

CASA Conversations



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Employment and Job Search

Introduction

One of the most important things we can do as CASAs to older youth and young adults is to help them find employment and envision themselves in rewarding careers. A job has many benefits, including financial support and an opportunity to build professional skills and a resume. Plus, if a young adult works at least 80 hours per month and/or is enrolled in a job training program, these endeavors can fulfill the participation requirements for extended foster care (AB12).

The Facts

Resources for finding work:

One-stop Career Center

There is a one-stop career center in virtually every county in California. These centers provide job search assistance, job training, and career planning and exploration. They also have resource rooms with computers and fax and copy machines that youth and young adults can use to write their resumes and fill out applications (many of which are now online). Depending on the site, they may offer help with transportation to job interviews or child care during the job search. One-stop career centers also offer opportunities for eligible youth and young adults ages 14-21 to receive academic tutoring, mentoring, work experience, leadership development, and guidance counseling. Also, foster youth are eligible to participate in the Youth Employment Opportunity Program, which matches youth and young adults ages 15-25 with a peer mentor and targeted services to help them realize their educational and vocational goals.

"It's more than just having a job. It gives us a sense of self and a sense of control. It validates you as a person." – Monica

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Adult Education Venues

Adult education venues often provide hands-on training for trades that can give entry-level applicants a leg up. Remember that community colleges do not require a high school degree or equivalent to enroll in courses. This might be an affordable and structured way for young adults to both acquire job training and become immersed in an academic environment. Vocational training is often the best route to apprenticeships, which provide those new to a field with experience and contacts. Encourage the young adult to pursue opportunities outside of school-based ones as well: professional associations can be a great place to find out about employment opportunities.

Volunteering

Volunteering is another great way to get involved with a field of interest. Organizations are always looking for volunteers, and helping others is a great way to build both one's self-esteem and one's resume. Some successful stints as a volunteer may turn into paid positions, but even when this does not happen, volunteering somewhere garners experience with a field of interest, new relationships, and new skills. Many counties have volunteer centers to connect individuals with organizations: look online to see if your county is one of them.

Independent Living Skills Programs are likely to impart life skills to youth and young adults that will help them in employment as well.

"If my CASA goes with me and gives me a pep talk, pumps me up, gives me a pat on the shoulder, I'll feel empowered and feel like I'm more able." – Monica

Starting a CASA Conversation

- It is helpful to share your own experiences of early employment with the young adult. For example, if you're now an attorney but then worked at a dry cleaners, it will help the young adult to see that one's first job is simply an opportunity to make money and gain experience, not what you must do for the rest of your life (or even the rest of the year). If you're doing something related today, it can illustrate that our early experiences with work can be particularly formative.
- You may wish to let them brainstorm about what they would like to do – and help them develop the steps needed to get there. If their goal is to be a hip hop musician who gets paid for their work, have they actually composed any songs? The goal isn't to discourage, but to guide them in outlining steps to their "dream job." No matter what the position is, their first job is a stepping stone – even if it isn't directly related, it will help them learn more about their skills and interests.
- Introduce them to the local web sites for employment- virtually every community has online job posting web sites.
- Find out about local job fairs and attend one with your youth; again, most communities have job fairs several times a year – they are often at local community colleges. This can be an excellent place to be able to ask questions of professionals in many different fields and get a sense of what careers are available in your area.

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- At the beginning of the job search, encourage the youth to apply for as many jobs as they can find. Many retail and food service outlets continually accept applications, so encourage him to apply at places that interest him, even if those places aren't currently hiring.
- Practice with your youth filling out an application so that when they go into a store, etc., they have their answers thought out ahead of time (most job applications ask the same series of standard questions).
- Help your youth set up informational interviews; sometimes just getting in the door is the beginning of a successful job experience. Explain that this is not a job interview, but an opportunity to explore different careers and talk to adults in the workforce. Most people are willing to give informational interviews because they are not being asked to give someone a job.
- If your youth has narrowed in on "the perfect job," support her in applying, but also help her to see that "perfect jobs" are hard to come by, and sometimes, a seemingly less-than-perfect job can provide a productive learning experience.
- Much of landing a job is about first impressions, so help your youth practice hers.

Some things to role play include:

Phone
etiquette

Professional
grooming
and dress

Firm
handshakes
with sincere
eye contact

The importance of
thanking others for
their time and
attention, including
thank you notes

Quickly and effectively communicating your work goal and relevant experience:

For example, "I am friendly, social, and love fashion. I want to work in retail because it will give me an opportunity to talk to people about something I love, and I know my passion will help me sell your product." Developing an elevator speech can be a great self-esteem booster, too!

Pitfalls to Avoid

We have all seen jobs advertised that are less than realistic: "Make thousands from home in 10 hours per month." Help the young person you are working with be able to discern honest, reputable ads for employment from less reliable ones. For example, does the employer have an office, or just a P.O. Box?

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Explain what realistic advertisements look like, and that if it looks too good to be true, it probably is!

Don't let your youth give up too soon! It is difficult for any teen or young adult to find work in this economy, so they may have to persevere. Help your youth hang in there, perhaps by volunteering while continuing to fill out applications.

Another pitfall can be giving up a post-secondary education for a "good job" now. It may be that your youth has a job they love that will turn into a career path with great income, but this is unlikely. What seems like good pay for someone at 16 will not look as good as an adult paying all one's own expenses. Help them with realistic budgets (covered in another CASA conversation), so that they know that they may need to continue their education, which is the greatest predictor of living above the poverty level.

"CASAs should remember to always, always, tell youth that they're proud of them when they're done [with a job interview]." - Janelle

"Be there when we walk out ... it's good to know there's somebody that's going to be there waiting for you – to vent or celebrate." - Fabian

Additional Resources

California Employment Development Department

"Services for Youth" For more California-wide, youth-targeted employment services, search engines, and opportunities, including the Youth Employment Opportunity Program, visit the http://www.edd.ca.gov/jobs_and_training/Services_for_Youth.htm

Casey Family Programs

"It's My Life: Employment Guide," (2006)
<http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/ItsMyLife/Employment.htm>

Job Corps

A free federal career education and job training program that helps young people earn their high school degree or equivalent and train for and land a job. To be eligible, young people must be at least 16 years old and qualify as low income. Visit their website or call for more information: 1-800-733-JOBS
<http://www.jobcorps.gov/Home.aspx>

Job Search resources

You can find your local one-stop career center here:
http://www.edd.ca.gov/jobs_and_training/pubs/osfile.pdf

Non-profit and volunteer opportunities

www.idealists.org or www.volunteermatch.org/

Planning for a career

Here you can find a personality test and results that include occupation matches

<http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes2.asp>

Resume Samples and Tips

Resume how-to and tips for teens

<http://jobsearch.about.com/od/resumesandcoverletters/a/teenresumetips.htm>

Resume, no work experience

http://www.oet.ky.gov/des/vws/resume/hs_noexp_resume.asp

Youth advocate resume

<http://www.bestsampleresume.com/sample-social-worker-resume/youth-advocate-resume.html>