

## **Ask the Expert with Michele Bartlett FAQ Sheet** *Transitional Age Youth (TAY) and the Foster Care System*

**Q: How do we help kids to feel the system is actually helping them instead of making them feel hindered as many of them do?**

**A:** The system (in LA County) are on a massive hiring spree to get more social workers to effectively work with this population. We need to lower the current caseload. That's happening with the AB12 unit to specifically address needs of TAY population. AB12 is a specialized unit trained to work with transitional living plans and to get stabilized housing. The issue is finding stable housing for these kids.

**Q: How much money and what benefits do foster youth get through AB12? What are the requirements?**

**A:** To be part of the AB12 program, the foster youth must have an open case and meet one of 5 participation conditions:

- 1) Complete secondary education or equivalent credential (vocational school, community college)
  - 2) Work 80 hours per month
  - 3) Have a medical condition
  - 4) Receive SSI
  - 5) Agree to live in approved housing by DCFS - transitional housing or supervised independent living program (SILP)
- SILP gets \$915 per month. The youth have to pay rent and be responsible for themselves. They must have a SILP assessment and housing must be approved by DCFS.

**Q: What percentage of youth on AB12 are dropped from program?**

**A:** There is no specific percentage; we are just starting to keep statistics. It is very unlikely the minor will be asked to leave the program.

**Q: With all of the new health care changes or potential changes, has the covered to 26 already been cut or modified or have there been no changes yet?**

**A:** There have been no changes yet with Coverage 26. Foster kids qualify until they're 26 and after 26 there are different things to look at, for example if they qualify for Medi-Cal (most TAY youth under 26 qualify due to income level).

**Q: Any new changes to the laws?**

**A:** Supervising independent living program (SILP) kids can now go back and live with their parents. Initially they could not go back to their biological parents. Now they are able to, based on approval and assessment from the department. Parents cannot be the payee of the TAY's rent check.

**Q: How are we supporting our LGBT youth?**

**A:** Social workers depend on community resources to help with this. It is hard to find homes and safety for our transgender youth. One of our biggest barriers across the board is housing for this population. There isn't sufficient housing available. We have to look specifically at the populations we're dealing with and connect them to the community resources available. Part of the AB12 social workers job is to connect youth to services so they can become more independent. At 18 they can make up their own mind to get services. We must be motivating and encouraging to get them to agree to the services. They do have a lot of distrust for the department and the system so it's really just making those connections with the clients we work with and knowing what resources are out there for them.

**Q: What is the best way to help TAY who you suspect are using drugs/alcohol?**

**A:** Foster youth come to the unit right around their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. We are always looking to build relationships so they do trust us. If there is drug use, we make referrals and transport TAY youth to the services they need. They can refuse to go to these services. It's really about connecting them and guiding them and telling them the benefits of getting clean and sober. There are substance abuse navigators and resources we can connect them with and really support them in getting off substances they're using.

**Q: Are there resources available for TAY to help teach basic life skills?**

**A:** We connect our TAY youth to mentors who can mentor them through different skills, such as banking, transportation, financial aid, scholarships, etc. It's more about a mentoring relationship at this age. If they go into transitional housing, they have their own program where a social worker comes in and teaches them the skills they need to know to become independent. Money management is one of the biggest lessons these kids need to know. Social workers see these clients once a month, which is why they make sure to connect them with services in the community. As they get ready to age out they are connected to different skills programs. It is easier under 18 to mandate them to go to these independent living skills programs. Again, it's about connecting them to mentors that can help them navigate life skills.

**Q: What do you think are the major gaps in services for TAY?**

**A:** Finding safe housing. There is not enough housing for this group of kids. If they don't want to go into transitional housing, they're out on the streets at that point. Sometimes they bounce from different shelters. It's about trying to get that connection to find safe and stable housing. Without housing they can't get a job, go to school, etc. Mental health services are another gap. TAY youth can decline mental health services. They usually feel so jaded from the therapists coming in and out of their lives under 18. It's about building that trust again so they'll go to a counselor.

**Q: We are a Victim Services dept. What are some procedures, laws rights we should know when it comes to foster youth who are possibly victim of sexual assault or domestic violence?**

**A:** When talking about TAY youth (18-21), you have to stick with the reporting laws. They're 18 and adults but developmentally they're not mature enough yet. They fall under the same adult reporting laws. They have to want help and ask for help. If informed consent is signed, they can speak to a youth's social worker. All consent forms must be signed before talking to a social worker. If they don't want help, you can't force that help on them. You have to work with the client to get them to make reports they need to make, i.e. going to the hospital for sexual assault or going to the police department.

**Q: General tips to help uplift and inspire TAY, especially when talking about future.**

**A:** It's showing them that they can trust you and being there for them. Once you build that trust we can make the next steps to helping them. When they've been through the system or foster homes, they don't trust anyone. So using those skills to build trust and rapport. Knowing that if they're resistant it's their defense mechanism. As frustrating as it is when they aren't following what they want them to, we have to step back and address that defense mechanism and realize it's not specific to us, it's not personal. Most of these kids just want to know someone is listening. We need to make sure we follow through. TAY needs a lot of time and energy and we need to be there for him. On our side, how are we going to do time management so we can effectively work with them?

**Q: How can the barriers of working with youth with disabilities be removed? Aside from Regional Center there is not much support here in San Diego. A lot of the time youth cannot get much employment support from Regional Center until there are 22 years old. Any additional resources are appreciated!**

**A:** The regional center doesn't kick in until the DCFS case is closed. You can connect them to a group home or a home that specifically works with TAY youth with disabilities. The regional center is the biggest option for connecting kids with disabilities to housing, job skills, job training. How do we get TAY youth to accept the services? We must continue to work with the regional center and advocate for the clients who have disabilities. If the regional center and CPS can work together, there is a better chance of supporting youth.

**Q: Now that we are able to approve SILPs in the home of offending parents, will there be services tailored towards these youth to help them adjust to their living environment and maintaining their safety as an adult?**

**A:** Safety is always talked about. If trauma hasn't been resolved with parents that needs to be addressed. Connect the youth with mental health services and counseling. A SILP Inspection will be done on the house and the home needs to pass inspection. Since the law has changed, there isn't really a safety assessment for the parents. It's strictly on whether the home is safe. Since this law just came into effect, I think we have some time to see how this is going to play itself out. Kids will often try to go back with their families. In one way this helps with housing shortage but it does open a can of worms. We have to wait to see what will happen. When working

with TAY, we are always talking about safety and how they can keep themselves safe - what the red flags are, what their safety plan is, etc.

**Q: Advice for coping with the effects of secondary trauma?**

**A:** Self-care, self-care, self-care. We have to know when to turn our phones off. If you have the ability to switch off your phone, leave a message saying to call 911 in an emergency so you don't just cut your kids or agency off. Talk to your supervisor. Self-care is not skipping lunch, going for a walk, getting away from your desk, and enjoying your personal time. Stress leads to burn out. Populations won't be effectively serviced if we are burned out. The better we take care of ourselves, the better we can take care of our clients. Spend time with your family and your loved ones and don't think about work. If you need to speak to someone, your own therapist, or someone who deals with secondary trauma, they can help you. Clients need us to be on and do the best job we can.