



Vice President of Programs

Oakland, California

Each year in California, more than 5,000 youth age out of foster care and lose access to all state-funded foster care services. Without housing, education or emotional support, 65 percent of foster youth will face imminent homelessness, 20 percent will be arrested or incarcerated, 46 percent will complete high school and only 1 percent will graduate from college. – www.firstplaceforyouth.org

Executive Summary

First Place for Youth (First Place) is redefining the experience for youth transitioning out of foster care by delivering an innovative program that helps youth build the necessary life skills towards self-sufficiency and an independent, productive, and responsible adulthood. By making these crucial resources available to transition-age foster youth, ages 18 to 24, First Place helps establish the family stability needed – through housing, education and employment support – to help them avoid negative social outcomes and achieve real long-term self-sufficiency. Over the last decade, First Place has had a profound impact on its youth participants who are five times less likely to experience homelessness, three times less likely to give birth before the age of 21, three times less likely to be arrested, six times more likely to be enrolled in college, twice as likely to graduate from high school, and twice as likely to be employed.

Grounded in positive youth development theory, First Place's approach focuses on partnering with youth in service delivery and providing situations to fulfill their full range of developmental needs – educational, economic, social, and psychological. To escape chronic homelessness and long-term poverty and break the intergenerational cycle of foster care, foster youth face a tremendous need for housing, supportive services and development of independent living skills. First Place's model has a strong track record of successful outcomes, and the potential to grow toward sustainably addressing these persistent challenges in California and beyond. Founded in 1998 and based in Oakland, California, First Place operates in five counties: Alameda (headquarters), Contra Costa, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Solano. It also manages the First Step Community Resource Center in Oakland, which serves as an information and referral hub for youth. Key programming areas include: Housing Stability, Economic Stability, Education, Health, and Community Connection.

Under the leadership of CEO Sam Cobbs and with support from the Tipping Point Community, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, The Conrad Hilton Foundation, New Profit Inc., among others, First Place has grown from a housing organization in Oakland to a nationally recognized employment and education program that is changing the dialogue around emancipated youth, shaping the culture and

practices of child welfare in the State of California, and affecting legislation in a way that supports the desired outcome of self-sufficiency.

The implementation of Fostering Connections to Success Act (FCSA), which extends foster care from 18 to 21, is changing the landscape for foster youth providers in California. This recent legislation is fueling the growth of First Place's programs and currently positions the organization as a national model for replication. As a strategic plan for national expansion emerges, the Vice President of Programs has an opportunity to refine and revision the program model to demonstrate its power, strengthen its evidence base and ultimately impact youth policy across the country.

Reporting into the CEO, the Vice President of Programs will oversee both the day-to-day operations and the broad strategic vision of the full continuum of First Place programs, which are being delivered through multiple sites in northern and southern California. As a member of the executive team, s/he will also help to set the agency's strategic direction, shape policy priorities, monitor relevant shifts in the regional and national landscape, and develop the systems and relationships that will allow First Place to fully capture opportunities for expansion of its innovative, transformational model. S/he will optimize the quality and effectiveness of First Place's programs by deepening staff and organizational capacity to create results, assisting staff in analyzing and leveraging evaluative data in order to develop, implement and refine programs and continue to provide the highest levels of service to youth.

The ideal candidate will be a proven program builder and leader with a sophisticated understanding of data-driven program design and management and a record of success in service delivery, program operations, performance management, strategy, and organizational design. S/he will possess an ability to translate strategy and theory into actionable and executable steps; the curiosity and sophistication to effectively test, build out, and re-envision the program model in a continuous improvement process; outstanding aptitude for understanding and communicating data to a variety of audiences; and an unwavering commitment to strengthening evidence-based practices. Exceptional analytical skills combined with a transparent and results-oriented style that embraces collective problem-solving and proactive team-building are essential. The Vice President will inspire a talented and seasoned team to embrace change while honoring the history and proud legacy of the organization. S/he will bring at least five years of senior management experience, a proven track record of building and leading cross-functional and multi-disciplinary teams, and exhibit crisp and inclusive decision making in the face of complex challenges.

Challenges and Opportunities for the Vice President of Programs

Focus on critical program revision work currently underway while leading strategic planning for the ongoing refinement and expansion of all programs to further First Place's success in addressing the persistent challenges facing foster youth. Play an integral role in First Place's program revision work to ensure best-in-class service delivery. Oversee the ongoing evaluation of the programs to measure consistency and fidelity to the model, key outcomes, and drive deeper and broader impact. In concert with the board, leadership team, and staff, set ambitious goals that are codified and measurable, and carry the team forward to meet them.

Build and promote a rigorous culture of data and continuous learning and shepherd the ongoing internal and external evaluation plan for all agency programs.

In concert with the Director of Evaluation and Learning, the VP will develop programmatic strategies to address issues identified through continuous program evaluation, analysis and reflection, seizing opportunities to improve and/or modify service delivery at the site level. S/he will bring keen awareness of developing best practices in the field and lead the publications of white papers and other publications for dissemination.

Serve as an effective organizational ambassador and spokesperson, raising the profile of First Place as a national model in arenas encompassing government, philanthropy, evaluation and performance management, the media, and other venues that amplify its message and potential for impact.

The VP will leverage external meetings and conferences to both contribute to and learn from field-based best practices and seek opportunities for First Place to have a voice in key policy and advocacy conversations. S/he will develop a cogent outreach strategy to raise brand awareness and utilization of First Place's services, including expansion of the referral network of social workers and other youth-facing entities to drive growth.

Foster an environment that embraces teamwork, open communication and dialogue, accountability, integrity, and commitment to quality, and establish systems to support and sustain it.

The VP will work with program staff to foster strategic thinking, developing processes and relationships that cultivate an impact- and data-driven learning community. This environment will form a strong foundation for the hiring, training, management, development, and supervision of all departmental staff, including: Director of Contracts and Partnerships, Director of Evaluation and Learning, Director of Program Operations, as well as regional Assistant Directors and Managers, and others.

Qualifications of the Ideal Candidate

While no one person may embody all of the qualities enumerated below, the ideal candidate will possess many of the following professional and personal abilities, attributes, and experiences:

- A demonstrated commitment to the mission of changing the life trajectories of low-income and disadvantaged youth and the firmly held belief that all people have the capacity to achieve economic independence and success; a servant-leader orientation with a grounding in direct service to underserved populations, preferably youth;
- Sophisticated leadership skills and presence developed through a minimum of 8-10 years of progressive program management experience, preferably in a high-growth, best-in-class organization with a youth-facing and/or direct service focus; Demonstrated capacity to lead a multi-site, statewide organization and manage a distributed team;
- Unwavering commitment to quality programs as well as experience managing in a data-driven environment with an emphasis on rigorous evaluation; the technical skillset and sophistication to quickly and effectively test program components and refinements and respond to new data and findings;
- The highest levels of integrity; skill in fostering open dialogue and encouraging accountability and self-reflection; a management style that embodies respect, teamwork, and transparency; proven capacity to coach, manage and develop high-performing teams, set and achieve strategic objectives, empower staff to take ownership of the strategy, and manage a budget; an effective manager by

indirect influence, who can build and reinforce buy-in and mutual accountability even when geographically removed;

- Exceptional written and verbal communication skills; ability to translate and organize complex data effectively for a spectrum of audiences, internally and externally, and the charisma to inspire passion and support for First Place's mission;
- Demonstrated understanding of cost analysis and budget development, as well as experience with the intersection of funding and programming; an effective steward of resources and knowledge of relevant compliance standards and procedures;
- Decisive nature and well-honed ability to independently anticipate and analyze situations, define problems and objectives, recognize viable alternatives and formulate rapid solutions, with understanding of the inherent risks and the implications of making tough decisions;
- Sense of humor, humility, perspective, and balance; and
- Bachelor's degree required; advanced degree preferred.

To Apply

This search is being conducted with assistance from Allison Kupfer Poteet and Adele Mezher of Nonprofit Professionals Advisory Group. Candidates are encouraged to apply as soon as possible, and applications will be reviewed as they are received. Please send nominations and/or applications including cover letter describing your interest and qualifications, your resume (in Word format), salary history, and where you learned of the position to: fpfy-vpp@nonprofitprofessionals.com.

For more information see www.firstplaceforyouth.org

First Place for Youth is an Equal Opportunity Employer.
Candidates of all backgrounds are encouraged to apply.