

# HUMBOLDT COUNTY TRANSITION AGE YOUTH COLLABORATION Second Year Evaluation

**y.o.u.t.h.**  
training project



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2008, the Humboldt County Transition Age Youth Collaboration (HCTAYC) was launched in partnership with the County's Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project, California Youth Connection, and Youth In Mind. The overarching goal of this initiative is to build an effective, responsive, and youth-informed transition age youth (TAY)-serving system of care.

### The desired outcomes of HCTAYC's work include:

- ▶ Transition age youth will increase their knowledge, skills, and capacity to engage in decision-making and policy-setting within TAY-serving programs.
- ▶ There will be increased awareness and understanding of TAY and their associated needs within DHHS and the Humboldt community.
- ▶ There will be a mechanism and protocols for integrating youth input into DHHS policies.
- ▶ Humboldt County will operate an effective, responsive, and youth-informed Humboldt County TAY-serving system of care.

The Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project, HCTAYC's lead agency, contracted with Korwin Consulting, an independent evaluation firm, to evaluate the impact of HCTAYC using the experiences and insights of HCTAYC project staff, collaborative partners, county DHHS staff, community members, and youth members. With data from post-training surveys, key internal project documents, and interviews with key stakeholders, this evaluation is designed to capture the progress of the second year of HCTAYC and its impact on transition age youth, county staff, and the system of care in Humboldt County.

## FINDINGS

### YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

**Training.** HCTAYC provides leadership development and professional skills training to increase youth capacities in decision-making and policy setting. Three training workshops, one on digital storytelling, one on policy, and the third on community/youth organizing were conducted this year.<sup>1</sup>

**Conferences.** HCTAYC youth members attended five state and national conferences to develop their leadership skills and knowledge about policies affecting children and youth. Participation in the various conferences allowed youth from Humboldt County to share their experiences with youth from different regions, and learn about larger issues facing TAY nationwide.

**Youth Advisory Board.** The Youth Advisory Board (YAB) is comprised of a diverse group of youth from Humboldt County. Through their involvement in HCTAYC, YAB members developed critical professional skills through conducting presentations for various agencies in Humboldt County, testifying at policy hearings in Sacramento, preparing policy recommendations for Humboldt County's DHHS, and participating on local boards and engaging in other policy-related discussions.

<sup>1</sup> Evaluation findings are only available for the digital storytelling and policy trainings.

## **HCTAYC's PRESENCE IN THE LARGER COMMUNITY**

**All key stakeholders interviewed notice the growing presence and engagement of TAY in Humboldt County.** HCTAYC organized various events that were open to the general public and participated in numerous meetings and forums organized by more than a dozen agencies and organizations in Humboldt County. The *Times-Standard*, a local newspaper, has featured HCTAYC and its activities in six articles since October of 2009.

HCTAYC has represented the experiences of Humboldt youth and advocated for youth services to various state bodies including the California State Assembly.

DHHS staff members have also shared the work of HCTAYC in different settings and forums throughout California. For example, staff participated in a panel discussion at the University of California Davis to discuss the integration of foster care and behavioral health in October of 2009. Additionally, the Humboldt County DHHS director, Phillip Crandall, shared the goals and progress of HCTAYC to the Children's Advocacy Institute of University of San Diego School of Law in March of 2010.

Collectively these presentations are increasing the visibility of HCTAYC and TAY in general.

### **IMPACT OF HCTAYC ON TAY**

HCTAYC engaged a diverse group of TAY in 2010, including youth accessing various branches of DHHS services, youth involved with the juvenile justice system, and students attending the local university and community college in Humboldt County.

Both DHHS and HCTAYC project staff indicate that youth are beginning to show initiative in advocating for themselves and for other youth. One explains, "Youth are more outspoken in the meetings," and another observes, "Youth have a stronger presence: Last year, we were inviting them to tell us what they thought, and they did. This year, they are taking the initiative in giving feedback."

### **HCTAYC has had the most visible impact on Youth Advisory Board members — the core youth leaders of the project.**

Youth Advisory Board members feel that their involvement in HCTAYC has increased their self-esteem, confidence, and independence. They report that they feel more confident in public speaking and comfortable in presenting their opinions to county staff and adults. Project staff concur with these findings, noting a growing maturity and stability among Youth Advisory Board members. Project staff appreciate the continuity of a few Youth Advisory Board members, and the youths' ability to organize themselves.

HCTAYC project staff, collaborating partners, and Youth Advisory Board members find that providing youth access to multiple educational opportunities, one-on-one coaching from staff, and a contained environment to focus allows for more successful youth engagement in systems improvement. Project staff also identify challenges in building the capacity and engagement of the youth. They describe major obstacles TAY experience in meeting their basic needs, and the challenges HCTAYC faces in engaging youth with diverse educational backgrounds, learning abilities, and maturity levels.

## IMPACT ON DHHS COUNTY SYSTEMS

HCTAYC youth members are providing input to staff of various county units by sitting in on decision-making meetings, participating in working groups, and joining the county Mental Health Board. Additionally, youth have presented the challenges facing TAY and their associated needs to more than a dozen TAY-serving agencies in Humboldt County, and four state bodies in the Capitol.

In Year One, several key stakeholders reported that DHHS leadership's mandate to obtain the input of TAY in county systems was the primary reason behind their engagement of TAY. **In Year Two, all key stakeholders notice a general shift among upper and, in some cases, mid-level DHHS managers in their awareness and understanding of the value of TAY input on program-related decisions.** One expression—county staff are actively inviting youth to participate in more meetings and events than ever before.

**Many key stakeholders attribute their increased awareness and understanding of TAY issues to their involvement with HCTAYC youth.** A county staff member cites her experience with youth engagement, "When we have included youth, we have learned that they have something to teach us." Another explains, "When we bring youth to the table now, [their] perspective is like having another professional perspective with a respected opinion in the room."

Increased exposure to youth input through shared meetings and trainings organized by TAY appears to be increasing the value that the county staff place on TAY engagement.

While there appears to be a shift in thinking among leadership staff, many key

stakeholders believe that line staff do not yet share the same level of understanding and appreciation of engaging TAY in program planning. Line staff who are not involved in HCTAYC do not have the opportunity to be exposed to TAY input that might lead them to see value in that perspective. **Key stakeholders share that in order to fully engage youth at all levels of the county system, a larger cultural shift across all leadership and line staff to value youth input is needed.**

Many stakeholders believe that HCTAYC is a useful mechanism to invite youth input. They see that HCTAYC not only provides a structure to access a pool of youth leaders but ensures they have the capacity to provide credible input, as well as making county staff feel accountable to TAY feedback. Further, several county staff see more value in true youth engagement at the practical level rather than formal policy and procedures that dictate youth engagement on a bureaucratic level.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve HCTAYC's effectiveness, key stakeholders recommend increasing staff support for HCTAYC's Youth Organizer, Rochelle Trochtenberg, increasing the county's involvement as a collaborating partner, and improving the Youth Advisory Board by training and retaining a consistent group of youth leaders from Humboldt.

To better engage TAY in county systems improvement and better serve TAY, key stakeholders recommend continuing to educate county staff about the value of youth input, providing more opportunities for TAY to interact with all levels of county staff, changing TAY-serving county staff's working hours to coincide with TAY's school

schedules, hiring county staff who are better able to work with youth, and identifying an internal champion to promote TAY input within DHHS.

## **EVALUATOR'S RECOMMENDATIONS**

Reflecting on all recommendations made by key stakeholders, the evaluator recommends that HCTAYC pay special attention to the following suggestions voiced by multiple stakeholders:

- ▶ Expand the core group of talented youth leaders to increase youth leadership in Humboldt County.
- ▶ Increase the number of local HCTAYC staff to better support the collaborative's work in Humboldt County.
- ▶ Advocate for a permanent youth presence in various county departments beyond the Mental Health Board.
- ▶ Increase the number of opportunities for more county staff to interact with transition age youth and HCTAYC.
- ▶ Collaborate with Children's Center and Sempervirens Psychiatric Health Facility staff to share and disseminate findings from the youth surveys conducted at each site with HCTAYC partners.

## **CONCLUSION**

In its second year, HCTAYC continues to build on its first year's efforts to develop a county health and human services system that is more effective and informed on TAY issues, a strong community of youth voices in the county, and empowerment of transition age youth to shape the local systems of care.

HCTAYC successfully organized a core group of youth leaders to engage in decision-making and policy setting within Humboldt

County. A growing awareness of TAY needs within DHHS is leading to increased involvement of HCTAYC youth in county systems. Further, in HCTAYC's second year, a growing number of county departments actively sought youth input at various meetings and events.

Through HCTAYC, transition age youth are increasingly engaged in the policy process in Humboldt County and in some cases, in the State Capitol. Youth are gaining confidence to take on leadership roles to advocate for other youth. As a result of the work of HCTAYC, the Humboldt community is increasingly aware of the issues and associated needs of transition age youth.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2008, the Humboldt County Transition Age Youth Collaborative (HCTAYC) was launched in partnership with the County's Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project, California Youth Connection, and Youth In Mind. Now in its second year, the overarching goal of this initiative continues to be to build an effective, responsive, and youth-informed transition age youth (TAY)-serving system of care.

HCTAYC partners believe the most effective way to improve TAY-serving systems of care is to develop ongoing mechanisms for engaging youth in providing input about the services provided by DHHS and other TAY-serving programs within the County. The work is guided by a Theory of Change that has evolved since the end of Year One to reflect this larger reach.

### **The desired outcomes of HCTAYC's work include:**

- ▶ Transition age youth will increase their knowledge, skills, and capacity to engage in decision-making and policy-setting within TAY-serving programs.
- ▶ There will be increased awareness and understanding of TAY and their associated needs within DHHS and the Humboldt community.
- ▶ There will be a mechanism and protocols for integrating youth input into DHHS policies.
- ▶ Humboldt County will operate an effective, responsive, and youth-informed Humboldt County TAY-serving system of care.

*(Please see the Theory of Change in the Appendix of this report for complete list of outcomes.)*

During its first year, HCTAYC formed a Youth Advisory Board of local TAY with diverse life experiences and cultural identities. The project staff and collaborating partners used a capacity-building approach, based on the principles of positive youth development, to support and prepare youth for providing input into DHHS processes and programs. Through these efforts, TAY reported increasing their self-esteem and confidence to take on leadership roles in their community. As a result, Humboldt County has begun to integrate youth voices into decision-making and policy-setting processes.

HCTAYC's work in its second year builds upon findings, successes, and recommendations from year one. It was designed to achieve progress toward the following specific goals:

- ▶ Conduct strategic planning with the Humboldt community to build a Transition Age Youth Center.
- ▶ Expand leadership opportunities for Humboldt County Youth.
- ▶ Strengthen communication and collaboration among HCTAYC partners.
- ▶ Continue to improve County services.
- ▶ Market and publicize HCTAYC success and areas of interest.

## **EVALUATING PROGRESS**

With these objectives in mind, the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project, HCTAYC's lead agency, contracted with Korwin Consulting, an independent evaluation firm, to assess the effectiveness of HCTAYC. This evaluation is designed to capture the progress of HCTAYC's second year and its impact on transition age youth, county staff, and the system of care in Humboldt County. It draws on the experiences and insights of HCTAYC project staff, collaborative partners, County DHHS staff, community members, and youth members through sixteen in-depth interviews, along with data from two post-training surveys, and nine key internal project documents.

## FINDINGS

### YOUTH ENGAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP, AND OPPORTUNITIES

***Have transition age youth (TAY) increased their knowledge, skills, and capacity to engage in decision making and policy setting within DHHS?***

#### YOUTH DEVELOPMENT TRAININGS

HCTAYC seeks to expand opportunities for transition age youth to develop leadership skills and knowledge about policy, the county system of TAY care, and needs of transition age youth in Humboldt County and nationwide. In 2010, HCTAYC held three training workshops on digital storytelling, community/youth organizing, and policy to further develop the capacity of transition age youth in Humboldt County.

Fifty-eight youth attended the trainings<sup>2</sup>: Ten at Digital Storytelling (Training One), 26 at Policy (Training Two), and 22 at Community/Youth Organizing (Training Three). Most are between 16 and 25 years of age, and the majority are female (67 percent in Training One and 52 percent in Training Two).<sup>3</sup>

The participants come from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, with the largest percentage being Caucasian, followed by Tribal youth, and youth from multi-racial heritages. Many of the youth have accessed Independent Living Skills, housing resources, food programs, and health services. Most youth in one or the other training participated in Youth In Mind (67 percent in Training One) or California Youth Connection (72 percent in Training Two).

*(Please see tables in the Appendix for further details about participating youth.)*

#### DIGITAL STORYTELLING (Training One)

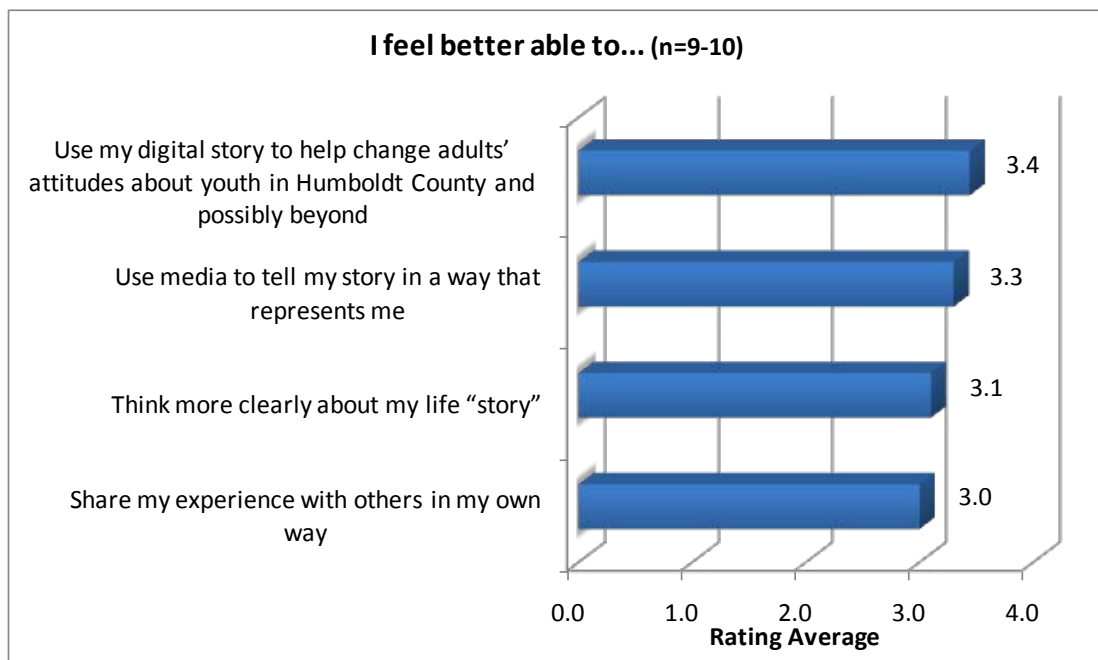
Participants in the digital storytelling training gained technical skills in using this medium to tell their life stories and share their experiences with employees of child welfare, mental health, and other systems serving transition age youth and the larger community.

The chart below shows that following the training, youth rate highly their abilities to use their digital story to change adults' attitudes about youth, and to use media to tell a story that represents them. Using a four-point scale ("1" = "strongly disagree" and "4" = "strongly agree"), youth participants at this training also indicate an increase in their ability to think more clearly and to share their experiences in their own way.

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<sup>2</sup> This is a duplicative count, as several youth attended more than one training.

<sup>3</sup> There was no evaluation conducted of Training Three therefore demographic characteristics and survey data are presented for Trainings One and Two only.



Ninety percent of the youth report that they will use computer skills gained in this training in the future. The ten digital stories that were produced through this training will be used in trainings, presentations, and meetings to educate DHHS staff and other community members about the lived experience of transition age youth.

The benefits of the training go beyond learning new skills. Ninety percent of the youth say that they “feel more powerful in the world as a result of the training,” that is, more skillful, experienced, and brave. Many of the youth also believe that this training helped them feel more connected to others. The following comments illustrate some of their important gains related to finding their voice, gaining news skills, and connecting with others:

- ▶ “It helped me get my story out and helped me understand the problems of others.”
- ▶ “I learned new computer skills that will carry with me through life.”
- ▶ “I really appreciate this opportunity. I think it's an excellent way to voice things. This process could potentially prevent ‘suicide attempts’ due to emotional/stress build-up.”

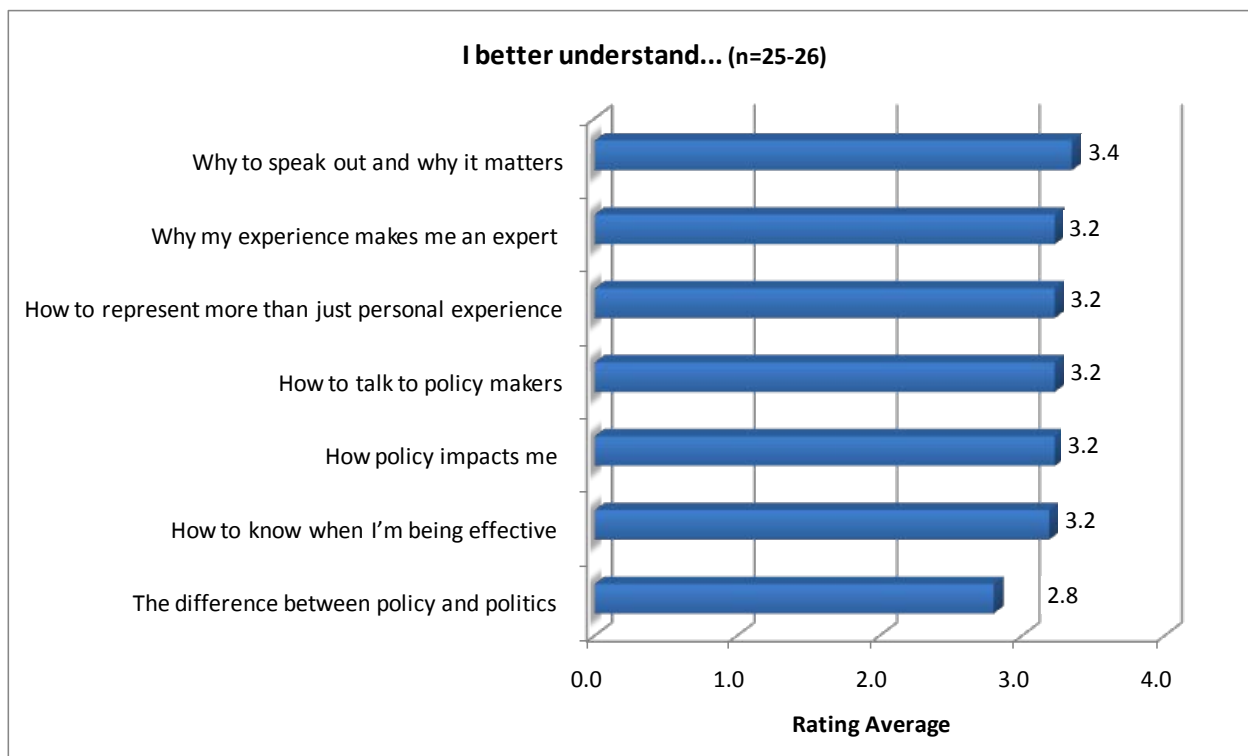
The youth also offer recommendation for future digital storytelling workshops including:

- ▶ Greater freedom in “telling their story the way they want to tell it.”
- ▶ Flexibility in selecting the length of their digital story.
- ▶ Ideally more time to work on their stories.

## POLICY (Training Two)

At the heart of HCTAYC is the goal to increase youths' capacity to effect lasting systems change that will improve the lives of transition age youth. To this end, the policy training had a strong focus on building youths' understanding of policy, how youth can be affected by policy, and how they can participate in the policy process. In this training, youth participants learned about how policy is created and implemented, why working on policy is important, what HCTAYC's goals are, and how to join the collaborative in its policy work.

After this training, youth participants rated their gains in understanding on a scale of 1 to 4, ("1" = "strongly disagree" and "4" = "strongly agree"). The chart below shows that youth participants made a number of gains in their understanding of policy, with the greatest gain in their understanding of why youth need to speak out and why policy matters.



The policy training also helped many of the youth feel better able to express themselves and make changes in policy affecting them and other youth in Humboldt. Youth commented on specific aspects of the training experience that they found most useful:

- ▶ "Looking at the local and statewide people who are involved in policy."
- ▶ "Learning about analyzing motives of people in power."
- ▶ "Learning new stuff about the community and everything."
- ▶ "I really liked the 'what I bring' activity; it reminded me that I'm not useless and/or irrelevant."

They also offer recommendations to strengthen future policy trainings including:

- ▶ “Try to get the main point across in a shorter period of time.”
- ▶ “Have more activities and have them where we can move around.”
- ▶ “More questions and answers like at the end.”
- ▶ “Role playing.”

## CONFERENCES

HCTAYC youth members attended five conferences this past year to further develop their leadership skills and knowledge about state and national policies affecting children and youth. Participation in the various conferences allowed youth from Humboldt County to share their experiences with youth from different regions and learn about larger issues facing TAY nationwide.

Approximately 17 HCTAYC youth, including Youth Advisory Board members, attended the following conferences in 2010:

### Statewide

- ▶ Youth In Mind Leadership Summit
- ▶ California Youth Connection’s 2010 Summer Leadership and Policy Conference
- ▶ California Youth Connections Day at the Capitol Conference
- ▶ California Mental Health Advocates for Children and Youth & Youth In Mind Youth Leadership Academy
- ▶ Administrative Office of the Court’s Beyond the Bench Conference

### Nationwide

- ▶ The National Resource Center for Youth Service’s National Pathways to Adulthood Conference
- ▶ The Daniel Memorial Institute’s 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual National Independent Livings Conference, “Growing Pains 2010”

## YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

The Youth Advisory Board (YAB) consists of five youth, two former foster youth and three youth with experiences in mental health care and transitional housing services in Humboldt County. These YAB members form an integral part of HCTAYC. (Two of the members also served on the YAB in 2009.) Since last year, there was a gradual turnover of the YAB—three of the four former YAB members left the board due to changing personal, educational and professional circumstances, and others came on to take their place. Project staff and YAB members explain that some of the former board members left due to their relocation outside of Humboldt County, or their need to focus on other priorities in their life.

During the YAB members’ involvement in HCTAYC, they sought to develop a set of critical professional skills through their work in improving the Humboldt County system of care, conducting presentations to various county agencies, and preparing policy recommendations for the County’s Department of Health and Human Services.

YAB members report developing the following capacities:

- ▶ Inter-personal skills and the ability to connect with other youth and adults
- ▶ Professional skills in public speaking, presentation, problem solving, leadership, time management, and facilitation
- ▶ Knowledge of Humboldt County systems and the ability to work within these systems to change policy

**Almost all DHHS County staff indicate noticing the increased engagement of YAB members this year as compared to last:**

- ▶ “The youth are very well-organized in providing feedback.”
- ▶ “They’ve shown remarkable maturity in trying to engage in our system.”
- ▶ “They [HCTAYC] have a stronger advisory group. Those folks [youth] that are attending meetings with DHHS staff appear more comfortable speaking out and asking questions.”
- ▶ “I see spontaneous pride, confidence, and empowerment from youth. I see more leadership from youth.”
- ▶ “HCTAYC has taken the time to assist many of our youth to become better speakers and to make presentations, and the youth are being taken more seriously by adults in the community.”
- ▶ “I am impressed by HCTAYC’s ability to increase knowledge of the youth in our community. I see that the presentations from the Youth Advisory Board contribute to local conferences and trainings provided by the county.”

HCTAYC project staff observe a growing maturity and stability of the Youth Advisory Board members. Project staff appreciate the continuity of a few board members and the youths’ ability to organize themselves. While the recruitment of Youth Advisory Board members has been successful this year, HCTAYC project staff would like to see less turnover in the board and establish more continuity of youth participation. Project staff and Youth Advisory Board members look forward to continuing to refine youths’ skills through increased leadership development training activities in the coming year.

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## **HCTAYC’S PRESENCE IN THE LARGER COMMUNITY**

### **HUMBOLDT COMMUNITY**

All stakeholders see that HCTAYC has increased its presence in Humboldt County over this past year. HCTAYC organized various events that were open to the general public and participated in numerous meetings and forums organized by more than a dozen agencies in Humboldt County. In January, HCTAYC organized a TAY Center planning event which engaged 105 members of the Humboldt community, including service providers, educators, youth, and interested community members.

HCTAYC youth members participated in a range of presentations and events held by a number of agencies from the larger Humboldt community, including the Board of Supervisors, Juvenile

Justice, Humboldt State University, among others. In the project's second year, HCTAYC has also increased its media presence by obtaining coverage in a local newspaper, the *Times-Standard*, including five news articles featuring HCTAYC and its goals and activities. Many key stakeholders believe that HCTAYC's strong presence in the community is contributing to the community's increased awareness of TAY and different issues faced by TAY in Humboldt County.

Numerous TAY who are not involved with HCTAYC directly have most likely benefitted by its work as they access services at the Children's Center and the Sempervirens Psychiatric Health Facility improved in part from implementation of HCTAYC's youth recommendations. One YAB member observes this awareness from other TAY, "I have friends who have been in the Children's Center and Sempervirens Psychiatric Health Facility. I have heard stories from a friend who is in the Center now and say that it is a lot nicer environment compared to before." He continues, "HCTAYC has popped up in my conversations with friends who are outside of HCTAYC. Other youth outside of HCTAYC also wants to know what's happening at HCTAYC so they can make a difference as well."

## STATEWIDE PRESENCE

HCTAYC has represented the experiences of Humboldt youth and advocated for youth services to various state bodies including the California State Assembly during this past year.

DHHS staff members have also shared the work of HCTAYC in different settings and forums throughout California. For example, staff participated in a panel discussion at the University of California Davis to discuss the integration of foster care and behavioral health in October of 2009. Additionally, the Humboldt County DHHS director, Phillip Crandall, shared the goals and progress of HCTAYC to the Children's Advocacy Institute of University of San Diego School of Law in March of 2010.

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## IMPACT OF HCTAYC ON TAY

***Have transition age youth engaged in informing Humboldt County DHHS system of care and other transition age youth-serving programs?***

## GROWING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

**All key stakeholders interviewed, including Youth Advisory Board members, county staff, HCTAYC project staff, one collaborating partner and one community member, notice a growing engagement and presence of TAY youth in Humboldt County.**

HCTAYC project staff note that a major achievement of the second year's efforts is successfully engaging a diverse youth population through expanded recruitment and outreach in Humboldt County. In the first year, HCTAYC relied on the county's Independent Living Skills program to recruit foster youth. This year, recruitment efforts include outreach to youth accessing mental

health services, homeless youth, youth from the Juvenile Justice system, non-foster youth, and youth from the Humboldt State University.

As a result of these outreach efforts, youth participating in HCTAYC vary in their backgrounds and ages. In Year One, a majority of the youth were between 18 to 20 years of age. In Year Two, youth start as young as 15 and extend to 26 years of age. Project staff estimates that about 60 Humboldt youth have participated in various HCTAYC activities, and each event included new youth participants. A project staff says, “We have probably doubled the number of people participating and the number of people we outreached to.”

## **ENGAGEMENT INSIDE HUMBOLDT COUNTY DHHS**

**All key stakeholders interviewed believe that HCTAYC youth are increasingly vocal in Humboldt County within DHHS systems and beyond.** Another major achievement pointed out by HCTAYC project staff is youths’ increased involvement in various county departments. One project staff member notes, “[Staff in] various systems are coming to us to ask for feedback, which is a big change this year. Different units are calling us to invite youth input.” HCTAYC youth members conduct trainings for DHHS County staff and sit in on meetings or workgroups on a regular basis. Increased youth involvement in various decision-making processes at the county level indicate the growing engagement of youth, whose input is contributing to a more TAY-informed DHHS system of care in Humboldt.

### **HCTAYC youth are engaged in the following DHHS and other County Department efforts:**

- ▶ Participating in ongoing policy recommendations follow-up work meetings regarding the County’s Children’s Center and Sempervirens Psychiatric Health Facility. (The recommendations were delivered in August 2009, and follow-up meetings have been held since.)
  - Participating in a subcommittee that is redesigning programs at the Children’s Center
- ▶ Developing policy recommendations for Independent Living Skills program (DHHS—Child Welfare) and county homeless services
- ▶ Joining the Mental Health Board
- ▶ Participating in the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) Committee meetings
- ▶ Coordinating the planning process for a new TAY center, a one-stop center for TAY to access a support network from peers, adults, and county services
- ▶ Participating in the Youth Transition Action Team Initiative in Humboldt County
- ▶ Participating in the two Soloist presentations facilitated by the MHSA PEI Stigma Reduction Committee
- ▶ Presenting to the Child Welfare System

## ENGAGEMENT ELSEWHERE IN HUMBOLDT COUNTY

In Year One, HCTAYC youth members' involvement was focused on providing input into Humboldt County's DHHS. In Year Two, HCTAYC youth members expanded their focus to reach DHHS and beyond. They report increasing involvement in meetings with other TAY-service agencies and programs in the county in which they are invited to voice their opinions on various issues, share their experiences, and promote the work of HCTAYC in various community platforms in Humboldt County.

### HCTAYC youth members have presented to the following non-DHHS agencies in Humboldt County:

- ▶ Humboldt County *Beyond the Bench* Conference, an annual conference bringing professionals together to discuss services and issues related to the juvenile justice system
- ▶ Humboldt County Board of Supervisors
- ▶ California Youth Empowerment Network (CAYEN)
- ▶ Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Humboldt County, a National Association that is recruiting, training and supporting volunteers to represent the best interests of abused and neglected children in the courtroom and other settings
- ▶ Humboldt State University — Former Foster Youth Club, Hand-in-Hand, ELITE Scholar's program, and various social work-related classes
- ▶ Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Commission
- ▶ Humboldt Housing and Homeless Coalition
- ▶ North Coast Youth Summit, an annual conference designed to increase the leadership skills of youth and empower them to become agents of change in the world
- ▶ Soroptimists International, a worldwide organization for women in management and professions, working through service projects to advance human rights and the status of women
- ▶ St. Joseph Hospital's "Teens and Their Unique Needs Conference"
- ▶ Teen Adult Partnership for Enhancing Strategies Toward Responsible Youth Initiative (TAPESTRY) of the Humboldt County Office of Education
- ▶ Planned Parenthood
- ▶ Public Health Branch-Community Wellness Center

## ENGAGEMENT AT THE STATE LEVEL

In addition to attending statewide conferences, HCTAYC youth members have brought their voices to a number of state bodies at the Capitol. The youth have shared their digital stories and experiences as transition age youth and made presentations to the following groups in Sacramento:

- ▶ *Take A Foster Youth to the Capitol Day*
- ▶ California Connected by 25 Initiative's (CC25I) Safe and Thriving Futures Training
- ▶ Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission

During *Take a Foster Youth to the Capitol Day*, five youth members from HCTAYC visited the State Capitol to present to the California State Assembly Budget Sub-Committee on Health and Human Services. The youth presented their digital stories to help Assembly Members understand the challenges foster youth face and the need to fund this vulnerable population. During their visit, the budget Subcommittee on Health and Human Services voted unanimously to restore the \$133 million Child Welfare Services funding to the budget. The success of the event was covered by the local newspaper, the *Times-Standard*. The news article notes that Assemblyman Wesley Chesbro was so impressed by Preston Massey, a HCTAYC Youth Advisory Board member who shadowed Chesbro on the Assembly floor, that he offered Massey an internship at the Assemblyman's office in Humboldt County<sup>4</sup>.

The value of youth input in statewide legislation is also evidenced by the recent passage of AB 12, which extends foster care services from age 18 to 21. HCTAYC promoted youths' support of the bill and exposed legislators to the voices of foster youth through digital story presentations and accompanying youth to meet with legislators in the Capitol, as part of a statewide effort that advocated for this bill.

## YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Over the course of youth members' involvement in HCTAYC, project staff and collaborating partners see the youth increase their understanding of the needs of other TAY and their growing role in improving the county's care system. As the youth are gaining a better understanding of the diverse needs of TAY, they become empowered to take leadership roles to make changes in the county's care system through their involvement with HCTAYC. Project staff explain that as the youth members get exposure to a diverse range of youth from the county and other regions, they begin to learn about challenges faced by others. One project staff member explains, "We are really building a community of youth through HCTAYC, they are now gaining a better understanding of each other."

Youth are also showing their increased ownership of HCTAYC and making their involvement in HCTAYC a priority. One Youth Advisory Board member describes her increased leadership role in HCTAYC, "There have been a few times when an [HCTAYC staff] member was out of town, I still went to the meeting. Normally [the staff] makes the announcements about HCTAYC and upcoming events, and I did those in her absence." She continues, "I noticed that some of the other youth thought that I was a staff member and they were surprised to hear that I am not staff."

Both county staff and project staff see youth beginning to show initiative in advocating for themselves and for other youth. One explains, "Youth are more outspoken in the meetings." Another observes, "Youth have a stronger presence. Last year, we were inviting them to tell us what they thought and they did. This year, they are taking the initiative in giving feedback." County staff and project staff believe this change can be attributed to the youths' involvement

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<sup>4</sup> Donna Tam, Local Foster Youth Spend a Day at the State Capitol. *Time-Standard*, May 2, 2010

in HCTAYC and the support they receive from the project. “It is clear that the training and support that HCTAYC is providing is resulting in really good outcomes,” states a county staff member.

## IMPACT ON YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

HCTAYC has the most visible impact on Youth Advisory Board members — the core youth leaders of the project. Youth Advisory Board members feel that their involvement in HCTAYC has increased their self-esteem, confidence, and independence. They feel more confident in public speaking and comfortable presenting their opinions to authority figures.

Youth Advisory Board members say their involvement in HCTAYC allows them to focus on a set of goals and find a new self-identity. All five Youth Advisory Board members indicate the ability to create social change as one of their greatest interests in HCTAYC. During the course of their involvement in HCTAYC, three out of four Youth Advisory Board members have enrolled in college or continued to attend school. Some specifically attribute support from HCTAYC as contributing to their ability and desire to attend college.

Youth Advisory Board members explain how their involvement in HCTAYC has changed them personally in terms of their aspirations, how they relate to others, and how they perceive themselves:

- ▶ “I see myself as a leader, and I now have the ability to make presentations. I am now attending an online university course working on a bachelor’s degree for human health and services. I never thought I would be able to do that prior to HCTAYC.”
- ▶ “I think I have definitely grown as a leader, not only in HCTAYC, but at home I can also use the same leadership skills. I am able to demonstrate my leadership skills to my children at home and at work.”
- ▶ “I feel a little different about myself through gaining the power that I have gained, knowing what I know, and having the ability to talk to people about what I know. It feels empowering, from my part, to know how to talk to these people.”
- ▶ “I guess I am just better at speaking in general. I am better at public speaking and more confident as a facilitator. I think I will use these skills throughout my life.”
- ▶ “I think that I have become more responsible because this is the first time I have been a part of anything this long.”
- ▶ “HCTAYC makes me keep my goals in mind and continue to do what I do.”
- ▶ “Being a youth working towards the same goals as other youth has changed me in a sense that I have a different self-identity.”
- ▶ “I have changed my views of the world. I have learned a lot and changed my view on how I want to help youth.”

## SUCSESSES AND CHALLENGES IN ENGAGING YOUTH

HCTAYC project staff, collaborating partners, and Youth Advisory Board members identify a number of successes and challenges associated with engaging youth in HCTAYC. Many key stakeholders find that having access to multiple educational opportunities allow youth to get informed and continue to be engaged in HCTAYC. A high level of support from HCTAYC staff via one-on-one coaching and training also contribute to successful youth engagement. Others believe that providing a more contained environment, such as the meeting held at UC Davis to prepare the youth for making policy recommendations, allows youth to be more focused and engaged.

One key stakeholder identifies a need to prepare the adults to become more aware and sensitive to youths' needs as a critical factor in successfully encouraging youth to be engaged. One project staff member also believes that having youth members who have been consistently involved with HCTAYC over time and have participated in making policy recommendations through the Youth Advisory Board is key to successfully contributing to systems-level improvements. She explains, "Having Youth Advisory Board members with history in the program and who are well trained has worked well this year."

**Key stakeholders find the diversity in the backgrounds, learning ability, and maturity levels of the youth present a great challenge in preparing them for engagement activities.** Project staff find it time consuming to provide the individual coaching or support required by youth as they come from all walks of life. A project staff member explains, "Sometimes there is a real diversity of educational background; some are in college, some have not graduated from high school, some have symptomatic mental health issues. And working with this diversity of youth can be challenging." A Youth Advisory Board member also comments on the challenge of having youth of diverse characteristics, saying, "I feel like the wide age range of youth is strange because youth can be as old as 26."

All key stakeholders, including Youth Advisory Board members, county staff, project staff, and collaborating partners are concerned about the workload required of staff and constraints of staff resources. Multiple county staff, Youth Advisory Board members, and project staff express major concerns about the overwhelming workload required of Rochelle Trochtenberg, HCTAYC's Youth Organizer, and the need to provide additional support for her role in Humboldt County. Due to the limited number of staff, HCTAYC is not able to provide the level of youth development training project staff and Youth Advisory Board members wish to see. Several stakeholders are also concerned about the overwhelming workload of the Youth Advisory Board members. While county and project staff appreciate the increasing involvement of Youth Advisory Board members in DHHS, they also worry that this may cause burn-out. A county staff explains, "We need to develop talented youth and grow our own youth from our county and not use the same youth over and over again." Many Youth Advisory Board members also expressed that one of the challenges in their involvement with HCTAYC is the time commitment it requires, and it can be difficult to balance this work with their personal life.

**Another major challenge identified by project staff and collaborating partners is the personal obstacles youth face as transition age youth.** This population continues to face tremendous challenges in meeting their basic needs, such as housing, mental and physical health, food, and education. Understandably, juggling these personal challenges can make it difficult at times for youth to prioritize or even sustain their engagement in HCTAYC.

While HCTAYC has a solid structure to engage Youth Advisory Board members, TAY from the larger Humboldt community do not have as many opportunities to participate in HCTAYC. One project staff member suggests that there is a need to develop a plan to consistently engage TAY from the larger community and recruit more youth members to become a core part of HCTAYC.

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## IMPACT ON DHHS COUNTY SYSTEMS

***Have staff in DHHS increased their awareness and understanding of transition age youth (TAY) and their associated needs? Are DHHS staff more prepared to engage youth in decision making and policy setting?***

### SHIFTS IN AWARENESS AND INCLUSION OF TAY

In year one, several key stakeholders referred to DHHS leadership’s mandate to obtain TAY’s input in county systems as the primary reason behind their engagement of TAY. **In year two, all key stakeholders interviewed report a general shift in awareness and understanding of the value of TAY input in DHHS’ upper and in some cases, mid-level managers.** They appear increasingly appreciative of obtaining TAY’s input on program-related decisions. County staff cite the following examples of this growing awareness:

- ▶ “I think that the overall feel or tone of the managers that I engage with — mid-to upper-level management — clearly has changed. There is a more active and excited, and generally speaking, more alive response to HCTAYC activities.”
- ▶ “I do hear people say ‘What do youth think about that,’ and ‘Should we bring youth into this conversation at this point?’ ...When we have included youth, we have learned that they have something to teach us.”
- ▶ “We charged one of our deputies with coming up with a design that would provide oversight to the TAY Division. During a check-in the deputy told me, ‘We’re getting a meeting together and want to be sure that the TAY are available to attend.’”
- ▶ “For me, the change is my understanding of youth needing assistance from a variety of backgrounds.”

**DHHS staff's increased exposure to youth enables them to see the value of youth input.** Many stakeholders attribute this growing awareness among county staff leadership to their involvement with HCTAYC youth. One DHHS staff member explains, "HCTAYC contributed by exposing youth to these conversations and getting DHHS to have youth join in these conversations. The emphasis of DHHS's leadership on the need to bring youth input also contributed to these changes." HCTAYC allows county staff to directly interact with youth by sitting in meetings with young people and by attending a training organized by youth. One county staff member says, "When you watch a training put together by youth which is better than any other training put together before, that is very valuable and staff take away the message that youth are valuable." She continues, "The youth created games for the staff to help them experience the frustration that youth feel...They did a fantastic job; it was the most engaging training I have been to in the entire year!" Another county staff member shares her experience in interacting with youth, "When we bring youth to the table now, [their] perspective is like having another professional perspective with a respected opinion in the room."

Several project staff members and collaborating partners have also witnessed this change in awareness among county staff:

- ▶ "County staff show sincere reflection and appreciation for our work."
- ▶ "DHHS is much more aware that if they want to reach TAY, they need to do things differently. So, they are creating a TAY Division. Their awareness has grown because they are now doing something about it. We are invited to a lot more different events and meetings."
- ▶ "I think that especially the staff that had the opportunity to interact with HCTAYC youth have changed their awareness a little more."

There appears to be a shift in awareness and an ongoing general openness to engage youth within DHHS among leadership staff. More county staff are becoming increasingly committed and excited about engaging youth. This is evidenced by the increasing number of invitations HCTAYC receive from staff involved in various county systems to include youth participation in meetings and events. One HCTAYC project staff member observes, "In the first year, staff turned to HCTAYC to get a youth voice; now they turn to us to ask for youth to engage in meetings." A county staff member notes, "There is an ongoing increase in openness to engage youth and to get input from youth." Another project staff member notices a shift in county staff's willingness to engage youth as the county requests young people to attend meetings, even without HCTAYC staff. She further explains, "I have experienced the county to feel more partnership with youth and be open to engaging TAY in policy development."

HCTAYC project staff also find that a diverse range of staff, including line-level as well as leadership staff, attend trainings organized by HCTAYC. Project staff see trainings as critical in engaging county staff as they help the county realize the value of young people. A project staff member notes, "Trainings are always something that we need to continue to do and constantly remind county staff of the value of young people."

## CHALLENGES IN CREATING A CULTURAL SHIFT TO VALUE YOUTH IN DHHS

While there is a notable change in awareness and willingness to engage TAY among leadership staff, many key stakeholders believe that line-level staff do not yet appear to have the same level of understanding and appreciation of engaging TAY in program planning. In some cases, there is still room to grow among mid-level management.

According to several key stakeholders, the department mandate is still the primary motivator behind many line staff's decisions to engage TAY. A county staff member explains: "DHHS created a new admissions packet to welcome youth to the Sempervirens hospital. These practices have changed but I am not clear whether line-level staff are fully aware of TAY's needs." Meanwhile, project staff describe the work yet to be done:

- ▶ "We have been able to build good relationships with county leadership. What we [HCTAYC] really want to do may be to work with county staff that are at the frontline of dealing with youth on a daily basis."
- ▶ "Dealing with people who will undermine and restrict youth voices at the meetings is another challenge. Sometimes the challenges are experienced in the line-level staff and middle management staff."

**Key stakeholders find the lack of a larger systemic culture shift that values youth input at all levels of DHHS as the greatest challenge in engaging county staff.** In order to effectively engage youth input in improving the county systems in Humboldt, county staff at all levels need to change their attitude to trust youth, and show respect for youth feedback. While there have been noticeable improvements, project staff continue to experience skepticism and unwillingness to accept youth input from some county staff. One project staff member explains this challenge, "Sometimes there are people who don't want youth presence and I always have to advocate for why it is important to have youth input. I'd go to people's supervisor or administration when I couldn't resolve it in any other way." This member illustrates the challenge in engaging county staff in welcoming youth participation. One project staff member believes that it takes an educational process to train staff on the value of youth input and achieve a larger cultural shift, "Educating people takes time, which is challenging."

Another key stakeholder believes that this shift in thinking about the value of youth involvement in all aspects of county systems and full acceptance of youth input in the county systems is critical to making greater structural changes. In order to fully engage county staff and youth in this systems improvement process, she proposes, "I think it has to start with making the youth feel welcomed and valued. We need to extend the invitation to youth, and not just have youth invite themselves in."

Project staff experience a certain degree of resistance from some county staff as HCTAYC youth present policy recommendations or feedback to the county. A project staff member reflects, "Our policy recommendations might have also scared people. I think people know that we are a watchdog to some extent. To some people, that can be scary and some people may want to be more protective of their staff." Another county staff member also points out

the need to educate county staff in order to accept youth feedback positively, “We still need to work on the line staff to make them understand these are not criticisms but critical feedback we need from the youth.”

Key stakeholders understand that in order to overcome these challenges, it requires successful relationship building with county staff, a strong physical presence in Humboldt County that allows for HCTAYC youth and staff members to interact with county staff, and an educational process that takes time and intensive training from HCTAYC. Staff training on the importance of youth presence and consistent open communication between DHHS and HCTAYC will be key to achieving a cultural shift within DHHS. While all key stakeholders recognize that these challenges exist, they also feel optimistic about the progress of HCTAYC and the efforts that have been underway in the past two years.

A county staff member expresses excitement about current efforts, **“We have made more progress in the last two years than in the last twenty because of HCTAYC efforts. They have made tremendous efforts. I’m very pleased with the work. It needs to be strengthened with [DHHS] staffing support, system restructuring, and embedding more TAY into our system to get that transformation locked in.”** A community member also welcomes the change HCTAYC has brought about, “HCTAYC provides a voice from the bottom, where historically, in Humboldt County, decisions made for youth used to be top down. Having been in the county for 30 years, I think this is a significant change and a welcome one.”

## **PROVIDING A MECHANISM FOR YOUTH INPUT**

***Is there an ongoing mechanism and protocols for youth to provide input into DHHS policies and to operate an effective, responsive, and youth-informed DHHS system of care for transition age youth?***

Many stakeholders believe that HCTAYC is a useful mechanism to invite youth input. They see that HCTAYC not only provides a structure to access a pool of youth leaders but ensures they have the capacity to provide credible input, as well as making county staff feel accountable to TAY feedback.

Several stakeholders think that true youth engagement at the practical level is more valuable than formal policies and procedures that dictate youth engagement. For example, currently, two Youth Advisory Board members are part of the Mental Health Board in DHHS. The youth are actively providing input. Several county staff note that they prefer to achieve this level of youth engagement over formal written policies and procedures. One county staff member reveals her reasoning: “We need to be careful that formal protocols do not replace the flavor or the true engagement process. I think paper alone is insufficient. A lot of care needs to be taken to not rely on that.” Another explains, “It has been inclusive, and we make sure to bring in youth when appropriate. I think this is working well, so I don’t think we need to have a formalized procedure to bring youth in.”

Another ongoing mechanism for youth input can be illustrated by the youth policy recommendations made to DHHS. In 2009, HCTAYC members developed a set of policy

recommendations to improve the Children’s Center, Sempervirens Psychiatric Health Facility, Psychiatric Emergency Services and the Crisis Line. Following these policy recommendations, HCTAYC met with respective units to ensure that the youths’ recommendations were implemented. According to a survey completed by county staff after their participation at the policy recommendations meeting, they found it useful to hear from the youth directly. It was interesting for county staff to learn how the youth experienced these policies. Several county staff members suggested that next time recommendations be presented in a less formal structure to encourage a dialogue between the youth and staff. A number of county staff members expressed that the recommendations were presented in an accusatory tone and it would be more preferable to present these concerns in a less threatening manner. Overall, though, county staff appreciate the opportunity to receive feedback from the youth. In the coming year, TAY will create another set of policy recommendations to improve the Independent Living Skills program and youth homelessness services. These policy recommendations provide a strong mechanism for youth to provide input into DHHS policies.

Several stakeholders indicate that the creation of a TAY center and a TAY division at DHHS can become longer-term mechanisms for youth input in DHHS policies in the future. In the beginning of this year, HCTAYC organized the Humboldt community to plan for the building of a TAY center that serves as a one-stop center for TAY to access a support network from peers, adults, and county services. At the leadership level of DHHS, the county is planning to create a new division dedicated to serve TAY. This new division will allow the county to be more responsive to TAY needs and may provide an added mechanism for youth input.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Youth Advisory Board members, project staff, partners, and county staff offer several suggestions on how to improve the collaboration in the coming year including:

### RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF HCTAYC

- ▶ **Increase staff support for Rochelle Trochtenberg**, HCTAYC's Youth Organizer, and hire youth to become full-time staff. All key stakeholders expressed concerns about the overwhelming workload of Trochtenberg and wish to see more support for her role.
- ▶ **Increase the county's involvement as a collaborating partner and identify more county staff to become involved with HCTAYC.** Several key stakeholders would like to see the county become a stronger collaborating partner and see more involvement from county staff beyond leadership levels. For example, county staff can take on leadership in convening HCTAYC partners to meet regularly to discuss how to better improve the collaborative.
- ▶ **HCTAYC staff needs to better prepare county staff for the policy recommendations**, in order to make the policy recommendations more effective and useful to county staff. Extra time to review policy recommendations prior to the presentation made by youth will allow county staff to have sufficient time to analyze the different implications these policy recommendations would have for their work and how they can move forward to implement them.
- ▶ **Increase communication between all partnering agencies to plan and discuss strategies for the collaboration.** While HCTAYC project staff and youth have been actively involved in various presentations within DHHS and other agencies, HCTAYC collaborating partners, including the county, have not focused enough time and resources to communicate about strategies and develop a plan to better achieve HCTAYC's goals.
- ▶ **Improve recruitment of Youth Advisory Board members by allowing more flexibility around participation requirements and providing a higher stipend to attract participation.** Transition age youth are highly transient and require flexibility in order to participate in the Youth Advisory Board. In order to encourage a culture that values youth participation in the county systems as well as in the Youth Advisory Board, youth need to be compensated appropriately for their time and expertise.
- ▶ **Maintain a consistent core group of members for the Youth Advisory Board.** While the recruitment of Youth Advisory Board members has been satisfactory this year, the board continues to experience a high turnover rate due to the transient nature of transition age youth. In order to develop a strong roster of youth leaders, it is important to retain a consistent group of youth to take on leadership roles and strengthen the capacity of the Youth Advisory Board. Consider increasing opportunities for youth members from the Humboldt community to engage in HCTAYC and provide a planned structure to consistently engage youth members.

- ▶ **Provide more youth leadership development training opportunities** to increase the capacity of youth. Both project staff and Youth Advisory Board members believe that it is necessary to continue to refine the youths’ leadership and professional skills through a number of youth development training activities. They identified the following set of skills that should be focused on in HCTAYC’s youth development trainings:

Alcohol and Drug Use	Professionalism
Facilitation Training	Presentation Skills
Leadership Skills	Policy Training
Mental Health	Public Speaking
Technology Use	Personal Hygiene

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO BETTER SERVE TAY AND ENCOURAGE TAY INPUT

- ▶ **Continue to provide trainings to DHHS staff on issues faced by TAY and how to address TAY challenges.** Consider possibly extending these trainings to the general public as a way to increase community awareness on TAY issues.
- ▶ **Provide more opportunities for county staff to interact with TAY on a daily basis.** Consider hiring TAY as staff in the county to increase their exposure within county systems and support efforts to create a welcoming environment for youth. Many stakeholders find that staff who have the opportunity to interact with youth understand the value of their input. It is important to provide opportunities for more county staff to interact with youth in order to increase their understanding of TAY issues.
- ▶ **County staff should adopt more flexible office hours to coincide with youths’ school schedules in order to make services accessible to youth.** A number of key stakeholders believe the work hours of county services becomes a barrier for youth to access services or participate in meetings as they conflict with school hours. Changing the county staff’s working schedules to serve youth during after school hours and moving meeting schedules around school schedules are essential in encouraging youth involvement.
- ▶ **Hire county staff that have an understanding of TAY and have personal qualities that attract youth in order to better work with youth.** In order to provide a more welcoming environment for youth at DHHS, county departments need to recruit staff members who know how to work with youth and respect their input.
- ▶ **Identify internal champions within DHHS to advocate for TAY within the county.** It is important to promote the value of youth input and involvement in HCTAYC internally among county staff. While HCTAYC’s Youth Organizer, Rochelle Trochtenberg, has been a strong advocate for youths’ voice and HCTAYC, several stakeholders believe it would be more effective to recruit internal line staff champions within DHHS to advocate for youth and promote the value of youth engagement.

## EVALUATOR'S RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ **Expand the core group of talented youth leaders to increase youth leadership in Humboldt County.** Multiple stakeholders including youth, project staff, collaborating partners and county staff would like to see a larger group of youth leaders in Humboldt County. In order to establish sustainability of HCTAYC, project staff and partners need to continue to recruit and retain a growing group of local youth leaders that will be fully committed to youth advocacy and involvement in HCTAYC. Several stakeholders suggest increasing employment opportunities for youth in the county or in HCTAYC. County departments can use talented youth to outreach to their peers and invite youth engagement. HCTAYC can also provide opportunities for youth to take on staff positions in order to expand on project staff capacity.
- ▶ **Increase the number of local HCTAYC staff to better support the collaborative's work in Humboldt County.** Involvement from local community leaders in Humboldt is critical to ensure that the goals and efforts of the project are sustained over time. Hiring local Humboldt staff provides HCTAYC the opportunity to develop local capacity that will continue project activities in the long term.
- ▶ **Advocate for permanent youth presence in various county departments beyond the Mental Health Board.** Currently, there are two youth who are part of the Mental Health Board and sit in on decision-making processes for mental health services. Consider increasing the number of permanent youth positions dedicated to local youth leaders in various county departments. Having a permanent youth presence in various county departments will complement the current ad-hoc system of inviting youth input on an as needed-basis.
- ▶ **Increase opportunities for more county staff to interact with transition age youth and HCTAYC.** When more county staff gain exposure to youth input and see the value of youth participation, it will foster a larger cultural shift at the county to accept youth engagement. Several stakeholders suggest hiring TAY to work in DHHS as one way to increase interaction between county staff and this population. Another example is to provide more trainings such as presenting the digital stories to line staff on a regular basis and have discussions on how to better address TAY issues specific to their work areas.
- ▶ **Collaborate with Children's Center and Sempervirens Psychiatric Health Facility staff to share and disseminate findings from the youth surveys conducted at each site.** Both the Children's Center and Sempervirens Psychiatric Health Facility have developed a youth survey to collect feedback from youth using these services. It would be of great value to HCTAYC and DHHS to learn about youths' experience in using these services after the policy recommendations have been implemented at both sites.

## CONCLUSION

HCTAYC's second year continues to build upon its first year's efforts in developing a more effective and informed county health and human services system, a strong community of youth voices in the county, and empowerment of transition age youth to shape the local systems of care. Year One was focused on developing local youth leadership and building relationships with key stakeholders at the county's Department of Health and Human Services. Year Two's key focus was to increase the presence of youth voice in Humboldt County within DHHS and beyond.

HCTAYC successfully organized a core group of youth leaders to engage in decision-making and policy setting within Humboldt County, including various DHHS departments and other transition age youth-serving programs and agencies. A growing awareness of TAY needs within DHHS is leading to increased involvement of HCTAYC youth in county systems. In the second year, a growing number of county departments actively seeks youth input in various meetings and events to represent the voices of Humboldt youth. While DHHS' upper- and in some cases, middle-level managers appear to be increasingly appreciative of youth input, the same level of awareness has yet to appear at the line-level staff. Greater involvement with youth at every level of DHHS is needed to foster a cultural shift of youth engagement within the Department.

Through HCTAYC, transition age youth are increasingly engaged in the policy process in Humboldt County and in some cases, in the State Capitol. Youth are gaining confidence to take on leadership roles to advocate for other youth. As a result of the work of HCTAYC, the Humboldt community is increasingly aware of the issues and associated needs of transition age youth.

## METHODOLOGY

This evaluation was guided by HCTAYC's Theory of Change developed by Korwin Consulting in partnership with HCTAYC staff at the onset of the evaluation process. The first stage of this evaluation included a meeting between Korwin Consulting and HCTAYC project staff to develop an evaluation plan with key goals and strategies for the process. A timeline was also developed to guide the progress of the evaluation plan.

HCTAYC's Theory of Change, revised this year to better capture the broadened objectives of the project, explains the logic of the project's strategies and anticipated outcomes and impact it seeks to achieve. It includes the overarching purpose of HCTAYC, key strategies used to achieve goals, short- and longer-term outcomes resulting from HCTAYC strategies, and ultimately, the long-term impact of this project. (*HCTAYC's Theory of Change can be found in the Appendix.*)

Based upon this Theory of Change, Korwin Consulting and HCTAYC project staff developed evaluation questions to learn more about the outcomes resulting from HCTAYC's efforts. Using a mixed methods evaluation, the evaluation process included:

- ▶ **Post-Training Surveys:** A post-training survey was administered after the Digital Storytelling and Policy trainings. No survey was administered at the Community/Youth Organizing training. (*For detailed results of the surveys please refer to the Appendix.*)
- ▶ **Individual interviews:** Protocols were developed for interviews with the Youth Advisory Board, HCTAYC project staff and a collaborative partner, community member, and Humboldt County DHHS staff. In October of 2010, a total of seventeen, 45-60 minute telephone interviews were conducted to collect feedback from these stakeholders.
- ▶ **Project Documentation:** HCTAYC shared a set of internal and external project documents that tracked important data on the progress of the project including:
  - Humboldt County DHHS' written response to youth policy recommendations made to the Children's Center and Sempervirens Psychiatric Health Facility;
  - HCTAYC project work plan;
  - Training and presentation schedule of HCTAYC youth activities;
  - *Book of Proceedings*, which documents activities and procedures from the TAY center planning day event;
  - HCTAYC's mid-year project report;
  - Survey results from county staff at the Policy Recommendation Meeting;
  - Humboldt County DHHS' report to the Child Advocacy Institute of University of San Diego School of Law;
  - Youth survey templates from the Children's Center and Sempervirens Psychiatric Health Facility;
  - News articles from *Times-Standard*, Humboldt County's local newspaper; and
  - Information from the HCTAYC project website ([www.humboldtyouth.org](http://www.humboldtyouth.org)).

## LIMITATIONS

When reviewing findings of this evaluation it is important to note current and projected limitations of this methodology.

- ▶ This evaluation did not engage youth who are accessing services from the county systems of care in Humboldt County, but are not involved in HCTAYC. All youth feedback came from participants of HCTAYC. Therefore, the findings pertain to youth members of HCTAYC, and certain assumptions are made about the impact of HCTAYC within the broader Humboldt County transition age youth population.
- ▶ HCTAYC youth participants are involved at two levels: HCTAYC members who attend training events and Youth Advisory Board members who are responsible for leading the project. Although all participating youth completed post-training surveys, individual interviews were only conducted with Youth Advisory Board members. Therefore, all in-depth findings about the impact of the project on all youth participants are extrapolated from Youth Advisory Board, project staff, and collaborating partner interviews.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- ▶ Carolyn Albee, *Social Work Supervisor, Independent Skills Living Program, and Project Lead, California Connected by 25 Initiative*
- ▶ Phillip Crandall, *Director, Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services*
- ▶ Steve D'Agati, *Commissioner, Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Commission*
- ▶ Jamie Lee Evans, MSW, *HCTAYC Project Director, Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project*
- ▶ Laura Forrest, *HCTAYC Project Assistant, Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project*
- ▶ Asha George, Ph.D., *Deputy Director, Humboldt County Mental Health Services Branch*
- ▶ Jude Koski, MBA, *Special Projects Coordinator, California Youth Connection*
- ▶ Barbara LaHaie, *Assistant Director of Programs, Humboldt County Department Health and Human Services*
- ▶ Abby Lubowe, *Youth Advisory Board Member*
- ▶ Cody Hoyt, *Youth Advisory Board Member*
- ▶ Shelly Nilsen, *Acting Deputy Director, Humboldt County Children and Family Services*
- ▶ Tia Richardson, *Youth Advisory Board Member*
- ▶ Karolyn Rim Stein, RN, *Director, Humboldt County Mental Health Services Branch*
- ▶ Rochelle Trochtenberg, *HCTAYC Youth Organizer*
- ▶ Helen Weaver, *Youth Advisory Board Member*
- ▶ Katherine D. Young, MSW, *Director, Humboldt County Social Services Branch*



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**K**orwin Consulting, an evaluation and planning firm, advances social justice solutions by identifying community strengths, building organizational capacity, and evaluating impact. We have developed a reputation for producing high quality work that is not only responsive to our clients' needs but also engages our clients in interpreting preliminary findings to ensure that the information gathered is useful and accurate. More information on Korwin Consulting is available at [www.korwinconsulting.com](http://www.korwinconsulting.com).

## APPENDIX

- ▶ **Post-Training Survey Tables**
- ▶ **List/Links to HCTAYC-related Articles in Times-Standard**
- ▶ **HCTAYC Theory of Change**

## POST- TRAINING SURVEY TABLES

### Demographic Information

HCTAYC Participants	Training One: Digital Story Telling		Training Two: Policy Training	
<b>What is your gender?</b>	#	%	#	%
Female	6	67%	13	52%
Male	3	33%	9	36%
Transgender	0	0%	2	8%
Other	0	0%	1	4%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>
skipped question	1		1	
<b>What is your age?</b>	#	%	#	%
Under 16 years	0	0%	4	16%
16 – 18 years	4	45%	6	24%
19 – 22 years	2	22%	10	40%
23 - 25 years	2	22%	3	12%
Over 25 years	1	11%	2	8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>
skipped question	1		1	
<b>What is your race or ethnicity?</b>	#	%	#	%
African Diasporic/Continental African/Black	2	22%	0	0%
Asian/Pacific Islander/Asian or Pacific Islander American	0	0%	1	4%
Caucasian /European American	3	33%	9	36%
Latino(a)/Hispanic	0	0%	1	4%
Multi-racial	2	22%	5	20%
Tribal, Native American	2	22%	4	16%
Other	0	0%	5	20%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>
skipped question	1		1	

### Demographic Information Continued

HCTAYC Participants	Training One: Digital Story Telling		Training Two: Policy Training	
	#	%	#	%
<b>What is your sexual orientation?</b>				
Straight	6	67%	16	67%
Gay	1	11%	1	4%
Lesbian	1	11%	1	4%
Bisexual	0	0%	5	21%
Queer	0	0%	1	4%
Questioning	0	0%	0	0%
Other	1	11%	0	0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100%</b>
skipped question	1		2	

### Participation with Organizations

HCTAYC Participants	Training One: Digital Story Telling		Training Two: Policy Training	
	#	%	#	%
<b>Participated in any activities or services with the following organizations or programs?</b>				
California Youth Connection	1	17%	13	72%
Tribal programs	2	33%	0	0%
Youth in Mind	4	67%	7	39%
Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project	2	33%	6	33%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>NA</b>
skipped question	4		8	
* Respondents may participate in more than one organization/program, resulting in a total that exceeds 100%				

### Participation in Activities and Trainings

HCTAYC Participants	Training One: Digital Story Telling		Training Two: Policy Training	
	#	%	#	%
What HCTAYC events and trainings have you participated in?	#	%	#	%
HCTAYC Information Meeting (10/12/08)	0	0%	5	31%
YIM Information Meeting (10/14/08)	1	25%	3	19%
YIM Policy Discussion (12/15/08)	0	0%	2	13%
Policy Training Day 1 (1/31/09)	0	0%	6	38%
Policy Training Day 2 (2/1/09)	0	0%	5	31%
CYC Day at the Capitol Conference (2/9/09)	0	0%	2	13%
Digital Stories (2/19-2/22/09)	0	0%	2	13%
HCTAYC Game Night (3/21/09)	1	25%	5	31%
Facilitation Skills Training (5/3/09)	0	0%	4	25%
CYC Chapter Meetings	1	25%	8	50%
HCTAYC Movie Night (8/15/09)	0	0%	3	19%
YIM Leadership Summit (8/28-8/30/09)	1	25%	3	19%
TAY Center Planning Event (1/22/10)	1	25%	7	44%
CYC Day at the Capitol Conference (1/29-2/1/10)	0	0%	6	38%
HCTAYC Community Organizing Training (4/24/10)	1	25%	10	63%
Foster Youth Shadow Day in Sacramento (4/28/10)	0	0%	2	13%
Youth in Mind Youth Leadership Academy at CMHACY (5/4-5/7/10)	2	50%	3	19%
Youth in Mind Youth Leadership Summit (7/16-7/18/10)	1	25%	0	0%
California Catalysts For Change meeting (7/21/10)	0	0%	0	0%
Other (Please specify)	1	25%	2	13%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>NA</b>
skipped question	6		10	
* Respondents may participate in more than one training, resulting in a total that exceeds 100%				

## Seeking/Using Services

HCTAYC Participants	Training One: Digital Story Telling		Training Two: Policy Training	
	#	%	#	%
<b>What services have you used or sought?</b>				
Drug & alcohol treatment	1	13%	5	23%
Emergency shelters	3	38%	4	18%
Food programs	4	50%	10	45%
Homeless shelters	3	38%	6	27%
Housing resources (e.g., transitional housing)	5	63%	9	41%
Independent Living Skills	3	38%	15	68%
Juvenile justice	0	0%	4	18%
Mental health	3	38%	11	50%
Medical health services (e.g. going to doctor, hospital, not Sempervirens)	3	38%	12	55%
Public health (e.g., condoms, HIV tests, sex education)	3	38%	12	55%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>NA</b>
skipped question	2		4	
* Respondents may have used or sought more than one service resulting in a total that exceeds 100%				

### Digital Storytelling (Training One)

BECAUSE OF THIS WEEKEND'S DIGITAL STORYTELLING WORKSHOP	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Rating Average	Response Count
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%		
I feel more powerful in the world (more skillful, more experienced, braver...)	0	0%	1	10%	7	70%	2	20%	3.1	10
I learned computer skills that I will use in the future	0	0%	1	10%	7	70%	2	20%	3.1	10

I FEEL BETTER ABLE TO...	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Rating Average	Response Count
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%		
Use my digital story to help change adults' attitudes about youth in Humboldt County and possibly beyond	0	0%	2	22%	1	11%	6	67%	3.4	9
Use media to tell my story in a way that represents me	0	0%	1	10%	5	50%	4	40%	3.3	10
Think more clearly about my life "story"	0	0%	1	10%	7	70%	2	20%	3.1	10
Share my experience with others in my own way	0	0%	1	10%	8	80%	1	10%	3.0	10

Overall, the digital storytelling workshop was ...	#	%
Not Very Good	1	10%
Good	2	20%
Great	7	70%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100%</b>
skipped question	0	

Overall, the facilitators were...	#	%
Hard to Understand	0	0%
Somewhat Easy to Understand	6	67%
Easy to Understand	3	33%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100%</b>
skipped question	1	

What was most helpful about the digital storytelling workshop?
"The staff"
"Being allowed and encouraged to tell a story that I see as a resistance and non-dominant narrative."
"Being able to let my story be told."
"Having time to talk about our story and think about which story to tell..."
"Sitting around the table sharing each other's stories."
"It helped me get my story out and helped me understand the problems of others."
"Others that shared theirs."
"I had a great time just getting to know new people and hear their stories."
"I really appreciate this opportunity. I think it's an excellent way to voice things. This process could potentially prevent "suicide attempts" due to emotional/stress build-up."
"Learning new computer skills that will carry with me through life."

**Are there ways you think the workshop could be improved?**

"Be able to use our length and words of our stories. Tell it in our perspective and not having to worry who and how people are going to take it."

"Let the youth tell the story they want to tell without limiting their freedom to write what they want and say what they have to say."

"I don't feel I told my story my way. It was still cool and a good experience for sure though."

"Big workspace comfortable chairs."

"I personally needed a lot more info about what I was getting into, but that's apparently just because I only got invited to come at the last possible minute - so maybe that's not really something that could be improved. I also needed more time - it was hard that there wasn't an option of spending extra time working on our stories (because we needed to use the computers at the center)."

"Maybe have a PC available somewhere..."

"A more diverse group."

**Is there anything else you would like to add?**

"It was Perfect."

"Thank you!"

### Policy (Training Two)

I BETTER UNDERSTAND...	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Rating Average	Response Count	Skipped Question
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%			
Why to speak out and why it matters	0	0%	0	0%	17	65%	9	35%	3.4	26	0
How policy impacts me	1	4%	2	8%	13	50%	10	38%	3.2	26	0
How to talk to policy makers	1	4%	2	8%	13	50%	10	38%	3.2	26	0
How to represent for more than just my personal experience	1	4%	1	4%	15	58%	9	35%	3.2	26	0
How to know when I'm being effective	1	4%	2	8%	14	54%	9	35%	3.2	26	0
Why my experience makes me an expert	2	8%	0	0%	14	54%	10	38%	3.2	26	0
The difference between policy and politics	1	4%	5	20%	17	68%	2	8%	2.8	25	1

I FEEL BETTER ABLE TO...	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Rating Average	Response Count	Skipped Question
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%			
Express my opinions and make recommendations in a way that might help me and other youth in Humboldt.	0	0%	0	0%	14	58%	10	42%	3.4	24	2
Help make changes in local policies affecting me and other youth in Humboldt.	0	0%	0	0%	14	61%	9	39%	3.4	23	3

Overall, today's training topics were...	#	%
Not Very Good	0	0%
Good	8	35%
Great	15	65%
TOTAL	23	100%
skipped question	3	

Overall, the facilitators today were...	#	%
Hard to Understand	0	0%
Somewhat Easy to Understand	2	9%
Easy to Understand	21	91%
TOTAL	23	100%
skipped question	3	

What was most helpful about the policy training workshop?
"The group work was more effective than the workshop would have been otherwise."
"Discussion and feedback from peers and facilitators."
"The people and discussions."
"The stories and experiences."
"Doing the activities that involved us to get up and move around! Looking at the local and statewide people who are involved in Policy."
"Learning about analyzing motives of people in power."
"Learning new stuff about the community and everything."
"I really liked the "what I bring." It reminded me that I'm not useless and/or irrelevant."
"The many questions that were answered."
"The questions that I had were answered with an example and how to use it."
"The trainer and repeating what we say fully, then giving examples."
"Everything was perfect."
"It was all helpful. Thank you."
"It was fun and was put together well."
"All."
"Showing up!"

Are there ways you think the workshop could be improved?
"Make it slightly more time efficient."
"The facilitators could help guide discussions to stay on topic better."
"Try to get the main point across in a shorter period of time."
"Less time on first activity (writing ideas on lists)."
"More movement."
"Have more activities and have them where we can move around."
"More questions and answers like at the end."
"Role playing."
"The next steps."
"Yes. Not be so shy."
"More ground rules!"
"More on Policies IN Politics."
"Keep unnecessary comments to yourself!!!"
"I enjoyed it."
"No. I think it went well."
"Not really. I just know this stuff already."

Is there anything else you would like to add?
"I loved it! So glad I came."
"Great training."
"Love Jennifer! She's awesome!"
"No. I think it was a perfect gathering."

### Feel Connected to Others and Valued by Project Staff

TO WHAT EXTENT...	Training One: Digital Story Telling (n=10)		Training Two: Policy Training (n=24)	
	#	%	#	%
<b>Do you feel that participating in this training has helped you to feel more connected to others?</b>				
Not at all	0	0%	0	0%
Somewhat	2	20%	2	9%
Fairly Well	6	60%	14	58%
Big Time!	2	20%	8	33%
<b>TOTAL</b>	10	100%	24	100%
<b>Rating Average</b>	3.00		3.25	
skipped question	0		2	
<b>Did the project staff help you to feel important, respected, appreciated, and valued at this training?</b>				
Not at all	0	0%	0	0%
Somewhat	1	10%	2	8%
Fairly Well	6	60%	10	42%
Big Time!	3	30%	12	50%
<b>TOTAL</b>	10	100%	24	100%
<b>Rating Average</b>	3.20		3.42	
skipped question	0		2	

## HCTAYC-RELATED NEWS ARTICLES IN TIMES-STANDARD (OCTOBER 2009-SEPTEMBER 2010)

1. "County renews commitment to youth collaboration program" [http://www.times-standard.com/ci\\_14092615?IADID=Search-www.times-standard.com-www.times-standard.com](http://www.times-standard.com/ci_14092615?IADID=Search-www.times-standard.com-www.times-standard.com)
2. "Calling all youth: Program holds meeting for new youth center" [http://www.times-standard.com/ci\\_16225164?IADID=Search-www.times-standard.com-www.times-standard.com](http://www.times-standard.com/ci_16225164?IADID=Search-www.times-standard.com-www.times-standard.com)
3. "Mental health service providers, consumers share insight in MHSA forum" [http://www.times-standard.com/ci\\_15485915?IADID=Search-www.times-standard.com-www.times-standard.com](http://www.times-standard.com/ci_15485915?IADID=Search-www.times-standard.com-www.times-standard.com) (HCTAYC listed as resource)
4. "County renews commitment to youth collaboration program" [http://www.times-standard.com/ci\\_14092615?IADID=Search-www.times-standard.com-www.times-standard.com](http://www.times-standard.com/ci_14092615?IADID=Search-www.times-standard.com-www.times-standard.com)
5. "Local foster youth spend a day in the state Capitol" [http://www.times-standard.com/ci\\_15002293?IADID=Search-www.times-standard.com-www.times-standard.com](http://www.times-standard.com/ci_15002293?IADID=Search-www.times-standard.com-www.times-standard.com)
6. "Beyond the Bench explores foster youth services in Humboldt County" [http://www.times-standard.com/ci\\_13477936?IADID=Search-www.times-standard.com-www.times-standard.com&IADID=Search-www.times-standard.com-www.times-standard.com](http://www.times-standard.com/ci_13477936?IADID=Search-www.times-standard.com-www.times-standard.com&IADID=Search-www.times-standard.com-www.times-standard.com)

# Humboldt Collaborative Theory of Change

