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## TRANSITION LIFE COACH (TLC) PLAN

### THE PROBLEM:

The median age for financial self-sufficiency for American youth is 26 years of age. And few are ready socially or emotionally to live independently until about then.<sup>i</sup> Each of California's foster youth has been abused or neglected to such an extent that the courts have found by "clear and convincing evidence" that their parents are unfit. They are then subject to an often impersonal foster care system and many lack stability in placements and in relationships. They often age out with no social or familial safety net. The results are devastating:

- Many experience school failure. Only 50% get a high school diploma and only 3% ever receive a four year college diploma.<sup>ii</sup> Consider this statistic in light of the fact that individuals with a high school diploma have a median income 28% higher than those without and individuals with a Bachelor's degree have a median income that is 59% higher than those without a high school diploma.<sup>iii</sup> Further, in the current economic climate, individuals without a high school diploma are unemployed at rates far higher for those without a high school diploma (14.6%) than it is for those with a high school diploma (9.7%) or with a Bachelor's degree (5.2%).<sup>iv</sup> Former foster youth face these conditions without the safety net of parents and family.
- By the age of 24, nearly 40% of former foster youth have experienced homelessness, or have "couch surfed."<sup>v</sup>
- By the age of 24, over 30% of former foster youth are not yet connected to the job market.<sup>vi</sup>
- Foster youth experience post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at higher rates than war veterans.<sup>vii</sup>
- They have a high arrest rate after leaving care (up to 45% are incarcerated for some period as adults).<sup>viii</sup>
- They experience higher rates of pregnancies and welfare, homelessness and unemployment (most foster youth have no job when they age out).<sup>ix</sup>

### THE CONSIDERED SOLUTION FAVORED BY THE KIDS AND EXPERTS:

The solution to this problem for many is not to depend solely on continued servility as children in a system many understandably find aversive. Such an extension, in its current and soon-to-be federally expanded form, involves (a) spending up to \$40,000 per year for continued care – often in group home-

type settings; (b) requires the youth to agree to remain subservient within the system, under state control, even though all their peers are adults; (c) is not necessarily customized to their needs, and (d) assures no personal contact with a caring adult. Each of these four considerable disadvantages is reversed by the “Transition Life Coach” (TLC) plan the kids favor (along with experts and the adults familiar with what happens to them).

The solution is to approximate as closely as possible the performance of a successful private parent – whose homes remain available to the kids, and who give a median amount of nearly \$50,000 and the equivalent of 9 weeks of full-time assistance per child post-18 to facilitate their self-sufficiency.<sup>x</sup> Foster youth, receive only a fraction of this assistance and are essentially abandoned at 18. The TLC plan involves the state functioning as a responsible parent does and:

(a) Appoints each “coach” – someone known to the youth, trusted and subject to basic training including training on services available to the youth, how to access them, and a contact for assistance when needed.

(b) The youth and the court (counsel and the court where appropriate) develop and approve a plan to achieve self-sufficiency, including education, wellness, housing, job search, insurance, and a budget.

(c) A TLC Fund receives at least the approximately \$50,000 private parents spend as a median amounts – possibly supplemented by special sums needed by an individual and available from SSI or other special sources. Note that if SSI is involved, the youth will require a Special Needs Trust to ensure that necessary SSI funding and benefits are not discontinued.

(d) The court uses a legal mechanism familiar to judges – trust law – and appoints the coach as the trustee of the Fund. He or she provides the amount budgeted under the plan at 6 month intervals. The coach may obtain expenses of no more than 5% of the fund (for travel and other necessary expenses). The Coach monitors the youth and the plan, and writes checks consistent with its terms.<sup>xi</sup> The coach also ensures the youth accesses services, such as counseling, transition living classes, and health care appointments, as needed and /or outlined in the plan. The youth is an adult, but retains access to the court and the court retains control over the fund – just as a parent functions when a child reaches 18.

This format provides the best chance for self-sufficiency. A peer reviewed cost-benefit study in 2007 indicated that simply in terms of welfare and arrest savings, the fund amount will return substantial public savings beyond its expenditure.

The TLC program is economical, with a demonstrated positive public funds benefit-cost ratio; and it is a solution to the disadvantages of continued foster care which many of these youth may understandably resist. It is (1) customized, (2) involves youth participation in formulation and execution, (3) includes personal contact (selected with youth participation, not administered by changing social-workers), (4) does not automatically cut-off at age 21, (5) does not involve huge bureaucratic or private cost, and (6) continues the involvement of the court as a critical check to a later date– taking advantage of the existing court system while allowing use of existing records (already maintained by the court as the parent to age 18). Finally, and importantly, (7) it provides youth with more than simply another pile of money and services; it provides the youth with a caring adult and the safety net and network that comes along with that relationship. The adult can mentor the youth, introduce the youth to friends and family who will begin to provide a family-like network and the safety net that is lacking for too many former foster youth.

Although the TLC approach is authorized by California law, it has not been used as of this writing. However, it is a well-received idea and enjoys support from foster youth, the Children’s Advocacy Institute (which has operated a clinic representing foster youth for 18 years), public officials, judges, and local foundations.<sup>xii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup>For more information – see The Bank of Mom and Dad. *The New York Times*, G2 p.1. Bennett, C.M. and Baird, A.A. Anatomical Changes in the Emerging Adult Brain: A Voxel-Based Morphometry Study., Bower, B. (May 4, 2004). Teen Brains on Trial. *Science News*, 165, p. 299. Shirk, M. and Stangler, G. (2004). *On Their Own: What Happens to Kids When They Age Out of The Foster Care System*. Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, Brannen, D., *Debunking the Year 18 Myth: Righting the Way for America's Foster Youth*, Advocacy Strategy Paper of Dan Brannen and Kids@Home (October 2002) at 6. Boca Raton: Kids@Home.

<sup>ii</sup> P.J. Pecora, R.C. Kessler, et al. Improving family foster care: Findings from the Northwest foster care alumni study. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs. (2005) See also Mark Courtney, Amy Dworsky, et al. Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Foster Youth: Outcomes at age 23 and 24. Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2010. Pg. 22. Available online at: [http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Midwest\\_Study\\_Age\\_23\\_24.pdf](http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Midwest_Study_Age_23_24.pdf). Note that this study included foster youth alumni from Illinois, where youth have the option to continue in care until age 21.

<sup>iii</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey: Earnings and education in the second quarter of 2008. Available online at: <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2008/jul/wk3/art01.htm>.

<sup>iv</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections: Education Pays...Unemployment Rates in 2009. Available online at: [http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep\\_chart\\_001.htm](http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm).

<sup>v</sup> Mark Courtney, Amy Dworsky, et al. Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Foster Youth: Outcomes at age 23 and 24. Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2010. Pg. 10. Available online at: [http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Midwest\\_Study\\_Age\\_23\\_24.pdf](http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Midwest_Study_Age_23_24.pdf). Note: Youth “couch surf” when they sleep on the couches of friends and families because they have no permanent living arrangement.

<sup>vi</sup> Jennifer L. Hook & Mark Courtney. Employment of Former Foster Youth as Young Adults: Evidence from the Midwest Study. Chapin Hall, March 2010. Available online at: [http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/publications/Midwest\\_IB3\\_Employment.pdf](http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/publications/Midwest_IB3_Employment.pdf).

<sup>vii</sup> Casey Family Programs. The Foster Care Alumni Studies: Assessing the Effects of Foster Care: Mental Health Outcomes from the Casey National Alumni Study. Available online at: [http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/pdf/CaseyNationalAlumniStudy\\_MentalHealth.pdf](http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/pdf/CaseyNationalAlumniStudy_MentalHealth.pdf).

<sup>viii</sup> Mark Courtney, Amy Dworsky, et al. Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Foster Youth: Outcomes at age 23 and 24. Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2010. Pg. 67. Available online at: [http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Midwest\\_Study\\_Age\\_23\\_24.pdf](http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Midwest_Study_Age_23_24.pdf).

<sup>ix</sup> *Id.*

<sup>x</sup> Schoeni, Robert F. and Ross, Karen E. Chapter 12: Material Assistance Received From Families During Transition to Adulthood. On the Frontier to Adulthood: Theory, Research and Public Policy. Edited by Richard A. Settersten, Jr., Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., and Rubén G. Rumbaut. Available online at [www.transad.pop.upenn.edu/projects/frontier.htm](http://www.transad.pop.upenn.edu/projects/frontier.htm). The average amount parents pay to assist their children post-18 is \$38,340 (2001 dollars, the figure in 2010 dollars is about \$47,590 – Federal reserve Bank of Minneapolis CPI Calculator at <http://www.minneapolisfed.org/>).

<sup>xi</sup> Courts commonly monitor conservatorships, guardianships, probate funds and the juvenile court functions in this tradition, assuring plan compliance (and adjustment as needed) and fidelity to the plan. Note that California Probate Code Section 1517(b) clarifies the clear right of a juvenile court to make such orders *or appointments* as needed to administer funds for foster children *after they age out*. The court may retain jurisdiction over such an appointee and a fund established for such a purpose.

<sup>xii</sup> See letters of Support from the LEAP board, Candy Morales, James Kanter, Susan Golding (former San Diego Mayor and currently CEO of Promises 2 Kids), Bonnie Dumanis (San Diego D.A.), James McKenna (CASA), Judge Susan Huguenor (former Presiding Juvenile Court Judge, San Diego), Judge Cynthia Bashant (Presiding Juvenile Court Judge, San Diego), Sheriff Kolender, Lynn Schenk and other community leaders.