



Pathways to Adulthood: Independent Living Skills

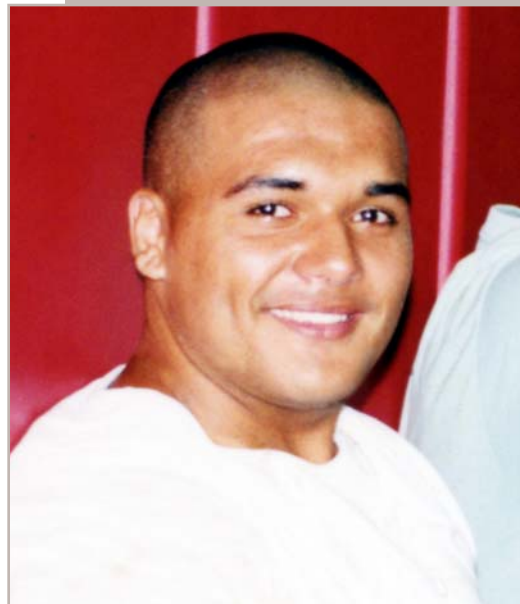
Our Pathways to Adulthood: Independent Living Skills program is based on the theories of a positive youth development model of practice. Our practice methods encourage and create opportunities for young people to be meaningfully involved in a variety of projects that meet their specific needs. Our programs empower youth to actively engage in their own development while contributing to the larger community in which they live. These combined efforts are inextricably linked and in our experience demonstrate the greatest promise for achieving positive outcomes for adolescents. Resilience research shows that young people living in high-risk conditions are able to transcend their environments and overcome the odds to lead successful lives. Youth who are socially competent, have problem solving skills that include critical and creative thinking strategies, a sense of identity, a sense of purpose and belief in a bright future have the traits that will enable them to successfully maneuver through difficult life circumstances. At Southwest Key, we seek to nurture these qualities in the youth who participate in our programs.

Program Description

Many of the young people served through our independent living skills program have been involved with the juvenile justice system for a long period of time and experienced numerous facilities including state schools, boot camps, and detention facilities. We have found that after years of living in the system, youth often lack basic social skills, career readiness skills, and a realistic plan for their future that will enable them to transition into a life of independence and personal responsibility. Most lack a positive peer network or support system, have fractured relationships with family and have not had opportunities considered typical of adolescents their age. All of these realities make it much more difficult for the youth to create their lives in a way that allows them to realize their dreams and personal goals. It is a sad reality that even after years of involvement with systems of care, many youth lack the foundational traits needed to help them avoid dependence on additional systems of care or involvement in the criminal justice system.

Over the past 17 years, we have developed our Pathways to Adulthood: Independent Living Program, combining our experience in providing transitional housing to youth re-entering the community from out of home care, with our experiences in teaching life skills to the thousands of youth who have been through our programs. Through this program our young people are provided the knowledge, skills, supports and experiences needed to be able to apply learning to real life situations and therefore give them the best chances for successful futures.

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Transitional Housing

A critical component of The Pathways to Adulthood: Independent Living Skills Program is the transitional housing provided to youth through community-based supervised living apartments. Southwest Key provides furnished apartments in community complexes in which youth are placed with a roommate in order to allow them to offer support for each other. Each young person is guided through a process of increasing responsibility for managing their homes and their expenses. They are expected to develop a savings account and to pay utilities with money earned from their jobs. Caseworkers visit each young person on a daily basis in their apartments, at their jobs and educational facilities when appropriate, to provide supervision, encouragement and support services as needed. When youth demonstrate readiness, they are supported through the transition into a permanent living situation - either a return to their family or into their own apartment.



Skills Development

The program also has a skills-building component that combines classroom work with hands-on experiences. Youth participate in program activities based on an assessment done in partnership with the young person. Activities happen in small groups and on a one-to-one basis based on the identified needs of the young person. The curriculum 1) challenges youth to think differently about opportunities available to them by building skills and providing new experiences; and 2) provides guidance and critical thinking skills to help participants make healthy decisions for themselves. A full-time "Homemaker" meets with the young people on a weekly basis and conducts special activities to teach the young people specific skills such as cooking, house cleaning, food shopping, etc. to smooth their transition into the community. Staff also assists youth in seeking employment, which is part of the youth's transitional plan towards independence.

The combination of stable housing and skills development provides young people who have few independent living skills, the pathway to adulthood that they require. This program fills a significant gap in the services continuum by creating an opportunity for older adolescents to practice living independently while adequately supported and subsidized. The Pathway to Adulthood: Independent Living Skills Program can be adjusted to fit the needs of the individual youth involved in the program.

To learn more about the Pathways to Adulthood: Independent Living Skills Program or any of the other programs operated by Southwest Key Programs please visit our website at www.swkey.org or e-mail info@swkey.org or write:

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