

## The Walter S. Johnson Foundation

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### New Reports Highlight Improved Outcomes for Older Foster Youth in California *Eight County Initiative Provides Promising Strategies for Extension of Foster Care to 21*

**San Francisco, CA (October 31, 2011)** – California’s leading funders in child welfare, Stuart Foundation and Walter S. Johnson Foundation, issued two reports today with the results of the six-year California Connected by 25 Initiative. *The Premise and Promise of the California Connected by 25 Initiative* and *Promising Strategies from the California Connected by 25 Initiative* highlighting strategies used by child welfare departments in Fresno, Glenn, Humboldt, Orange, San Francisco, Santa Clara, Solano, and Stanislaus counties that improved education, housing, and other outcomes for foster youth ages 14 to 24.

“The California Connected by 25 Initiative was an effort to take a group of disconnected youth and connect them to the anchors that make a difference - education, employment, housing, permanency, and financial skills,” explained Teri Kook, child welfare director for the Stuart Foundation.

Every year approximately 4,000 youth emancipate from foster care and many do not have safe and affordable housing, a high school diploma, the skills to find work, and relationships with caring adults that all young people need to be successful. While many young people are struggling in this difficult economy, foster youth, lacking the support of family networks, are more likely to be unemployed, suffer from mental health problems, be a victim of crime, go to jail, become homeless and live in poverty.

#### **Data Shows Education and Housing Success**

The initiative was developed to change the trajectory for youth emancipating from the foster care system. Data collected over a three year period in five of the eight counties, 2008-2011, found that:

- Foster youth that completed some or all of their A-G requirements, the college prep courses needed for admission to a UC or CSU, increased from 31% to 45%;
- Foster youth passing the high school exit exam (CAHSEE) increased from 44% to 54%; and
- Foster youth reporting a safe housing plan increased from 53% to 72%

#### **Reports Offer Strategies to Implement New Law Extending Foster Care to 21**

The core focus areas and strategies are described in greater detail in the report *Promising Strategies from the California Connected by 25 Initiative*. The report will be valuable for counties preparing to implement AB 12, California’s Fostering Connections to Success Act. Starting January 1, 2012, foster youth will be able to continue to receive child welfare supports and services past their 18th birthday, provided that they meet certain criteria, including working towards a high school diploma or GED, being employed at least 80 hours a month, going to college, or participating in a vocational or employment program.

Amy Freeman, program officer for the Walter S. Johnson Foundation, noted “Counties implementing AB 12 will need to encourage youth to stay in extended care and then provide the supports and services they need to maintain their eligibility. This initiative offers a starting point for counties and stakeholders looking to better engage youth and enhance services.”

### **Youth Engagement Key Strategy**

One of the most important strategies that evolved from the initiative was youth engagement and empowerment. Although child welfare agencies and other providers work with youth on a daily basis, staff are not always trained in youth engagement and youth involvement in service planning and decision-making is generally not an institutionalized practice.

“Youth are a critical and equal part of all communities,” said Lyssa Trujillo, youth engagement technical assistant for the initiative, “The lives of youth belong to themselves, not child welfare workers, and youth must be involved in the decisions that affect their future.”

In the current economic climate, most young adults are struggling to support themselves and rely on family support. Removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect and often disconnected from their families and communities, foster youth are at an even greater disadvantage. They lack a safety net to fall back on and face enormous obstacles on their path to adulthood.

“The transition from childhood to adulthood is a hugely significant time in every person’s life,” said James Anderson, project manager for the California Connected by 25 Initiative, describing the underlying premise of the initiative. “The fact that so many of our emancipating foster youth are leaving care only to become homeless and disconnected is unacceptable. With the lessons learned from the initiative and extending foster care to 21, we have the opportunity to create promising futures.”

The California Connected by 25 Initiative report will be highlighted at a conference on November 1, 2011 at The California Endowment Oakland Conference Center.

For more information about the California Connected by 25 Initiative and to read the report, visit [www.californiaconnectedby25.org](http://www.californiaconnectedby25.org).

The Stuart Foundation is dedicated to transforming public education and the child welfare system so that *all* youth can learn and achieve in school and life. The Foundation is a partner and convener in melding the resources, thinking, and energy necessary to create and sustain system-wide change in California and Washington. It invests in programs and practices that serve as scalable and sustainable models and that inform policy. For more information, visit [www.stuartfoundation.org](http://www.stuartfoundation.org).

The Walter S. Johnson Foundation seeks to help youth become successful adults by preparing them to participate fully in their education, their workplaces and their communities. For more information, visit [www.wsjf.org](http://www.wsjf.org).

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