for minors (THPP). It is important that permanent regulations are developed for THP+FC and issued expediently to avoid interruptions or delays to accessing housing as a result of administrative barriers.
At Covenant Coffee in Kern County, hope brews alongside the coffee served to its customers. A “business with a purpose,” Covenant Coffee is operated by THP-Plus Provider Covenant Community Services, Inc.

What began as a summer camp in 1995 by Covenant CEO Randy Martin has now expanded into an organization serving the same kids Randy noticed “needed help after age 18.” Covenant is quickly changing lives as it employs former foster youth and providing them with the job training and skills necessary to survive in a region known for poverty and crime.

Like most THP-Plus programs, Covenant provides housing and other supportive services to former foster youth. Yet, according to Randy, providing basic services was not enough. “We needed to invest heavily in the people we serve.” Hence the creation of a coffee shop to help former foster youth learn accountability and acquire essential business tools needed for socioeconomic mobility.

Desirae Hurley is one of those young people who have found renewed promise at Covenant. Upon emancipating from the foster care system, Desirae had difficulty finding permanent housing and lived in three different states before landing at Covenant at the suggestion of a social worker.

As she described, Covenant gave her the opportunity to provide for herself and her son especially when “it was difficult to find a job when you had no skills.” Through the coffee shop, she received training on operating a cash register and even learned financial discipline through a savings fund required of Covenant participants. While “some days are hard,” Desirae is making positive strides by working as a barista while pursuing a degree in counseling to help former foster youth like herself one day.

And Desirae is not the only one. In the past year, Covenant provided training and certification for 20 former foster youth in areas such as food handling and coffee making. In fact, the coffee shop is managed by former THP-Plus participant Balinda Amavisca, a former foster youth who previously struggled with substance abuse.

According to Balinda, who grew up in the juvenile justice system, “I was always told I couldn’t.” Once entering the THP-Plus program at Covenant and later returning to work at the coffee shop, “I was able to feel connected and strive to be better.” Though she enjoys managing Covenant Coffee, Balinda aspires to own a coffee shop of her own one day.

Covenant currently serves 91 youth per year, falling in the top ten of providers in the state who serve the highest number of youth, in addition to the highest number of youth who are custodial parents (19). One-hundred percent of purchases at Covenant Coffee go directly to former foster youth. Many youth are able to obtain employment after leaving Covenant through business partnerships across Kern County.

When the pressures of affordable housing and financial insecurity continue to confront former foster youth across the state, Randy Martin believes “you can’t be afraid of being innovative” to address these issues. As the motto of Covenant goes, “hope lives here.”

Once entering the THP-Plus program at Covenant and later returning to work at the coffee shop, “I was able to feel connected and strived to be better.”
This report was developed by the THP-Plus Statewide Implementation Project, a project of the John Burton Foundation. It was made possible by the generous support of the Walter S. Johnson Foundation and the California Wellness Foundation.

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For more information about the THP-Plus Statewide Implementation Project, please visit www.thpplus.org or contact the John Burton Foundation:

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