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COLLECTION:

Clinton Presidential Records
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Domestic Policy Council (Nicole Rabner)
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FOLDER TITLE:

Emancipation-Interagency Issue [2]

2012-1035-S

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RESTRICTION CODES

Presidential Records Act - [44 U.S.C. 2204(a)]

P1 National Security Classified Information [(a)(1) of the PRA]
P2 Relating to the appointment to Federal office [(a)(2) of the PRA]
P3 Release would violate a Federal statute [(a)(3) of the PRA]
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Freedom of Information Act - [5 U.S.C. 552(b)]

b(1) National security classified information [(b)(1) of the FOIA]
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THE NATIONAL FOSTER CARE AWARENESS PROJECT

Improving the Transition from Foster Care to Adulthood

Administrative Steps the Federal Government Can Take to Help¹

Young people in foster care are the proverbial "canary in the coal mine." That is, they are so vulnerable that they are often the first affected when a public system doesn't work very well. The distress of the canary warns that the miners are at risk. When public systems fail children in foster care, they are also failing other vulnerable young people: the effects are just not as immediately apparent.

Almost all public systems touch young people in foster care: education, training, juvenile justice, health care, housing, welfare, substance abuse and mental health, as well as the child welfare system. Just looking at one piece of the puzzle is inadequate and, too often, no one looks at the whole.

The following pages identify specific cross-agency and administrative activities and initiatives to help youth transition from foster care to independent adulthood, using current resources and funding in a more holistic way. These ideas assume no new federal money and no changes in federal law.

Focus Public Attention on the Issues

The issues faced by young people in foster care as they try to move successfully to adulthood (often against great odds) are far below the radar screen of most Americans, including the press. The White House has an unparalleled ability to raise the level of public awareness about this or any other issue. The White House conferences on early childhood development (and the budget and policy initiatives that have resulted from these conferences) illustrate this power. Similarly, Cabinet Secretaries and other Administration officials can use their positions to highlight important policy issues. *Ideas:*

Hold a White House conference that focuses on helping young people in foster care move successfully to adulthood.

Involve juvenile court judges in this conference in a central way since the courts actually place many young people in foster care, and since many children and young people in foster care tangle with the justice system. Identify and highlight

¹ Policy advice provided by Margaret Dunkle, Institute for Educational Leadership.

strategies that recognize that children in foster care have fewer supports and are consequently at greater risk than most other children and that respond by providing an early "stitch in time" or extra support along the way.

(Judges could also be effectively engaged in this issue in ways other than a big conference: for example, through a speech by a high-level Administration official at an appropriate organizational meeting or conference of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, by hosting a White House or Justice-HHS meeting of judges, etc.)

Use children and youth in foster care as the theme of Vice President Gore's "Family Reunion" in the year 2000 or 2001. (The 1999 theme is families and communities.)

Provide one of the Vice President's "Hammer Awards" (for reinventing government) for work that helps young people transition successfully from foster care to adulthood. Or, alternatively, give a special award to an agency, community or state at the conference or "Family Reunion" suggested above.

Work with Andrew Cuomo, Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), to exert leadership concerning homeless youth, expressly including those who have been in foster care. Leadership efforts could include: issuing (with some fanfare) a report on homelessness among youth (making linkages to foster care), getting the word out about promising approaches to address these issues, giving speeches and using the HUD seminar series to highlight the issues.

Events could be hosted by any number of Administration officials including the First Lady or the Second Lady. These high-profile events could engage well-known people who are already involved with these issues (just as Rob Reiner was involved with the White House conferences on early childhood development). A possibility is Monty Roberts of "Horse Whisperer" fame: he and his wife have had many foster children.

Key players at any event should cover a broad spectrum, not just the traditional "child welfare" community. Important players include school/educational leaders (where we would hope these young people *would* be), juvenile justice/law enforcement, faith-based organizations, corporations and "homelessness" leaders (where we hope these young people *will not* be), as well as leaders of all of the systems in between.

Get the Facts Out

Most people don't know the facts about foster care and why it matters to them and their communities. Most officials who run (or legislators who craft) public programs don't understand the degree to which children and youth in foster care are over-represented in the "at-risk" population (however one might define "at-risk" from substance abuse to domestic violence and teen pregnancy). *Ideas:*

Have the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics publish a special report on children and youth in foster care, much as they have done with their "fatherhood" initiative. Include, for example, information about the degree of over-representation of young people in foster care in various populations or programs. Also include, to the extent possible, budget figures about short-term versus long-term costs related to foster care.

Have the Forum use an indicator concerning "foster care" as a "Special Indicator" in their 1999 or 2000 report on *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being*, though this will be challenging since so much of the data about foster care is administrative in nature and of relatively poor quality.

These efforts or, for that matter, any "data" effort would highlight the dearth, poor quality and inconsistency across states of information about children and youth in foster care. This could be a very positive result *if* it improved the information available to policy makers and communities alike.

Use the Regulatory Process Creatively to Address "Transition" Issues

Several major pieces of federal legislation recently signed into law by the President *have the potential* to improve the chances that a young person in foster care will move successfully into adulthood.

The Workforce Investment Act (administered by the U.S. Department of Labor) totally revamps the nation's federally-funded job training system. (WIA is especially important for young people "the forgotten half" of whom do not pursue a post-secondary education.)

The major student financial assistance programs for post-secondary education (administered by the U.S. Department of Education) have just been reauthorized by Congress.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is important because many children and youth in foster care spend too little time in any one school to be properly diagnosed, much less receive the services they need to learn and be ready for higher education or the work force.

Ideas:

Instruct the Departments of Labor and Education to write regulations and implement these laws in ways that help young people in foster care use these benefits and services to make a successful transition through school and to adulthood. Ask these departments to identify specific barriers and ways to overcome these barriers within the bounds of the statute.

Especially look at such intensive programs as the Job Corps, a largely residential program that serves more than 60,000 youth (age 14-24) each year, providing such services as basic education, vocational skill training, work experience, counseling, health care and other support services.

The Youth Opportunity Grant Program (in the Workforce Investment Act, \$250 million) could also be important, because it focuses on EZ/EC (Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities), where there is high poverty, high unemployment and, most likely, also a high percentage of children and youth in foster care.

Identify ways to assure that schools *quickly evaluate* students in foster care for their special education needs, and schools make sure that the resulting *Individual Education Plans (IEPs) follow these young people* when they change schools. For example, use the new coordination provision in IDEA towards this end.

Have a senior Administration official convene a meeting at which these agencies report on their specific plans, including barriers, solutions and time lines. Possible conveners include the Vice President, First Lady, Second Lady or Director of OMB.

Also, involve top policy staff from *other agencies* in this meeting, and have them follow up by suggesting specific administrative or regulatory changes that they might make in the programs that *they* administer.

Push the Departments and States to Use Existing Flexibility in Federal Laws to Help Youth in Foster Care Transition Successfully

Few federal agencies (as well as few communities and states) use this existing flexibility creatively to do more, better, with less. It is always easier, at least in the short run, to continue to fund existing programs, practices and people.

Existing flexibility in federal laws includes, for example:

Being able to waive some aspects of federal education, training, health and welfare laws (often as a "demonstration" program).

The ability of schools and school districts to use up to five percent of their federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funds to coordinate health and social service which has tremendous implications for children in foster care.

HHS's ability to grant waivers to allow states to experiment with federal child welfare programs, using the demonstration authority in the law.

Flexibility concerning Medicaid and CHIP that is available to states (either at their option or by asking for a federal waiver).

Ideas:

Convene knowledgeable practitioners from the field along with the various departmental experts on waivers and flexibility, with the charge of developing a "best practices" or "bright ideas" manual with an emphasis on young people transitioning from foster care.

Train the waiver, "state plan," and flexibility "experts" in each agency about best practices, and make these materials broadly available, e.g., in publications, on the Web, etc.

Provide leadership to encourage states to open their federal Independent Living Program (Title IV-E, \$70 million annually) to young people up to age 21. (States can do this at their option, but it costs them money. There is a 50 percent matching requirement after \$45 million of the federal funds are spent.)

Have HCFA (the Health Care Financing Agency, which is in charge of Medicaid) aggressively encourage states to expand Medicaid eligibility to all children (not just those who have been in foster care) until their 21st birthday. Specific actions could include, for example: a letter to states from the Medicaid Director or HCFA administrator specifically suggesting that states amend their state Medicaid plans to cover children up to age 21, a "forcing event" (such as a speech by the President or Vice President to the Governors or state Medicaid Directors, or a White House meeting).

These youth (age 18, 19 and 20) would be defined as "children" for Medicaid purposes: the significance of this is that they would be eligible for the more comprehensive EPSDT services, rather than the more limited package of Medicaid services available to adults. (EPSDT= Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment = the "kids" part of Medicaid.)

This expanded coverage for 18-20 year-olds is especially important, given that the new CHIP (Child Health Insurance Program) only covers children until their 19th birthday.

Create a "Re-invention Lab" to Focus on Foster Care Transition

The problems and issues faced by children and youth in foster care are important in their own right. They are also often early-warning signs of systemic failures programs and policies that don't work very well. The Vice President's National Partnership for Reinventing Government (NPR) has designed "re-invention labs" throughout government to test ways to make government work better, cost less and get results that matter to the American public. *Ideas:*

Explore having an interdepartmental "re-invention lab" to test successful interdepartmental, interagency and intergovernmental ways to help young people in foster care transition to successful adulthood.

Building on the NPR focus on "putting customers first," involve young people who are (or have been) in foster care as well as practitioners in the design of this re-invention lab.

Use foster care as a test case (or "model") to define meaningful interdepartmental performance measures under the Government Performance and Results Act.

Mine lessons that have been learned in the relatively small Foster Care Independent Living Program (created in 1986) and identify specific ways to apply these lessons more broadly.

Highlight and Replicate What Works

Too often, people across agencies don't have models of success. They need to know what works to help young people transition successfully from foster care to adulthood. *Ideas:*

Have the involved federal departments identify *and disseminate* "best practices" to help young people in foster care transition successfully. Some of these "best practices" will involve asking for federal waivers; others will not.

Provide technical assistance through the departments, their "TA contractors" and/or the WEB giving specific advice about how to use existing flexibility to serve young people transitioning from foster care to adulthood successfully.

In instances where federal law requires states and agencies to develop "plans," train agency staff so that they can suggest specific ways these plans can effectively address foster care "transition" issues.

Push for Comprehensive Plans That Work for These Young People

Again and again, we hear about children and youth in foster care who have multiple case workers and multiple but piecemeal "plans." For example, the same young person could have one "case manager" in the child welfare system, another in the health system, a probation officer in the juvenile justice system, and a disability that requires the school system to develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Yet, these multiple case workers have typically never even met one another, much less worked collaboratively to develop a sensible road map for the young person in foster care. *Ideas:*

Have the departments identify specific "plans" for young people (*and their families*) that are required or encouraged by various federal laws.

Scrutinize "confidentiality" requirements and provisions in federal law. And then identify and disseminate ways for agencies to share key information without violating the rights or privacy of young people in foster care.

Next, develop and disseminate specific suggestions for coordinating these plans more effectively. Issues that are likely to arise include: different goals and accountability measures for the various plans, the lack of incentives for coordinating across agencies, different timing and reporting requirements, different professional training of the case managers/"planners," etc.

Train professionals in the foster care system so that they are better equipped to coordinate these multiple "case management" systems.

Develop a Web site that a case manager or a young person in foster care could use to identify possible sources of support (including, but not limited to, funding) as he or she moves into adulthood.

Explore modifying the content and administration of the written case plans for each child in foster care (as required by federal law since 1980) to make these plans more coordinated and comprehensive across departments, systems, programs and levels of government. In these plans, place an increased emphasis on transitioning to adulthood as a desirable "permanency arrangement."

The lessons learned from looking at young people transitioning from foster care will also be relevant to other children, youth and families especially those at risk and those affected by multiple public systems as well.

THE NATIONAL FOSTER CARE AWARENESS PROJECT

Improving the Transition from Foster Care to Adulthood

Policy Options

There has been a great deal of well-deserved attention recently to the challenges that young people face as they make the transition from foster care to adulthood. News articles and young people themselves point to the need for stronger systems of support for these most vulnerable citizens. We must now move toward improvement of programs and coordination of policies that will enhance the child welfare system's ability to help every youth in foster care become a self-sufficient, contributing member of his or her community.

Improving the transition of young people from foster care into healthy adulthood requires a clear, consistent goal that guides a child's experiences and becomes the primary theme for organizing service delivery. Throughout the foster care experience, a relationship must be established and sustained between each child and one or more caring, committed adults. Such relationships would support a developmental approach to meeting youth needs, and would create desperately needed stability in the life of the young person. The responsible adult or adults would facilitate connections for that young person both within and beyond the child welfare system.

These connections must be broader than currently defined so that decisions affecting young people involve not only service providers within the child welfare system but also the young people themselves, their foster families, legal guardians, service providers (such as teachers and employers), and other concerned community members. A wide array of connections must be established while a youth is still in foster care, and continue beyond the time of emancipation. This diverse web of supports will ensure that housing, healthcare, employment, education and other needs are met. We must ensure that young people have both the stable relationships with caring adults and broad, community-wide connections that will help them make the transition to adulthood in healthy and successful ways.

How do we strengthen our nation's ability to promote more successful outcomes for the 25,000 young people who must leave the foster care system each year? Federal and state policies play a critical role in determining what supports and opportunities are available to this group of youth. Child welfare, education and youth development policies must support the following program and service strategies: *promoting supports for youth, providing ongoing preparation for self-sufficiency, strengthening independent living services, promoting academic achievement, emphasizing career development, teaching money management, ensuring a safe and stable place to live and fostering meaningful attachments between youth in care and one or more caring adults.* The following outlines possible policy enhancements and reforms within current federal statutory authority that will support best practice for helping older youth in foster care.

Promote supports for young people in care and after leaving care

Young people report that relationships with people who care about them and are there for them consistently make all the difference in the world when they are on their own. In addition to education and support in making decisions about permanency, children and youth in care must have opportunities to establish and maintain long-term supportive relationships with caring adults and that continue after emancipation. Opportunities to develop such relationships can be created through participation in mentoring, recreation, community service, and other youth development programs. These relationships can only develop and flourish, however, if children and youth in foster care have access to stable community placements and strong case advocacy.

Young adults need consistent, accessible support after they leave care that will enable them to overcome short-term instability in meeting housing, transportation, child care, employment and education needs. These youth should be able to return to a caring family, child welfare providers or youth development programs for assistance when they need it. An aftercare system would assist young adults in addressing short-term crises, as well as supporting them as they struggle to sustain long-term independence. While the lead agency may vary by community, formal aftercare systems would help connect young people to existing adult support systems and other available community resources.

Policy Ideas:

- Offer incentives for child welfare agencies to provide aftercare services to emancipated young adults
- Encourage coordination at the federal and state level with the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) for outreach to youth leaving the foster care system
- Explore existing programs within the Departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Labor, and Education, and the Corporation for National Service as resources for enhanced support
- Provide policy guidance through creating incentives, performance measures and standards within the Independent Living Program
- Reward programmatic improvements from states such as: (1) identifying and training a group of caring, committed adults who will support young people as they prepare for this transition and beyond the age of emancipation as needed; (2) creating a resource person on staff in each child welfare agency responsible for broader connections; and (3) forming alumni groups among young adults leaving the foster care system
- Require measurement of outcomes and evaluation of services for those young people who do emancipate from the foster care system to adulthood
- Promote active youth participation in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of services, as well as in advocacy and system reform efforts

Promote Early and Ongoing Preparation for Independence

In addition to planning for permanency, preparing youth for self-sufficiency must begin early. Foster parents, legal guardians, family members, other involved adults (including birth family members) and youth themselves should participate actively in the planning process. Guiding principles and strategies to promote positive long-term development must be integrated into ongoing services from the time a child enters care, and must help forge connections to birth family and community of origin. Life (and social) skills, work skills and academic skills training should be implemented on a continuum of developmental readiness for children and youth of all ages. Maximizing educational continuity and achievement for young people in foster care is of paramount importance. It must go hand in hand with promoting placement stability for a child. Specifically, the child welfare system must connect children and youth to community services and supports that promote academic achievement and readiness for community participation and productive citizenship.

Policy Ideas:

- Integrate early assessment and provision of developmentally appropriate independent living skills into the case plans for all children and youth in care
- Examine current “best practices” around educational attainment for youth in foster care (i.e., programs and partnerships involving schools and child welfare agencies; role of special education and disabilities statutes)
- Promote stability and consistency for youth in educational settings through incentives for tutoring and other services that promote high academic achievement
- Encourage coordination among systems to ensure stability and consistency, i.e. coordination between schools and child welfare agencies (e.g., an education “passport” for youth)
- Examine best practice in school-to-career initiatives (i.e., programs and partnerships involving employers, post-secondary institutions, and high schools)
- Create incentives to improve educational stability for foster youth within the existing federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act
- Increase professional development opportunities for teachers, foster parents and other adults working with foster youth within current child welfare and education statutes

Strengthen Current Independent Living Services

Improve the quality and delivery of current independent living and other critical services that support successful transitions and promote more effective transition planning while young people

are in care. Ensure that resources are allocated fairly to states according to their youth population in foster care. Enhance professional development for case workers and all adult caretakers especially foster parents, teachers and other significant adults in a youth's life to facilitate self-sufficiency skill development while in care and to sustain connections to community resources. Enhance planning for youth in group homes and residential facilities who may not have the support of a family structure during the transition to adulthood. Ensure access to high quality independent living services through promotion of standards for service planning and delivery.

Policy Ideas:

- Utilize existing tax incentives, waivers, interagency agreements or initiatives and other cost-neutral policy mechanisms to encourage effective use of existing resources and funding for independent living and other services
- Increase outreach for use of Medicaid for mental health and other health-related services
- Strengthen the requirements of Independent Living Programs to encourage the child welfare system to coordinate with other institutions' school-to-career and post-secondary education programs
- Strengthen the requirements of Independent Living Programs to meet minimum standards of case management, service coordination and planning, and service delivery
- Connect Americorps volunteers to independent living programs to provide mentoring, tutoring and other educational planning assistance

Promote academic achievement and emphasize career development

Children and youth in foster care often have lower educational outcomes than young people who are raised by their birth parents, and may experience more challenges to successful employment. Contributing factors include unstable school experiences caused by changes in home placements and the lack of focus on developing social skills, work skills and work experience to enable a young person to function effectively in a job. In order to improve these outcomes, the foster care system must promote high academic achievement and strong vocational preparation as goals that all youth in the foster care system can achieve. All young people have equal potential to be successful learners, and should receive the supports and opportunities needed to achieve educational goals. Professional development and coordination among institutions are critical. Extra support for participation in post-secondary education and vocational training should be available to each youth leaving care.

Policy Ideas:

- Identify opportunities for policy coordination across the child welfare system in relation to those federal statutes that address K-12 education, post-secondary education, adult and vocational education, disabilities, workforce, and other relevant opportunities for education and career advancement
- Consider a comprehensive approach linking existing federal programs to create a regulatory “G.I. Bill for Youth in Foster Care” that would include promotion of academic achievement, vocational training and career development
- Ensure that educational achievement, career development, and coordination of services and supports are consistently addressed through case management and planning policies

Increase Emphasis on Fiscal Management and Savings

Allow children and youth in the foster care system to accumulate savings without penalty so that when they leave care they have a capacity to secure basic necessities (e.g., rental deposit for housing, food, transportation and other services). Provide every child who enters the foster care system with a long-term financial plan. The plan needs to include information regarding state laws and financial literacy/training for child welfare providers, foster families, young people, and other adult caretakers. When a young adult leaves the foster care system, a plan for earning and managing money should already be in place.

Policy Ideas:

- Evaluate utility of TANF/individual development accounts for youth in foster care
- Ask the National Endowment for Financial Education to develop potential strategies
- Collect information state-by-state regarding current laws and regulations that affect asset accumulation
- Consider a comprehensive approach linking existing federal programs to create a regulatory “G.I. Bill for Youth in Foster Care” that would address financial needs
- Promote a focus on accumulation of assets in addition to generation of income

Improve Housing Opportunities for Youth Transitioning From Care

Assure that every young adult leaving the foster care system has a plan for immediate short- and long-term housing. Increase access to emergency shelter, transitional housing and longer-term affordable housing. This housing could include foster families, group homes/residences,

transitional living arrangements, community-based placements, and visiting mentor homes (i.e., for young adults who need places to live while in college but not necessarily subject to restrictions of foster care placements)

Ensure that no young person is discharged to homelessness. This is crucial given the numbers of youth who end up in homeless shelters upon leaving the foster care system.

Policy Ideas:

- Promote public/private partnerships for development of affordable transitional housing (within current programs such as the Transitional Living Program) for young people leaving the foster care system
- Invite the Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac Foundations to create challenge grants in high-impact communities to increase supply of affordable housing
- Look at overlap with existing TANF funding regarding opportunities for housing for young welfare recipients
- Examine provisions of Section 8, Supportive Housing, the Family Self-sufficiency Program, the Family Unification Program, and Public Housing statutes to determine feasibility of targeting youth leaving foster care for housing services and support
- Explore potential of flexibility for states to draw down funds for housing through waiver authority

Independent Living Memo for Inter-Departmental Meeting

Each year approximately 17,000 18 year olds "age out" of the public child welfare system and are expected to function as adults. These young adults entered foster care due to abuse and neglect. They were unable to return to their birth families and did not find permanency with an adoptive family. Federal financial support to them ends just at the time they are making the critical transition to adulthood.

A proportion of these children are supported by two HHS programs:

The Independent Living Program (ILP) provides funds to the States that may be used to provide services to foster children who are 16 year of age or older to help them make the transition to independent living by supporting them as they earn a high school diploma; receive vocational training and education; and learn daily living skills such as budgeting, career planning and securing housing and employment. The types of services vary from State to State and may not be used for room or board.

The Transitional Living Program (TLP) provides funds to local community based organizations for residential care, life skills training, and other support services to homeless adolescents, ages 16-21. These programs help these youth achieve self-sufficiency, avoid long-term dependency on social welfare, and become independent, productive members of society.

Both ILP and TLP service providers are encouraged to support young people through a youth development approach which suggests that the best way to prevent young people's involvement in risky behavior is to help them achieve their full developmental potential. Youth development strategies, therefore, focus on giving young people the chance to exercise leadership, build skills, and become involved in their communities.

Like all young adults those leaving the foster care system need support to achieve an effective passage to adulthood. Unlike most, their lives have been chaotic and unpredictable. Maltreatment, lack of connection to families, multiple placements, and the resulting mental health and educational consequences, make the transition to self sufficiency and adult-functioning very difficult. Research documenting the experiences of these youngsters in the years immediately following foster care identifies unstable housing and homelessness, depression, poor health, violence and incarceration as part of their experience.

The support these youngsters need to achieve self-sufficiency, stable living arrangements and mature relationships includes:

- Medical services, including mental health;
- Education and/or vocational training;
- Employment preparation and opportunities, including internships;
- Transitional and/or supported housing; and
- Psycho-social support via mentorship, counseling and/or support groups.

THE NATIONAL FOSTER CARE AWARENESS PROJECT

COPY

December 15, 1998

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of our respective organizations, as well as our collaborative work as a part of the National Foster Care Awareness Project, we would like to thank you and the First Lady for your continued interest and support of our nation's young people.

After years of indifference, there has been a great deal of recent attention directed to adequately address the needs and challenges faced by young people in foster care who are making the transition to adulthood. Through the work of our respective foundations, we recognize the need to strengthen systems of support for the estimated 25,000 youth who leave state foster care each year – often with too little preparation to lead productive lives as adults.

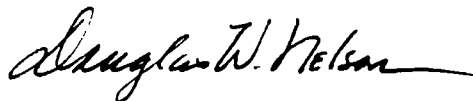
We believe that *now* is the time to move toward improvement of those systems and policies through effective new approaches and innovative collaborations that will ensure every foster youth's development into a self-sufficient, contributing member of his or her community.

Your willingness to tackle this important challenge will have a positive impact—one that can be easily measured because it affects a very specific number of children. Providing improved economic opportunities for these young people as they leave foster care is an achievable goal for your Administration—and one that, no doubt, could be part of your legacy as President. We look forward to working with you, and offer our experiences, research, and commitment to help in this effort.

Respectfully,



Ruth W. Massinga
Chief Executive Officer
The Casey Family Program



Douglas W. Nelson
President
Annie E. Casey Foundation

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Child Welfare League of America, Inc.

The Health Needs of Youth Leaving Foster Care

The extent of the health care problems facing abused and neglected children and youth in foster care is truly alarming [Schor 1982; Hochstadt et al., 1987; Simms, 1989; Halfon, 1992]. Most children enter foster care in a poor state of health, and most enter with developmental, behavioral, and emotional disturbances. Even when compared with other children of the same socioeconomic background, children in foster care suffer much higher rates of serious chronic physical disabilities, birth defects, developmental delays, and emotional problems [American Academy of Pediatrics, 1994]. A GAO study found that "As a group, they [children in foster care] are sicker than homeless children and children living in the poorest sections of the inner city." Chronic medical problems affect 30% to 40% of children and youth in the child welfare system. Often these chronic conditions have been untreated or only partially treated [Schor, 1988].

Adolescents in foster care experience higher risk for continuing medical problems, which are exacerbated by multiple placements, lack of continuity of intervention and record-keeping, and declining emphasis on preventive measures (e.g., immunization) as they enter adolescence. In addition, adolescents in foster care report feeling low levels of trust in adults and the service system, which may prevent their accessing health care and other services.

During the time immediately following statutory discharge from the foster care system (usually at age 18), former foster youth experience tremendous problems both in terms of their health status and in their ability to access health services. Because health coverage ends at the time of emancipation, young people lose both routine preventive care and the care they have needed to treat chronic medical conditions. As many as 25% of youth leaving foster care experience homelessness during the year following emancipation [Cook, 1991]. In a national study of youth accessing services from urban health clinics, 41% of homeless youth served had a history of placement in foster care [National Coalition for the Homeless, 1998].

Securing and maintaining employment are critical factors in accessing health insurance for all adults. Youth who are forced to leave foster care at 18 are often still in high school, and most are still in entry-level employment, if they have been able to secure employment at all. Research suggests that about half of the youth leaving care are employed at the time of discharge [Mech, 1994]. Furthermore, since only 35 to 45 percent of teenagers in foster care are able to graduate from high school, their employment prospects are particularly discouraging. Clearly, the realities of educational underachievement and difficulties with securing and maintaining employment place these youth at a significant disadvantage for achieving self-sufficiency and meeting their health needs.

Like most young people their age, youth leaving foster care cannot achieve immediate economic independence. They carry the additional burdens of the long term effects of severe abuse and neglect, and of not having access to family members who might provide for some of their needs. This vulnerable population of young people needs sustained support from the child welfare system to ensure that their long term health needs are met during the transition to adulthood. Most importantly, they deserve the opportunity to achieve their potential as healthy adults and productive citizens.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Capitol Tragedy

From 1991 until my retirement last September, I was privileged to be a part of the project team that assisted the Architect of the Capitol in the design of the proposed underground visitor center for the U.S. Capitol Building. With the tragic deaths of two esteemed members of the Capitol police, renewed interest in the visitor center has surfaced as one possible way to improve security at the Capitol ("Hill Leaders Press for Visitor's Center," news story, July 30).

Although the visitor center provides a means to conduct security clearances at a safe distance from the Capitol Building, it cannot prevent the type of incident that occurred July 24. As several members of Congress have stated recently, no reasonable measure can be taken—including construction of the visitor

center—that will ensure the safety of the Capitol police in fulfilling their duty to protect those who visit or work in the Capitol Building.

A fuller understanding of the visitor center design, however, will reveal that it offers many important benefits to the Capitol police in conducting their daily activities and in handling emergency situations. Currently, the officers are hampered by inadequate and inefficient facilities housed within the Capitol. With heightened awareness of the importance of the Capitol police in protecting "the People's House," the proposed visitor center can provide tangible support and respect for these unsung heroes of democracy.

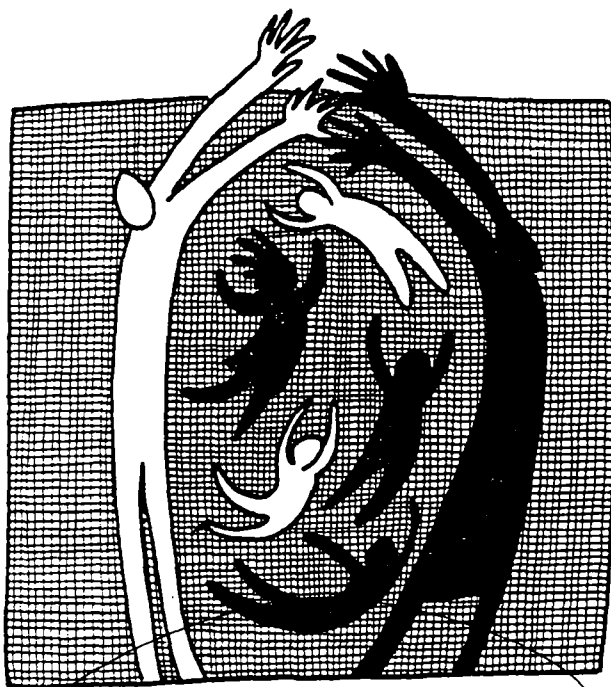
BERNARD J. WULFF
Lothian, Md.

Since the shooting at the Capitol Building, The Post and other media have inundated us with information about how this tragedy happened and about Russell Eugene Weston Jr.'s mental condition. I may have missed it, but not once did I hear a reporter ask Mr. Weston's father where he kept his revolver, and why it was not kept secured.

I believe that if the gun had been secured by a responsible adult, this latest tragedy would not have happened. As I recall, many of the major shootings that have happened in the past few months were the result of unsecured weapons.

I support gun possession at home but only if the guns are kept secured and handled responsibly.

SAMUEL LOMBARDO
Washington



BY MARGARET SCOTT

Too Young to Be on Their Own

The Post uncovers a serious issue with its front-page story "At 18, It's Sink or Swim: For Ex-Foster Children, Transition Is Difficult" [July 21].

The increasing numbers of children entering the foster care system have kept policymakers' attention focused on who is coming into the foster care system, but not enough attention is given to who is leaving the system and how. Current national and state policy and program dollars devoted to independent living and youth development are too little and too unfocused to address adequately the needs of 25,000 youth who leave the state foster care systems each year with too little preparation to lead productive lives as adults.

A recent Greenberg Quinlan Research poll found that most Americans want more resources devoted to helping former foster care children make it on their own. The majority of

respondents (79 percent) said they were willing to pay an extra \$2 in state taxes to provide extended help, including job training and placement services, tuition assistance at state universities and housing until the teen is able to live independently.

Without effective new approaches, too many young people will continue to fall between society's cracks, and all the investments made to help them reach age 18 may be lost. All those involved in foster care, from state to federal governments and from local agencies to nonprofit organizations, need to focus resources on providing more potent ways to help launch these young people into successful futures.

RUTH W. MASSINGA
Seattle

The writer is chief executive officer of the Casey Family Program, which serves children in long-term foster care.

Violence in Cambodia

The July 26 news story "Abuses Reported in Cambodian Vote: U.N. Groups Disagree About Fairness of Congressional Election Campaign" is misleading. The Cambodia Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has documented meticulously facts relating to human rights violations in Cambodia during the pre-election period. These facts have been published in weekly reports, which were made available to The Post.

In the course of the office's work, we carefully record allegations of political intimidation and violence, and follow up on the most serious instances to verify the circumstances. Our office always has made a clear distinction between allegations and confirmed instances of human rights violations. It is most regrettable that this crucial distinction was not respected in the article.

For example, the article states that the office has received credible reports of 400 cases of murder, violence and intimidation. In fact, I stated that among these allegations are 18 killings that may be related to the electoral process and that are being investigated to assess motives. Further, I did not say that we had "seven other politically motivated slayings" but seven "allegations of killings" described by political and other parties as political, and which we have not yet been able to investigate.

I also stated that although the electoral campaign had been marred by widespread political intimidation, there had been little serious violence. I did not state that observers have ignored the violence. Those who are confronting it cannot ignore it. I have, however, expressed my dismay that the statement of the Joint International Observers Group on the eve of the elections was so elusive about the political intimidation and violence during the 12 months prior to the elections.

As a U.N. human rights investigator in Cambodia for the past five years, I am meticulous about facts, details, and nuances and would like to see these inaccuracies cleared up.

CHRISTOPHE PESCHOUX
Phnom Penh

The writer is assistant to the director and to the special representative for Human Rights in Cambodia.

The Washington Post

MONDAY, AUGUST 10, 1998

Trooper Sanders

Nicole-

I thought
you'd find
this interesting

X

**A REPORT ON TRANSITIONAL HOUSING
FOR EMANCIPATED FOSTER YOUTH
IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY**

Prepared by:

**Shelter Partnership, Inc.
523 West Sixth Street, Suite 616
Los Angeles, CA 90014
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April 1997

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. BACKGROUND

According to the County of Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), there were nearly 45,000 youth in out-of-home foster care placements in Los Angeles County in December 1996. Approximately 1,000 of the youth under the care of DCFS emancipate from the foster care system annually. Further, according to DCFS, 45% of the youth emancipated each year tragically become part of the homeless population of Los Angeles. As a result, policy changes at all levels of government have recently been implemented to better meet the unique needs of youth being emancipated from foster care. Locally, the County has begun to address the epidemic of homelessness among emancipating youth with independent living skills training and even further, with more comprehensive emancipation planning and post-emancipation support.

The Community Development Commission of the County of Los Angeles (CDC) has been instrumental in bringing about initial coordination among those entities developing transitional housing for emancipated foster youth in Los Angeles County. The CDC requested that Shelter Partnership, Inc. facilitate a coordination effort among developer/providers, which has led to quarterly meetings of these providers as well as other specific efforts. This report resulted from the need for detailed and reliable data regarding the services and housing available to emancipated foster youth. It examines the context in which current services and housing are being provided and offers some guidance for further action in addressing the needs of this population.

Emancipated foster youth have now become a priority among public funding sources. During the 1996 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Supportive Housing Program (SHP), "homeless youth, including unaccompanied youth and emancipated foster youth" were locally established as one of the top four areas for project selection. Additionally, the Board of Supervisors of the County of Los Angeles adopted program guidelines for use of funds from the City of Industry, which when available are expected to be used for the development of low-income housing for "special needs" populations, which include emancipated foster youth.

Private-public collaborations further emphasize the need for housing for this population. The Homeless Foster Youth Program (HFYP), the largest effort to develop post-emancipation housing options in Los Angeles County, was initiated by United Friends of the Children (UFC), a non-profit agency, and DCFS, in conjunction with the CDC and several other non-profit providers. UFC and DCFS remain formidable advocates for this population. UFC, as the lead agency, was recently awarded a major multi-year grant from the Weingart Foundation to implement a collaborative effort to serve emancipated foster youth. Working with DCFS and other Los Angeles City and County Departments, UFC proposed a comprehensive program that is expected to have a significant impact on the delivery of housing and services to emancipated foster youth. In addition, several other non-profit agencies have been developing similar types of housing and service programs developed exclusively for this population.

B. METHODOLOGY

The fifteen provider agencies who regularly attended Shelter Partnership, Inc.'s quarterly meetings were surveyed for this report. Of the surveyed providers, nine had *existing* housing and services that served emancipated foster youth, exclusively for that population or for those of a similar age range, generally 18 and older. Three agencies surveyed were developing housing and services for this population as well. This group of agencies was selected because at the time of surveying, they represented the universe of providers serving emancipated foster youth in Los Angeles County as known to Shelter Partnership, Inc. Several other providers who were working with foster youth still in care were also included in the survey to provide additional information and another perspective on housing and service needs.

The survey focused on three areas of agency operation: 1) aspects of the entire agency (range of services, size); 2) aspects of the specific program being operated to serve emancipated foster youth (number of beds, age range of clients, source of referrals); and 3) expert opinion from the providers. Other sources of information included in this report are various studies and surveys of emancipated foster youth and homeless and runaway youth conducted in Los Angeles County. The balance of the data is from current literature documenting the correlation between

homelessness and foster care as well as from studies examining the issues faced by foster youth.

C. FINDINGS

According to the data collected by Shelter Partnership, Inc., 11 programs currently operate 272 transitional housing beds in Los Angeles County for homeless youth, either exclusively for emancipated foster youth or for those who are of a similar age range. At present, 76 (or 28%) of the existing beds are available strictly to emancipated foster youth. Of these 76 beds, 60 (or 79%) are located in projects of UFC/DCFS.

There are 275 beds in development in Los Angeles County to serve youth of the emancipation age range. Of these beds, 191 (or 69%) are targeted strictly to emancipated foster youth. Among the beds in development strictly for emancipated foster youth, 155 (or 81%) are being created by UFC/DCFS, either alone or in collaboration with a non-profit agency. It is especially meaningful that although only 28% of existing beds are targeted for emancipated foster youth, 69% of the pool of beds in development for youth of the same age range are being targeted specifically to emancipated foster youth.

For the purposes of data tabulation, only information from the 12 agencies that were or would be dealing imminently with emancipated foster youth has been considered. This includes data from nine existing providers and three programs in development. A total of 11 of 12 (92%) agencies get client referrals to their programs from DCFS, with six (50%) ranking it as their first source. Nine of 12 (75%) agencies get referrals from each social service agencies and client self-referrals. The Probation Department was ranked as a referral source by only five agencies (42%).

On average, of the 11 agencies who could provide information regarding their funding sources, approximately 68% came from public sources and 32% came from private sources.

Fifty percent (6 of 12) of all programs do not charge clients fees, although three (25%) collect a percentage of the client's income (10%, 30%, and 80%) and return it to the youth upon exiting the program. Among the others, two (17%) charge 30% of

the youth's income; two (17%) have a flat fee; one (8%) has a sliding scale; and one (8%) collects 33% of the youth's income if the resident works or a flat fee is s/he is on public assistance, which can be reduced with the contribution of volunteer hours.

Occupancy rates hovered near 90% for most existing programs (n=9) due to good waiting list systems. Programs with higher rates of vacancy indicated that the application process for transitional housing is long and that often program participants leave suddenly, creating a gap.

Among all programs (n=12), four programs (33%) permit maximum stays up to 18 months; four programs (33%) permit maximum stays up to 24 months; and one program each (8%), permits up to six months, up to 12 months, over 24 months or has no maximum.

A majority (78%) of existing programs (n=9) accept clients at 18 years of age or those who are legal adults. Among these programs, four (44%) serve clients to age 21; two (22%) programs serve to age 23; and one each (11%) serves to ages 22, 24, and 28.

Among existing programs (n=9), there was a predominance of programs available to the general youth population (5), pregnant women (5) and gay, lesbian and bisexual youth (4), with other sub-populations represented, as well. Two existing programs serve females only, and two serve single parents with more than one child. One existing program serves youth with mental illness; one program serves minority immigrant youth; and another serves males only.

To examine the services offered by providers to clients, information only from existing programs (n=9) was considered. Case management, individual counseling, group counseling and housing placement assistance are offered on-site by each of the nine existing surveyed programs. Follow-up services are provided on-site by eight of nine programs. Seven programs provide transportation assistance on-site, and clothing is made available on-site at six programs.

All programs (9 of 9) offer assistance in obtaining a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) or a high school diploma, with seven providing the help on-site.

All nine provide assistance applying for higher education, as well, with two programs by referral only. Eight providers offer assistance paying for books and supplies, and seven offer assistance paying for tuition for higher education.

All providers (9 of 9) offer job interview skills training on-site. Job search assistance is also offered by each of the providers, though one only by referral. Every agency provides on-site money budgeting skills as well as information on how to open a bank account.

All programs (9 of 9) offer guidance on-site regarding how to get health care and how to access an alcohol or drug treatment program. Assistance accessing counseling services and community mental health programs are also provided by every program.

In order to rank the supportive services viewed as most important by local providers, the responses of 14 interviewees were considered, as one agency was unable to assign priority among the services. From a list of over 35 services, the providers ranked the following six as the most important services for emancipated foster youth: case management; how to budget money; individual counseling; housing placement; job search assistance; and how to access health care. Case management was ranked the most important service by fifty percent of the agencies.

D. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is a need throughout Los Angeles County for additional public and private resources for both capital and operating costs aimed toward serving the housing needs of the emancipated foster youth population. These resources should be encouraged to complement projects currently in development for this population.
2. Transitional housing programs serving emancipated foster youth need to offer comprehensive services to ensure that the youth successfully transition to independence.
3. Additional housing for emancipated single parents with two or more children should be developed.

4. Better case management and maintenance of services coupled with sufficient and separate housing, where necessary, should be encouraged for emancipated foster youth with mental illness.
5. Although it is preferable that youth being emancipated from the foster care system have the option to remain in the community in which they have been placed and grown accustomed to, it is also important to consider the needs of youth and whether or not these needs are being met. The location of housing for emancipated foster youth must take into consideration the proximity of services that are readily available.
6. Additional housing and services are needed for youth who emancipate through the Probation Department. Further research on the specific needs of this population should be encouraged as it is likely that there is a large unmet demand for post-emancipated housing and services for these youth.
7. The development of both congregate living facilities and scattered site apartments as housing options for emancipated foster youth should be encouraged.
8. Housing for emancipated foster youth should be further studied as more programs come on line to serve this population. The information contained in this report should be updated as the housing system for emancipated foster youth changes.
9. More overall evaluation and follow-up measurement should be undertaken to determine how successful transitional living programs are in meeting the needs of emancipating and emancipated foster youth and transitioning them to independence. As more programs come on line to serve youth while still in care, the effect on post-emancipated youth and the programs designed to serve them must be examined.

Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service

Economic Opportunities Forum Proceedings

Muskie
School
University of Southern Maine

96 Falmouth Street
P.O. Box 9300
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Economic Opportunities Forum Proceedings

March 16-17, 1998

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Introduction

In October, 1997 The Annie E. Casey Foundation in collaboration with Casey Family Services and Casey Family Program sought to define the current knowledge base regarding how youth are transitioning out of foster care. A grant was awarded to The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement (NCWRCOI), at the University of Southern Maine and the National Resource Center for Youth Services (NRCYS), at the University of Oklahoma. Together, the two centers sought to examine effective practices and policies that strengthen employment opportunities and meet the educational needs for youth in foster care.

In March of 1998, a forum was convened in Dallas, Texas to help formulate a programmatic and research agenda to address gaps in knowledge about the most effective and efficient strategies to enhance the economic opportunities for youth leaving foster care.

The two specific questions addressed by the forum included:

1. What are the strategic interventions or services that youth in care need to assist them in their transition to self-sufficiency?; and
2. What strategies should be promoted for the support of higher education and economic opportunities for youth in transition?

A select group of participants including youth with experience in the foster care system, researchers, employers, foster care parents and Independent Living program specialists were invited to the forum. The diversity of perspectives contributed to a lively interchange as the group discussed the most critical factors for preparing foster care youth for adult life. The youth were invited as "experts" and were considered equal partners as forum participants in discussing barriers to economic success and formulating potential solutions.

As a backdrop for the development of a comprehensive plan, the participants were asked to review two papers prepared by the NCWRCOI and NRCYS. The first, *Improving Economic Opportunities for Young People Served by the Foster Care System*, was a review of the most recent literature. A companion paper, *Opportunities for Foster Care Youth in Transition: Three Views of the Path to Independent Living* provided a continuation of the study by documenting the results of three separate national surveys sent to independent living coordinators, youth in care, and key informants.

The forum structure consisted of panel discussions and small group breakout sessions. A panel of youth were asked to share their experiences about what had helped and hindered their educational and employment aspirations while in the foster care system. A panel of employers and youth employment experts presented strategies and problems on integrating youth in care into the job market. The small group sessions addressed the questions presented above using a technique facilitated by NRCYS to ensure group participation. The forum concluded with attendees developing an action plan.

This document presents the Proceedings from the Dallas forum. It is organized in two parts. The first part is a summary of the forum highlights, including comments made by individual participants during forum presentations. The second part is a summary of the comprehensive plan for improving economic opportunities for youth in foster care developed by the group. While the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Program and Casey Family Services requested specific recommendations for investing in the issues of the economic status of young people leaving the foster care system, the recommendations developed by the group far exceed the work that could be carried out by one foundation. Instead, these recommendations should be treated as a national agenda for foster care youth to be carried out by collaborations between public agencies and national service organizations, such as the Child Welfare League of America with a number of private foundations in conjunction with the youth themselves at the local, state and federal levels.

Day One

Data Presentation

Elizabeth D. Jones, Ph.D. and Al Sheehy, M.A.
Muskie School of Public Service

Study results from the paper "*Opportunities for Foster Care Youth in Transition: Three Views of the Path to Independent Living*" were presented. Survey responses were collected from three different groups:

1. youth who are currently or were formerly served by the foster care system (N=249);
2. public and private agencies who provide transitional/independent living (IL) services (N=26); and
3. key informants comprised of researchers, policy makers and service providers (N=11).

The data presentation focused on educational and employment issues. Findings of the surveys, and responses to the presentation follow.

Educational Issues

Although youth in foster care plan to attend college, they are not enrolled in college preparatory classes in high school. Issues raised by the forum participants during this discussion included the following:

- Lack of guidance - Youth in foster care need more guidance regarding college preparatory classes, and need to start taking them before the 11th or 12th grade, in order to avoid playing "catch-up". Social workers often do not provide advocacy for youth; they may be unaware of how to work with schools and accept youth dropping out. Casey youth have a higher graduation rate. Why? Social workers more focused? Educational consultants?
- Lack of training/decision making power of foster parents - Foster parents are often unaware of educational funds and counseling, therefore they are unable to effectively advocate for youth. In Connecticut, foster parents cannot make educational decisions for a foster child in their care if the child is in special education classes - the state assigns a surrogate parent to make educational decisions.
- Tracking foster youth - Young people in special education classes are often "tracked" into vocational education rather than college; minority youth may also be more frequently tracked to vocational training.

- Lack of stability - Stability in education requires stability in placements; one youth commented that because she had attended 11 different high schools, she will be graduating late. School records are often difficult to track down; no one seems to be responsible for records and youth lose credits. Who is responsible? Schools? Social Workers? Foster Parents? Credits do not transfer from residential treatment to high schools, and there are no college preparatory classes in residential facilities.
- Emancipation age of 18 - Eighteen year old cutoff forces people to drop out and get jobs to support themselves. Most youth in foster care will be slightly behind and will not graduate until ages 19-22. Eighteen is an arbitrary age, with no meaning in Western culture, where adolescence extends far beyond the teenage years. An attendee from the Casey program stated that there is a need to be with youth until they graduate high school, which is often past the age of 18.

Employment Issues

Aspirations for youth in care are no different from those of other youth. Barriers can be categorized as internal (cognitive, behavioral) and external (environmental - lack of transportation, multiple placements). The survey focused on the external barriers that youth in care encounter.

- Need for transportation - Lack of transportation is a common problem faced by youth in care. Some states magnify the issue by barring foster youth from driving until age 18 (a youth told of how youth in care in the state of California organized to successfully overturn this law).
- Need for support/training for foster parents - Foster parents need training on how to support young people with employment, help youth keep jobs, and develop pre-employment job skills. Families have a critical role in helping children move from school to work.
- Policies that discourage employment/savings - Youth who save "too much" are penalized by having to contribute to AFDC (limits on savings in Texas are being worked on so that savings greater than \$1000 are not taken by the state). Welfare restrictions on the biological family carry over to youth in custody, which can prevent youth in care from accumulating savings. Youth sometimes deliberately fail in employment to avoid getting cut off from state aid.
- Lack of job/IL skills - Independent living skills are not formally taught until age 16. States can begin at a younger age, but they must use their own money. There is a wish to expand IL programs to younger youth, but financial resources are stretched to the limit. School to Work Legislation (1995) starts to target younger students. Age 12 is an appropriate age for youth to begin to think about careers. Vocational training, if completed, results in positive economic benefits, but often training is not completed.

Youth need to have job experiences as teens; studies show teens who work have better transition into the adult workforce

- Lack of jobs - There is a need to increase contact with local and private businesses, and to work with businesses to employ youth in care. Job Corps is an accessible resource, with increased funding every year.

Youth Panel

A panel of 9 youth ages 16-24 currently or previously served by the foster care system: Carl Douglas, Melat F., Lizmarie German, Charlotte Kellis, Celyne Krauss, Alonzo Moorner, Alfred Perez, Caroline Vasquez, April Yachninich, Joshua Z. facilitated by Marty Zanghi, M.S.W., Muskie School of Public Service

Prior to the session, the youth were asked what they wished most for the panel. They replied that they wanted:

*To be heard;
To learn something from each other; and,
For something to happen, other than a lot of talking and a paper.*

What are the needs, in your opinion, of youth in care today as they make their transition to young adulthood?

- Mandatory IL programs - Youth suggested that independent living programs be mandated and monitored closely by social workers and/or guidance counselors.
- Support services - Both emotional and financial support resources are needed. These can range from individual guidance counselors, foster parents, or teachers who are encouraging individual youth, to programs designed to assist youth with IL or financial support, (i.e. WAY scholarship program [Work Activities for Youth], YAC [Youth Advocacy Committee]).
- Housing - Difficulty finding affordable housing is a common problem. Rental assistance was mentioned as a need. A strong desire was expressed for programs that allow young people to "practice" independent living, such as programs that provide apartments and guidance to youth while they are living in the apartments.
- Educational advocacy - Financial assistance for post secondary education is lacking. Youth also described wanting help with school applications and college visits. School consistency is a major issue, several youth reiterated the importance of school stability, and the educational and emotional disruption caused when they were forced to change schools.

- **Mentorship and guidance** Youth valued mentors, both assigned and unassigned. There were various opinions regarding whether mentors should be matched ethnically, for some it was important for others it did not matter. It was suggested that common career interests might make a match more suitable. When describing what made a good mentor, some youth expressed that mentors need to show they care by “going the extra mile” (i.e. checking on homework, committing to the relationship over an extended period of time). Youth stated that it was critical that mentors be persistent, that they be there for “the long haul”; that the mentor continue to support their mentee no matter how much a youth “messed up” or acted out. It was important that youth be able to express themselves to their mentors, and that they be able to trust their mentors. Mentors at times do not realize how important they are (mentees are more often satisfied than mentors think they are).

What hindered you and what helped you in the foster care system?

Hindered
Not being taught any IL skills
Multiple changes of schools
Unsuitable placements - need better screening of foster parents, more options for youth who are parents
Uncaring system - youth received a form letter telling her she was no longer in system
Multiple placements

Helped
Programs focusing on bringing out successes and strengths, centering on hopes and dreams rather than “fixing” behaviors or problems
Learning how to advocate for self
Social worker having high expectations of youth (having to prove self in order to enter an IL program)
Learning IL skills such as budgeting, job seeking skills, cooking
Strong relationships with teachers, social workers, mentors (assigned or unassigned)
Being employed - allowed youth to leave group home and to feel “normal”
Someone talking to me and telling me that what I had gone through was not my fault
Learning the system and taking advantage of everything the system could offer
Someone who insisted on youth having goals and a plan
Having an advocate to make sure youth could attend one high school for four years

Why aren't Independent Living programs being utilized?

- System mentality - should I move on, move back or stay
- "Another class, oh no", programs need better publicity, stipends for attending help
- Fear - 16 year olds are scared, only 2 more years, fear of reaching adulthood/emancipation
- Lack of knowledge - people do not know programs exist
- The age... at 16, kids live in the present, 18 seems so far away
- Older youth need to reiterate message to younger kids - they need to hear the value of these programs from us, not adults

What one message do you want to leave the group with?

- Put to use what we've said.
- Try to work on it - trying makes us feel good, even if it takes a while.
- Put kids in placements that fit. Send kids into IL earlier. Give kids scholarships, funds.
- Nothing changes. All talk, no action!
- We live in it, we know it - you are seeing it from outside.
- More resources needed for youth exiting care, support services. Should age out at 21, not 18.
- More programs for kids who are out of care, after 18. Need networks, a net for kids, for every one of us.
- Don't get frustrated, stick with the kid, you might not know what good you are doing.

Focus Question Brainstorming

*Facilitated by James Walker and Peter R. Correia, III
University of Oklahoma*

Forum participants divided into small groups to generate solutions to two focus questions:

1. What are the strategic interventions (Stuff/Actions) or services that youth in care need to assist them in their transition to self-sufficiency?
2. What strategies should be promoted to support education and economic opportunities for youth in transition?

The lists of solutions were posted so that the entire group could view each intervention. Forum participants then placed related interventions into categories. The following tables show the ideas generated by the small groups, grouped into categories created by the entire group.

Focus Question 1: What are the strategic interventions (Stuff/Actions) or services that youth in care need to assist them in their transition to self-sufficiency?

Real Life 101	Community Responsibility to Youth	Comprehensive Educational Services	Training and Accountability for All Players	Extended Services	Youth as Resources	Healing	Housing
Begin teaching social skills when youth enter foster care	Connection to 1 or more community citizens for "long haul"	Educational stability	Recruitment with IL focus	Ability to re-enter	Youth helping youth	Making peace with the past	Housing pre & post
Real world orienteering R.O.P.	Community connection and relationships	Educational support	ILP training for all players	2 nd chance aftercare services	Post care alumni mentoring	Connection with birth family	Safe affordable housing
Living and work skills	Links to community resources	Identify one person to track school records	Education, training for staff	Uniform extended services 14-23	Hot line for youth	Chemical dependency	
Progressive life skills/expectations	Partnerships with employers	Improve literacy	Foster parent training/independent living	Extend age range beyond 18 or 21	Peer support	Developmental disabilities	
Opportunities for practicing life skills/IL	Mentor/caring adult support network	Education/training once started must be able to continue	Caregiver involved NILA (National Independent Living Assoc.)	Health care support			
Job retention skills	Build support services between schools, DSS, ILP	Comprehensive educational support & dollars	IL coordinated and transition planning	Provide health care			
Provide more work experience opportunities	Transportation	Educational advocate					
Support for programs like YAC	One consistent, unconditional supporter	Post secondary \$\$\$ for education and training					
Connect foster care with the world of work	Destigmatize foster care experience	Technology skills & utilization					
Practice work skills							

**Focus Question 2: What strategies should be promoted
to support education and economic opportunities for youth in transition?**

Partnerships with Private Industry	Systems Collaboration	Transferable Tangible Skills for 21 st Century	*Educational Advocacy	Stability	Extended Support Services	Show Me the \$
*Policy to Reflect Realities						
Engage business community	Contract mutual expectations	World of work skills	Long term, stable educational advocate	Contract mutual expectations	Transportation	*Post-secondary scholarships
Educate employers about unique needs of youth	*Schedule appointments after school hours	Work experience early and often	Educational advocate from entry	Better recruitment & placement	Extended services including housing and transportation	*State University, community college etc. tuition waivers
*Job fairs & college visits/job exploration	Eliminate causes of school disruption	Tangible & transferable skills tech & college prep	Advocating for appropriate educational services	Stable placements	Child care for parenting workers	Assist youth w/seeking financial aid earlier than 12 th grade
Partnerships with private industry	*Education as primary focus of plan	Develop entrepreneurial skills/opportunities	Developmentally appropriate extracurricular activities	Limit school transitions (even if placement changes)	Experienced youth helping youth	
Voucher system for trial employment	Contract specifying mutual expectations	Early instruction on money management	Testing for developmental disabilities	Specialized IL training for caregivers	*Mentoring	
Internships for youth (in government)	Collaboration between Department of Education and Social Services	*Job resource center	Identify, assess and support youth's strengths	Bio-family involvement/interruption		
Connect foster youth to school-to-work	*Community Schools	Labor market preparedness for 21 st century	Tutoring			
Graduated employment opportunities with pay	Target outreach	Funds for interviews and work clothes	Literacy/educational stability			
Job newsletter (regional) for youth in/out of foster care	School-business partnerships	Utilization of technology				
Connect minority business and minority youth						
Supported work situations						
Strategic linkage of jobs and youth						

***Youth identified as a priority**

Day Two

The Employer Perspective

Employers Panel including:

Jim Gann, Red Lobster Restaurant

Glenn Eagleson, New Ways Workers

Jim Callahan, The Sar Levitan Center for Social Policy Studies

Jim Gann, Red Lobster

Red Lobster makes a practice of employing 1-2 foster youth at each restaurant in Oklahoma. Lack of job experience is not necessarily a liability, new workers have no "bad habits". The first job a young person has can encourage them to think about what they want to do in the future.

- The chain and the youth help to serve each others needs. Youth provide the restaurant with a work force, the corporation provides seminars, job building skills, and work experience.
- The corporation hires foster children because there is a need for employees; youth in care are not treated any differently from other youth.

To assist youth in getting jobs, workshops are given on interviewing skills.

- Youth often find interviews difficult, self-esteem may be low and a lack of eye contact and "slouching" can put off the interviewer.
- Role-playing interviews with youth can be very helpful, practicing makes situation less intimidating.
- A portfolio is a useful tool that can help structure an interview, giving youth something to talk about.

The foster care system needs to support youth adequately. There is a need for:

- ⇒ transportation;
- ⇒ job coaches;
- ⇒ uniform acquisition;
- ⇒ stable placements; and
- ⇒ accessible contact people.

Businesses do not want foster care to become a workplace issue. They can provide jobs, but not the support systems that youth need. Job coaches are an excellent example of ongoing

assistance for foster youth; there is a lack of training of youth in keeping a job after they obtain a job.

Restaurant needs will be growing in the next 10-20 years. Red Lobster cannot be a social service agency, but can be an avenue for youth in care to get into life.

Glenn Eagleson, New Ways Workers (see appendix A for handouts)

New Ways Workers connects young people from educational and training institutions to the workplace, and employers to schools and community organizations. A guiding principle of the organization is that:

youth need sequential, developmental, early and intentional series of work-based opportunities.

Exposure to work at an early age is a goal. Youth need to practice job skills, and just like other skills if they do not learn things on the first try, they need to be able to try again.

- Expectations are kept high for all workers.
- Young people rise to meet expectations set out for them.
- If youth need to be connected with support services they are, but expectations at work are no different.

New Ways Workers is an employer driven program, in that it focuses on providing specific services to employers so that the workplace can offer meaningful work-based learning opportunities.

- Youth are helped to identify important experiences within the work setting, and are helped to get the most they can out of employment.
- It is important to view work-based competencies as being just as important as educational competencies.

Different segments of the system need to come together to agree on needed competencies, and how to develop these capabilities.

Jim Callahan, The Sar Levitan Center for Social Policy Studies, Johns Hopkins University

Sar Levitan does not endorse any particular model, many models can work. Rather than replicating models, the following key features have been found to be part of successful strategies in generating employment opportunities for youth.

- Continuity of connection with a caring adult that follows employment
- Focus on centrality of work connection with employers
- Offer options for skill development
- Hands on experiential training with employers
- On-going support through all first jobs
- Provide incentives and recognize success
- Build in opportunity for leadership development for youth
- Leadership and governing opportunity for youth
- Connection with extended services, such as housing, healthcare support

While many social service agencies have seen funding cuts the last few years, there are sources of funding that can be tapped into!

- ⇒ State aid education funds
- ⇒ Pell grants
- ⇒ JTPA - 8% funds
- ⇒ JTPA Summer work program
- ⇒ TANF funds
- ⇒ Welfare to work grants
- ⇒ HUD
- ⇒ Juvenile justice

When designing programs, we need to ask ourselves how we can become part of the system. Services should be community based, use existing resources, use a community anchor (a center where connections are made) and be designed to fit employer needs and local labor market needs.

Next Steps and Recommendations

Forum participants divided into small groups to generate suggestions for a comprehensive action plan for policy makers and researchers.

Systems Changes

Raise Age of Emancipation/Extend Services:

- Support national effort to raise emancipation age to at least 21 years of age nationwide
- Provide extended services and re-entry for children in out-of-home placements until at least 23 years of age through organized mechanism (case manager)
- Dense networks of support for young adults/parents through their mid 20's

Increased Focus on IL in Foster Care System

- Integration of independent living issues into all aspects of foster care
- Agencies need to take ownership of IL philosophy. Provide services through creative means

Stabilize Foster Care Placements

- Stabilize placements for youth by developing and creating a contract that includes an accountability mechanism (youth involved, ombudsman, etc.) among all caregivers, service providers, families and youth that clarifies roles, expectations, long term goals for youth that includes "crisis intervention" strategies.
- Always keep communication optional or available between biological siblings

Educational Access

- Support college tuition fee waiver (like the Texas program) nationwide
- National scholarship fund for foster care youth
- Target outreach for foster youth at colleges and universities
- Supported system of educational advocates
- Policy change - work with departments of education and social services to establish educational advocates
- Education = support from collaborative team to show interest and youth's success and future

Programmatic Changes

Expand Independent Living Services/Programs

- Find ways to expand IL services to younger and older (post IL) youth
- Independent living training and support services for 14 to 21 year olds
- Extended support and aftercare services
- Supervised independent living programs
- One stop shopping for adjunct services - i.e., clearinghouse for housing, transportation, financial aid, health care
- Support for young parents
- Coordinated network of services for youth after leaving care

Mentors

- Community-based Mentoring clearinghouses
- Identify an adult outside the child welfare system (mentor or advocate with training and support) who is responsible within a structured plan for understanding and monitoring a young person's educational goals/plan throughout the length of foster care and who connects with the broader community.
- Targeted mentoring and safety nets for those youth most likely to be lost or isolated

Housing

- Guaranteed housing
- Look at Transitional Living Program Models

Collaborate with Community, Schools, Agencies and Businesses

Partnership with Community:

- Identify existing collaborative efforts (including private sector, education, etc.) and partner to include youth in foster care
- Educate community on foster care issues in order to gain support
- Engage the broader community via existing efforts and strategic new ones (e.g., forum on this issue; youth on boards) in becoming informed about ways to include and "train" or educate the broader community about how to be responsive, participatory and "equal partners".

Partnership with Schools:

- Create a coordinated, cooperative partnership between child welfare and educational systems
- Quick and accurate transfer of information
- Greater flexibility of schools to allow for more school stability

Partnership with Businesses

- Youth need a sequential, developmental, early and intentional series of work-based opportunities
- Connections with private sector employees
- Community-based vocational training and support with linkages to employers
- Community collaborative efforts between employers, IL services, private and public agencies. Identify and develop mechanisms to address collaborative issues.
- Collaboration with workforce development, PICs, School-to-Work, etc. for job linkage, scholarships (One-Stop Shopping)
- Partnerships with industry to develop internships, job opportunities

Training of Foster Parents, Social Workers and Service Providers

- Training for foster parents re: independent living
- Recruitment, training, and coordination of care among caregivers with the expectation that a primary focus will be on preparation for adulthood
- Screening of foster parents with clear and articulated expectations
- Foster-parents, caregivers, service providers training and education for independent living that is community specific and regionally adapted
- Competency-based training for foster parents. Develop a model tool and incentives to bring them to a para-professional level.

Technical Assistance

- Technical assistance to states on improved utilization of IL resources and other resources to support IL
- Technical assistance to advocates and legislatures to ensure that IL resources get to the right people

Funding

- Consultation of how to access available funding streams
- Funds available for foster care youth nationwide
- Identify states that are not spending their full allocation of money and explore creative ways to invest

Research and Evaluation

- Look at impact of managed care on service quality and outcomes
- Gather research on effective programs to develop a policy agenda
- Impact of For-Profits on issues: safety, quality and outcomes

- Internet dialogue forums to continue discussion
- Pilot control studies on:
 - ◆ Educational advocate activities and successes over time,
 - ◆ Mentoring activities over time and the role they play
 - ◆ Re-evaluate state independent living plans

Youth Involvement

- Youth involvement and leadership as decision makers in every aspect of identifying their goals/plan; participating in policy determination; etc. Training and ongoing "tools" for young people

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