

Youth Spotlight: One Provider's Response

By Shira Andron

Your efforts to plan for your transition out of the foster care system and your ability to utilize the resources in your community should be commended. It is crucial that resources for transitional age youth be available and that youth are aware of the resources and how to access them. The Bay Area has a variety of service providers that support current and former foster youth during this transition, including: Tri-City Homeless Coalition, Larkin Street Youth Services, Beyond Emancipation, and First Place for Youth.

First Place for Youth's mission is to support youth in their transition from foster care to successful adulthood by promoting choices and strengthening individual and community resources. We specialize in providing a variety of services that provide youth the opportunity to experience a safe supported transition from foster care. Professional, caring staff work with youth to set realistic goals and access needed resources. Our transitional support center, First Steps, provides case management, educational and employment support, housing referrals and community resources. First Place has two housing programs available to former foster youth.

My First Place, a supported housing program, provides stability for former foster youth through safe, permanent, affordable housing, intensive case management, and advocacy and support services. Young people live in one- and two-bedroom apartments throughout the community. The PATH Program is designed to provide permanency in the lives of former foster youth by housing them in the home of a youth-identified permanent adult connection. All housing participants receive support with move-in costs, rent, food, self-reliance planning, health and mental health needs as well as employment

and education. First Place's housing programs provide former foster youth the opportunity to develop a sense of permanency for the first time in their lives.

The First Foundation Program is designed to provide transition support services to youth living in group homes. Professional, caring staff work with youth to set realistic goals and provide youth access to educational advancement, mental health services and employment resources in their communities to prepare them for the transition from foster care.

All these resources exist to support current and former foster youth in having a successful transition to independent living. We strive to connect youth to these services prior to exiting the system so that they have a seamless transition to adulthood. In addition, First Place has been working with CYC to advocate on a state level that the services offered in the Bay Area are offered statewide regardless of what county a youth.

Shira Andron is the First Foundation Program Manager at First Place for Youth. She currently spearheads an academic enrichment program for group home youth and First Place's two newest housing programs: the Summer Leadership Academy, a summer housing program for former foster youth attending four-year universities, and the PATH Program, a host home model that pairs a former foster youth with a permanent caring adult. Ms. Andron is an associate clinical social worker and has eight years of experience working with children, youth, and families in non-profit organizations and schools.

First Place for Youth is an Oakland-based nonprofit organization founded in 1998 to remedy the lack of services available to youth who are making the difficult transition from foster care to independent living.