



10 Tips for Building Connections Between Legal Aid and Juvenile Court Counsel to Support Youth and Families

The transition to adulthood is a critical time in child and adolescent development; youth go through tremendous growth and experience significant challenges as they move through this period. Youth with experiences with foster care, homelessness, or the juvenile justice system face many additional obstacles during this transition, including lack of family and community connections and limited access to appropriate services and supports which can be compounded by a history of trauma.

In California, outside of juvenile dependency and delinquency representation, there are few civil legal aid offices devoted to representing transition-aged youth (ages 16-26). However, many of these youth have civil legal needs that dependency attorneys and juvenile defenders are not trained to address and for which they do not have capacity. Examples of these issues - which legal aid attorneys could address - include housing, public benefits, health and behavioral health access, school discipline and special education, domestic violence, credit repair, tax filing, immigration, and more.

This resource spotlights opportunities for partnerships and collaboration between juvenile court attorneys and civil legal aid attorneys to support transition-aged youth clients who are impacted by the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. These tips highlight the importance of high-quality youth-directed representation and meeting the various civil legal needs of youth and families involved with juvenile court systems to support long-term well-being.

The information provided in this resource and the referenced materials do not constitute legal advice. All content is for general informational purposes only. This resource was last updated in September 2024. For any questions related to this resource, please contact info@ylc.org.

Ten Tips

- 1. Schedule a meet and greet between local legal aid attorneys, dependency counsel and juvenile public defenders.** Most civil legal aid organizations can be found at <https://www.lawhelpca.org/> and most delinquency-involved youth are represented by the local public defender (or alternate defender or panel for conflicts), but there is no public list of juvenile court dependency attorneys (for children and youth or parents) available in California. If you do not know where to



start in your community, contact the [Youth Law Center](#) for help making connections.

- 2. Schedule a forum or overview training to provide details about your services and legal obligations to your clients.**¹ The roles and expertise of civil legal aid attorneys and juvenile court attorneys are different. It can be helpful to schedule time with your local juvenile court and civil legal aid partners to provide a high level overview of:
 - a. The types of legal cases and services your office provides (i.e. case acceptance guidelines)
 - b. Any restrictions on what types of cases you can take, especially if there are nuances (e.g. we take eviction defense cases, but not voucher termination)
 - c. Other requirements to access legal services (e.g. income requirements, geographical requirements etc.)
 - d. Any restrictions on who you can serve (e.g. immigrants with certain statuses)
 - e. Model of representation (e.g. vertical vs. horizontal representation and best vs. state interest representations), including whether you work with non-attorney staff (investigators, social workers, peer partners, non-attorney advocates etc.)
 - f. How your office gets cases (e.g. typical intake, beginning of the representation [by court appointment or retainer] etc.)
- 3. Offer substantive legal trainings to help local juvenile court counsel and legal aid attorneys to be able to issue spot, resolve legal issues, or refer cases.** For attorneys in counties that have local dependency and/or juvenile defender continuing legal education or scheduled brown bag training, invite legal aid to join or present.
- 4. Legal aid should offer technical assistance to juvenile court counsel.** Legal aid attorneys have deep knowledge about various civil legal aid issues (e.g.

¹ Note: a few of these overview topics may be more applicable to legal aid providing information to juvenile court counsel (e.g. case acceptance guidelines); however, this high level information can be very helpful in both directions since civil legal aid attorneys may be less familiar with some of the nuances of juvenile court representation (e.g. best interest representation vs. stated interest representation or providing legal services to youth who are placed outside the county of jurisdiction).

housing, health access, public benefits etc.) and can provide detailed legal information to their juvenile court counsel partners. Providing this information allows the juvenile court attorney to either provide the necessary advice and/or advocacy for their client or to refer the case to legal aid. Note: this strategy can also include connecting the juvenile court counsel to the “right person” at an agency or organization (e.g. social services, housing authority, CBO, etc.) since legal aid attorneys oftentimes have relationships with these agencies and a base of knowledge that can be very helpful to a juvenile court attorney navigating these less-familiar systems.

5. **Create “warm handoff” referral mechanisms between juvenile court counsel and legal aid offices.** One way to do this is for legal aid to create a short intake or referral form for juvenile court counsel to provide necessary information to easily refer a case to legal aid. These connections and referrals could also occur through periodic joint case staffing, by designating particular contacts in each office to directly handoff cases, or staffing in-person clinics at the juvenile court house (see more below). Juvenile court counsel could also incorporate the civil legal aid intake/issue or referral form into their own intake procedures.
6. **Have clients sign appropriate releases of information (as needed or applicable) to ensure collaboration to work towards shared goals.** Releases will allow both attorneys (legal aid and juvenile court) to ensure that they’re working in partnership to support the youth and family. It also allows the attorneys to communicate with each other if there are issues with the case or with reaching or maintaining contact with the client.
7. **Meet or reach families where they are located.** Legal aid attorneys could provide office hours or a legal aid clinic at the juvenile court, or ensure that flyers/contact information for their organization is posted in appropriate places at the courthouse (as permitted).
8. **Add questions about current or former foster youth status/child welfare or juvenile justice involvement for youth and young adults (up to age 26)² to**

² Many benefits and entitlements have different age limits/end dates, and may or may not be connected to current court involvement, so even older youth, or youth who are no longer in foster care, may be eligible. Examples include the Transitional Housing Placement-Plus (THP-Plus) program for former foster youth ages 18-25 (see Youth Law Center’s [Fact Sheet: Transitional Housing Placement Program-Plus](#)), Foster



legal aid intake forms. These questions do not need to be extensive, nor do they need to ask for information protected by Welfare and Institutions Code Section 827, but capturing this information early can help to ensure that a legal aid youth client is properly screened for all possible benefits, entitlements etc uniquely related to these statuses. Examples of some types of questions that would assist in gathering this information include:

- a. Where were you living on your 18th birthday?³
- b. Where were you supposed to be living?⁴
- c. Have you ever lived with someone other than your parents?
- d. Has a court ever made decisions about where you live, or who you live with?
- e. Have you ever had a social worker or probation officer?
- f. Have you ever had a lawyer?

These are more nuanced than the questions “have you ever been in foster care?” or “have you ever been involved with juvenile probation?” since some youth may not immediately know whether they were in foster care or be willing to share that information at an initial intake.

9. Engage juvenile court partners in community needs assessments to ensure the unique needs of systems-impacted youth and families are considered.

Mapping and tracking the various civil legal needs of local communities, including families that are impacted by juvenile court systems, can help ensure that families are receiving necessary civil legal supports that may prevent them from becoming involved in the juvenile court system, or help the family to exit the child welfare or juvenile justice systems faster.

Youth to Independence or Family Unification Program Housing Choice Vouchers for youth ages 18-25 (see Youth Law Center’s [FYI and FUP Overview Fact Sheet \(California\)](#)), or Former Foster Youth Medi-Cal (4M Medi-cal) for youth ages 18-26 (see <https://coveredtil26.org/>).

³ This question is particularly important since youth under age 21 who turned 18 years old while subject to a foster care placement order through the juvenile dependency or delinquency court; or who turned 18 under a juvenile court legal guardianship or adoption order, then lost the support of their legal guardian or adoptive parent, may be able to reenter extended foster care to access age-appropriate supports and services to help them transition to adulthood, including housing and case management. See Welf. & Inst. Code §§ 388(e), 388.1, 11400(v), and 11400(aa). For more about extended foster care reentry in California, see Youth Law Center’s [Fact Sheet: Extended Foster Care Reentry in California](#).

⁴ This question may help to provide additional details or clarity to question (a) because “subject to a foster care placement order” means the court order, not where the youth is physically located (e.g. for a youth who may not be staying at their court ordered foster care placement on their 18th birthday).



10. Engage court partners in these conversations as well. Including the court and the bench in trainings and collaborative spaces can ensure that bench officers understand the benefits of legal aid partnerships and can assist the bench to make proper referrals, orders, or recommendations if needed.



Additional Resources

Opportunities for Cross-Training

Advokids Dependency 101 Training

<https://advokids.org/training/juvenile-dependency-training-for-attorneys/>

Alliance for Children’s Rights, Monthly Webinar Series

<https://allianceforchildrensrights.org/resources/>

Child Welfare Policy Roundtable

<https://www.childrennow.org/blog/cwroundtable/>

John Burton Advocates for Youth Policy Webinars

<https://jbay.org/>

Juvenile Cases, Articles, Resources, Trainings (CART) by the Judicial Council Center for Families, Children & the Courts (CFCC)

<https://jcart.courts.ca.gov/user/login?destination=/home>

Legal Aid Association of California

<https://www.laaonline.org/train/>

Practising Law Institute (PLI)

<https://www.pli.edu/>

Pro Bono Training Institute (PBTI)

<https://pbtraining.org/>

Youth Law Center’s Transition Aged Youth Civil Legal Practice Exchange Training Series.

<https://www.ylc.org/resource/tay-px-flyer/>. Contact mlopez@ylc.org to learn more or join.

Other Resources

Alliance for Children’s Rights



<https://allianceforchildrensrights.org/resources/>

Center on Juvenile & Criminal Justice

<https://www.cjcj.org/>

Dependency Quick Guide from the Judicial Council Center for Families, Children & the Courts (CFCC)

<https://www.courts.ca.gov/dogbook.htm>

The Gault Center

<https://www.defendyouthrights.org/>

John Burton Advocates for Youth

<https://jbay.org/resources/>

National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC)

<https://naccchildlaw.org/resources/>

National Center for Youth Law

<https://youthlaw.org/resource-library>

National Health Law Program, Foster Youth Health Access California Listserv

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdHh9BTzmB7iNJM8tFgil0Kgvhshs35xX-3cRqDofg8znuGvg/viewform>

Center for Law, Brain and Behavior's NeuroLaw Library

<https://clbbneurolawlibrary.com/resource>

Pacific Juvenile Defender Center

<https://www.pjdc.org/resources/>

Youth Law Center

<https://www.ylc.org/resource-library/>