

Beyond Emancipation: GROW Oakland Farm

Foster youth are one of the most vulnerable populations in our community. One study revealed that at age 24 only one in five was employed, only two percent had a college degree and one in five had been homeless within a year of exiting foster care.

When a young person grows up in foster care, it means they have experienced trauma, loss and barriers to their development. They have had to grow up too fast in some ways, and in other ways they have not had opportunities to develop.

Beyond Emancipation (B:E) helps young people from foster care and probation on their journey to adulthood with education, employment, housing, life skills and wellness support. As young people transition from teens to adults we connect them with resources and opportunities and reconnect them to their own dreams and unique abilities. With over 20 years of experience as Alameda County's primary provider of these services, we know that **young people are our future** and working together we can build healthy vibrant communities.

B:E is launching recently-acquired **GROW Oakland Farm** in West Oakland, building on its roots as a successful social enterprise under a previous nonprofit. GROW Oakland Farm is the only urban flower farm of its kind in the nation, and will serve more than 90 youth each year. The farm is a natural place for young people to flourish.

Using the **urban farm as a classroom**, we provide 45 youth each year with paid 12-week internships where they learn to become leaders, work together and succeed in a work setting. Participant outcomes include: 80% will have increased comfort and confidence in speaking with professional adults about their skills and accomplishments; and making decisions that have a positive impact on their lives; and 80% will understand frameworks for evaluating business impact and improve their team work and leadership skills. In addition, youth interns take home paychecks and fresh flowers.

Using the **urban farm as a source of health and wellness**, we will plant and harvest vegetables for use in healthy eating workshops and community meals. This will introduce a seed to plate understanding of healthy eating to an additional 45 youth participating in B:E workshops.

The farm is also a community gathering place and a blooming bright spot amongst the concrete, overpasses and grit of West Oakland.

B:E is seeking funding for the internships, to incorporate the farm into our wellness and workforce programs, and to teach job readiness and business. When young people have the opportunity to connect with the earth, build community and see the literal fruits of their labor, **we all benefit.**

