

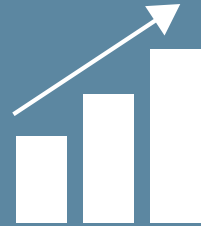
Creating **Voices** in Your Community

Is your county ready to radically rethink
how it engages youth aging-out of foster care?



Aging-Out of Foster Care – The Sobering Facts

As thousands of youth age-out of the foster care system each year in California, almost completely unprepared for adult life, the issues they and your community face are sobering and multifaceted including high rates of homelessness, unemployment, poverty, chronic health problems, lack of education, and incarceration.



VOICES – A Radical Response

Faced with this stark reality within their own county, in early 2005 a group of leaders from Napa County met to radically rethink how they worked with youth aging out of the foster care system. They began to sketch out ideas for a youth-led community center that would empower these young people in a way never seen before.

By July 2005, On The Move, a local nonprofit, recruited ten young people between the ages of 16 and 21 to serve as founders. These youth – all of whom were in, or emancipating from, the foster care system – began to design VOICES in partnership with staff from multiple social service agencies. Only 90 days later VOICES (Voice Our Independent Choices for Emancipation Support) opened its doors, demonstrating the capacity of foster youth to act as effective leaders and to develop innovative service delivery strategies to support their peers transitioning out of the foster care system.

After establishing co-located partnerships with 15 agencies and serving more than 450 youth, the team from VOICES Napa was invited to establish a second program. VOICES opened the doors to a new center in Santa Rosa, California, in April 2009. Each site now serves approximately 500 youth each year.



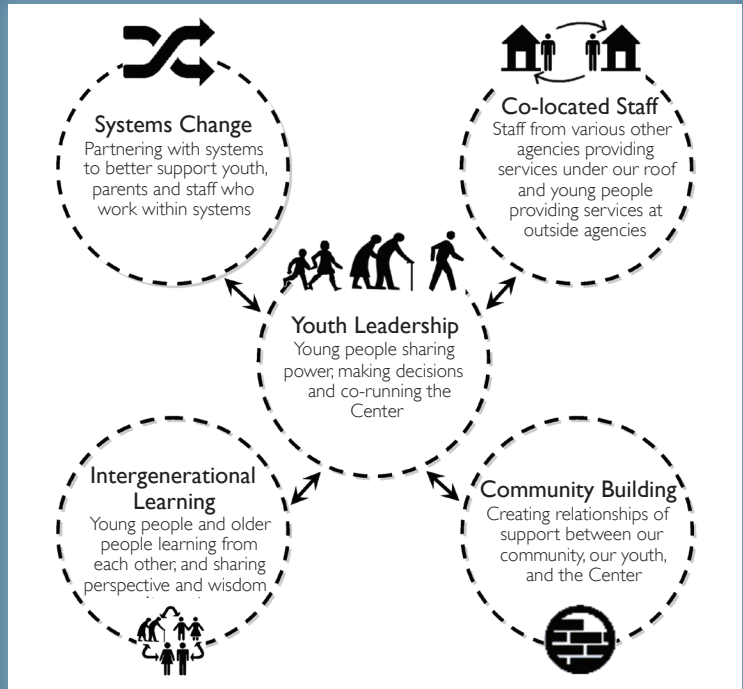
Representatives from numerous organizations have conducted site visits to the Napa and Santa Rosa sites and received technical assistance in order to integrate elements of the VOICES model. In 2011, VOICES leaders supported Santa Clara County government and nonprofit agencies in establishing a VOICES-like program called "The Hub" in downtown San Jose.

How VOICES is Structured

VOICES has designed and implemented five best practices to guide their work with current and former foster youth. Each element working in concert with the others is crucial to the success of individual youth, the program and the community at large.

Within the center each program is comprised of a team, which includes current and former foster youth, VOICES staff, co-located frontline staff and agency directors.

Intergenerational leadership takes place as members of each of these teams come together to provide direction, serve on committees, make presentations, develop policies and shape the ongoing vision of the programs. Together, these teams maintain a broad variety of centralized, youth-friendly support services for emancipating foster youth.



VOICES Outcomes

Harvard University youth development research suggests that a main indicator of a program's success is the level of engagement of its participants, meaning in short that young people "vote with their feet." Youth will quickly stop attending a program that is not meeting their needs, and their behaviors will not change unless they participate fully.

On average, 250 young people utilize VOICES two to four times per month, and the average youth participates for a minimum of three years. The demand for services and the ability of VOICES to design and implement programs in a flexible, responsive, effective manner has led to the success of VOICES youth. Perhaps the most important evidence of the efficacy of VOICES are the results achieved to date:



- **88%** of VOICES youth have completed or are working toward their high school diploma or GED
- **75%** have received employment support
- **72%** have accessed health and wellness services
- **80%** have successfully avoided homelessness
- **97%** report feeling supported by the VOICES community. Since 2009, VOICES has become a family for more than 4,000 youth

The VOICES Model

VOICES is moving into a new era and is now reaching out to counties within California that exhibit key criteria for success, positioning them to bring about positive and lasting change.



In 2012, Stanford University Graduate School's Business Alumni Consulting Team conducted an in-depth assessment of the overall capacity of VOICES to replicate their successful youth-led model. Their assessment concluded that the VOICES model achieves a complex and delicate balance built upon three inter-related components:

- The integration of real and meaningful youth leadership opportunities
- The innovative service delivery strategy of comprehensive resources and integrated services within a transition-age youth center
- Creating an atmosphere of safety and acceptance

Having intensively reviewed feasibility and strategies for replication, VOICES is committed to promoting its model and practices in order to impact the future of young people in California.



Is Your County Ready For VOICES?



The VOICES model succeeds in counties that are ready to – and looking forward to – fundamental change in terms of innovative practices that empower youth to take charge of their lives in impactful ways.

VOICES believes that the key elements that identify counties that are prepared are those with key leadership who demonstrate:

- Willingness to learn and take on the challenges and rewards of inter-generational leadership between professionals and youth
- Ability to establish and maintain inter-dependent partnerships with county and community-based organizations
- Capacity to attract diverse funding including sources such as government, foundations and individual major donors



If You're Ready, We'd Like to Talk With You and Your Team

Contact Us:

To learn more about the VOICES model and to discuss its possible role in your county, please contact:

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Online Resources:

Visit our website: <http://www.voicesyouthcenter.org>

Here you'll find program overviews, media coverage, profiles of VOICES youth and much more

On Youtube check out “**VOICES – You Inspire Change**” a 3:34 minute video of VOICES youth talking about what the center means to them