

SAN DIEGO

South Bay Community Services (SBCS)

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“A lot more people would be homeless and people would not have people to talk to for counseling – they wouldn’t know where to go for help with things – without South Bay Community Services. I was homeless for a month after I turned 18. I was three months pregnant when I went there, and they helped me get medical [care], which I had gone without for a really long time. They referred me to a job with SBCS, where I now work as a peer educator for CAT, and at Casa Nuestra, where I help out homeless youth as a residential counselor.”

-- Lisa Jorgensen, age 19, former Trolley Trestle resident and now SBSC peer educator and residential counselor

Mission: Founded in 1971, SBCS began as a treatment center for drug abusing teens and has evolved and expanded in response to the growing needs of the community. SBCS currently provides services, support and opportunities for more than 20,000 individuals and families each year. SBCS is a multi-service and community development agency.

Overview: Several programs focus on providing safe and productive environments for foster youth, including an affordable transitional living program for youth aging out of foster care, skill building for foster care youth, and shelter and services for runaway and homeless youth.

- The *Trolley Trestle Program* is a 24-month transitional living program for homeless former foster youth ages 18 to 23 and their young children. Staff maintains an office on site and conducts group and case management activities in the youths’ apartments. These activities include assistance in developing and carrying out individualized service plans. Participants are either enrolled in an educational program or employed, and some work on their independent living skills development in a structured program. Participants learn basic life skills (budgeting, providing for nutritional needs, keeping their living space clean) as well as job skills, including job search coaching and interview tips.
- *Casa Nuestra* is a voluntary group home for homeless and runaway youth ages 12 to 17. If reunification with family is not possible, youth are taught independent living skills to become self-sufficient. For reunification, family must be willing to attend counseling and multi-family groups.
- The *Independent Living Skills Program*, for foster youth ages 16 to 21, seeks to train participating youth in independent living skills and provide information needed to access community resources and agencies.

Elements include:

- Individual and family counseling
- Support and group counseling
- Case management, advocacy, crisis intervention, home visiting
- Referral assistance
- Skill development: Parenting education (including a collaboration with the First 5 Program, which conducts weekly parenting classes), decision-making, conflict resolution
- Career guidance, job skill-building
- Tutoring and academic assistance
- Leadership development

Target Population: Casa Nuestra residents are youth 16 to 21. Trolley Trestle residents are 18-year-olds aging out of the foster care program.

Evaluation: Trolley Trestle Transitional Living Program, Program Evaluation Semi-Annual Report
October 2003 – March 2004

Results:

- One hundred percent of youth participating in Trolley Trestle for at least 6 months obtain their high school diploma or GED by the time they leave.
- Of those youth who were in the Trolley Trestle program for 6 months and graduated from high school, 100 percent went on to college, trade, or vocational school at the completion of services. One hundred percent of the youth who were not attending school found employment for at least 20 hours per week.
- Trolley Trestle is always looking for unique ways to include our youth in decision-making opportunities. As a result, three former residents have been hired by South Bay Community Services to work as Peer Educators within various SBCS programs.

A former resident of Casa Nuestra was recently hired as a Peer Educator for SBCS' Independent Living Skills Program. An exceptional role model for all the youth we serve, she will complete her associate degree in criminal justice this spring and has been accepted into the Police Academy. She is an advocate for foster youth throughout San Diego County, and her strong commitment to improving the dependency system has had a positive impact on the lives of foster youth. She will travel to Washington, D.C. in June to speak with congressional leaders on the need for change within the dependency system.

“There are classes where youth learn about domestic violence and how to take care of themselves. The programs also connect people with where to go, through referrals. SBSC is about prevention.”

-- Lisa Jorgensen, age 19, former Trolley Trestle resident and now SBSC peer educator and residential counselor