



CFLC Evaluation Report

California Family Life Center

CFLC Staff Focus Group Report (July 2012)

Prepared for: California Family Life Center

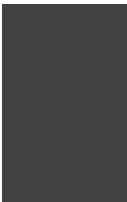
Prepared by: NEXUS CONSULTING

Delivered: July 2012

CFLC Staff Focus Group Report

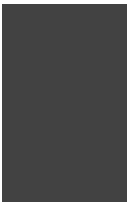
California Family Life Center

Evaluation Report (2012)



Contents

- Staff Focus Group Summary 1
- Methodology 1
- Results 1
 - Question 1: Response Summary2
 - Conclusion3
 - Question 2: Response Summary4
 - Conclusion5
 - Question 3: Response Summary6
 - Conclusion8
 - Question 4: Response Summary8
 - Conclusion9
 - Question 5: Response Summary9
 - Conclusion12
- Summary 12
- Recommendations 13
 - Employment13
 - Education14



Youth Development14

General Recommendations15

Staff Focus Group Summary

A focus group with staff from Planet Youth (Lake Elsinore), Empower Youth (Hemet), and the Rubidoux Youth Opportunity Center was held on June 28, 2012 at the Empower Youth Center in Hemet. Reflecting California Family Life Center's (CFLC) commitment to continuous quality improvement, the focus group was conducted to answer one general question: What can CFLC do to become a better, more effective youth-serving agency? In answering this question, staff were asked about current processes to help youth find employment, further their education, and participate in youth development activities, such as community service.

Methodology

Five open-ended questions were constructed to elicit ideas from staff about how CFLC could improve its processes, procedures, and activities related to serving youth. Emphasis was placed on identifying innovative ways of making processes more efficient and of improving outcomes.

Participants included Program Coordinators, Youth Development Specialists (YDS), Community Liaisons, and Intake and Eligibility personnel from all three of CFLC's centers. Participants were assured that their responses would be kept confidential so that their comments could not be traced back to them.

A total of 20 staff participated in the focus groups. The focus group lasted about an hour and 15 minutes.

Results

The results presented in this report reflect the main ideas expressed by staff. Included are responses to the main questions and the follow-up or "probe" questions designed to get participants to explain an answer further. A section entitled "Conclusion" summarizes the main points made during the discussion.

Question 1. What do you think your center does well? Where are you most effective?

Question 1: Response Summary

The first question began the discussion by focusing on the positive things CFLC is doing. CFLC staff members were asked to think of ways in which their center -- Empower Youth, Planet Youth, or Rubidoux Youth Opportunity Center -- performs efficiently and effectively, particularly in comparison to the other two centers. Among the things mentioned:

- **Quality of Service.** Most of the responses from participants focused on the quality of service that youth receive at CFLC. Of particular importance was that CFLC offers individualized services, that CFLC is not a “cookie-cutter program”, where individual needs are ignored.

One staff member explained:

“When the youth come in here, there’s -- because it’s very individualized -- that we can individualize that youth with systems that we have already going. It’s just a matter of making sure that we can help them with that...because everything’s in place; it’s just a matter of using them correctly. And, I think we do really well with that.”

Another staff member echoed this sentiment:

“We work with that kid -- that individual kid -- whatever his deal is, whatever he comes to the table with, that’s what we deal with. So, each kid get a specialized service from all of us, and they all feel welcomed, loved, and cared for. And that’s why they are successful.”

Another aspect of service quality staff mentioned related to CFLC being viewed as a safe haven, a place of security and support. One staff member mentioned that she has been told by youth that when they come to CFLC they feel at home. Another staff member mentioned that youth have told her that they (the youth) know that what CFLC staff are doing is more than just a “job” to them. Staff commented that youth feel comfortable at CFLC because CFLC provides the youth with support that their

family sometimes does not give them. Youth stay at CFLC, moreover, because they feel that CFLC staff is like their family, their support system.

- **Communication.** Some staff members felt that communication between staff and management was good, with information passed down from management and leadership to other staff quickly.
- **Leadership Team.** The quality of CFLC's leadership also received praise from staff members, who were described as "really good" and "awesome".
- **Good Educational Opportunities.** A few participants commented that CFLC has been effective at connecting youth with college, particularly at Rubidoux, where staff felt that the partnership CFLC has developed with Riverside Community College (RCC) and the Come Back Kids program, has helped move youth into college quickly. Staff from Empower Youth (Hemet) and Planet Youth (Lake Elsinore) also felt that the youth have benefitted by having a college mentor who helps guide youth to and through college.
- **Tracking and Following Youth.** One staff member commented that CFLC has been effective at locating and following-up with youth. A successful strategy has been to ask youth every month whether they have moved and have new contact information (e.g., e-mail, phone number). Checking teens' Facebook accounts has also been a n effective way to locate youth.

Conclusion

In general, staff addressed how CFLC as an organization has had a positive impact on youth, rarely comparing their center to the other two sites.

In a few instances, however, staff from one site compared their performance relative to other sites. Staff from Rubidoux offered to compared themselves to the other centers. Staff suggested that they there was a more relaxed atmosphere at the Rubidoux Youth Opportunity Center, in part, because of the on-site basketball court. Rubidoux staff also felt that they were able to get youth enrolled in college courses quickly because of the partnerships they have developed with Riverside Community College, Riverside County

Office of Education, and the Come Back Kids program. Staff from Hemet and Lake Elsinoire felt that they were effective at getting youth to complete certificates.

Other comments addressed CFLC's strengths as an organization. Staff members, for example, discussed the quality of CFLC's services, paying special attention to how CFLC individualizes its services depending upon the needs of each client. Staff members also agreed that CFLC is effective in helping youth because it provides them with a comfortable, supportive environment.

Question 2. What can be done to improve processes related pre-employment -- that is, getting youth to find and secure employment?

Question 2: Response Summary

Staff were asked how CFLC could be more effective at helping youth find and keep employment. Emphasis was placed on coming up with new, innovative ways to improve processes related to pre-employment.

Staff offered a number of suggestions:

- **Offer a Job-Retention Workshop.** Staff believe that youth are often only interested in *getting* a job and do not focus enough on *keeping* the job. They also agreed that CFLC does not currently does not effectively provide youth with the guidance and assistance the youth need to keep and retain a job once hired. As one staff member mentioned, "There needs to be a retention piece before they get on the worksite." Part of the retention workshop may include instruction in some basic skills, such as handling and counting cash. Many worksites want to hire the youth, but the youth lack some basic skills that the employers need.
- **Better Guidance After Youth Have Completed Their Internship.** Staff members acknowledged that much emphasis is placed on getting youth their internship, but once that is completed, youth need guidance: "A lot of the times we kind of leave them hanging. And I kind of get that sense when I talk to them." Another agreed saying, "A lot of times they kind of feel lost, and they don't understand the

importance of what they've just done." An example of this is when youth fail to update their résumé to reflect their newly-acquired job experience, which will make them more employable. They also do not know how to re-initiate a job search. Staff commented that once the youth finish their internship, some of them want to do another internship rather than look for a job.

To address this, staff suggested creating a "What Now?" session to help youth begin searching for employment once they complete their internship. Staff felt that the post-internship guidance should be just as comprehensive as the pre-employment training component of the program and, like pre-employment training, post-internship assistance should involve clearly-defined steps to gauge client's progress.

- **Simplify Processes.** A staff member offered a general recommendation that processes and requirements for youth should be made simpler. Although no specifics were offered, the belief was that youth feel that CFLC requires a lot from them -- that is, they have to complete a lot of steps -- and this makes it less likely that things, such as the career websites, are used consistently.
- **Developing Stronger Connections with Potential Employers.** Developing relationships with local employers was something that staff from Rubidoux, in particular, felt they could do to strengthen their program. Until recently, for example, staff from Rubidoux did not even know when local job fairs were held.

Conclusion

Staff agreed that CFLC needs to be more effective at helping youth *find* and *keep* employment once they complete their internship. Staff seemed to agree that while much emphasis is placed on pre-employment, little emphasis is placed on helping youth conduct a job-search *after* their internship. As a result, many youth flounder after completing their internship and, ultimately, get discouraged.

Question 3. What can be done to improve processes related education -- that is, getting youth to obtain a GED, get a diploma, or attend college or a vocational school?

Question 3: Response Summary

As with activities and processes related to pre-employment, CFLC staff were asked how processes related to helping youth further their education could be improved. Suggestions included the following:

- **Insure that the Educational and Employment Components of the Program are Emphasized Equally.** Staff felt that so much emphasis is placed on helping youth find employment, particularly during orientation, that the educational component of the program suffers. Staff feel that they “set the tone” and that the educational aspect of the program should be stressed more when youth start at CFLC.

- **Develop a More Effective Strategy Relating to Basic Skills Certification.** Also mentioned was the need to get youth to obtain their basic skills certification sooner because many of them want to start a job but lose hope if they are delayed. One staff member explained:

“It is about strategy in the process. It’s about finding a way to get what we need while we’re giving them what they need. And it isn’t easy because this is -- and I am sorry; I don’t care what they say -- this is the least important thing on their list of things to do -- is their education. And, unless they really realize how important it is to get their their diploma, the rest of that stuff -- I’m sorry -- has always been a struggle because I don’t believe that it is a priority with all of them.”

- **Educate Staff about Changes in Educational Requirements and Opportunities.** Many staff members feel that they do not know enough about the college and financial aid application process, particularly when opportunities and requirements change. For example, some staff did not know that high school dropout

does not qualify for financial aid. The general consensus was that staff need to be educated more about educational requirements.

One way to do this would be to post important deadlines around each center so that all staff can see when applications need to be completed, for instance.

Others believed that Rubidoux Youth Opportunity Center should have a college mentor. Currently, a college mentor is only available at Lake Elsinore and Hemet. Because the Youth Development Specialists are so busy, Rubidoux staff feel that having a mentor -- that is, someone who could help youth apply for financial aid and college admission -- would make Rubidoux more effective and improve outcomes related to education.

- **Make the Transition to College Easier.** Some staff believed that when youth enter college with a full load of courses, they may find it difficult to make the transition into college and quickly become discouraged. It was suggested that youth might be better served if they started by taking one or two college courses first before they begin college full-time.
- **Regularly Tracking and Monitoring Youths' Progress.** Recognizing the importance of being able to identify and respond to problems early, staff suggested that CFLC implement a progress report system. This would involve obtaining a monthly report from their teachers so that CFLC staff can help youth who are falling behind in their coursework and earning poor grades. Staff felt that some youth do not understand how poor grades can impact them.
- **Develop Better Connections to Vocational Schools.** The emphasis here was on developing better connections with low-cost, inexpensive vocational schools. Staff discussed the problems surrounding the cost of vocational schools and how youth can find themselves in debt and unemployed after graduating from them. However, others felt that CFLC should seek out vocational schools with that are relatively inexpensive.
- **Encourage Youth to Obtain Certificates.** Another suggestion from staff was to “push” certificates while youth are waiting to find employment. The feeling was that

many youth do not want to go to college because it takes time to complete and get a degree, but obtaining a certificate may take only 1 or 1.5 years.

Conclusion

Suggestions for improvement revolved around highlighting the educational component of CFLC's program during orientation and throughout the program, strategizing to prevent youth from getting discouraged with college, and providing youth with alternatives to a traditional college degree.

Question 4. What can be done to improve processes related youth development -- that is, getting youth involved in community service, leadership roles, and helping them become capable adults?

Question 4: Response Summary

Staff were also asked how CFLC could improve processes related to youth development. Suggestions included the following:

- **Provide Better Life Skills Instruction.** Staff felt that many youth did not have basic life skills. One staff member said: "They do need to have some serious life skills." For example, some mentioned many youth do not know how to read an analog clock. Other skills that staff felt youth lacked were time management and study skills. Currently, a youth's life skills knowledge is assessed informally during the initial interview, but some also feel that all of the youth need some form of life skills instruction.
- **Make the Youth Development More Structured.** Youth Council and community service/service learning are some ways in which youth development is implemented at CFLC. Some staff admitted that youth development is among one of CFLC's weaker program components. One person summed up CFLC's approach to leadership development this way: "Leadership is something that we do -- kinda". Another said that "It needs to be more present, I think". Still another said that Youth Council is more of an "activities council", with youth really more interested in "having fun" than in finding out more about the city and how it is run.

Staff suggested that not only should youth development be made a more visible component of the program, but it should also be more structured. One way to add more structure is to identify a set projects that youth need to complete. To these required projects, youth can then add projects that they want to complete. In order to make this happen, it was felt that CFLC will need to develop stronger relationships with other non-profit agencies that are doing something positive in the community and that would be willing to have CFLC youth become involved. Developing a stronger relationship with the Chamber of Commerce was also mentioned.

Conclusion

There was a consensus among staff that processes and activities related to youth development are in need of improvement at CFLC. First, youth development activities are given little emphasis at CFLC, especially when compared to pre-employment and educational activities. Youth appear to lack some essential life skills, which is hampering their ability to succeed in school and in the workplace. Community service and leadership development activities needed more structure and should better reflect the community's needs.

Question 5. What is one thing -- one improvement -- that CFLC could do that you feel is really important and would make CFLC better?

Question 5: Response Summary

A final question asked CFLC staff to identify an improvement that they felt CFLC could make that would make CFLC better. This was a very open-ended question, and it was left up to the group to decide how big or small an improvement was needed. They were also left to decide how they defined "better", whether, for instance, "better" meant a better place to work or more effective in helping youth.

Responses to this question focused on the following:

- **Educating Staff about CQI.** Some felt that they did not know enough about the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process and believed that it would make it

easier to understand if it was made clearer how CFLC processes and activities reflect CQI. According to one staff member: “We don’t really see it or hear about it until it’s time for accreditation”. The feeling was that the CQI process should be more visible. Part of this involves making sure that everyone understands what CQI is, how it is implemented, and how it impacts what they do.

Staff also felt that they should be better prepared for the CQI visits because, while they feel they know their job and their role at CFLC, they often do not understand what they are being asked when the CQI interview is held. They admitted that this often boils down to a language problem, because the terminology used at CQI visits is unfamiliar.

- **Making Strategic Outcomes and Goals More Visual.** Staff also believed that a more visual approach could be adopted when it comes to reporting on program outcomes. The incorporation of the dashboard to show how each center was doing in relation to outcomes was an eye-opener for some, who did not really understand how performance is looked at by the funder and felt that the reports were confusing. The dashboard also had the effect of making some more competitive because they could see how their center was performing relative to the other CFLC centers. Staff urged CFLC to adopt a visual approach to describing progress and outcomes more often:

- ▶ *“It needs to be visual. And, if it’s visual, everyone will be able to be on the same page.”*
- ▶ *“Make the performance visual so that everyone can understand exactly what is required, what is needed, and where we are percentage-wise. I think that will make us more successful.”*

Staff felt that using visual representations -- a board or chart, for instance -- to record those youth that are progressing through the program and those that are not. Staff felt that this would help them strategize what to do with difficult files. Some staff also felt this might increase staff cooperation and suggested that some time each month could be set aside for a round table discussion about what to do with difficult files.

- **Using Social Media to Promote CFLC.** Several staff commented on the importance of using YouTube and Facebook to help promote the program. Videos could aid in recruitment and to get more youth in the program. Some staff mentioned that e-mail “blasts” work, particularly when the youth themselves send them out. The messages are perceived as having more validity when youth send them. CFLC staff recommended having youth send them.
- **More Visible Implementation of Ideas Developed During Strategic Planning.** Several staff commented that they would like to see how and when ideas from the strategic planning meeting are implemented. Staff agreed that many valuable ideas and suggestions are made during the strategic planning session, but they (staff) are not always aware of how they are incorporated into CFLC’s activities and policies. In addition to knowing when ideas from the strategic planning session have been implemented, staff suggested that proper credit be given to the youth for their ideas when their suggestions are implemented.

Staff wanted to know more about how ideas that were addressed in the annual strategic planning meeting were implemented, and they, furthermore, wanted to be more active in the implementation process. One solution to this offered by staff was to dedicate a month -- say, August -- for planning, perhaps calling it “strategic planning month”. Staff commented that if this was planned in advance and placed on a calendar, staff could prepare and plan for it.

- **Hosting Agency-Wide Team-Building Activities and Events.** Staff suggested having an agency-wide activity, like a picnic, with employees from all of CFLC’s programs (e.g., kin care) in attendance. If that was not feasible, then a gathering of employees from Empower Youth, Planet Youth, and Rubidoux Youth Opportunity Center, it was believed, would also be beneficial. Staff believed that having staff from different sites interact with each other in a different environment would promote a better understanding of the organization and of each other. It was felt that this would be particularly helpful to new employees. These kinds of activities, it was mentioned, are often held by companies to promote a sense of togetherness and promote camaraderie, with staff having an opportunity to share experiences outside of the

work environment. Holding these activities was also seen as a way for CFLC to show appreciation for its employees: “It tells your employees that you did a great job.”

Conclusion

Recommendations for improvement were varied. One theme that emerged was the need to make CQI and outcomes part of the “culture” of CFLC, something that is understood by all staff and discussed regularly. Staff suggested this might be done in three ways: (1) by making performance results more visible through the use of charts, figures, diagrams, and tables that are shared and displayed openly at the centers, (2) by demonstrating how suggestions and recommendations developed during strategic planning sessions have been implemented, and (3) by dedicating time for staff to learn about CQI processes and to plan and strategize how to improve performance outcomes.

Two other ideas concerned (1) helping to promote the program more effectively by using the youth themselves to promote CFLC through Facebook, YouTube, and e-mail blasts; and (2) improving morale by hosting agency-wide events or activities.

Summary

While CFLC staff recognized that one of the agency’s greatest strengths is that it provides individualized services to youth in a comfortable, secure environment, staff were also quick to identify areas related to pre-employment, educational attainment, and youth development that could be improved.

- **Pre-Employment.** Regarding CFLC’s goal of getting youth ready for work, CFLC staff felt that more emphasis needs to be placed on giving the skills they need to keep a job and advance (e.g., cash-handling skills) and find a new job once they have completed their internship.
- **Educational Attainment.** CFLC staff maintained that the educational component of the program needs to be emphasized during a youth’s orientation and presented as being as important as the pre-employment component. Staff also recommended that CFLC find ways to prevent youth from getting discouraged -- for example, by easing them into college, encouraging them to pursue certificates, and being able to identify early if they are having problems with their grades.

- **Youth Development.** CFLC staff agreed that youth development is not one of CFLC's strongest components and could be improved. Youth need basic life skills that would help them succeed in school (e.g., time management and study skills) and in the workplace (e.g., how to read an analog clock). Staff also recommended that service learning be more structured.

Staff also offered a number of other recommendations related to incorporating CQI into CFLC's daily activities, making it more visible and results and outcomes more transparent; using youth to promote the program; and hosting agency-wide activities to build morale.

Recommendations

The following are some recommendations based upon the results and findings of the June 28th focus group. Some of these recommendations represent minor steps along the way of implementing more comprehensive recommendations -- for example, conducting life skills assessments as a step to improving life skills instruction.

In truth, all of comments made in response to questions 2 through 5 are recommendations and could be implemented by CFLC. The list below is by no means an exhaustive one, but it identifies recommendations that staff members would appear to support the most. It also identifies a few steps that are necessary in order to move forward. These recommendations listed below are grouped by program area.

Employment

1. **Add a Job-Retention Component.** Youth need post-internship guidance, perhaps in the form of an internship "debriefing". Clear steps and goals should be laid out for youth that identify what they should be doing next and in what time frame each should be accomplished. A second part of this component involves helps youth acquire the skills they need to retain a job (e.g., cash-handling skills). This may or may not be a part of any life skills instruction that CFLC implements.
2. **Talk with/Survey Employers about the Skills They Need.** To help CFLC implement a job-retention workshop, CFLC will want to talk with or survey (either formally or informally) what skills employers are looking for in new employees and which ones they feel that CFLC youth are deficient.

3. **Research Evidence-Based Curriculum on Job Retention.** CFLC may wish to incorporate elements of curriculum and programs designed to help youth find and retain employment.

Education

1. **Have a College Mentor at all Centers.** Staff agreed that having a college mentor, someone whose primary responsibility was to help youth transition into college, was a great benefit to Empower Youth and Planet Youth. Currently, Rubidoux Youth Opportunity Center does not have a college mentor, but staff there feel that they would benefit by having one on site.
2. **Make Sure Staff are Informed of Educational Requirements and Deadlines.** Staff should also be educated and updated about current college entrance requirements, financial aid qualifications, and important deadlines. A schedule or calendar should be available to all staff for easy reference.
3. **Regularly Monitor Youths' Progress in School.** Monthly or regular progress reports should be conducted on youth entering college to help identify any problems youth are having with their coursework. If problems are identified, tutoring may be recommended. It is important to identify problems early to prevent youth from becoming discouraged and dropping out.

Youth Development

1. **Incorporate Life Skills Instruction.** Staff agreed that youth need life skills instruction. CFLC may want to refer to evidence-based life skills curricula or research best practices when conducting life skills instruction (e.g., ARISE Life Skills).
2. **Conduct a Life Skills Assessment.** Currently, youths' proficiency in life skills is assessed informally at intake. CFLC may wish to adopt a more formal, standardized assessment to identify areas where youth need instruction. Casey Life Skills (www.caseylifeskills.org), for example, provides a number of free, evidence-based life skills assessments for different age groups and populations. CFLC may also wish to adopt a pre- and post assessment of life skills to measure program impact and progress.

3. **Develop/Strengthen Relationships with Other Non-Profits.** To strengthen CFLC's community service activities, CFLC should develop and strengthen relationships with other non-profit agencies that are providing services in the community, especially those agencies that would be able to offer CFLC youth opportunities for community service.
4. **Develop Community Service Requirements.** Building upon the relationships that CFLC develops with other agencies, it is recommended that a set of required projects be devised for youth. Staff agreed that the service learning component needs more structure to keep youth focused. In addition to a set of required projects, youth should also be able to select their own project(s), one or more projects that they agree are important.

General Recommendations

1. **Make CQI Processes More Visible.** This means literally making CQI more visible at the center via charts, tables, graphs, and boards, but also more visible in the sense that CQI, performance, and outcomes become topics that are discussed regularly. CQI and outcomes need to be embedded in the daily activities of staff and a visible part of CFLC's "culture". Staff responded well to their performance being represented on a dashboard and urged CFLC to take a more visual approach to tracking youths' progress. They also wanted opportunities to work together to strategize ways of improving outcomes and of implementing recommendations collected from strategic planning session and CFLC's ongoing data collection and evaluation efforts.
2. **Have Projects/Contests that Use Youth to Promote the Program.** Current CFLC participants are probably the most effective promoters of CFLC's program. Therefore, CFLC should find ways to encourage CFLC youth to promote the program and events CFLC is hosting. Projects or even contests in which youth compete to develop a promotional items (e.g., logo, video, poster, etc.) are one way in which include and utilize youth.
3. **Host an Annual CFLC Picnic or Event.** CFLC might consider hosting an annual picnic or event that brings together all of CFLC's programs in an effort to boost morale and build relationships between CFLC's staff members.