



## State Youth Council Overview

### **Vision:**

California is a leader in the country in innovative child welfare legislation and policy, and specifically in engaging foster youth directly in child welfare policy and practice development. California Department of Social Services, County Welfare Directors Association and the Co-Investment Partnership know that youth voice is critical to improving child welfare - not just youth presenting to policy makers, but as part of local and state decision-making processes impacting children and youth in foster care and their families.

To achieve this, a State Youth Council is being created to establish a continuous avenue for this dialogue. The Youth Council is an integrated effort bringing together the expertise of California Connected by 25 Initiative (CC25I), California Youth Connection (CYC), and the Breakthrough Series Collaborative on Independent Living Program Transformation (BSC ILP). Youth Council Ambassadors will be trained in the process of child welfare policy and practice implementation and act as technical assistants, providing valuable insights about policies and practices that engage youth, build youth-adult partnerships and improve the foster care system, public speaking and other leadership skills. Youth Ambassadors will participate in an ongoing and substantive way, partnering with state and local child welfare agencies to promote youth voice in policy and practice implementation in California.

The Youth Council will be supported by Lyssa Trujillo, CC25I's Youth Alumni Technical Assistant and former Youth Faculty and Content Trainer of the BSC ILP and Chantel Johnson, California Youth Connection's Statewide Policy Coordinator, and initially by Kristina Gelardi, CYC's Policy Team Coordinator and former Co-Chair and Content Trainer of the BSC ILP.

California Connected by 25 Initiative: CC25I is a statewide effort, funding 8 counties to improve outcomes for transition age youth (TAY). CC25I focuses on improving systems and practices in the areas of housing, employment, education, permanency, financial literacy, and increasing youth engagement in improving practices.

California Youth Connection: CYC is a youth-driven organization that empowers current and former foster youth to advocate for improvements to California child welfare policy and practice.

Breakthrough Series Collaborative on Independent Living Program Transformation: Leaders in California's child welfare work decided to use the Breakthrough Series Collaborative methodology to improve Independent Living Program services specifically integrating education, employment and permanency efforts and improving youth-adult partnerships in youths' everyday lives and in program decision-making.

### **About the Breakthrough Series Collaborative on Independent Living Program Transformation:**

In 2008 California embarked on a two year effort to more effectively support youth to learn skills through everyday family, neighborhood and community experiences and to engage youth in

these ILP program improvements. Nine counties participated in the 18-month long Breakthrough Series Collaborative to Transform California's Independent Living Program (BSC ILP). Core teams were composed of youth, caregivers, social workers, community partners and senior administrators in the counties. Each participant identified ways in which they could improve ILP and "tested" their ideas in small ways, building on their innovative ideas as they received feedback from their test groups.

One of the defining goals of the BSC ILP was that young people are at the heart of planning and decision-making about their lives. To this end, there were three youth faculty trainers and a CYC staff person hired to support counties in engaging youth in the process. Youth leaders in the Collaborative expressed a vision that in California: Youth will be engaged and empowered in youth-adult partnership to participate in planning and decision making about their futures, and in system-wide improvements both in their communities and at a state level.

The California Statewide Youth Council is the product of many years of efforts to improve services and supports for foster youth and to ensure they are engaged and fully participating in child welfare policy and practice reform. The Youth Council will be building off of the work started by the BSC ILP and incorporate the lessons learned by that project.

**Details:**

The State Youth Council will deepen the work started in the BSC ILP counties around youth-adult partnership and expand these efforts to include a link between county and statewide work. The nine BSC ILP counties and three other counties with additional youth engagement expertise and geographic diversity are invited to identify youth to participate in the Youth Council.

We are looking for a current or former foster youth 14-24 years old with diverse experiences from each of the following 13 counties: Fresno, Glenn, Humboldt, Monterey, Napa, Los Angeles, Orange, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Francisco, Santa Clara, Solano and Ventura.

Youth Ambassadors must be...

- Passionate about improving foster care in California;
- Interested in working with peers to provide the Department of Social Services, County Child Welfare Agencies, and others with thoughtful input on issues affecting children and youth in or transitioning from foster care;
- Energetic and willing to learn new skills; and
- Committed to participating in a unique statewide youth council (10-20 hours/month) for 12-18 months

The 12 Youth Council Ambassadors will be representing all the youth in foster care across California, so we are looking for youth with a range of experiences, including but not limited to...

- Foster homes
- Group homes
- Kinship care
- Tribal Youth
- Transitional housing (THP-Plus and THPP)

- Experiences with homelessness
- Emancipated youth
- Current foster youth
- Parenting youth
- Enrolled in college or trade schools
- College support programs (i.e. Guardian Scholars, Renaissance Scholars, etc.)
- Working full-time
- Cross system youth (mental health, juvenile justice, etc.)

The Ambassadors of the State Youth Council will...

- Think strategically about child welfare policies and practices in counties similar and very different from your own
- Work locally to engage youth in your county/region in this work (through focus groups, surveys, etc.) - this will be supported by the Youth Council staff in partnership with others county partners, such as local CYC chapters, youth advisory boards, their self-identified Adult Ally and other local child welfare partners
- Work with Youth Council staff to develop a communications plan for ongoing communication with the county's Department of Social Services (a.k.a. Human Services, Child Welfare, etc.), other local youth councils and youth leaders, to share the work of the State Youth Council
- Attend in person State Youth Council meetings in Sacramento (6 per year) and up to 2 annual training/retreats, regardless of work or school commitments
- Communicate with Youth Council staff for 1-on-1 check-ins
- Participate on monthly conference calls with other Youth Council Ambassadors to check-in and follow up on tasks
- With training and support, feel comfortable when speaking in public and making presentations to groups
- A stipend of \$150/meeting for attending the in person State Youth Council meetings in Sacramento (6 meetings total)
- Additional stipend up to \$125 every other month for work done between in person meetings

### **Commitment from Counties:**

- Identify one county staff person to be the county liaison for the Youth Council and actively support your local youth ambassador in their Council work
- Coordinate travel for youth to Sacramento (6 meetings), including arranging advance purchase of bus, train, plane tickets and lodging. It is preferred that travel is paid for by each county; however counties that are unable to meet this expectation may be reimbursed according to state travel guidelines and limits if appropriate forms and receipts are provided.
- Support Youth Ambassadors in their Youth Council and related County work (youth may be required to conduct focus groups, distribute surveys, etc.) Encourage an “Adult Ally” relationship with the youth (please see “What Makes a Good Adult Ally” document)
- Support the process of youth finding an additional Adult Ally.

- Have regular check-ins with Youth Council Ambassador on Council work (at least monthly and more as needed).
- Help interested youth with the Youth Council application process and recruitment. Partner with State Youth Council staff in selecting county youth ambassador (for example: selection process of submitted applications).
- Maintain regular contact with Youth Council staff.
- Participate in monthly conference calls with other counties' support staff and Youth Council staff to stay up to date on Council work.
- Help youth build relationships and collaborate with county and community partners to strengthen and coordinate their Council work with other youth engagement and system improvement efforts in your county, including existing youth councils, youth-adult partnerships, etc.

### **Selection Process:**

We are looking to create a council that represents the diversity and experiences of youth in foster care in California including:

- Cultural/Ethnic diversity
- Gender (including LGBTQ)
- Educational experience
- Career experience
- Previous leadership and or training experience
- Ability to advocate or provide training

Youth Council staff will partner with County staff to select youth ambassadors to participate in the State Youth Council. The application is due Friday June 10<sup>th</sup>. The following week the County and Council staff will narrow the applicants down to three candidates. Phone interviews will be held the last 2 weeks in June and a final selection will be made by the end of June. The first Youth Council event will be a retreat in early/mid August.

Important dates:

- Application due: Friday June 10<sup>th</sup>
- Interviews for final candidates: last 2 weeks in June
- Retreat: early/mid August

### **Questions about the State Youth Council or application process:**

Please contact Lyssa Trujillo, California Connected by 25 Initiative, at 408.656.6673 or [LTrujillo.cc25i@gmail.com](mailto:LTrujillo.cc25i@gmail.com) with questions about the Council or the process.



## **What Makes a Good Adult Ally?**

**Based on ideas from Independent Living Program Breakthrough Series Collaborative youth members**

**Adapted from the CA ILP BSC document designed for County Teams**

### **What is an ally?**

Simply put, an ally is someone who believes in youth empowerment, supports the work that the youth are doing and will take the steps needed to help the youth to be successful. In a youth program an ally is a staff member or volunteer who is committed to helping the youth truly engage and become empowered in a project or organization

### **Why is it important to have an ally in youth programs?**

- Engagement is key to empowering youth—adults must take the extra steps needed to engage youth and keep them engaged
- Youth and adults look at things through different “lenses”. Allies help bridge the gap, bringing together creative ideas from both sides making transformation richer and more sustainable
- Allies can act as a liaison for youth and the rest of the team, making sure that youth “voice” is heard and that youth are continuously engaged in a program or organization

### **What characteristics make a good ally?**

Someone who...

- Holds on to youth rather than youth having to hang on to her/him
- Has the youth perspective, seeks it, and honors it
- Is realistic and knows what is doable
- Youth can ask questions to when s/he doesn't understand
- Is able to listen and make a youth feel heard
- Gives real, honest feedback
- Gives realistic feedback and helps youth think through pros/cons
- Youth can call anytime and s/he always call youth back
- Will always follow up with youth
- Makes youth feel connected
- Makes an effort to seek youth's input about what s/he thinks and gives youth room to make suggestions
- Has qualities youth can relate to when they interact
- Is flexible in her/his communications: Facebook, e-mail, phone, text
- When youth makes mistakes, takes time to look at strategies that will help next time and does not discourage youth if things are not done, instead s/he helps youth figure out how to overcome the potential barriers
- Is supportive
- Has authority to get things done, makes things happen, and will follow through—or knows who to contact
- Is able to work through things with youth
- Is focused and committed

- Is passionate about empowering youth
- Helps break things down into small steps

### **How do allies help engage youth?**

- Allies help youth stay in the loop
- Allies make sure youth know when meetings and activities are scheduled
- Allies give youth reminders a few days before and the day of meetings/activities in whatever way works for the youth (text, email, etc.)
- Allies take the youth's schedule into consideration when scheduling meetings or calls that youth can and/or should be involved in
- Allies make sure youth understand acronyms and jargon used in meetings
- Allies keep youth up-to-date on events happening in the county and community
- Allies keep youth informed about everything going on within the program or organization that they want youth input on, even if the youth misses meetings
- Allies will take the time if youth miss a meeting to recap, explain, set goals and expectations, give assignments and follow up with the youth to see how they are doing
- Allies, when youth need to miss a meeting, will ask the youth if it is okay to share her/his thoughts and ideas with the group and report back to youth that ideas were shared and everyone's responses
- Allies act as a liaison for youth and their ideas in other meetings, relaying youth's thoughts and ideas to others beyond the program or organization
- Allies can help both youth and adults recognize that it takes stepping outside of their comfort zone to "meet the other half way"

### **What can youth do to reach out to an ally or potential ally?**

Youth can...

- Identify someone that would make a good ally and ask her/him officially to be an ally
- Go to lunch or have a meeting to establish expectations of both the ally and youth – by making the more formal invitation, youth are communicating that they have expectations of an ally—that they may end up calling the ally more than other members of the team
- Begin to build a relationship, share information and thoughts about the program/organization and get to know each other