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**IMPROVING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE SERVED BY
THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM**

BACKGROUND PAPER

December, 1997

Submitted to:

The Annie E. Casey Foundation
701 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Submitted by:

Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service
National Child Welfare Resource Center for
Organizational Improvement
Institute for Child and Family Policy
400 Congress Street
Portland, ME 04101

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IMPROVING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE SERVED BY THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

BACKGROUND PAPER

I. INTRODUCTION

In October, 1997, the Annie E. Casey Foundation in collaboration with Casey Family Services and the Casey Family Program awarded a grant to the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement of the University of Southern Maine and the National Resource Center for Youth Services of the University of Oklahoma to complete a background paper concerning the economic opportunities for young people who are preparing to exit the foster care system. The goal of this effort is to define the current knowledge base regarding the transition of youth out of foster care and to examine effective practices and policies which may improve opportunities for youth to become fulfilled, productive adults. Understanding who this population is, what they need and how services can be delivered effectively and efficiently is a complex, yet important, task.

Our project involves two interrelated components:

- a background paper synthesizing the current research related to the transition of foster care youth into adult roles; and
- a working paper which incorporates youth's experiences with this transition and outlines an approach to programmatic, policy and research development to improve economic success.

The background paper is based on secondary sources of information identified through a literature review. In contrast, the working paper will focus on primary data collection from a broad range of constituencies: independent living coordinators, youth advisory councils, and key informants from research, policy and practice arenas. Finally, this effort will culminate in a think tank summit in which interested parties will have the opportunity to review the background summary and working paper, in order to help with formulating a programmatic and research agenda to address the identified gaps in knowledge regarding the most effective and efficient strategies to enhance the economic opportunities for youth leaving foster care.

This current document is the background paper which summarizes the most recent research on what happens to youth when they leave care. The guiding question throughout the paper is the following:

- What are the diverse needs of foster care youth as they make the transition to adulthood which will enable them to obtain employment, pursue secondary education, and become economically self-sufficient?

In particular, we focus on the following five specific questions:

1. How large is, and what are the demographic characteristics of the foster care population who drop out or age out of the system nationally each year?;
2. What are the differences in the transition to adulthood outcomes between youth raised in foster care and the general population of youth?;
3. What follow-up studies have been conducted on youth who exit the foster care system?;
4. What are the general barriers to employment and education among youth, and what barriers are specific to the foster care population?; and
5. What resiliency factors among youth formerly in foster care have been documented in the current literature as enhancing their transition to economic self-sufficiency?

Our discussion is divided into six sections. We start with an overview of the numbers of youth in foster care, focusing specifically on age, race, gender, length of time in care and number of placements. In Section III, we set the stage for understanding educational and economic outcomes of foster care youth by reviewing the youth labor market literature. In Section IV, we review the most recently published studies which examine educational and employment outcomes for youth as they leave care. These studies are divided into two types: those which look at educational and employment status at the time youth leave care and those which examine economic outcomes at a follow-up point after leaving care. In Section V, we present information on some of the barriers identified by previous studies as hindering youth who have been in foster care from reaching economic self-sufficiency. Section VI reviews resiliency factors among adolescents which help foster care youth make a successful transition. In the final section, we present research and programmatic recommendations based on the needs of foster care youth drawn from this review of the literature.

II. SIZE AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FOSTER CARE POPULATION

Two sources of national data exist which provide a comprehensive picture of youth in foster care: 1.) the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis System (AFCARS) and 2.) Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) Annual Child Welfare Data. AFCARS, a federal data collection effort implemented on October 1, 1994, is structured on semi-annual reporting periods which close on March 31 and September 30 of each year. Statistics reported by CWLA reflect a combination of several sources of information including AFCARS data, collected through CWLA administered surveys of state child welfare systems and data collected by the American Public Welfare Association (APWA) which is reported through the Voluntary Cooperative Information System (VCIS).

While AFCARS represents one of our best sources of data, a number of limitations to the AFCARS system exist. First, at this writing AFCARS is a voluntary system, therefore it does not represent all states. In fact, only 33 states submitted data for the April and September reporting periods of 1996. Second, of the state data sent to AFCARS a significant portion is not available to the public. Data from as many as 22 states were excluded from each of the tables the AFCARS administrators produce to illustrate the state of children in the foster care system. Data are excluded primarily for two reasons: 1.) concerns about data quality and 2.) specific state requests to have their data excluded.

Keeping these shortcomings in mind, we selected the time period of April to September, 1996 as the focus for our AFCARS estimates. It represents the most recent usable data and it covers a period two years after AFCARS inception, allowing ample time to correct initial data reporting problems. The data presented in the following tables are estimated by AFCARS to represent 55 percent (data from 33 states) of the children served by state child welfare foster care systems in FY 1996¹. Thus, in each chart, data will be presented for the 291,825 actual children reported on. We supplement the AFCARS data with CWLA information in instances where the CWLA information addresses an issue important to this current inquiry.

Based on the AFCARS data, we can estimate that as of September 30, 1996 there were 423,147 children in foster care in the entire United States. This is determined from the fact that the 291,825 actual children reported on in the charts represents 55% of the entire population of children served by the child welfare systems in FY 1996. The 1995 CWLA data, based on reports from all 50 states places the number of children in out of home care at 483,629² for an increase of 21 percent over their 1990 estimate of 400,398 children in care.

The characteristics of foster care youth described below were selected because they represent some of the key indicators identified in our literature review as impacting how youth fare economically as they prepare to leave foster care. It is important to note, however, that this type of data does not capture the complexities of youth's and children's lives and will necessarily not include important variables such as the influence of the family and social networks. In the tables which follow, we include children and youth of all ages in the foster care system. One of the major disadvantages of both of these data collection systems is that they only provide aggregate level data, a feature which precludes focusing on specific age populations. We will suggest later in this paper that preparation for adult transition activities needs to occur during early adolescence, therefore, our depiction of children of all ages is meant to serve as an estimate for the demographic and case characteristics of youth who will be in need of assistance with planning for adulthood.

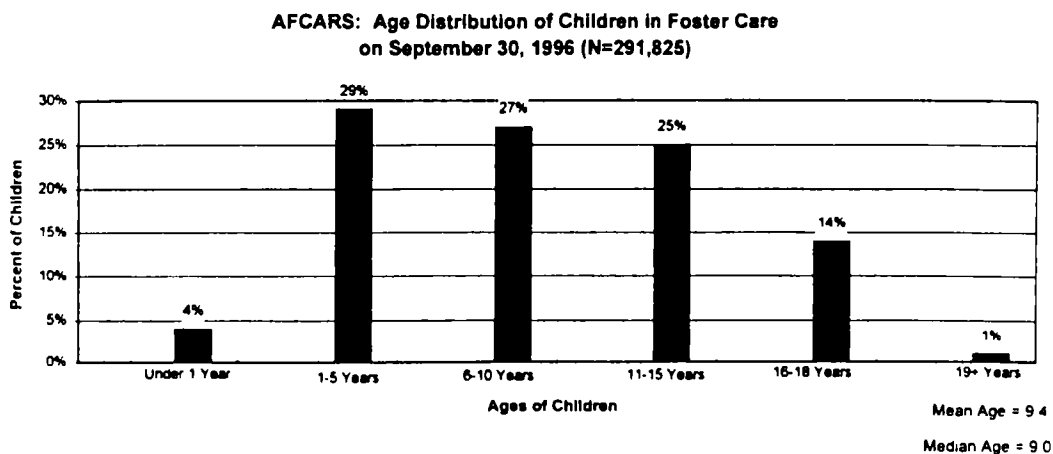
¹ For more information on AFCARS, see their web site www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/stats/index.htm#AFCARS.

² 1990, APWA VCIS (1994 December); CWLA (1996) State Agency survey

Age of Children in Foster Care

The age distribution of children in foster care as of September 30, 1996 is illustrated in Chart 1. Forty percent of the children in foster care on this date are between 11 and 19+ years of age, and, according to the AFCARS data, 50 percent of the children in care are nine years old or older.

Chart 1

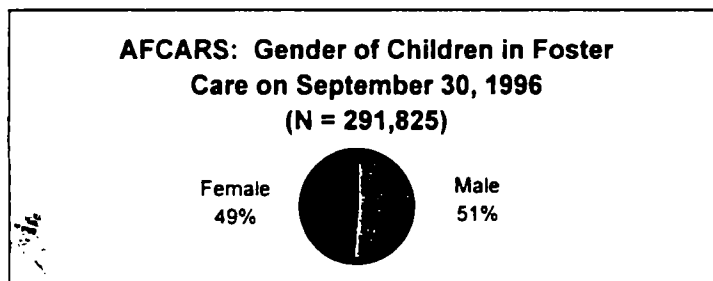


Using data from 31 states, CWLA also reports that 40 percent of the individuals currently in care are adolescents.

Gender of Children in Foster Care

As shown in Chart 2, females made up 49 percent (146,424) of the children in foster care as of September 30, 1996, the remaining 51 percent (148,831) were males. CWLA data support the same gender proportions.

Chart 2



Race/Ethnicity³ of Children in Foster Care.

The racial/ethnic make up of children in foster care on September 30, 1996 is displayed in Table 1 below. African-American children at 44 percent of the total (128,403 children) represent the largest racial/ethnic proportion of the foster care caseload at this point in time. White children make up 38 percent of the foster care caseload (110,894 children). Hispanic children represent 14 percent of the foster care caseload on September 30, 1996 (40,856 children). The remaining four percent of children categorized as other in the chart below are composed of 2 percent Native American children (5,837 children), one percent Asian children (2,918 children) and one percent (2,918 children) of unknown ethnicity.

Comparing the racial/ethnic composition of the foster care population to the racial/ethnic composition of the general population of the United States underscores the fact that children of color are over-represented in the foster care system. As shown in the next table the percentage of African-American children in the foster care system is 3.67 times that of African-Americans in the general population. In contrast, white children make up 38 percent of the foster care population, compared to the 73.6 percent of the U.S. general population that is white. Hispanic children make up 14 percent of the foster care population, a proportion slightly larger than the proportion of the general population that is Hispanic.

CWLA data on race/ethnicity largely parallels that of the AFCARS system. CWLA, based on data from 28 states, reports a racial/ethnic breakdown of 41 percent white, 3 percent higher than AFCARS, 44 percent African-American, identical to AFCARS, 12 percent Hispanic, 2 percent lower than AFCARS, and 3 percent other, 1 percent lower than AFCARS.

Table 1
Ethnicity of Children in the Foster Care Population
On September 30, 1996

Race/Ethnicity	Foster Care Population (AFCARS)	CWLA	United States Population ⁴
African American	44 %	44 %	12 %
White	38 %	41 %	74 %
Hispanic	14 %	12 %	10 %
Other	4 %	3 %	4 %

³ The category "Other" includes 1% Asian, 2% American Indian, and 1% unable to determine.

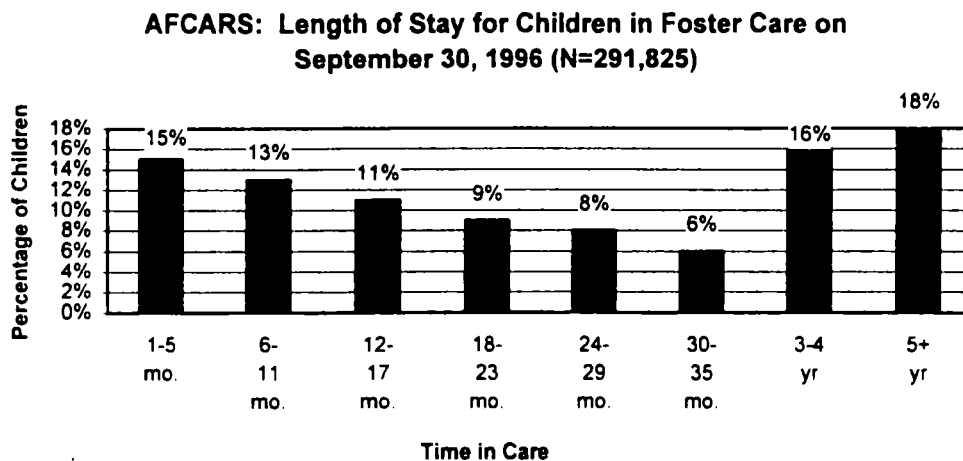
⁴ *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1995*. Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce, p.19.

Length of Stay⁵ of Children in Foster Care

The length of stay of children in foster care as of September 30, 1996 is displayed in Chart 3 below. This chart presents data from AFCARS. In general, this chart shows that youth either have fairly short stays, less than a year or that they stay in care for three years or more. Twenty-eight percent of the children (81,711 children) had been in care between one and eleven months as of September 30, 1996. Twenty percent of the children in care as of this date (58,365 children) had been in care between 12 and 23 months. Fourteen percent of the children in care (40,856 children) had been in care between 24 and 35 months as of September 30, 1996. Thirty-four percent of the children in care as of September 30, 1996, (99,221 children) had been in care for over three years.

An examination of 99,221 children who had been in care for over three years as of September 30, 1996 reveals that 53 percent of these children (52,599 children) have been in care for more than five years as of September 30, 1996.

Chart 3



CWLA data on length of stay is presented as the “median number of months children spend in care”. These data are presented by state. CWLA found that the median number of months in care for the 31 reporting states was 22.1 months with a reported low median number of months of 6.6 and a highest reported median months in care of 79 months.

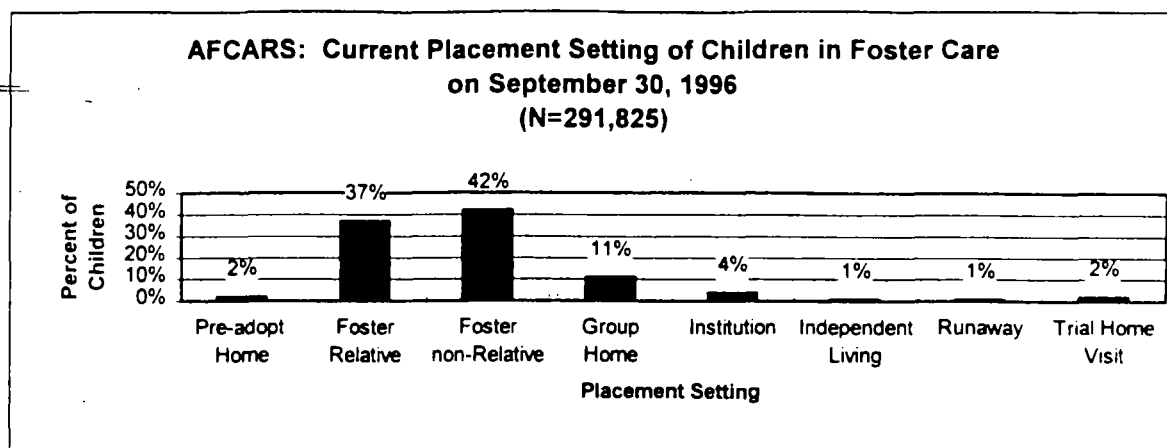
CWLA also presents data on the average number of months children spend in care by race/ethnicity. African-American children have the longest average stay in care at 25.1 months, followed by American Indian/Alaskan Native children at 21.9 months, “Other” children at 21.4 months, and White children at 20.1 months. Asian/Pacific Islander children

⁵ Length of stay is measured from first entrance into foster care to status on September 30, 1996.

Current Placement Setting of Children in Foster Care

The current placement setting of children in foster care is illustrated in Chart 4 below.

Chart 4



In 1996, almost half of children in foster care, 42 percent (122,567 children) were in non-relative foster home placements. Over one-third, 37 percent of the children in care, 107,976 children, were placed with relatives. Fifteen percent of the children in foster care (43,774 children), were in either group home or institutional placements. Two percent of the children in care (5,837 children) were in pre-adoptive placements on September 30, 1996. Another two percent of the children in care were experiencing trial home visits as of September 30, 1996. Finally, one percent of the children in care (2,918 children) were classified as runaways as of September 30, 1996. The statistic that is important for this current examination is rather misleading. Although AFCARS reports that only one percent (2,918 children) were in independent living placement settings, this statistic does not truly reflect the number of youth involved in independent living. Because an individual youth participating in independent living services may be in a placement such as a group home, institution or foster home, that individual is not represented in the statistic reported. However, CWLA presents a more reliable statistic; 55,449 youth in foster care are participating in independent living services, based on data from 40 states.

The CWLA presents data from 46 states on the placement type of children in out-of-home care. CWLA presents placement data differently than AFCARS, utilizing nine types of placements compared to eight placement types reported by AFCARS. Table 2 illustrates both CWLA and AFCARS placement data, to facilitate comparison of the two data sources.

Table 2
Comparison of AFCARS and CWLA Placement Data

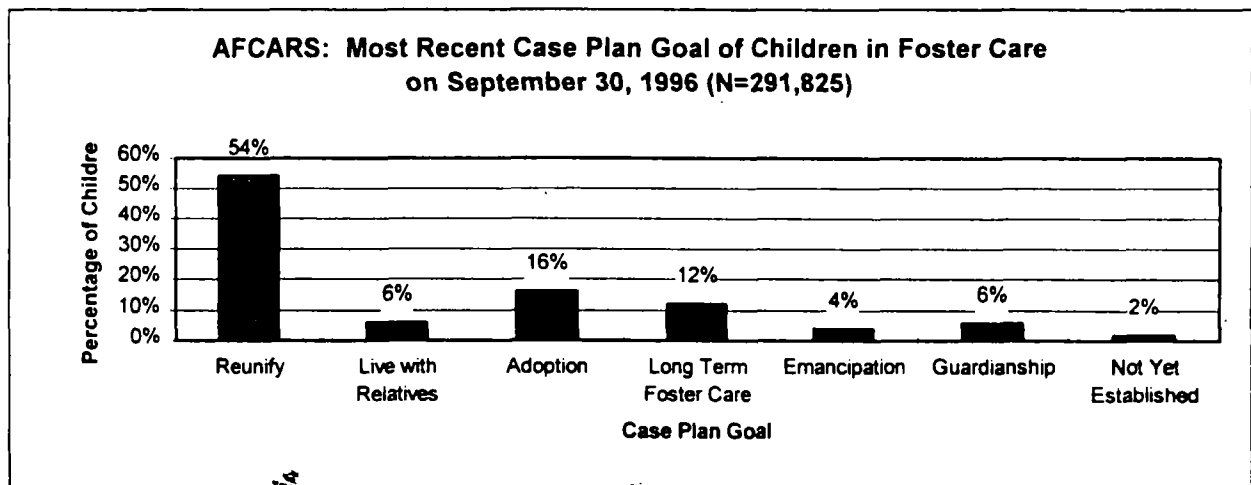
Placement	AFCARS	CWLA	Dif.
Family foster care	37%	49%	12%
Kinship	37%	23%	-14%
Residential Treatment	NR	2%	-
Group home	11%	9%	2%
Emergency shelter	NR	6%	-
Therapeutic foster care	NR	2.2%	-
Independent living	1%	0.4%	0.6%
Psychiatric hospital	NR	0.9%	-
Other	NR	7%	-
Pre-adoptive home	2%	NR	-
Runaway	1%	NR	-
Trial home visit	2%	NR	-

*NR denotes not reported as a placement category.

Most Recent Case Plan Goal for Children in Foster Care

The most recent case plan goal for children in foster care on September 30, 1996 is displayed in Chart 5.

Chart 5



For 54 percent of the children in care (157,586 children), the case plan goal is to return home. Sixteen percent of the children (46,692 children) have a case plan goal of adoption, while 12 percent of the children in foster care (35,019 children) have a case plan goal of long

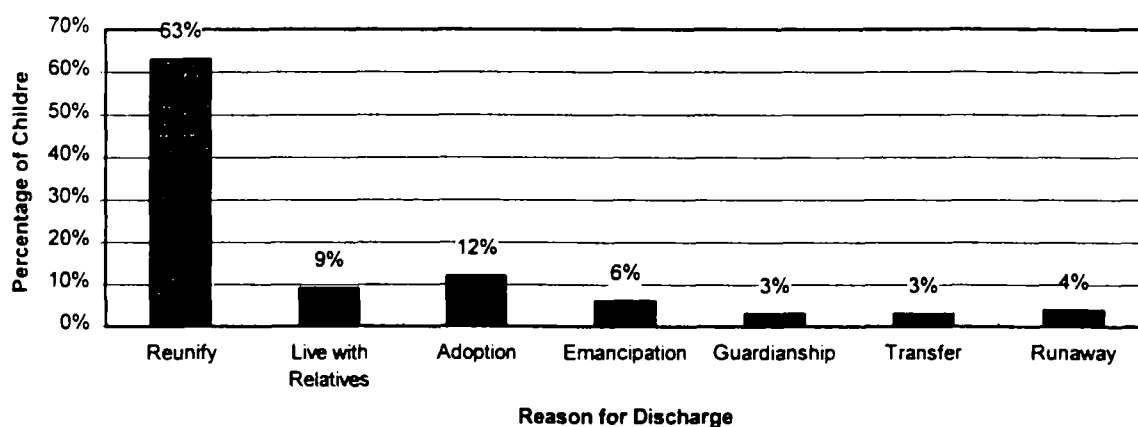
term foster care. Six percent of the children (7,510 children) have a case plan goal of living with relatives; another six percent of the children have a case plan goal of guardianship. Four percent of the children in foster care, 11,673 children, have a goal of emancipation, while two percent of the children in foster care, 5,837 children, did not have an established goal as of September 30, 1996. CWLA does not present data on case plan goals.

Reason for Discharge of Children Exiting Foster Care

As shown in Chart 6, almost two thirds, 63 percent (27,459 children) of the children discharged from foster care during this period were reunified with their families. The next largest group, 12 percent (5,230 children) were discharged to adoptive families. Nine percent of the children discharged (3,923 children) were discharged to live with relatives. Six percent of the children (2,615 children) were discharged as emancipated, while four percent of the children (1,743 children) were discharged from care as runaways. Three percent of the children discharged (1,308 children) were discharged to guardianships, while the remaining three percent of the children discharged were discharged as transfers.

Chart 6

**AFCARS: Reason for Discharge of Children Exiting Foster Care during
the period April 1, 1996 through September 30, 1996
(N=43, 585)**



We turn now from national-level descriptive data to an in-depth look at the factors related to economic success among youth in general and youth formerly in foster care in particular.

III. YOUTH LABOR MARKET PARTICIPATION

One of our best sources of information about improving the chances of youth successfully transitioning out of foster care into the labor market comes from reports regarding the youth labor market in general. Examining the factors that determine successful and unsuccessful transitions into the labor market among youth in general will allow us to develop strategies and recommendations for programs seeking to prepare youth transitioning out of foster care for the work force. We will organize our discussion by moving from the exploration of human capital influences to structural influences on the labor market success of youth. Thus, we will first examine the effect of characteristics and direct experiences of the youth on labor market participation. Second, characteristics of the labor market and community/neighborhood influences will be explored. These factors will be considered within the context of racial/ethnic and gender differences. Finally, we will discuss strategies that have been implemented and evaluated in order to improve the labor market participation of youth.

Characteristics and Experiences of Youth

In March of 1996, the Department of Labor reported that 6.5 million teenagers were in the labor force which indicated a 55.8 percent participation rate (U.S. Department of Labor, 1996). The unemployment rate for teenagers differed by race and by gender. The unemployment rate for teenage males was 19.4 percent, teenage females was 15.4 percent, white teenagers was 14.8 percent and black teenagers was 33.5 percent. We can begin to understand the differences in unemployment between teenagers of differing race and gender by looking at what factors affect the employment of teenagers. Garansky (1996), using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, looked at factors affecting teenage employment, adult employment and adult wages. The main factors positively affecting adult labor force participation were graduating from high school on time (by age 19) for men and prior work experience for both men and women. The single significant factor that negatively affected adult employment was the presence of health problems. The main determinant of wages at age 27 for both men and women was greater educational attainment. Thus, teenage employment and educational levels are critical for later successful employment.

Garansky (1996) also looked at a variety of influences on teenage employment and educational attainment. Factors affecting on-time graduation included:

- teenage employment
- greater household income
- higher intelligence score
- religious involvement
- teenage parenting

- Black
- Hispanic
- White

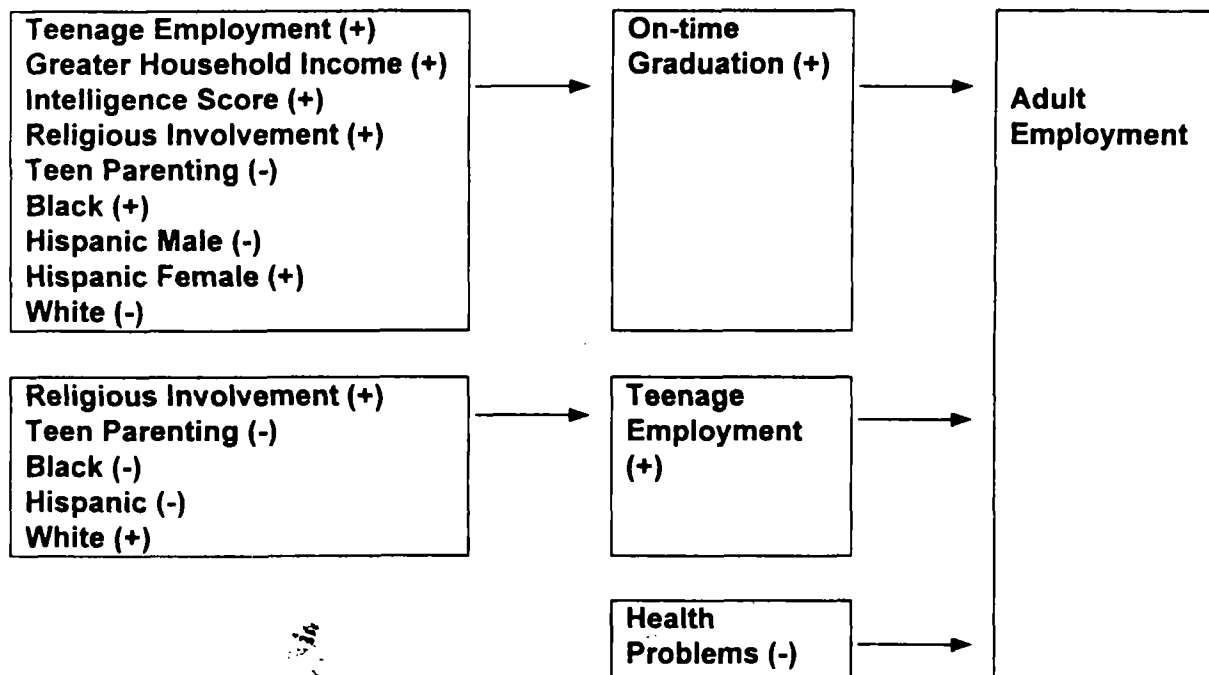
Factors affecting teenage employment included:

- teenage parenting
- religious involvement
- Black
- Hispanic
- White

Factors affecting adult employment include:

- on-time graduation
- teenage employment
- health problems

The conceptual illustration of the direction of the influence of each factor, with positive relationship denoted by a (+) and negative relationship denoted by a (-), in Garansky's model follows:



Please note that Garansky's model only incorporates variables he chose to measure. However, Garansky's study gives us a good idea of the range of variables that affect long-term

adult employment. The amalgamation of information from recent research supports the particular importance of employment, teen parenting and education. We will now explore these three variables and the effect they have on short and long-term employment.

Early Employment

Early employment experiences during the high school years have favorable short- and long-term effects on employment and earnings outcomes (Sum, Fogg & Fogg, 1997). However, when considering the advantages of early employment, one must also consider outcomes in other domains. For example, teen employment, especially when it involves long hours (over 20 hours per week), was associated with short- and long-term increased use of alcohol and short-term decreased involvement with one's family (Mihalic & Elliot, 1997; Mortimer et al, 1996; Mortimer & Shanahan, 1994). On the other hand, moderate amounts of work (20 hours or less per week) are associated with higher grades in high school (Mortimer et al., 1996; Ruscoe, Morgan & Peebles, 1996). Early employment, when that employment leads to the development of useful skills, has been found to enhance youth's values regarding employment (Mortimer, Pimentel, Ryu, Nash & Lee, 1996). The conclusion we can draw from the extant literature is two-fold: (1) the formation of occupational values and valuable work experience during the teen years may lead the youth in the direction of successful adult employment and (2) intensive teen employment involving long hours should not be encouraged especially at the expense of completing one's education.

Early Parenting

Early parenting is associated with many deleterious outcomes and unfortunate situations. While direction of effects has not been clearly established, early parenting among men and women is associated with poverty, single-parent households, minority status, lower educational attainment and drug use (Pirog-Good, 1996; Markey, 1988). Although reports on teenage childbearing indicate a decline in rates in recent years, the absolute numbers of those having children before the age of 21 is still problematic. Most of the empirical work on the association between early parenting and employment outcomes has focused on differential earnings. Pirog-Good's recent study on adolescent fathers showed that teen fathers completed fewer years of education, were less likely to finish high school and earned less over time than males who delayed parenting. While women's wages are already less than men's wages (Marini, 1989), mothers' wages are even less than non-mothers' (Elliot & Parcel, 1996). Thus regardless of their skills and work experience, mothers are making less than non-mothers. However, the finding that mothers earned less than non-mothers only held true for non-black women, possibly indicating that black women are already discriminated against on the basis of race regardless of their mother status (Elliot & Parcel, 1996). Findings of lower earnings for teen parents is especially disturbing taking into account that lower earnings have to support greater numbers of family members.

High School Completion

The importance of completing high school or completing a GED to future economic opportunities are clear. Numerous studies have now documented the inhibiting qualities of low educational attainment (Gleason & Cain, 1997; Sum, Fogg & Fogg, 1997; Lerman, 1996; Klerman & Karoly, 1994). Sum, Fogg & Fogg (1997), looking at data from the 1995 Current Population Survey, found that at the age of 24 only 36 percent of high school dropouts were employed full time while 87 percent of college graduates were employed full-time. Klerman & Karoly (1994), in their study using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, cited similar statistics: 81 percent of college graduates are employed one year after leaving school compared to 48 percent of high school dropouts. However, while obtainment of an educational degree is helpful in securing employment, solutions to youth labor market problems are not as simple as increasing rates of graduation. Low educational attainment is associated with other problematic background variables such as family income, parental education, criminal involvement and early parenting (Sum, Fogg & Fogg, 1997, Markey, 1988). While some of these background variables might improve from prevention strategies, they are already extant in a substantial portion of the population (especially the foster youth population) indicating that we need to take these variables into account when designing programs for youth. Furthermore, discrepancies in rates of high school graduation do not fully explain the differences in employment between white and black youth. These issues will be explored in the next section on characteristics of the labor market and influences of community on youth employment outcomes.

Labor Market and Community Characteristics

Labor Market Characteristics

The second half of the puzzle involves structural influences on the labor market participation of youth. These include market characteristics and community influences. Kazis and Kopp (1997) suggest that in order to develop and understand the full complex picture of youth labor participation, the market characteristics in addition to individual youth characteristics must be considered. Within the category of market characteristics are trends in the labor force, trends in available jobs and trends in employer demands. Competition is increasing in the labor force for 18-24 year old youth, with the number of 18-24 year old youth increasing steadily through the year 2010 (Sum, Fogg & Fogg, 1997). Furthermore, competition is expected to grow more intense due to the increasing number of immigrants entering the labor pool and from young adult women entering the workforce after transitioning from welfare (Sum, Fogg & Fogg, 1997; Holzer, 1994). Availability of jobs, especially jobs for youth, may become a problem as the labor pool increases (Sum, Fogg & Fogg, 1997). Gleason & Cain (1997) found that the low levels of teenage job availability contributed significantly to the low employment levels of black youth. Current trends in job availability cited by Kazis and Kopp (1997) include decreases in manufacturing jobs, increases in service employment and a movement of jobs from the cities into the suburbs. Availability of jobs may become complicated by the expectations of employers as compared to the qualifications of

today's youth. According to Kazis & Kopp (1997), 60 percent of twelfth graders cannot perform at a level of basic math proficiency. With employer's expecting more complex skills from entry-level workers (Kazis & Kopp, 1997; Skinner, 1995), many youth may be unable to secure employment. Most employers prefer experience, occupational skills, references, and no criminal record (Lerman, 1996). Thus, the combination of increased competition, lack of availability of jobs and increased employer demands may be detrimental to rates of youth labor participation.

Community Characteristics

Next, we will investigate the influence of the community which we consider to be family, peers and neighborhood. The family and peers of an individual can be characterized by their ethnicity and the influence they wield concerning employment values. The neighborhood has an impact on the individual through school, home and the surrounding infrastructure. Thus, while local labor markets may provide the opportunity, the context of family, peers and neighborhood may provide the motivation to get a job. We will begin with an examination of employment differences by ethnicity.

The factors guiding youths into or away from employment differ by ethnicity. It is acknowledged that white youth are working more and earning more than black youth (Gleason, 1997; Skinner, 1995). Unfortunately, this trend extends into adulthood (Holzer, 1994). Discrimination in hiring, higher rates of illegal activity, a mismatch of skills, competition from immigrants and location of employment in suburban areas are all valid possibilities (Desaran & Keithly, 1994; Holzer, 1994) for the disparity in rates of employment and earnings among white and black youth. Theories as to the cause of this range from "culture of poverty" theories in which the individual is to blame for lack of employment (Murray, 1984) to "opportunity-structure" theories in which the insufficient opportunities afforded the individual through the school system and the labor market are to blame (Johnson, 1989). While support can be found for both theories, it is clear that there are no simple solutions. As stated previously, obtaining a high-school diploma does not uniformly lead to a job for every individual. Therefore, we need to determine what other factors are making a difference in the rates of participation in employment.

Although ethnicity appears to be a key variable in determining an individual's employment outcomes, it is closely related to many other important variables. For example, ethnicity is associated with poverty status, type of residence, location of residence, discrimination in the workplace and the quality of the public school system. Thus, it is not truly ethnicity that is the cause of disparity in economic outcomes, but those variables closely associated with ethnicity. Therefore, the solutions for closing the gap in employment participation lie in those associated contextual variables (Skinner, 1995). For example, Skinner (1995) suggests that funding urban housing and infrastructural development along with combating racial discrimination in housing, hiring and job ladders is needed.

Findings from a study by Powers (1994) also support the need for increased attention to contextual variables especially with regard to non-white populations. Powers examined the inactivity of youth (not being in school, in the military or employed), which is viewed as a problematic outcome in and of itself and is related to future economic prospects. Powers (1994) found that inactivity among white youth is primarily determined by socioeconomic factors (parents' education, family income, welfare status) while inactivity among black and Hispanic youth is primarily determined by sociocontextual factors (family structure, residence, influential others). Specifically, youth from single parent homes, who lived in urban areas and interacted with individuals who discouraged employment were more likely to be inactive. Thus, one's neighborhood, family and peers do play a role in determining the economic outcomes of non-white youth.

For any intervention program to be successful in increasing participation in the labor market, it must attend to complex problems and devise complex solutions. Successful programs will be aware of the characteristics of the individual, the current conditions of the labor market and the influence that the community can have on the individual. Not only are community effects important for the economic prospects of the individual, but regional effects will become more important in the future as jobs move farther away from inner cities and thus the possible employment boundaries widen. Next, we discuss interventions programs addressing problems associated with youth employment.

Strategies to Improve Youth Labor Market Participation

In this section we will discuss programs designed specifically to address some of the aforementioned problems associated with youth unemployment. The focus of interventions has been to improve the economic prospects of youth. We will not expound a comprehensive review of the past and existing youth employment programs in this review (See Swanson & Spencer, 1991 for an overview) but will instead address suggested and successful components to be used in future youth employment programs. To reiterate, the *barriers* to successful employment explored in the previous sections included:

- low educational attainment;
- lack of employment experience;
- lack of credible references;
- early parenting;
- health problems;
- competition for and location of available jobs;

- place of residence;
- influential others, and
- unfair housing and hiring practices.

Youth labor market management strategies based on previous research either directly or indirectly address most of these barriers. Solutions suggested are multifaceted and take into account the complexities of the lives of the youth in need (Swanson & Spencer, 1991).

Themes that emerge from the literature include staying in school, completing an educational degree, providing positive role models, and providing for employment experiences. Walker (1997), in a recent review, offered the following four suggestions for successful youth training programs:

- promote long-term mentoring relationships between the youth and a trained adult;
- develop strong connections to employers in an effort to place the youth in employment;
- promote the continuation or completion of an educational degree, and
- encourage independence and confidence in the youth while acknowledging a long-term relationship with that youth.

These goals are reiterated by researchers (Lerman, 1996) and are articulated by the youth themselves (DeJesus, 1997). Lerman (1996) expands this list by adding work experience in the form of part-time jobs that are linked to school curricula. Lerman advocates use of the School-to-Career (STC) curricula (in part sponsored by the School-to-Work Opportunities Act) that are being implemented through schools or independent programs across the country. Within these programs, youth are taught about possible career paths through direct work-based learning. Enhancing the employment experience of youth while encouraging and continuing their education has proved successful. Lerman notes that students involved in STC programs are more likely to enter college, have positive attitudes about work and school, have better relationships with their teachers, and through credible references and experience may even increase their chances of getting and maintaining a job.

While the previous recommendations by Walker and Lerman have resulted in positive results in past and current job training programs and initiatives (JTPA, Job Corps, Big Brother/Big Sisters, YouthBuild), at-risk youth may need additional services to ensure their success (Swanson & Spencer, 1991). To address problems among the most disadvantaged youth, assistance with adequate housing, food, appropriate clothing, counseling and medical support should be provided (Walker, 1997).

Additionally, strategies to combat negative community influences are needed. Lerman (1996) offers the School-to-Career programs as a possible solution in that they expose youth to positive peer and adult role models and may help in delaying early childbearing and criminal activity by involving the youth in positive and engaging activities. DeJesus (1997), in interviewing youth in job training programs about what they saw as the most important components, found that youth longed to be involved in activities that build self-esteem and self-confidence. Suggestions from the youth included working with adults who expressed genuine concern for their well-being and working in activities that allow them to be of service in the larger community. Civic involvement is also a technique supported by Walker (1997) to build self-esteem while building respect for the positive aspects of the youths' environment. DeJesus (1997) found that those youth who had a greater sense of social awareness and community were more successful in obtaining long term employment.

Table 3

Critical elements for employment programs serving youth:	
<i>Important for all programs:</i>	<i>Particularly important for vulnerable youth:</i>
1. Promote long-term mentoring relationships	1. Expose youth to positive peer and adult role models
2. Develop strong connections to employers	2. Engage youth in positive activities in effort to delay teen parenting and criminal activity
3. Promote the continuation or completion of an educational degree	3. Promote activities that build self-esteem
4. Encourage independence and confidence in the youth	4. Encourage civic involvement
5. Provide work experience that is linked to school curriculum	

Thus, the suggestions made for youth job training programs do address most of the individual, labor market and community barriers illustrated in the first two sections. In addition, the job training recommendations added a couple of factors not entirely explored by the youth labor market literature such as self-esteem, decreasing criminal activity and community involvement. Prause & Dooley (1995, 1997) did report that youths who are unemployed or underemployed suffer from low self-esteem. One omission from suggested youth training programs is the provision of health care insurance. The health of the individual is important for success in the labor market (Garansky, 1996).

Past employment training programs have been criticized for not reaching the most vulnerable youth (Skinner, 1995. Swanson & Spencer, 1991). It may be that extra steps are needed for these youth. Youth coming out of foster care between the ages of 18 and 21 may well be members of the most vulnerable group of youth based on data below regarding educational deficits and health and mental health issues. It is quite possible that youth leaving foster care need extra steps to be taken and may even need more help according to their special needs. In particular, it will be important to understand the individual youth's social network to better comprehend the available strengths and possible barriers. We will now explore the employment and educational outcomes for youth transitioning out of foster care.

IV. EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH LEAVING FOSTER CARE

In this section, we review studies which examine educational and employment outcomes for youth as they leave foster care. Such studies fall into two categories: 1.) those which look at outcomes for youth as they leave care and 2.) those which examine these outcomes for youth at some follow-up point after leaving care. While we discuss education and employment outcomes separately, most of the studies cited examined both. In total, since 1960, only 14 studies have addressed this issue. Such studies vary in scope and geographic location, with only one nationally representative study of Independent Living Programs (Cook, 1991) and only one drawn from a nationally representative sample of youth, the High School and Beyond Survey (Blome, 1997). The other studies are state specific: in California (Iglehart, 1994); Kentucky (Mangine, 1990); West Virginia (Jones and Moses, 1984); Wisconsin (Courtney, Piliavan and Grogan-Taylor, 1995); and Minnesota (Meier, 1965) or city specific, such as: New York City (Festinger, 1983); San Francisco (Barth, 1990); Seattle (Fanshel, 1990); New Orleans (Zimmerman, 1982); and Boise (Wederen, 1994). One study was conducted in Paris, France.

Education

Following the format used by Mech's (1994) summary of outcome studies, we summarize all of the outcome studies focusing on education in Table 4. Specifically, for each study, we indicate the sample, study method and findings on four outcomes:

- high school and GED completion;
- enrollment in college preparatory classes;
- enrollment in secondary school; and
- vocational classes.

Other noteworthy outcomes are listed in the final column of the table. While the types of educational outcomes examined varied, the two most commonly collected outcomes include the percentage of youth completing high school or GED (some present it as percentage dropping-out) and the percentage of youth enrolled in post-secondary school. Despite the different samples and definitions used, one findings is consistent: the educational completion rates for foster care youth are lower than the general population of youth both at the time they leave care and as they move through their early adult years.

Educational Outcomes at the Point of Leaving Care

The most recent and comprehensive study of educational outcomes for youth in care is Blome's (1997) research on what happens to youth once they have "aged out" of foster care. This study relied on data from the "High School and Beyond" survey administered every two years by the Department of Education from 1980 through 1986. Existing data included a subset of 167 foster youth. These youth were matched with non-foster youth on age, gender, race, verbal abilities and math abilities (total n = 334). This study represents a departure from the other foster care youth studies as it uses an longitudinal quasi-experimental design in which foster care children were matched with a comparison group of non-foster care youth. Although matched comparison groups have been used in previous research, studies in which the same questions are asked of the matched youth at the same time are virtually non-existent. Regarding high school performance, Blome found the following:

- Foster care youth were more likely to have dropped out of high school than non-foster youth (37 percent vs. 16 percent), though both groups were equally likely to agree that dropping out of high school was not a good idea.
- Foster care youth who dropped out of high school were less likely to have received a high school diploma or a GED certificate (77 percent vs. 93 percent).
- Foster care youth were less likely to be enrolled in college preparatory classes than non-foster youth (15 percent vs. 32 percent).
- Foster care youth spent less time studying than non-foster youth.
- Participation in school activities and clubs did not differ between the two groups.
- Foster youth participated more in vocational clubs than did non-foster youth.
- Foster youth were more likely to report that they had been disciplined in school, suspended, and had been in "serious trouble with the law".

Table 4

Educational Outcomes for Foster Care Youth

Design			Outcomes				
Study	Sample	Method	High School/GED Completion	Enrollment in College Prep	Enrollment in Secondary School	Vocational Classes	Other
Blome, W.W., 1997	High School and Beyond National Survey, bi-annual survey, 1980-1986, 167 foster care youth matched with 167 non foster care youth (N = 334)	Longitudinal quasi experimental design, youth matched on age, gender, race, verbal and math abilities	37% foster youth dropped out vs. 16% comparison	15% foster youth vs. 32% comparison	Lower than comparison group, although 45% of foster youth had taken higher education courses	More foster youth than comparison	
Dumaret, et. al., 1997	Targeted 63 adults from severely dysfunctional families in France who had been in care for at least 5 years, final sample size was 59	semi-structured interviews	67% had no educational diploma, 7% had completed high school, compared to 32% for national norm			42% vocational diploma	
Courtney, et. al., 1995	141 youth in Wisconsin who had been in out-of-home care for at least 18 months, 17 years old, were not developmentally disabled	Currently study reports only descriptive data about the sample. Extensive multivariate statistical analyses will be conducted	90% still in high school		79% expect to enter college, 63% expect to complete college		26% read at 12th grade, 32% read below 8th grade, 30% failed at least one grade, 37% enrolled in special ed, 20% had to stop school for at least one month at some point

Table 4

Educational Outcomes for Foster Care Youth							
Design			Outcomes				
Study	Sample	Method	High School/GED Completion	Enrollment in College Prep	Enrollment in Secondary School	Vocational Classes	Other
Mech, 1994	1,465 former foster care youth aggregated across 4 outcome studies: Barth, 1990; Festinger, 1983; Jones-Moses, 1984; and Cook 1991	All used interview data, aggregated to focus on education, employment, housing, support and cost-to-community	58% had completed high school				
Wedeven, et. al., 1994	68 former foster care youth from Boise, Idaho Casey Family Program	Survey	94% had completed high school or GED		57% had post-secondary education		
Barth, R. 1990	55 young adults who left foster care, San Francisco Bay area/Sacramento	Interviews, 76% in person and 24% by phone	62% completed high school degree		33% enrolled in college		
Cook, R. 1990	810 former foster youth from Arizona, California, North Carolina, Illinois, Missouri, Pennsylvania, New York, Tennessee; multi stage probability	Interviews conducted 2.5 to 4 years after youth discharged from care. 69% conducted on phone, 31% in person	54% had completed high school degree		18% enrolled in college		

Table 4

Educational Outcomes for Foster Care Youth

Design			Outcomes				
Study	Sample	Method	High School/GED Completion	Enrollment in College Prep	Enrollment in Secondary School	Vocational Classes	Other
Fanshel, 1990	Targeted 180 former foster care youth from Seattle Casey Family Program; 106 youth in final sample	Interviews, conducted an average of 7 years after leaving care	Does not report rates of completion				
Jones and Moses, 1984	607 former foster care youth in West Virginia targeted; 328 youth in final sample. Had been in foster care for a minimum of one year.	Pre-coded interview schedule. 89% conducted in person, 11% by phone or mail	51% had completed high school degree		7% had at least one year of college		Lagged behind their peers in education by one year
Festinger, 1983	364 former foster care youth in New York City targeted, 277 were interviewed	Structured interview	65% had completed high school or GED at the time of discharge		34% completed some college, 5% graduated from college.		
Zimmerman, 1982	61 former foster care youth, ages 19 to 29 at follow-up in New Orleans	Interviews comparison to general population of southern blacks	39% completed the 12th grade compared to a 69% completion rate for all southern blacks				

Blome attributes the observed differences between foster care youth and their counterparts to several factors. School stability played a key role. Foster care youth changed schools more frequently than other youth, often three or more times since fifth grade. The lack of family support for educational endeavors among foster care youth may also contribute to poorer school outcomes. Foster care mothers and fathers were less likely to monitor their children's homework than were non-foster care parents. In addition, foster care parents were less likely to attend teacher conferences, visit the classroom or volunteer at school. Part of this difference may be due to that fact that 20 percent of foster care youth were living independently their senior year as compared to 3 percent of the other youth. It is also important to note that foster care youth may have decided to become employed rather than complete school as those foster youth who did drop out were almost twice as likely to be employed than comparison group members (50 percent vs. 26 percent).

Blome's study also looked at foster care youth after high school. While 45 percent of foster youth had taken higher education courses, this percentage was less than non-foster youth. Fewer foster youth who had dropped out of high school were enrolled in a GED course than non-foster youth (27 percent vs. 75 percent). However, foster youth were more likely to report participating in training programs (on-the-job and classroom based) than non-foster youth after high school. Of those youth enrolled in higher education courses, only one-fifth of the foster youth were receiving supportive monies from their families while 38 percent of non-foster youth were receiving supportive funds. Perhaps more importantly, foster youth were receiving, on average, far less money (\$600 vs. \$2000) than non-foster youth for their schooling.

Another strength of the Blome study was examination of educational aspirations. As sophomores, more foster youth thought they would be homemakers, more foster youth thought they would finish their education by age 19 (indicating no plans for higher education) and fewer foster youth thought they would work just after high school. In many respects, foster care youth's educational aspirations are no different than other youth. The authors surmise that the discrepancy in educational aspirations and attainment between foster youth and non-foster youth may be due to different expectations with regard to ability and outcomes for each group. This finding is particularly important as the researchers controlled for actual ability in this study.

The Blome study raises several important concerns. First, it is imperative that workers and teachers have equal expectations for foster youth and encourage them to go as far in their education as possible. Equal emphasis should be placed on educational attainment for foster youth as is for non-foster youth. Second, the authors advocate training foster parents to monitor school performance, training service providers to track the youth's progress in school, and encouraging birth parents to be involved either physically or mentally in the youth's school progress. Third, considering the higher rate of school change among the foster youth and the possible deleterious effects of this, service providers may want to factor in the effects of school change in their decision of when and where to place the child. The final concern relates to financial assistance for higher education. The disparity between foster care youth and other

youth of equal ability in financial assistance suggests that setting aside formal foster youth funds for help with education and living costs would significantly improve foster care youths' chances for advanced education.

The Blome study provides an important view of educational outcomes for foster care youth, but since the focus of the original study was not foster care, the subjects' history in foster care is unknown. Two other studies examine educational outcomes using samples of drawn specifically from agencies or programs serving foster care youth which help us understand the relationships between educational outcomes and characteristics of care.

Courtney and his colleagues at the University of Wisconsin (Courtney, Piliavin, and Grogan-Taylor, 1995) are currently conducting a longitudinal study of the post-care experiences of youth who have had relatively long stays in out-of-home care. Their sample was identified through the Wisconsin Human Services Reporting System (HSRS) which includes youth from Milwaukee and 41 other counties within the state. The sample included 141 youth who met the following criteria: 1.) had been in out-of-home care for at least 18 months; 2.) were at least 17 years old at time of sample selection; and 3.) were not developmentally disabled. This on-going study includes three waves of structured in-person interviews. The interviews require approximately 60-80 minutes to conduct and respondents are paid for their time. Wave 1 was conducted between February and May of 1995. Wave 2 will be conducted after the youth have been out of care for approximately 6 months and Wave 3 will occur at approximately 18 months after the youth have left care.

The 1995 wave of this study provides useful information about the educational status of youth as they prepare to leave foster care. At that point, at age 17, 90 percent of the sample were still attending high school. A full 79 percent expected to enter college and 63 percent expected to complete college. These figures corroborate Blome's findings that educational self-expectations of foster care youth are similar to youth in general. At this point Courtney et al do not provide any comparison statistics. While the enrollment figures are promising, this sample did report some educational difficulties. In particular, one-third read at or below an eighth grade reading level, though one-quarter read at a twelfth grade or higher level. Thirty percent of the sample had at some point failed to complete a grade and 37 percent had been enrolled in special education classes at some point in their educational careers. One-fifth of the sample (20 percent) revealed that they had to stop school for at least one month at some point in the past.

The Wisconsin findings are based on a sample which is 57 percent female, 65 percent Caucasian, 27 percent African-American, and 6 percent Native-American. Regarding the types of maltreatment these youth experienced, 66 percent reported neglect, 57 percent reported an incident of physical abuse, 31 percent reported a history of sexual abuse. One-quarter (25 percent) reported physical abuse as the primary reason for removal, 12 percent reported neglect as primary reason, and 11 percent reported sexual abuse. Sixteen percent reported their placement as voluntary, however, all cases in the sample were in placement due to court order. Though no information is yet available about how long they had been in foster care other than the 18 month minimum required for sample inclusion or how many different

placements they had experienced, the youth were generally satisfied with their placements and agreed that the placements were necessary. Three-fourths of respondents agreed with the statement that they were "lucky" to have been placed in out-of-home care. Seventy-two percent were generally satisfied with their experiences in out-of-home care. Eighty-seven percent agreed with the statement that "foster parents have been a help to me," although only 50 percent felt the same way toward social workers. Moreover, 85 percent of respondents have received training in education, job seeking and decision-making skills. While over one-third (39 percent) indicated that the primary source of their training was their foster parent(s), 32 percent got most of their training from specialized independent living training programs. The fact that the majority of these youth feel positive about their placements and have some type of independent living services or support from their foster parents may relate to the fact so many of them are still enrolled in school.

The federally funded Westat (Cook, 1991; Cook, 1987) evaluation of Independent Living Programs affords the only nationally representative picture of how foster care youth fare as they make the transition to adulthood. The Westat study, conducted in 1987, consisted of two parts: 1.) a process study in eight randomly selected states including 47 counties which resulted in case record reviews of 1,644 randomly selected youth who were discharged from care between January 1987 and July of 1988; and 2.) a follow-up study of approximately half of these youth (N=810) two and one half years to four years following discharge from foster care.

The first phase of the Westat study found that only 48 percent of the 18 and 19 year olds had completed high school at the time of discharge. The national high school completion rate for the same age group was 64 percent, indicating that adolescents leaving care had large educational deficits. To place these findings in context, it is important to understand the demographic and case histories of these youth. Seventy percent of these youth had entered the foster care system as adolescents. Minority and male youth, however, were more likely to have entered care at younger ages. The majority (82 percent) experienced only one episode of out-of-home care, with the median length of stay of 2.5 years. However, almost 60 percent resided in three or more placements during that time period. By the time of discharge, one third had experienced a serious emotional disturbance, 17 percent of the females had become pregnant; 17 percent had abused drugs; 9 percent had health problems; and almost half had run away at least once. With regard to Independent Living Services, over half of the sample (60 percent) had received some type of independent living services prior to discharge, but only one-third were enrolled in an independent living program. In assessing the impact of these services on educational outcomes at discharge, the Westat study found that youth who received the most comprehensive Independent Living Services while in care fared better educationally than did their counterparts who did not receive Independent Living Services.

Educational Status after Leaving Foster Care

Educational outcomes were among the important issues focused on by studies that followed the lives of youth leaving foster care. While these studies provide important information, it is difficult to draw any definitive conclusions as the ages at follow-up vary considerably, from age 18 to 29. In addition, as all these researchers acknowledge, these samples represent only those who could be found (Cook, 1991; Festinger, 1983). It is unknown whether those who could not be found would be doing worse or better than the sample members who were interviewed.

At the follow-up point, 54 percent of the Westat sample had completed high school. The median age at the time of these interviews was 21, with a range of 18 to 24. Young parenthood appeared to affect education completion at the follow-up interview, as 60 percent of young women had given birth to at least one child and these women were half as likely to complete further schooling than the former foster care women who had not given birth. Two and one half to four years after foster care emancipation, these youth's economic situation, in part due to the lack of educational attainment, resembled those of individuals living below the poverty line.

Festinger's (1983) follow-up study of 277 youth who had been discharged from care in New York City in 1975 conducted in 1979-80, though somewhat dated, also provides useful information about educational outcomes for foster care youth. The youth had been in care for at least five years and were ages 18 to 21 years old at discharge; three-fourths had been discharged from foster homes while the remainder had been in group facilities. Festinger (1983) found that 65 percent had completed high school and among that group, only 40 percent stopped their education at high school graduation. An additional 25 percent of the high school graduates reported college enrollment. While Festinger's high school completion rates are higher than other foster care studies, educational achievement was an area in which youth formerly in foster care differed greatly from the norms of the general New York City population. For example, males who were formerly in foster care completed college at a rate of 2.3 percent, compared to a rate of 22.1 percent for the general population of New York City.

Other studies of educational outcomes have estimated lower levels of high school completion than did Festinger's study. Barth interviewed 55 young adults who left foster care in the San Francisco area and found that only 45 percent reported high school completion. Zimmerman (1987), studying primarily southern black foster care youths found that while 70 percent of those discharged from foster care had entered high school, only 39 percent had completed 12th grade, compared to a 69 percent completion rate for all southern blacks. Finally, one study reported comparable levels of high school completion to Festinger's study. The Child Welfare League of American Study (Jones and Moses, 1984) of 328 former foster care youth in West Virginia found that 63 percent had completed grade 12 or earned a GED. Approximately 60 percent also expressed interest in obtaining additional schooling. Our best estimate of high school completion comes from a study by Mech (1994) in which he reanalyzed

the four studies described above (Barth, 1990; Cook, 1991; Jones and Moses, 1984; Festinger, 1983). By combining data across the four studies, he found a 58 percent high school completion rate.

While estimates vary as to the percentage of youth who had completed high school after leaving foster care, it is clear that a substantial percentage of the youth are not reaching an adequate level of educational attainment. To get a sense of whether the lack of education is affecting youth's rate of employment, we will now explore employment outcomes.

Employment Outcomes

Most of the studies cited above examined employment and economic status in conjunction with education. Employment outcomes typically included the following: 1.) percentage employed at time of follow-up, 2.) wages or income and 3.) percentage of youth receiving public assistance. The Westat study attempted to measure sustained employment by measuring the percentage who had been in the same jobs for at least one year. The employment outcomes from these studies are summarized in Table 5. With the exception of the Festinger sample, the employment and economic status outcomes of the former foster care sample resemble that of people living at or below the poverty line.

Employment at the Time of Leaving Care

Courtney et. al. (1995) found that of the 141 Wisconsin youth, at age 17, 80 percent reported being employed at some time. Fifty-seven percent held a job at the time of the interview. A majority, 92 percent of the respondents, were either "very optimistic" or "fairly optimistic" about their hopes and goals for the future. Among the Westat sample, 39 percent had been employed at some point before they left care, a figure much lower than the Wisconsin study. Comparing the Westat figures with employment figures of the general population of 16-19 year olds suggest a much lower level of employment among youth in foster care. In 1986, 56 percent of young men and 55 percent of young women were employed. It is difficult to interpret the meaning of employment percentages for youth who may still be in school. Indeed, some youth may not be able to work because of school commitments. On the other hand, employment while in school may represent an important avenue to job experience, job "socialization", and networks for finding future job.

Table 5

Employment Outcomes

Design			Outcomes				
Study	Sample	Method	Employed	Employed at Least One Year	Annual Wages	AFDC	Other
Courtney, et al., 1995	141 youth in Wisconsin who had been in out-of-home care for at least 18 months, 17 years old, were not developmentally disabled	Currently study reports only descriptive data about the sample. Extensive multivariate statistical analyses will be conducted	80% employed at some point before interview, 57% employed at time of interview				92% optimistic about future employment
Cook, R. 1991	810 former foster youth from Arizona, California, North Carolina, Illinois, Missouri, Pennsylvania, New York, Tennessee; multi study probability	Interviews conducted 2.5 to 4 years after youth discharged from care. 69% conducted on phone, 31% in person	49% at time of follow-up	38% at time of follow-up	\$10,000 per year	39% at time of follow-up	
Booth, R. 1990	55 young adults who left foster care, San Francisco Bay area/Sacramento	Interviews, 76% in person and 24% by phone	75% at time of follow-up, mostly full-time		\$10,000 per year	47% at time of follow-up	
Jones and Moses, 1984	607 former foster care youth in West Virginia targeted; 328 youth in final sample. Had been in foster care for a minimum of one year.	Pre-coded interview schedule. 89% conducted in person, 11% by phone or mail	32% full-time or part-time work, greater employment for high-school grads			16% at time of follow-up, mostly food stamps, 34% since discharge	

Table 5

Employment Outcomes							
Design			Outcomes				
Study	Sample	Method	Employed	Employed at Least One Year	Annual Wages	AFDC	Other
Festinger, 1983	364 former foster care youth in New York City targeted, 277 were interviewed	Structured interview	90% held job at some point after care, 75% males at follow-up, 55% females at follow-up			34% of females, 10% of males	
Zimmerman, 1982	61 former foster care youth, ages 19 to 29 at follow-up in New Orleans	Interviews, comparison to general population of southern blacks	75% self-supporting				over 33% below poverty line

Employment at Follow-up

Most of the studies of employment of foster care youth focus on some follow-up point after leaving care. Of all the follow-up studies, the Westat one is the most comprehensive. Nearly half (49 percent) of the 810 of the Westat sample was employed at the follow-up interview, with the median income being \$10,000. The Westat (Cook, 1991) study used employment for at least one year as their primary employment outcome. Over one-third (38 percent) of their follow-up sample achieved this outcome. Those youth who received multiple skills training were more likely to have held jobs for longer than a year than youth who did not receive multiple skills training, regardless of whether they were involved with Independent Living. The particular combination of skills training which enhanced employment outcomes was training in the following areas: money management skills, consumer skills, establishing and maintaining credit, education and employment. The Westat study also showed that apart from skills training received while in foster care, other characteristics were related to employment stability. Finishing high school before leaving care and having at least one job during foster care were also positively related to maintaining a job for at least one year. Further, African-American youth were less likely than either white or Hispanic youth to be employed for one year or longer. Additionally, youth who were assessed as either emotionally disturbed or handicapped were less likely to be employed. Finally, drug problems and chronic health problems were negatively related to job stability.

In addition to employment, the Westat study also looked at public assistance dependency which they called "cost to community." Thirty-nine percent of the Westat sample were either receiving public assistance, institutionalized, or using Medicaid at the time of the follow-up. As was the case with employment stability, the types of skills received made the difference between those who were receiving public assistance and those who were not. The five core skill areas were money management, consumer skills, establishing and maintaining credit, education and employment. White females who had been in foster care, even with no skill training, were the least likely to be a cost to the community. African-American males, with no skills training, were most likely to be receiving public assistance or institutionalized. However, with skills training in all five core areas mentioned above, young African-American males were no more likely than others to be receiving public assistance at the follow-up period. Several other factors were related to receiving public assistance, including age at foster care entry, number of months in foster care, and number of placements while in care. Youth who entered foster care at older ages were more likely to be receiving public assistance at the follow-up point as compared to those who entered care at younger ages. Youth who were in care for a longer period of time and those who experienced multiple placements were also more likely to be receiving public assistance or institutionalized than their counterparts with shorter stays or fewer living arrangements. Females were more likely to be on welfare than males, most likely due to early parenthood. Physical handicaps and drug abuse also increased a former foster care youth's chances of receiving public assistance at the follow-up.

Other follow-up studies have found varied percentages of employment after leaving care. In Festinger's sample, 70 percent of the males were employed and 55 percent of the females were employed. Barth found that nearly three in four of his sample were employed, mostly full-time. For those reporting full-time employment, annual income was only \$10,000 (in 1987), a figure similar to that found in the Westat study. One third of Barth's sample indicated that limitations in education and job skills were obstacles to better paying jobs. In the Jones and Moses study, 40 percent reported having a job at the follow-up. Those who had high school degrees were more likely to be employed than those who did not.

Clearly, having a high school degree is important for foster care youths' long term employment. However, the low wages cited in the studies above raises concern about the long term economic self-sufficiency of these young adults.

While the exact percentage of foster youth participating in the labor market is not clear, what is clear is that a substantial percentage of youth exiting foster care are unable to get and maintain a job. As explicated in the first section on economic prospects among the general youth population, solutions to increase the economic success of youth are not simple. The population of youth coming out of foster care is varied and cannot be easily characterized; some of the youth are capable and have the personal resources to get a job while others need multiple services just to help them survive.

Fanshel (1990) expanded the research conversation by considering extensive background characteristics that may affect an individual's education and thus economic success. Fanshel examined educational outcomes of graduates of the Casey Family Program and found a modest linkage between the educational performance while in care and educational attainment after leaving care. The youth who had experienced severe abuse as children performed less well in school while in care, a pattern which followed them into their adult life. This was especially true for males who had been physically abused.

The review of existing studies of employment and educational outcomes for youth after they leave care illustrates two common themes. First, among youth raised in foster care, high school completion rates lag behind youth in general. Second, with respect to economic well-being, foster care youth, on average, resemble individuals living at or below the poverty line. These two themes point to several important areas which need to be addressed.

To help improve the educational achievement of youth raised in foster care, the following are important:

- School stability is a key factor in ensuring high school completion and where possible, placement decisions need to account for such continuity.
- It is unrealistic to assume that youth raised in foster care can continue higher education without some social or institutional support, therefore, the emancipation age for children in foster care should be 21 in all states.

- The disparity in financial resources for higher education between youth in foster care and youth in the general population suggests that setting aside scholarships for former foster care youth would improve their chances of school completion.
- The encouragement and involvement of foster care providers in the educational progress of youth is critical to staying in school, therefore training and support need to be available for foster care providers to achieve this goal.
- Given the similarity in aspirations between foster care youth and other youth, foster parents and school personnel need to help youth to plan for steps that need to be taken to reach their educational goals. Starting this process at earlier ages would prove most beneficial.

From the literature on employment outcomes, we offer the following observations:

- As teenage employment is an important predictor of adult employment, foster care youth should be encouraged to obtain employment experience either through part-time work or through volunteering.
- Helping youth acquire multiple independent living skills, particularly money management skills, consumer skills, education about credit acquisition and maintenance, as well as assistance with continuing education and employment skills, will increase their chance of adult employment.
- Given the prevalence of discrimination in youth employment, employers and employees need to be trained in cross-cultural interactions.

While a certain percentage of youth coming out of foster care will succeed, a substantial proportion have serious problems that need to be addressed in future descriptive and multivariate research as well as in development of and evaluation of interventions. In order to make recommendations for future research and interventions, we need to fully understand the barriers to employment and the resiliency factors that make a difference in the short and long term educational and economic outcomes of youth.

V. BARRIERS OF FOSTER CARE YOUTH TO SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS TO ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

While deficits in education and employment preparation hinder the ability of youth raised in foster care to become economically self-sufficient, they are also more likely to experience additional challenges which make finding and sustaining employment difficult. In particular, previous research identifies four areas of concern:

- significant developmental barriers including mental health, developmental delay and physical health problems;
- drug and alcohol problems;
- justice system involvement; and
- homelessness.

The studies examining barriers to employment are summarized in Table 6.

It is important to note that these issues were among those identified by youth labor market experts as barriers to employment for youth in general. Because of the greater incidence of these barriers among youth in foster care, the impact of these barriers on youth may be magnified.

Developmental Barriers

Mental Health

While most would agree that youth raised in the foster care system suffer emotional trauma stemming from childhood abuse and/or placements within the foster care system itself, relatively few studies have attempted to document the prevalence of mental health problems among youth in out-of-home care. Fortunately, some recent studies have acknowledged the importance of mental health issues. In particular, Fanshel (1990) has been an important advocate for the consideration of mental health issues within foster care studies.

The most predominant mental health problems found in children in out-of home care have been psychological and/or behavioral. As can be seen in the descriptions of concurrent and longitudinal foster care studies, consistency of measures and definitions are problematic. Thompson and Fuhr, (1992) found evidence of psychopathology in 60 percent to 80 percent of the children in their out-of-home-care sample. Hulsey and White, (1989) found that the mean behavior scores on the Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist for maltreated children in out-of-home-care were significantly higher than for those of a control group who had never been in care. Mech, Ludy-Dobson, and Hulseman (1994), in a study of 534 older adolescents in care, report that half to three-quarters of their study group had social-emotional adjustment problems. Finally, Iglehart (1994) interviewed 152 adolescents in care in California and subsequently reported that 22 percent of her sample had mental health problems. Furthermore, adolescents with mental health problems had difficulty taking responsibility and taking care of themselves, creating a supportive physical and emotional environment and being ready for employment. Thus, Iglehart goes as far as to recommend specialized programs for adolescents with mental health concerns.

Table 6

Barriers to Economic Self-Sufficiency

Design			Outcomes			
Study	Sample	Method	Mental Health	Delinquency/ Incarceration	Homelessness	Drug/Alcohol Problems
Roman and Wolfe, 1997	21 homeless service organizations throughout the country	Combination of case record reviews of 1,324 people, survey data from 1,209 homeless and case studies of former foster care residents who are homeless			36% had foster care history	
Courtney, et. al., 1995	141 youth in Wisconsin who had been in out-of-home care for at least 18 months, 17 years old, were not developmentally disabled	Currently study reports only descriptive data about the sample. Extensive multivariate statistical analyses will be conducted	47% received mental health services. Psychological distress is higher in foster care youth (including both White and Black subjects) than in the general population.	71% reported committing a delinquent act		
Iglehart, 1994	152 youth (16+) in out-of-home placements in California	Interviews with youths, caseworkers and caregivers	22% of the sample had mental health problems			

Table 6

Barriers to Economic Self-Sufficiency

Design			Outcomes			
Study	Sample	Method	Mental Health	Delinquency/ Incarceration	Homelessness	Drug/Alcohol Problems
Cook, R. 1991	810 former foster youth from Arizona, California, North Carolina, Illinois, Missouri, Pennsylvania, New York, Tennessee; multi-study probability	Interviews conducted 2.5 to 4 years after youth discharged from care. 69% conducted by phone, 31% in person	~ 47% were handicapped; 38% were diagnosed as mentally disturbed.	25% in trouble with law, 4% incarcerated	25% spent at least 1 night without a place to stay.	42% alcohol used within 30 days (vs. 62% general population), 13% marijuana use (vs. 13% general population), 50% never use illegal drugs (vs. 51% general population).
Mangine et. al., 1990	74 homeless persons in Lexington Kentucky	Survey and structured clinical interviews at homeless drop-in center and soup kitchen	No different from general population		16% had foster care history	
Jones and Moses, 1984	607 former foster care youth in West Virginia targeted; 328 youth in final sample. Had been in foster care for a minimum of one year.	Pre-coded interview schedule. 89% conducted in person, 11% by phone or mail				20% problems with alcohol
Festinger, 1983	364 former foster care youth in New York City targeted, 277 were interviewed	Structured interview		Arrest rates no different from general N.Y.C. population		

Table 6

Barriers to Economic Self-Sufficiency

Design			Outcomes			
Study	Sample	Method	Mental Health	Delinquency/ Incarceration	Homelessness	Drug/Alcohol Problems
Zimmerman, 1982	61 former foster care youth, ages 19 to 29 at follow-up in New Orleans	Interviews, comparison to general population of southern blacks	50% needing or seeking mental health services, 5% hospitalized for mental illness	10% incarcerated		

In the recent Wisconsin sample, nearly half (47 percent) reported receiving some form of mental health or social service, primarily individual counseling or therapy. The RAND Mental Health Inventory was used to measure psychological stress in the Wisconsin sample. Lower scores on this measure indicate greater psychological distress. Interestingly, although scores for the foster care sample as a whole were lower (indicating more psychological distress) than the general population, mental health scores did not differ by ethnicity. The average score for Whites in the Wisconsin sample was 65.7, compared to an average of 70.9 in the RAND sample (drawn from the general population.) The mean for sample Blacks was 65.8, compared to a RAND sample mean of 75.4

Studies of individuals after they leave foster care also support that about half needed or were seeking mental health services, with about 5 percent being hospitalized (Zimmerman, 1982). Unfortunately, many longitudinal studies have not specifically tracked mental health outcomes. Former foster care youth in the Westat study were asked about their satisfaction with life. Eight percent of the youth volunteered that they felt depressed and were reported as having emotional problems. Had a direct measure of mental health problems been used, rates for problems may have been higher. As can be seen in the descriptions of concurrent and longitudinal foster care studies, consistency of measures and definitions of mental health problems is a difficult issue that needs to be addressed.

In addition to studies concentrating on clinical or quasi-clinical diagnoses of mental health problems, a number of studies have focused on problems relating to self-image and self-esteem. A recent study attempted to examine the differences in self-image between male adolescents in foster care and their peers in the normal population and to relate specific foster care characteristics to self-image development (Lyman and Bird, 1996). The study sample was comprised of 58 12-19 year old residents of a group home in Virginia. Eighty percent were placed for the first time after age 10, 65 percent had been in care for two years or less, with the remainder spanning up to 15 years in care. Seventy-nine percent had been in one or two placements, the remaining 21 percent had experienced 3-10 placements. Over 70 percent of the sample came from families with less than \$15,000 in annual income. All of the youths had contact with at least one parent. All respondents attended public school and had the opportunity to participate in community activities. Eighty percent of the youths were white, and 20 percent were African-American. The comparison group was the normative population of 1,385 adolescents used to establish the standardized norms for the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire for Adolescents (OSIQ). The 130 item instrument measures self-image in 11 domains considered to be important in the psychological world of the adolescent. The study revealed that there were no differences in global self-esteem between the adolescent males in foster care and their counterparts. There were differences, however, in specific domains of self-esteem. The foster care sample scored significantly higher than the normative sample on the social relations sub-scale and scored significantly lower on the family relations and emotional health sub-scales. The study supports the findings of Evans and Hoffman (1988) who found that when family support is low, social relationships gain importance. The study findings suggest that the family relations domain was the most depressed for these adolescents. Consistent with the findings of Fanshel and Shinn (1978), 25 percent of the sample had self-image scores in the emotional

health domain that fell outside the normal range, indicating the presence of severe psychopathology. This study suggests that while foster care youths lack family support, relationships other than with family may be providing the support necessary for the majority of youths to establish a healthy self-image. However, there is apparently a substantial portion of the youth who lack family support and have not been able to develop a positive self-image through their social network. Interestingly, the study did not find that any of the characteristics of foster care, such as number of placements or length of stay to be related to differences on self-image.

Cognitive Delays

Children in out-of-home-care also appear to have elevated rates of developmental delay and educational problems. Evidence of developmental delay has been found in 25 percent to 61 percent of pre-school children (Hochstadt, 1987, Kendall, et.al., 1995) while 45 percent to 75 percent of school aged children have had school problems (Fanshel and Shinn, 1978, Hochstadt et. al., 1987). Thirty-five percent to 48 percent of children in out-of-home care have failed at least one grade (Chernoff, et. al, 1994, Sawyer and Dubowitz, 1994). The Westat study examined the issue of special education specifically in terms of an adolescent population and found that 37 percent of the youth involved in the foster care system were receiving special education services.

Although substantial proportions of youth have been placed in special education services, a comparable amount of study on this issue has not resulted. Oversights in recent research have demonstrated the need for an increase in the awareness of the connection between foster care and the presence of disabilities. While a number of studies examining foster care populations have noted the high incidence of developmental delay, there are few studies focusing on children in foster care who also have disabilities. Some studies have even excluded developmentally delayed or disabled youth from their sample which unfortunately contributes to our lack of information regarding this population (Courtney, 1995). In addition, large studies of children with disabilities such as the National Longitudinal Transition Study, have not typically examined the relationships within the family as related to the disability resulting in a dearth of information regarding foster care involvement among children with disabilities (Wagner, personal communication, 1997).

Physical Health

The youth labor market literature indicated that health problems can seriously interfere with finding and maintaining employment. Regarding health problems, several studies indicate that youth raised in foster care experience far more health problems than other adolescents. The Wisconsin study used the RAND General Health Rating Index to assess the health status of the 141 youth in their sample (Courtney, et al., 1995). Whites scored 68.0 compared to RAND sample Whites 72.4, indicating that youth in foster care did have lower health scores.

Interestingly, there was no difference in the health status among African-Americans in Courtney's sample compared to a sample from the general population.

While the health information on adolescents as they leave foster care is limited, the health status of children in care gives some indication of the extent of health problems in this population. Recent studies of children entering care have found that while 87 percent to 95 percent have at least one physical health problem, 50 percent to 60 percent have multiple physical abnormalities. (Hochstadt, et. al., 1987; Chernoff, et. al., 1994.) Further studies of current children in foster care suggest that these children are not obtaining the health care they need to remedy their health issues. Moffat, et. Al., (1985) reported from a sample of 257 foster children, 79 percent of whom had been in care for more than one year, that 18 percent had no known source of health care and that nearly half had not been examined in the past year.

Thus, a particular problem facing the foster care population seems to be the receipt of services. The data presented in this section reports relatively large portions of the children and youth in foster care as having physical and mental health problems as well as developmental delays. Despite reports of high incidence, many children and youth are not receiving appropriate services. For example, Simms, (1989) reported that 60 percent of the children with developmental delays were not involved in any treatment program, although they had been in foster care for an average of six months. Additionally, Dubowitz, et. al., (1990) reported that of 144 children diagnosed as depressed or having emotional problems, only 18 (12.5 percent) were receiving treatment. Finally, Risley-Curtiss et. al., (1996) reported on the health care use by 291 children entering foster care. They found that fewer than 50 percent of referrals for physical, dental and mental health care were completed despite the fact that the children were part of a new health project designed to improve their health care and in the custody of an agency under a federal consent decree specifically requiring the provision of adequate health care. Health care access is evidently still a problem when youth leave care. The Westat study reported that 30 percent of emancipated youth did not have adequate access to medical care when needed.

Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Use and abuse of drugs and alcohol may present a barrier to educational attainment, employability and ultimately one's economic success. A substantial number of foster care placements have been initiated due to alcohol and drug abuse. The U.S. General Accounting Office estimates that drug and alcohol abuse play a role in more than 75 percent of the placements of all children in care. In fact, substance abuse has been the most significant factor in the increasing number of children in foster care (Child Welfare League of America, 1997). Not only are alcohol and drug abuse a problem in the biological families of the youths, but among the population of youths in foster care themselves. The Child Welfare League of America, in their discussion guide for the Take this Heart campaign, report that 56 percent of

adolescents in care report using street drugs. Other studies have not reported such high levels of incidence. The Westat study reported illegal drug taking in 50 percent of their foster care youth population which is comparable to the rate of illegal drug taking in the general high school senior population. The Westat study also reported that the rate of alcohol consumption was actually less than in the general population (42 percent vs. 62 percent). Although the rate of substance use may reflect levels in the general population, this is not to say that the issue should be ignored. Because youth coming out of foster care have many other associated risks, the use of substances could lead to more serious short and long term detrimental effects for those youth.

Abuse of alcohol and drugs in the family of origin may exacerbate or lead to other risk factors. Substance-abusing family environments are associated with low self-esteem, depression, anger and acting-out in adolescents (McGaha, 1995). Furthermore, depression is related to the onset of alcohol abuse (Chaffin, 1996) which has also been implicated in negative developmental outcomes for children and youth (Levendosky, Okun & Parker, 1995). Children from alcohol and drug abusing families have much longer stays in foster care and are more likely to have multiple periods of placements as their families typically have a harder time maintaining a safe home (Child Welfare League of America, 1997).

Delinquency and Incarceration

Involvement with the juvenile justice system represents another barrier to economic self-sufficiency. The studies which address this issue reveal mixed results. Of the 141 youth in the Wisconsin sample (Courtney, et.al., 1995), 71 percent reported committing a delinquent act, with the number of delinquent acts committed ranging from one to more than seven. Acts committed ranged from public rowdiness and petty theft to dealing in stolen goods, auto theft, assault with intent to do serious harm and drug dealing. The study does not indicate how many members of the sample were adjudicated delinquents, however. In Zimmerman's follow-up study of 61 former foster care youth in New Orleans, he found that 10 percent were incarcerated at the time of the follow-up. Finally, the Westat study reported that 25 percent of the youth had been in trouble with the law and 4 percent were incarcerated. It is noteworthy that many of the studies following youth formerly in foster care report that attrition rates were in part due to incarceration (Fanshel, 1990).

In contrast, other studies suggest that incarceration among former foster care youth is no different than the general population. Festinger's (1983) follow-up study of 364 former foster care youth in New York City showed that their arrests were comparable to the general New York City population.

Homelessness

The majority of follow-up studies did not look at homelessness as an outcome. However, a number of studies of the homeless population indicate that former foster care youth are disproportionately represented in homeless shelters. Figures range from 23 percent with foster care histories in homeless shelters in New York City to 45 percent in Chicago (Roman & Wolfe, 1997). The Westat study (Cook, 1991) did look at homelessness as an outcome and reported that 25 percent of the sample had spent at least one night without a place to stay. While 45 percent of those particular youth were able to stay with friends, 19 percent spent the night in a shelter and 36 percent lived on the street or in a car.

In a national study of the relationship between foster care and homelessness, Roman and Wolfe (1997) found individuals with foster care history were over-represented in the homeless population. The study also found that those with childhood foster care placement tended to become homeless at earlier ages and remain homeless for longer periods of time than did homeless individuals who had not been in foster care. The Roman and Wolfe study relied on multiple sources of data: 1.) foster care history on 1,134 individuals supplied by 21 homeless service organizations around the country; 2.) survey data on 1,209 homeless individuals collected by 40 homeless service and housing providers; and 3.) ten case studies of former foster care residents who are homeless. Each of the three Roman and Wolfe study components revealed remarkably consistent findings. The information collected from the 1,134 individuals provided by the Homeless Service and Housing Providers showed that 36.2 percent had a foster care history. The survey data from the 1,209 homeless individuals revealed that 43 percent had lived outside of their home as children. The ten case studies provided some insight into why former foster care youth were likely to become homeless. Some respondents pointed out that the lesson learned from multiple placements is that the way to deal with problems is to leave and go somewhere new. Other respondents confirmed that the previously reported problems foster children experience in developing support networks contributes to potential homelessness.

The four barriers discussed in detail in this section represent some of the most serious problems one can expect to encounter in a subset of the youth leaving out-of-home care. However, there are other factors that will exacerbate or at least add to the problems encountered when trying to plan for the self-sufficiency of a population of foster care youth. First, teenage and early parenting may have an impact on self-sufficiency success rates. The Westat (1990) study reports that 60 percent of the young women had given birth to a child two to four years after discharge from foster care (24 percent of men had also fathered a child in this sample). Having a child may have a multiplicative effect in that many other factors are affected: employment, high school graduation, higher education, financial responsibilities, need for social support, family planning and psychological well-being. Furthermore, one must always consider the background of the youth when trying to understand and alleviate the present barriers. Although the situations of the youth are unique to the individuals, it is clear

that all the youth have experienced some kind of trauma that initiated their entrance into foster care. For example, Courtney (1995) reports that 66 percent of the sample members had experienced situations constituting neglect, 57 percent had experienced physical abuse and 31 percent had experienced sexual abuse.

Finally, we present our observations with regard to the barriers to economic opportunities. Barriers to economic opportunity include biological (cognitive deficiencies) and environmental factors (home environment). From extant research it is virtually impossible to determine causal links between these types of factors (what caused what). Thus, current research typically assumes that bi-directional, interactional influences are prevalent between biological and environmental factors. Following this logic, our observations with respect to barriers to economic opportunity relate to the individual barriers as well as the broader aspect of barriers as a whole. Thus, our observations follow:

- Children and youth who need comprehensive social services do not always receive them. Thus, efforts should be made to coordinate and deliver appropriate services.
- Systematic reform needs to occur in the area of foster care research and practice with respect to our knowledge, awareness and appreciation of children with disabilities within the foster care system.
- The over-representation of foster youth among the homeless population is alarming. Preventative measures are needed to ensure successful independent living.
- Concentrating on the alleviation of barriers will not be sufficient to ensure continued self-sufficiency in youth leaving foster care. Positive youth development is a critical component of any successful youth intervention (Nixon, 1997).
- When considering impact models of barriers on economic viability, we promote the use of a holistic perspective. That is, one should consider not only the connection of the individual barriers to out-of-home placement but the connection of the various barriers to each other.

Understanding the barriers to economic opportunity gives us part of the picture. In order to understand the actual impact of these barriers on short and long-term economic stability and to set the stage for developing interventions to alleviate these barriers, we need to understand the factors that contribute to the resilience of individuals.

VI. RESILIENCY FACTORS

The term resiliency is used in this paper to identify factors that research indicates will enhance a child's ability to overcome life situations that place youth at risk. Research on risk and protective factors looks at individual or environmental hazards that increase the young person's vulnerability to negative developmental outcomes and at the factors which mitigate against a negative outcome in spite of these hazards. The presence of risk factors does not guarantee a negative developmental outcome, but rather increases the odds, the possibilities that problem behavior will occur. Even in the face of overwhelming odds, some children exhibit a remarkable degree of resilience (Werner, 1990). Research which examines both individual and community protective factors seeks to enhance an individual's ability to overcome circumstances which have placed that individual at risk.

For the past thirty years, research in the area of juvenile delinquency prevention has focused on prevention strategies that look at the factors that place youth at risk for delinquency or violent behavior and at the protective factors that either reduce the impact of those risks or change the way a person responds to them (OJJDP, 1995).

It is clear that the foster care youth we are dealing with have experienced numerous risk factors both within the family of origin, and to some degree, through their experience within foster care (Kumpher, 1993). Again, focusing on juvenile delinquency prevention strategies, the National Juvenile Justice Action Plan, *Combating Violence and Delinquency*, identifies several areas where enhancement of protective factors can increase an individual child's ability to be successful. These areas focus not only on individual skills and abilities but on changing and improving social systems that create or contribute to risk conditions:

- Protective factors in the social support network, such as maintaining and encouraging contact with siblings, birth parents, mentors and foster care providers, are substantial. The provision of love, especially as expressed through involvement in the youth's activities and through monitoring and supervision, is important. Other family-oriented protective factors include family stability and adequate financial resources.
- Positive *personal attributes*, such as intelligence, a steady disposition, social skills (including the ability to solve problems without resorting to violence) and a conventional belief system.
- *Schools* that positively shape the behavior of young children and teenagers due to stern policies on violence and drugs, and teachers who care about students and illustrate their concern for their students' social and academic growth also help to insure successful development. When youth are prepared for school, succeed in school, and are committed to the educational system they are less likely to become delinquent.
- *Communities* that provide opportunities and social controls. Communities that exhibit a high level of organization and cooperation, with neighbors working together to meet

common objectives, channel youth behavior towards positive outcomes. For example, communities with active PTAs, after-school activities, churches and religious organizations and youth social clubs help to protect youth from the temptations and hazards that exist in society.

- *Youth participation* in and acceptance by prosocial peer groups. Peer influence is particularly important during adolescence.
- *Adult supervision* of and involvement in youth group activities to provide added protection against developing delinquent behavior. (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 1996)

Resiliency research focusing on adolescents who are moving to independent living from foster care, have focused primarily on two issues: the ability of young people exiting foster care to develop a support network (Mech, 1994), and the influence of an informal role model or mentor (Rhodes, 1995; Mech, 1995).

Development of a Support Network

Mech describes the research on family, social, and community support indicators as impressionistic, anecdotal, and quite general (Mech, 1994). In Barth's report of 55 young adults who left foster care in the San Francisco area, nearly 90 percent reported some contact with former foster parents or group home personnel after leaving care. The average number of contacts was five times per year. Most indicated an intention to continue contact. Although one in four identified foster/group home parents as their psychological parents, nearly 15 percent were unable to identify a psychological parent or someone of significance to turn to for advice. In Festinger's sample of 277 young adults in New York City, less than 50 percent of those who left care from foster homes reported keeping in contact with their biological families. A high percentage of those leaving a foster home arrangement, however, kept in frequent contact with their last foster family (87 percent). In contrast, a majority of those discharged from group placements reported contact with their own parents or relatives (Festinger 1983).

The West Virginia study (Jones and Moses 1984) administered a 10-item informal support scale to respondents. Females were reported to have stronger informal support systems than males. Caucasian respondents were rated lower in social supports than non-Caucasian respondents. The living arrangements of respondents was significantly associated with the relative strength of his or her support system. The highest support system ratings were obtained by respondents who lived with a spouse or partner. Those who lived only with siblings received the lowest rating on the support scale. The authors concluded that "formalized attachments and obligations produce a stronger support network" (Jones and Moses 1984). Overall, in the West Virginia sample, only 30 percent reported belonging to a

community, social or religious organization. Most of the community affiliations reported were church-related.

In the Westat follow-up study (Cook, 1991), youths were asked to identify up to five people in their lives who provided strong support for them. The majority of youths (86 percent) were able to identify at least one person in their lives. On the other hand, 14 percent of the youth in this study could identify no one. When asked to identify up to two of the most important people in their lives, the largest number (45 percent) identified a friend. Other important people included birth/adoptive parents (24 percent), foster parents (23 percent), other relatives (20 percent), significant other (20 percent), counselor/social worker (18 percent), siblings (17 percent), child, teacher, employer, other (less than 10 percent for each) (Cook, 1991).

Mentoring

Mentoring is increasingly being used as a support service to assist older foster care youths to make the transition to adult living (Mech, Pryde & Rycraft, 1995). These relationships can be either natural or assigned mentor relationships and to date have not been the subject of rigorous research efforts.

At the invitational research conference, Preparing Foster Youths for Adult Living, Jean Rhodes presented a paper entitled: Natural and Assigned Mentor Relationships with At Risk Youth: Promising Directions for Research and Intervention. She noted that adolescents who grow up under extremely difficult circumstances, and yet somehow succeed, often credit their success to the influence and informal role model of mentor (Anderson, 1991; Freedman, 1993; Lefkowitz, 1986; Williams & Kornblum, 1985). Reports of mentors' protective influence are supported by a growing body of research which strongly suggests that relationships with caring adults can make an important difference in the lives of vulnerable children and adolescents (Cowen & Work, 1988; Garmezy, 1985; Rutter, 1990; Werner & Smith, 1982). She cautions, however, that very little research on the underlying characteristics of mentor relationships has actually been conducted. Her subsequent study on mentor relationships and the career development of pregnant and parenting African-American teenagers (Klaw & Rhodes, 1995) examines the influence of natural mentor relationships on the career outlook and overall life optimism on the sample, 204 students at an alternative school for pregnant and parenting students in a large midwestern city. Natural mentors are defined as a role model or mentor, other than your parents or whoever raised you, who you go to for support and guidance. Participants were told that a mentor is not someone around your age or a boyfriend. Several characteristics of the mentor relationship were then listed, including: (1) that you could count on this person to be there for you, (2) that he or she believes in and cares deeply for you, (3) that he or she inspires you to do your best, and (4) that knowing him or her has really affected what you do and the choices you make, (5) that he or she is a model for the kind of person you would like to be, and (6) that he or she is a model for the kind of career successes you would like to have. The study revealed that the existence of natural mentor relationships was

positively related to participants' increased life optimism as well as their participation in career-related activities and beliefs that education would lead to future jobs which were each positively related to increased life optimism. Natural mentor relationships are characterized as a powerful, supportive emotional ties between older and younger persons in which the older member is trusted loving, and experienced in the guidance of others (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson & Mckee, 1978; Merriam, 1983). In this study, the majority of participants (57.8 percent) nominated adults whom they considered to be mentors. Nearly half (46.3 percent) had known their mentors for at least 15 years and more that 80 percent expected to maintain the relationship forever. Nearly half (47.7 percent) of the participants reported that they saw their mentors daily, and an additional 48 percent reported that they saw their mentors at least once a week. Similar findings regarding the important protective influence of natural mentors were revealed in a study of mentoring among young Latino mothers (Contreras, Rhodes & Mangelsdorf, 1993).

Mech and others examined the use of mentoring programs as an intervention for youth considered to be at-risk, vulnerable, or likely to be unprepared for adult living. The programs fell generally into five categories: (1) transitional life-skills mentors who attempt to provide mentees with social support, friendship, and serve as role models to facilitate the acquisition of independent living skills, and to assist mentees to develop tangible and intangible life skills; (2) cultural-empowerment mentors who are matched with the individual from the same cultural or ethnic group. The rationale for this model is that minority status groups are recipients of negative societal messages and that a positive role model from their minority group can have a beneficial influence on mentee identity, aspiration levels and future orientation; (3) corporate/business mentors who tend to be private sector/business community members that are matched with older foster adolescents. This model provides jobs, monitors work experience and offers career development opportunities for mentees who successfully complete a prescribed program; (4) mentors for young parents. In this situation, young mothers are matched with experienced mothers. Mentors share their child rearing experiences and try to help young mothers develop responsibility confidence and a positive orientation toward raising children; and (5) mentor homes in which four to six foster adolescents are placed in a home with an adult mentor. The mentor is in residence and is responsible for guiding the activities of the youth in terms of education, employment and community involvement.

Other Efforts to Empower Youth

There has also been research on programs designed to empower youth in foster care through culturally specific rites of passage. The African American Rites of Passage Program (AA-RITES) seeks to further the knowledge base of participants about their African American heritage and to empower them through the operationalization of African-centered principles and values. Preliminary interviews of program participants reveal several themes: (1) positive racial identification; (2) positive self-concept; (3) importance of learning through education; (4) intrinsic view of success; (5) inner power; (6) self-responsibility; (7) responsibility to community; (8) importance of cultural heritage; and (9) respect for women. While the study

authors caution that the study was conducted without an experimental design and therefore will not allow inferential analysis and generalizability of findings. the themes that did emerge from these interviews were consistent with program goals (Gravassi, Alford & McKenry, 1996).

Research from successful youth employment programs identified certain factors that contribute to successful outcomes. DeJesus sought to discover what worked for successful youth by talking to youth who had been consecutively employed for at least one year. These young people participated in job related programs including the Center for Employment Training (CEDT), Jobs Corps, Conservation Corps, YouthBuild, STRIVE, JTPA, IIC programs, privately funded initiatives and alternative/charter school. His research found that the most critical outcome of these programs was a change in mentality, attitude or outlook on life. Several things contribute to this change:

1. activities that engage and expose young adults with positive adult role models;
2. activities that build self-confidence and self-esteem;
3. activities that teach interpersonal and communication skills;
4. activities in which young adults feel support and genuine concern;
5. activities that help young adults realize their educational objectives; and
6. activities that allow young adults to be of service in the larger community.

Although there is still very little research on the impacts of programs designed to enhance protective influences on adolescents in placement, the literature, specifically that related to adolescent development and prevention of juvenile delinquency suggests that specific protective factors can influence a child's ability to cope with difficult and stressful circumstances.

VII. FUTURE RESEARCH AND PROGRAMMATIC DIRECTIONS

Key Findings

The review of the literature has provided many answers to our questions but in many ways has raised additional questions or alerted us to gaps in the extant research. For each question raised in the beginning of the paper, we highlight the key lessons learned and what questions need further investigation.

- How large is and what are the demographic characteristics of the foster care population who drop out or age out of the system nationally each year?;

National data on the size and demographics of the foster care population illustrate several striking facts⁶. First, forty percent of the children in foster care (169,259 children) are adolescents, and over one third of these children (59,241 children) are between the ages of 16 and 21. These older youths will be leaving care within the next one to five years. In most cases, these youth will live independently of any significant familial support. Over half of these youths will have lived in the foster care system for a minimum of two years; most of the guidance and support they have received to prepare them for adult roles will have been delivered through the foster care system. Based on 1996 AFCARS data we know that six percent of the children discharged during the six-months period from April through September (3,792 children) were discharged as emancipated, and additional four percent (2,527 children) were discharged as runaways and are also attempting to live self-sufficiently. Doubling the figure (to estimate 12 months of discharge data) our estimate would result in a figure of 12,638 children discharged as either emancipated youth or runaways. These estimates are conservative when compared to other estimates in the literature. Cook (1988) estimated that approximately 18,000 youths exit foster care at age 18 each year, and in the same year Senator Daniel P. Moynihan (1988) estimated that 25,000 to 30,000 teenage youth were likely to be discharged from the foster care system.

We also know that if these youths parallel the racial/ethnic makeup of the foster care population as a whole they will be 44 percent African-American, 38 percent White, 14 percent Hispanic, two percent Native American, one percent Asian, and one percent children of unknown ethnicity. These youth will have come from a variety of placements reflecting a continuum of restrictiveness in their living situations.

- What are the differences in the transition to adulthood between youth raised in foster care and the general population of youth?

Leaving adolescence and taking on adult roles is a critical transition for all youth. Viewed from a life course perspective, this transition includes a combination of any of the following: completing one's education, obtaining one's own residence, becoming employed full-time, having a child, or getting married. As Mech (1994) points out, relationships with family, friends, and community supports are being redefined during this period. While many of these transitions may be dependent on one another, the key adulthood transition discussed in this paper was becoming gainfully employed and economically self-sufficient. When making the transition, youth raised in foster care and youth in the general population must face many of the same hurdles: educational attainment, employment experience, maintaining credible references, remaining financially afloat, and obtaining health insurance. While the follow-up research on youth raised in foster care shows great variability in educational and employment success, the foster youth population, on average, tends to experience many of the same difficulties as vulnerable youth mentioned in the literature on the general youth labor force. In addition to the problems encountered by youth such as early parenting, cognitive deficiencies,

⁶ In this summary paragraph AFCARS estimates are inflated by a factor of 1.45 to allow the projection of AFCARS data (representing 55 percent of the children in foster care), to an estimate of all children in foster care.

and participation in illegal activities, youth raised in foster care tend to have a number of additional barriers such as mental health issues and homelessness. Examining the general youth population is illustrative of some of the factors that may hamper the transition to economic self-sufficiency, but it is critical to view the population of youth raised in foster care as unique in that their experiences before foster care and while in care produces different needs and requires increased levels of support as they move into adulthood.

- What follow-up studies have been conducted on youth who exit the foster care system?

We reviewed studies involving educational and employment outcomes at the point of leaving care and at some time after leaving care. It was clear that youth leaving foster care lagged behind in terms of high school completion rates. Furthermore, although a portion of the former foster care population were employed after care, as a whole, the former foster care population resembled the population of those living in poverty. This was evidenced by low labor force participation rates, low wages for those who were employed, homelessness, and welfare dependency.

However, it is important to point out that these findings are based on only a few studies that followed youth once they left care. Thus, longitudinal educational and economic outcomes are still an area for further exploration. Four research design issues are important for improving the quality and robustness of future follow-up studies. First, to further understand the differences between youth raised in foster care and other youth it is critical to use appropriate comparison groups which reflect individual characteristics of these groups. Looking at aggregate comparison figures, such as percent of a city's population of a certain age range who is employed does not allow us to examine the impact of specific demographics, foster care history or academic abilities on educational or employment outcomes. The second issue involves examining individuals of the same age and during the same timeframe. Researchers who study what happens to youth while they are in care agree that picking a cohort and following them through time produces results which can best inform policy. The same approach should be used to study this group after leaving care. Furthermore, comparable measures must be given to each group so that differences can be rigorously studied. Finally, larger sample sizes are required to have sufficient power to test complex multivariate hypotheses.

- What barriers to employment and education are encountered among youth in general and what barriers are specific to the foster care population?

Barriers to employment and education for the general youth population include low educational attainment, lack of employment experience, lack of credible references, early parenting, health problems, competition for and location of available jobs, place of residence (urban vs. rural), influential others and unfair housing and hiring practices. Barriers for the foster care population include the above barriers in addition to housing issues, mental health issues, social support issues, high incidence of disabilities (cognitive, emotional, behavioral and social), and the lack of positive adult role models. Furthermore, many of the barriers that

exist for a minority of youth in the general population are seen in substantially higher numbers among youth raised in foster care (early parenting, cognitive deficiencies). Finally, some of the barriers to youth, especially those youth that have spent a substantial amount of time in the foster care system, are more intangible. In general, the notion of turbulence in one's life from multiple placements and the lack of contact with one's birth parents and family can negatively affect the development of foster care youth. Overall, barriers to youth in foster care are magnified and multiplied as compared to youth in the general population.

Barriers also exist to researchers and practitioners attempting to examine and develop strong and effective interventions programs. Certain sub-samples of youth have been neglected in recent research. Children and youth with disabilities are one of those neglected samples. These children have special needs that would need to be addressed in any successful transition program. Making the review of the literature even more difficult was the lack of comparability in definitions of developmental disabilities across studies. There is a need for a large scale collaborative effort across studies of youth transitioning out of foster care to make the data comparable and easier to understand. Additionally, most studies addressing barriers to economic self-sufficiency have not looked at individual barriers but have focused in on the interactions between barriers. In order to get a true sense of what services need to be put in place for the youth to succeed, we need to know exactly what barriers exist and how the barriers interact with each other to affect the individual's outcomes.

- What resiliency factors among youth who have been in foster care have been documented in the current literature as enhancing their transition to economic self-sufficiency?

The research reviewed pointed to several potential protective factors among adolescents in general. Personal attributes that may serve as protective factors are intelligence, a steady disposition, social skills and a conventional belief system. Protective factors beyond the individual include the development of a support network and the influence of an informal role model or mentor. The provision of educational support within the school and in the community by individuals in the youth's support network is critical for the youth's continued success. In addition, cultural supports, in the form of specifically designed youth empowerment programs, are a necessary ingredient to positive youth development and economic success.

While a number of protective factors have been identified, very little research has been conducted in this area with foster care youth. Therefore, our understanding of exactly how such protective factors work to enhance the ability of youth raised in foster care to achieve economic success is limited.

Suggestions for Future Research

To understand more clearly what types of adulthood preparation youth need as they leave foster care requires a comprehensive and careful account all the factors addressed above. While the current studies on educational and economic outcomes, barriers and resiliency factors provide useful information about how to best help this population, they fail to adequately address these issues simultaneously and therefore fail to answer important questions. Some questions remaining to be answered include:

- What is the relative effectiveness of various supportive interventions for improving the economic self sufficiency of youth as they leave care?
- What specific program components are necessary to improve youth's economic and educational outcomes?
- What specific supports are necessary to assist youth who have developmental delays or mental health problems?
- Are some supportive programs more effective for certain types of foster care youth than for others?

After reviewing the literature, we propose the following model which draws on some of the strongest aspects of previous studies.

<u>BACKGROUND VARIABLES</u>	<u>BARRIERS</u>	<u>PROTECTIVE FACTORS</u>	<u>OUTCOMES</u>
History of Abuse and Neglect	Early Parenting	Social support system	Education
Turbulence- # of placements	Mental Health Problems	Mentors (natural or assigned)	Employment
Type of placement	Cognitive Delay	Intelligence	Economic self- sufficiency
Foster Care Experience	Behavioral Problems	Social skills	
Ethnicity	Physical disabilities	Ability to form secure attachments	
Gender	Substance abuse		
	Living arrangements/ homelessness		
	Delinquency/ incarceration		

Moving from this general model to specific recommendations, we recognize that three of the previously mentioned studies have strong components which need to be incorporated into future research on this topic. Fanshel's study of Casey Family Program youth represents an excellent model of including clinical and child maltreatment background. This study, in contrast to the others, was able to give us some indication of the impact of early childhood maltreatment and the trauma of separation had on later life success. Second, Courtney and his colleagues' current study of what happens to youth once they leave care provides a strong prospective longitudinal study design. It also collects critical information about social support, health, mental health, substance use, juvenile delinquency, and aspirations. The type of information collected by the Courtney study is similar to the types of information collected on well known data sets which address youth employment, such as the National Longitudinal Study of Youth. Finally, the programmatic information about Independent Living services included in the Westat study are an important component to help us understand how services should be structured, what should be offered and how soon we should begin working with youth to prepare them for adulthood roles.

Finally, to improve upon some of the methodological weaknesses of earlier studies, the type of research which needs to be conducted should have the following design:

- a prospective longitudinal study;
- the sample should be drawn from current youth in a variety of settings;
- the sample should be followed at set intervals of time until the sample is in their late twenties; and
- special sub samples should be drawn of youth with mental health issues and developmental delays to further explore the needs of this population.

As has been pointed out by all the researchers who conducted follow-up studies, actually locating their sample proved to be an onerous task. Starting the study at the point at which youth are still in the care would reduce the difficulty of attempting to find youth. Courtney and his colleagues at Wisconsin are using this approach and it should be replicated using a more representative sample.

Next Steps

A key area not addressed in this background paper is that of the types of transition services available to youth and the effectiveness of those services. The next phase of this project will be devoted to collecting information about such services. In addition, we are currently collecting information from a variety of youth about their experiences with transitional services and their own concerns regarding future education and employment. Such information will help us begin to formulate more clearly the questions about what programmatic and policy avenues need to be pursued to assist these youth. In addition, we are surveying Independent Living programs, Casey Family Programs and other programs serving youth to understand the types of programs available. The specific questions to be addressed in the next phase are:

- What are the types and utilization of transitional services offered by public and private agencies?;
- What are foster care youth and providers' views on service needs?;
- From foster care youth and providers' perspectives, which transitional services are most effective?;
- What types of access do these youth have to post-secondary school or training?;

- Does the child welfare system's philosophy and program structure contribute to feeling of dependency?;
- What is the impact of other social service systems (such as schools and job training programs like JOBCORPS) on assisting youth who leave care?;
- What are employers' experience hiring foster care youth?;
- What is the communities role in supporting foster care youth's transition to economic self-sufficiency?; and
- What is the role of family support in fostering a successful transition?

We will also supplement the educational and economic outcomes information presented in this current paper with information based on the responses to the youth survey. The youth survey will be distributed to approximately 1500 youth across the country. We will examine how youth fare on the following indicators: living arrangements, high school completion, employment, welfare dependency, parenting, substance abuse and armed services participation.

The goal of the second phase of this project will be to combine what we have learned from the literature review and from our own data collection effort to derive a set of questions to guide a programmatic and research agenda. In addition we will suggest an approach to determine the extent to which adult transition support services for foster care youth should be separate or integrated with support services for youth not in the foster care system, such as Upward Bound. It will also describe a process for determining realistic outcomes and measures of accountability for transitional employment services for foster care youth. Finally, we will suggest an approach to determine which types of programs are most successful in assisting youth who grew up in the foster care system to become economically self-sufficient. In essence, we would outline an evaluation plan which tests the effectiveness of several diverse approaches on adult transition outcomes. Such an evaluation plan could be designed as a quasi-experimental design which compares various approaches which are revealed through our surveys (e.g., Foster Care Transition Model, Family Support and Connectivity) with a group of foster care youth who are not part of these services. This approach would allow us to determine which program elements are most successful for which youth. This information will be used to help suggest some "best practice" models which could then be the basis of a research and demonstration initiative.

Re: Economic Opportunities Forum Proceedings, Dallas, Texas, March 1998

The purpose of this forum was to help plan a research agenda to examine the most effective strategies to enhance economic opportunities for foster care youth leaving the system. This memorandum summarizes the forum highlights and future plans.

- Data was presented from the two Muskie Reports which you have a copy of.
- The following issues were raised when discussing why a very low percentage of youth enter college:
 - Lack of guidance and planning in regard to college prep classes/h.s. education
 - Lack of training of foster parents regarding educational funds/counseling or no decision making power to make educational decisions (such as Connecticut)
 - tracking of foster youth into vocational education rather than college
 - Lack of stability such as constantly changing schools and losing credits
 - emancipation at 18 when most youth are already slightly behind in school and won't graduate until ages 19 to 22.
- The following issues were raised when discussing external barriers to employment:
 - Lack of transportation
 - Lack of training of foster parent on how to develop pre-employment skills, etc.
 - Policies that penalize youth who save their money-- often times, youth fail to become employed in order to avoid getting cut off from state aid
 - lack of job and independent living skills-- need to target youth at a younger age
 - lack of jobs
- A panel of former and current foster youth discussed the needs of foster youth today in order to make a successful transition:
 - mandatory independent living programs
 - emotional and financial support services
 - affordable housing and rental assistance or a program that provides apartments and guidance to youth while they live there.
 - help with school applications, college visits, school consistency, and financial assistance for post secondary education
 - mentors with common career interests or common ethnicity.
- Panel also stated that many IL programs or not being utilized because youth feel it is another class, they do not know the program exists, they don't think they need to attend until later in life,

or because they're scared. Recommended that older youth need to tell younger kids the value of the program.

- Focus Question Brainstorming-- See pages 8 + 9 of report (chart of ideas that came up)
- Employers Panel discussed services foster care youth should receive that would make it easier to find employment:

- Workshop on interview skills, role-playing interviews, designing a portfolio, etc.
- provide transportation, job coaches, accessible contact people, and stable placements.

- expose youth to work at an early age

- connection with extended services such as housing and health care support.

- Recommendations of Forum:(specific ones are included in Muskie Report outline-- these are broad recommendations...)

- raise emancipation age to at least 21 years nation-wide

- extend/coordinate network of services for foster care youth after leaving care

- increase and expand focus on independent living programs

- stabilize foster care placements by holding care givers accountable and keeping communication available between biological siblings

- support college tuition waiver, start national scholarship fund, target outreach for foster youth at colleges, establish educational advocates, etc.

- Develop mentoring program

- guaranteed housing

- establish partnership with community to include youth in foster care

- create partnership between child welfare and school (to keep track of youth's progress) and child welfare and business (to gain internships, jobs, etc.)

- train and screen foster parents, care givers, and service providers

- provide technical assistance to states, advocates, and legislatures to ensure proper utilization of independent living resources

- make funds available to youth nation-wide and identify states not spending their full allocation

- gather research on effective programs

- involve youth in all decisions and in policy making.

Conference Proceedings (focused on recently published Muskie reports):

- Summary of Data in reports
- Former/current foster youth panel
- Focus Question Brainstorming
- Employers talk about how to assist foster youth in finding a job
- Recommendations to change system (already summarized in Muskie report)

Economic Opportunities Forum Proceedings

March 16-17, 1998

The Fairmont Hotel
Dallas, Texas

Conducted by

The University of Southern Maine
Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service

The University of Oklahoma
National Resource Center for Youth Services

Funded by

The Annie E. Casey Foundation
701 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

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 Moorer, 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 S
*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

List of Participants

Dorothy Ansell
3837 Northdale Blvd. Suite 176
Tampa, FL 33624
813-264-1057

Judy Baggett
DHHS
1301 Young Street, #914
ACF-1
Dallas, TX 75202
214-767-5241

Kathleen Barbell
Child Welfare League of America
440 First Street, Suite 310
Washington, DC 20001
202-942-0309

Michele Bergeron
DHHS
1301 Young Street, #914
ACF-1
Dallas, TX 75202
214-767-8865

Jerry Blake
Dept. of Children & Family Services
3955 Euclid Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44115
216-431-4500 x2646

Sharon Butler
DHHS
1301 Young Street, #914
ACF-1
Dallas, TX 75202
214-767-8704

Andrew Cain
Cambridge Associates/Trearne Foundation
1110 N. Glebe Road, Suite 1100
Arlington, VA 22201-4795
703-525-6800

Jim Callahan
Sar Levitan Center
10656 Quarterstaff Road
Columbia, MD 21044
410-531-6509

Becky Copeland
National Resource Center for Youth
Services
202 W. 8th
Tulsa, OK 74119
918-585-2986

Peter R. Correia, III
National Resource Center for Youth
Services
202 W. 8th
Tulsa, OK 74119
918-585-2986

Carl Douglas
National Assoc. of Former Foster Care
Children of America
611 Edgewood Street, #818
Washington, DC 20017
210-832-7595

Paula Dressell, Research
The Annie E. Casey Foundation
701 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, MD 21212
410-547-6600

John Emerson
Casey Family Program
1300 Dexter Avenue North
Seattle, WA 98109
206-282-7300

Michael Horn
The Casey Family Program
1300 Dexter Avenue North
Seattle, WA 98109
206-282-7300

Melat F.
California Community College Foundation
2415 K Street
Sacramento, CA 95816
1-800-400-5881

Elizabeth Jones
Edmund S. Muskie School of Public
Service
One Post Office Square
P.O. Box 15010
Portland, ME 04112
207-780-5810

Sue Furtado
The Providence Center TLP
520 Hope Street
Providence, RI 02206
401-276-4000

Charlotte Kellis
Lighthouse Youth Services
1527 Madison Road, 3rd Floor
Cincinnati, OH, 45206
513-475-5680 x 200

Jim Gann
Red Lobster
2217 Berrywood Drive
Edmond, OK 73034
Pager #888-939-7331
Voice mail 407-245-6053

Judy Kelly
Casey Family Services
One Corporate Drive
Suite 515
Shelton, CT 06484
203-929-3837

Deborah Hayes
Youth Advocacy Center, Inc.
281 Sixth Avenue
New York, NY 10014
212-675-6181

Sara Kittarath
Texas Department of Protective and
Regulatory Services
P.O. Box 181839
Arlington, TX 76097-1839
8177-264-4321

Louis Henderson
National Association of Former Foster Care
Children of America
611 Edgewood Street Suite 818
N.E. Washington, DC 20017
202-832-7595

Janet Knipe
California Youth Connection
114 Sansome Street
Suite 921
San Francisco, CA 94101-3820
415-398-1063

Talmira Hill, Program Associate
The Annie E. Casey Foundation
701 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, MD 21212
410-547-6600

Celyne Krauss
JSAS - Breaking Away
1200 Memorial Drive
Asbury Park, NJ 07712
732-774-9036

Marc Kroner
Lighthouse Youth Services
1527 Madison Road, Third Floor
Cincinnati, OH 45206
513-475-5680 ext. 200

Catherine Lewis
Casey Family Services
Warwick Executive Park
250 Centerville Road, Building C
Warwick, RI 02886
401-738-7141

Sharyn L. Logan
County of Los Angeles
Department of Children and Family Svcs.
Bureau of Specialized Programs
425 Shatto Place, #603
Los Angeles, CA 90020
213-351-5790

Janet Legler Luft
NILA REP
IL State Coordinator
Texas Dept. of Protective & Regulatory
Svcs.
P.O. Box 149030, M.C. #-558
Austin, TX 78714-9030
512-438-3782

John Mattingly
Senior Associate
The Annie E. Casey Foundation
701 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, MD 21212
410-547-6600

Leon McGowen
DHHS
1301 Young Street, #914
ACF-1
Dallas, TX 75202
214-767-9648

Edmund V. Mech
University of Illinois
School of Social Work
1207 W. Oregon Street
Urbana, IL 61801
217-244-5234

Mark Millar
Casey Family Services
261 Commercial Street
2nd Floor
Portland, ME 0410
207-772-4110

Alonzo Moorer
Department of Children & Family Services
3955 Euclid Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44115
216-431-4500 x 2646

Brian Moran
Administration for Children's Services
80 Lafayette Street - 18th Floor
New York, NY 10013
212-266-2509

Jim Morris
Casey Family Services
Warwick Executive Park
250 Centerville Road,
Building C1
Warwick, RI 02886
401-738-7141

Anne Morrison
Research Director
Casey Family Program
1 Corp. Drive, Suite 515
Shelton, CT 06484
203-929-3837

Robin Nixon
Child Welfare League of America
440 First Street, NW #310
Washington, DC 20001
202-638-2952

Erin Oldham
Edmund S. Muskie School of Public
Service
One Post Office Square
P.O. Box 15010
Portland, ME 04112
207-780-5810

John O'Neill
JSAS - Breaking Away
1200 Memorial Drive
Asbury Park, New Jersey 07712
732-774-9306

Alfred Perez
California Youth Connection
114 Sansome Street, #921
San Francisco, CA 94101-3820
415-398-1063

Candace Rashada,
The Children's Village
Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522
914-693-0600

Tammy Richards
Edmund S. Muskie School of Public
Service
One Post Office Square
P.O. Box 15010
Portland, ME 04112
207-780-5810

Ralph Rogers
DHHS
1301 Young Street, #914
ACF-1
Dallas, TX 75202
214-767-9648

Al Sheehy
Edmund S. Muskie School of Public
Service
One Post Office Square
P.O. Box 15010
Portland, ME 04112
207-780-5810

Anita St. Onge
Edmund S. Muskie School of Public
Service
One Post Office Square
P.O. Box 15010
Portland, ME 04112
207-780-5810

Donna Stark
The Annie E. Casey Foundation
701 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, MD 21212
410-547-6600

Ms. Chris Steel
California Community College Foundation
2415 K. Street
Sacramento, CA 95816
1-800-400-5881

Caroline Vasquez
The Providence Center TLP
520 Hope Street
Providence, RI 02206
401-276-4000

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[001]

James M. Walker
National Resource Center for Youth
Services
202 W. 8th
Tulsa, OK 74119
918-585-2986

Susan Weiss
Casey Family Program
1300 Dexter Avenue North
Seattle, WA 98109

Douglas Woods
P6/(b)(6)
Shelton, CT 06484
P6/(b)(6)

Renda Woods
P6/(b)(6)
Shelton, CT 06484
P6/(b)(6)

April Yachninich
P6/(b)(6)
San Antonio, TX 78250
P6/(b)(6)

Joshua Z.
The Children's Village
Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522
914-693-0600

Marty Zanghi
Edmund S. Muskie School of Public
Service
One Post Office Square
P.O. Box 15010
Portland, ME 04112
207-780-5810

Wisconsin Study

MEMORANDUM

To: Nicole
 From: Areej
 Re: Wisconsin Study: Phase I summary

The Wisconsin Study of Youth Aging Out-of-home Care, 1995 (Phase I)

The goal of this long-term study is to learn about the post-care experiences of foster care youth and to what extent government services, including those provided by the Independent Living Initiative, help youth make the transition to independence.

The report explains the results of the first stage of the study in which the conditions of the youth are examined as they prepare to leave the child welfare system. The other two stages of the study will be conducted after the youth have been out for a period of 12 -18 months and then three years.

The youth interviewed (over 100 in total from 42 different counties in WI) had been in out-of-home care for at least 18 months, were 17 or 18, and were not developmentally disabled.

Key Responses:

- The average percentage of those responding had been trained in at least one given area (such as money management, interpersonal skills, finding housing, using community resources, legal skills, parenting, etc.) was 76% but this number varied greatly depending on the area of knowledge in question.
- 73% had been give some type of concrete assistance in obtaining employment such as clothing and transportation.
- 39% identified their foster parents as the primary source of independent living skills training, 32% as specialized independent living training programs, and the rest as child care institutions, group homes, or other sources.
- 90% were still in high school, 79% expected to enter college, and 63% expected to complete college. This might seem promising but a large number have experienced difficulty at school-- 33% of the sample read below eighth grade level, 30% had failed a grade at some point, and 37% had been enrolled in special education classes at some point.
- 66% reported neglect, 57% an incident of physical abuse, and 31% an incident of sexual abuse

The Foster Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study

There are currently two waves of the study available online.

- Wave One is available as an HTML web page. (NB: This study was formerly termed The Wisconsin Study of Youth Aging Out of Out-Of-Home Care.)
- Wave Two is available as an Adobe Acrobat PDF file. For information on reading Adobe Acrobat Files, [click here](#).

[Return](#) to the School of Social Work's Web Page.

The Wisconsin Study of Youth Aging Out of Out-Of-Home Care

A Portrait of Children About to Leave Care

Mark Courtney and Irving Piliavin, Co-Principal Investigators

Andrew Grogan-Kaylor, Project Assistant

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We would like to thank the Bureau of Children, Youth and Families, Division of Community Services, of the State of Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) for collaborating with us in carrying out this study. DHSS provided the bulk of the funding for the project through the Title IV-E Independent Living Initiative. In addition, Bureau staff helped to smooth over organizational hurdles and to make the personal connections necessary to conduct a study of this scope. In particular, we would like to thank Gerald Boren, Linda Hisgen, Barbara Barnard, and Fred Hebert for their confidence in our efforts and their help along the way. We look forward to continuing our work with DHSS staff as the project progresses.

The Graduate School Research Committee of the University of Wisconsin-Madison also deserves thanks for their early funding of the study. Graduate School funds provided much of the cost-sharing match used to leverage federal monies under the Independent Living Initiative and to carry out the work described in this report.

We would like to thank the many child welfare workers and administrative staff around the state who helped us in contacting foster youth. Without their help the study would not have been possible. Lastly, we appreciate the help of child welfare staff in Dane County who were instrumental in developing the survey instrument used in this study through their participation in a focus group and their help in conducting the pre-test of the instrument. Their work helped us to eliminate some significant "bugs" from the instrument and to ask some important questions that we would not have thought to ask.

Introduction

This is a report of the first stage of the Wisconsin Study of Youth Aging Out of Out-of-Home Care. The primary aim of the study is to explore the post-care experiences of youth who have had relatively long stays in out-of-home care. The study will also help clarify the extent to which government services, including services provided under the Independent Living Initiative, help youth in out-of-home care to make the transition to independence. In this report we examine the conditions of the youth as they approach the point at which they must leave the care of the child welfare system.

Ultimately, the study will involve three waves of interviews with a cohort of youth exiting out-of-home care in Wisconsin. The first wave of interviews was conducted between February and May 1995 before the youth had exited care. The second wave will be conducted after the youth have been out of care about 6 months. The final wave of interviews will happen approximately 18 months after the youth have

exited out-of-home care. The youth voluntarily participate in the study and are paid for their participation. Each interview takes between 60 and 80 minutes to complete, depending on the sample member's pattern of responses.

The youth selected had been in out-of-home care at least 18 months, were 17 or 18 years old at the time of sample selection, and were not developmentally disabled. We wanted youth who had been in care for a significant period of time since it is these youth who would be expected to experience the greatest impact of out-of-home placement and be least likely to be reunified with family. In addition, it is questionable whether child welfare services personnel can be expected to prepare youth for independent living when they are in care for only a few months. We chose to interview youth as young as 17 because our own experience and that of others suggests that many youth leave the protection of the child welfare system before reaching their 18th birthday and it is difficult to predict when youth will leave care.

We used data from the Wisconsin Human Services Reporting System (HSRS) to identify young people who met our sample selection criteria. After deleting from the sample those who were either developmentally disabled or who had exited care but had not been recorded as discharged in the HSRS data, we were left with a sample of 157 individuals who met our sample selection criteria. We were ultimately able to interview 141 of these for a response rate of about 90%. Among those not interviewed, all but two had either already left care at the time we tried to contact them or declined to participate in the study. In the other cases, one foster parent refused to allow us to conduct an interview, and one youth died before we were able to interview him.

Sample members who were interviewed came from 42 different counties. Milwaukee County had the largest number ($n = 42$) accounting for about 30% of the sample. This enables us to present limited information on a regional (i.e., Milwaukee County compared to the rest of the state) basis. No other county had enough children in the sample to allow for county-specific analysis.

The findings from this initial report of the Wisconsin Study of Youth Aging Out of Out-of-Home Care should be interpreted with caution for at least two reasons. First, the report provides no information about the post-discharge functioning of these youth. It is difficult to clearly interpret many of the findings of the first wave of interviews without knowing how such findings are related to subsequent outcomes for these youth. Second, we have only provided descriptive data in this report. Much of the richness of the experiences and conditions of these youth will only become apparent after the data are subjected to multivariate statistical analysis. We will be conducting these analyses over the next year.

In spite of its preliminary nature, this report presents the first concrete look at the population of youth aging out of out-of-home care in Wisconsin. We hope that it contributes to a better appreciation of the needs of this population and the level of services they are currently receiving.

Demographic Characteristics and Family of Origin

About 57% of the sample were females; 65% were Caucasian, 27% African-American and 6% American Indian; all were at least 17 years of age. At the time of their initial out-of-home placement only 24% were living with both biological parents, with another 62% reporting living with their mother. At the time of the interview, over 55% of the respondents had one or more siblings in out-of-home care.

Data were collected on the family ties of respondents as reported at the time of their interviews. Among

those reporting, only 32% said they felt very close to their biological mothers and another 25% indicated they felt fairly close to their mothers. Reported relations with fathers were more distant with only 41% of respondents indicating that they felt very close or fairly close to their male parents. While only a small fraction of sample members reported on their relationships with step-parents, the majority of these indicated that they were not close to either their step-mothers or step-fathers. A somewhat different picture emerges in respondents' reports on their relationships to other family members. Over 70% of those replying indicated that they were at least somewhat close to their grandparents and almost 80% of those replying reported being at least somewhat close to their siblings.

Visiting between the children in care and other family members reflected the attitudes expressed above. Three quarters of those responding indicated that they had visits with their biological mothers during the 12 months preceding their survey interview and less than half reported having visits with their biological fathers during that period. During the same interval, almost 65% of sample members reported visits with grandparents, and 83% reported visits with siblings. The median frequency of visits with biological mothers among those reporting such visits was once a month, that for fathers was approximately twice every three months.

The lack of close family ties for many sample members is also seen in their preferences for future family relationships. Approximately, 41% of all respondents indicated that they wanted to be adopted. Seemingly, their relationships to their parents or the circumstances of their parents' lives have remained sufficiently problematic that they have little desire to return to their families of origin.

History of Maltreatment and Reasons for Placement in Out-of-Home Care

Respondents were asked whether they had experienced various forms of child maltreatment prior to being placed in out-of-home care. Although administrative data from the Human Services Reporting System records the primary reason for a child's placement and we asked a similar question of our sample members, primary placement reason often does not reflect the level of maltreatment suffered by children placed in out-of-home care since many of them experience multiple forms of maltreatment.

The questions were framed in terms of specific incidents of maltreatment (e.g., "Did any of your caregivers ever hit you hard with a fist, or kick you or slap you really hard?"). For conceptual purposes we grouped questions into the categories of neglect, physical abuse and sexual abuse. Neglect was the most common form of maltreatment experienced by our sample members, with 66% reporting one or more incident. Over half of the respondents (57%) had also experienced one or more incidents of physical abuse prior to entering out-of-home care. Less common was a history of sexual abuse, although with 31% of sample members reporting a history of sexual abuse it was certainly not uncommon. Overall, about 76% of the sample members had experienced at least one form of child maltreatment. This varied by region with 64% of respondents from Milwaukee reporting a history of abuse compared to 81% in the rest of the state.

The reasons given by sample members for their removal from home are varied. Twenty five percent reported that the primary basis for their removal was physical abuse; 12% asserted that their removal was due to parental neglect and 11% reported that their placements were due to their having been sexually abused. Although sixteen percent of the respondents indicated that their placements were voluntary this is unlikely since all of the sample members are placed by court order. Possibly these responses reflect respondents' lack of knowledge regarding the circumstances of their initial placements.

Need for Placement in Out-of-Home Care

Two questions asked the sample members to assess the necessity of their placement in out-of-home care. The overwhelming response to these questions was that the placement was necessary and that no services could have prevented placement. The first question asked: "Looking back at everything that has happened, would you say that your placement was necessary or not necessary." Only 10 respondents (7%) indicated that the placement was not necessary, whereas 90% felt that it was necessary. An additional 3% answered with "don't know." The second question asked: "In your opinion, are there any services, that were either unavailable, or not made available at the time you were placed, that would have avoided the need to place you in out of home care?" 87% of respondents indicated no services would have avoided the need for placement, 9% felt that the provision of additional services could have made a difference, and 4% did not know. Nearly all of those who indicated that services could have helped mentioned services directed at helping their parents (e.g., counseling, substance abuse treatment).

We asked a related question about services that might have allowed youth who spent time in congregate care to remain in a less intensive setting. The question asked: "Were there any services that would have allowed you to remain in a less intensive setting, like a foster home, rather than a group care setting, or institutional setting?" Of the 67 sample members who had spent time in a group home or child caring institution, only 8 (12%) indicated that services might have allowed them to remain in a less intensive placement. An additional 4 (6%) either did not know or declined to answer the question.

Experiences in Out-of-Home Care

On average, sample members had lived in out-of-home care of some sort for 38 months. Including placements in group homes and residential treatment centers, the median number of out-of-home settings in which sample members resided, is approximately three; the mean number of settings is somewhat greater than 4. The large majority of sample members reported having positive relationships to their out-of-home caretakers. Seventy-five percent of all respondents felt "somewhat close" or "close" to the adults who provided them with care. Despite these attitudes, 36% of the sample members reported that at some previous time they had run away from their out-of-care placements. Over 70% of these youths had run away more than once.

Although we can not assess in detail the relationships of sample members to their child welfare workers, their contacts were generally not frequent. During the year preceding wave 1 interviews, the median number of in-person contacts between members of the two groups was approximately 6. The median number of phone contacts over the same period was 3. This varied considerably by region with fewer in-person and phone contacts in Milwaukee County than in the balance of the state. The median number of in-person visits was two in Milwaukee and 10 in the rest of the state. The median number of phone contacts was 3 in Milwaukee and 5 outside Milwaukee.

Attitudes Toward Out-of-Home Care

Sample members were asked a series of questions intended to assess their attitudes toward their out-of-home care experiences and the likelihood that they would turn to the child welfare system for support in the future. Our respondents had generally positive attitudes towards the child welfare system and intended to rely on the system in the future if the need arose.

Items intended to assess the respondents' attitudes towards out-of-home care consisted of statements the sample members were asked to respond to on a scale ranging from "very strongly agree" to "very strongly disagree" with a middle category indicating neither agreement or disagreement with the statement. The clear majority of sample members had a positive attitude toward, and experience with, the child welfare system. Three-quarters of respondents agree with the statement that they were "lucky" to have been placed in out-of-home care. About 72% agreed that they were generally satisfied with their experiences in out-of-home care. Fully 87% agreed with the statement that "foster parents have been a help to me," although only 50% felt the same way towards social workers.

Although responses were generally positive, for a number of statements a significant percentage (25% or more) of sample members gave responses indicative of dissatisfaction with their out-of-home care experiences. Most of these statements indicated a sense of alienation on the part of the sample members. For example, a significant minority of respondents indicated that they felt lonely in out-of-home care (36%) and that they were somehow different from other youth (35%). They felt that being in out-of-home care was not like being in their own family (39%) and that they did not want to let on that they were in out-of-home care (27%). Nearly three fifths wished that they knew more about their own family background. Other concerns had to do with the child welfare agency, the respondents' out-of-home caregivers, or the conditions the sample members experienced while in out-of-home care. A significant percentage of respondents felt that the child welfare agency did not have their best interests in mind (26%) and had too much say over family visiting (31%). One third felt that social workers had not been a help to them and 28% felt that foster parents treated their own children better than foster children. Nearly two fifths of our sample reported that they had moved around too much while in out-of-home care and about one quarter experienced a lack of privacy. Although about 10% of respondents indicated agreement with the statement that they had been "mistreated" while in out-of-home care, the ambiguity of this statement does not warrant the interpretation that these youth were actually abused or neglected while in care. We did not ask any questions about any maltreatment our respondents might have received during their stay in out-of-home care.

Surprisingly, a substantial percentage of the youth indicated that in the event of personal difficulty they would turn to the child welfare system for help after being discharged from care. Sample members were asked how likely they were to seek help for a number of types of problems from their out-of-home care agency after they left care. Over two fifths of respondents indicated that it was "likely" or "very likely" that they would turn to their agency for help with finances, as well as personal, employment, family, and health problems. Over one half stated that it was likely or very likely that they would seek help in obtaining housing.

Independent Living Training and Services

The youth were asked a number of questions about their preparation for independent living. We asked whether they had been trained in a number of areas such as money management, food preparation, personal hygiene and health care, finding housing, transportation and employment, educational planning, the use of community resources, interpersonal skills, legal skills and parenting.

The average percentage of sample members reporting that they had been trained in a given area was 76%. The percentage who indicated they had been trained varied considerably, however, depending on the skill or area of knowledge in question. For example, over 85% of respondents stated that they had been educated about personal health care, and trained in job seeking and decision making skills. In contrast, less than 70% had been trained in money management, legal skills, making use of community resources,

or parenting. Overall, 73% of sample members had been given some type of concrete assistance in obtaining employment. About 40% had been given clothing, 60% transportation, and 24% some other form of assistance. About one eighth of the respondents stated that they wished they had been given some form of assistance that was not provided to them. Youth in Milwaukee were somewhat less likely than youth in the rest of Wisconsin to receive independent living services. The average percentage of sample members reporting that they had been trained in a given area was 71% in Milwaukee County and 78% outside of Milwaukee.

The youth were asked to identify the primary source of their independent living skills training. The largest percentage (39%) indicated that their training came mostly from foster parents while another 32% got most of their training from specialized independent living training programs. Group homes and child caring institutions had provided the bulk of the training to 7% of respondents. The remainder received their training from various other sources. About 9% of the sample members were receiving or had received a financial subsidy of some sort to support their living independently.

Mental Health and Social Services Received by Foster Youth

In addition to questions about the amount of contact sample members had with social workers and the independent living services they had received, we specifically asked them whether they had received any "mental health or social services" other than placement in out-of-home care during the prior year. These services were defined as "counseling, therapy, group therapy or counseling, medication for your emotions, substance abuse treatment, psychiatric hospitalization, and so on." Overall, about 47% indicated that they had received some form of mental health or social service while the same percentage reported receiving no such services. Reported service receipt varied considerably by region, however, with 54% of respondents from outside of Milwaukee County reporting service receipt but only 31% of Milwaukee respondents doing so.

Statewide, among the sample members who reported receiving at least one service during the previous year (n=66), the most common service reported was individual counseling or therapy (92%). One third reported that they had participated in some form of group counseling or therapy. Although only 14% of respondents who received services had received treatment in a psychiatric hospital in the previous year, 38% had taken medication for emotional problems. About 5% of respondents had received substance abuse treatment and 8% reported receiving some "other" type of service.

Education and Employment: Attainment and Aspirations

In many respects the current experience and future aspirations of these young people are very encouraging. While 90% were still attending high schools, less than half would complete their public schooling at the close of the 1994-95 academic year. The vast majority desired not only to graduate from high school but to enter (79%) and complete (63%) college. Most sample members, in fact, (71% and 53%, respectively) expect that they will attain these goals.

As part of our study we also administered the Wide Range Achievement Test of Reading (WRAT-R) (Jastak & Wilkinson, 1994), a test designed to measure an individual's reading level. There was a great

deal of variation in the reading scores of our subjects. Some of them showed quite an advanced level of reading ability. Indeed, just more than one fourth (25.5%) of the subjects demonstrated a reading level which placed them at or above a twelfth grade reading level. However, even though all of our subjects were in high school, almost a third (31.9%) were at or below an eighth grade reading level and two were classified as "pre-reading" according to the WRAT.

Nevertheless, some indicators suggest that at least the future educational achievements of sample members may be limited. For example, approximately 30% of the sample had at some time in the past failed to complete a grade, and almost 37% reported having been in one or more special education classes. While the degree to which these outcomes were due to constraints on abilities rather than other factors is not known, there is evidence that the living experiences of these young people created some hardship for their educational achievements. Thus, for example, about 23% of the sample had attended "on grounds" schools, (i.e. schools on the grounds of children's institutions). About 20% of the children in the sample also reported that at some time they had to stop school for at least a month, suggesting that at some point they encountered a major disruption in their educational experiences. Finally, suggestive of another source of instability, almost 50% of the sample members reported that they had to change schools at least four times since beginning their formal education.

In general the youth have extensive employment histories. Over 80% of the sample members report they have been employed at some time, with 57% stating they currently hold a job. These employees work on average about 20 hours per week and have wages up to \$7.50/hr (median wage ÷ \$4.60/hr.). Over 85% stated they were satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs.

Overall, 92% of respondents were either "very optimistic" or "fairly optimistic" about their hopes and goals for the future.

Mental Health Status

Subjects were asked a series of questions collectively referred to as the Mental Health Inventory (MHI). The MHI was developed by the RAND Corporation for its Health Insurance Experiment (HIE) (Veit & Ware, 1983). The MHI assesses the respondent's level of psychological distress and well-being. Scores on the MHI have been shown to be predictive of mental health services utilization and the large number of subjects in the RAND experiment who were within the age range of our study (n=642) facilitates a comparison of our study population to a "normal" group of young adults. The RAND population was large enough to provide norms for both Blacks and Whites; this is an important feature since self-reported mental health and health have been found to vary by race.

The average scores on the MHI for both Whites and Blacks in our study population were considerably lower than the scores for groups in the same age range in the HIE, providing evidence that these foster youth may suffer from considerably more psychological distress than is typical for this age group. The mean MHI score for Whites in our sample was 65.7 whereas the mean for the Whites in the HIE sample was 70.9. The mean for Blacks in our sample was 65.8 whereas the mean for Blacks in the HIE sample was 75.4. These differences are statistically significant at a probability level of $p < .05$.

Health Status

Sample members were asked a series of questions about their health. Like the MHI these questions were developed for the HIE and are referred to as the General Health Rating Index (GHRI) (Davies & Ware,

1981). The mean GHRI score for Whites in our sample (68.0) was lower than that of Whites (72.4) from the same age group in the HIE ($p < .05$). In contrast, the mean for Blacks in our sample (70.0) was not significantly different from the mean score of comparable Blacks in the HIE (67.4).

Delinquency

Sample members were asked whether they had committed one or more delinquent acts. The acts included crimes against property, crimes against persons and status offenses. Statewide, the average number of self-reported delinquent acts was about 4.23 with 25% of respondents having committed 7 or more and 29% not reporting any. Self-reported delinquency was considerably higher outside of Milwaukee county, however, than inside Milwaukee. The mean number of delinquent acts reported by youth in Milwaukee was 3.07 and the median was 1. In contrast, the mean for the remainder of the state was 4.72 and the median 3.

Not surprisingly, the most commonly-reported delinquent acts were, in general, not the most serious ones. For example, the acts admitted by 30% or more of respondents included public rowdiness, petty theft, assault on another person without intent to do serious harm, and driving without a license. A troubling percentage of respondents, however, did report that they had committed more serious crimes. In terms of property crimes, 14% reported having engaged in breaking and entering to steal something, the same percentage reported stealing something worth more than \$100, 17% reported dealing in stolen goods, and 11% had stolen a vehicle. Regarding crimes against persons, 18% had attacked someone they lived with, intending to do serious harm, 18% had attacked someone they did not live with intending to do serious harm, and over one fifth of the sample had made obscene telephone calls. Significant numbers had committed other miscellaneous delinquent acts including being drunk in a public place (24%) and interfering with the work of law enforcement authorities (28%). Some had been involved in drug dealing with 14% having sold marijuana or hashish and 8% having sold "hard drugs."

Perceived Social Support

Social support is an important contributor to well-being. Youth aging out of out-of-home care might experience disruptions in the level of social support they receive from various people in their lives, particularly their substitute caregivers. We administered the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet, et al., 1988) to our sample members to assess their perceptions of the level of support they receive from others. The MSPSS assesses social support from "family," "friends," and a "significant other" (a special friend). We also constructed a separate set of questions for sample members living in foster homes to assess their perception of the support they receive from their foster family. Each of the items was a statement which the sample member responded to on a seven-point scale ranging from "very strongly agree"(7) to "very strongly disagree"(1). Thus, higher scores indicate a greater level of perceived social support.

Overall, our respondents reported a high level of social support with the average total score on the MSPSS being 5.13. Average scores on the subscales were high, with the exception of support from family. Average subscales scores were 5.85 for significant other, 5.72 for friends, 5.51 for foster family, and 3.82 for family. The low score for family no doubt reflects the poor relationship many of the youths have with their families of origin.

Conclusion

In spite of some of the significant problems they have experienced in the past, and the deficits many of them bring to their transition to "independence," our sample members are generally satisfied with their experiences in out-of-home care. It remains to be seen how well they will fare after they are no longer under the protection of the child welfare services system. The post-discharge interviews now underway as part of the Wisconsin Study of Youth Aging Out of Out-of-Home Care should help illuminate longer-term outcomes for our sample members.

References

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MEMORANDUM

To: Nicole

From: Areej

Re: Wisconsin Study: Summary of Phase 2 , July 1998

You should have the initial report and summary on the first phase of the project. This memo will note some of the key results of the second phase.

New information:

- 113 young adults were interviewed (only 80% of those interviewed at phase 1)
- 19% of the females had had children since phase 1.

Results:*Education*

- Youth had much higher expectations of finishing education while in care. Only 55% had completed high school (at phase 1, 90% were in high school), and only 9% had entered college (at phase 1, 71% expected to attend college)

Preparedness for Independent Living

- 25% to 33% of youths felt they were not prepared in several skills area such as parenting and obtaining health information (however, at phase 1, 76% indicated that they had been trained in these areas).

- only a small minority (less than 20%) reported they had received concrete assistance in preparing for independence such as how to obtain housing, insurance, etc.

Living Arrangements

- 12% reported being homeless at least once since discharge

- 22% had lived in four or more separate places

- only a third lived by themselves, (another third lived in a relative's home and the last third lived with a friend or in another living situation)

Finances and employment:

- 81% had held at least one job; however, many were not able to maintain employment-- only 50% were employed at phase 2 (at phase 1, 57% were employed).

- weekly wages ranged from \$31 to \$450 per week

Public assistance:

- 32% of youth received some kind of public assistance (many more women relied on this help than men)

Medical and Dental needs:

- 44% had trouble accessing medical care
- 51% had no insurance coverage.

Mental Health:

- youth were much less likely to get mental health services after exiting care-- only 21% received services (at phase 1, 47% received some kind of service)

Social Support:

- youth had a great deal of contact with their biological families after discharge-- 55% visited their biological mothers, 35% visited their biological fathers
- a large percentage (in the 40% range) felt their biological families were supportive
- 40% had remained in contact with their previous foster parents.

Physical Victimization:

- 25% of males and 15% of females had experienced some sort of physical victimization such as being beat up, choked, strangled, attacked with a weapon, etc.
- 13% of the females had been sexually assaulted or raped after discharge.
- 27% of the males and 10% of the females had been incarcerated at least once

Conclusion

It appears as though in Wisconsin, there is a large percentage of foster youth who have a very difficult time making the transition to independence. Now more research needs to be done to see which services are most useful to combat these problems such as finding a way to involve the family as a resource, providing concrete assistance in finding a job and housing, and helping to arrange health insurance before discharge.

Phase 3 Interviews will be conducted in 1999.

Foster Youth Transitions to Adulthood:
Outcomes 12 to 18 Months After Leaving Out-of-Home Care

July 1998

Mark E. Courtney & Irving Piliavin, Co-Principal Investigators
Andrew Grogan-Kaylor & Ande Nesmith, Project Assistants
School of Social Work and Institute for Research On Poverty
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and the authors alone.

Introduction

The Foster Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (FYTA) is a project intended to explore the experiences and adjustment of youth after they have been discharged from out-of-home care in Wisconsin. The study involves three waves of interviews: the first while youths were residing in out-of-home care, the second 12 to 18 months after they exited care, and the third after they have been out of care about three years. Youths participate voluntarily and are paid for in-person interviews of 60 to 80 minutes in duration. The current report provides a brief description of Wave 1, a more detailed discussion of Wave 2 results, and a preliminary look at implications of the study's findings.¹

Wave 1

The first wave of interviews was conducted while the youths were still in care, between February and May, 1995. Those included in the study were 17 or 18 years old at the time of our first interview with them. We interviewed only those youths who had been in foster care for at least 18 months, an indication that the child welfare system could reasonably be held at least partly accountable for their transition to independent living. Those with developmental disabilities or who were placed for reasons of delinquency were also excluded from the sample. We interviewed 141 youths at Wave 1, approximately 95% of the youth in care at the time in Wisconsin who met our sample selection criteria. Fifty-seven percent of the participants were female and 43% male. The racial breakdown indicated that about two-thirds (65%) were Caucasian, 27% were African American, and 6% Native American. About 30% of the youths lived in Milwaukee County while the remainder lived in 41 other Wisconsin counties. At the time

¹ For a discussion of Wave 1 results see Courtney, Piliavin, and Grogan-Kaylor (1995).

of our first interviews with the youths, they had been in out-of-home care an average of 38 months, including family foster homes, group homes, and residential treatment centers.

Most of the youth reported that they had been maltreated prior to placement, the largest proportion of whom were neglected. Regarding incidents prior to placement, 66% of the youth reported having been neglected, 57% experienced physical abuse, and 31% reported that they had been sexually abused.

Ninety percent of the youth indicated that they felt their placement was necessary, and 87% believed that no services would have averted the need for placement. They generally described their relationships with their out-of-home caretakers favorably, with 75% stating they felt “somewhat close” or “close” to the adults caring for them. Eighty-seven percent agreed with the statement, “foster parents have been a help to me.” Additionally, when asked how they felt about various statements regarding the child welfare system, with a scale ranging from “very strongly disagree” to “very strongly agree,” the majority presented a positive attitude toward and positive experience with the child welfare system. In fact, 75% agreed with the statement that they were “lucky” to have been placed in out-of-home care.

Wave 2

The second wave of the study was conducted in 1996 and 1997, 12 to 18 months after the youths were discharged from the child welfare system. At Wave 2, 113 young adults were interviewed, 80% of those interviewed at Wave 1. Much like Wave 1, the interviews were 60 to 80 minutes long, conducted in-person at the young adult's home. For a few respondents who lived far away, interviews were completed by telephone. At Wave 2, 45% (n=51) of respondents were male and 55% (n=62) were female, 68% (n=77) were Caucasian, 24% (27) were African

American, 5% (6) Native American, and the remainder were of other racial/ethnic heritage. Four of the males (8%) and 12 of the females (19%) had parented children by the time of Wave 2 interviews.

Education

Finishing high school or continuing with education proved to be less common than suggested by youths' expectations while in care. At Wave 1, participants were asked what their goals were, pertaining to educational attainment. At that time, 90% of the youths were still attending high school; 79% expressed a desire to enter college and 71% expected they would attain that goal. In contrast to their goals while still in care, by 12 to 18 months past discharge 37% of the young adults had not yet completed high school, 55% had completed high school, and another 9% had entered college.

Preparedness for Independent Living

The participants were asked to describe how prepared they were for independent living. Their responses fell into four categories: not at all prepared, not very well prepared, somewhat prepared, or very prepared (Table 1).

Table 1: Preparedness for Independent Living

Independent Living Skill	Not at all Prepared (%)	Not very well Prepared (%)	Somewhat Prepared (%)	Very Prepared (%)
Getting a job	10.8	20.7	34.2	34.2
Managing money	11.7	19.8	36.9	31.5
Health information	4.5	18.0	44.1	33.3
Obtaining housing	12.0	19.4	42.6	25.9
Obtaining transportation	10.9	10.9	29.1	49.1
Knowledge of Resources	9.9	18.0	48.6	23.4
Parenting	23.4	20.6	34.6	21.5
Living on own	8.0	21.4	45.5	25.0

About one quarter to one third of the youths reported a perceived lack of preparedness in several skill areas. For example, one third reported feeling not at all or not very well prepared to obtain a job or manage money. Approximately one third felt similarly unprepared in how to secure housing, with 29% of the sample feeling unprepared to live on their own. One quarter felt not at all or not very well prepared regarding health information. Very few felt well prepared for parenting, perhaps reflecting the troubled homes from which these young adults generally came.

The youths were asked a number of questions at Wave 1 about their preparation for independent living. We asked whether they had received training in a number of areas such as money management, food preparation, personal hygiene and health care, finding housing, transportation and employment, educational planning, the use of community resources, interpersonal skills, legal skills and parenting. The average percentage of sample members who reported that they had been trained in a given area was 76%. The largest percentage (39%) indicated that their training came mostly from foster parents while another 32% got most of their training from specialized independent living training programs. Group homes and child caring institutions had provided the bulk of the training to 7% of respondents. The remainder received their training from various other sources. Only about 9% of the sample members were receiving or had received a financial subsidy of some sort to support their living independently.

“Training,” however, can consist of anything from informal discussions, to classes, to more concrete assistance such as actually carrying out a particular task with a foster youth (e.g., seeking housing, looking for a job, obtaining medical records). When asked at Wave 2, only a minority of young adults reported that they received concrete assistance in preparing for a variety

had their driver's licenses before they were discharged. Feeling unprepared in handling these independent living skills was also reflected in the problems the young adults faced since discharge (see Table 3).

Table 2: Concrete Assistance In Preparing for Independence Prior to Discharge

Type of Assistance Provided	Percent Reporting Receiving Assistance
Job training	18%
Conducting a job interview	11%
Help finding a job	14%
Obtaining housing	12%
Obtaining personal health records	15%
Obtaining health insurance	11%
How to obtain public assistance	11%

Table 3: Problems Experienced "Most" of "All of the Time" Since Discharge

Type of Problem	Percent Reporting Having a Problem Most or All of the Time
Having enough money	32%
Finding a job	18%
Obtaining housing	9%
Obtaining medical care	44%
Making friends	6%
Obtaining transportation	14%
Relations with family	25%

Living Arrangements

Securing stable housing posed a serious problem for some of the youth, though most were able to obtain housing, often with the help of family. Approximately 40% of our sample had to leave their last foster or group care placement because they were discharged from the child welfare system, another third were able to stay for some period of time after discharge in their last foster home, while the remainder either left care of their own volition prior to being discharged (15%) or for other reasons. Fourteen percent of the males and 10% of the females reported being homeless (i.e., living on the street or in a shelter) at least once since discharge, a total of 12% of all the youth interviewed at Wave 2. Although about 37% of the respondents had lived in the same place since discharge from the child welfare system, 22% had lived in four or more separate places over that period. At Wave 2, 37% of the participants were residing in their own room in an apartment or house, another 31% were living in the home of a relative, and the remaining third lived with a friend, a spouse or partner, in an institution, or another living situation.

Finances and Employment

Likely contributing to or exacerbating problems locating housing and meeting other basic needs were problems meeting financial needs. Fewer than half (46%) of the youths reported that they had at least \$250 when they left care. The most common sources of monetary help since discharge were family members (35%) followed by friends (14%). About 10% had received cash assistance (excluding the forms of public assistance discussed below) from a public or private social services agency. The median amount of assistance received by those who got monetary help was \$300.

Eighty-one percent of the participants held at least one job at some point between discharge and the Wave 2 interview. However, they were not as successful at maintaining employment. Fewer were employed at Wave 2 (50%), when they were on their own, than at Wave 1 (57%) when they were supported by the child welfare system. They were more likely to be employed at Wave 2 if they were Caucasian than if they were African American.² The average weekly wage for those with jobs ranged from \$31 to \$450. Employed Caucasian youth on average were earning \$196 per week, while African American youth earned \$155. Although there were no gender differences in the likelihood of being employed at the time of the Wave 2 interview, employed males earned on average \$210 per week while females earned \$157.

Public Assistance

Thirty-two percent of all the youth received some kind of public assistance, with more females (40%) than males (23%) receiving such help. There were notable sex differences in the percentage of young adults receiving Food Stamps and AFDC. Twenty-three percent of females had received AFDC (no males), and 20% of females had received Food Stamps compared with only 2% of males. The same proportion of males and females (12%) had received Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and fewer than 4% of males and females had received General Assistance or housing assistance.

Medical and Dental Needs

Obtaining affordable medical care when needed was a significant issue for close to half the participants after discharge. Forty-four percent indicated they had problems acquiring needed

² The number of sample members of other races/ethnicities was too small to make meaningful comparisons across groups.

medical care most or all of the time. When asked what prevented them from obtaining medical care, 51% stated they had no insurance coverage. Similarly, another 38% said the medical care was too expensive. Only 5% said it was a matter of not knowing where to go, and another 5% said the hours were inconvenient. Over one quarter of the young adults (28%) could not get needed dental care. Again, a total of 90% attributed this to no insurance coverage or to care costing too much.

Mental Health

The participants were much less likely to receive mental health services once they exited care than when they were in the child welfare system. Respondents were asked whether they had received any "mental health or social services" other than placement in out-of-home care during the prior year. These services were defined as "counseling, therapy, group therapy or counseling, medication for your emotions, substance abuse treatment, psychiatric hospitalization, and so on." Twenty-one percent of the young adults interviewed at Wave 2 reported receiving some kind of mental health services in the previous year. This is a substantial decrease in service usage since Wave 1 when more than twice as many (47%) reported receiving some kind of mental health service in the previous year.

During both waves of interviews we administered the Mental Health Inventory (MHI), a standardized self-report measure of the respondent's level of psychological distress and well-being (Veit & Ware, 1983). Scores on the MHI have been shown to be predictive of mental health services utilization, with lower scores indicating poorer mental health. In the general population, the average score for youth of the same age group as our former foster youth is 71 for Caucasians and 75 for African Americans whereas the mean score at Wave 2 was 65 for our Caucasian

sample members and 67 for our African American sample members (differences are statistically significant at $p < .05$). The average scores on this measure at both interview waves suggest that our sample members experience more psychological distress than their peers of the same age group. Moreover, the average score did not change between interview waves. Thus, although the receipt of mental health services decreased dramatically over time, there is no evidence that the young adults' need for services decreased.

Social Support

At both waves of interviews we administered the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), a series of questions intended to gauge the respondent's perception of the degree of social support they receive from significant others, friends, and family (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988). We also created a similar scale that measures the respondent's perception of the degree of support they receive from their foster family. Based on analysis of MSPSS scores it appears that on average the young adults perceive that they receive a great deal of support from significant others, friends, and their former foster families. In contrast, the respondents report receiving somewhat less support on average from family.

Although the young adults' perception of social support from biological families was, on average, relatively low when compared to other sources of support, families continue to play an important role in the lives of many of these young adults. The participants on the whole had a great deal of contact with their biological families after discharge. As noted above, about one-third lived with relatives after discharge and family members were the most common source of monetary help since discharge. Fifty-five percent visited their biological mothers at least once since discharge and 35% had visited their biological fathers. Twenty-one percent felt that they

since discharge.

When asked where they received their social support, although not a majority, a large percentage of the respondents did feel that their families were supportive. Forty percent reported that their families tried to help them, 46% indicated their families provided emotional support to them, and 49% agreed that they could talk with their families about problems.

Foster parents also remain an important factor in the participants' lives after discharge. Forty percent of the youth reported that they spoke with their previous foster parents at least once a week 12 to 18 months after discharge. Twenty percent of the youth agreed that their foster families continued to help them, provide emotional support, and helped them make decisions after discharge.

Indicators of Failed Transitions to Self-Sufficiency

A large minority of the participants experienced situations seriously dangerous to their well-being or otherwise indicative of an unsuccessful transition to independence. For example, at Wave 2 we asked the young adults whether they had experienced a number of forms of physical victimization in the 12 to 18 months since they had left the care of the child welfare system. In all, 25% of the males (n=13) and 15% of the females (n=9) reported experiencing some kind of serious physical victimization involving being "beat up," "choked, strangled, or smothered," "attacked with a weapon," or "tied up, held down, or blindfolded" against their will. Serious sexual victimization was reported exclusively by females post-discharge. Eleven percent (n=7) of the females reported having been sexually assaulted. Similarly, 10% (n=6) disclosed they had been forced against their will to engage in oral or anal intercourse. Altogether, eight of the young

women (13%) had been sexually assaulted and/or raped since discharge from foster care. Lastly, over one quarter of the males (27%, $n=14$) and 10% of the females ($n=6$) were incarcerated at least once after discharge. Overall, 18% of the young adults experienced post-discharge incarceration.

In order to obtain a global picture of what percentage of young adults had encountered serious problems in making a successful transition to independence, we calculated how many of our respondents reported being either seriously physically victimized (as described above), sexually assaulted, raped, incarcerated, or homeless at least once since discharge. Overall, 37% of the youth interviewed at Wave 2 experienced one or more of these unwanted outcomes in the 12 to 18 months after they left out-of-home care. The risk varied considerably by gender, with 43% of males and 32% of females experiencing one of these events.

Discussion

This report is essentially descriptive in nature. Although we now have a rough picture of how the former foster youth participating in the FYTA are faring in their first year or so post-discharge, we have only begun to conduct the types of analysis necessary to shed light on a number of important questions. Who does well in making the transition to self-sufficient adulthood and who does not? What differentiates the former from the latter? How can we better aid foster youth in achieving independence? Over the next year we will try to provide some answers to these questions using the rich information provided to us by the participants in the FYTA. The picture will hopefully become even clearer when we finish our Wave 3 interviews towards the end of 1999. Still, in the mean time some of our findings are suggestive of both the

scope of the challenges facing foster youth who “age out” of the system and of some of the missing links in service provision to this group.

There should be little doubt that, at least in Wisconsin, a significant proportion of foster youth have a very difficult time making the transition to self-sufficiency. To be sure, most of our sample members avoided the worst of the outcomes that we tracked. Moreover, a clear majority believe that they were fortunate to have been placed in out-of-home care. Still, only half of our sample were employed when we found them 12 to 18 months after the child welfare system had relinquished its responsibility for them. Even those who were employed were, on average, earning less than a full-time worker paid the minimum wage. This should not be surprising given the limited education they had received. When they needed medical care they often could not obtain it. Too large a group encountered housing instability or even homelessness and too many were victims of violence. Policy makers interested in crime prevention would be hard pressed to find a group at higher risk of incarceration than the males in our sample. In short, it appears that the glass is little more than half full for the bulk of the young adults we interviewed and near empty for many of the rest.

We found tentative support for change in child welfare practice and policy in four general areas: 1) the role of family after discharge; 2) factors that affect the chances of employment and housing; 3) transitional support; 4) and meeting health and mental health care needs.

The family clearly remains a significant factor in the lives of the young adults after discharge, in many cases fulfilling important needs. A large proportion indicated that they received various forms of support from their families and one-third resided in the home of a

relative when we last talked with them. In all likelihood, kin will continue to play an important role in the lives of many of our study participants.

However, all contact with families is not positive. One-fourth reported having problems with their families most or all of the time. Although for some young adults these difficulties may be little more than communication problems encountered in most families, for others it is much more severe. For example, preliminary analysis of the violence committed against our respondents since they left foster care suggests that at least some of it occurred at the hands of kin.

Although child welfare agencies may in some cases work informally with youths' families in developing independent living plans for foster youth, the practice literature on independent living services barely mentions families. This may reflect the fact that only recently has the child welfare field begun to pay much attention to the family ties of children in long-term foster care. Whatever the reason, ignoring the important ties that youth maintain with their parents, siblings, and extended kin even after long stays in out-of-home care, can leave a potentially important source of support, and stress, unexamined. Finding a way to maximize the potential of the family as a resource for youth approaching independence, while seeking to minimize ways in which family can be a source of stress, may be a useful avenue for intervention to improve independent living services. Additionally, for those agencies that do work with families post-discharge, disseminating information on "what works" in this regard might help other agencies to follow suit.

Obtaining employment and housing is a fundamental problem for many of these youth. Our findings suggest that independent living training per se made less of a difference than concrete assistance in whether the young adults found a place to live or secured employment,

though this finding should be regarded as preliminary pending more in-depth exploration of the data. By concrete assistance we refer to receiving in-person help in locating or securing a job or housing, whereas training refers to attending courses or life-skills groups. Not surprisingly, employment while in foster care predicted later employment as well. It was not necessarily the case that participants were employed later because they maintained the same job they had before discharge. In fact, many held several jobs in sequence, at times with periods of unemployment in between. It may be that the experience of holding a job while in care instilled a sense of confidence, or provided skills and preparation for future jobs.

Many of the young adults fell into crisis situations once they exited care including incarceration, homelessness, victimization, or unemployment, suggesting that they might need transitional support to facilitate a more smooth move into independent living. Perhaps many young adults who age out of care need something between foster care and independence, in the form of direct adult guidance and concrete support. This could entail more adult contact, mentoring, and the availability of a more structured transitional living environment. It should be noted that Wisconsin has very little in the way of transitional living services for foster youth.

Health care needs posed a serious concern for many of the participants after discharge. Close to half needed medical care they could not get, the vast majority of whom indicated this was due to lack of insurance or money to pay for care. Nearly one-third were unable to obtain needed dental care, again with most suggesting that lack of insurance was the reason. Similarly, a substantial drop in utilization of mental health services by the study participants with no apparent change in their mental health status should be of great concern.

If these young adults are not receiving medical, dental, and mental health care during times

in which they need it, then it is likely they are also not receiving preventive care. The long-term effect of inaccessibility of such care may contribute to more serious difficulties if ongoing problems remain untreated and new ones go undetected. In some cases, particularly when the young adults are unemployed, they might be eligible for Medicaid and simply need to enroll. Unfortunately, 90% reported that they did not receive help in arranging health insurance before discharge and 85% did not get help with obtaining their health records. It may be that a simple solution to the problem is ensuring that as youth approach emancipation from foster care steps are taken to establish medical coverage for them once they exit care.

Certainly children enter foster care under difficult circumstances, with the deck often already stacked against them. For some, it may be that foster care brings them stability they might not otherwise have, but that once discharged they struggle unsuccessfully. For others, though, it may be the abruptness of discharge, coinciding with the cessation of many services and support systems, that in fact contributes to poor adjustment. The experiences of the young adults in the present study suggest that the child welfare system might be able to improve the passage to independent living by building on family strengths while minimizing negative family impact, providing more concrete assistance in locating housing and employment, providing a better transitional safety net for those with the fewest life skills, and ensuring that former foster youth have access to medical care during their move to self-sufficiency. Of course, at this stage more research is clearly necessary to distinguish which services are most useful for improving the lot of young adults forced to make the difficult transition from out-of-home care to being “on their own.”

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Foster Care & Homelessness

After care, Then Where?

After care then where? Outcomes of an independent living program: Article includes outcome data for youths discharged from a New York City based independent living program (see description below). Study was conducted to monitor effectiveness of program.

Green Chimneys Children's Services is a voluntary nonprofit child welfare agency contracting with the New York City Administration for Children's Services and licensed by the New York State Department of Social Services to provide residential care, including independent living skills programming for adolescents.

Background information:

- The study population consisted of 46 youth discharged from the program between Dec. 1987 and Dec. 1994.
- Age at admission to the program ranged from 16 to 20 with an average age of 18 years. Age at the time of follow-up ranged from 20 to 28 with an average age of 24 years.
- The average mean length of time in foster care placement was 8 years. The average length of stay in the program was two years and four months.
- The youth were tracked through two time periods, 1) when they all received the same services including counseling and participation in Life Skills courses using a structured curriculum, and 2) when they lived independently outside the agency and did not receive any services.

Results: data was collected based on the participants' characteristics, and placement history as well as on the assessment of skills related to education, employment, savings, and living arrangements.

- Education: At time of discharge, about 75% had completed high school or had a GED. More than a quarter had some college education.
- Employment: At time of discharge, 72% had full-time employment. At time of follow-up this number increased to 78%.
- Welfare: At discharge, only one person relied on public assistance. At follow-up, two reported receiving benefits.
- Savings: At discharge, 65% had savings accounts as compared to 39% at the time of follow-up. An overwhelming majority (90%) said that they had difficulty budgeting their earnings and saving after discharge and wished they had learned more before leaving care.
- Living Arrangements: 21% were discharged to their families but at follow-up time only 15% were still living there. On average, youths had lived in three different locations since discharge.
- Life Skills Preparation: The scores from the Life Skills Assessment Tool indicated an improvement in all 14 life skills categories.
- Support Network: 96% reported having at least one person in their lives providing a strong close relationship. 67% remained in regular contact with various staff members from the program.

Conclusion:

Findings indicate that the program did improve the ability of youths to be self-sufficient at the time of discharge and suggests that youths can sustain these outcomes at a later follow-up time. Recommended the need for transitional programming beyond the age at which foster youth are discharged such as the New York City Independent Living Partnership. This aftercare program is funded by child welfare agencies and foundation grants, and provides monthly support groups, leadership development seminars, etc for ex-foster youth.

Note: The results of study are not highly accurate-- small sample size, etc.

After Care, Then Where? Outcomes of an Independent Living Program

Gerald P. Mallon

Society has made a major capital investment in the out-of-home care system and, to a lesser extent, in preparing youths exiting out-of-home care for self-sufficiency. The field of child and family services has begun to evaluate the effectiveness of independent living skills programs and to measure outcomes that document the extent to which these social investments are cost effective and linked to positive outcomes. This article provides descriptive and evaluative outcome data for all youths discharged to independent living from December 1987 to December 1994 in a New York City-based independent living program operated by Green Chimneys Children's Services.

Gerald P. Mallon, D.S.W., is Assistant Professor, Columbia University School of Social Work, New York, NY.

Preparing young people in out-of-home care for independent living and for successful adulthood has not been one of the child welfare system's primary goals. The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-272), intended to restructure the nation's out-of-home care system by preventing the unnecessary placement of children and adolescents in care and by moving children toward permanence in a timely manner, neglected to address independent living for adolescents who remain in long-term care.

All young people must amass a tremendous amount of knowledge to function self-sufficiently in society. For the majority of adolescents, learning life skills occurs both formally and informally over a period of years within the family milieu. In contrast, young people growing up in out-of-home care, many without the advantage of a stable home environment, have limited opportunities to learn life skills in the typical way. Nollan and Pecora [1994] noted that in 1992, an estimated 442,000 children were in out-of-home care. Cook [1990, 1991] noted that approximately 40% of this population are adolescents. Many of these young people are not reunited with their families and experience multiple placements, with the number of placements rising with the length of time spent in care [Cook 1988; Maluccio & Fein 1985]. Hornby and Collins [1981] observed that less than 20% of the youths in out-of-home care returned to their biological families and fewer than one in 20 were likely to be adopted. Recent attention to the needs of these young people, who are too old to remain in out-of-home care and yet unable to support themselves and to live independently, has prompted the child welfare system to deal with the necessity of preparing the youths in its care for self-sufficiency [Mech 1988a]. Ironically, for most youths in out-of-home care, their long years of "being in care" does not guarantee that they can care for themselves at discharge [Mallon 1992].

This article offers descriptive and evaluative outcome data for youths discharged to self from a New York City-based independent living program operated by Green Chimneys Children's Services. This exploratory study was conducted for two pur-

poses: first, to generate aggregate program data and client outcome data to monitor the effectiveness of the program, and second, to respond to the concerns of the agency's board of directors, who customarily asked about independent living outcomes as they pertained to the self-sufficiency of the client population after discharge. To answer the question, "What happens to youths in out-of-home care who are discharged from the Green Chimneys Life Skills Program?" the investigator assessed the overall results of the independent living program's efforts and evaluated the effect of the program upon the youths served.

The literature in the early 1980s [Euster et al. 1984; Festinger 1983; Jones & Moses 1984; Mauzerall 1983; Zimmerman 1982] strongly suggested that child welfare practitioners and policymakers should examine and respond to the fact that many young people exiting out-of-home care were insufficiently prepared for living independently. Educational and employment deficits of these youths were concerns consistently cited for policymakers. Mech [1995: 3-4] provides an excellent review of the major issues, programs, and directions for research with respect to preparing youths in out-of-home care for independence.

Studies from New York City [Citizen's Committee for Children of New York 1984; Shaffer & Caton 1984] documented the disproportionate representation of persons who were formerly in care in the homeless population. An investigation of the childhood experiences of homeless men [Susser et al. 1987] found that 23% of the sample ($N = 223$) had been previously placed in out-of-home care. Legal advocates for children in New York City have also found an overrepresentation of youths formerly in out-of-home care in homeless shelters. In some cases, young people reported that they spent their first night out of care on the streets [Lasdon 1995]. In a study conducted for the Human Resources Administration of New York City, Pettiford [1981] found that approximately one-third of the youths exiting out-of-home care relied on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) or on the city's home relief program within 18 months of leaving care. Cook [1988: 4] notes that "This level of

dependency was significantly higher than the estimated 12% of public aid users reported for all youths age 18 to 21 years in New York City." Thus, these studies documented the consequences of discharging young people from care without a plan, without linkages to resources, and with almost no preparation for living on their own.

The enactment of the federal Independent Living Initiative of 1986 (P.L. 99-272) brought about a programmatic focus on, and funds for, the preparation of young people for independence. Professionals in the emerging field of independent living enthusiastically greeted this new initiative with conferences, newsletters, independent living curricula [Stone 1987; Mallon 1990] publications [DeWoody et al. 1993; Mech 1988b, 1994; Mech & Rycraft 1995], standards for services [Child Welfare League of America 1989], and the enactment of rigorous state-wide legislation and guidelines [New York State Department of Social Services 1987]. There was, however, little focus or emphasis on research or outcome studies. Noting the paucity of "systematic information regarding the ability of former foster youths to become economically self-supporting," Mech [1988a: xviii] suggested that the effects of various independent living services should be documented by testing the results of these services and by engaging in follow-up studies of youths formerly in care. Mech reaffirmed this call [1994: 144] when he wrote, "Society has made a major financial stake in the out-of-home care system. If the concept of human capital investment is to have meaning, child welfare will need to document the extent to which its social investments are cost-beneficial and linked to positive outcomes."

Method

Setting

Green Chimneys Children's Services is a voluntary nonprofit child welfare agency contracting with the New York City Administration for Children's Services and licensed by the New

York State Department of Social Services to provide residential care, including independent living skills programming for adolescents preparing for discharge to self on or before their twenty-first birthday. The agency provides a continuum of services for adolescents [Cooke et al. 1989], including two independent living programs based in New York City: The Gramercy Life Skills Residence Program and the Supervised Independent Living Apartment Program.

Sample

The study population consisted of all youths discharged from Green Chimneys to independent living between December 1987 and December 1994 ($N = 46$). All of the subjects were male. The overwhelming majority were young people of color (96%), reflecting the disproportionate representation of children of color (93%) in New York City's child welfare system [Mayor's Commission for the Foster Care of Children 1993]. Over one-quarter of the subjects ($n = 13$) were identified as having a gay sexual orientation; the remainder were identified as heterosexual. Case record reviews indicated that 15% ($n = 7$) of the sample had evidence of organic impairment. Thirty-five percent ($n = 16$) were classified as learning disabled.

Age at admission to the independent living program ranged from 16 to 20, with an average age of 18 years. African American young people remained in care the longest (an average of three years); Latino youths stayed slightly more than one year (see table 1). Age at discharge ranged from 18 to 23, with an average age of 21 years. Age at the time of follow-up (T_1) ranged from 20 to 28, with an average age of 24 years. All participants in the study had been discharged from the program for more than six months.

The overall mean length of time in placement for the study sample was eight years. Twenty-eight percent ($n = 13$) of these youths had spent between 10 and 21 years in care. Ninety-three percent of the youths ($n = 43$) had experienced multiple placements within the child welfare system. The average length of stay at Green Chimneys was two years and four months.

TABLE 1

Mean Age at Intake (T_1) and at Discharge (T_2), and Mean Length of Stay, by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	%	Mean Age at Intake	Mean Age at Discharge	Mean Length of Stay
African American ($n = 31$)	67%	17.47	20.63	3.16
Latino ($n = 9$)	20%	18.51	19.56	1.05
Multiracial ($n = 4$)	9%	17.20	20.05	2.85
Caucasian ($n = 2$)	4%	18.55	21.00	2.45
Total ($n = 46$)	100%	17.93	20.31	2.38

Data Collection

The investigator employed a data collection strategy for aggregate program data and client outcome data as recommended by Tatara et al. [1988]. Aggregate program data were collected at two points in time: T_1 baseline data at intake and T_2 postprogram data at discharge.

Client outcome data were gathered on the 46 youths at three points in time. These three points followed programmatic activities and the life movements of the youths moving through the program as follows: T_1 case opening (the date at which the client was first enrolled in the program), T_2 case closing (the date at which the client was discharged to self), and T_3 follow-up (the time of the follow-up study, December 1994 to June 1995, for youths who had completed the life skills program).

Between T_1 and T_2 , all youths received the same array of independent living skills services, including an initial, semianual, and discharge Life Skills Assessment, weekly individual counseling with a social worker and life skills coordinator, and weekly participation in a Life Skills course using a structured life skills curriculum [Mallon 1990]. Between T_2 and T_3 , youths lived independently outside of the agency and did not receive any formal independent living skills services.

Data Sources

Independent living scale. The agency used the Green Chimneys Life Skills Assessment Tool to collect data on each program

participant at T_1 and T_2 .^{*} This paper and pencil instrument was adapted from the Independent Life Inventory Summary Report developed by Ansell [1983]. Using a five-point Likert scale, the interviewer completed the form within 30 days of the youth's admission to Green Chimneys and 30 days before the youth's discharge, with input from the young person. The instrument assessed both "hard" basic life skills such as employment, food preparation, health care, housing and home management, money management, and transportation, and "soft" basic life skills such as self-esteem and interpersonal skills development [Pine et al. 1990]. Scores in each of the 14 areas were based upon numerical ratings from one to five. Overall, the highest possible score is 75 points; the lowest possible score is 15 points.

Case records. In addition to the use of the Life Skills Assessment Tool at T_1 and T_2 , case records were reviewed by the investigator using a customized survey instrument. Preprogram client profile data (client identification and demographic information: age, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, education/employment status, special-needs status, social support systems, history of savings, case initiation date) were collected at T_1 . Postprogram client outcome data (age, education/employment status, marital/parental status, social support systems, history of savings, length of stay in program, current living arrangement) were collected at T_2 . Client program impact data (age, education/employment status, marital/parental status, social supports systems, savings history, current living arrangements, social services received since discharge) were collected at T_3 .

Interviews with former clients. Additional data were collected from 43 of the 46 former clients in face-to-face semistructured interviews. These interviews provided in-depth information about each youth's experiences while in the Green Chimneys independent living programs and after discharge from the programs. Interviews were conducted by first-year M.S.W. students from a local school of social work who were trained

^{*} This tool has been used nationally by other life skills programs. Copies are available from the author.

by the investigator prior to the interview. Former clients were contacted via telephone by the interviewers. The interviewers explained the purpose of the study and asked if the former clients would be willing to be interviewed. In addition, a flyer about the study was posted at the program residences to notify former clients who might be visiting. Interviews required approximately one hour and were conducted either at the youths' homes or at the agency headquarters. Ninety-three percent ($n = 43$) of the youths who had been in the programs agreed to participate. Several were helpful in contacting other former clients. Two youths could not be located, and one youth had committed suicide since discharge.

Results

Data are presented on the clients' characteristics and placement history, as well as on the assessment of skills as these relate to education, employment, savings, and living arrangements. A comparison of the youth's life skills assessment scores between T_1 and T_2 and self-reports of the youth's actual performance since discharge to self are also presented.

Education/Employment

Education and employment outcomes are two of the primary concerns for independent living programs. Iglehart [1994: 160] notes that "Education and employment represent critical areas that affect an adolescent's transition to independence and adulthood. Those adolescents with a sound educational base and employment history may be better equipped for independent living." The findings in these two areas are highlighted below.

Education. As table 2 indicates, three-quarters ($n = 34$) of the study population had completed high school or obtained a GED (General Equivalency Diploma) at the time of discharge. Of those who had a diploma, more than one-quarter ($n = 8$) had some college education. The rate of noncompletion of high

TABLE 2**Education Attainment at Discharge (T₁) (N = 46)**

	<i>n</i>	%
Less than High School Diploma	12	26
General Equivalency Diploma (GED)	14	31
High School Diploma	12	26
Diploma and Postsecondary Education	8	17

school for African American youths in this study (20%), was more favorable than the noncompletion rate of 24.5% reported by the U.S. Department of Education [Children's Defense Fund 1995] for this group. The findings with respect to graduation rates (74%) were also more favorable than graduation rates reported for other populations in out-of-home care by Barth [1990] (45%); Cook [1988] (62%); Festinger [1983] (65%); and Scannapieco et al. [1995] (50%).

Employment. About 72% of the clients ($n = 33$) had full-time employment at discharge (see table 3). Clients reported holding positions as clerical workers in offices and hospitals; as a conductor with a commuter railroad; as child care workers with the mentally retarded; as salespersons in retail stores, and as food service employees. African American and Latino youths were employed at comparable rates of 74% and 78% respectively. These figures are higher than those reported by Scannapieco et al. [1995], who noted that 52% of the youths in their study had obtained employment at discharge. At follow-up, the employment percentage for youths in the present study increased by 3% (78%). These figures are comparable with those reported by Barth [1990], who found that 75% of the youths discharged from care to self were employed at follow-up.

It is important to note that of those who were unemployed at discharge ($n = 10$), 80% ($n = 8$) left care without a high school or general equivalency diploma. Nine of the 10 who were not employed at discharge reported being dependent on family members and friends for financial support.

TABLE 3**Employment at Discharge (T₁) by Race/Ethnicity**

<i>Status</i>	<i>African American (N = 31)</i>		<i>Other (N = 15)</i>		<i>All (N=46)</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Full-Time Employment	23	74	10	67	33	72
Part-Time Employment	1	3	2	13	3	7
Not Employed	7	23	3	20	10	21

Independence from reliance on public assistance is another indicator of economic self-sufficiency among youths discharged from out-of-home care. At discharge, only one young person from the sample population (2%) relied on public assistance as the sole means of financial support. At follow-up, two clients (4%) reported they were receiving welfare benefits. This compares with 5% receiving public assistance in the general population, and is a much lower figure than the 30% reported by Cook [1994: 220].

Savings

Closely linked to economic self-sufficiency is the ability to save one's earnings. A strength of the Green Chimneys program was its effectiveness in encouraging youths to open savings accounts. At discharge, 65% ($n = 30$) of the subjects had savings accounts, as compared with 4% ($n = 2$) who had one at intake. This figure, however had decreased to 39% ($n = 18$) at follow-up. When asked what they most wished they had learned more about before leaving care, an overwhelming majority (90%) ($n = 41$) of respondents said they had difficulty budgeting their earnings and saving after discharge. One young person's comment is representative:

I think the one thing I wished I learned more about was the importance of saving money. I know that it was always something that the staff were telling me I should do, but I just had no idea how much it cost to live on your own. When you live in a group home you don't

really have to worry about paying for anything, but boy, when you're on your own, you have to pay for everything!

Living Arrangements

Finding suitable and affordable living arrangements in New York City is challenging even for those who have not spent time in out-of-home care. With studio apartments averaging \$400 per month, most young people exiting care used a variety of housing options. As table 4 indicates, 46% ($n = 21$) of those studied shared an apartment at T_2 . This figure increased to 51% at T_3 . One of the more prominent findings of this study is the finding that a large proportion of youths (21%, $n = 10$), regardless of ethnicity, were discharged to their families. The percentage of young people living with their families decreased to 15% at follow-up, which is comparable to the findings of Courtney and Barth [1996: 80] that 16.8% of youths who had spent at least 18 months in care were eventually living with family. These figures are considerably lower, however, than the 54% noted by Cook [1994]. Youths noted on the average that they had lived in three different locations since discharge. One youth was incarcerated at T_3 ; another had committed suicide.

Life Skills Preparation

All of the youths in this study had participated in the same array of independent living skills services. The descriptive measures displayed in table 5 comparing the scores from the Life Skills Assessment Tool at T_1 and T_2 ($N = 46$) indicate an improvement in mean ratings in all 14 life skills categories.

Despite the positive outcomes reported above, most youths said that they found it harder than they expected to live independently. One young person's reflections on the difficulties that he encountered are characteristic of the group as a whole:

Everybody here was trying to help me, sometimes I just didn't let them help me. I was living in my own fantasy world. I didn't get it. But I sure got it when I left, I can

TABLE 4**Client Housing Options at Discharge (T₁) and at Follow-Up (T₂)**

	T ₁		T ₂	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Own Apartment	7	15	10	21
Share	21	46	23	51
Furnished Room	3	7	2	4.5
With Family Member	10	21	7	15
With Friends	2	4.5	2	4.5
Military Service	3	8.5		
Jail			1	2
Deceased			1	2

tell you that! It ain't no fantasy world out there in the real world—it's hard. It's a lot of work, but it feels good knowing I'm taking care of me. It's also good to know that when I look around my apartment, that everything that's there is mine!

Support Network

The establishment of a social support network is essential in developing a foundation for independence [Cook 1994]. Approximately 96% (*n* = 44) of the youths in the study reported having at least one person in their lives who provided a strong close relationship. These findings were consistent with both Festinger's [1983] and Cook's [1994] samples of youths; in those studies, the youths reported that they were satisfied with their friendships and with the number of their social contacts. Other research [Maluccio & Marlow 1972; Whittaker & Pecora 1984; Wilson & Lyman 1983] suggests that those who have supportive relationships after discharge are more likely to be functioning well after care than those who do not have such supports. The social supports cited by young people in this study can be grouped into three categories: (a) family, relatives, and friends; (b) community resources, that is, teachers, employers, workplaces, neighbors, and religious organizations; and (c) agency-program services after youths leave care. Sixty-seven percent

TABLE 5
Mean Scores at Intake (T_1) and at Discharge (T_2) by Life Skills Category

Life Skills Category	T_1		T_2	
	Mean Scores	S.D.	Mean Scores	S.D.
Personal Appearance	3.08	.661	3.93	1.041
Health Care	2.67	.435	3.80	.859
Educational Planning	3.08	1.041	3.78	1.134
Housekeeping Skills	3.04	.556	3.65	1.016
Money Management	2.54	.504	3.41	1.024
Food Management	2.81	.463	3.80	.934
Job Seeking Skills	2.37	.532	3.47	1.150
Job Maintenance Skills	2.45	.585	3.43	1.205
Transportation	3.10	.605	4.41	.652
Housing Skills	2.10	.315	3.45	1.130
Knowledge of Community Resources	2.80	.577	4.10	.767
Emergency/Safety Skills	2.82	.437	4.08	.865
Legal Issues	2.73	.444	3.95	.888
Interpersonal Skills	3.08	.509	3.47	.883

($n = 31$) of the youths reported that they had regular contact with various individual staff members from the Green Chimneys program and cited them as most helpful since their discharge. One former resident of the program expressed his perception of support in the following way:

It's the one place where I can come that everyone will always be happy to see me. I still come to see my social worker and the director—they were both very important people to me. I want them to see how good I'm doing. I visit because people here really cared for me. Even when I was in my own little fantasy world, they cared for me. I come back to see them. I come back when I need help. They even let me stay here for two weeks once when I lost my apartment and had no place to go, I mean most agencies would not do that for you. They really care for you, even after you're gone. Whenever I walk in that door, I am always welcomed—that's important—that you're always welcomed.

These qualitative findings are consistent with findings by Cook [1994: 228], who notes, "Although not quantifiably measured, the in-depth interviews with youths uncovered their reliance on a particular individual having a positive influence on their lives."

Discussion

This study's findings indicate that the Green Chimneys Life Skills program improved the ability of youths to be self-sufficient at the time of discharge from out-of-home care and further suggests that youths can sustain these positive outcomes at follow-up. On the one hand, the results of the study must be interpreted within the context of its limitations. The life skills assessment scale that was used did not have powerful reliability scores and the sample size ($N = 46$) was relatively small. Both factors are key limits to the study and affect its generalizability. On the other hand, the population and the program from which the sample was drawn have been studied infrequently and the findings yield useful observations.

The need for transitional programming for these adolescents extends beyond the age at which they are discharged from out-of-home care. Ongoing relationships with instrumental and effective supports have to be developed for young people leaving care. Variations in their skill levels demand that aftercare services be highly individualized. Long-term support may be necessary and one possible model that could work would involve the young people and adults in an aftercare program that could meet these needs, and would include, as participants, key staff members from all levels of the programs and family members with whom some young people may live at discharge.

One such unique aftercare model, developed by Morse and colleagues [Morse 1996] is The New York City Independent Living Partnership. This program, which is funded by a consortium of child welfare agencies and foundation grants, is a model of how adults can work together with youths discharged from care. Youths, in collaboration with adult mentors, plan and par-

ticipate twice yearly in leadership development weekends, meet together in monthly support groups, and informally act as a network of support for one another. Young people who have exited out-of-home care can be of real help to one another in linking peers to housing, jobs, and other services. They can also offer emotional support for one another if negotiating the realities of living independently proves to be overwhelming. The feedback and insights that young people can give to one another can be self-strengthening.

From a purely economic standpoint, the present study confirms the feasibility of achieving the primary aim of independent living services, that is, to prepare youths in out-of-home care to function in society without the benefit of public assistance or long-term reliance on the social safety net [Mech 1988b: xiv]. The study also contributes to the knowledge-generating potential of linking child welfare and independent living data, while documenting the extent to which society's social investments in child welfare services are cost-efficient and linked to positive outcomes. ♦

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(Address requests for a reprint to Gerald P. Mallon, Columbia University School of Social Work, 622 West 113th Street, New York, NY 10025.)