An Implementation Guide for Improving Outcomes for Older Foster Youth

Court Lab – A Nonprofit, Child Welfare, and Judicial Partnership

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Child Welfare Initiative

Our Mission

The Child Welfare Initiative implements programs and practices that produce measurable improvements in the lives of children and families involved in child welfare systems.

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Introduction

According to the Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), more than 2,300 youth age 18 and older were receiving child welfare services in Los Angeles County in September 2013. An in-depth review of outcomes, conducted by Dennis P. Culhane, PhD, and funded by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, discovered that over 30% of youth between the ages of 16 and 21 in Los Angeles County's child welfare system experience a period of extreme poverty; 25% are incarcerated at some point; a substantial number of youth need outpatient treatment for health, mental health, and drug/alcohol issues; less than 50% have any earnings in the immediate years following their exit from foster care; only 2% of youth obtain two-year college degrees and less than 0.5% obtain four-year degrees. Similarly, an Urban Institute study, funded by the Stuart Foundation, determined that roughly 20% of transition age youth experience homelessness after leaving care.

Housed in three Edelman Children's Court courtrooms in Los Angeles County, *Court Lab* is a partnership of the Child Welfare Initiative (CWI), Children's Law Center of California, and The Alliance for Children's Rights with the Los Angeles County Juvenile Court and Department of Children and Family Services ("*Court Lab's* Partners").

Responding to the outcomes described above, *Court Lab* identifies and implements best practices and recommendations for improving transition planning at the departmental, judicial, and caregiver levels for older foster youth. These best practices were chosen for their positive impact on youth as they transition to independence. Transition age youth—youth ages 14 and older—interact primarily with four groups within the foster care system: their caregivers, social workers, attorneys, and judges. Youth spend most of their time with their caregivers, and decisions affecting youths' lives within the system are primarily made at the departmental and judicial levels. *Court Lab* studied transition age youths' interaction with the court because the court is one of the few places where these four groups come together.

Prior to the work of *Court Lab's* Partners, information on current transition planning practices in Los Angeles County was discussed anecdotally. *Court Lab* gathered data on these practices in order to develop informed recommendations for meaningful change and improvement.

Beginning in June 2011, *Court Lab's* Partners gathered and collected data across ten domains critical to the safety, well-being, and self-sufficiency of foster youth approaching independence. *Court Lab's* Partners reviewed court reports, observed judicial proceedings, and interviewed both youth and caregivers. Particular emphasis was given to transitional planning in the areas of education, employment, housing, mental and physical health, and extended foster care. Focusing on youth age 14 and older that were removed from their families of origin and in out-of-home placements, *Court Lab's* Partners conducted nearly 700 file reviews, observed 430 judicial proceedings, and interviewed 190 youth and 35 caregivers. In addition, *Court Lab's* Partners, judicial officers, former foster youth, and relative caregivers met twice monthly to assess data results and trends, and to identify best practices and discuss policy recommendations for Edelman Children's Court, DCFS, attorneys representing foster youth, and the California Department of Social Services.

Phase One: Measuring Gaps in Existing Transitional Planning for Older Foster Youth in Care, Youth Entering Extended Care, and Youth Leaving Care Entirely

Methodology

Court Lab evaluated the quality and process of transition planning for foster youth as they prepare to leave the child welfare system. To analyze this process most effectively, *Court Lab's* Partners developed an online data collection tool in Spring 2011 then began using it in the first courtroom by June 2011. *Court Lab's* Partners provided court observers—a total of 8 observers were on the project at all times. While in court, observers filled out up to four forms for each youth: a file review of the court report, a caregiver interview if the caregiver was present, and both a hearing observation and interview if the youth was present. *Court Lab's* Partners met with all of the observers at least once per month to discuss observations, suggest improvements to the tool, and ensure consistent data collection.

Data Collection

1. DCFS Court Reports
   DCFS social workers evaluate the safety and well-being of youth under DCFS's jurisdiction and prepare reports that document their assessments and recommendations. DCFS social workers share these reports with the Juvenile Court and all counsel. DCFS court reports must be thorough and clearly stated. Court reports contain information related to all aspects of a youth's life: the allegations that brought the youth into foster care, the youth's placement type, the youth's visitation with various family members, and other information. Court reports may also be the only documentation that judicial officers and counsel read to understand the case planning that took place since the youth's last court appearance.

   In Los Angeles County and across the State of California, court reports discuss transitional case planning that has taken place since the youth's last appearance in court and other topics that directly relate to a youth's transition from foster care to independence. Lacking clear and accurate court reports, judicial officers are hindered in their ability to make specific orders that ensure steps necessary to achieve clearly defined transition goals are taken. Transition goals help youth, caregivers, judges, attorneys, social workers, and other important adults stay focused on moving youth toward a successful transition to independence. Similarly, it is a challenge for a foster youth's attorney to communicate concerns or suggestions to social workers or make requests for specific orders.

   Court Lab's Partners conducted 688 file reviews of court reports. Using court reports, *Court Lab's* Partners evaluated transition planning for older foster youth across the ten domains most closely associated with transition age youth outcomes: permanent adult connections, education, healthcare, employment, transition planning (i.e., Transition to Independent Living Plans, Independent Living Program classes, Extended Foster Care), essential documents (i.e., birth certificate, social security card, driver's license), housing, delinquency, Kin-GAP, and youth/caregiver involvement.

   One component of the court report is the Transition to Independent Living Plan (TILP), a critical planning document that identifies a youth's goals to achieve self-

sufficiency and must be attached to court reports for all Los Angeles County foster youth aged 14 and older. The State of California requires TILPs for all youth 16 and older, and Los Angeles County's DCFS Procedural Guide details the importance of such planning:

> It is DCFS policy to initiate transitional independent living planning for all youth who are 14 years of age or older and reside in out-of-home care. As children transition out of childhood and begin to develop into mature adults, they need a different level of support, skills training and guidance. Youth need to learn the process of how to set goals, what the steps are to achieve these goals, and how to assess their progress as they move towards their goals. It is the responsibility of the adults who are charged with ensuring the care and well-being of each youth to provide support, guidance and resources to the youth in the achievement of the youth's goals. The process for youth to successfully "launch" into their independent adult lives requires planning and support. No youth can do this alone.

2. Court Observations
   Because court reports were often incomplete, *Court Lab's* Partners tracked topics discussed in the court hearings using a court observation form. *Court Lab's* Partners documented 1) instances when case planning may have taken place, but was not described in the court report, 2) important transition discussions that occurred between the judge and youth (e.g., when a TILP is not present in the court report), and 3) how often the judge engaged the youth about his or her transition goals.

3. Youth Interviews
   Court reports and courtroom observations generally cannot convey how well youth understand the their transition plans. Therefore, *Court Lab's* Partners interviewed all consenting youth who were present for their hearings in order to assess each youth's understanding of his or her own transition goals/process, and to document who helped him or her develop those goals. Using a Youth Interview Form, *Court Lab's* Partners covered the same subjects documented in file reviews and court observations, but focused on what information youth knew, who told them about it, and who helps them reach their transition goals.

4. Caregiver Interviews
   Similarly, *Court Lab's* Partners interviewed all willing and present caregivers to assess their involvement and understanding of the youth transition process. Using a Caregiver Information Form, *Court Lab's* Partners asked caregivers if they knew or had participated in the planning and decision making around where the youth will live and attend school after exiting care, to identify the youth's short-term and long-term employment goals, and to explain how caregivers were helping youth reach those goals.

   Caregivers—foster parents, kincare providers, group home providers—are often the most supportive adults for youth preparing to leave foster care, a largely overlooked group of adults who could provide a continued presence in youths' lives after they enter extended foster care at age 18 or leave the foster care system entirely. In addition to knowing the details of youths' daily lives, caregivers often best know youths' goals, strengths and needs. Caregivers often have information that can inform social workers and judges on youths' needs, and if accessed, can improve the planning and long-term outcomes for older foster youth.

Data Analysis

To assess a youth's preparedness to enter extended post-18 foster care or leave foster care entirely, *Court Lab's* Partners used four online data collection tools—File Review, Court Observation, Youth Interview, Caregiver Interview (see Data Collection Tools: Phase One, Figures 1-4 at the end of this guide)—in the courtroom using either tablets or laptops. If a court report lacked a TILP, the Partners listened for a discussion of the TILP during the hearing, as well as interviewed youth about his or her transition goals. If the court report was lacking information, the hearing observation or youth interview may have shown a clearer picture of the youth's transition progress. Data concerning individual youth and judicial proceedings was in turn aggregated into a centralized spreadsheet.

Summary of *Court Lab's* Findings

Court Lab revealed the following regarding the state of transitional planning for older foster youth as they approached age 18, either to enter extended foster care under AB 12 or opt out of AB 12 and exit foster care entirely:

1. Permanent Adult Connection
   - 35% of court reports indicated that youth had a permanent connection with a trusted adult.

2. Youth and Caregiver Involvement
   - During the *Court Lab* observations, 38% of youth attended their hearings.
   - Youth attendance at hearings based on placement:
     - Of all youth placed with foster parents, 42% attended their hearing
     - Of all youth placed in group homes, 59% attended their hearing
     - Of all youth placed with relatives, 37% attended their hearings
     - Of all youth placed with legal guardians, 31% attended their hearing
   - Caregiver attendance at hearings based on placement:
     - 8% of foster parents attended their foster youth's hearing
     - 21% of legal guardians attended their foster youth's hearing
     - 33% of relatives attended their foster youth's hearing

3. Educational Planning
   - 38% of court reports indicated that high school aged youth (9th-12th grade) were not on track to graduate, as noted in the report or based on observers' review of attached education information, such as a report card. An additional 17% of court reports did not provide any information to the court of whether the youth was on track to graduate.
   - Of youth who were not on track to graduate, 57% of court reports indicated a plan to help the youth graduate from high school.
   - When the court report indicated that the youth was not on track to graduate, education was discussed in 76% of hearings where the youth was present for the hearing.

4. Health Care
   - When the court report mentioned a physical or mental health condition that may impact a youth's transition from care, 47% of youth interviews indicated that someone had discussed how to access medical care with the youth after they leave foster care.

5. Employment Planning
   - For youth 16 and older, 38% of court reports addressed career development.

6. Transition to Independent Living Plan (TILP)
   - 50% of youth ages 14-21 had a TILP attached to their court report.
     - 21% of youth under age 16 had a TILP attached to their court report

    - 63% of youth age 16 and older had a TILP attached to their court report
  - When the report did not contain a TILP, transitional planning was discussed in 17% of court hearings where the youth was present for the hearing.
  - When the report did not contain a TILP, the youth indicated they did have a TILP in 41% of transition age youth interviews.
  - The caregiver was listed as a responsible party to at least one goal in 40% of TILPs.
  - 84% of youth signed the TILP, 77% DCFS social workers signed, and 50% caregivers (all ages, but same values for youth 16 and older).

7. Extended Foster Care
   - For youth ages 17.5-18.5, extended foster care was mentioned in 49% of court reports since January 2012, when extended foster care went into effect for youth in the State of California.
   - For youth ages 17.5-18.5, information regarding the right to re-entry was discussed in 10% of court reports since January 2012.
   - For youth ages 17.5-18.5, 8% of court reports mentioned a 90-day transition plan when youths' cases close.

8. Essential Documents for Youth Self-Sufficiency
   - 38% of court reports indicated that youth ages 17.5 to 18.5 have at least one form of identification required upon exit from care, such as a birth certificate or social security card.
   - 3% of court reports indicated that a credit check has been performed for youth ages 16 or older.

Recommended Changes in Transitional Planning Policies and Practices

Court Lab's Partners met with the Juvenile Court Presiding Judge and the DCFS Director in November and December 2012, to discuss *Court Lab's* findings and to recommend changes in policy and practice that would produce concrete improvements for youth approaching independence. Importantly, both the Presiding Judge and DCFS Director expressed a strong commitment to correct ongoing gaps in transitional planning for foster youth and to work closely with *Court Lab's* Partners to implement essential changes in policies and practices.

1. Increase caregiver involvement in the development and implementation of transition plans and improve the Juvenile Court and DCFS's knowledge of caregiver concerns regarding individual youth.

Caregivers are among the most important adults in a youth's life and often have information essential to the development and implementation of appropriate transition goals. Caregivers are in a unique position to inform the Juvenile Court's and DCFS's understanding of the services that can best support a youth's transition goals. Caregivers are likely the adults most aware of the appropriateness and effectiveness of services that youth receive, and most likely to understand what changes in existing services or new services would be most useful for a youth in their home. Nevertheless, judicial proceedings and court reports continue to have little to no input from youth caregivers.

To improve outcomes for youth who may enter extended foster care at age 18 or leave care entirely, the following changes in practice and policy are recommended:

a) Increase caregiver attendance at court hearings, and engage caregivers during the hearings in a manner that they feel is beneficial to the youth in their home and useful to them as foster parents.
b) Increase the use of the Caregiver Information Form (JV-290), and discuss the content during judicial proceedings. The Caregiver Information Form is an optional state form that allows caregivers an accessible way to provide information about youth to the court.

2. Improve the quality of information presented to the Juvenile Court in court reports to allow well-informed, specific orders that ensure steps necessary to achieve clearly defined goals are taken.

   Court reports are essential to assessing and ensuring the youth's safety, well-being, and progress toward self-sufficiency. Court reports must provide judicial officers sufficient information to issue orders that support the youth's achievement of transition goals. As discussed in CWI's *Transition Age Youth Housing and Service Roadmap: A Best Practices Framework*, effective case plans require deliberate action steps that are relevant to the youth's identified interests and desired goals (see http://www.cwinitiative.org/news/).

   To improve outcomes for youth entering extended foster care at age 18 or leaving care entirely, social workers should include the following information in every youth's court report:

a) *Educational Planning*: Include every youth's high school graduation progress, including the number of credits required by the youth's school district, the number of credits the youth has accumulated, whether the youth is on track to graduate with a high school degree, and, if not on track, what steps will need to be taken by what specific adults to ensure the youth obtains a high school degree before age 18. For youth under 16 years old who are not on track to graduate, include steps to ensure high school completion that are aimed at high school degrees rather than GEDs.
b) *Employment Planning*: Include whether the youth would like to have a job before age 18; if yes, discuss what steps will be taken by which specific adults to ensure the youth is employed before age 18. Include whether or not the youth would like to have a job after age 18; if yes, discuss what steps will be taken by which specific adults to ensure the youth is employed after age 18.
c) *Essential Documents for Youth Self-Sufficiency*: The State of California requires that every youth receives critical documents—social security card, birth certificate, driver's license, and health and education summary, among others—upon leaving care, but youth may seek employment or apply for financial aid at an earlier point. Therefore, include whether the youth has the documentation that he or she needs to meet his or her employment or financial aid goals; if not, discuss what steps will be taken by which specific adults to ensure the youth receives the information. Amend DCFS policy and/or local rules of court to allow earlier release of documents to the youth and identify what adult is responsible for ensuring the youth receives those documents.
d) *Credit Checks*: Include the credit check status for each youth aged 16 and older in each court report; if not, discuss what steps will be taken by what specific adults to ensure that a credit check is done and that the youth receives the results.
e) *Permanent Adult Connection*: Discuss the existence or absence of a permanent connected adult, identify who that adult is, and clarify how that adult is connected to the youth. Ask if the adult is in the youth's own network of relationships and how connected the youth feels to the adult emotionally. Additionally, discuss the nature and reciprocity of the youth's relationship with the adult, as well as the youth's expectations of the longevity of the relationship with the adult. If no permanent connected adult has been identified, discuss what steps will be taken by which specific adults to establish

a permanent connected adult for the youth before age 18. Importantly, a permanent connected adult should not be a peer of the youth and, ideally, should be an adult independent of the child welfare system.

f) *Transition to Independent Living Plan (TILP)*: Attach to the court report for every youth aged 14 and older a TILP that states short-term, measurable, and age-appropriate goals that the youth has identified and with which the youth is in agreement. Ensure that each TILP has 1) clear and defined steps to support the youth's achievement of those goals and 2) what steps will be taken by what specific adult to ensure that the youth and caregiver receive the necessary services and support for the caregiver and the youth to progress toward achieving those goals.

   Short-term, measurable, and age-appropriate goals are ones that are quantifiable and can be easily evaluated at the end of a six-month period. For example, a measurable and age-appropriate six-month goal for a 15 year old may be to raise a math score by a letter grade. Graduating high school would not be an age-appropriate goal for a 15 year old since it cannot be accomplished within the next six months.

3. Conduct a thorough review of all DCFS court reports and TILPs to ensure that the youth and caregiver have actively participated in the development of individualized, clearly defined goals for successful transition to extended foster care or exit from care entirely.

   Court reports are essential to assessing and evaluating the youth's safety, well-being and progress toward self-sufficiency, and to ensuring that judicial officers have sufficient information to issue the orders that support the caregiver's and youth's achievement of transition goals.

   To improve transition outcomes for youth, Juvenile Court judges, lawyers, and social workers should ensure that the information listed in Recommendation 2 above is included in every youth's court report and reviewed at every judicial proceeding that the youth attends.

4. Identify the specific adults who are responsible for helping a youth achieve his or her goals, including the social worker, caregiver, and adults outside the child welfare system.

   When part of a collaborative process involving clearly identified adults involved in the youth's life in and outside the child welfare system, the TILP can be extremely effective in helping the youth describe and achieve his or her goals that will lead to safety, well-being, and self-sufficiency.

   To improve outcomes for youth who may enter extended foster care at age 18 or leave care entirely, the following changes in practice and policy are recommended:

   a) Assign responsibility for specific steps to specific adults to support the youth's achievement of each individual TILP goal. The assigned adult must be informed that he or she is responsible for ensuring that each step is completed. When the caregiver is present, discuss progress toward each TILP goal, focusing on the caregiver's assigned TILP responsibilities during judicial hearings.
   b) Increase youth attendance at court hearings, and engage youth during those hearings on the development and progress toward their own identified TILP goals in a manner that the youth feels has been supportive and productive.
   c) Update the TILP template to detail specific, measurable, and age-appropriate goals that the youth has identified and agreed to, with clearly defined, short-term and immediate steps that a clearly identified adult and the youth will take to achieve those goals.

5. Review all available information—including DCFS court reports and TILPs—with the youth, communicate the youth's concerns or suggestions to social workers, and when necessary, ask the Juvenile Court for specific orders or DCFS for specific services.

   To improve the information about a youth and to respond effectively to that information, the youth's attorney should verify the DCFS court reports and TILPs are filled out accurately and appropriately, articulate any deficiencies

before or during the hearing, and when necessary, request specific orders from the Juvenile Court judge to address those deficiencies.

6. Improve efforts to connect every older youth who is in foster care, has entered extended post-18 foster care under AB 12, has left care entirely with services aimed at establishing, supporting, and when necessary, finding permanent adult connections.

   To help youth develop and maintain enduring adult relationships, attorneys, judges, social workers, and caregivers should:
   a) Increase efforts to find a youth's family members using family finding tools. Family finding connects youth in out-of-home placements to family members with whom they have lost contact, then to provide education, training, and support to those family members to allow them to help the youth find assistance in the child welfare system and to move toward self-sufficiency outside child welfare.
   b) Speak with youth about their non-family adult relationships before, during, and after judicial hearings.
   c) Develop new connected adult relationships for the youth, if none can be found, within the youth's existing network of adult relationships or with new activities.
   d) Train connected adults on child welfare issues, such as navigating the child welfare system, knowing what services and eligibility requirements exist for youth, and understanding a youth's developmental needs.

Phase Two: Implementing Recommended Improvements in Policies and Practices with Enhanced Transitional Planning

Court Lab's Partners developed *Enhanced Transitional Planning* to implement the recommendations above, which were presented to the Juvenile Court Presiding Judge and DCFS Director. *Enhanced Transitional Planning* primarily addresses two issues:

1. Consistent judicial oversight of DCFS court reports and planning to ensure that every transition age youth in an out-of-home placement receives meaningful transitional planning reflected in a written and regularly updated TILP and DCFS

court report; that every TILP and DCFS court report is discussed and reviewed by all parties for accuracy, appropriateness, and progress; and that all parties assess overall transitional planning and take corrective actions, when needed.

2. Increased youth and caregiver involvement with transition planning by providing both the opportunity to address the Juvenile Court directly.

Implementation of concrete improvements with *Enhanced Transitional Planning* began in September 2013 in one Edelman courtroom. In November 2013 it expanded into a second courtroom and may be implemented in other courtrooms in early 2014. *Court Lab's* Partners will evaluate *Enhanced Transitional Planning* using the findings from Phase One as the baseline from which to improve. *Enhanced Transitional Planning* implements the *Court Lab* recommendations in two ways: transition planning training sessions and courtroom practice.

Enhanced Transitional Planning Training

To implement *Court Lab's* recommendations, *Court Lab's* Partners trained judges, attorneys, and social workers on the importance of effective and documented transition planning for every transition age youth in an out-of-home placement. The trainings focused on producing rigorous and regularly updated written transition plans in the TILP and court report, and the consequences for youth when failing to undertake such planning.

Judges

Court Lab's Partners trained Juvenile Court judges. The training included an overview of *Court Lab's* findings and recommendations and an introduction to *Enhanced Transitional Planning*. Attendees received *Court Lab's* data analysis, copies of previously ineffective TILPs and specific examples of comprehensive TILPs, which include age-appropriate, measurable, and youth driven goals. Effective TILPs have deliberate action steps that are relevant to the youth's identified interests and desired goals. The training identified specifically where the court reports lack information and how TILPs can be improved.

Enhanced Transitional Planning asks judges to review TILPs for youth-driven goals with specific steps assigned to responsible adults. Court reports must be reviewed for the information as set forth in the *Enhanced Transitional Planning* Bench Card and discussed in greater detail below in the Courtroom Practice section. Following such a review of each

youth's TILP and court report, judges will have the information required to issue necessary orders that update and improve TILPs and court reports and that prepare youth to enter extended foster care at age 18 or to exit care entirely.

Attorneys

Using *Court Lab's* recommendations, *Court Lab's* Partners trained attorneys responsible for representing foster children. Attorneys reviewed the DCFS policy manual on the TILP process and the requirement and description of a quality, regularly updated TILP that is developed with the youth and the caregiver. The training addressed resources that can help attorneys better serve their transition age youth clients. The training prepared attorneys to communicate clearly and consistently with social workers regarding youth-identified transition goals and to request more specific orders from bench officers to assist youth in meeting those goals.

Social Workers

At the request and with the assistance of the DCFS Director, *Court Lab's* Partners trained administrators and social workers at DCFS regional offices on the importance of effective TILPs, and on *Court Lab* findings and recommendations concerning TILPs. The majority of social workers from these trained Regional Offices are assigned to the courtroom in which *Court Lab's* Partners are currently implementing *Enhanced Transitional Planning*. In addition, *Court Lab's* Partners are working with DCFS regional administrators on the implementation of *Enhanced Transitional Planning* at the Juvenile Court, from which *Court Lab's* Partners will provide ongoing social worker trainings to improve the content in the DCFS court reports and transitional services for youth.

Improved Courtroom Practices

Enhanced Transitional Planning requires consistent judicial oversight of DCFS court reports and TILPs for every transition age youth, combined with improved youth and caregiver involvement with DCFS and the Juvenile Court.

Judicial Bench Card

The *Court Lab* data revealed a number of areas in the court reports that regularly lacked information: TILPs were either not attached or did not contain meaningful information if they were attached; the education section often did not list if the youth was on track to graduate from high school or sometimes whether he or she was enrolled in high school at

all; and most court reports did not discuss the youth's current employment situation or future employment goals. *Court Lab's* Partners created the Bench Card (see the Bench Card in Data Collection Tools: Phase Two, Figure 5 at the end of this guide) to make certain that TILPs and court reports included more complete information.

Caregiver and Social Worker Involvement

Enhanced Transitional Planning trains caregivers on the value of their involvement in transitional planning, youth court hearings, and the importance of providing judicial officers the completed Caregiver Information Form. *Court Lab* findings indicate that caregivers rarely attend court. Therefore, with *Enhanced Transitional Planning*, all caregivers—foster parents, kincare providers, group home providers—for transition age youth in out-of-home placements will be called after a youth's hearing to determine why the caregiver did or did not attend court and what would make it easier for the caregiver to attend (see the Caregiver Home Form and the Caregiver Court Form in Data Collection Tools: Phase Two, Figures 7 and 8 at the end of this guide).

DCFS social workers will encourage caregivers to attend court hearings during their monthly home meetings. Social workers will also distribute and collect the Caregiver Information Form. Social workers will then submit the Caregiver Information Form to the court, providing the judge with additional information about the youth. The caregiver's presence in court and the Caregiver Information Form offer essential background about the youth, providing the judge with a clear understanding of the youth's progress and how to connect the youth with appropriate services. As importantly, the caregiver's presence in court may help youth feel supported during the hearing.

Youth Involvement

Enhanced Transitional Planning includes an individualized, youth-focused questionnaire that gives youth the opportunity to address the Juvenile Court directly and participate actively in the development of his or her plans for the future. When the youth is present for his or her court hearing, peer advocates will ask the youth to identify their three most important transitional planning areas of interest. The judge will then invite the youth to talk about and participate in the planning of his or her transition services and TILP (see the Youth Questionnaire in Data Collection Tools: Phase Two, Figure 6 at the end of this guide). The process is centered on encouraging the youth to identify and describe his or her personal goals, to articulate his or her housing, educational and employment needs, and to explain what adults he or she feels can best support achieving those goals.

As of the writing of this guide, the Youth Questionnaire has led to additional and longer transitional planning conversations between youth and peer advocates, attorneys, and judges. Youth have identified their short-term and long-term goals, and are learning to present those goals to others and advocate for themselves. This self-advocacy is especially important for youth ages 18 and older in extended foster care who have less adult supervision and more independence than younger youth in foster care.

When *Court Lab's* Partners presented their findings and recommendations to the Juvenile Court Presiding Judge, he expressed a strong interest in expanding *Enhanced Transitional Planning* to every courtroom at the Juvenile Court. Similarly, in judicial officer trainings, other judges expressed an interest in including *Enhanced Transitional Planning* in their courtrooms. Neither *Court Lab's* Partners nor the Juvenile Court have sufficient resources to place peer advocates in every courtroom at this time. However, early results from *Enhanced Transitional Planning* have shown that incorporating the Bench Card into the daily judicial reviews of transition age youth court reports significantly improves the quality of transition planning youth receive.

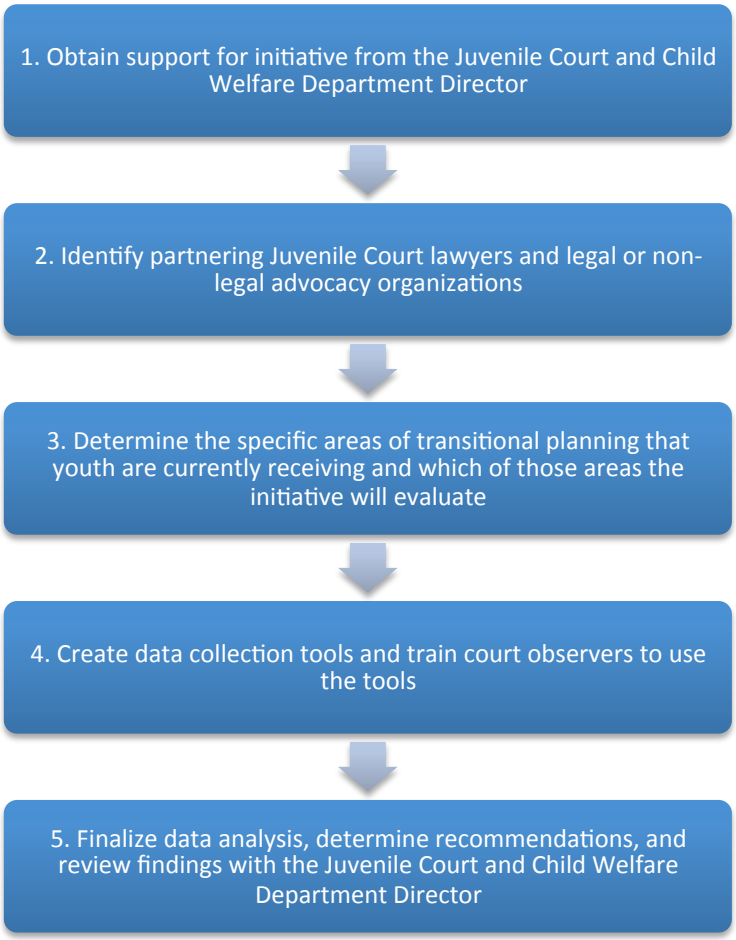
Data and Benchmark Analysis

Court Lab's Partners will evaluate *Enhanced Transitional Planning* using the data from the nearly 700 cases evaluated in Phase One as a baseline from which to improve. *Enhanced Transitional Planning's* Bench Card results should improve upon *Court Lab's* File Review results in all areas that previously lacked information. *Enhanced Transitional Planning's* results are currently being analyzed and the comparison with Phase One will be published at the completion of the project.

Implementation in Other Child Welfare Jurisdictions

Youth aging out of the foster care system are unprepared for independence due to a number of risk factors: low educational attainment, minimal or no employment experience, presence of mental disabilities or behavioral disorders, pregnant or parenting status, multiple placements while in foster care, and few close relationships with supportive adults. *Court Lab* and *Enhanced Transitional Planning* together can be used as a model for other jurisdictions, both in and outside California, to evaluate the transition planning for older youth and to implement concrete changes to improve that planning. The following steps offer a guide for undertaking similar initiatives in other jurisdictions.

Phase One: Measuring Gaps in Existing Transitional Planning for Older Foster Youth in Care, Youth Entering Extended Care, and Youth Leaving Care Entirely



The first step to evaluating transitional planning for youth and improving outcomes is to gain the support of the local Juvenile Court and Child Welfare Department, particularly the Presiding Judge and Department Director, if possible. *Court Lab* and *Enhanced Transitional Planning* evaluate social worker court reports as well as judicial procedures and practices related to transition age youth hearings. The Presiding Judge not only provides access to the courtroom and court reports, but also provides the necessary support to implement recommendations. The Department Director can ensure support from senior administrative leadership within his or her agency as well as support from department social workers.

With support from the Juvenile Court and Child Welfare Department secured, the next step is to identify partner agencies. Partners can vary depending on the agencies and organizations within a local child welfare system, as well as the role of your organization in the child welfare system. Potential partners may include attorneys responsible for representing foster youth, the local child welfare agency, caregiver groups, and youth advocacy groups.

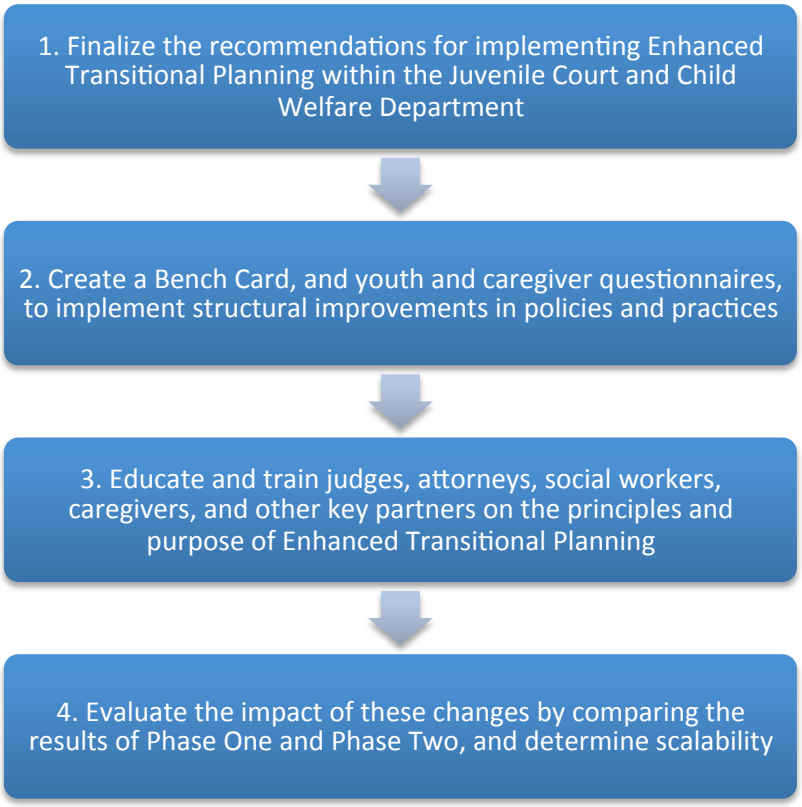
Working together with the partner agencies, research local laws, regulations, practices, and policies affecting transition age youth, as well as best practices around the country. This research will shape the data collection specific to existing transition planning procedures and practices and help establish clear goals for your project. These goals may include determining caregiver involvement in judicial proceedings, social workers' thoroughness in completing court reports, bench officers' enforcement of TILPs, among many others. Once these goals are established, determine the process to evaluate them. This process can include judicial or departmental forms that will be evaluated and the standards they will be compared to; individuals such as youth and caregivers that will be interviewed and the information to be gathered from them; and the capacity of partners to observe hearings, train court observers, and determine how often observations can occur.

Once the project goals are determined, create a data collection tool (see Data Collection Tools: Phase One, Figures 1-4) that captures the desired information. *Court Lab's* Partners chose to use an online data collection tool. The online data collection tool allows *Court Lab's* Partners along with judicial officers, social workers, and others to access collected data relatively easily and quickly. All court observers need detailed training on how to use the data collection tool. Follow-up trainings for court observers should occur frequently to ensure consistent data collection, to make necessary revisions to the tools being used to collect that data, and identify early trends in the consistency and depth of transitional planning that youth are currently receiving.

Once court observers begin collecting data, the partner agencies need to meet regularly to review data analysis and discuss barriers, issues, and trends in the data. *Court Lab's* Partners met every two weeks during Phase One's court observations to discuss trends and barriers. These discussions provided a forum for developing recommendations. Once data collection and analysis are sufficient to provide a full picture of the quality of transitional planning for older foster youth in a given child welfare jurisdiction, consolidate

that data to identify common trends and barriers to effective planning for youth, then finalize recommendations for improving that planning. Present finalized findings to all affected groups, most critically to the Juvenile Court and Child Welfare Department.

Phase Two: Implementing Recommended Improvements in Policies and Practices with Enhanced Transitional Planning



Enhanced Transitional Planning focuses on implementing improvements in policies and practices within the Juvenile Court and Child Welfare Department, principally among individual judges, minor's attorneys, and social workers. Outcomes for older foster youth, youth entering extended foster care, or youth exiting foster care entirely are most likely to improve with changes in policies and practices that allow judicial officers access to court reports and transitional planning documents, before and during the course of a youth's hearing. These documents must accurately reflect what the youth's needs currently are, how well the youth has progressed since the last hearing, whether existing services have been helpful to the youth, and what corrective orders need to be issued to meet the

youth's changing needs. Documentation of the above must be in the court report or other transitional planning documents that are immediately available to the judge.

Importantly, reliance on strictly verbal descriptions of the youth's needs and goals, and of the history and effectiveness of services to address those needs and goals, is highly unlikely to produce planning that is effective. Meaningful transition planning depends on documentation from judges, social workers, attorneys, and others that is written clearly and updated regularly. The Bench Card attached to this guide, along with the increased involvement of youth and caregivers as documented in the Youth and Caregiver Questionnaires, provide the documentation that supports effective transition planning and produces improved outcomes for older youth.

Though the improvements may vary in individual child welfare jurisdictions, *Court Lab's* Partners recommended and are currently implementing changes in Juvenile Court and Child Welfare Department policies and practices that relate to the documentation and transitional planning that include Educational Planning, Employment Planning, Essential Documents for Youth Self-Sufficiency, Credit Checks, Permanent Adult Connections, and Health. In addition, *Court Lab's* Partners' recommendations are based on data collected during Phase One, which established gaps in existing planning for youth. Choosing recommendations in this manner allowed *Court Lab's* Partners to address deficiencies in current transitional planning that had been measured. Moreover, *Court Lab's* Partners will use those earlier measurements of deficiencies as benchmarks to assess the success of Phase Two's recommendations in improving outcomes in youths' transitional planning.

Essential to this process is the meaningful involvement of youth; meaning that youth are present at the hearing and able to state and describe what transition goals are important to them and whether the support they are currently receiving is helping them move closer to their goals. *Enhanced Transitional Planning* includes an individualized, youth-focused questionnaire, which is also attached to this guide. Administered by a trained peer advocate, the questionnaire gives the youth both a written and verbal opportunity to address the Juvenile Court directly and to participate actively in the development of his or her plans for the future.

Also critical is the involvement of the youth's caregiver, whether that caregiver is a traditional foster parent, kincare provider, group home provider, or someone else. Caregivers often possess the most accurate and up-to-date understanding of a youth's

strengths, needs, and goals, along with what the youth needs most and from what supports the youth will most benefit. Caregivers can be a reassuring presence for the youth during a hearing, and offer a judicial officer the opportunity to observe and to gain at least some understanding of the relationship between the youth and his or her caregiver. In addition, caregivers may offer the youth a permanent connection with an adult once the youth enters extended foster care at age-18 or exits foster care entirely.

Enhanced Transitional Planning includes two caregiver-focused questionnaires that determine why caregivers do or do not attend court, and if they feel their presence is beneficial to the youth when they do attend court. These questionnaires are attached to this guide. Additionally, *Enhanced Transitional Planning* increases caregivers' usage of the Caregiver Information Form, which provides additional information about the youth to the judge that is not included in the court reports.

Upon the determination of deficiencies and recommended changes in Juvenile Court and Child Welfare Department practices and policies, the selection of a limited number of courtrooms in which to begin implementing those changes is necessary. Educating judicial officers, attorneys, social workers, and others on the principles and purpose of *Enhanced Transitional Planning* is essential.

Court Lab's Partners choose to implement *Enhanced Transitional Planning* in a single courtroom with the possibility of expanding it to additional courtrooms. Active engagement with and commitment from the judicial officer in that first courtroom, along with the attorneys and social workers who practice within that courtroom, have been critical. *Court Lab's* Partners have involved each of those parties in developing the Bench Card, Youth Questionnaire, Caregiver Home Questionnaire, and Caregiver Court Questionnaire. *Court Lab's* Partners and the associated courtroom parties also worked together to determine the most efficient and effective means to monitor and measure improvements in documenting and implementing meaningful transitional planning for youth. Working with *Court Lab's* Partners, social workers, attorneys representing youth, and judges have agreed on fundamental changes in transitional planning practices and policies to ensure that every youth has a meaningful opportunity to express what is important to his or her future goals and has an informed team of adults—a judge, social worker, attorney, and caregiver—capable of providing the support and services that the youth needs to help him or her achieve those goals.

Acknowledgments

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Los Angeles County DCFS Fact Sheets (2013)

Pergamit, Michael R., and Johnson, Heidi. *Extending Foster Care to Age 21: Implications and Estimates from Youth Aging Out of Foster Care in Los Angeles*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute; Funded by the Stuart Foundation. (2009)

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS:

PHASE ONE

File Review	Figure 1
Court Observation	Figure 2
Youth Interview	Figure 3
Caregiver Interview	Figure 4

FILE REVIEW

Date: _____ **Obs. Initials:** _____
Case #: _____ **Cal #/MI#:** _____
Youth's DOB: _____ **Youth's Atty:** _____
Date petition filed: _____ **Placement:** **(circle one; describe other) Relative/Foster Parent/Group Home/Legal Guard./NREFM/ Other:** _____
Purpose of Hrg: _____ **Gender:** **M / F**

	SUBJECT		DOES THE FILE CONTAIN EVIDENCE OR DISCUSSION OF THE FOLLOWING? --	Y	N	N/A	DESCRIPTION/NOTES
1	Transition Planning	a	TILP				Date of current TILP: Signed by (circle one or more): Youth / CSW / Caregiver / Other Number of TILPs on file: Reference to earlier TILPs, or follow up on goals from previous TILP?
			Goals/Steps to achieve goals (list responsible person for each goal):				
		b	ILP Classes (16+) (check N/A for those under 16 years old)				Have they taken/received ILP classes/services? (circle one): Yes / Not yet, but referred or pending / No Description of ILP classes/services:
		c	Extended Foster Care Benefits (check N/A for older youth who are not eligible for extended benefits)				
		d	Plan to help youth meet one of the extended foster care participation requirements?				
		e	For youth who opt out, is there a 90 day transition plan?				
		f	For youth who opt out, are they informed of how to re-enter care?				
2	Documents	a	Birth Certificate Soc. CDL ____ ID ____				Indication of whether documents have been given to youth and/or caregiver?
		b	Credit Check (N/A for those who are younger than 16)				
3	Education	a	Currently Enrolled? (In the summer, youth is enrolled if he/she is on summer break and starting school in the fall)				If youth's enrollment in school is unclear, circle unknown: Unknown Note current or highest grade completed:
		b	Is Youth on track to graduate high school on time? (check				If report is unclear, circle unknown: Unknown
		c	If Youth not on track to graduate on time, is there a plan to get the youth to graduate?				If yes, describe (example: tutoring, summer school, etc.): If report is unclear, circle unknown: Unknown Is an IEP on file? Yes / No
4	Employment	a	Employment				
5	Delinquency/Cross-over/	a	Delinquency issues that may impact youth's transition from foster care				If yes, describe, and note whether it is in the juvenile and/or adult systems:
6	Healthcare/ Disability	a	Is the Health and Education Passport (HEP) attached to the court report?				
			Date of most recent education discussion/notes in HEP?				Date: _____
		b	Physical/mental condition that may impact youth's transition				Is the youth a Regional Center client? (circle one): Yes / No
			Plan to manage physical/mental condition				
		c	SSI Screening (16.5+) (check N/A for those under 16.5 years old)				Mention/documentation of CSW completing SSI Screening Guide? _____ Referral of Youth for SSI assessment? _____ SSI assessment
		d	Substance abuse issues that may impact youth's transition from foster care				
			Plan to manage substance				
		e	Pregnancy/Parenting				
			Plan for services/assistance for pregnant/parenting teen				
7	Housing	a	Discussion of housing goals/plans for 18+ youth? (check N/A for youth younger than age 16)				If yes, please describe:
8	Kin-GAP	a	Discussion of Kin-GAP (check N/A if caregiver is NOT a				If yes, with whom? _____ Describe:
9	Perm. Adult Conn.	a	Connected adult in youth's life				

Figure 1

COURT OBSERVATION

Date:	Case #:	Cal #:
Obs. Initials:	Next Court Date:	Minor #:
Youth present: Y / N	Others present (please circle; indicate other): CSW / CASA / FFA or Group Home social worker Other:	

WHO RAISED THE SUBJECT KEY: Youth's Atty = YA; Court = CT; County Counsel = CC; Parent's Atty = LADL; Caregiver = CG; Youth = Y;

NOTE: In some cases, the nature of the hearing is to discuss/resolve something very specific--if that seems to be the reason that the issues below are not discussed, please check the appropriate boxes, but describe in the notes/comments that the hearing did not generally cover youth's transition goals due to the nature of the hearing.

	SUBJECT		ARE THE FOLLOWING ISSUES DISCUSSED IN THE HEARING?	Y	N	N/A	Who?	NOTES/COMMENTS (if an issue is discussed in the hearing, describe HOW)
1	Transition Planning	a	TILP (if TILP is not discussed in hearing, describe why -- perhaps not appropriate in hearing; if TILP discussed and one is not on file, note if court orders one)					
		b	Specific goals in TILP or youth's transition, in general (check N/A if TILP and transition not					
		c	Discussion of who was involved in TILP development?					
		d	ILP Services (check N/A if youth younger than age 16)					
		e	Extended foster care benefits (check N/A for older youth who are not eligible for extended benefits)					
		f	*If youth staying in extended foster care:* Youth's progress in meeting the eligibility criteria and/or meeting transition goals? Describe.					
		g	*If Youth exiting care:* Is the re-entry process described? Any discussion of youth's transition out of foster care? Describe.					
2	Documents	a	Are any documents (e.g., birth certificate, social security card, CDL, ID, credit check, immigration, other) discussed?					
3	Education	a	Youth's education					
4	Employment	a	Youth's employment goals					
5	Delinquency/ Cross-over/ Tickets	a	Delinquency issues or discussion of tickets					
6	Healthcare/ Disability	a	Youth's medical needs and plans for addressing needs					
7	Housing	a	Where the youth is planning to live and wants to live post-foster care or after age 18? (check N/A if youth younger than age 16)					
8	Kin-GAP	a	Whether youth is going into Kin-GAP? (check N/A if caregiver is not a relative)					
	(Relative caregiver	b	How youth's benefits and services can be affected by the decision to go into Kin-GAP? Describe.					
9	Perm. Adult Conn.	a	Does the youth have an adult in his/her life who is supportive (e.g. emotional, financial, etc.)? (*If so, whom?)*					
#	Involved/ Informed	a	Is Youth / Caregiver / CSW input solicited during the hearing? (please circle one or more, if applicable)					

Figure 2

Figure 3

YOUTH INTERVIEW

Date: _____ Obs. Initials: _____ Case #: _____ Cal #: _____ MI: _____

Note: Please be sure to ask youth follow-up questions (like those in the parentheses) to have a discussion with the youth for the comments/notes section. The goal is to understand how much the youth is involved/informed about their transition goals/process, and who is helping them reach their goals.

	SUBJECT		QUESTION	Y	N	N/A	Notes/Comments
1	Transition Planning	a	Has anyone started talking to you about your plans for leaving foster care? (*Who has talked to you about your transition out of foster care?*)				
		b	Do you have a TILP? *(Did you complete it yourself and come up with the goals? Who helped you fill it out? CSW, caregiver, anyone else?)*				
		c	Who is helping you reach your TILP goals?				
		d	Do you know about a new law (AB 12) that lets you stay in foster care until you are 20? (*Who told you about it and what do you know?*)				
		e	Has anyone explained to you the process of how you can opt in to extended foster care? *(Who? What do you know?)*				
		f	If you opt out of extended foster care, do you know how to opt back in?				
2	Documents	a	Do you have a birth certificate, social security card, CDL, ID, credit check, immigration, other?				
		b	Are these documents in your possession? *(Do you know who has these documents?)*				
3	Education	a	Have you thought about your plans for school after leaving foster care? (*What are some of your current and future educational goals?*)				
		b	Has anyone talked to you about how to accomplish your educational goals? (*Who? CSW, caregiver, anyone else?*)				
4	Employment	a	Do you have any work/internship/volunteer experience? (*If yes, what type of experience? How did you find/obtain this experience?*)				
		b	Has anyone talked to you about whether or not you want a job and/or how to find a job? (*Who? CSW, caregiver, anyone else?*)				
		c	Has anyone talked to you about how to manage your money and budget? (*Who? CSW, caregiver, ILP class, anyone else?*)				
5	Healthcare/ Disability	a	Has anyone talked to you about how to access medical care when you leave foster care? If so, what did they tell you? *(Who? CSW, caregiver, anyone*				
		b	*If pregnant or parenting:* Has anyone talked to you about how to take care of your child? (*Who has talked to you? About what? What services do you know about?*)				
6	Housing	a	Has anyone talked to you about where you want to live after you turn 18? (*Who? Where? How?*)				
7	Perm. Ad. Conn.	a	Is there an adult that you can talk to about things that are important to you? (*Who? How often do you talk to that person? If no adult, has anyone talked to you about having someone like that in your life and how to develop a relationship with that person?*)				Scale (1-5; 1=not at all, 5=often):
8	Involved / Informed	a	Before a hearing, do you usually feel like you receive the information you need? (*Who gives you the info? Or who would you ask for info?*)				Scale (1-5; 1=no information, 5=most information):
		b	How long did you wait today before you were called into the courtroom?				

Figure 4

CAREGIVER INTERVIEW

Date: _____ Obs. Initials: _____ Case #: _____ Cal #: _____ MI: _____

Type of Caregiver (please circle): Foster Parent / Relative (relation to youth: _____) / Other: _____

NOTE: Please be sure to ask the caregiver relevant follow-up questions (like those in the parentheses) to have a discussion with the caregiver for the notes/comments section. The goal is to understand how much the caregiver is involved/informed about their youth's transition goals/process, and how they are

	SUBJECT		QUESTION	Y	N	N/A	NOTES/COMMENTS
1	Transition Planning	a	Have you talked to the youth about specific goals/plans for transitioning out of foster care and/or becoming independent? (*How? What have you discussed?*)				
			-Education and employment				
			-Health care/disability (medical and mental health needs)				
			-Housing (Do you know how to help the youth receive housing services,				
		b	Will you be involved in helping the youth reach his/her transition goals? (*How? What will you do/teach them?*)				
		c	Does the youth have a TILP? *(Did you help the youth develop his/her goals?)*				
		d	Do you know about a new law that allows the youth to stay in care until 20? (*Who has talked to you? What do you know?*)				
		e	Has anyone explained to you the process of how the youth should opt in to extended foster care? (*Who? What is the process?*)				
		f	Have you been included in making those plans? (*How so? Have you discussed with the youth and/or CSW?*)				
		g	If the youth opts out of extended foster care, do you know the process for him/her to opt back in? *(Have you discussed it with the youth and/or*				
2	Documents	a	Does the youth have documents (e.g., birth certificate, social security card, CDL, ID, credit check, immigration, other)?				
		b	Who is in possession of these documents?				
3	Kin-GAP (For Relative Caregivers ONLY)	a	Has anyone talked to you about Kin-GAP? (*Who? What did you discuss? What was the end result of the discussion?*)				
		b	Has anyone talked to you about what you would do if the youth's mental or physical health needs changed after you've gone into Kin-GAP? (*Who? What do you know about the benefits/requirements of Kin-GAP?*)				
		c	Has anyone talked to you about waiting to enter Kin-GAP until after the youth turns 16? (*Who? Why did you have this discussion?*)				
4	Perm. Adult Conn.	a	Do you think you will be a part of the youth's life after the youth turns 18? (*Why? How do you see yourself being involved?*)				
		b	Does the youth have other adults in his/her life to talk to about important things in his/her life? (*Who? Do you know the adult(s)? Have you talked to them?*)				
5	Involved/ Informed	a	Do you feel like you generally get the information that you need before a hearing? (*From whom? Who do you call if you need the info?*)				Scale (1-5; 1=no information, 5=most information):
		b	Do you provide information to the court, attorneys, etc., if asked? Do you feel like the information you provide makes a difference?				
		c	Do you often attend the youth's hearings?				
		d	Would you attend more often if you knew what time the case would be called?				

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS:

PHASE TWO

Bench Card	Figure 5
Youth Questionnaire	Figure 6
Caregiver Home Form	Figure 7
Caregiver Court Form	Figure 8

Figure 5

Printed November 18, 2013

Bench Card:

Youth 14 and older; Hearing types: RPP, 21e, 21f, 22, NMDSR

Date: _____ Youth number: _____ Youth's birthday: _____
Case number: _____ Youth's name: _____ Hearing type: _____
Calendar #: _____

General Comments:

1. TILP: Verify the court report includes the following:

Yes	*No*	*Details*
		Current TILP included in court report (generated within the last six months)?
		Specific, age appropriate, measurable goals?
		Detailed steps to achieve those goals?
		Important adults listed as responsible parties in addition to the youth?

If any of the above are NO, unknown, or unsatisfactory list corrective action:

2. Education: Verify the court report or Health & Education Passport (HEP) includes the following information:

Yes	*No*	*Details*
		Current enrollment status? Circle: HS Comm. Coll. Univ. Vocation Other:_____
		On track to graduate high school on time?
		If not on track to graduate, is there a plan to get the youth to graduate? If not applicable, circle: already graduated
		Does the youth have an education rights holder?
		IEP on file? If not applicable, circle: N/A

If any of the above are NO, unknown, or unsatisfactory list corrective action:

3. Documentation: Verify the court report discusses ALL of following:

Yes	*No*	*Details*
		Birth certificate, social security card, and immigration (if appropriate)?
		Credit check (Applicable for youth ages 16.5 to 17.5)? Applied Completed Remediated (circle one)

If NO, list corrective action:

4. Perm. Connection: Verify the court report discusses the following:

Yes	*No*	*Details*
		Is there a caring, committed adult in youth's life? (*Indicate explicit info or inference.)*

If any of the above are NO, unknown, or unsatisfactory list corrective action:

5. Career Development: Verify the court report discusses the following:

Yes	*No*	*Details*
		Current or previous employment, including internship and/or volunteer work?
		Job training skills and/or future career goals?

If any of the above are NO, unknown, or unsatisfactory list corrective action:

6. Health Status: Verify the court report discusses the following:

Yes	*No*	*Details*
		Physical/mental condition that may impact youth's transition from care?
		For youth ages 17+, plan to manage health condition as they transition from care?
		Family planning and reproductive health education?
		SSI screening (N/A for youth under age 16.5)? Not Applied Approved Pending (circle one)

If any of the above are NO, unknown, or unsatisfactory list corrective action:

7. AB12 Status: Verify the court report discusses the following:

Yes	*No*	*N/A*	*Details*
			Does youth plan to remain in care under AB12?
			If yes, list the AB12 eligibility criteria youth meets in the box on the left.
			Is this a re-entry case?
			If it is a re-entry case, are there any issues or barriers?

If any of the above are NO, unknown, or unsatisfactory list corrective action:

8. Youth/Caregiver Involvement in Hearing:

Yes	*No*	*N/A*	*Details*
			Is the youth present for the hearing?
			Is the caregiver present for the hearing?
			Was the youth involved in the hearing, either by speaking or through his/her attorney? (*Please indicate how.*)
			Was the caregiver involved in the hearing, either by speaking, submitting an information form, or through the youth's attorney? (*Please indicate how*)
			Was the Caregiver Information Form in the court report?

Copies: CWI (white), Bench officer (pink), CLC (orange), County Counsel (yellow)

Date: _____ Hearing type: _____
Calendar #: _____ Attorney: _____
Case #: _____ Youth's name: _____
Youth #: _____

Youth Questionnaire:

Be Heard at Your Hearing!

This is **your court hearing** to talk about **what you need to reach your goals**.

Fill out this section BEFORE THE HEARING:

We encourage you to focus on 3 areas that are **most important to you as you think about your future** to discuss in court today. Sample discussion points: Education (credits, graduation, financial aid), Housing, Employment, Important Documents, Transportation, Health/Mental Health, and/or anything else that's important to your future plans:

Point #1:

Point #2:

Point #3:

1. Do you have a family member or another adult that is important to you that you will talk with regularly after you leave foster care?

2. How often do you spend time with that person or person(s)?

3. Do they call you most of the time or do you usually call them?

4. After you leave care, how often do you expect to talk with your caregiver?

   Circle one: At least once a week; Twice a month; Once a month; Less than once a month; Not at all

Fill out this section AFTER THE HEARING:

1. How did you feel about speaking up for yourself in court?

Circle all that apply: Empowered Scared Nervous Overwhelmed Important Confused Happy Sad Comfortable Helpful Bored Frustrated Satisfied Angry Okay
Comments:

2. Do you think coming to court today was useful and beneficial?

Circle one: Yes, definitely Yes, probably No, probably not No, definitely not Not sure/don't know
Comments:

Figure 6

Caregiver Home Form

Court date: _____ Caregiver's name: _____
Case number: _____ Caregiver's phone #: _____
Minor number: _____ Attorney's name: _____
Youth's name: _____ Youth's age: _____

Purpose: The purpose of this form is to determine the reasons that you do or do not attend court regularly.

1) Type of caregiver (circle all that apply)

Foster parent	Relative	Legal guardian	Preadoptive parent
Group home staff	Wrap around	NREFM	Other: _____

2) Did you attend the youth's hearing on _____?

3) How often do you attend court hearings with the youth (circle one)?
   a) Every hearing
   b) Occasionally
   c) Never

4) Please list the reasons you attend or do not attend court regularly:
   a) _____
   b) _____
   c) _____

5) What could the foster care system do differently so that you would be willing to come to court? (Examples: Tell me the date of the hearing earlier; I need to know a specific time the hearing will be called; provide transportation for relative caregivers; etc.)
   a) _____
   b) _____
   c) _____

6) Did anyone discuss the benefits for both you and the youth of your coming to court?

   Who?

Figure 7

Caregiver Court Form

Date: _____ Hearing type: _____
Case number: _____ Minor's Attorney: _____
Minor number: _____

Purpose:
Caregivers play an important role in preparing youth for life after foster care. Your input is very important. Please share your opinions for the questions below. This form will be collected following the hearing.

1) Type of caregiver (circle all that apply)

Foster parent	Relative	Legal guardian	Preadoptive parent
Group home staff	Wrap around	NREFM	Other: _____

2) Did the judge ask for your input regarding the youth's transition plans and/or TILP during the hearing?

3) Do you feel like the information you shared was useful and beneficial to the judge and/or youth?

4) Do you feel like your presence in court benefited the youth?

5) Were you asked to fill out the Caregiver Information Form (JV-290) before attending court?

   □ Yes □No □ I have never heard of this form

   a) If yes, did you fill it out and send it to court?

   b) Was the information you provided on the Caregiver Information Form (JV-290) discussed in court?

6) How often do you expect to talk with the youth after he/she leaves foster care?

   Circle one: At least once a week; Twice a month; Once a month; Less than once a month; Not at all

Figure 8

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An Implementation Guide for Improving Outcomes for Older Foster Youth:
Court Lab – A Nonprofit, Child Welfare, and Judicial Partnership
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