for BEYOND THE SAFETY NET, a two-year initiative to transform housing providers serving foster & homeless youth into college success programs

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BEYOND THE SAFETY NET:
CORE PRACTICE MODEL

The Core Practice Model was designed for housing providers participating in “Beyond the Safety Net,” a two-year initiative led by John Burton Advocates for Youth to transform housing providers into college success programs. This tool is intended for service providers who work with transition-age youth who may lack supportive adult role models to assist them with applying for and enrolling and persisting in post-secondary education, such as current and former foster or probation youth and homeless youth. It includes recommendations in eight practice areas to improve a provider’s capacity to support post-secondary educational success within a housing milieu.

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This publication can be found online at http://www.jbaforyouth.org/core-practice-model-btsn/.

For more information about Beyond the Safety Net, visit http://www.jbaforyouth.org/btsn/, or contact Simone Tureck Lee at simone@jbay.org.
1 | Provide Intensive, Academic-Focused Case Management.

When youth are supported by adults with knowledge of the resources, systems and processes of getting to and through college, they are more likely to succeed.

Training: Case managers should receive training on and be well-versed in post-secondary education-related topics. This includes but is not limited to:

- understanding the range of education options, including Career and Technical Education at California Community Colleges;
- understanding the matriculation and enrollment process;
- being familiar with financial aid, including how to apply for and how to maintain aid;
- being familiar with the range of on-campus supports and resources for current and former foster youth and homeless youth; and
- being aware of important timelines and deadlines associated with the academic year.

Hands-On Approach: Case managers should be hands-on with activities required with enrolling, completing matriculation, applying for and receiving financial aid, and accessing priority enrollment. This may include completing applications and forms with students, accompanying students to meetings with counselors, and assisting youth in advocating for their needs on campus.

Ensuring Preparation: Case managers should work with youth to access necessary supplies, transportation and resources for school, and ensure that they have these things in place in time to begin classes.

Timewise Support: Case managers should be aware of the student’s individual calendar, including the calendar of the college they are attending, in order to help remind students about critical deadlines and important dates (i.e. financial aid deadlines, priority enrollment dates, etc.), support them during stressful times (i.e. providing care packages during finals), and to assist in balancing competing priorities (i.e. work obligations, parenting, etc.) Programs may consider implementing a texting reminder system. The Case Management Check-In Guide can assist case managers with providing this timewise support.
**Awareness of Academic Progress & Standing:** The program should consider having students provide mid-term grade reports to case managers to ensure case managers can anticipate obstacles before it’s too late. This can be done using various methods depending on the program’s preference and capability, and what works for the student. Students may provide information on their progress directly to case managers, most commonly by logging onto their student portal with the case manager. Campus support programs - such as Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) or disabled student services - may track this progress and communicate with the housing program by way of a Release of Information, or the housing program may get this information directly from professors using a form the student asks them to complete.

**Supporting the Education Plan:** Case managers should ensure that students are completing an Education Plan with a certified college counselor at their college. Completing an Education Plan is part of the matriculation process and must be done before a student can access priority registration. Students should opt to meet with a counselor within a campus support program that has an understanding of vulnerable student populations. Before attending this meeting, case managers should explore with the student how many units they think they might be able to handle, particularly if this is their first semester, and empower the student to advocate for their needs if the counselor encourages them to enroll in too many units. The case manager should be aware of what the academic case plan consists of and support the student’s work toward the goals outlined in the plan.

**Homeless Youth Determinations:** (For homeless, non-foster youth) Case managers should ensure that homeless youth have provided verification, referred to as a homeless “determination” that they met the McKinney Vento definition of homelessness at any point within 24 months prior to college application, so that they can access priority enrollment. Homeless youth providers authorized to verify homeless student status should be prepared to provide a letter to the school. For the purposes of priority registration, homeless youth status may be verified by a homeless youth services provider,* a director/designee of a federal TRIO program or GEAR UP, or a financial aid administrator.\(^{vii}\)

* "Homeless youth services provider“ Includes government or nonprofit agency receiving government funding to serve homeless persons; an attorney; a local education liaison; or a state funded provider of health services, mental or behavioral health services, substance use disorder services, or public assistance or employment services.
2 | Ensure youth are accessing tutoring and other academic support to meet their individual needs.

When youth are academically prepared, they are more likely to succeed in school. This is particularly important for current and former foster youth and homeless youth because of the academic challenges faced as a result of frequent school changes, childhood trauma and other factors that impact academic performance.

**Tutoring:** Tutoring is offered on all college campuses. When a case manager takes a student to visit campus, ensure they are stopping by the tutoring center, and/or looking into how to access tutoring on campus. Alternately, some programs may offer tutoring at their organization’s office/site, either through a partnership with a local university that provides student volunteers, a tutoring company, or the program’s existing staff who may have tutoring expertise. It’s important that tutors understand the population with which they’re working, and the individual needs of the student they are paired with.

**Incentives:** Programs that experience challenges in getting students to access tutoring consistently should consider developing a tutoring incentive program where students can earn small stipends or gift cards for attending tutoring.

**Skill-Building:** Programs should develop opportunities for youth to learn the skills necessary to be a successful student, such as effective study methods, time management, note-taking, and syllabus-reading, etc. This could be provided one-on-one, in workshops provided by the housing program, or by accessing workshops offered on some campuses.

**Professor Relationships:** Case managers should encourage youth to reach out to professors early in the semester to establish a relationship, and for assistance when they are struggling in a class. Try making this fun – i.e. challenge students to take selfies with their professors.

**Disabilities & Accommodations:** Case managers should ensure that youth with disabilities or special needs are connected to disabled student services and that their needs for academic accommodations are being met. Stigma associated with these services should be discussed, explored and addressed.
Establish a close, working relationship with all local campus support programs.

When college students are participating in campus support programs, they are more likely to succeed.

**Point-of-Contact:** Housing programs should have contacts in the following departments/programs:

- Extended Opportunity Programs & Services (EOPS) at community colleges
- Programs for current and former foster youth (i.e. NextUp/CAFYES within EOPS at community colleges, Guardian Scholars or other foster youth support programs across all campus systems)
- Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) at CSUs
- Disability services (DSPS at the community colleges)
- For foster youth, the FYSI Liaison and for homeless non-foster youth, the homeless youth liaison at the community colleges

(Although not a support program, it is also important to have a contact in the financial aid office)

**Visiting Campus/Program:** Housing programs should have the campus support program representative visit their space and meet their youth, and/or bring youth to the campus to visit the program.

**Regular Meetings/Contact:** The housing program and the campus support program should have a standing meeting or communication (i.e. twice per semester, monthly, etc.) to ensure they are collaborating to support youth in both of their programs, and to stay up-to-date on pertinent information related to the campus or the housing program.

**Sharing of Information:** Case managers should make an effort to engage with the campus program to discuss individual student progress. Ideally, meetings between the student, the campus support program and the housing program can serve as a vehicle for the sharing of progress or obstacles. Some campuses will agree to a release of information between the youth, the campus support program and the housing program that allows for the youth's progress to be shared.

**Awareness of Services & Resources:** The housing program should be aware of the services provided on campus so that they can refer youth to those resources, fill in any gaps that exist, and avoid unnecessary duplication of services. The campus support program should be aware of the services provided by the housing program so that they can make referrals and turn to the program as a community-based resource.
4 | Ensure all youth complete the FAFSA and financial aid process and assist students in maintaining their financial aid.

When youth receive financial aid, they perform better academically, are more likely to persist, and more likely to complete a degree.

Individual, Hands-On Support: Programs should ensure they have staff (such as a case manager or education specialist) that can work with youth individually on completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and other financial aid applications and forms, ideally by the March 2nd priority deadline to maximize the financial aid youth receive. Programs should ensure that current and former foster youth submit a separate Chafee grant application in addition to the FAFSA and assist youth in researching and applying for private scholarships.

FAFSA Workshops: Programs should offer a FAFSA workshop or collaborate with another program who offers the workshop, such as the Independent Living Program (ILP). Programs can register to be a “Cash for College” partner that hosts FAFSA workshops through the California Student Aid Commission’s website.

On-Campus Assistance: Know where and who to send youth to at local colleges for support with FAFSA (i.e. specific contact in the financial aid office, campus support program representative, etc.)

Support with Verification: Programs should ensure youth have the proper verification documents:

- Current and former foster youth can get a dependency letter from the county or the state, if needed. Foster youth verification will soon be automated for the purposes of financial aid, however in some cases, other departments may still require the foster youth verification letter to access resources such as priority registration.

- For homeless youth, providers who are HUD-funded emergency shelters, HUD-funded transitional housing programs, RHYA-funded basic center programs or RHYA-funded transitional living programs should be prepared to provide a homeless determination (verification letter) each year the youth is in school. The letter must state that the youth met the McKinney Vento definition of homeless or is self-supporting and at risk of being homeless at any time after July 1 of the application year. In addition to McKinney Vento K-12 district liaisons and Financial Aid Administrators (FAAs), these are the only authorities that can provide homeless determinations for students. However, anyone can provide
supporting evidence (a written statement or phone call) to an FAA who is making a determination. (Note: this is different from the verification required to access priority enrollment).

Additional Documentation: Programs should ensure that youth provide any other documents requested by the school upon completion of the FAFSA. Students should be checking their e-mail frequently to see if any additional documents are being requested. (Ensure that youth use a reliable e-mail when they complete the FAFSA).

Financial Management: Programs often assist youth with budgeting and teach financial management skills. Programs should ensure that for college students, financial aid is an integral part of these conversations and workshops. An important tip to underscore with students is to not spend all financial aid once it is disbursed. If they drop any classes, they may have to pay that aid back.

Preventative Measures: Programs should educate students about the impact of dropping or withdrawing from classes (aid may have to be paid back), and ensure they meet with an academic counselor prior to dropping or withdrawing. Programs should also outline the consequences of student debt (i.e. enrollment hold, can be subject to long-term debt collection, etc.)

Filing Appeals: If a student loses eligibility for financial aid because they do not make Satisfactory Academic Progress, programs should assist the student in filing an appeal so that they can keep their financial aid while they work toward meeting requirements.

Payment Arrangements: If a student accrues student debt, the case manager should accompany the student to meet with the financial aid office and assist the student with negotiating payment arrangements immediately. Acting fast can prevent the debt from being sent to collections, and schools have the option to be flexible when negotiating arrangements.
5 | Develop a college-going culture in the housing program.

When youth are immersed in a “college-going culture” where post-secondary education is viewed as a normal expectation and that it feels possible, they are more likely to pursue post-secondary education.

Organizational Culture: Programs should implement staff training/workshops on post-secondary education topics to enrich organizational knowledge and interest of staff. Trainings should dispel myths such as college is not for everyone, and foster youth and homeless youth are better off working without first getting some sort of post-secondary training or education (i.e. certificate, license or degree).

Visuals: Programs should enhance the physical space of their facility with college flyers, other informational resources, and college swag. This may also include a personalized space with a “hall of fame” wall for youth who have earned a certificate or license, transferred, or earned a degree.

Post-Secondary Education-Related Events: Programs should organize events centered around college promotion. This may include a resource fair with local colleges making presentations and handing out college gear, and youth workshops on financial aid, enrollment and matriculation, etc. This also may include taking a trip to the local campuses for a tour or having former program participants who have graduated or been successful in college come speak to the youth in the program.

Build in Structured Time: Programs should create space and structured time to accommodate student needs and foster a student community in the program. This may include making computer time available on site or hosting study sessions during finals (with food).
6 | Enable youth to be a student with as little work obligation as possible.

When youth are able to focus solely on school with few distractions, they are less likely to disenroll as a result of crisis or life obstacles.

Maximize Financial Aid: Programs should ensure youth are accessing maximum financial aid. Youth can potentially reach a higher monthly income when financial aid is maximized, than from working a minimum wage job.

Offer a Monthly Stipend: Case managers should work with each youth to create a budget, ensure they have adequate resources available, and when possible, provide a monthly stipend. (This is required for THP+FC and THP-Plus providers. Try to establish a stipend amount that, when coupled with financial aid is sufficient to cover monthly expenses).*

*If you are a THP-Plus provider and your county’s THP-Plus rate is not sufficient to adequately house and provide services in the region you are located, this may mean engaging in a discussion with your county or counties about increasing your THP-Plus rate(s).

Work Life Balance: If a youth must work while in school, case managers should assist the youth with structuring their time and balancing competing priorities (i.e. building in study time, not working late shifts the night before an early class, etc.)

Student-Friendly Employment: If a youth must work while in school, case managers should assist the youth with finding a job with flexibility for students (i.e. best-case scenario would be a job on campus through work study).

Financial Incentives: As the organizational budget allows, build in financial incentives that reinforce positive behaviors and activities (i.e. good grades, accessing tutoring, sharing of academic progress with case manager, etc.) and provide a small financial boost.

Discounted Rent: Depending on the structure of and funding for the housing program, offer a discounted rent program for youth enrolled in school. (This may not be applicable to THP+FC programs because the foster care payment covers room, thus no real rent can be collected).
7 | Assist youth with avoiding unnecessary placement in remedial courses and accessing accelerated remediation options if needed.

When youth are placed in remedial courses, they are less likely to make it to transfer-level courses and complete their educational goal.

Knowledge of Assessment Methods: It is important that programs stay informed about assessment and remediation practices at the local colleges. Recent policy change requires community colleges to utilize multiple measures (high school transcript data or other variables), and to ensure that students enter and complete transfer level math and English courses within a one-year timeframe (less remedial coursework). California State Universities are implementing similar requirements. Implementation of these requirements at community colleges is taking place on a phased-in basis, and so it is important to stay up-to-date with current practices at the local colleges.

Multiple Measures: If available, programs should direct students toward colleges that utilize multiple measures to predict student success in college-level courses, as opposed to a single test on a single day. Research shows that students place higher when multiple measures are used to assess readiness.

Test Preparation or Transcript Assistance: Programs should assist youth with navigating the assessment process:

- For students at schools that still use the test, help youth to both prepare for assessment tests and understand the importance and purpose of assessment tests. If they are unsatisfied with their test score, encourage them to inquire about re-taking the exam.
- For students at schools utilizing multiple measures, assist the student in acquiring their high school transcripts and correcting those transcripts if necessary.

Accelerated Remediation: If placed in remediation, if available, programs should direct students toward more effective mechanisms for addressing remediation needs (i.e. beginning in transferable courses with co-requisite support, beginning in “accelerated” courses one level below transferrable, taking “stretch” courses that integrate remedial content and college-level content over the course of two semesters, etc.)
8 | Collect data on post-secondary education outcomes of youth participants and use that data to inform service provision.

When organizations are data-driven, they produce better results.

Determine Data to Collect: Programs should collect data on enrollment in post-secondary education and completion. Also collecting data on retention and receipt of financial aid is recommended. Enrollment data should capture part-time versus full-time enrollment and type of institution (i.e. community college, four-year university, vocational program). Retention data can be collected by tracking whether students are persisting from one semester to the next, and whether students are persisting from one year to the next. Completion data should track the type of credential (i.e. certificate, license, degree or other). Data on financial aid should track whether the student is receiving any financial aid, in addition to what type(s) of aid they are receiving (i.e. California Community College Promise Grant, Cal Grant, Pell Grant, Chafee Education and Training Voucher, scholarships, loans, other).

Set Metrics: Set metrics for each outcome area. It is alright to start at a moderate level, then as you collect data, push to improve. For example, “For the 2019-20 fall semester, at least 40% of the youth in our housing program will be engaged in post-secondary education. At least 60% of the students enrolled in the fall will be enrolled in the spring 2020 semester.” If you find that you’ve surpassed your goals for the 2019-20 academic year, set new goals for 2020-21 using higher percentages.

Analyze Data: Programs should set a regular meeting (i.e. quarterly) to review the post-secondary educational outcome data they are collecting and discuss areas of progress and needed improvement. Develop hypotheses about patterns or trends, interview youth to inform these hypotheses, then develop plans to attempt to address areas of needed improvement.

Alter Services: For outcome areas your program is not reaching, refocus services to target those areas.

Example --

Reaching youth enrollment goals, reaching retention goals, but not reaching financial aid utilization goals. Why?
Based on what’s being reported by case managers, youth are completing the FAFSA, but there is a disconnect with all of the required steps after completing the FAFSA.

Solution: Staff need more rigorous training and resources to help youth get through these steps – implement training, identify additional outside resources to help youth through these steps.
i Learn more about California Community College Career and Technical Education Programs, along with helpful tools for prospective students here: www.cccmypath.org
ii Learn more about the matriculation process at California Community Colleges here: http://stepforward.cccco.edu/
iv Find campus support programs and key contacts for foster youth here: www.cacollegepathways.org/find-campus-support-programs/find-campus-support-programs-for-foster-youth. Download the list of Homeless Youth Liaisons here: http://www.cccstudentmentalhealth.org/resources/

v, vi Download the Case Management Check-in Guide, which includes information about the academic calendar and key topics to discuss with students over the academic term, here: www.jbaforyouth.org/casemanagementcheckinguide. Homeless students were granted priority registration by Assembly Bill 801 (Bloom, 2016), which also specified the three authorities that could provide a homeless determination. http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160AB801
vii, viii California Student Aid Commission, Cash for College webpage: https://www.cash4college.csac.ca.gov/
x Senate Bill 12 (Beall, 2017) required the California Student Aid Commission and Department of Social Services to develop an automated system to verify a student’s status as a foster youth to aid in the processing of applications for federal student aid. http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180SB12.