

In-Home Learning System:

Technology for delivery of education and training to foster youth in San Bernardino, California

Introduction

According to The Annie E. Casey Foundation, high school dropout rates among foster youth are as high as 55%. That sounds especially dire when you consider that high school dropout rates for the general population are at 18%. With such low numbers of academic success in foster youth, it is no wonder that they often fail to reach a number of other life's milestones. Covenant House, a non-profit organization that serves homeless youth, reports that "Compared to other youth in the United States, kids who age out of foster care are more likely to not have completed high school or received a GED, they often suffer from mental health problems, many are unemployed and live in poverty, and nearly 40% become homeless."

In 2011, San Bernardino County Children and Family Services in San Bernardino, California, in partnership with Business Access, launched an In-Home Learning System Program that sought to address high rates of unemployment, low wages and lack of a High School Diploma or GED in foster youth.

The Program

The Business Access In-Home Learning System (IHLS) is a self-sufficiency development program. Individuals, or "Achievers" as they are called, were guided every step of the way so that they could reach the end goal of increased employment retention, higher wages, a high school diploma or GED, and long-term self-sufficiency. Achievers were given laptop computers preloaded with learning modules and internet access for 12 months, so that they could complete their curriculums from anywhere. The curriculum was individually assigned but Achievers also received across the board work readiness training. Upon successful completion of the program, Achievers earned ownership of their laptops.

Goals

The goals of this program were:

- Complete all assigned training
- Complete job profile and resume
- Complete the core curriculum within the first 30 days
- Meet monthly participation requirements (40 hours per month)
- Obtain a GED or High School Diploma
- Secure unsubsidized employment

Eligibility

In order to enroll in this IHLS program, which was funded by the Department of Family Services, individuals were required to be young adults who were part of the foster care system in San Bernardino. Individuals who took part in the program were either enrolled in high school, home schooled or already finished with high school and working or looking for work. Their ages ranged from 14-18. Achievers included both males and females and they lived with distant relatives, in a group home or with foster families.

Results

A total of 20 youths began the program in June 2011. In order to graduate from the program Achievers could either:

A) Obtain full time employment and maintain it for at least six months
Or

B) Meet the course requirements of the program for one full year. This meant that 2 courses per week had to be completed.

There was a 100% success rate. All 20 of these Achievers completed and graduated from the program within one year of starting! They completed 1,312 courses, which is an average of 62 courses each. 197 curriculums were completed. Participation hours over the year that the program was carried out were 7,336.

A Closer Look: Patrick's Story

Patrick R. was one foster child who found success with the Business Access In-Home Learning System program. He had been in foster care in San Bernardino since the age of 11 after the deaths of both his parents and was 18 at the time he was enrolled in the IHLS program. Patrick was picked to take part in the program because of his determination to create a successful life for himself in spite of his hectic and unstable upbringing. Unlike many of the other program participants, Patrick had already earned his high school diploma by the start of the program. A week after the program began, he had secured a full time position at a local security company. Because of this, Patrick and his mentor decided that his goal for the program should be to engage in Professional & Personal Development Curriculums through the IHLS. His hope was to land a better paying position with his employer. At the time, he was making minimum wage.

Within two weeks of beginning the program, Patrick completed his required Digital Literacy Component. When his mentor asked him how his courses were going, Patrick replied,

"The courses I have been taking are so informational. I think all of this should be required in high school! I've learned so much in the past 2 months. Because I take the laptop with me to my job, I am able to work on my courses during my down time. My boss saw me taking a course on resume writing and told me that it should come in handy because there will be an assistant manager position opening up soon! I think that really impressed him."

Patrick went on to complete 50 courses total while still holding on to his full time job. Because Patrick was able to keep a full time position for 6 months, he was eligible to graduate Business Access and earn full ownership of his computer on December 29th, 2011. A month after graduating from the Business Access Program, Patrick excitedly told his mentor that he had just been promoted to Assistant Manager and would now be making \$14.75 an hour — a \$5 an hour pay increase!

When asked about his experience with the BA IHLS program, Patrick replied,

"My time with Business Access really showed me that I can do anything I put my mind to. I was really confused on what I should be doing after I graduated high school because I was not going to college. I thought I was going to be making minimum wage forever. My boss was so impressed with my dedication to complete my online courses; he said that was his main reason for giving me a promotion. I am so happy I decided to participate in this program, I would recommend this program for anybody looking to better themselves and wanting a better life!"

